



# Islamabad POST

Saturday, June 20, 2026

Pakistan's Credible Daily Newspaper

Price Rs. 30

**Baker says unique capacity of arts to forge lasting relations**

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**India using water issue to bully Pak: minister**

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**KP CM Afridi terms budget people-friendly**

Detailed News On Page-01



**Tehran says it was ready**

## US-Iran talks in Geneva called off due to Israel

US Vice President called off his trip. The Iranian delegation also refused to attend, citing continued Israeli bombing of Lebanon as the reason for their withdrawal; No UN sanctions lifting on Iran without France's approval, foreign minister says

DNA

GENEVA: Planned peace talks between the United States and Iran were abruptly canceled after the US Vice President called off his trip. The Iranian delegation also refused to attend, citing continued Israeli bombing of Lebanon as the reason for their withdrawal. Israeli National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir has said that "all of Lebanon must burn" after Israel's military announced the deaths of four soldiers. France has meanwhile taken a firm stance on the issue of sanctions. French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot stated on Friday that Paris will not approve the lifting of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) sanctions on Iran unless negotiations on Tehran's nuclear program meet French expectations. Barrot emphasized that stability in the region depends on resolving concerns over Iran's ballistic missile program and its support for proxy groups. "We need a radical change of posture by Iran," he said. The cancellation of the Geneva talks underscores the deep divisions among international stakeholders and highlights the challenges ahead in addressing Iran's nuclear ambitions and regional policies. Meanwhile Swiss foreign ministry said that talks, set for mountaintop resort of Burgenstock, will not take place.

## Vance issues a rare rebuke of Israel

CENTRELINE REPORT

WASHINGTON: United States Vice President JD issued a rare rebuke of Israel during a White House press briefing, criticising Israeli lawmakers who had opposed the memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed between Washington and Tehran. Under the deal, the two sides have agreed on a framework to end the war, reopening of the Strait of Hormuz and a 60-day timeline for further talks. Vance's comments come amid rising tensions between US President Donald Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. "If I was in the cabinet of the Israeli government, I might not be attacking the only powerful ally that I have anywhere left in the entire world," Vance told reporters. "Anybody in Israel who thinks their biggest problem is the president of the United States needs to wake up and smell the reality of the situation." Talking about the MoU itself, the vice president noted that Iran will "have to perform" and honour its end of the deal. "If they don't perform as we've said before, they don't get any of the benefits of the bargain," he said. Vance, a war sceptic

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ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif delivers his important speech encompassing US-Iran deal and cut in petroleum prices. - DNA

## KP budget announced

SHAMIM SHAHID

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Sohail Afridi on Friday presented the provincial budget for the fiscal year 2026-27. The budget outlay is Rs2.17 trillion, with an estimated fiscal deficit of Rs48 billion, according to the budget documents. At the outset of his budget speech, he said all parliamentarians of the PTI from the provincial assembly had "unanimously decided" to present the budget. Earlier, the presentation of the KP budget remained doubtful as the provincial government reportedly linked it to a meeting with incarcerated PTI founder Imran Khan. In his speech, Afridi also announced that the budget he was presenting had a deficit of Rs48bn. "The KP government will not seek a loan of Rs48bn from anyone," he said, adding that "we will provide this amount to the people of KP from our own resources".

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## Speaks in National Assembly

## PM Shehbaz invites Iranian President to visit Pakistan

He urged both sides of the aisle to collectively send a message to the world that, despite "our political differences, we will always be united" for national causes

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said "While the people of Pakistan made every humanly possible effort to save the economy, the federal government immediately spent Rs128 billion rupees to bring inflation to the lowest possible level," he recalled. But now, he said, "the sun of progress and prosperity is about to rise". In this connection, he also thanked provincial governments for "extending their full support and leaving no stone unturned in providing relief to the people". He further thanked Petroleum Minister Ali Pervaiz Malik, Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb, Federal Board of Revenue Chairman Rashid Mahmood

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## PM talks to Saudi Crown Prince on phone

ANSAR M BHATTI

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said on Friday that Pakistan and Saudi Arabia were ready to finalise and sign a comprehensive economic package under the patronage of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud. The prime minister stated this during a telephonic conversation with

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## Briefs

**Nuclear program status to remain unchanged: Iran**

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Iran's Foreign Ministry has said that the current status of the country's nuclear programme will remain unchanged until a final agreement is reached, following the signing of the Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) aimed at ending months of tensions and opening the way for broader negotiations between Tehran and Washington. The MoU provides for a 60-day negotiation period during which both sides will work toward a comprehensive settlement of outstanding issues, including Iran's nuclear programme. Under the interim arrangement, Iran will maintain the existing status of its nuclear activities while the United States will refrain from imposing new sanctions or deploying additional forces in the region. Iranian officials have emphasized that nuclear-related matters will be addressed in the next phase of negotiations and that the immediate focus of the Islamabad MoU is to consolidate the ceasefire, restore regional stability, and facilitate diplomatic engagement. Meanwhile, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Ishaq Dar congratulated the Islamic Republic of Iran on the signing of the Islamabad MoU and expressed Pakistan's best wishes for the successful continuation of negotiations toward a final agreement. Dar described the development as a major diplomatic breakthrough and reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to supporting dialogue and peaceful resolution of disputes. He said the understanding reflected the power of sustained diplomacy and would contribute to lasting peace, stability, and economic confidence in the region and beyond.

## Info Ministry says 'Afghan claims of targeting ISKP false'

Terrorist camps, including those of Daesh and more than two dozen other organizations, are in fact located, run, and patronized from within territories under the control of the Afghan Taliban regime

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Afghan Taliban regime, through its propaganda outlets and official statements, has claimed to have targeted alleged ISKP camps in border areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan using rudimentary drones. The Ministry of Information & Broadcasting has categorically rejected these claims, terming them false. Terrorist camps, including those of Daesh and more than two dozen other organizations, are in fact located, run, and

patronized from within territories under the control of the Afghan Taliban regime. Officials noted that such fabricated statements are routinely issued by the Taliban regime to cover its patronization of cross-border terrorism in neighboring countries and the wider region, including activities of Daesh, FAK, FAH, and others. Fact: A single rudimentary drone from the Taliban regime intruded into Pakistan's airspace near Shinko, Khyber. It was swiftly identified and neutralized by the alert Air Defence system of the Pakistan Air Force.

## 'Promise fulfilled'

## PM Shehbaz cuts petrol, diesel prices

Petrol will fall to Rs299 per litre, while diesel will decrease to Rs311 per litre, reads PMO statement

FIAZ CHAUDHRY

ISLAMABAD: The government on Friday reduced the prices of petrol by Rs74 per litre and diesel by Rs67 per litre following a sharp decline in international crude oil rates and easing geopolitical tensions in the Middle East. The relief was announced by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif in a statement issued by his office. The relief comes in the wake of the US-Iran peace agreement, brokered and mediated with Pakistan's diplomatic facilitation, and the subsequent reopening of the Strait of Hormuz, a critical global oil shipping route. "Petrol prices are being reduced by Rs74 per litre and diesel prices by Rs67 per litre. As a result, the price of petrol will fall from Rs373 to Rs299 per litre, while diesel will decrease from Rs378 to Rs311 per litre," the Prime Minister's Office said in a statement. He said the government was immediately passing on to the public the benefits of improved economic conditions in the region and lower international oil prices. "We had made a promise to the nation and, by the grace of Allah, we are now fulfilling it," he said. The prime minister acknowledged the difficulties

faced by citizens and thanked them for showing patience during the recent crisis. He said the federal government had used Rs129bn from development allocations and savings generated through austerity measures to provide relief and shield consumers from the full impact of rising fuel prices. The prime minister further said Pakistan had avoided an energy crisis despite regional economic challenges. "There were no fuel shortages, no long queues and no disruption in the supply of petroleum products," he said, attributing this to government planning and coordination between the federal and provincial governments. He added that any further decline in global oil prices would be passed on to consumers. "Whatever reduction takes place in international oil prices will be transferred to the public in full," he said. The prime minister also said the government would continue efforts to maintain economic stability and reduce inflation while prioritising public relief. Referring to regional developments, PM Shehbaz said peace in the region had become possible through Pakistan's mediation efforts and described the signing of

Continued on Page 06

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### The protest caused disruption in the House as...

PESHAWAR: Opposition members staged a protest in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly on Friday during the budget session, gathering in front of the Speaker's dais and interrupting the budget speech of the Chief Minister by raising slogans against the provincial budget. The protesting lawmakers chanted "Budget Na-Manzoor" (Budget Rejected) and voiced criticism of the government's financial proposals during the assembly proceedings. The protest caused disruption in the House as opposition members continued their demonstration while carrying placards in their hands. Despite the protest and slogan chanting, the assembly proceedings continued and the Chief Minister Sohail Afridi proceeded with his speech. The opposition maintained that it opposed the budget measures presented by the government and registered its protest inside the House.—APP

### Public participation ensures uplift: CM

QUETTA: Balochistan Chief Minister (CM) Mir Sarfraz Bugti has underscored the vital role of community involvement in education and social development, describing it as a guarantee of sustainable progress. He made these remarks during a meeting with a delegation led by Sardar Ahmed Khan Ghaibzai, a prominent tribal and social leader from Gulistan. The delegation briefed the Chief Minister on grassroots initiatives currently underway in Gulistan to promote education and improve social welfare. They highlighted non-governmental efforts at the local level, aimed at expanding learning opportunities and strengthening community structures. Chief Minister Sarfraz Bugti expressed satisfaction with the progress achieved through community partnerships, noting that such efforts complement government programs. "Private and community-led initiatives in education and social development are not only commendable but also provide the foundation for sustainable growth when combined with government institutions," he said. He assured the delegation that the provincial government would continue to encourage and support all constructive measures. Bugti emphasized that the Gulistan model of community participation in education should be replicated across other regions of Balochistan to ensure equal access to learning opportunities for all citizens. Reiterating his government's priorities, CM Sarfraz Bugti said that improving educational institutions, providing basic facilities, and raising the quality of education remain top objectives. He added that public participation in education.—APP

# ICCI hosts reception in honour of Dr. Anam TI

Appreciating the role of traders and market associations, Dr. Anam said their support has been instrumental in implementing civic reforms and improving the city's infrastructure. She reiterated her commitment to maintaining an open-door policy and ensuring that MCI remains responsive, accessible and accountable to the people of Islamabad

DNA

Islamabad: Dr. Anam Fatima, Chief Officer, Municipal Corporation Islamabad (MCI), has said that transparency, digitization and stakeholder engagement are essential for improving civic services and ensuring good governance. Addressing a ceremony organized by the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) in celebration of her conferment of the prestigious Tamgha-e-Imtiaz, she expressed gratitude to the business community for its continued support and cooperation. She emphasized that MCI has introduced a series of reforms aimed at reducing public inconvenience and eliminating human involvement, including the digitization of key municipal taxes and permits. She announced that services related to parking permits, generator licenses, open-space permits and fee collection have been shifted online, enabling businesses and citizens to complete procedures without direct interaction with officials. Dr. Anam Fatima said that her Department has consistently promoted respectful and dignified enforcement practices, particularly during anti-encroachment operations. She noted that birth and death registration services have also been digitized and integrated with modern verification systems to facilitate citizens. Highlighting MCI's development agenda, she said the Corporation is actively working on environmental improvement, restoration of drainage channels, protection of Islamabad's water resources and removal of encroachments. She assured the business community that issues related to parking, markets, industrial areas and other civic concerns would continue to receive priority attention through consultation and collaborative planning with stakeholders. Appreciating the role of traders and market associations, she said their support has been instrumental in implementing civic reforms and improving the city's infrastructure. She reiterated her commitment to maintaining an open-door policy and ensuring that MCI remains responsive, accessible and accountable to the people of Islamabad. Speaking on the occasion, Sardar Tahir Mehmood, President ICCI, congratulated Dr. Anam Fatima on receiving Tamgha-e-Imtiaz and termed it a well-deserved recognition



of her exemplary public service, integrity and dedication to Islamabad's development. He said her leadership has brought a new culture of professionalism, transparency and responsiveness in municipal administration, benefiting both citizens and the business community. Kamran Bakht Director Enforcement MCI highlighted the significance of consultative approach for strengthening trust among all the stakeholders to find practical and sustainable solutions to longstanding civic and enforcement issues, strengthened trust between MCI and the business community and has played a key role in finding practical and sustainable solutions to longstanding civic and enforcement issues. Senior Vice President ICCI Tahir Ayub, said that Dr. Anam Fatima has set a remarkable example of public service through her professionalism, commitment and people-centric approach. He observed that her efforts to modernize municipal services and maintain continuous engagement

with stakeholders have significantly improved the relationship between the civic administration and the business community. He expressed confidence that her visionary leadership would continue to contribute to Islamabad's progress and prosperity. Vice President Muhammad Irfan Chaudhry, said that the conferment of Tamgha-e-Imtiaz on Dr. Anam Fatima is a matter of pride for Islamabad and a recognition of her outstanding contributions to civic administration. He appreciated her accessibility, positive attitude and willingness to address issues faced by traders and citizens alike. President Islamabad Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry Samina Fazil, congratulated Dr. Anam Fatima on the prestigious award and praised her efforts to support women entrepreneurs and promote inclusive economic development. She said Dr. Anam's achievements serve as an inspiration for women across the country and reflect the positive role women leaders can play in national development.

## Edu remains govt's topmost priority in budget: Rabia

ISLAMABAD: Parliamentary Secretary for Federal Education and Professional Training Rabia Naseem Farooqi on Friday said the government has placed education at the top of its priorities in the federal budget, allocating substantial funds to improve access to quality education and equip students with skills required in a modern knowledge-based economy. Participating in the budget debate in the National Assembly, she said Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif had declared an education emergency after assuming office, reflecting the government's focus on promoting education and empowering youth through quality learning and skill development. She said efforts are underway to reduce illiteracy and provide young people with the tools needed to succeed in a rapidly changing, technology-driven world. Highlighting key initiatives, she said Rs22 billion has been allocated for the establishment and expansion of Daanish Schools across the country to provide quality education to talented students from underprivileged backgrounds. She informed the House that new Daanish Schools are

also being planned in Sindh. A project in Karachi's Malir area has moved forward after land allocation in coordination with the Sindh government, while another project in Tando Muhammad Khan is also progressing with provincial support. She said improvement and upgradation work has been completed in 167 federal educational institutions. More than 20,000 students have been provided Chromebooks, while 437 smart boards have been installed and over 200 classrooms set up to support modern learning. She added that 16 degree colleges have been equipped with IT laboratories, while 62 digital learning hubs have been established to strengthen digital education infrastructure. Farooqi said special attention is being given to teacher training, early childhood education, and improving access to education for all children, particularly girls. She said these steps reflect the government's focus on not only upgrading infrastructure but also shaping a modern, inclusive and quality education system for the country's youth. The parliamentary secretary said a Centre of Excellence for children with autism is being established in Islamabad to provide edu-

cation, training and care for affected children. She said Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif laid the foundation stone of the project on December 3, 2024, and it is expected to be completed by December 2026. The centre will offer modern services and strengthen support systems for children with autism on higher education, she said the government has allocated Rs65 billion as a recurring grant and Rs46 billion under the Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) for the upcoming fiscal year. Despite financial constraints, she said the Higher Education Commission (HEC) continues to support universities and colleges nationwide to maintain academic and research activities. She noted that around 60 percent of Pakistan's population comprises young people, making investment in education and skills development vital for national progress. She said the government, under the leadership of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, remains committed to strengthening higher education institutions through sustained funding and development initiatives aimed at preparing the youth for future challenges.—DNA

## Privatisation commission board advances key strategic transactions

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Privatisation Commission (PC) Board, in its meeting held today under the chairmanship of Mr. Muhammad Ali, Adviser to the Prime Minister on Privatisation and Chairman of the Privatisation Commission, considered and approved a number of important measures relating to the Government's ongoing privatisation programme. As part of the Government's efforts to enhance efficiency, improve service delivery, and attract private sector investment, the Board approved the restructuring plan for Faisalabad Electric Supply Company (FESCO). FESCO forms part of the first batch of Power Distribution Companies (DISCOs) identified for privatisation, alongside Gujranwala Electric Power Company (GEPCO) and Islamabad Electric Supply Company (IESCO). The restructuring plan, prepared by the Financial Ad-

viser, will now be submitted to the Cabinet Committee on Privatisation (CCoP) for consideration and approval. The Privatisation Commission has already invited Expressions of Interest (EOIs) from domestic and international investors for the privatisation of the first batch of DISCOs, marking a significant step towards expanding private sector participation in Pakistan's power distribution sector and improving operational performance. The Board also approved the consortium led by KPMG, in association with Bridge Factor and other consortium partners, as the highest-ranked bidder for appointment as Financial Adviser for House Building Finance Company Limited (HBFC). To facilitate the next phase of the transaction, the Board constituted a Negotiation Committee to finalise the Financial Advisory Services Agreement (FASA) with the successful consortium. In another important agenda item, the Board reviewed

the proposed Transaction Advisory Services Agreement (TASA) with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) for the outsourcing of operations at Islamabad International Airport (IIAP). Following a detailed discussion, the Board appreciated the progress made on the transaction and provided guidance on certain provisions of the proposed agreement, seeking further clarity before its consideration at a subsequent meeting. The proposed transaction envisages the engagement of a qualified private sector operator under a long-term concession framework through a transparent and competitive process. The initiative is aimed at enhancing operational efficiency, improving passenger experience, and aligning airport services with international best practices. The Board further approved the budget estimates of the Privatisation Commission for the financial year 2026-27, enabling the organisation to effectively pursue its strategic objectives and manage an expanding pipeline of transactions. The Board reaffirmed the Government's commitment to implementing a transparent, competitive, and investor-friendly privatisation programme that promotes economic growth, attracts investment, improves public service delivery, and supports the broader reform agenda. The Privatisation Commission remains committed to conducting all transactions in accordance with applicable legal and regulatory frameworks, while ensuring transparency, accountability, and value maximisation for the people of Pakistan.



### MILITARY LANDS & CANTONMENTS DEPT RAWALPINDI CANTONMENT BOARD

The Mall, Rawalpindi Cantt  
Tel: 051-9274420 Fax No: 051-9274407

### NOTICE INVITING E-BIDS SINGLE STAGE ONE ENVELOP THROUGH E-PADS V2.0

Rawalpindi Cantonment Board (RCB), being the Procuring Agency, invites electronic bids from reputed pharmaceutical firms, medical stores, distributors, and suppliers for the Local Purchase of Medicines for Employees of the Ministry of Defence (MoD). Interested firms must be registered with the relevant authorities, be on the Active Taxpayers List (ATL) of the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) for both Income Tax and Sales Tax, and possess a valid Drug Sale License / Drug Distribution License (Category-A) issued by the competent authority. The procurement shall be conducted in accordance with Rule 36(a) of the Public Procurement Rules, 2004 (as amended), through Open Competitive Bidding under Single Stage – One Envelope Procedure via EPADS V2.0.

Sr#	Detail of Vehicles	Estimated Cost (Rs. in Million)	Earnest Money (2%) Rs.	EPADS v2.0
01	Local Purchase of Medicines and Surgical items for Employees of Ministry of Defence (MoD)	60.00	1,200,000/-	P50900

#### 1. Availability of Bidding Documents

Bidding documents shall be available exclusively on the PPRA and EPADS V2.0 portals. No hard copies shall be issued. Only vendors registered on EPADS V2.0 shall be eligible to participate.

#### 2. Submission and Opening of Bids

E-bids, prepared in accordance with the instructions contained in the bidding documents, must be submitted electronically through EPADS V2.0 on or before:

**Submission Deadline:** Monday, 06 July 2026 at 11:00 AM

The bids shall be opened electronically on the same day at

**Opening Time:** Monday, 06 July 2026 at 11:30 AM

#### 3. EPADS Registration

Manual submission of bids shall not be entertained. Vendors not registered on EPADS V2.0 may register through Vendor Registration Portal: <https://vendors.epads.gov.pk>

EPADS Tutorial: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MNW6T38v7tc>

#### 4. Grievance Redressal

In accordance with Rule 48 of PPRA Rules, 2004, a Grievance Redressal Committee (GRC) has been constituted. The relevant notification is available on the Procuring Agency's website and EPADS portal.

#### 5. Procurement Method and Evaluation Criteria

Procurement shall be carried out through Open Competitive Bidding under the Single Stage – One Envelope Procedure, adopting the Least Cost Based Selection (LCBS) methodology in accordance with PPRA Rules, 2004.

Bidders shall quote their rates in the form of a uniform percentage discount on the prevailing retail price of medicines. The bidder offering the highest admissible discount percentage while meeting all mandatory eligibility and qualification requirements shall be considered the lowest evaluated responsive bidder.

#### 6. Earnest Money

Bidders shall furnish Earnest Money equivalent to 2% of the estimated cost in the shape of a Call Deposit Receipt (CDR) issued by any scheduled bank in favour of Cantonment Executive Officer, Rawalpindi Cantonment Board

i. A scanned copy of the CDR shall be uploaded with the e-bid.

ii. The original CDR must be submitted in the office of the Procuring Agency prior to the opening of bids.

#### 7. Mandatory Eligibility Criteria

The participating firms shall:

- Possess a valid Drug Sale License / Drug Distribution License (Category-A) issued by the competent authority.
- Be registered with FBR and appear on the Active Taxpayers List (ATL) for Income Tax and Sales Tax.
- Have at least three (03) years' experiences in the supply of medicines to Government, Semi-Government, Armed Forces, Autonomous Bodies, Hospitals, or other reputable organizations.
- Submit an affidavit on judicial stamp paper confirming that the firm has never been blacklisted, suspended, or debarred by any Government, Semi-Government, Autonomous Body, or Regulatory Authority.
- Maintain adequate stock availability and ensure timely supply of medicines prescribed by authorized medical practitioners throughout the contract period.
- Provide medicines with valid manufacturing and expiry dates and comply with all applicable DRAP regulations and quality standards.
- Only firms having an operational pharmacy, medical store, distribution outlet, or business premises equipped with adequate refrigerated storage facilities and located within a radius of one (01) kilometer from the Cantt General Hospital, Rawalpindi Cantt, shall be eligible to participate in the bidding process.
- All medicines supplied under the contract shall have a remaining shelf life of not less than nine (09) months from the date of delivery. Any medicine with an expiry period of less than nine months shall not be accepted
- The successful bidder shall submit itemized bills/invoices along with supporting documents for all medicines supplied during the preceding week on a weekly basis to the Ministry of Defence (MoD) for verification and processing of payment.

#### 8. Award of Contract

The contract shall be awarded to the lowest evaluated responsive bidder in accordance with PPRA Rules. Issuance of the Supply Order / Framework Contract shall be subject to approval of the Competent Authority.

#### 9. Disqualification

i. Any firm found to have submitted false information, forged documents, or misleading statements shall be disqualified and may be proceeded against under applicable laws and PPRA Rules.

ii. Any firm that has been blacklisted, suspended, or debarred by any Government Department, Semi-Government Organization, Autonomous Body, Regulatory Authority, or Public Sector Entity shall not be eligible to participate in the bidding process. If such status is discovered at any stage of the procurement process or during the contract period, the bid/contract shall be liable to rejection or termination without any liability on the part of the procuring agency.

#### 10. Additional Information

Detailed terms and conditions, specifications and evaluation criteria may be obtained from the PPRA and EPADS portals or inspected at the office of Rawalpindi Cantonment Board during working hours on any working day.

#### 11. Right of Acceptance or Rejection

The Procuring Agency reserves the right to reject any or all bids at any time prior to acceptance of a bid in accordance with Rule 33(1) of the Public Procurement Rules, 2004, without assigning any reason.

PID (I) No.10201/25

Cantonment Executive Officer,  
Rawalpindi Cantt

## 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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- Shifa International 4603666



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- RDA.....5555864
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### Islamabad Metropolitan

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

### Water Tank

- Islamabad.....0321-5744480



ISLAMABAD: Former Federal Minister Khurram Dastgir, Additional Foreign Secretary Hamid Asghar Khan and others taking interests in various stalls set up on the occasion of the Africa day event organized by the ISSI. DNA

## U.S. Embassy convenes freedom 250 arts showcase

Speaking on the occasion, CDA Baker noted the unique capacity of the arts to forge lasting connections between nations and people, "The textile industry is one of the most powerful linkages between our two countries"

### DNA

ISLAMABAD: Today, the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad hosted an "Arts Entrepreneurship Showcase" at the United States Educational Foundation in Pakistan (USEFP) that convened artists, designers, entrepreneurs and cultural leaders to celebrate the power of creative industries to drive economic growth, strengthen bilateral ties, and connect people across cultures. U.S. Chargé d'Affaires (CDA) Natalie Baker and celebrated Pakistani fashion designer HSY headlined the event, moderated by renowned broadcaster and filmmaker Tauseeq Haider. The showcase, held as part of the United States' Freedom 250 initiative marking the 250th anniversary of American independence, featured three signature elements: A Freedom 250 entrepreneurship lecture to share American business expertise and best practices, an alumni arts marketplace showcasing the work of 20 Pakistan-U.S. Alumni Network (PUAN) alumni active in Pakistan's creative industries, and a fashion runway show presenting 250 years of American design, culture, and textile innovation. Together, these elements reflected the depth and strength of the U.S.-Pakistan bilateral relationship across business, culture, and the arts. Speaking on the occasion, CDA Baker noted the unique capacity of the arts to forge lasting connections between nations and people, "The textile industry is one of the most powerful linkages between our two countries. Over the past five years, Pakistani exports of finished apparel and clothing products to the United States have averaged over \$4 billion



dollars," she said, adding, "Many of these garments were made from American cotton, with Pakistan importing nearly \$800 million in U.S. cotton and other raw cotton inputs annually. In fact, the United States is Pakistan's second-largest supplier of cotton, underscoring how deeply

interconnected our textile supply chains are—from American fields to Pakistani factories to global markets. Pakistan is also one of the world's leading producers of denim fabric and garments, and there is a good chance that the jeans sold in American stores began their journey right here in Pakistan. Just look at a pair of Levi's jeans for a powerful reminder that the U.S. – Pakistan relationship is woven into the everyday lives of people in both countries." CDA Baker underscored the U.S. commitment to creative entrepreneurship as a driver of economic opportunity and bilateral partnership saying, "The United States has long believed in the power of creative industries to fuel progress and economic growth. It has been a part of our national identity since 1776. American excellence in the arts and design comes not only from talent, but from a culture that encourages experimentation, entrepreneurship, and bold new ideas. American creative industries continue to shape global conversations and inspire audiences around the world." A highlight of the evening, the runway show brought 250 years of American fashion to life through textiles, design, and cultural storytelling serving as a vivid, visual expression of America's creative heritage and its ongoing capacity for reinvention. The Freedom 250 initiative marks the United States' 250th anniversary of independence through a year-long series of events, partnerships, and programs that celebrate American excellence, promote U.S. values, and deepen bilateral relationships with partner nations around the world.

## Experts call for Pakistan, Central Asia connectivity

### SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Leading policymakers, and regional experts convened for an online seminar hosted by the Central Asia Program for Regional Cooperation and Connectivity at the Institute of Regional Studies, Islamabad as part of its Eminent Speaker Series titled "Breaking the Connectivity Barrier to Central Asia: Pakistan and the C5 in 2026." Experts from Russia and Uzbekistan underscored the urgent need to transform visions into tangible action to advance Eurasian connectivity. While connectivity has long been a strategic aspiration, tangible progress hinges on implementation, coordination, and political will. President of the Institute of Regional Studies, Ambassador Jauhar Saleem inaugurated the session by framing connectivity as a "multidimensional agenda" central to regional stability and prosperity. He noted that despite shared ambitions—mirroring similar regional visions on Eurasia as those pursued by Türkiye–Pakistan's connectivity with Central Asia remains below its potential. He identified several persistent barriers including critical infrastructure gaps, instability in Afghanistan, regulatory and customs fragmentation and logistical bottlenecks as impediments which need to be overcome for rhetorical commitments to translate into practical,

implementable solutions for regional integration. Policy Analyst and Expert of the Valdai Discussion Club and the Gorchakov Fund from Russia, Dr. Daria Saprynskaya highlighted that connectivity, from a Russian perspective, encompasses trade, logistics, investment, and security, all of which are deeply interlinked. She outlined Russia's evolving strategic vision centered on the concept of "integration of integrations," linking major regional initiatives such as the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to build a flexible and interconnected Eurasian architecture rather than a single unified bloc. Connectivity hence, operates on two inseparable dimensions: economic (infrastructure, trade corridors) and political-institutional (regulatory and multilateral frameworks) with Central Asia serving as a critical bridge, linking Russia with South Asia, the Middle East, and beyond. Dr. Saprynskaya also noted that while all projects contribute to regional development, some could reshape geopolitical balances. Leading Research Fellow at the International Institute for Central Asia (IICA) in Tashkent and former Leading Specialist at Uzspace, Mr. Salomov Bakhtiyor Ravshan o'g'li emphasized on how connectivity is not a zero-sum game, but a shared platform for mutual economic gain. Highlighting impressive growth in Uzbekistan–Pakistan trade—from \$36 billion

in 2017 to over \$400 million in 2024—he spoke of vast, untapped potential, with bilateral trade projected to reach \$2 billion in the coming years. Lowering transportation costs through improved infrastructure, ensuring maritime access for landlocked Central Asian states, digitalizing customs and transit systems and addressing persistent security concerns, allows Pakistan to become a strategically vital partner capable of linking Central Asia to global markets. Expert on Asian Affairs at the Institute of China and Contemporary Asia at the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow Dr. Liudmila A. Pechishcheva underlined the growing diversification of connectivity options for Central Asia, particularly Uzbekistan's efforts to expand access through both land and maritime routes. She underscored Pakistan's increasing importance as a regional transit hub, noting that Karachi and Gwadar ports serve as key gateways for Central Asian trade with emerging railroad integration linking Central Asia with Pakistan's transport network. The potential from data and energy transit corridors connecting Central Asia to the Middle East and Europe, operationalization of energy pipelines and the expansion of corridor networks further places Pakistan's at the heart of strategic geographic positioning in a rapidly evolving Eurasian connectivity landscape.

## Windstorm ravages mango orchards ahead of peak harvest

ISLAMABAD :A powerful windstorm followed by rain swept across Multan Thursday evening,destroying nearly one-third of the mango crop just days before peak harvest and inflicting heavy financial losses on growers already struggling with a below-average season. The storm caused varying degrees of destruction across orchards in the district. In some orchards where irrigation had recently been carried out,waterlogged soil left tree roots weakened,causing entire trees to be uprooted by the force of the wind. In other orchards, large branches snapped and fell under the pressure of strong gusts, damaging fruit-laden portions of the canopy and accelerating fruit drop across the affected areas. Farmers including Malik Akram Kalrou,Umar Hayat,Sajid and some others said the timing made the damage especially severe, as fruit had grown to near-mature size and was particularly vulnerable to being dislodged. The losses come at a moment when growers had begun to feel cautiously optimistic after a difficult early season marked by poor fruit set and below-expected yields. "Approximately one-third of the mangoes have fallen to the ground due to the strong winds,"claimed mango farmer Malik Arif Kalro of Nawabpur. "Farmers were already facing difficulties because the crop was not as abundant as expected.The storm has now caused severe economic losses and further reduced the marketable yield." Kalro said much of the fallen fruit lacked full commercial value due to immaturity but hinted that some could be salvaged through alternative uses. Some of the fruit can be used for preparing mango preserve,while mangoes closer to maturity may be ripened through commercial processes," he said. "Other fruit may be suitable for making pickles, which could help farmers recover at least part of their losses." The uprooting of trees in recently irrigated orchards resulted a longer-term blow beyond the current season, as mango trees take several years to mature and bear fruit. Growers whose trees were uprooted face not only the loss of this year's harvest but also the prospect of replanting and waiting years before full productivity was restored. Fellow grower Malik Laiq Ali Sheikhana said the storm underscored agriculture's growing vulnerability to extreme weather events. He maintained that mango farming required year-round investment in irrigation,fertilizer,labour and orchard management,making sudden weather-related losses particularly devastating for producers who operate on tight seasonal margins. Agricultural experts warned that climate volatility poses an escalating threat to South Punjab's mango industry and called for improved crop insurance mechanisms and targeted government support to help growers absorb climate-related shocks. They stressed that without institutional safety nets,repeated weather events of this kind could push smallholder mango farmers into serious debt. The storm was expected to reduce market supplies and grower incomes throughout the ongoing season with its impact likely to ripple through the wider fruit economy affecting traders,labourers,transporters and agribusinesses linked to the region's annual mango harvest. With mangoes serving as a primary income source for thousands of farming families across Multan division, authorities have been urged to conduct a rapid damage assessment and announce relief measures before the situation worsens further.—DNA

## SOEs body reviews governance matters

ISLAMABAD: The Cabinet Committee on State-Owned Enterprises (CCoSOEs), chaired by Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb, on Friday reviewed a range of governance matters and approved key appointments and policy measures concerning state-owned entities. The meeting, held at the Finance Division, was attended by Federal Minister for Commerce Jam Kamal Khan, Federal Minister for Science and Technology Khalid Hussain Magsoo and Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs Muhammad Junaid Anwar Chaudhry, along with federal secretaries and senior officials from the relevant ministries, divisions, regulatory bodies and state-owned enterprises, a news release said. The committee considered a summary submitted by the Maritime Affairs Division regarding the appointment of Independent Directors on the Board of Directors of the Pakistan National Shipping Corporation (PNSC), Karachi. After detailed deliberations, it approved the proposed appointments in accordance with the provisions of the State-Owned Enterprises (Governance and Operations) Act, 2023, and the applicable governance framework. The committee also reviewed and approved a summary presented by the Power Division seeking approval of the Public Service Obligation (PSO) Agreement in respect of the WX-DISCOs for timely formalisation of the public service obligations in light of the agreed terms and conditions of the Government of Pakistan with international financial institutions.—APP

## OGDC increases working in Qadirpur D&PL to 82.99%

ISLAMABAD, Jun 19 (APP):Oil and Gas Development Company Limited (OGDC) has completed the acquisition of an additional 7.99% Working Interest in the Qadirpur Development and Production Lease (D&PL) through a Farm-in Agreement with M/s KUPPEC Pakistan B.V. (KPBV), raising its total stake in the Qadirpur D&PL to 82.99% Following government of Pakistan approval and the execution of a Deed of Assignment (DOA), the transfer of 7.99% Working Interest from KPBV to OGDC has been formally effected under Rule 8 and Rule 9 of the Pakistan Onshore Petroleum (Exploration and Production) Rules, 1986, said a news release. With the completion of this acquisition, OGDC's Working Interest in the Qadirpur D&PL / Concession Area (Block 2667-1) has increased from 75.00% to 82.99%, consolidating the company's position as the major operator in one of Pakistan's key producing gas fields. The company had earlier disclosed the planned acquisition on January 23, 2025.—APP

## Briefs

## Police ensure security at mosques, Imambargahs

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police officers and personnel performed security duties at mosques and Imambargahs across the federal capital on Friday to ensure the safety of worshippers and maintain a peaceful environment. An official told APP on Friday that comprehensive security arrangements were put in place at mosques and Imambargahs throughout the district in view of Friday prayers and prevailing security requirements. Police personnel remained deployed at entry and exit points, while security measures were enhanced to facilitate worshippers and prevent any untoward incident. Officers supervised security arrangements in their respective areas and ensured strict implementation of the prescribed security protocols. The official said Islamabad Police remained vigilant throughout the day and maintained close coordination with mosque and Imambargah administrations to ensure smooth conduct of religious activities. Special attention was given to the protection of citizens and maintaining law and order, while police personnel continued monitoring sensitive locations across the capital Iqbal met officers and personnel performing duties at the National Assembly and reviewed operational preparedness and implementation of security measures. The SP briefed officers and jawans on their responsibilities and directed them to remain vigilant and perform their duties with professionalism, dedication and a high sense of responsibility. He emphasized strict adherence to security protocols and instructed personnel to maintain a heightened level of alertness throughout the parliamentary session.—APP

## IRSA releases 264000 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD: Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Friday released 264,000 cusecs of water from various rim stations with an inflow of 258,700 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, the water level in the River Indus at Tarbela Dam stood at 1444.90 feet, which was 44.90 feet higher than the dead level of 1402.00 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam were recorded as 144,500 cusecs and 146,000 cusecs, respectively. The water level in the Jhelum River at Mangla Dam was 1171.90 feet, which was 121.90 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water were recorded as 33,200 cusecs and 37,000 cusecs, respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 210,900, 161,700, 115,600, and 57,100 cusecs, respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 52,600 cusecs of water was released at Nowshera, and 11,200 cusecs were released from River Chenab at Marala.—APP

## IGP reviews Muharram emergency preparedness

ISLAMABAD: Inspector General of Police (IGP) Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi chaired a high-level meeting to review security arrangements, traffic management and emergency preparedness ahead of Muharram-ul-Haram in the federal capital. An official told on Friday that the meeting was attended by DIG Islamabad, DG Safe City, AIG Logistics and SSP Prisons, who discussed various operational and security matters. The official said the participants reviewed a comprehensive strategy relating to Muharram security, traffic management, emergency response mechanisms and public facilitation measures. IGP Rizvi directed officers to further strengthen security arrangements through the use of modern technology, effective coordination and timely response to emerging situations. He emphasized the need for enhanced inter-departmental coordination to ensure the smooth implementation of security plans and the uninterrupted delivery of public services during Muharram. IGP also stressed maintaining high operational readiness.—APP

## Around 3.5m shopkeepers to be brought into tax net: Kayani

In the construction sector, measures were introduced to support housing access, including allocations under the "Apna Ghar" scheme to provide subsidised loans for house construction

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Minister of State for Finance and Revenue Bilal Azhar Kayani on Friday said that around 3.5 million shopkeepers will be included in the tax net during fiscal year 2026-27. Participating in the National Assembly debate on the federal budget 2026-27, he said the government's economic policy aims to strengthen the national economy and ensure inclusive growth. He congratulated Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir, and the finance team, saying their efforts had improved Pakistan's global standing.

He described the budget as a "people-friendly" document, saying it includes relief measures for different sectors.

He said when the government took office in February 2024, the economy was in a difficult condition and there were doubts about stability. However, he added that under the Prime Minister's leadership, economic stability was achieved, inflation declined, foreign exchange reserves increased, and the IMF programme was successfully completed. He said the government met all fiscal targets in the fiscal year 2025 without presenting any supplementary or mini budget. He highlighted relief measures for salaried individuals, saying tax rates had been reduced across multiple income brackets. He said the tax rate for people earning Rs2.2 to Rs2.3 million annually was reduced from 23% to 20%. For those earning Rs3.2 to Rs4.1 million, the rate was

reduced from 30% to 25%, while for income between Rs4.1 to Rs5.6 million it was reduced from 35% to 29%. For those earning Rs5.6 to Rs7 million, the rate was cut from 35% to 32%. He also said the super tax had been abolished. He said exporters were given tax relief to reduce costs and improve competitiveness, while tax incentives for the IT sector were extended for three more years.

In the construction sector, measures were introduced to support housing access, including allocations under the "Apna Ghar" scheme to provide subsidised loans for house construction. Kayani said that Rs 300 billion had been allocated for agriculture, along with Rs 110 billion under the Prime Minister's Agriculture Youth Initiative. Customs

duty on agricultural machinery was removed to support farmers. Sales tax exemptions were also given on essential items for women and family planning products. Incentives were provided to the shipping sector to strengthen trade capacity. On tax expansion measures, he said a new scheme had been introduced to bring small traders into the formal system. Shopkeepers with annual sales up to Rs 20 million will pay 1% tax. Registration will be done through a simple Urdu form, and registered traders will receive a green plate from the Federal Board of Revenue, with limited audit checks under normal circumstances. He said the goal is to bring 3.5 million shopkeepers into the tax net. He concluded by thanking business organisations for appreciating the budget measures.



LAHORE: Provincial Minister for Industries and Commerce Chaudhry Shafay Hussain presenting a commemorative shield to the Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates.

## Lawmakers calls for economic stability

ISLAMABAD: Lawmakers in the National Assembly on Friday lauded Pakistan's diplomatic success, fiscal management efforts, and ongoing governance reforms, with members from both treasury and opposition benches emphasizing the need for continued institutional stability and sustained economic improvement. Taking part in the discussion, MQM-P MNA Arshad Abdullah Vohra praised Pakistan's diplomatic efforts, particularly its role in facilitating peace efforts between the United States and Iran. He paid tribute to Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir, saying his leadership, vision, and strategic approach had helped strengthen Pakistan's international diplomatic standing. He also appreciated Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, saying his diplomatic engagement and global outreach had helped effectively project Pakistan's case on the international stage. The MQM lawmaker said the Iran-US Memorandum of Understanding showed that dialogue remains the only viable path to resolving conflicts, adding that Pakistan had played a constructive role in bridging differences. He said such diplomatic gains should be translated into internal economic stability and relief for citizens. Regarding the federal budget, he said the announced 7 percent salary increase for government employees was limited in impact amid inflationary pressures, arguing that it should have been closer to 10 percent to provide meaningful relief. He added that a significant portion of the budget was consumed by debt servicing, including interest payments on loans, leaving limited fiscal space for development spending. This imbalance, he warned, was affecting public investment and slowing national development. He acknowledged an increase in the development budget but said implementation and planning capacity needed strengthening. Highlighting broader economic concerns, he said agriculture contributed significantly to GDP but remained largely outside the tax net, proposing that large landholders be brought into the tax system through agricultural taxation reforms. Opposition leader Mahmood Khan Achakzai said political differences should not override national interests, stressing that Parliament, the armed forces, and democratic institutions all belong to the country and must be respected collectively. He added that Pakistan's progress depended on institutional harmony and mutual respect, saying elected representatives serve millions of citizens, and their voices should not be restricted inside the House. Senior lawmaker from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Muhammad Nawaz Khan appreciated the Speaker for allowing full participation in the budget debate. He said the finance minister had presented the budget as "pro-people," but in his view, citizens had received no real relief over the past several budgets. Instead, he said inflation had continued to rise, increasing financial pressure on ordinary citizens. He argued that rising prices of electricity, gas, and essential commodities had made life increasingly difficult for low-income groups. PML-N MNA Syeda Nosheen Iftikhar said the federal budget was among the best in nature, presented in difficult circumstances, including last year's floods and regional tensions.—DNA

## Karachi Port sets record by handling over 2.65m containers

ISLAMABAD: Karachi Port Trust (KPT) has set a new record for container throughput, handling more than 2.651 million twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs) this fiscal year, Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs Muhammad Junaid Anwar Chaudhry said on Friday. The minister said the milestone, achieved weeks before the close of the fiscal year, surpassed the previous high and underlined growing confidence in Pakistan's maritime sector and improved port performance. "KPT has surpassed last year's record of 2.651 million TEUs, creating history by achieving the highest-ever container handling

volume," he said in a statement, attributing the result to "the dedication of our workforce, improved operational efficiency and the government's commitment to strengthening Pakistan's maritime infrastructure." Admiral Shahid Ahmad, chairman of KPT, said the performance demonstrated the port's ability to accommodate rising trade volumes and support national economic objectives. "The ongoing reforms, infrastructure upgrades and measures aimed at improving port services have contributed to the rise in cargo and container traffic," he said, adding that Karachi Port handles a substantial share of the country's seaborne trade and remains a critical gateway for imports and exports. Junaid Chaudhry said the enhanced efficiency and capacity expansion at the port are expected to boost Pakistan's competitiveness in regional and international shipping markets. The government, the minister added, will continue investing in maritime infrastructure and modernisation to position Pakistan as a leading logistics and transshipment hub connecting South Asia, Central Asia and the Middle East. The record throughput is being seen as an indicator of rising commercial activity and the growing importance of Pakistani ports within regional supply chains, Junaid Chaudhry concluded.—APP

## Budget misses chance to empower women economically: IWCCI

ISLAMABAD: The founder president of the Islamabad Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry (IWCCI), Samina Fazil, said the federal budget for 2026-27 missed an opportunity to strengthen women's economic participation by underinvesting in skills development, entrepreneurship support, and access to finance. She said women account for nearly half of Pakistan's population but continue to face barriers in education, technology, financial services, and markets. Sustainable growth, she added, requires prioritising women as an economic force. While acknowledging social protection programmes for vulnerable households, she said long-term progress depends on greater investment in education, vocational training, and employment opportunities for women. The federal government has allocated Rs 58 billion for education compared to Rs 838 billion for the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), reflecting a wide gap between social protection spending and education investment. She said the budget also does not appear to include a dedicated federal skills development programme for women entrepreneurs or women-led businesses, with most initiatives grouped

under general youth programmes rather than gender-specific interventions. "The focus should be on enabling women to become entrepreneurs, business leaders, and job creators rather than relying on short-term relief," she said. Fazil called for dedicated financing facilities for women entrepreneurs, expanded vocational and technical training, tax incentives for women-owned SMEs, and stronger digital and e-commerce support. She said improved business development services and market access mechanisms are needed to help women-led enterprises scale domestically and internationally. The business leader said greater female participation in the economy could boost incomes, jobs, and growth, adding that women entrepreneurs can contribute significantly to exports and innovation if supported properly. Naima Ansari, former vice president of FPCCI, said the budget prioritised fiscal consolidation and growth but lacked targeted measures for underrepresented groups, including women entrepreneurs. She added that Pakistan's long-term prosperity depends on ensuring women have equal access to economic opportunities and tools for participation.—DNA

## HEC launches revised computing curriculum

ISLAMABAD: Chairman Higher Education Commission (HEC) Dr Niaz Ahmad Akhtar launched the revised computing curriculum at the British Council's 'Partnership for Future Skills and Employment' event held under the European Union TVET Sector Support Programme at the National Incubation Centre (NIC), Islamabad. The HEC delegation included Dr Muhammad Ali Nasir, Advisor, Research & Innovation Division, HEC, Engr. Waheed Ahmed Mangi, head of the Academics Division HEC, and Mr. Hidayatullah Kasi, Deputy Director Curriculum. During the event, Dr Muhammad Ali Nasir presented the details of the recently revised Computing curriculum, developed through extensive consultations involving academia, industry, accreditation bodies, the Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunication, Pakistan Software Export Board (PSEB), P@SHA, National Computing Education Accreditation Council (NCEAC), and development partners. The curriculum aligns with HEC's Undergraduate Education Policy 2023 and represents a significant shift towards competency-based, industry-aligned computing education.—APP

## Islamabad MoU outcome of years of quiet diplomacy

ISLAMABAD: Spokesperson to the President, Murtaza Solangi, on Friday said that the Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was not the result of social media trends, TikTok videos, public statements, or wishful thinking, but rather the outcome of painstaking efforts by dedicated professionals committed to advancing peace. In a statement shared on his official X wall, Solangi said the agreement was achieved after thousands of hours of work by professionals who remained steadfast despite hurdles, setbacks, and attempts by spoilers and enemies of peace to obstruct the process. Solangi stressed that peace-building is a long and demanding process requiring patience, courage and sustained effort from a wide range of stakeholders. "Achieving peace takes time, patience, courage and hard work of many," he remarked. He said building peace was comparable to constructing the Taj Mahal or the Pyramids of Egypt, which required the craftsmanship and dedication of hundreds of people.—APP

## PNCA hosts printmaking workshop

The Pakistan National Council of the Arts remains committed to organizing educational and public engagement programs that make artistic practices more accessible to wider audiences and support the growth of emerging creative talent across the country

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA), through its Visual Arts Division, successfully organized a Linocut Printmaking Workshop at its premises, bringing together art enthusiasts, students, and emerging artists for an immersive exploration of one of the most accessible and rewarding printmaking techniques. Facilitated by visual artist and creative practitioner Ms. Tayyaba Idrees, the workshop introduced participants to the fundamentals of relief printmaking through the medium of linocut. The session combined technical instruction with hands-on experimentation, allowing participants to engage directly with the artistic process from concept development to the creation of finished prints. The workshop introduced the history and practice of printmaking, followed by demonstrations of carving, inking, and hand-printing techniques. Participants explored various approaches to texture, composition, and visual storytelling while producing original artworks of their own. The event witnessed enthusiastic participation from individuals of diverse backgrounds, creating a vibrant and collaborative learning environment. Attendees expressed great appreciation for the opportunity to learn a traditional artistic technique through an interactive and accessible format. The workshop encouraged creativity, experimentation, and meaningful engagement with the visual arts, while also fostering a sense of community among participants. Speaking on the occasion, representatives of the Visual Arts Division highlighted the importance of providing platforms that encourage artistic exploration and skill development. Workshops of this nature contribute to PNCA's broader mission of promoting art education, cultural participation, and creative exchange within the community. The Pakistan National Council of the Arts remains committed to organizing educational and public engagement programs that make artistic practices more accessible to wider audiences and support the growth of emerging creative talent across the country.—APP

**ASHRAF INDUSTRIES (PVT) LTD**  
127 C, Industrial Estate  
Sahwal-51340, Pakistan  
Phones: +92-52-3256000 / 3255798  
E-mail: info@ashraf.net.pk

**ASHRAF**

Pakistan's First And Only Diplomatic Daily

Editor-in-Chief: Ansar Mahmood Bhatti

Deputy Editor: Abid Raza

Member APNS / ABC Certified

Vol: 06 Issue: 218

Email: dailyisbpost@gmail.com

Phone: 051-8488394 / 051-2261960

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

## Pakistan Hockey's struggles: lessons and the road ahead

A.M.BHATTI

**P**AKISTAN'S participation in the ongoing FIH Pro League second round has been marked by heavy defeats and sobering realities. The national team, ranked 12th in the world, lost two pool matches against Belgium, conceding a staggering 12 goals, and another against Germany where they let in 6 goals. These results underline the gulf in class between Pakistan and the world's top hockey nations, but they also highlight deeper structural issues that continue to plague the sport in the country. To be fair, Pakistan's poor results were not entirely unexpected. Belgium and Germany are among the world's elite hockey teams, boasting professional setups, advanced training facilities, and consistent international exposure. Pakistan, by contrast, entered the Pro League almost by accident. Originally, New Zealand had qualified, but after their withdrawal, Pakistan was invited to fill the slot. This meant Pakistan was thrust into a competition against the very best without adequate preparation or realistic chances of victory. The defeats, though heavy, should be seen in the context of Pakistan's current standing. Ranked 12th, Pakistan is far behind the likes of Belgium, Germany, and other Pro League participants who occupy the top tier of world hockey. Competing against them is not just a matter of skill but also of fitness, infrastructure, and long-term planning—areas where Pakistan lags significantly. While the scorelines are painful, Pakistan's presence in the Pro League can still be considered valuable. Playing against top-ranked teams offers exposure to the highest level of hockey, something the players rarely experience otherwise. These matches serve as practice opportunities, allowing Pakistan to gauge where they stand and what needs to be improved before major tournaments like the Hockey World Cup. Facing stronger opponents can also help young players adapt to the pace, intensity, and tactical sophistication of modern hockey. If lessons are drawn constructively, these defeats could become stepping stones toward rebuilding the national team. However, the real challenge lies not in the defeats themselves but in the systemic issues that have crippled Pakistan hockey for decades. The sport, once the pride of the nation with multiple Olympic



and World Cup titles, has been in decline due to mismanagement, lack of continuity, and political interference. One of the most glaring problems is the absence of a permanent management setup. After every defeat, officials are reshuffled, coaches are replaced, and committees are dissolved. This cycle of instability prevents long-term planning and denies players the consistency they need to develop. Continuity is essential in sports management, and Pakistan's hockey federation has failed to provide it. Another critical issue is the lack of proper facilities and support for players. Modern hockey requires advanced training centers, fitness regimes, and sports science support. Pakistani players often train under outdated conditions, with limited access to modern equipment or structured fitness programs. Moreover, many players struggle with financial insecurity, as there are no permanent jobs or contracts to sustain them. Without proper incentives, it is difficult to expect athletes to dedicate themselves fully to the sport. To revive hockey, Pakistan must invest in better facilities, provide secure employment opportunities for players, and ensure they are treated as professionals rather than amateurs. Only then can the team hope to compete with nations that have embraced professionalism in hockey. Selection policies also need urgent reform. Currently, politics and favoritism are rampant within the hockey federation. Players are often chosen based on connections rather than merit, undermining the credibility of the team and demoralizing deserving athletes. Honest and competent individuals must be entrusted with the responsibility of managing the sport, and selection should be strictly merit-based. Without transparency, Pakistan hockey will continue to suffer. Pakistan's defeats in the Pro League should serve as a wake-up call. The team cannot expect miracles against top-ranked opponents without addressing the fundamental issues at home. A comprehensive overhaul of hockey management is required, focusing on continuity, professionalism, and meritocracy. The federation must stop the cycle of knee-jerk reactions and instead commit to long-term planning. At the same time, participation in tournaments like the Pro League should be embraced as opportunities for growth. Even if victories are unlikely, the experience gained can help prepare the team for future competitions, including the World Cup. Exposure to high-level hockey is invaluable, but it must be complemented by reforms at the domestic level. Pakistan hockey's poor performance in the Pro League second round is disappointing but not surprising. Heavy defeats against Belgium and Germany reflect the current state of the sport in the country. Yet, these losses also highlight the urgent need for structural reforms. With better facilities, stable management, merit-based selection, and professional support for players, Pakistan can begin the long journey back to competitiveness. Until then, participation in elite tournaments will remain more of a learning exercise than a contest for victories.

## Trump Turns Turtle

Qamar Bashir



The prospect of prolonged conflict threatened global energy markets, international trade routes, and investor confidence. Every discussion of peace pushed markets higher. Every hint of escalation drove uncertainty into global commerce. Trump himself repeatedly noted that financial markets reacted positively whenever negotiations appeared likely to succeed. For a president who closely associates economic performance with political success, the message from the markets was impossible to ignore. The second factor was geopolitical reality. The United States is not Israel

**P**OLITICS is full of surprises, but few developments in recent history have been as dramatic as the transformation of President Donald Trump's position on Iran. Only months ago, Washington's rhetoric revolved around maximum pressure, overwhelming force, and the language of unconditional surrender. Iran was portrayed as an adversary that could be subdued through military power and economic strangulation. Today, the same president is defending a peace agreement with Iran, advocating reconstruction, supporting the return of frozen Iranian assets, criticizing aspects of Israeli military conduct in Lebanon, and warning against actions that could derail the ceasefire he now champions. The question is obvious: What changed? How did a leader who once spoke of destroying Iran's military capabilities become the chief defender of an agreement designed to reintegrate Iran into regional stability? How did the United States move from threats of escalation to discussions of reconstruction and diplomacy? The answer lies in the collision between ideology and reality. At the outset of the conflict, many in Washington appeared convinced that overwhelming military pressure would quickly force Tehran into submission. Yet as the confrontation unfolded, it became increasingly clear that military victories do not automatically translate into strategic success. President Trump himself provided clues to this transformation during his remarks at the G7 Summit. Defending the agreement, he openly acknowledged that continuing the war would have imposed catastrophic economic costs on the world economy. "If we didn't do this deal," Trump declared, "we could have dropped more bombs for another three weeks, two years, whatever. But you would never have the Strait of Hormuz open. Your market would go down at levels nobody had ever seen before." This statement reveals the first and perhaps most important reason for Washington's change of course: economics. The prospect of prolonged conflict threatened global energy markets, international trade routes, and investor confidence. Every discussion of peace pushed markets higher. Every hint of escalation drove uncertainty into global commerce. Trump himself repeatedly noted that financial markets reacted positively whenever negotiations appeared likely to succeed. For a president who closely associates economic performance with political success, the message from the markets was impossible to ignore. The second factor was geopolitical reality. The United States is not Israel. Israel's strategic focus is naturally centered on its immediate neighborhood. The United States, however, is a global superpower whose interests span every continent. Washington must maintain relationships with Europe, Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Muslim world simultaneously. As the conflict expanded, American policymakers increasingly recognized that unlimited support for military escalation carried substantial diplomatic costs. Relations with Gulf states, broader Muslim-majority countries, and important global partners risked deterioration. This broader perspective became

increasingly evident in Trump's remarks. Speaking about Lebanon, he departed sharply from traditional rhetoric. "I feel very bad for Lebanon," Trump said. "It was a great culture. It was an incredible culture. For the last 50 or 60 years they have been living in hell." Even more strikingly, he publicly criticized the Israeli approach to Hezbollah, arguing that "when two drones are shot into the desert and dropped harmlessly, you don't have to knock down buildings in Beirut." Such comments would have been almost unimaginable from an American president at the beginning of the conflict. The third factor was the realization that economic warfare and military operations have limits. Trump repeatedly emphasized that the objective of preventing nuclear proliferation had been achieved. He argued that Israel's greatest security concern was the possibility of an Iranian nuclear weapon. His message to Israeli critics was simple: the agreement delivers exactly what Israel has always claimed to want. Vice President JD Vance reinforced this position even more bluntly. Responding to criticism from members of the Israeli cabinet, Vance stated: "Donald J. Trump is the only head of state in the entire world who is sympathetic to the nation of Israel at this moment in time." He added a pointed reminder: "Two-thirds of the defensive weapons that have protected Israel have been built by American hands and paid for by American tax dollars." Most remarkably, Vance challenged the assumption that military force alone could solve every security challenge. "You can't just kill your way out of solving every single national security problem that you have," he said. Those words represent a profound shift in tone from Washington. For decades, American officials often defended Israeli military actions without publicly questioning the underlying strategy. Vance's comments suggest growing frustration within the administration regarding what it perceives as the absence of a long-term political solution. A fourth factor was military sustainability. Wars consume resources at extraordinary rates. Ammunition stockpiles, advanced weapons systems, naval deployments, and logistical support all impose enormous burdens on national budgets. Trump himself highlighted the staggering financial cost of continued operations, noting that hundreds of millions of dollars were being spent in a matter of days. Even the world's strongest military cannot wage unlimited campaigns without consequences. The fifth factor was the fear of global economic disruption. Trump repeatedly argued that keeping the Strait of Hormuz open was essential not only for regional stability but also for preventing worldwide economic turmoil. He warned that prolonged conflict could have triggered severe disruptions to shipping, energy supplies, and international trade. At one point he bluntly stated that the world was avoiding a potential economic disaster. Rather than presiding over a global downturn, Trump chose to pursue a settlement that promised lower oil prices, stronger markets, and renewed economic confidence. Another revealing moment came when Trump addressed

the issue of frozen Iranian assets. Historically, American administrations have often treated sanctions and frozen funds as permanent leverage. Yet Trump acknowledged a fundamental principle that surprised many observers. "We have taken their money," he said. "It's not our money. It's their money." He went even further. "If we didn't give it back, nobody would ever invest in the dollar again." This statement reflects a recognition that America's financial power ultimately depends on trust in the international system. If foreign governments believe their assets can be permanently confiscated, confidence in that system inevitably erodes. Perhaps the most significant transformation, however, occurred at the level of strategic vision. As the conflict unfolded, Washington increasingly realized that its interests and Israel's interests were not always identical. The United States must manage relationships with dozens of nations across the Middle East. It must protect global commerce, preserve alliances, maintain military readiness, and avoid unnecessary economic shocks. Israel's concerns are immediate and regional. America's concerns are global. At some point, Washington appears to have concluded that continued escalation served neither American interests nor global stability. This helps explain why Trump increasingly praised diplomatic efforts involving regional actors, including Pakistan and Qatar. He publicly acknowledged their role in facilitating negotiations and reducing tensions. In doing so, he signaled a broader shift away from confrontation and toward managed coexistence. None of this means that Trump has become soft on Iran. On the contrary, he repeatedly emphasized that military force remains available if Tehran violates the agreement. His position is not one of surrender but conditional engagement. The difference is that Washington now appears to view diplomacy as the preferred mechanism and military action as the last resort rather than the first. That is a major transformation. Whether critics describe it as pragmatism, realism, or strategic necessity, the shift is undeniable. The president who once spoke primarily of bombs now speaks of reconstruction. The administration that once emphasized pressure now speaks of investment and economic recovery. The government that once focused exclusively on confrontation now emphasizes stability, trade, and regional normalization. History will determine whether this policy succeeds. But one conclusion is already clear: faced with the prospect of economic turmoil, diplomatic isolation, and an open-ended conflict, Washington changed course. Trump did not simply negotiate a deal with Iran. He redefined America's approach to the conflict itself. And in doing so, he may have altered the future trajectory of the Middle East for years to come.

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

## Pakistan: The Candle of Peace

Muhammad Mohsin Iqbal



Pakistan's good intentions and the tireless efforts of its leadership have paid off magnificently. True mediation, as the elders of the Panchayat have long understood, rests upon prestige and mutual trust. The disputing parties must believe the intermediary capable of justice and wisdom. Pakistan, by virtue of its geographic position, its deep understanding...

**I**N the grand tapestry of international affairs, where peace prizes have long been the preserve of singular visionaries or dedicated institutions, a remarkable chapter has now been inscribed in the name of an entire nation. On Thursday, Pakistan's Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif set his signature upon the Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding, formally establishing Pakistan as the trusted mediator between the United States and Iran. In that solemn act, history itself bent its course, awarding to Pakistan a distinction rarer than any laurel bestowed by distant committees; the mantle of peacemaker among mighty powers. When the conflict first erupted, the world beheld a blaze fed by ancient grudges and modern suspicions, threatening to consume the Gulf in fire and bloodshed. The waters of Hormuz themselves seemed poised to carry the sparks farther still. Many counselled caution or watched from afar, yet Pakistan chose a braver path. Like a candle thrust into gathering darkness, the nation stepped forward, undeterred by the powder keg at its feet. Such intervention demanded not merely diplomacy but courage of the highest order, the same resolve Pakistan had lately shown in answering provocation with measured strength. In May 2025, the country had already reminded the world that it would not shrink from defending its honour; now it offered that same fortitude in the service of concord. Pakistan's good intentions and the tireless efforts of its leadership have paid off magnificently. True mediation, as the elders of the Panchayat have long understood, rests upon prestige and mutual trust. The disputing parties must believe the intermediary capable of justice and wisdom. Pakistan, by virtue of its geographic position, its deep understanding of regional currents, and the integrity of its leadership, possessed precisely these qualities. With patience and clear purpose, Pakistani diplomacy worked to extinguish flames that gun-

powder had so easily kindled. The good intentions of the government and the tireless exertions of its envoys have borne fruit. A disaster that might have engulfed economies and nations has been averted, and the world breathes more easily for it—saved from possible catastrophe through this pivotal role of Pakistan. The document itself, bearing the signatures of the American and Iranian presidents alongside that of Pakistan's Prime Minister as mediator, stands as a testament to this achievement. The signature of the Pakistani Prime Minister on this historic page is no less than a profound honor for the nation. Few honours could equal the quiet dignity of that page. By lighting this candle of peace, Pakistan has begun to dispel shadows that had lengthened across the region. Lighting this candle of peace will disperse the possible darkness of the region and the world. Oil supplies, so vital to the arteries of global commerce, now flow once more. With the resumption of oil supply, the world's shaky economy will recover, and the genie of inflation will be bottled again in the countries affected by this crisis. The persistent unrest that troubled the Gulf waters has been quieted, and this candle of peace has also put an end to the ongoing unrest in the Gulf. The meddlesome intrigues that once disturbed its shores have met their correction. The mischief that Israel had been continuing in the Gulf has also been corrected. Not least among the outcomes is the clarity brought to old imbalances. The biggest success in this whole matter is that America has now thrown the spoiled child that it had been holding in its lap in the form of Israel on the ground, allowing wiser counsels to prevail. In this realignment, Pakistan has also extended a hand of renewed hope to the broader Muslim world. Pakistan has once again provided the Muslim Ummah with an opportunity to unite. The Ummah, so often divided by circumstance and design, finds before it a fresh opportunity for unity and purposeful cooperation. When

brother nations stand together, their collective voice carries farther and their shared endeavours flourish. For Pakistan itself, the dividends promise to be both immediate and enduring. In addition to the good of the region and the world, closed paths of prosperity and development will also open for Pakistan. Paths long obstructed by tension now open toward prosperity. The suspended project of the gas pipeline between Pakistan and Iran may at last reach its completion, bringing energy and stability to millions. Iranian oil, secured at equitable terms, will ease domestic burdens. Pakistan will be happy to buy oil from Iran at cheap prices. Bilateral trade between Pakistan and Iran, long promising yet underfulfilled, stands ready to double and redouble, carrying development in its wake. Most precious of all, the peoples of this region may begin to regard one another less as strangers divided by borders and more as members of an extended family bound by faith, geography, and mutual interest. In addition, the people in this region will be united like a family and Muslim countries will proudly play their role in the world. In such an atmosphere, Muslim nations can assume their rightful place on the world stage, not as petitioners but as architects of their own destiny. None of this has come without cost or risk. To leap into the furnace of Gulf tensions required vision and sacrifice. Yet Pakistan's leadership weighed the peril against the prize of peace and chose the harder, nobler course. The flame they have kindled will not easily be extinguished, for it draws its light from the timeless human longing for concord amid discord. In an age still shadowed by strife, the world has been reminded that courage paired with wisdom can still bend the arc of events toward justice. Pakistan, by its actions, has written its name not only in the records of diplomacy but in the brighter ledger of history's peacemakers. The candle burns steadily; may its glow long endure.

## Briefs

Vance issues  
a rare rebuke  
of Israel

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who has become the public face of the deal Trump signed at Versailles on Thursday, rejected claims that the deal rewards Iran without achieving Trump's war aims. The most controversial points have been around oil sales, sanctions relief and a \$300 billion reconstruction fund for Iran, while there is no firm mechanism for destroying Iran's nuclear programme. But Vance said Iran would only get the rewards if it proves that it has complied with the terms that will be hammered out in a 60-day period that he said began on Thursday, following the signing of the MoU.

PM Shehbaz  
cuts petrol,  
diesel prices

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the Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding as a historic achievement. He also praised Chief of Defence Forces and Chief of Army Staff (COAS) Field Marshal Asim Munir, Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar, Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi and other members of the government for their contributions to the peace process and economic management during the crisis. The government has been reviewing petroleum prices on a weekly basis since the US-Israeli conflict with Iran on February 28. 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. During that month, petrol price was raised by Rs137 per litre to a record Rs458.4 per litre. Meanwhile, diesel was at Rs275.7 per litre and jumped to as high as Rs520.35 per litre. Petrol is mainly used by commuters in small vehicles, rickshaws and two-wheelers. Higher fuel prices significantly impact the budgets of middle and lower-middle-class households, who rely on petrol for daily travel. On the other hand, a significant portion of the transport sector relies on high-speed diesel. Its price is considered inflationary since it is predominantly used in heavy goods transport vehicles, trucks, buses, trains, and agricultural machinery such as tractors, tube wells, and threshers.

KP budget  
announced

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Moreover, he said the budget would be in accordance with the Federal Board of Revenue's tax collection target of Rs15.2 trillion. "There will be no grants for the Centre in this budget," he added. Here, he was apparently referring to an arrangement under which provinces have been asked to freeze their share from the federal tax divisible pool under the National Finance Commission award, returning any receipts above the current year's level to the Centre as grants. The KP CM went on to say in his speech that his government's representatives had clearly stated in a meeting of the National Economic Council that a decision on providing grants to the Centre could not be made without consulting Imran. "We said Imran Khan sahib is the final authority on this," he said, adding that the KP government's representatives were not being allowed to meet Imran. He said his party had demanded a meeting with Imran ahead of the provincial budget, further reiterating the PTI's allegation that Imran and his spouse, Bushra Bibi, were being kept in solitary confinement and isolation. Amid protest by the opposition, he continued that a demand to allow Imran's meetings with his family had also been made. "The restoration Imran's fundamental rights was also demanded," he added. He went on to say that demands for Imran's treatment in the presence of his personal physicians and allowing him telephone calls with his sons and access to television, books and newspapers were also demanded.

Iran to lodge complaint with  
Fifa over World Cup restrictions

*Despite submitting preparation schedule, Iran's football team subjected to restrictions, says football federation spokesman*

DNA

TEHRAN: Iran's World Cup team will lodge a complaint with Fifa claiming they are being subjected to travel restrictions during the tournament in North America, the Iranian football federation spokesman said on Thursday. "Despite having submitted its preparation schedule for the tournament well in advance, Iran's national football team has once again encountered restrictions imposed by the organisers, affecting

the implementation of its technical staff's plans," the spokesman said. Iran wanted to fly from their base camp in Tijuana, Mexico, to the United States two days before their next match, against Belgium in Los Angeles on Sunday. But the Iranian federation said its request was turned down. "Given that the game will be played at 12:00pm (local time) in Los Angeles, the Football Federation of Iran requested that the team be allowed to travel to Los Angeles two days before the match," the spokesman said. "The aim was to pro-

vide sufficient time for players to adapt to the match conditions, complete their final training session, and finalise preparations." Despite the technical reasons presented by the federation, the request was once again denied. "The Iranians were also angry that they had to leave Los Angeles the night of their first game of the World Cup, a 2-2 draw against New Zealand. The US administration has pushed back against the Iranian claims. Andrew Giuliani, the executive director of the White House Fifa Task Force, said

on Monday that Iran had been informed in advance that they would be allowed to come into the United States only on the day before the game. "The team will be allowed to come in, match day minus one, so the day before the match," Giuliani told CBS News. "They'll be asked to leave the day that the match wraps up, so the evening of the match. And they'll be able to do that again in Los Angeles." He added that the procedure would be the same for Iran's final group game against Egypt in Seattle on June 26.

South Africa hold Czechs, keep  
World Cup knockout dream alive

*South Africa next face South Korea, while Czech Republic take on daunting task of playing Mexico*

DNA

ATLANTA: Teboho Mokoena's penalty kept South Africa's dream of reaching the World Cup knockout stages for the first time alive after a 1-1 draw with the Czech Republic in Atlanta on Thursday. Michal Sadilek's early opener had the Czechs on course for just their second World Cup win as an independent nation. But Mokoena's late spot-kick kept both teams in the hunt for the last 32, although they will almost certainly have to win their final Group A fixture to advance. Both sides move onto one point, two behind co-hosts Mexico and South Korea, who face off later on Thursday. South Africa next face South Korea, while the Czech Republic

take on the daunting task of playing Mexico in the Estadio Azteca. Both sides started with disappointing performances and defeats on the World Cup's opening day, but the Czechs quickly set about making amends. Patrik Schick is the biggest name in a Czech side lacking the star quality of previous generations but the Bayer Leverkusen forward missed a glorious chance inside the first minute when he planted a header wide. Miroslav Koubek's men only had to wait another five minutes to take the lead. Adam Hlozek's cross was classily cushioned by Alexandr Sojka into the path of Sadilek, who calmly stroked the ball past Ronwen Williams. Now in their fourth attempt, South Africa have never progressed

beyond the group stage at the World Cup. Hugo Broos has overseen an upturn in Bafana Bafana's fortunes since taking charge five years ago. The 2010 hosts had not qualified for the World Cup since 2002 but finished third at the 2023 Africa Cup of Nations. Their return to the global stage has exposed a lack of quality, though, particularly in forward areas. The Czechs were left to rue not making more of their chances to kill the game off early in the second half. Vladimir Darida took too long to get his shot off with a big chance before Lukas Cerv's long-range effort was tipped over by Williams. There were thousands of empty seats on show at the futuristic home of the NFL's Atlanta Falcons,

but those that were in attendance loudly booed the mid-half hydration breaks in an enclosed and air-conditioned stadium. The majority of the crowd were backing South Africa and finally had something to cheer seven minutes from time. Thapelo Maseko's shot hit the arm of the unfortunate Pavel Sulc and referee Tori Penso, part of an all-female officiating team, pointed to the spot. Mokoena confidently drilled home the spot-kick for his nation's first World Cup goal in 16 years. They came close to a second five minutes later when Matej Kovar saved from Relebohile Mofokeng. But both sides had to settle for a point that could yet prove vital come the end of Wednesday's final Group A games.

Govt decision  
to reduce petrol  
prices welcomed

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Chairman of Rawal General and Dental Hospital and Rawal Foundation, and head of the Pakistan Awami Quwat Party, Khakan Waheed Khawaja, has welcomed the government's decision to reduce petroleum prices and urged authorities to provide further relief by cutting fuel prices even more. In a statement issued on Thursday, Khawaja said that if the government is genuinely committed to improving the lives of ordinary citizens, it should further reduce the prices of petrol and diesel. He noted that the sharp increase in petroleum prices over the past months had driven the cost of essential commodities to unprecedented levels, placing an unbearable burden on low-income families. He stressed that the recent reduction in fuel prices should

be followed by a comprehensive mechanism to ensure that the benefits are passed on to the public. According to him, the government must introduce an effective monitoring system to bring down the prices of daily-use items and prevent profiteering. Khawaja also called for an immediate reduction in public transport fares, arguing that lower fuel costs should translate into lower transportation expenses for citizens. He urged the authorities to restore the prices of essential commodities to the levels that existed before March 7, saying that people have yet to receive the full benefit of the decline in petroleum prices. While acknowledging that the cumulative reduction of Rs74 per litre in petrol prices has provided some relief, he maintained that greater reductions are necessary to create meaningful ease for poor and middle classes.

PM Shehbaz invites  
Iranian President...

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Langrial and Planning Minister Ahsan Iqbal for their efforts to keep the economy on track as the world reeled from the financial impact of the US-Israeli war on Iran. The prime minister began his address by noting that Pakistan had earned respect globally after mediating between the US and Iran. "Several countries have sought such respect for centuries, but could not get the respect that God has blessed Pakistan with today. From Japan to Saudi Arabia, from Kuala Lumpur to Casablanca and from Mexico to India, if any country's name is reverberating with respect and honour, it is Pakistan," he said. He urged both sides of the aisle to collectively send a message to the world that, despite "our political differences, we will always be united" for national causes. The premier said if he would not specifically name those who had worked day and night for peace between the US and Iran, even at the cost of repetition, "I will not be fair to myself, to yourself, to this honourable House and to the people of Pakistan." "It is an undeniable truth, whether we like it or not, that the most significant role in this is of Field Marshal Asim Munir, who worked tirelessly day and night, sacrificing his sleep for the last two to three months, to restore peace," he said.

PM talks  
to Saudi...

FROM PAGE 01

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, according to a statement issued by the PMO. Pakistan and Saudi Arabia signed the landmark Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement (SMDA) in September last year, which treats an attack on either nation as an act of aggression against both. During the warm and cordial exchange, the prime minister congratulated.

## Pak Hockey Captain Butt denied UK visa

DNA

Sports Board Punjab and the Pakistan Olympic Association have urged the FIA and Government of Pakistan to investigate any procedural lags that may have contributed to the late submission or processing of documents

ISLAMABAD: In a major blow to the national squad, Pakistan Hockey Team Captain Ammad Shakeel Butt has been refused a UK visa, ruling him out of the crucial FIH Pro League Phase 4 matches. The team is scheduled to play four matches in London, including two against arch-rivals England and two against India. The visa rejection comes at a critical time as the Green Shirts prepare for high-stakes encounters. Butt, the team's defensive anchor and on-field leader, was expected

to marshal the backline against some of the world's top forwards. His absence is a significant tactical disadvantage for the side. Pakistani wedding traditions The Pakistan Hockey Federation (PHF) has reportedly contacted the relevant authorities, including the Ministry of Inter Provincial Coordination and the Pakistan Sports Board, to explore diplomatic channels to resolve the issue, though time is running out before the team's departure. **Key Reactions:** Pakistan Hockey Federation officials have expressed disappointment, citing that the re-

India Seeks Pakistan Security  
Assurances for CAVA Championship

OUR CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD: In a significant development for regional sports, India has expressed keen interest in sending its national volleyball team to Pakistan for the upcoming CAVA Men's Volleyball Championship 2026, with the Volleyball Federation of India (VFI) formally seeking security and political assurances from the Government of Pakistan to facilitate the team's participation. Pakistan Volleyball Federation (PVF) Chairman Chaudhry Mohammad Yaqoob said the Volleyball Federation of India has approached the PVF requesting an official security guarantee and political clearance document required to obtain approval from Indian authorities and initiate the visa process. "The VFI is keen to send its team to Pakistan and has requested the necessary security assurances. We have already taken up the mat-

ter with the relevant authorities," Yaqoob said, adding that India's participation would significantly enhance the profile of the championship, increase fan interest, and provide a positive boost to sporting relations between the two neighboring countries. "Sporting exchanges between Pakistan and India have remained limited for many years. The participation of the Indian team in Islamabad would be a welcome step towards reviving sports ties and promoting regional cooperation through volleyball," he said. Yaqoob highlighted Pakistan's growing stature in international volleyball and confirmed that Islamabad will host the CAVA Men's Volleyball Championship from July 22 to 29. The prestigious tournament will feature ten nations – Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Maldives, Sri Lanka, India and hosts Pakistan. Expected to be one of the largest international volleyball events ever staged in the country.

Italy's  
Meloni says  
Trump 'made  
up' story

DNA

ROME: Italy's prime minister, Giorgia Meloni, has said she is astonished after President Donald Trump told Italian TV she had "begged" him for a picture with her, in comments that have provoked an open row between the two leaders. Meloni has said his comments were entirely "made-up", and Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani has cancelled a trip to the US early next week. The highly public exchange is an indication of how far their earlier close ties have frayed in the months since Trump's decision to go to war with Iran. Trump and Meloni were seen in close conversation at the G7 summit at Evian-Bains in eastern France this week, and the Italian leader later told reporters their relationship was unchanged and there had been "no recriminations". However, Trump has since given a phone interview with Italy's La7 TV channel in which he alleged: "She begged me to take a photo with her; I felt sorry for her." The two leaders were filmed several times at Evian, including while they appeared engrossed in conversation on a small sofa, with Meloni smiling as they talked.

Two passenger  
trains collide  
in UK

LONDON: British Transport Police are responding to reports of a collision involving two trains in an area north of London, with media outlets saying the major incident had resulted in multiple injuries. "We're responding to reports of a collision involving two trains in the Bedford area," the transport police force said on X on Friday, referring to a market town about 56 miles (90km) north of the capital. Unverified footage posted to social media appeared to show two East Midlands Railway (EMR) trains having collided, with one running into the other, and passengers pictured standing on the tracks beside damaged rail carriages. The trains appeared to have remained upright on the track, according to the images posted. "Emergency services are dealing with an incident between London St Pancras and Leicester," EMR said on X, without providing further details. The Daily Telegraph and TalkTV were among British media outlets to report passengers had been injured in the incident. But the emergency services have yet to provide any details about injuries. The East of England Ambulance Service said it had sent multiple resources, including an air ambulance, to the collision on the railway south of Bedford, and urged people to avoid the area. Transport minister Heidi Alexander said in a post on X that she was "deeply concerned" by reports of the collision. - APP

Lebanon  
ceasefire  
agreed

DUBAI/WASHINGTON: Israel and Hezbollah agreed to a ceasefire in Lebanon on Friday after an escalation in fighting there jeopardised the chances of an interim agreement on ending the war in Iran turning into a lasting Middle East peace deal. US-Iran talks in Switzerland planned for Friday were cancelled as fighting flared in Lebanon, creating new uncertainty about the timing of negotiations vital to ensure the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz to global shipping. US President Donald Trump later told NBC News that he had spoken with Israel and asked it to agree to the ceasefire. "You just gotta calm down sometimes and use your head," Trump was quoted as saying by an NBC reporter on X, who added that the president had declined to specify whether he spoke with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu directly. A senior US official said the ceasefire came into effect around 4 pm Lebanon time (1300 GMT) following an exchange of fire, adding that negotiators for the US and Qatar had worked out the agreement with help from Iran. Two sources from Iran-aligned Hezbollah and a senior Israeli official confirmed the ceasefire to Reuters.

Canada romp to first World Cup win,  
Switzerland thump Bosnia

*Jesse Marsch's side wins 6-0 against Qatar, leaving them needing a point against Switzerland to top Group B*

DNA

LOS ANGELES: Canada thrashed nine-man Qatar 6-0 to secure their first ever World Cup victory on Thursday as Switzerland reignited their campaign with a resounding defeat of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Tournament co-hosts Canada had lost all six of their previous matches at the World Cup, at the 1986 and 2022 finals, but brought that run of losses to a halt in spectacular fashion at Vancouver's BC Place Stadium. With Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney – wearing a replica Canada shirt – among a fired-up crowd, Jesse Marsch's side ran riot to secure a win that leaves them needing only a point against Switzerland to finish top of Group B. A hat-trick from Juventus striker Jonathan David, one goal apiece from Cyle Larin and Nathan Saliba, and a Mohammad Marnai own goal sealed Canada's win.

The victory was marred though by a serious left leg injury to midfielder Ismael Kone, who was stretchered off after being clumsily upended by Qatar's Assim Madibo in the 51st minute. Madibo was initially shown a yellow card for the challenge which was subsequently upgraded to red. The stricken Kone was given oxygen as he was carried off the field, waving to fans. Canada coach Jesse Marsch revealed afterwards Kone was being treated in hospital for a suspected broken leg, adding that his staff had understood the severity of the injury immediately. "It was right in front of us, and everyone could hear the bone snap," Marsch said. "I haven't spoken to Ismael yet, but he's at the hospital. He will prepare for a surgery. "Everybody's a little shaken by the whole experience because of the nature of the injury, and also because Ismael is a big part of the heart of our team. It will be a big loss for us." Madibo's dismissal left Qatar down to

nine men after Homam el-Amin was also sent off in the first half for denying a goalscoring opportunity. Canada duly made their numerical advantage count, scoring three times in the second half to crucially boost their goal difference. The Canadians are level with Switzerland on four points at the top of the group, but their superior goal difference means they will win Group B if they draw when the two sides meet in Vancouver on June 24. Earlier Thursday, Switzerland got their campaign back on track with a 4-1 drubbing of Bosnia-Herzegovina at the SoFi Stadium in Los Angeles. Johan Manzambi scored twice while Ruben Vargas and Granit Zhaka were on target in a late flurry of goals for the Swiss, who are dreaming of advancing beyond the last 16 for the first time at this World Cup. Bosnia, who upset Italy in a playoff to reach this year's tournament, are on the brink after a damaging loss that leaves

them with one point from two games. In other games on Thursday, South Africa, who had two men sent off in an abject 2-0 defeat to Mexico in Group A last week, resurrected their slender qualification hopes with a 1-1 draw against the Czech Republic in Atlanta. Teboho Mokoena's penalty earned a point for South Africa after Michal Sadilek opened the scoring for the Czechs. But Mokoena's late spot-kick kept both teams in the hunt for the last 32, although they will almost certainly have to win their final Group A fixture to advance. Both sides move onto one point, two behind South Korea, and five behind co-hosts Mexico. Mexico became the first team to reach the knockout rounds of the World Cup with a 1-0 win over South Korea in a group decider in Guadalajara that has been shrouded in intrigue after Mexican authorities brought down a drone that was spotted hovering over the South Korean training camp earlier this week.

## Briefs

## No vaccine, conflict, mistrust: Ebola's return to DR Congo

KINSHASA: Ebola is spreading again in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, where conflict, mistrust and the lack of a vaccine have made the outbreak hard to contain. The virus, transmitted through close contact and bodily fluids, can cause a fatal haemorrhagic fever and has killed more than 15,000 people in Africa over the past 50 years. Here is a look back at developments during the latest outbreak:

The DRC's 17th Ebola outbreak was officially declared on May 15 but is believed to have been spreading under the radar for weeks. The World Health Organization had already been alerted on May 5 to a mysterious and deadly illness in the mining town of Mongbwalu, where four health workers died within days. In northeastern Ituri province, locals told AFP of unexplained deaths that had been fueling rumors of a "mystical illness" as far back as March. Health authorities initially struggled to identify the virus. Early cases were mistaken for more common diseases like malaria, typhoid or yellow fever. Initial lab tests in Bunia, Ituri's capital, also came back negative because local facilities could only detect the Zaire strain of Ebola — not the Bundibugyo strain responsible for this outbreak.—APP

## Fresh arrests target Türkiye's opp-run municipalities

ISTANBUL: The Turkish government is tightening its grip on the opposition, with fresh arrests on Friday targeting elected officials from the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) as it faces a deepening leadership crisis. Authorities carried out operations targeting CHP-run municipalities in Istanbul's islands district and in southern Türkiye over a range of allegations, including corruption and fraud. Police conducted simultaneous raids in four cities, detaining 37 of 47 suspects named in arrest warrants, the Istanbul prosecutor's office said in a statement. Among those detained was Adalar (islands) mayor Ali Ercan Akpolat. The suspects are accused of bribery, embezzlement, forgery of official documents, forming and leading a criminal organization, and abuse of office, according to the statement. A separate operation targeted the municipality of Silifke in the southern coastal province of Mersin. Turkish media reported that several people, including the mayor, were detained as part of an investigation into allegations of bribery, embezzlement, bid-rigging and abuse of office. The detentions follow a series of operations over the past week against CHP municipalities, including in Istanbul's Beylikduzu and Silivri districts, as well as in the Seferihisar district in the western city of Izmir.

## Syria's wheat harvest expected to more than double this year

DAMASCUS: Syria's wheat production is expected to more than double this year, authorities said, bolstered by heavier rains and the state's recapture of a northeastern breadbasket region from Kurdish forces — but demand has grown in parallel. The agriculture ministry estimates a harvest between 2.3 million and 2.5 million metric tons of wheat this year, senior ministry official Ahmed Jalal Al-Ahmad told Reuters. Last year's production stood at around 900,000 metric tons. "We were blessed with a bountiful harvest season," Ahmad said. Production increased partly "due to a season of heavy rainfall," a surprise turnaround after last year's historic drought slashed wheat production and threatened a food crisis. Ahmad said the harvest projection was also higher because the count included contributions from northern and northeastern provinces, held for years by Kurdish authorities but now merged into state control after an offensive by Syrian government troops. The contributions from three recaptured provinces make up more than half of the expected production, with Hasakah expected to yield around 800,000 tons, Raqqa 300,000 tons.—APP

## On role in US-Iran peace deal

## Tajik president Emomali congratulates PM Shehbaz

According to the Tajik President, the accord also creates a solid foundation for future peace initiatives and reinforces the value of dialogue and diplomacy in resolving complex international disputes

DNA NEWS AGENCY

ISLAMABAD/DUSHANBE: President of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon has congratulated Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on his role in facilitating the peace agreement between the United States and Iran, describing the development as a significant diplomatic achievement with far-reaching implications for regional and global stability. In a congratulatory message sent to the Pakistani premier, President Rahmon commended Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif for his effective mediation efforts that contributed to the successful conclusion of the agreement. "With all due respect, I sincerely congratulate you on your effective role as a mediator in reaching a peace agreement between the United States of America and the Islamic Republic of Iran," the Tajik leader said. President Rahmon praised the Prime Minister's determination and diplomatic engagement, noting that his tireless efforts and strong resolve had helped address a highly sensitive international issue. He said the agreements reached between Washington and Tehran were of immense importance for ensuring lasting peace in the Middle East, strengthening the international security architecture, and promoting sustainable economic and social development worldwide. According to the Tajik President, the accord also creates a solid foundation for future peace initiatives and reinforces the value of dialogue and diplomacy in resolving complex international disputes. President



Rahmon reaffirmed Tajikistan's longstanding commitment to peaceful conflict resolution and welcomed the agreement as an important step toward regional and international stability. "The Republic of Tajikistan, as a peace-loving country and a supporter of resolving all disputes and conflicts through negotiations and dialogue, sincerely welcomes this important diplomatic achieve-

ment," he stated. Expressing confidence in the future of bilateral relations, the Tajik leader voiced hope for the continued expansion of cooperation and friendship between Pakistan and Tajikistan. He also extended his best wishes to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif for good health and continued success, while conveying his hopes for peace, stability, prosperity and lasting

development for the people of Pakistan. The message adds to a growing number of international endorsements of Pakistan's diplomatic role in facilitating dialogue between the United States and Iran, following the signing of the Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding aimed at ending months of tensions and laying the groundwork for a comprehensive peace settlement

## Paris issues last-minute ban on Iranian opposition rally

PARIS: French police have banned a rally planned for Saturday by an Iranian opposition group outlawed by Tehran, citing a risk of clashes, in a decision organizers called "bogus." The National Resistance Council of Iran (NRCI) said the demonstration against a wave of executions in Iran was canceled "after business hours" on Thursday by the Paris police, "citing bogus reasons." The police order said that "in the current particularly tense national and international context there is a serious risk that, during this demonstration, clashes may occur between activists holding opposing views which could seriously disrupt public order." It noted that the gathering point and route of the planned march was due to pass "close to several public buildings and diplomatic missions." The organizers, who have filed an emergency motion to reverse the ban, suggested it was linked to a call hours before the last-minute cancellation on Thursday evening between the French and Iranian foreign ministers. French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot "did not mention this demonstration or request its cancellation," the ministry said. The NRCI is the political arm of the People's Mujahedin of Iran (PMOI or its Persian acronym MEK), which is outlawed as a "terrorist" group by the Islamic republic. The group has organized many protests in Paris previously without incident, including in recent months during nationwide anti-government protests in Iran and the US-Israeli war against the Islamic republic. It is one of several Iranian diaspora groups, who are often bitterly at loggerheads. The demonstration — which organizers expected to draw 100,000 people — was due to draw awareness to a wave of executions in Iran during the Middle East war. A deal to end the conflict signed this week between Tehran and Washington was already under strain on Friday. Rights groups said more than 40 people have been executed in Iran since the war began, many of them people linked to the protests that broke out prior to the war. At least a dozen men have been hanged recently over links to banned opposition groups including the MEK but also outlawed Kurdish and Sunni Baluch organizations.—DNA

## Deadly Philippines quake turns seabed into shore

GLAN, Philippines: Arsenio Butil Jr. fell to his knees and began to pray when last week's deadly 7.8-magnitude earthquake began shaking his home on the coast of the southern Philippines. When he opened his eyes, he saw a once-familiar shoreline changing in real time, with swathes of previously submerged coral suddenly pushing above the waterline. The June 8 quake, driven by a shifting of the nearby Cotabato Trench, toppled buildings, triggered landslides and killed at least 76 people on the southern island of Mindanao. The tectonic forces at work also thrust chunks of the island's coastline upward in a phenomenon known as "coastal uplift," leaving stretches of shore unrecognizable to families who have spent their whole lives there. During a visit to the area, AFP saw fishing boats that had once been at the water's edge on the wrong side of a wall of jagged, now-dead coral stretching for kilometers in both directions. Butil Jr, a fisherman and pastor living in Sarangani province's Glan, told AFP the June 8 quake was the largest that he had ever felt. "The people were extremely panicked," he said. "What I saw at the shoreline was that the water receded. After a while, I saw it ... slowly returning. And then it receded again. Maybe three or four times," Butil said. "The fish were dying and floating." The Cotabato Trench, which lies as close as 50 kilometers off Mindanao, is the site of frequent seismic activity, including a "swarm" of thousands of mostly small tremors recorded in January. A UN disaster risk reduction report released in mid-May hinted they could be a precursor to a large earthquake. "What they see now is their new coastline," Nane Danlag of the Philippines' seismology center told AFP from her office in General Santos City on Friday, adding the change was permanent. "The (seabed) went up two meters," Danlag said, extending the shore by 200 meters (650 feet) in some areas according to initial assessments. Pointing at a map, she said the affected area stretched between two towns nearly 100 kilometers (62 miles) apart. As shocking as the changes to the coastline appeared, the shifting of the earth's crust that created it was a "natural movement," she said. "This has been going on for thousands of years." In the hills above a neighboring village, about 100 men, women and children who fled to higher ground when the earthquake struck were still living in an encampment visited by AFP. Datu Atom Malimping, a Maguindanao chieftain, said the newly formed coastline had left the group of fishermen and their families hesitant to return to their now-destroyed homes. Many remain convinced a tsunami could yet strike, he said, as government aid workers ladled rice porridge into bowls for the evacuees. "(The seabed) rose... It's not the same as it was before," Malimping said. "What if the sea surges forward? That is what everyone fears," he said, adding their new home atop the hill felt far safer. Ten kilometers away, Edzel Baylon, a staffer at the Isla Jardin del Mar resort, bemoaned a newly changed landscape that spelled trouble for a destination that touted a white sand beach holiday experience. "It has a huge effect on the resort, because the main draw for customers is the sea," she said, pointing at an idyllic beachfront now separated from the water by exposed coral. "Sadly, today, our sea has become shallow. It's no longer suitable for swimming." Since the June 8 quake, more than 8,500 aftershocks have shaken the region, according to the seismology agency. In Glan, residents were thinking about next steps, but not yet ready to attempt to rebuild their destroyed homes, said Butil Jr, the pastor. "The ground there is cracked, and the cracks are long. That is why this area would be very dangerous if another earthquake as strong follows," he said. Minutes later, a 5.4 tremor shook the ground underneath his feet.—DNA

## Water injustice destabilising vulnerable nations: Musadik

BRUSSELS: Federal Minister for Climate Change and Environmental Coordination Dr Musadik Malik on Friday argued that the world's water crisis was fundamentally a question of justice rather than scarcity, saying vulnerable communities were increasingly suffering the combined effects of climate change and upstream control of transboundary rivers. Addressing the Transboundary Water Resources Seminar organised by the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) and the Embassy of Pakistan in Brussels, the minister said the problem facing millions of people was not simply floods or droughts, but that others often made decisions affecting water availability. "The problem is neither the scarcity of water nor the floods," he said. "It's someone else having their hand on the tap that allows for the water to flow." To illustrate the human consequences of climate-related disasters, Dr Malik recounted the story of Iqbal Solangi, a farmer living where two Pakistani provinces meet. Solangi was hit by floods in 2010, rebuilt his life, suffered another devastating flood in 2012, recovered again, and was eventually displaced after a third disaster. According to the minister, seven generations of farming were lost, livestock accumulated over two generations disappeared, children dropped out of school and the family was forced to move to an urban area. "He was devastated by floods followed by droughts, droughts that would crack his land, followed by floods again and droughts again," Dr Malik said. The minister argued that Solangi's experience reflected a broader global challenge in which vulnerable populations bear the consequences of decisions they had no role in making. "If someone else, who is not Solangi, decides when he's going to be inundated and when he's going to starve, then it doesn't become a problem of water; it becomes a problem of justice," he said. Dr Malik said Pakistan's experi-

ence was not unique, pointing to communities in Bangladesh and elsewhere whose lives depended on water flows they could not control. He also referred to women forced to walk long distances daily to fetch water after local water sources had receded. "This is not a crisis in her life. This is her life," he said. The minister described what he called a "double bind" facing climate-vulnerable countries. On one hand, he said, major carbon emitters were contributing to global warming, glacier melt and extreme weather events. On the other hand, upstream control of water resources added further pressure on downstream communities. He noted that three countries account for 56 per cent of global carbon dioxide emissions, while 10 countries produce 70pc of emissions and receive 80pc of green financing "We are 220 million people and we produce less than one per cent of carbon dioxide emissions," he said. Referring to Pakistan's climate-related losses, Dr Malik said approximately 6,000 people had died over the past 15 years, around 19,000 had been injured or disabled, and an estimated 1.8 billion school days had been lost. The minister also linked climate change with transboundary water management, saying Pakistan faced the combined impact of glacier melt, changing hydrological patterns and uncertainty regarding shared rivers. He referred to Pakistan's neighbour as the world's third-largest emitter of carbon dioxide and said the same country that contributed to warming was also in a position to influence water flows affecting downstream populations. Dr Malik cited sharp fluctuations in flows at a point on the Chenab River, saying water levels had changed from around 18,000 cusecs to 1,500 cusecs within two days despite no rainfall. "When 18,000 cusecs of water flow drops to 1,500, or starts from 1,500 and goes to 18,000 within two days with no rainfall, it's not rainfall, it's something else," he said. "And that something

else is transboundary water." The minister said the issue extended beyond the Indus Waters Treaty and touched on the wider principle of a rules-based international order. "When you're talking about the Indus Waters Treaty, you're not talking about one treaty. You're talking about the rules-based regime," he said. Dr Malik urged academics, policymakers and international institutions to raise their voices against injustice in both climate governance and transboundary water management. "I think it's a problem of rights. I think it's a problem of justice," he said. The minister stressed that Pakistan's concerns were not directed against ordinary people living across the border, saying poor farmers on both sides faced similar threats from changing monsoon patterns, climate change and environmental degradation. "We are not against the poor people living across the border in India. Why would we be against them? They're equally poor," he said. Warning about the consequences of disrupting river flows, Dr Malik said around 40pc of Pakistan's population depended on agriculture, the sector accounted for roughly 25pc of GDP and underpinned the country's food security. "If someone attacks the flow of river around which we've built this entire civilisation, what do you think it's going to be? From our perspective, it's going to be a declaration of war," he said. However, the minister emphasised that Pakistan sought peace rather than conflict. "We want Pakistan and other countries to be net peace providers," he said, urging dialogue, multilateral engagement and negotiated solutions to transboundary disputes. Calling unilateral approaches dangerous, Dr Malik urged scholars and policymakers to engage in dialogue and strengthen international cooperation on climate and water governance. "If your argument and your evidence are stronger, we stand corrected. But let's have a dialogue, talk about it," he said.—DNA

## FBR offices to remain open on June 27-28

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has announced that all its field formations will observe normal working hours on June 27 and 28, 2026 (Saturday and Sunday), to facilitate the collection of duties and taxes. According to FBR notification issued here on Friday, the extended working hours will also be observed on 29 and 30 June 2026 (Monday, Tuesday), to ensure maximum revenue collection before the close of the fiscal year. The board directed all FBR field offices, including Large Taxpayers' Offices (LTOs), Medium Taxpayers' Offices (MTO), Corporate Tax Offices (CTOs), and Regional Tax Offices (RTOs) across the country. US says needs \$80b for Iran war, other bills WASHINGTON: The US Defense Department will ask Congress to approve around \$80 billion to cover costs from the Iran war and other expenses, the Wall Street Journal reported Thursday. President Donald Trump has faced backlash from Americans who accuse him of pouring billions of taxpayer dollars into the Middle East conflict while oil prices and inflation skyrocket in the United States.—APP

## Syria sets professional standards

DAMASCUS: Syria is intensifying efforts to combat hate speech and promote responsible journalism, marking the UN's International Day for Countering Hate Speech on June 18 with a series of measures anchored in a newly introduced media code of conduct. The Professional and Ethical Code of Conduct for the media sector, introduced earlier this year, aims to raise professional standards, counter inflammatory rhetoric, and reinforce respect for diversity. Officials say implementation is already underway. Omar Haj Ahmad, director of press affairs at Syria's Ministry of Information, said the ministry is embedding the code's principles into editorial policies and developing early-detection mechanisms for hate speech. He said the approach prioritizes awareness and professional guidance over punitive action. Mahmoud Shahoud, head of Syria's Journalists' Union, said the union has translated the code into binding professional commitments, requiring members to pledge adherence to ethical standards — including explicit rejection of hate speech. He stressed the need for accountability and professional self-regulation within the industry. Akram Al-Ahmad, chairman of the Syrian Charter of Honor for Media Professionals and a member of the code's drafting committee, said the next phase will focus on implementation through newsroom policies, training programs, and complaint mechanisms.—APP

## Starmer vows to fight any challenge

WIGAN, England: British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said on Friday he would not walk away from his job, vowing to fight any challenge from his leading party rival Andy Burnham and potentially ushering in a new bout of political instability. Burnham, the Greater Manchester mayor, won a decisive victory for Labour in an election for a parliamentary seat in northwest England, and has signaled that he will use it to enter any contest to replace Starmer. The scale of his victory in Makerfield prompted more Labour lawmakers to say Starmer should consider stepping down to choreograph an orderly handover to Burnham. But Starmer, who won a landslide election in 2024, said he was "not going to walk away," reeling off a list of actions during his two years in power: closer ties to the European Union, stabilizing the economy and reducing waiting times for the health service. "If there is a contest ... then yes, I will run, I will stand, and I've said repeatedly I'm not going to walk away," Starmer told reporters in London during a visit designed to indicate it was "business as usual" for him. He again warned of the dangers of a potentially disruptive leadership campaign.—APP

Briefs

Third suspect in a synagogue arson charged

MELBOURNE: Police charged a third suspect on Friday with an arson attack on a Melbourne synagogue that was allegedly directed by Iran. The 20-year-old man was one of three masked offenders who broke into the Adass Israel Synagogue, doused the interior with flammable liquid then set it alight in the early hours of Dec. 6, 2024, a police statement alleged. The fire caused extensive damage to the synagogue and a worshipper sustained minor injuries. The Victorian Joint Counter Terrorism Team, which brings together federal and state police with a spy agency, charged the man, who has not been named, with offenses including arson. He was charged in a Melbourne jail where he was already being held in custody on unrelated offenses. Police declined to elaborate on those offenses. - APP

Japan owned vessels passed thru Hormuz

TOKYO: A vessel owned by a Japanese company carrying three Japanese crew members safely passed through the Strait of Hormuz on Friday and exited the Gulf, Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said. The vessel, which had been stuck in the Gulf due to the Iran war, is now sailing toward Japan, MOFA said, adding the government had coordinated with Iran over the passage. The vessel is a Liberian-flagged crude oil tanker owned by Japan's Kyoei Tanker, the company said. All Japan-linked vessels carrying Japanese crew members have now evacuated the Gulf, the ministry said. "Following the recent signing of a memorandum of understanding between the United States and Iran, the government will continue making every diplomatic effort to ensure that free and safe navigation of vessels in the Strait of Hormuz resumes promptly," Japan's Prime Minister Sanae Takachi said on X. - APP

Tokyo schools fires injures 10

TOKYO: A fire that broke out at an elementary school in Tokyo on Friday injured around 10 people, including children, media reports said. Thick black smoke billowed from a top-floor window after the blaze reportedly started in a music room at Takinogawa Dai-san School in the Kita area of the Japanese capital. All pupils and staff were evacuated safely and the blaze was extinguished after around three hours, with 75 fire engines and dozens of firefighters at the scene. Most of the 10 injured suffered from smoke inhalation, Kyodo News reported, adding that four people had to be rescued from inside the school building. An AFP journalist said helicopters flew overhead as parents rushed to pick up frightened children. - APP

IRGC sets up cells in Iraq to conduct drone attacks on Gulf

Groups acting under the banner of Islamic Resistance in Iraq have claimed responsibility for dozens of drone and rocket attacks against American assets in the country, drawing deadly retaliatory airstrikes, since the US and Israel attacked Iran on February 28

MONITORING DESK

TEHRAN: Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) has set up secretive new cells in Iraq to carry out attacks on Gulf countries that host American forces, bypassing established militia networks to avoid detection, eight Iraqi sources told media. Three or four cells, each comprising about 10 elite Iraqi Shiite Muslim fighters, launched at least seven drone attacks from desert locations near the southern cities of Basra and Samawa against sites in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates between April 20 and May 17, three of the sources said. A number of their members were drawn from Islamic Resistance in Iraq, an umbrella group of hard-line Shiite factions with thousands of fighters. But the new groups operate outside its command structure, reporting directly to the IRGC, according to the sources, who include two Iraqi military officials, another security official and five local militia commanders. The establishment of the new Iraqi cells, which has not previously been reported, reflects a shift in IRGC tactics aimed at preserving Iran's ability to project force across the region at a time when its armed proxy groups are greatly diminished and its own military and economic resources are depleted, the five militia commanders said. Groups acting under the banner of Islamic Resistance in Iraq have claimed

responsibility for dozens of drone and rocket attacks against American assets in the country, drawing deadly retaliatory airstrikes, since the US and Israel attacked Iran on February 28. But there has been no mass mobilization of Iran's proxies inside Iraq's borders. Several powerful Shiite factions there have been signaling since last year that they are ready to disarm and focus on domestic politics to avert an escalating conflict with the administration of US President Donald Trump. That development may have spurred the IRGC to set up groups under its direct control, according to Jasim Al-Bahadli, a retired Iraqi army general, and two lawmakers from the Shiite governing alliance. Two of these factions, Asaib Ahl Al-Haq and the Imam Ali Brigades, announced this month that they would begin surrendering their weapons to state authorities following repeated US warnings to Iraq's government to disband armed groups operating on its soil. "The newer groups established by the IRGC appear smaller, more ideologically hardened and more tightly controlled, reflecting Iran's need to conserve resources amid economic strain," said Bahadli, who is an expert on Shiite armed groups. US Iran deal does not address Tehran's support for proxies The US and Iranian presidents signed an interim agreement on Wednesday to end the war, with negotiations to follow on difficult issues like the future of Tehran's nuclear program. But Iranian officials have said Tehran's support for "resist-

ance groups" is not up for discussion, and the agreement does not address the issue. Iran's foreign ministry and its missions to the United Nations in New York and Geneva did not immediately respond to detailed questions for this article. The US State Department reiterated "expectations that the Iraqi government take immediate measures to dismantle all the tools of Iran's destabilizing activities in Iraq to include the IRGC and Iran-aligned terrorist militias in Iraq." At a meeting on Monday, Iraq's new prime minister, Ali Al-Zaidi, and US envoy Tom Barrack discussed Iraqi plans to ensure "the complete disarmament and disbandment of all armed groups" operating outside Iraqi state control and to ensure "Iraqi territory cannot be used by any side to threaten regional peace," according to a joint statement. Zaidi's military spokesman, Sabah Al-Numan, declined to comment for this article. Kuwait's information ministry, the Saudi government communications office and the UAE foreign ministry did not respond to requests for comment. The war in Iran has battered the world's most important energy-producing region, disrupting supplies and sending inflation surging. Tehran responded to US-Israeli bombing runs by effectively closing the Strait of Hormuz, through which roughly a fifth of the world's trade in oil and liquefied natural gas passes, and launching a sweeping campaign of drone and missile strikes on Gulf neighbors. New groups that emerged in Iraq during the

conflict, often operating under unfamiliar names and with minimal public profiles, carried out at least three drone attacks targeting Kuwait, two targeting Saudi Arabia and two aimed at the UAE, the three Iraqi security sources said, citing a combination of human intelligence, intercepted communications and evidence gathered from launch sites. Targets included Kuwait's Ali Al Salem Air Base, where US forces are deployed, and a military terminal at the country's international airport, the sources said without elaborating. The attacks aimed at Saudi Arabia and the UAE were intercepted, according to the sources who could not confirm the intended targets. Reuters could not independently verify their accounts. An early test for Iraq's new prime minister Iraqi officials said the IRGC turned to the new cells to maintain plausible deniability, deflect blame from the country's main Iran-backed groups and reduce US pressure on Baghdad to disarm them. The Iraqi security forces have limited information about the groups but are working to uncover their chains of command to help prevent future attacks, the officials said. The groups include elite fighters with expertise in drone operations and communications, they added. Tehran spent decades and billions of dollars building up its network of regional alliances, which has been severely weakened since the Iran-backed Palestinian militant group Hamas attacked Israel on October 7, 2023.

FIA foils illegal migration attempt at Lahore Airport

LAHORE: The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) Immigration Wing on Friday foiled an attempt at illegal migration at Allama Iqbal International Airport and offloaded a passenger who was allegedly planning to travel illegally to Serbia via Azerbaijan. According to an FIA spokesperson, the passenger was travelling to Baku on a visit visa when immigration officials found him suspicious during the clearance process. During further questioning and examination, FIA officials recovered digital evidence indicating that the passenger intended to proceed illegally to Serbia after reaching Azerbaijan. The spokesperson said the timely action by FIA Immigration Lahore thwarted the illegal migration attempt. The passenger was subsequently handed over to the FIA Anti-Human Trafficking Circle (AHTC) Lahore for further legal action and investigation. - APP

PSX tumbles over 2,800 points

DNA  
KARACHI: The Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) benchmark KSE-100 index tumbled by over 2,800 points during intraday trade, breaking its four-day gaining spree. Falling oil prices following the signing of the 'Islamabad MoU' between the United States and Iran had fueled optimism, triggering buying interest across multiple sectors. As a result, the KSE-100 index had maintained its recovery for the fourth straight session on Thursday. On Friday, initial positive momentum pushed KSE-100 to an intraday high of 182,185.87 points at 10:14am. However, the market declined almost steadily from 10:30am onwards. The KSE-100 index declined by 2,858.75 points (1.58 per cent) to stand at 178,539.46 at 12:03pm from the previous close of 181,398.21. The downward trend followed the postponement of the planned US-Iran talks in Geneva, which were seen as a key step in the peace framework under Islamabad MoU.

Pakistan to transition fully to E-Passports

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has decided in principle to transition entirely to an electronic passport system as part of a sweeping package of reforms aimed at modernizing passport services, improving security, and enhancing public convenience. The decision was taken during a special meeting chaired by Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi at the Passport and Immigration Headquarters in Islamabad. Officials said the complete shift to e-passports would significantly reduce fraud and forgery associated with travel documents. Addressing the meeting, Naqvi emphasized that the move would strengthen the integrity of Pakistan's passport system and align it with international standards. The meeting also approved a new fee structure under which applicants seeking premium passport services will be required to pay charges commensurate with the actual cost of those services. In another citizen-friendly initiative, authorities announced that preparatory work for home delivery of passports, both within Pakistan and abroad, has been completed. The service is expected to be launched soon, enabling citizens to receive passports at their doorstep without visiting passport offices for collection.

The minister was informed that a cashless payment system will be introduced in passport offices nationwide from July 1, marking a significant step toward digitization and transparency in public service delivery. As part of the modernization drive, online passport applications will also be migrated to the Pak ID platform, creating a more integrated and efficient digital process for applicants. The meeting further reviewed progress on the proposed Business Passport policy. Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi directed officials to finalize the policy at the earliest in consultation with the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR), underscoring the government's intent to facilitate legitimate business travel while ensuring regulatory compliance. During the session, Director General Passports and Immigration Muhammad Ali Randhawa provided a detailed briefing on ongoing reforms, operational improvements, and future plans for the passport and immigration system. The latest measures reflect the government's broader push to digitize public services, improve efficiency, and provide citizens with faster, more secure, and more accessible passport facilities. - APP



HASSANABDAL: Australian High Commissioner Tim Kane Gurdwaras Panja Sahib to learn more about the country's rich Sikh heritage. The preservation of these sites reflects Pakistan's diverse history & the importance of protecting places that hold deep meaning for communities around the world. - DNA

Pakistan's letter on India's IWT violations handed over to UNSC

UNITED NATIONS: Pakistan's UN Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad handed over a letter from the Deputy Prime Minister & Foreign Minister, Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar, to Ambassador Leonor Zalabata Torres of Columbia, president of the Security Council for June, concerning India's continued "illegal actions and violations" of the World Bank-brokered 1960 IWT between India and Pakistan, according to a Pakistani mission press release. It said the letter draws urgent attention of the 15-member Council to the two illegal Indian infrastructure projects linked to Chenab River system aimed at water diversion, which reveal India's intention to illegally alter the

Treaty-governed flow and use of the Western Rivers, weaponizing water with dangerous implications for Pakistan's water, food, and economic security as well as regional stability and international peace and security. The letter urges the Security Council to take cognizance of this "fragile and deteriorating situation and hold India accountable for its brazen violations". Ambassador Asim Ahmad also briefed the UNSC President on the overall situation in South Asia and India's continued non-compliance with its obligations under UN Security Council resolutions on the Jammu and Kashmir dispute, according to the press release. - APP

Rs8bn irregularities in Karachi Yellow Line BRT project

NEWS DESK

KARACHI: A Chief Minister's Inspection Team report has flagged financial irregularities of more than Rs8 billion in Karachi's BRT Yellow Line project, terming the matter serious mismanagement. "The administrative protocols governing contract management, tax deduction and deposition into the government exchequer, and disciplined execution have repeatedly been violated," the report said. The inquiry was ordered into financial mismanagement in the Karachi Mobility Project (KMP) for the Yellow Line BRT - designed to connect Quaidabad's Dawood Chowrangi with Numaish - being implemented with financial assistance from the World Bank. According to the report, the project includes the construction of the new Jam Sadiq Bridge, Depot-I at Dawood Chowrangi and Depot-II at Indus Hospital, Karachi. The report said then-KMP Project Director Zamir Abbasi and Director Jhaman Das issued cheques and payments to contractors, while "all established checks and balances" were bypassed, including those involving the PAO, consultants, PMC and SMTA.

A table in the report showed advance payments of Rs885 million for Depot-I, Rs2 billion for Depot-II and Rs5.682 billion for Jam Sadiq Bridge, taking the total to Rs8.567 billion. It said the advance payments were made in violation of rules and provided contractors with an undue benefit, while also putting the Yellow Line project and the bank agreement at risk. The report noted that the awarded cost of the Jam Sadiq Bridge was Rs12.53 billion, Depot-I Rs2.64 billion and Depot-II Rs16.96 billion. It showed physical progress up to April 2026 at 55.17% for JSB, 10% for Depot-I and 35.62% for Depot-II. "The management practices adopted by KMP represent a classic case of sham administration," the report said, adding that the matter warranted proceedings under relevant E&D and Misconduct Rules. The report also said the conduct reflected "unfitness for civil service" and rendered the official "undeserving of any position of trust or responsibility in the future". It recommended administrative and remedial measures by the Transport and Mass Transit Department to "rescue the project". The report also recommended a criminal investigation against the administration, after which the Anti-Corruption department registered an FIR.

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