



# Islamabad POST

Friday, June 26, 2026

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**Esmail Baghaei  
condemns Nato  
chief's admission**

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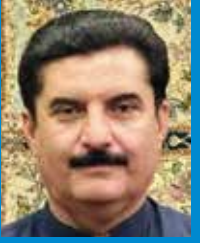
**Khwaja Asif  
stands by  
his remarks**

Detailed News On Page-08



**Governor KP  
reviews plans  
for Muharram**

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## Middle East tensions

# Any US-Iran deal will ensure security of Gulf allies: Rubio

Iran fought two of the world's most powerful armies – the US and Israel – during the conflict and took effective control of the vital Strait of Hormuz, heavily disrupting oil flows and rattling global energy markets and the wider economy

### NEWS DESK

WASHINGTON: US Secretary of State Marco Rubio told Gulf allies on Thursday that any deal with Iran would take their interests into account, as he wrapped up a Middle East trip aimed at selling the Trump administration's preliminary accord to sceptical regional partners. Speaking at a meeting of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in Bahrain, home to the US Navy's Fifth Fleet, Rubio said Washington was seeking an enduring peace with long-time foe Iran that would not undermine the security and prosperity of its allies in the oil-rich region, which fear the accord is too soft on Iran. Iran fought two of the world's most powerful armies – the US and Israel – during the conflict and took effective control of the vital Strait of Hormuz, heavily disrupting oil flows and rattling global energy markets and the wider economy. The war began with US-Israeli strikes on Iran in late February, and Tehran targeted US assets and bases in Gulf countries in retaliation. It, however, has not accepted responsibility for all of those attacks. At the GCC meeting, Rubio said: "The reality of it is that no country on Earth has the right to charge for the use of international waterways. And that will never be an acceptable condition of any deal. The president's been fundamentally clear about that." Bahrain's Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Rashid Al Zayani,

who chaired the gathering, welcomed Oman's announcement of a corridor for the safe passage of vessels through the strait. Rubio's three-day tour of the Gulf is the first high-level diplomatic mission since the US-Iran framework agreement last week to end the war on Iran. He has acknowledged the delicacy of his mission as he seeks to win over Gulf Arab leaders wary that excessive concessions could strengthen Tehran and reshape the region's security balance and oil flows. At his previous stops in the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait, Rubio sought to assure officials that the proposed deal was not overly favourable to Iran. "We're not going to do anything that undermines the security of our allies, our long-standing allies in the region," he told reporters in Kuwait. US President Donald Trump said on Tuesday that Iran had agreed to nuclear inspections into "infinity" while Tehran said it had made no such concession in negotiations. The two countries, which ended a first round of negotiations in Switzerland on Monday, have also offered conflicting accounts about financial incentives for Iran, control of the Strait of Hormuz, and Israel's parallel strikes in Lebanon. All six GCC nations – Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, UAE, Bahrain and Kuwait – are strategic US allies that offered some degree of logistical support to Washington during the war.

Continued on Page 06



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Germany Ina Lepel called on Federal Planning Minister Ahsan Iqbal. Both sides discussed matters of mutual interest. – DNA

## Pakistan, Turkiye sign three MoUs

### DNA

ANKARA: Pakistan and Turkiye on Thursday signed three Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) aimed at enhancing institutional collaboration, technical cooperation and knowledge sharing in the power sector during high-level consultations held in Istanbul. The agreements were signed as part of ongoing cooperation between the two brotherly countries in the energy sector, according to a press release issued by the Ministry of Energy (Power Division). The agreements reflect the shared commitment of both countries to deepen institutional collaboration, promote knowledge exchange, and strengthen technical cooperation across key areas of the power sector. The MoUs were signed between Pakistani and Turkish energy sector entities, Independent System and Market Operator (ISMO) and Energy Exchange Istanbul (EPIAS), ISMO and the Turkish Electricity Transmission Corporation (TEIAS), and the Power Planning and Monitoring Company (PPMC) and the

Continued on Page 06

# Death toll from Venezuela twin quakes above 200

USGS, using predictive modeling to estimate death toll, says it would most likely run into the thousands

### NEWS DESK

CRACAS: Two powerful earthquakes struck Venezuela on Wednesday, killing at least 200 people and injuring 700 more as buildings collapsed in and around the capital Caracas, interim President Delcy Rodriguez said. Rodriguez said that an initial fund of \$200 million will be created using resources from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to rebuild infrastructure, hospitals and housing. A magnitude 7.2 earthquake hit about 160 km (100 miles) west of Caracas, followed less than a minute later by a magnitude 7.5 tremor, according to the US Geological Survey (USGS). The USGS, using predictive modeling to estimate the death toll, said it would most likely run into the thousands, with a substantial probability of exceeding 10,000. Rodriguez said initial figures do not include casualties from La Guaira state, near Caracas and home to the city's airport, which is the worst affected. "Dozens of buildings have collapsed, and we are currently carrying out very intense rescue efforts to save as many lives as God allows us to save,"

Continued on Page 06

## PM expresses grief over earthquake devastation

### APP

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday expressed deep grief and sorrow over the devastation and loss of life caused by the earthquakes in Venezuela. "On behalf of the people of Pakistan, I convey our heartfelt condolences to the Government and people of Venezuela, especially the families of the victims", the prime minister said in his post on X. We pray for the injured and stand in solidarity with all those affected during this difficult and challenging time, he added.

## Briefs

### Govt lodges protest with BBC Urdu

ISLAMABAD: The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has filed a formal complaint with BBC Urdu regarding the publication of alleged fake news about Azad Jammu & Kashmir. The ministry stated that the report was based on unverified and uncorroborated allegations, ignoring official facts and on-record statements. Officials emphasized that this is not the first instance of such reporting, noting that repeated publication of unverified claims has become a concerning trend.

# 4 killed, 2 injured in Bannu firing

### NEWS DESK

BANNU: At least four people, including a mother and her two sons, were killed while two others, including a young girl, sustained injuries in a firing incident in Bannu, DNA News reported on Thursday, quoting local police. According to police, the shooting occurred in the Shabri Bharat area of Bannu, reportedly following a dispute involving women. The deceased include a mother, her two sons, and another man. The injured were shifted to a nearby hospital for medical treatment. Police officials said they reached the scene soon after receiving information about the incident and launched an investigation to determine the circumstances surrounding the shooting. On Wednesday, three proclaimed offenders were gunned down during a police encounter in Swabi.

Continued on Page 06

## One killed in IED explosion in Balochistan's Ormara

### DNA

QUETTA: A man was killed on Thursday after an improvised explosive device (IED) fitted to a motorcycle exploded in Ormara, a coastal town in Balochistan's Gwadar district, police officials said. The deceased was identified as Raja, a resident of Makola tehsil in Pasni. According to the police, he had spent the previous night as a guest at the residence of a man, Syed Muheem Jan. Police said the explosion occurred on Thursday morning when Raja started the

Continued on Page 06

# Petrol prices in Pakistan to drop further

Rana Sanaullah said the government has formed a dedicated team to monitor developments in petroleum markets and assess their impact on domestic petrol prices

### FIJAZ CHAUDHRY

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister's Adviser Rana Sanaullah has indicated that petrol prices in Pakistan may decline further as international oil prices continue to ease following the de-escalation in US-Iran tensions. Rana Sanaullah said the government has formed a dedicated team to monitor developments in petroleum markets and assess their impact on domestic petrol prices. He noted that global oil prices had surged during the US-Israel and Iran conflict amid concerns over regional stability and potential disruptions to energy supplies. In response to the uncertainty, the government had adopted a weekly review mechanism for petroleum prices. According to the adviser, oil marketing companies were required to purchase fuel at elevated prices during the period of volatility to maintain adequate stock levels. He said allegations that companies had earned excessive profits during the crisis did not fully reflect the realities of market fluctuations. Rana Sanaullah added that while companies may benefit from price movements at certain times, they also face losses when market conditions reverse. He said the government would review the extent of gains and losses within the sector while ensuring that the pricing system continues to function smoothly. Read more: Pakistan oil industry warns of fuel supply risks after petrol, diesel price cuts He stressed that the government remains committed to passing on the benefits of lower international oil prices to consumers. However, he warned that any attempt to create an artificial fuel shortage or market disruption would be dealt with strictly. The remarks come as international crude oil prices have declined in recent days, raising expectations of further relief for consumers if the downward trend continues. Brent crude fell more than one percent Thursday,

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## KP CM urges scholars to promote sectarian tolerance

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Chief Minister, Muhammad Sohail Afridi Thursday stated that historic event of Karbala represents a definitive battle between truth and falsehood. In his message for Ashura, he said that eternal sacrifice made by Hazrat Imam Hussain, grandson of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), was an unmatched act to uphold glory of Islam that will be remembered forever. KP CM highlighted that tragedy of Karbala serves as a powerful reminder of cruelty of unjust rulers and holds deep lessons for all of humanity. He described Hazrat Imam Hussain as a champion of honesty who stood firmly against oppression and tyrannical policies. Afridi said that by embodying this same spirit of patience and steadfastness, Muslims today can overcome systemic exploitation, counter injustice, and work toward a more peaceful and stable society instead of becoming divided by internal disagreements. To ensure safety during these holy days, KP CM stressed that law, order, and religious harmony must be strictly maintained throughout the province.—APP

## Ashura stands as unwavering pursuit of justice: Ayaz

ISLAMABAD: Speaker of National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq Thursday paid profound tribute to Hazrat Imam Hussain (AS), the Ahl-e-Bait (AS), and the martyrs of Karbala on the occasion of Ashura, terming the tragedy of Karbala as one of the most defining chapters in Islamic history and an enduring beacon of courage, righteousness and moral conviction. The Speaker said that the sacrifice rendered by Hazrat Imam Hussain (AS) and his devoted companions transcends the boundaries of time, offering a universal lesson in dignity, perseverance and unwavering commitment to truth. He said that rather than submitting to tyranny and injustice, the martyrs of Karbala chose the path of honour and principle, leaving behind a legacy that continues to inspire generations across the world. Ayaz Sadiq said that the message of Karbala serves as a powerful reminder that justice, compassion, tolerance and mutual respect are the foundations upon which peaceful and progressive societies are built. He emphasized that contemporary challenges such as extremism, intolerance and violence can only be overcome through unity, collective resolve and adherence to the values that promote social harmony and national cohesion. Expressing solidarity with the people of Palestine and Indian Occupied Jammu & Kashmir, he said that their continued struggle for justice, dignity and the realization of their legitimate rights echoes the universal principles embodied by the sacrifice of Hazrat Imam Hussain (AS). He said that standing against oppression, defending human rights and remaining steadfast in the face of adversity reflect the true spirit of Karbala and its enduring relevance in today's world. The Speaker further underscored the importance of fostering unity, understanding and mutual respect among the Muslim Ummah, saying that the challenges confronting the Islamic world require collective wisdom.—APP



ISLAMABAD: Artists making paintings at Jinnah Square Underpass for beatification purpose.

## Hajj 2027 online registration continues

ISLAMABAD: The Ministry of Religious Affairs, on Thursday said that the mandatory online registration process for Hajj 2027 is continuing uninterrupted, allowing prospective pilgrims to complete their registration from the comfort of their homes. According to a spokesperson, the latest statistics generated through the Hajj Management System, developed by the National Information Technology Board (NITB), reveal a strong response from intending pilgrims across the country. More than 80,000 applicants have registered within the first three days of the registration drive. Among them, those wishing to depart from Karachi constitute the largest group, followed by applicants selecting Lahore and Islamabad as their departure stations. The registered pilgrims include approximately 47,000 men and 33,000 women. Officials have described it as encouraging that the majority of registered applicants fall within the 25 to 50-year age bracket. Educational data of registered applicants shows that around 1,000 hold PhD degrees, 17,000 possess master's degrees.—APP

## Hazrat Data Ganj Bakhsh's 983rd ghusal ceremony held

The spokesperson said that all necessary measures had been taken to ensure the peaceful and secure conduct of the annual Ghusl-e-Mazar ceremony

LAHORE: The 983rd annual 'ghusal mubarak' ceremony of the shrine of revered Sufi saint Hazrat Al-Shaikh Al-Syed Ali Bin Usman Al-Hajveri (RA), widely known as Hazrat Data Ganj Bakhsh, was observed with great religious devotion and reverence, here on Thursday. The ceremony began with the recitation of the Holy Quran, followed by soul-stirring Naat recitations by renowned Naat khawans. The traditional ghusal of the shrine was performed with rosewater, accompanied by Chadar Poshi and the laying of floral wreaths. Special prayers were offered for the peace, prosperity, and stability of Pakistan. Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar attended the ceremony along with provincial ministers Khawaja Salman Rafique, Bilal Yaseen and Chaudhry Shafay Hussain,

as well as Special Assistant Ali Dar. Senior government officials, including Punjab Home Secretary Dr. Ahmad Javed Qazi, Secretary Aunaf Dr. Ehsan Bhutta, Secretary Excise Masood Mukhtar, and Senior Member Board of Revenue (SMBR) Nabeel Javed, also participated in the ceremony. A large number of devotees attended the annual ritual, while authorities ensured exemplary security and facilitation arrangements for visitors. According to the Punjab Home Department spokesperson, walk-through gates were installed at all entry points of the shrine, while continuous monitoring was maintained through an extensive security system. The spokesperson said that the inner and outer premises of the shrine were being monitored round-the-clock through CCTV cameras. Female police personnel were also deployed to facilitate and provide security to women devotees. Parking arrangements were made at a secure distance from the shrine to ensure smooth movement and effective crowd management. The spokesperson added that all entry and exit routes of Lahore were under effective 24-hour surveillance as part of the security plan. Fire brigade teams, Bomb Disposal Squad personnel, Rescue 1122 ambulances, and medical staff remained on duty throughout the event to respond promptly to any emergency situation. Teams of the Punjab Food Authority were also deployed at the distribution points of 'langar' and saabel to ensure food quality and hygiene standards for devotees. The spokesperson said that all necessary measures had been taken to ensure the peaceful and secure conduct of the annual Ghusl-e-Mazar ceremony.

## Cotton research trials inspected at CRI, CCRI

MULTAN: Pakistan Central Cotton Committee (PCCC) Chief Executive Officer and Cotton Commissioner Dr Khadim Hussain visited the Cotton Research Institute (CRI) Multan, where he conducted a detailed inspection of National Coordinated Varietal Trials (NCVT) and ongoing research experiments. Dr Khadim reviewed trial planning, experimental plots and current crop performance, describing preliminary data generated through the trials as highly valuable for future varietal selection and cultivation strategies. Chief Scientist CRI Muhammad Jameel briefed participants on field experiment methodology and data collection procedures. The NCVT Committee, comprising Dr. Nazar Iqbal, Director General Federal Seed Certification and Registration Department (FSC&RD), Dr. Muhammad Idrees Khan, Secretary PCCC, Ms. Sabahat Hussain, Director CCRI, and other agricultural scientists, inspected advanced cotton lines and appreciated progress achieved on scientific grounds. Deliberations focused on yield potential of new lines, disease.—APP

## Over 70,000 cops deployed for security

He added that the ban on pillion riding remained in force across the province, except for senior citizens, women and law enforcement personnel

LAHORE: Punjab Police remained on high alert across the province on the 9th of Muharram, deploying more than 70,000 officers and personnel to ensure the peaceful conduct of mourning processions and Majalis. According to a Punjab Police spokesperson, a total of 1,697 mourning processions and 3,869 Majalis were being held across Punjab on Thursday, including 208 Category-A processions and 337 Category-A Majalis. In Lahore, 81 mourning processions and 386 Majalis were being held under strict security arrangements, including 26 Category-A processions and 46 Category-A Majalis. Punjab Inspector General of Police (IGP) Abdul Kareem directed officers to further strengthen security measures and ensure strict

implementation of Section 144 across the province. He said more than 152,000 police officers and personnel had been deployed for security duties during Ashura, while all available resources were being utilized to maintain peace and public safety. The IGP directed field formations to remain vigilant against hostile and extremist elements and said the peaceful observance of Muharram events would be ensured through close coordination among community leaders, district administrations and security agencies. Abdul Kareem said RPOs, CPOs, DPOs and traffic officers were personally supervising security and traffic arrangements, while monitoring was being carried out through the Punjab Home Department, Safe Cities Authority and district control rooms.

He said CCTV cameras, walk-through gates, metal detectors and other modern equipment were being used to strengthen security checks. Snipers had also been deployed on rooftops along procession routes, while plainclothes commandos were accompanying major processions. The IGP urged religious scholars and community leaders to continue promoting inter-sect harmony, tolerance and brotherhood during Muharram. He also acknowledged the support of provincial ministers, religious scholars, armed forces, Rangers and other security agencies in maintaining peace. He added that the ban on pillion riding remained in force across the province, except for senior citizens, women and law enforcement personnel.—DNA

## Ulema Board delegation visits Home Department control room

LAHORE: A delegation of the Punjab Muttahida Ulema Board on Thursday visited the Central Control Room of the Punjab Home Department and held a meeting with Home Secretary Dr Ahmad Javed Qazi to discuss security arrangements for Muharram. The delegation was led by Muttahida Ulema Board Chairman, Mufti Intikhab Ahmad Noori and included religious scholars from various schools of thought. Pakistan Ulema Council Chairman Hafiz Tahir Mahmood Ashrafi also attended the visit. Other members of the delegation included Mufti Muhammad Ramzan Sialvi, Hafiz Muhammad Umar Madani, Hafiz Muhammad Amjad, Dr Shafiq Khan Pasruri, Dr Abdul Ghafoor Rashid, Dr Hafiz Hassan Madani, Dr Zulfiqar and Zafar Abbas Khawaja. Additional Secretary Internal Security Maham Asif Malik, Additional Secretary Special Initiatives Abdul Rauf and other relevant officials were also present. The delegation reviewed the live monitoring of 9th Muharram processions and Majalis as well as the cyber patrolling system being operated from the Punjab Home Department's Central Control Room. Speaking on the occasion, Dr Ahmad Javed said the Punjab government was taking all possible measures to ensure peaceful observance of Muharram across the province. He said more than 37,000 Majalis and over 9,000 processions were being monitored through a live surveillance system, while the Central Control Room of the Home Department remained operational round the clock and was receiving reports from all districts of Punjab. The Home secretary said foolproof security arrangements had been made for all Majalis and processions across the province and appreciated the role of religious scholars in promoting peace and harmony. He said the ulema were playing a key role in maintaining law and order by spreading the message of love, tolerance and patience. Mufti Intikhab Ahmad Noori said the Muttahida Ulema Board fully supported the Punjab government's efforts to promote inter-sect harmony and maintain peace during Muharram. He said scholars belonging to all schools of thought were standing shoulder to shoulder with the state to strengthen unity and social cohesion. He added that before the start of Muharram, the Cabinet Committee on Law and Order and the Ulema Peace Caravan had visited various districts of Punjab to promote harmony and brotherhood. Tahir Mahmood Ashrafi paid tribute to the Punjab Home Department and law enforcement agencies for their efforts to maintain peace during Muharram.—APP

## Governor Kundi reviews Muharram security arrangements

He observed that salaries of police personnel in the province were lower than those in other provinces and said he would forward recommendations to the chief minister for an increase in police salaries

PESHAWAR: Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Karim Kundi on Thursday visited the central 9th Muharram procession originating from Naeem Shah Chowk Saddar and reviewed security arrangements put in place for Muharram-ul-Haram. The Governor lauded the efforts of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Police, civil administration, and religious leaders from both Shia and Sunni communities for ensuring effective arrangements for the sacred month. Talking to media representatives, he said the police had made excellent security arrangements across the province, particularly in Peshawar, to ensure that Muharram and Youm-e-Ashur passed in a peaceful environment. He urged followers of all schools of thought to promote mutual respect, unity and cooperation. The Governor said directives had already been issued to ensure the provision of all possible facilities for mourners participating in processions and religious gatherings. Later, the Governor visited the Supreme

Command Post at Kohati Gate, where Deputy Commissioner Peshawar Sanaullah briefed him on security and monitoring arrangements. He was informed that Muharram processions and majalis were being continuously monitored through modern surveillance cameras and that around 90 percent of such events were being held within the Walled City areas. The Deputy Commissioner informed the Governor that more than 11,000 security personnel had been deployed across Peshawar during Muharram and also briefed him on the route and security plan for the central Ashura procession. Speaking on the occasion, Governor Kundi said personnel of all line departments performing duties during Muharram deserved appreciation. He said that security threats from hostile elements remained high this year and reiterated that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had been one of the provinces most affected by terrorism, while security forces and police continued to render immense sacrifices.

The Governor also visited the central control room established at the Supreme Command Post. Later, he visited the Integrated Command and Control System at Police Lines, where Capital City Police Officer (CCPO) Mian Saeed briefed him on the security monitoring system. The CCPO informed the Governor that more than 600 cameras were being used to monitor Muharram processions and gatherings, while security surveillance through modern cameras was also underway in Peshawar, Kohat, Hangu, Bannu and Dera Ismail Khan. Governor Kundi said the Safe City project was indispensable for maintaining law and order in the province. He appreciated the services of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Police, saying the force was performing commendably despite limited resources. He observed that salaries of police personnel in the province were lower than those in other provinces and said he would forward recommendations to the chief minister for an increase in police salaries.—DNA

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## National Days and Armed Forces Days

### JUNE

- June 02/Italy National/Independence Day
- June 04/Finland Armed Forces Day
- June 06/Sweden National Day
- June 10/Portugal Portugal Day (National Day)
- June 10/Jordan Arab Revolution & Army Day
- June 11/United Kingdom Birthday of Her Majesty The Queen Elizabeth
- June 12/Philippines Independence Day
- June 12/Russian Federation Day of Sovereignty of the Russian Federation (National Day)
- June 13/Zambia Armed Forces day
- June 17/Iceland National Day
- June 18/Seychells National Day
- June 25/Croatia National Day
- June 25/Mozambique National Day
- June 26/Azerbaijan Army Day

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- Cannt Hospital...9270907-11
- DHQT.....5556311-4
- RGH.....9290301-7
- Holy Family.....9290322-7
- PIMS.....9261170-79
- Polyclinic.....9218300-09
- Shifa International 4603666



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- CDA.....9208301-04
- Met Office.....9250360-6
- RDA.....5555864
- TMA.....5770886
- Cantonment Board 9270151-3



### Islamabad Metropolitan

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

### Water Tank

- Islamabad.....0321-5744480



ISLAMABAD: Mourners oozing themselves with knives and chains during main procession on 9th Muharramul Haram.

## Mehfooz App' emerges as game-changer for security

The official said Islamabad Police was utilizing all available resources, including modern surveillance and coordinated field deployment, to ensure foolproof security during the central 9th Muharram procession

ISLAMABAD: The Mehfooz Muharram App received overwhelming praise from procession participants in the capital, who hailed its launch as a landmark security initiative and lauded Interior Minister, Syed Mohsin Raza Naqvi and Islamabad Police for the pioneering step. According to media report, the app, developed to strengthen security during Muharram gatherings, allowed users to quickly report suspicious activities, access emergency services and stay connected with law enforcement through an easy-to-use digital platform. QR codes displayed at Imambargahs and procession routes have enabled participants to download and use the application with ease. Many mourners described the initiative as a timely step

that combines technology with public safety. They said the app has increased confidence among participants and made it easier to seek assistance or share information in case of an emergency. "We appreciate the efforts of Interior Minister Syed Mohsin Raza Naqvi and Islamabad Police for introducing such a useful facility," said one participant, adding that the QR code system is simple, accessible, and reassuring for families attending processions. Another participant remarked that the availability of instant reporting features and emergency contacts reflected a proactive approach to protecting citizens during Muharram, calling the initiative an example of modern policing. Participants urged authorities to continue ex-

panding digital public safety initiatives beyond Muharram, saying the Mehfooz Muharram App has demonstrated how technology can support secure, peaceful and well-managed religious events while strengthening cooperation between citizens and law enforcement. Inspector General of Police (IGP) Islamabad Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi on Thursday visited Imambargah Asna Ashri in Sector G-6 and reviewed security arrangements for the central 9th Muharram procession.

An official told APP, the IGP Rizvi inspected route security, point deployment and rooftop duties to assess the implementation of the comprehensive security plan for the procession. Rizvi reviewed the operational preparedness

of police personnel deployed at key locations and ensured that all security measures were being implemented effectively. IGP Rizvi also met DIGs and other senior police officers and issued necessary directions to further strengthen security arrangements and maintain close coordination throughout the procession.

He directed officers to remain vigilant, strictly enforce the security plan and ensure a peaceful environment for mourners.

The official said Islamabad Police was utilizing all available resources, including modern surveillance and coordinated field deployment, to ensure foolproof security during the central 9th Muharram procession.—APP

## Kashmiri identity under threat in IIOJK

ISLAMABAD: All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) has warned that the Modi regime was plotting to deprive Kashmiris of their identity and culture, with India "hell bent" on converting Indian illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir's Muslim majority into a minority. According to APHC Media Service, APHC spokesman Advocate Abdul Rashid Minhas in a statement in Srinagar said India removed legal barriers for non-locals to settle in the occupied territory by abrogating Articles 370 and 35A on August 5, 2019. Since then, IIOJK has witnessed huge demographic changes as the BJP-RSS systematically paves the way for settler colonialism. He said the BJP regime was depriving Kashmiris of jobs and other opportunities in their own land to fulfill its long-held desire of total occupation. "Kashmiris' freedom movement will run out of steam if their identity is lost," he warned, but added that brave and resilient Kashmiris would thwart India's nefarious designs. The spokesman urged the international community to take notice of India's plans to alter the demography and erode Kashmiri identity in the disputed territory. Three among child injured in road accident A car collided with a motorcycle in the Bhara Kahu area of the federal capital on Thursday, leaving a man and woman injured along with a child, who sustained serious injuries.—APP

## IESCO notifies power suspension programme

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad Electric Supply Company (IESCO) on Thursday issued a power suspension programme for Friday in various areas of its region due to necessary maintenance and routine development work. According to an IESCO spokesman, power supply will remain suspended in areas fed by KTM-2 feeder under Jhelum Circle from 6:00 am to 2:00 pm. In GSO Circle, electricity will remain suspended from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm on the 132-KV New Wah-POF transmission line and related earth switch, from 8:00 am to 6:00 pm on the 132-KV Chakwal-Bhagwal-Talagang, 132-KV Kahuta City-Palandri and 132-KV New Wah-Bahter More transmission lines along with related earth switches, and surrounding areas will remain closed. IESCO management apologizes to its esteemed customers for the power outage.—APP

## WAPDA synchronizes Gomal Zam hydel with national grid

ISLAMABAD: WAPDA has restored the damaged power generating unit of Gomal Zam Hydel Power Station and synchronized it successfully with the National Grid upon completion of all commissioning tests and full operational readiness to ensure safe and reliable operation of the unit. With Unit No.1, becoming fully functional, Gomal Zam Hydel Power Station, located in South Waziristan, has now been restored to its original installed generation capacity of 17.4 MW, benefiting the people living in far-flung areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, said a press release issued on Thursday. Prior to this, Gomal Zam Hydel Power Station was running on half of its installed capacity i.e. 8.7 MW for the last

8 years. It is pertinent to mention that Gomal Zam Hydel Power Station has two generating units - of 8.7 MW each - with an annual generation capacity of 90.9 million units. The facility is connected to the National Grid through 132 KV South Waziristan-Tank transmission line. Both units became non-operational in October 2016 due to a technical fault rendering the Reverse Power protection relay inoperative. WAPDA managed to restore Unit No. 2 with its in-house expertise and own resources in June 2018. However, Unit No.1 could not be restored due to the nature of the damage. Primarily, it was law and order situation in the area, which hampered restoration works for about 10 years. The reha-

bilitation works, awarded to a Joint Venture at a cost of Rs. 359.5 million, started on April 5, 2026, which have been successfully completed in 80 days on June 25, 2026. Gomal Zam Hydel Power Station is a component of Gomal Zam Dam, which is a multi-purpose Project, designed to ensure water availability for irrigated agriculture, flood mitigation and affordable electricity generation. Since its completion in 2013, it has been playing a key role in poverty alleviation in the area. Besides having an installed power generation capacity of 17.4 MW, the Project has a gross water storage capacity of 1.14 million acre feet to irrigate 191,139 acres of land.—APP

## Capital's women lead food distribution preparations

### DNA

ISLAMABAD: Like other parts of the country, Islamabad is observing the sacred days of 9th and 10th Muharram with religious devotion and solemnity. Women in the federal capital are preparing food and refreshments for mourners participating in Muharram processions. They remain engaged in acts of devotion and community service, ensuring that the spirit of generosity and remembrance remains an integral part of Muharram observances. In homes, community centres, Imambargahs, and neighbourhoods, women are taking part of the distribution of tabarruk, meals, and drinking water, continuing a longstanding tradition associated with remembrance, charity, and public service during Muharram. From preparing large quantities of rice, haleem, sweets, traditional dishes to arranging water, milk, and cold

beverages for participants in processions, women remain at the forefront of these efforts. Many volunteer their time and resources days in advance to ensure the smooth distribution of food and refreshments on both the 9th and 10th of Muharram. Across Islamabad and other major cities, including Rawalpindi, Lahore, Karachi, Peshawar, and Quetta, families have established saabels (energizing drinks) along procession routes where volunteers, many of them women, help organize supplies and coordinate distribution activities. Talking to APP, Rubina, a housewife, said preparations begin well before Muharram. "Women in our family gather to cook food and prepare packets for distribution among mourners and needy people. It is a tradition passed down from one generation to another," she said. Another volunteer, Shazia Ahmed, told APP that women contribute in various ways, from cooking and pack-

aging meals to managing logistics and ensuring hygiene standards. "Every one participates according to their capacity. The purpose is to serve people and uphold the values of compassion and generosity associated with these sacred days," she added. Talking to APP, Ayesha, a religious scholar, said that acts of charity and service during Muharram reflect the universal lessons of sacrifice, patience, and humanity associated with the tragedy of Karbala. She emphasized that providing food and water to others serves as a reminder of the hardships endured by Imam Husain (A.S.), his family, and companions during the historic events of Karbala. She believed that while public commemorations often focus on processions and majalis, the contributions of women behind the scenes remain equally significant. Their efforts help sustain a culture of service, solidarity, and compassion that accompanies Muharram observances across the country.

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## Briefs

Tribute to the  
Martyrs of  
Karbala, the  
Holy Ahl-e-  
Bait (RA)

ISLAMABAD: Vice President of the Pakistan Peoples Party Parliamentarians (PPPP), Senator Sherry Rehman, paid tribute to Hazrat Imam Hussain (RA), the Holy Ahl-e-Bait (RA), and their devoted companions on the occasion of Youm-e-Ashura. She stated that Youm-e-Ashura reminded the Muslim Ummah of the great sacrifices made by Hazrat Imam Hussain (RA), the Holy Ahl-e-Bait (RA), and their loyal companions in the plains of Karbala. Sherry Rehman said that this day symbolizes the eternal struggle between truth and falsehood, justice and oppression, and stood as a timeless example of steadfastness in upholding principles. She noted that Hazrat Imam Hussain (RA), the Holy Ahl-e-Bait (RA), and their companions made unparalleled sacrifices in Karbala for the cause of truth, justice, righteousness, and the supremacy of Islam. "The great sacrifice of the martyrs of Karbala and the Holy Ahl-e-Bait (RA) bears witness to the fact that tyranny and brutality can never prevail over truth and righteousness," she said. Sherry Rehman further remarked that the Karbala incident taught humanity to face hardships and trials with courage and dignity in the pursuit of truth, and never to surrender before falsehood and injustice.—APP

Safe City  
surveillance  
system  
monitoring  
reviewed

ISLAMABAD: Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Islamabad Muhammad Jawad Tariq on Thursday visited the Muharram Control Room established at Imambargah G-6/2 and reviewed the Safe City surveillance system monitoring the central 9th Muharram procession. An official told APP, Director IT Atif Abbas and Assistant Director Safe City Abbas Mehdi briefed the DIG on the surveillance mechanism, live monitoring and operational capabilities of the Safe City camera network deployed for Muharram security. Tariq was informed about the real-time monitoring of procession routes, sensitive locations and security points through the Safe City cameras to ensure timely detection of any untoward incident. DIG Tariq reviewed the operational readiness of the control room and directed officers to maintain uninterrupted surveillance, strengthen coordination with field formations and ensure an immediate response to any emergency.—APP

Traffic plan  
for Youm-  
e-Ashura  
processions

RAWALPINDI: City Traffic Police (CTP) Rawalpindi have devised a comprehensive traffic management plan for Youm-e-Ashura, deploying more than 1,100 traffic officers and personnel to ensure smooth traffic flow and public safety throughout the city. Chief Traffic Officer (CTO) Farhan Aslam stated that traffic arrangements have been finalized adding that several key roads and intersections will remain closed or diverted due to Ashura processions and security measures. According to the traffic plan, all kind of traffic will be prohibited from entering Iqbal Road from Committee Chowk. Due to diversions at DAV College Chowk, traffic access to College Road and Fawara Chowk will also be restricted. The CTO further said that traffic at City Saddar Road's Mashriq Hotel diversion point will be redirected towards Saddar and Mohanpura. Similarly, traffic heading towards Kashmiri Bazaar will not move from Cinema Chowk due to traffic diversions. On Shah Allah Ditta Road, motorists will be redirected to alternative routes.—APP

SECP, NAB join forces to  
combat illegal deposit-taking

The proposed MoU will establish a structured framework for intelligence sharing, coordinated investigations, and joint enforcement actions to address illegal financial activities and eliminate regulatory and jurisdictional gaps

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ISLAMABAD: The Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) and the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) have agreed to strengthen institutional collaboration to combat illegal deposit-taking activities and protect the public from financial fraud. The two organizations will sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to enhance cooperation, information sharing, and coordinated enforcement against illegal deposit-taking schemes, said a release issued here on Wednesday. The agreement

was reached during a high-level meeting between Chairman NAB, Lt. General (R) Nazir Ahmed Butt, and Chairman SECP, Dr Kabir Ahmed Sidhu, at the SECP Head Office. The proposed MoU will establish a structured framework for intelligence sharing, coordinated investigations, and joint enforcement actions to address illegal financial activities and eliminate regulatory and jurisdictional gaps. During the meeting, Dr Sidhu highlighted that illegal deposit-taking schemes have emerged as a serious threat to the public, often causing substantial financial losses to unsuspecting citizens through false promises of high returns. He noted that

such activities undermine confidence in the financial system and adversely affect legitimate businesses and financial institutions. The Chairman SECP emphasized the need for strict and timely action against entities involved in unlawful deposit-taking activities. The meeting agreed that enhanced cooperation between SECP and NAB would facilitate swift action against offenders, strengthen enforcement efforts, and provide timely relief to affected members of the public. Chairman NAB, Lt General (Retired) Nazir Ahmed Butt, reaffirmed the Bureau's commitment to working closely with the SECP to combat financial

crimes and safeguard public interest. He stated that stronger coordination between the two institutions would improve enforcement effectiveness, enhance accountability, and serve as a strong deterrent against illegal deposit-taking and other fraudulent financial practices. The SECP reiterated that the mere registration of a company does not authorize it to solicit or accept deposits from the general public. Under Section 84 of the Companies Act, 2017, deposit-taking by companies, other than banking companies and entities specifically licensed by the SECP is strictly prohibited and unlawful



ISLAMABAD: A view of the closed metro bus station as the metro services suspended in connection with security and traffic arrangements for Ashura procession in the Federal Capital.

NA passes Pak-China  
cooperation frameworks'  
projects under CPEC

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ISLAMABAD: The National Assembly had passed the development package, which includes major transport, water, and energy projects—many of which are part of China-Pakistan cooperation frameworks. The projects included Rs100 billion dualization of the N-25 Pakistan Expressway (Karachi-Chaman), Rs30 billion for the M-6 (Sukkur-Hyderabad Motorway), Rs25 billion for the Karachi-Rohri section of the ML-1 (Main Line 1) under ADB financing, Rs2 billion for the Thar Coal Connectivity Project, and over Rs93 billion for Gwadar Port infrastructure and transport linkages across provinces. Gwadar Pro quoting officials from the Planning Commission stated on Thursday, that these projects aim to improve freight movement, connect industrial zones, and strengthen port connectivity along key trade corridors. In the energy

and power sector, Rs116.2 billion has been allocated for generation and transmission upgrades, including major hydropower projects such as Dasu, Tarbela 5th Extension, and Mohmand. The budget also includes Rs10.2 billion for advanced grid stability systems, including STATCOM technology, and Rs3 billion for battery energy storage systems to improve reliability and manage peak load demand. The water sector has been allocated Rs103.1 billion for 43 ongoing and new projects amid rising concerns over water scarcity and climate vulnerability. Major allocations include Rs14 billion for the Diamer-Bhasha Dam, Rs22 billion for the Mohmand Dam, Rs15 billion for the Dasu Hydropower Project, and Rs10 billion for the Karachi K-IV water supply scheme. Officials noted that Pakistan continues to face serious water management challenges, including declining storage capacity and climate-induced flooding, with recent flood losses estimated at Rs822 billion, highlighting the urgency of resilient infrastructure investment.

Unsafe food, water  
driving rise in summer  
stomach diseases

ISLAMABAD: Expert on Thursday expressed their concerns over the rising number of stomach-related illnesses, warning that cases of diarrhea, vomiting and food poisoning are increasing during the summer months and urging the public to take preventive measures. Renowned expert Dr. Nashtir Anayat while speaking to local media outlet stressed the importance of drinking clean or boiled water, maintaining proper hygiene in food preparation and handling, and avoiding contaminated meals to reduce the risk of infection. He said stomach diseases tend to surge in summer, particularly in Karachi, where high temperatures and unsafe food practices contribute to a growing number of

patients seeking treatment. The expert also advised people not to consume Eid meat that has been stored in refrigerators for long or handled improperly, warning that spoiled meat could cause serious food poisoning and digestive infections. Dr. Anayat recommended staying well hydrated, washing hands regularly, eating freshly prepared meals and ensuring food was stored safely to prevent bacterial contamination. He urged families to remain vigilant and seek medical care if symptoms like persistent diarrhea, repeated vomiting or signs of dehydration appear, emphasizing that awareness and timely precautions could help curb the seasonal rise in stomach illnesses.—APP

Safe Muharram  
procession  
requires public discipline

Special arrangements have been put in place to minimize inconvenience and ensure orderly movement around the affected areas

ISLAMABAD: Chief Traffic Officer (CTO), Kainat Azhar Khan, visited the route of main Muharram procession in Islamabad's G-6 area on Thursday morning to review traffic management and oversee security-related arrangements. While speaking to media channels during her visit, the CTO inspected deployment plans, monitored the flow of traffic and issued instructions to officers performing duty along the procession route. She emphasized the importance of maintaining smooth traffic movement while ensuring the safety of participants and the general public. Kainat Azhar Khan urged procession participants and residents of the federal capital to maintain discipline, follow traffic advisories, and cooperate fully with police personnel de-

ployed on the routes. She also appealed to citizens to park their vehicles and motorcycles only in designated areas to avoid congestion and facilitate emergency access if needed. According to the traffic police, more than 350 officers have been deployed to manage traffic and assist commuters during the main Muharram procession. Special arrangements have been put in place to minimize inconvenience and ensure orderly movement around the affected areas. The CTO said that effective coordination between citizens and law enforcement agencies was essential for the peaceful conduct of religious events and asked road users to exercise patience and comply with directions issued by traffic officials throughout the day.—DNA

China's poverty  
alleviation offers  
'Systematic Blueprint'  
for Pakistan

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ISLAMABAD: As Pakistan grapples with a poverty rate affecting approximately a quarter of its population, a Pakistani scholar based in China said Beijing's success in lifting more than 800 million people out of extreme poverty offers a practical and scalable roadmap for his home country, provided that the model is adapted to local conditions. Dr. Muhammad Khalil Khan, an associate professor at Ningbo Tech University and director of its "Belt and Road" International Communication Research Center, made the remarks in an interview with China Economic Net (CEN). Having lived in China for more than a decade, Dr. Khan has conducted extensive field research across Zhejiang province and its surrounding regions, witnessing what he calls "an unprecedented case in the developing world". "The speed and scale of China's poverty reduction have left me deeply impressed," Dr. Khan said. "What fascinates me most is the model's ability to combine state-led initiatives with market-oriented reforms, particularly in rural areas. The essence lies in connecting remote regions through physical and digital infrastructure while empowering individuals with skills and entrepreneurial capabilities." Dr. Khan's research has identified several grassroots initiatives that he believes Pakistan could replicate. In villages near Zhoushan, he observed how local specialty fruits were branded and sold through e-commerce platforms like Taobao and Pinduoduo, directly linking farmers with urban consumers and solving the chronic problem of perishable goods going unsold. "Farmers could participate in economic activity through digital platforms without leaving their homes, significantly boosting their incomes," he noted. In Yuyao, he documented the "one household, one factory" model, where families established small workshops in their homes to produce parts for larger enterprises or sell directly to consumers. This approach enabled entrepreneurship without migrating to urban areas, preserving social structures while generating livelihoods. In mountainous Lishui, government-backed homestay facilities allowed villagers to attract urban tourists for weekend getaways, transforming natural landscapes into sustainable economic opportunities. Dr. Khan argues that Pakistan's specific challenges, namely a young population with high unemployment, a rural adult literacy rate of roughly 50 percent, and low female labor force participation, call for targeted solutions drawing on China's experience. "China's achievement in lifting hundreds of millions of people out of poverty serves as a global example of people-centered development," Dr. Khan said. "The integration of industrial development, human capital building, and grassroots governance has been central to China's poverty reduction efforts." According to CEN, he stressed the need for Pakistan to focus on industrialization, vocational education, gender equality, and infrastructure development, while also citing several "small yet beautiful" projects already implemented, including small hydropower stations in the northern remote areas to ease power shortages and aid irrigation; community-led solar projects to supply electricity to homes and health centers while creating local jobs.—APP

SSP Saud  
leads  
CTD, SWAT  
deployment

ISLAMABAD: Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP), Counter Terrorism Department (CTD), Saud Khan on Thursday led the deployment of CTD and Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) commands of Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police to secure the central 9th Muharram procession in Sector G-6. An official told APP on Thursday that SSP Saud Khan remained present in the field along with CTD and SWAT personnel to personally supervise security arrangements and monitor operational preparedness throughout the procession. The official said CTD and SWAT teams had been deployed at key points along the procession route to ensure a swift response to any emergency and provide a secure environment for mourners. According to the official, the elite personnel were performing their duties with vigilance, professionalism and dedication as part of the comprehensive security plan devised for Muharram-ul-Haram. Saud Khan directed the deployed personnel to remain alert, maintain close coordination with other law enforcement agencies and respond promptly to any untoward situation.—APP

Muharram  
security plans  
reviewed

ISLAMABAD: Federal and provincial authorities have stepped up preparations to ensure peaceful observance of Muharram-ul-Haram, with a high-level meeting reviewing security arrangements for processions and religious gatherings across the country. The meeting was chaired by Minister of State for Interior, Talal Chaudhry along with the Secretary Interior. Home secretaries and senior police officials from all provinces, as well as Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and Gilgit-Baltistan (GB), attended the session. Officials were given a detailed briefing on security plans for Muharram processions and majalis, with participants conducting a comprehensive review of arrangements aimed at maintaining law and order during the religious period. The meeting stressed the need for coordinated and foolproof security measures to protect participants, organizers and the general public. Authorities were directed to strengthen surveillance, improve inter-agency coordination and ensure timely response mechanisms in sensitive areas.—APP

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## Pakistan in United Nations Peacekeeping Missions

LAIBA BASHIR

THE maintenance of international peace and security remains one of the most challenging responsibilities of the United Nations in an increasingly turbulent world. Civil wars, ethnic conflicts, humanitarian crises and state fragility continue to test the capacity of the international community to prevent violence and restore stability. Within this framework, United Nations peacekeeping operations have emerged as one of the organisation's most visible and effective instruments. Among the countries that have consistently supported these efforts, Pakistan occupies a distinguished position. Since joining the United Nations in 1947, Pakistan has remained committed to the principles of collective security and international cooperation. Over the past six decades, Pakistani military personnel, police officers and civilian experts have participated in numerous peacekeeping missions across Africa, Asia and the Caribbean. According to UN statistics, more than 230,000 Pakistanis have served under the UN flag since 1960, making Pakistan one of the world's leading troop-contributing countries. Pakistan's peacekeeping journey began during the Congo Crisis in the early 1960s when the newly independent African state descended into political turmoil and armed conflict. Under the United Nations Operation in the Congo (ONUC), Pakistani troops played a vital role in restoring order, enforcing ceasefire arrangements and protecting civilian populations. Their professionalism and courage earned international recognition and laid the foundation for Pakistan's long-standing reputation as a reliable peacekeeping partner. Over the years, Pakistani peacekeepers have served in some of the most difficult and volatile regions of the world. Their presence has been felt in Somalia, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Sudan, Haiti and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), among other conflict-affected states. These missions have often required troops to operate under extremely dangerous conditions, where armed militias, political instability and humanitarian emergencies posed constant challenges. Somalia remains one of the most significant chapters in Pakistan's peacekeeping history. During the 1990s, thousands of Pakistani soldiers were deployed to assist international efforts aimed at addressing civil war and widespread famine. They secured humanitarian corridors, protected aid convoys and helped create conditions for relief operations. The mission came at a heavy cost. In 1993, twenty-four Pakistani soldiers lost their lives in one of the deadliest attacks against UN peacekeepers. Their sacrifice remains a powerful reminder of the risks associated with peacekeeping responsibilities. In Sierra Leone, Pakistani contingents played a crucial role in post-conflict reconstruction. Beyond their military duties, they participated in disarmament programmes, supported electoral processes and contributed to rebuilding damaged infrastructure. Their humanitarian engagement earned them considerable goodwill among local communities, many of whom regarded them as symbols of hope

Pakistan's First And Only Diplomatic Daily

Editor-in-Chief: Ansar Mahmood Bhatti

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Member APNS / ABC Certified

Vol: 06 Issue: 222

Email: dailyisbpost@gmail.com

Phone: 051-8488394

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



during a difficult period of national recovery. Similarly, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Pakistani peacekeepers have undertaken a broad range of responsibilities extending far beyond traditional military functions. They have assisted in protecting civilians, supporting humanitarian operations and facilitating local peace initiatives. Pakistani engineers and medical teams have also contributed to the construction of schools, healthcare facilities and community infrastructure. Such efforts demonstrate that modern peacekeeping is not solely about maintaining security but also about fostering conditions necessary for sustainable peace. A notable feature of Pakistan's contribution has been its growing emphasis on women's participation in peacekeeping. In recent years, female officers have played an increasingly visible role in UN missions. The deployment of an all-female engagement team to the Democratic Republic of Congo marked an important milestone. These officers worked closely with local communities, promoted healthcare awareness and encouraged greater social participation among women. Their presence reflected broader international efforts to strengthen the role of women in peace and security initiatives. The effectiveness of Pakistani peacekeepers is closely linked to the rigorous training they receive before deployment. The Centre for International Peace and Stability (CIPS) at the National University of Sciences and Technology has become a recognised institution for preparing peacekeepers according to international standards. Training programmes cover humanitarian law, conflict resolution, human rights, negotiation skills and cultural awareness. Such preparation enables personnel to operate effectively in complex environments where military professionalism must be balanced with diplomatic sensitivity. Despite these achievements, peacekeeping missions continue to face significant challenges. Many operations are conducted in remote areas characterised by poor infrastructure, difficult terrain and persistent insecurity. Peacekeepers often encounter armed groups that reject peace agreements and challenge UN authority. In addition, cultural differences, language barriers and competing political interests can complicate efforts to build trust among local populations. Modern peacekeeping has also evolved considerably from its original conception. Contemporary missions frequently involve state-building, governance support, election monitoring and humanitarian assistance alongside traditional security responsibilities. This expansion of mandates has increased operational demands while often stretching available resources. Peacekeepers are now expected to address a wider range of threats, including terrorism, organised crime and communal violence. Pakistan has responded to these challenges by adopting a comprehensive approach that combines security objectives with community engagement. Pakistani contingents have consistently invested in development projects designed to improve the daily lives of local populations. Medical camps, water supply schemes, educational initiatives and infrastructure rehabilitation projects have become important components of their peacekeeping activities. These efforts help strengthen public confidence and contribute to long-term stability. Beyond the operational sphere, Pakistan has emerged as an important voice in discussions on the future of UN peacekeeping. Pakistani diplomats and military officials have repeatedly called for clearer mandates, improved logistical support and enhanced training standards for peacekeeping forces. They have argued that successful missions require not only military capability but also strong political backing and realistic objectives.

## The Great Decoupling of United States and Israel

Qamar Bashir



Pakistan's role in this process has been particularly significant. Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian's visit to Islamabad on 23rd June underscored the importance Tehran attaches to Pakistan's mediation efforts. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to facilitating dialogue and helping both sides move toward a durable peace. The symbolism was powerful: a regional Muslim power acting as a bridge between Washington and Tehran at a moment when military confrontation seemed inevitable only months earlier. Yet the most important development may be the evolution of American objectives themselves

FOR more than half a century, the United States and Israel have been viewed as inseparable strategic partners in the Middle East. Successive American administrations, regardless of party affiliation, generally aligned their regional policies with Israel's security concerns, often treating the two nations' interests as largely identical. Yet the diplomatic developments that followed the recent Iran war suggest that this assumption may no longer hold true. Rather, it is the beginning of something far more consequential: the gradual decoupling of American strategic interests from Israel's broader regional agenda. The clearest evidence of this shift is not coming from Tehran or Islamabad. It is coming from within the United States itself. The political shockwave generated by Tucker Carlson's public break with the Republican Party illustrates a growing debate within conservative America. Carlson, one of the most influential voices on the American right, declared that he could no longer support a political movement that, in his view, places the interests of a foreign country ahead of those of the United States. Whether one agrees with his conclusion or not, the significance lies in the fact that such criticism is no longer confined to the political fringes. Questions that were once whispered are now being discussed openly among conservatives, libertarians, progressives, and independent voters alike. The debate intensified following the U.S.-Iran diplomatic initiative that emerged after the war. The architecture of this process is noteworthy. Rather than attempting to solve every dispute at once, the framework creates a pathway for addressing complex issues over time. The objective is not to produce instant solutions but to establish a structure capable of managing disagreements before they escalate into war. Pakistan's role in this process has been particularly significant. Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian's visit to Islamabad on 23rd June underscored the importance Tehran attaches to Pakistan's mediation efforts. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to facilitating dialogue and helping both sides move toward a durable peace. The symbolism was powerful: a regional Muslim power acting as a bridge between Washington and Tehran at a moment when military confrontation seemed inevitable only months earlier. Yet the most important development may be the evolution of American objectives themselves. For years, Israeli strategic thinking

has viewed Iran's nuclear program, ballistic missile capability, drone industry, cyber warfare assets, Revolutionary Guard networks, and relationships with Hezbollah, Hamas, and the Houthis as components of a single threat architecture. From this perspective, lasting security requires not merely preventing nuclear weaponization but substantially weakening Iran's broader ability to project power throughout the region. The emerging American position appears different. President Donald Trump has drawn a clear distinction between Iran's nuclear ambitions and its conventional military capabilities. In remarks that surprised many observers, Trump argued that if neighboring states possess missiles, drones, cyber capabilities, and conventional deterrent forces, it would be difficult to justify denying Iran every means of self-defense. Interestingly, the MOU is formally bilateral between Washington and Tehran, mediated by Pakistan and Qatar. But its effects reach Israel, Hezbollah, Hamas, the Houthis, Gaza, Lebanon, the Strait of Hormuz, and the GCC. None of these actors fully sits at the table. The assumption is simple: America will manage Israel and its Arab allies; Iran will manage Hezbollah, Hamas, and the Houthis. If that assumption holds, the deal can reshape the region. If it fails, the Middle East may again slide into fire. Israel is the elephant in the room. Netanyahu has already signaled that Israel reserves "full freedom of action" in Lebanon, even while Washington tries to stabilize the ceasefire. That statement exposes the central problem: America may want de-escalation, but Israel still wants operational freedom. If Israel refuses to follow Washington's larger strategy, then the U.S. will have to decide whether it is a superpower or merely Israel's security subcontractor. These goals of the USA and Israel are not identical but divergent. This divergence became more visible when Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reaffirmed Israel's determination to maintain operational freedom in Lebanon, even as diplomatic efforts sought to stabilize ceasefire arrangements. While Washington is investing political capital in de-escalation and negotiation, Israel continues to conduct military operations against threats it considers immediate and existential. The growing gap between these approaches represents the core of the emerging decoupling. The debate surrounding Senator Lindsey Graham, a close

associate of Donald Trump and staunch supporter of Israel. Graham openly warned that if the talks failed, which he hoped will, President Trump would seize control of the Strait of Hormuz by force, place the strategic waterway under American control, and charge transit fees on commercial shipping to recover the costs of military operations. He further declared that if Iran resisted such a move, the United States would "obliterate" Iran. More significantly, Graham linked the success or failure of the negotiations to a broader regional realignment involving the expansion of the Abraham Accords and the normalization of relations between Israel and key Arab states. His comments reflected the traditional strategic school that has dominated Middle East policy debates for decades: maintain maximum pressure, preserve overwhelming military leverage, and keep the option of force constantly on the table. The implications of Israel's manipulative ability extend beyond the USA. Across Western democracies and especially in the UK parliament, public debate is intensifying over the role of Israeli influence, its lobbying networks, campaign financing, and the relationship between national interests and alliance commitments. Discussions that once centered exclusively on security concerns now increasingly include questions about accountability, transparency, and whether governments are acting primarily in the interests of their own citizens. Nevertheless, the direction of travel appears increasingly clear. America is beginning to define its Middle East strategy through the lens of American interests rather than through automatic alignment with the preferences of Israel. The real story of the current negotiations is therefore larger than Iran, larger than Israel, and larger than any single agreement. It is the story of a superpower rediscovering the distinction between partnership and dependency, between alliance and alignment, between supporting an ally and adopting all of that ally's objectives as its own. If that trend continues, historians may one day view post-Iran-war diplomacy not merely as a ceasefire initiative, but as the moment when Washington began charting a more independent course in the Middle East. And that may prove to be the most significant geopolitical shift of all.

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

## The Eternal Choice: Right and Wrong in Age of Moral Crisis

Muhammad Mohsin Iqbal



The blood of Karbala was not shed in vain. It became a permanent rebuke to tyranny and a call to moral courage. "The best jihad is a just word spoken before a tyrannical ruler," said the Prophet (PBUH). Hazrat Imam Hussain (RA) lived this teaching to its ultimate conclusion. His sacrifice demonstrated that numbers, weapons, and temporary dominance...

IN every era, humanity confronts defining tests that separate right from wrong. Few figures embody this distinction with greater clarity and enduring power than Hazrat Imam Hussain (RA), the grandson of Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him). His stand at Karbala transcends sectarian history and speaks directly to the conscience of every generation. In our time—marked by technological disruption, geopolitical conflicts, moral relativism, and widespread injustice—Hazrat Imam Hussain's (RA) sacrifice offers a necessary moral compass. It reminds us that right and wrong are not negotiable opinions but foundational realities upon which civilized life depends. Hazrat Imam Hussain (RA) faced a tyrant who demanded allegiance not through legitimate authority but through coercion and corruption. Yazid's rule threatened to distort the ethical core of Islam—justice, mercy, truthfulness, and protection of the vulnerable—into a tool of dynastic power. Rather than submit for personal safety or political gain, Hazrat Imam Hussain (RA) chose the path of principle. He left Medina with a small group of family and companions, knowing the odds were overwhelmingly against them. On the plains of Karbala, denied water, surrounded by a massive army, he and his loved ones gave their lives rather than betray truth. This was not reckless rebellion or pursuit of worldly power. It was a deliberate, conscious defense of right against wrong. The Holy Qur'an affirms the eternal life of those who strive in Allah's way: "And do not think of those who have been killed in the way of Allah as dead. Rather, they are alive with their Lord, receiving provision" (Surah Aal-e-Imran, 3:169). Martyrdom here is not defeat but victory of the soul. The Prophet (PBUH) had said, "Hussain is from me, and I am from Hussain," linking the grandson's integrity inseparably to the prophetic mission. To harm the embodiment of that legacy was to attack the moral foundation itself. Right and wrong are not ancient abstractions; they are urgently relevant today. We live in an era of unprecedented information flow yet deepening moral confusion. Authoritarian regimes silence dissent, powerful interests exploit

the weak, and digital platforms amplify both truth and deception. In such conditions, neutrality often masks complicity. When children are slaughtered in conflict zones, when entire communities face systematic denial of dignity, when truth is subordinated to power—new manifestations of Yazidiyat emerge. The spirit of Karbala rejects the false comfort of "both sides" rhetoric when one side systematically violates fundamental human decency. The blood of Karbala was not shed in vain. It became a permanent rebuke to tyranny and a call to moral courage. "The best jihad is a just word spoken before a tyrannical ruler," said the Prophet (PBUH). Hazrat Imam Hussain (RA) lived this teaching to its ultimate conclusion. His sacrifice demonstrated that numbers, weapons, and temporary dominance do not determine rightness. Moral truth carries its own enduring authority. Centuries later, this lesson inspires not only Muslims but all who resist oppression. Hussainiyat—the spirit of principled resistance—transcends sect, ethnicity, and geography. It lives in the Palestinian father burying his children while refusing despair, in the Kashmiri voice demanding dignity, in the Rohingya refugee clinging to faith amid genocide, and in every individual who risks comfort to speak against corruption or cruelty. It is universal because the battle between right and wrong is universal. Tyranny adapts its face across ages, but so does the refusal to bow. Conversely, Yazid's legacy endures as a warning. His crime was not merely military victory but the attempt to normalize brutality, kinship betrayal, and the desecration of sacred values. Those who remain silent or indifferent when clear evil unfolds—mass atrocities, denial of basic rights, or the crushing of truth—effectively align with that legacy. In ethics, as in physics, vacuums are filled. Silence in the face of grave injustice is not innocence; it is a choice that empowers wrong. True moral adulthood requires the courage to name right and wrong clearly and to stand accordingly. Why does this matter so acutely in our recent era? We face complex challenges: climate collapse, technological ethics, economic inequality, and hybrid

wars. Moral relativism tempts us to say "everything is gray." Yet Karbala teaches that while tactics and contexts evolve, core principles do not. Slaughter of innocents remains wrong. Coercion disguised as governance remains wrong. Betraying truth for expediency remains wrong. Without this clarity, societies drift toward cynicism, apathy, and eventual collapse. Hazrat Imam Hussain's (RA) example calls individuals and communities to reject comfortable complicity and embrace costly integrity. Every Muharram, the commemoration of Ashura is not mere ritual mourning. It is a renewal of allegiance to justice. Tears shed for Karbala are commitments—promises that the next time tyranny demands submission, we will remember the small camp beside the Euphrates that chose honor over survival. This spirit does not glorify violence but insists that some things are worth more than life itself: truth, dignity, and the protection of the innocent. In the ongoing struggle between Hussainiyat and Yazidiyat, there is no neutral ground. One either contributes to justice—through voice, action, charity, education, or steadfast example—or allows injustice to spread. History shows that one person's principled refusal can ignite hope across generations. Hazrat Imam Hussain (RA) did not win the battlefield that day, yet his victory has outlasted every empire that followed. The soul of Karbala therefore delivers a timeless yet urgently contemporary message: Choose right, even when it costs dearly. Reject wrong, even when it wears the garments of power. Live with moral clarity rather than die slowly through compromise. In doing so, we do not merely honor the past—we shape a future worthy of humanity's highest potential. Imam Hussain (RA) does not belong only to 7th-century Arabia. He belongs to every age that refuses to let darkness define the terms of life. His name remains not a relic of sorrow, but a living banner of defiance against evil and a promise that truth, wedded to courage, ultimately prevails. In our troubled era, we need this reminder more than ever. The choice is ours—honor or expediency, right or wrong, Hussain or Yazid. History, and conscience, are watching.

## Briefs

## Any US-Iran deal will ensure security...

FROM PAGE 01  
Together, they make up the backbone of America's security architecture in the Middle East, and any country rethinking their security relationship with the US could have a significant impact on US military strategy in the region. The draft US-Iran agreement includes no limits on Iran's ballistic missiles, a proposed \$300 billion reconstruction fund and provisions that could expand Tehran's regional influence and control over critical oil shipping lanes. Rubio has said he would not be asking regional allies to contribute to any reconstruction fund during the trip, even as the MoU with Iran suggests that countries in the region would at least be partially responsible for footing the bill.

## 4 killed, 2 injured in Bannu firing

FROM PAGE 01  
The encounter took place in the Guduabad area of Swabi. Earlier this year, one person was killed and seven others were injured in a violent clash sparked by a dispute among children in Swat, KP. According to the police, the tragic incident occurred in the Shana Karpas Haji Abad area of Swat. The deceased was identified as Advocate Attaullah Jan. The body of the deceased and the injured individuals were shifted to a nearby hospital, where the survivors are receiving medical treatment.

## One killed in IED explosion...

FROM PAGE 01  
motorcycle to begin his return journey. The device attached to the vehicle detonated immediately, killing him on the spot. Following the incident, police personnel rushed to the scene and cordoned off the area. Investigators collected evidence for forensic examination and launched an investigation to determine the circumstances surrounding the blast and identify those responsible. Pakistan witnessed a surge in terror activities, particularly in its KP and Balochistan provinces, since 2021, when the Afghan Taliban came into power. Pakistan launched "Operation Ghazab il-Haq", killing scores of Afghan Taliban operatives and allied militants and injuring hundreds more. In October 2025, border clashes erupted after the Afghan Taliban and affiliated militants launched unprovoked attacks on Pakistani border posts. Despite several rounds of talks, both countries have been unable to reach an agreement, largely due to the Afghan Taliban regime's reluctance to take action against terrorist outfits.

## Pakistan, Turkiye sign three MoUs

FROM PAGE 01  
Turkish Electricity Distribution Corporation (TEDAS). The agreements establish formal frameworks for co-operation in areas including post-privatisation governance framework, electricity market development, ancillary services regulations formulation, power system operations, transmission planning, distribution sector management, digitalisation, capacity building, institutional strengthening, and the exchange of technical expertise. Federal Minister for Energy Sardar Awais Ahmad Khan Leghari welcomed the signing of the MoUs and noted that these partnerships represent an important step towards strengthening Pakistan's energy institutions through collaboration with leading Turkish counterparts. He emphasised that Pakistan is committed to learning from Turkiye's successful experience in electricity market reform, transmission system development, distribution sector modernisation, and the integration of advanced technologies into power sector operations.

## Vinicius Junior sparkles as Brazil beat Scots

Morocco took second in Group C, with seven points but behind Brazil on goal difference, after coming from behind twice to beat Haiti 4-2 in Atlanta

MIAMI: Vinicius Junior made it four goals in three games at the World Cup as Brazil cruised to a 3-0 victory over Scotland on Wednesday, sealing progress to the last 32 as Group C winners and leaving their opponents in danger of another first-round exit. Real Madrid superstar Vinicius took advantage of a defensive howler to give Brazil an early lead in Miami and headed in another in first-half stoppage time. Scotland were never really in it and Matheus Cunha got a third on the hour mark for the record five-time World Cup winners, who brought on Neymar toward the end for his first international appearance in over two-and-a-half years. There are doubts as to whether Carlo Ancelotti's side are genuine contenders to win this tournament but boosted by finishing top of the group they head to Texas for a last-32 tie in Houston on June 29. That will be against the runners-up in Group F, which will be either the Netherlands, Japan or Sweden. After scoring in both the opening 1-1 draw with Morocco and the 3-0 win over Haiti, Vinicius is the first Brazilian to find the net in every group game at a World Cup since Ronaldo and Rivaldo both did it in 2002. With four goals, he is one behind Lionel Messi and level with Erling Haaland and Kylian Mbappe in the golden boot race. Scotland, meanwhile, are at real risk of yet another group-stage elimination, as has been their fate at every previous major tournament in which they have participated – that includes eight World Cups before this year. Morocco took second in Group C, with



seven points but behind Brazil on goal difference, after coming from behind twice to beat Haiti 4-2 in Atlanta. Scotland came third with three points and a goal difference of minus three. They must wait to see if that is enough to finish as one of the eight best third-placed sides who advance to the last 32. Steve Clarke's team could not recover from

conceding inside two minutes in their last outing against Morocco in Boston, and they only had themselves to blame as they once again fell behind early. It was a very soft goal to concede and a nightmare for Scott McKenna, who had been brought into the defense in place of Grant Hanley. McKenna was too casual in possession in his own box in the seventh

minute and was closed down by Rayan. Starting in place of the injured Raphinha, the young Bournemouth forward gave it to Vinicius and he rounded Angus Gunn to score. Scotland were very lucky not to concede again in similar circumstances midway through the first half as Jack Hendry was closed down by Vinicius who went on to slot in. This time, however, the goal was overturned following a VAR check by the Mexican referee, who could see that Vinicius had clipped the leg of Hendry on his way through. But it was only a matter of time before Brazil scored again, and Vinicius headed in with the game in stoppage time at the end of the first half. Once more Scotland were punished for slack play at the back with an Andy Robertson pass being intercepted inside his own area before Bruno Guimaraes crossed for the goal. Scotland looked at risk of completely collapsing as Gunn had to save from Rayan just before the half-time whistle, and the goalkeeper then denied Vinicius his hat-trick soon after the restart. Instead it was Manchester United's Cunha who got the third – his third of the tournament – from a Guimaraes lay-off, and Brazil could have won by more. A consolation goal for Scotland might have been significant in their quest to reach the next round, but Alisson twice denied Scott McTominay. Neymar, Brazil's all-time top goal-scorer, came on for Cunha in the 76th minute to huge cheers, making his comeback after being absent from the Selecao since October 2023. This was Brazil's fourth win in five World Cup meetings with Scotland, the exception being a goalless draw in 1974. – APP

## Formula E to launch GEN4 era with season-opening doubleheader

JEDDAH: The ABB FIA Formula E World Championship will begin a new chapter in electric motorsport when the revolutionary GEN4 era makes its competitive debut under the lights of the Jeddah Corniche Circuit in December. Formula E and the FIA have confirmed the provisional calendar for the 2026-27 season, featuring a record 21 races across 13 cities worldwide. For the first time in the championship's history, Saudi Arabia will host the opening rounds, with a doubleheader on Dec. 18 and 19 in Jeddah. The opener will mark the debut of Formula E's new GEN4 car, the most powerful and technologically

advanced machine ever introduced in the all-electric series. The championship will also unveil a new race format designed to showcase the car's enhanced performance capabilities. The return of Formula E to Saudi Arabia reinforces the Kingdom's growing position as a major hub for international motorsport and sporting events. Set against the backdrop of the Red Sea, the Jeddah Corniche Circuit – widely regarded as one of the fastest street circuits in the world – is expected to provide a dramatic stage for the start of the championship. Prince Khalid bin Sultan Al-Faisal, chairman of the Saudi Automobile and Motorcycle Federation and

Saudi Motorsport Co., said hosting the season opener represented another milestone for Saudi Arabia's motorsport ambitions. "We are delighted to welcome the ABB FIA Formula E World Championship back to the Jeddah Corniche Circuit, which will host the opening two rounds of the season for the first time," he said. "Since its debut in Saudi Arabia, Formula E has become an important part of the Kingdom's motorsport journey, bringing together innovation, sustainability and world-class racing." He added that the introduction of the GEN4 car reflected the rapid evolution of electric racing technology and performance. "Saudi Arabia

continues to grow as a leading destination for major international sporting events, welcoming some of the world's top championships and showcasing the Kingdom's ambition, capabilities and passion for sport," he said. Carlo Boutagy, founder and chief executive of CBX, described the event as a significant moment for both Formula E and Saudi Arabia. "Bringing the opening race of the Formula E season to Jeddah is a proud moment for CBX," he said. "The event will not only welcome the world's leading electric racing championship back to Saudi Arabia, but will also mark the first competitive outing of the groundbreaking GEN4 car." – APP

## Mexico beat Czech Republic by 3-0

MEXICO CITY: Mateo Chávez and Julián Quiñones scored in a six-minute span early in the second half, and Mexico beat the Czech Republic 3-0 on Wednesday night to win all three of its World Cup group-stage matches for the first time. The 22-year-old Chávez, in his first World Cup, opened the scoring in the 55th minute and Quiñones scored his second goal of the tournament in the 61st. Alvaro Fidalgo added a goal in second-half stoppage time. Mexico's previous best group-stage performance was two wins and one draw, done in 1986 and 2002 and both featuring Javier Aguirre, the first as a midfielder and the second as El Tri's coach. Aguirre is back as coach this year, his third stint leading the team. Already the winner of Group A, Mexico will play again at Estadio Azteca on Tuesday in a round-of-32 match against an opponent to be determined. Mexico is undefeated at nine World Cup matches at the massive stadium, which was packed with 80,824 fans on Wednesday. El Tri has only two losses at Azteca, most recently in World Cup qualifying against Honduras on Sept. 6, 2013. The match included nods to Mexico's past and future. Gilberto Mora, at age 17, became the youngest Mexico player to start in a World Cup. And 40-year-old goalkeeper Guillermo "Memo" Ochoa entered in the 77th minute, joining Argentina's Lionel Messi and Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo as the only players to appear in six World Cups. – APP

## Cape Verde match final for Green Falcons

RIYADH: Not many expected Saudi Arabia to still be in contention for a direct place in the Round of 32 heading into the final matchday of the 2026 FIFA World Cup. Then again, few expected Group H to unfold the way it has. The expectation before the tournament was straightforward: Spain and Uruguay would arrive at the final matchday on six points, leaving Saudi Arabia and Cape Verde to battle for a slim chance as one of the best third-place teams. Instead, Saudi Arabia took a point off Uruguay, Cape Verde stunned Spain with a draw and then held Uruguay again, leaving all four teams with something to play for. Now, Saudi Arabia and Cape Verde meet at Houston's NRG Stadium on June 27, while Spain face Uruguay in Zapopan. The permutations are remarkable. A win for Cape Verde would send the debutants through. A Saudi victory, coupled with Uruguay failing to beat Spain, would see the Green Falcons reach the knockout stage for the first time since 1994. Even Spain are not guaranteed a top-two spot, while Uruguay could yet finish bottom of the group. In many ways, Saudi Arabia against Cape Verde has become a knockout match before the knockout stage itself. Al-Arabia reporter Nayef Al-Thaqil, reporting from Houston, said the Saudi camp has embraced that reality. "The players are treating this like a final," he reported, adding that the defeat to Spain has already been put behind them, with the focus now firmly on correcting the mistakes made in that match. – APP

## Stellar performances by lower ranked teams

LONDON: The words of the West Indies coach, Shane Dettiz, resounded during the matches that followed his team's victory over New Zealand in the 11th match of the 2026 T20 Women's World Cup. Dettiz felt that the gap is gradually closing between the top teams and the rest. This opinion was supported in subsequent press interviews with players and coaches, especially in terms of any team in this tournament being capable of beating any other team on its day. In the West Indies' very next match against Scotland, they were on the brink of being beaten by a team ranked five places below them. Struggling in the 15th over on 85 for 5, the team was rescued by Stafanie Taylor, now aged 35. She made her West Indies debut in 2008, going on to open the batting and be captain in a distinguished career of almost 300 international appearances. Recently, she has been slowed by injury but, rolling back the years, she smote 47 from 19 deliveries, including three sixes, to raise a total of 153 for six. Scotland's chase started strongly, reaching 51 in the first five overs. Hayley Matthews then struck twice in the sixth over of the chase and again in the eighth to stop the Scottish innings in its tracks at 58 for four. Darcey Carter led a fightback to push the score to 132 after 18 overs, leaving 22 runs to be scored from 12 deliveries. Scotland's hopes were all but crushed in the next over. Aaliyah Alleyne claimed Carter's wicket and then two more, which meant that 17 runs

were required from the final over, with only two wickets remaining. This proved to be too much, the innings closing on 148 all out. The greater experience of the West Indies proved decisive at critical moments. New Zealand's team arrived in Southampton having lost its first two matches and needing to beat Ireland to avoid elimination. Whether it was nerves, pressure or the adoption of an aggressive strategy, the beginning of the innings was calamitous, bordering on reckless. Three wickets were gifted for only 14 runs. A steady recovery was built by the captain, Amelia Kerr, Brooke Halliday and Izzy Sharp, who all made scores in the thirties, before Suzie Bates scored 19 from 12 deliveries. This included a last ball six, taking the total to 140. Gaby Lewis and Orla Prendergast took the game to New Zealand in a marvellous second-wicket partnership of 110, reaching 116 midway through the 18th over, 23 runs required from 15 deliveries. Then, Prendergast tried to clear the boundary, only to be superbly caught. In the following over, Lewis was well caught by Suzie Bates, who was then called upon to bowl the final over, with Ireland needing 15 runs for victory. Bates used all her experience in restricting the batters to 10 runs, victory achieved by six runs, the same number as she scored off the final ball of the New Zealand innings. Ireland was on the verge of history, one six away from a first T20 World Cup victory that would have eliminated the reigning champions. – APP

## USA, Germany in control as Dutch eye WC knockouts

EAST RUTHERFORD, USA: Co-hosts the United States and Germany will bid to complete perfect World Cup group stage campaigns on Thursday, while the Netherlands and Japan look poised to join them in the last 32. The US have clinched top spot in Group D with a game to spare after wins over Paraguay and Australia, and will try to maintain that momentum against already-eliminated Turkiye in Los Angeles. Mauricio Pochettino could rest a number of first-choice players, with Chris Richards, Antonee Robinson, Tyler Adams and Pollarin Balogun at risk of missing the next round if they pick up another yellow card. Forward Christian Pulisic has recovered from a calf injury that has limited him to just 45 minutes at the tournament so far and urged the US to keep their foot on the accelerator. "Going into the knockout rounds will definitely feel better with a win," said Pulisic. "We don't necessarily need a win, but it's a World Cup game, and we all want to give our best and do well." The US have not reached the quarter-finals of a World Cup since 2002, but a strong start has raised hopes they could go on a deep run on home turf. Australia and Paraguay square off in a battle for second place in Santa Clara. A draw would favor the Soccerros thanks to their better goal difference but would likely be enough to send Paraguay through too. Germany are guaranteed to advance as winners of Group E following wins over Curacao and Ivory Coast, putting first-round exits in the two previous World Cups behind them. "It is very important that we remain modest," said Germany coach Julian Nagelsmann. "We have won two matches, one was clear, one was very close. We want to win again tomorrow and we'll see who we play on Monday (in the last 32)." The four-time world champions take on an Ecuador side who desperately need a victory to extend their stay in

the competition. Ivory Coast are on course to finish second in the section and will be expected to see off debutants Curacao, who remain in contention after digging in to hold Ecuador to a 0-0 draw last time out.

Group F remains wide open with the Netherlands, Japan and Sweden still able to finish first. In Kansas City, the Dutch face a woeful Tunisia team that have suffered successive four-goal defeats and sacked their coach after the opening game. Herve Renard was parachuted in after Sabri Lamouchi's dismissal in the wake of a 5-1 loss to Sweden but his arrival did nothing to change Tunisia's fortunes, as a 4-0 defeat by Japan knocked them out of the tournament. Japan are level with the Netherlands on four points going into their clash with Sweden in Arlington. After beginning



the World Cup with a bang, the Swedes were hammered 5-1 by the Dutch.

Brazil clinched first place in Group C on Wednesday as Vinicius Junior notched two more goals in a 3-0 win over Scotland in Miami, where Neymar made his first international appearance since October 2023.

Carlo Ancelotti's side will meet the Group F runners-up, with Morocco, who twice came from behind to beat Haiti 4-2, due to face the winners after being piped to top spot by Brazil on goal difference.

Scotland face an anxious wait to see if they scrape through as one of the eight best third-placed teams.

Co-hosts Mexico sailed into the last 32 with a 3-0 defeat of the Czech Republic in an ebullient Estadio Azteca to wrap up a perfect Group A record.

The country's President Claudia Sheinbaum has also been using the World Cup to mend strained ties with former colonial power Spain, whose King Felipe VI was due to visit her in Mexico City on the way to his country's group stage match against Uruguay in Guadalajara.

The biggest surprise of the day was South Africa's qualification for the first time in their history as they pulled off a shock 1-0 win against South Korea to grab second place in Group A. That set off late night celebrations in South Africa, with fans singing and honking vuvuzelas from 5:00 am, when the match finished.

"There were fireworks outside and the celebration went on for more than an hour after the game," Soweto resident Nandi Ntini, who was woken up by the din, told AFP. Switzerland advanced as Group B winners ahead of Canada after a 2-1 victory over the co-hosts in Vancouver and Bosnia-Herzegovina joined them after beating Qatar 3-1 and taking one of the third-place finishers' spots. – APP

## Petrol prices in Pakistan to drop...

FROM PAGE 01  
slipping below its closing level on the eve of the Middle East war, as investors grow optimistic about US-Iran peace talks and tankers continue through the Strait of Hormuz. The contract for August hit a low of \$72.44 a barrel, compared with the February 27 close of \$72.48. Brent soared as high as \$119 in the weeks after the United States and Israel began their strikes on Iran on February 28.

## Death toll from Venezuela...

FROM PAGE 01  
she said in an appearance on state television just before 1am (local time) on Thursday. "I also want to say that this is a true tragedy. From here, we send our message of solidarity, and to those families who have lost loved ones, we reaffirm our condolences and our support in these difficult hours." The country is focused on rescue efforts, including the arrival in the coming hours of rescue crews from other countries, she said, as she thanked leaders including US President Donald Trump. Trump said in a post on social media the US was ready, willing and able to help in the disaster. "The two major earthquakes that just hit the great people of Venezuela are both massive in scale and have left a devastating number of deaths," said Trump, who ordered the capture of Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro in a violent raid in January. Three people were killed in the Baruta district in Caracas after two buildings collapsed, the district mayor said on social media. One person was killed and four buildings had completely collapsed, Gustavo Duque, the mayor of Chacao district in the capital told journalists.

## Libya frees 3 Italian activists

ROME: Three Italian activists from a Gaza-bound aid flotilla have been released after a month in prison by authorities controlling eastern Libya, the Italian government said. Since the fall of Muammar Qaddafi in 2011, Libya has been governed by a UN-recognized government in Tripoli, while a parallel administration based in Benghazi in the east is under the sway of powerful military chief Khalifa Haftar and his sons. "I am pleased to be able to announce the release of Domenico Centrone and Leonarda Alberizia, the two Italian activists from the Flotilla, who had been held for a month in Libya," Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani wrote on X on Tuesday evening. In addition to the two Italians, "our consul in Benghazi was entrusted with Matias Alvarez Rodriguez, a Uruguayan with Italian nationality, whom we had been monitoring and assisting in recent days," Tajani added. All were part of the "Flotilla for Gaza," a humanitarian convoy seeking to break the blockade of the Palestinian territory. But the three were traveling overland, like 230 other activists of various nationalities, according to the Global Sumud Flotilla. They were carrying humanitarian aid, including medicines. Israel intercepted nearly 430 activists from the flotilla in international waters last month.

## Russia, Romania expel CGs

NEWS DESK  
BUCHAREST: Russia's decision to expel Romania's consul general in St Petersburg is predictable after the European Union state expelled his counterpart from the Black Sea city of Constanta in the wake of a drone crash, the Romanian foreign ministry said. A Russian drone crashed into an apartment block in the eastern Romanian city of Galati during an overnight attack on neighbouring Ukraine in May, the first time a densely populated area in a NATO country had been hit causing injuries during Russia's war in Ukraine.

## Briefs

**Events canceled, records loom as heatwave reaches Germany**

BERLIN: A heatwave sweeping Europe was starting to peak in Germany on Thursday, with several open-air events canceled and temperatures expected to top 40C through the weekend. Large parts of the country are already under "severe to extreme heat stress" with temperatures soaring to around 37C, the German Weather Service (DWD) said. In an unprecedented step, rail operator Deutsche Bahn warned customers to avoid travel and said it would refund any tickets booked up to June 30 due to a high risk of disruption from wildfires, heavy summer rain and thunderstorms. Several open-air sports events have been canceled, including a half-marathon in Hamburg where authorities cited the risk of "an increased demand for emergency and rescue services." The mercury will rise further in Germany starting Friday and on Saturday, when almost the entire country is forecast to bake under temperatures of 35 to 41C. Experts say the current German record for June of 39.6C, recorded in 2019 in Saxony-Anhalt state, could easily be broken over the weekend. "Although public awareness of the dangers of heat has clearly increased, Germany is still poorly prepared, or not prepared at all, for a heat-related disaster," he said. Herrmann called for heat protection to be more firmly embedded in disaster and crisis management, "like flood protection.—APP

**France intercepts Russia-linked tanker off Sicily**

MARSEILLE: France detained a Russia-linked oil tanker off the coast of Sicily earlier this week, President Emmanuel Macron said Thursday. "On Tuesday, the French navy boarded the oil tanker Deliver as it was passing off the coast of Sicily in breach of the law of the sea," Macron posted on X. The vessel, which was flying the Cameroonian flag and sailing from Primorsk in Russia, was being escorted by the French navy to an anchorage for further checks, maritime authorities said. Macron said the Deliver was linked to Moscow's so-called "shadow fleet," used to circumvent Western sanctions imposed after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The vessels frequently change the flags they fly, a practice known as "flag-hopping," or use invalid registrations in an attempt to escape tracking. "We will not allow the 'shadow fleet' to circumvent sanctions and finance Russia's war effort," Macron said. Since September, France has boarded four other ships believed to belong to Russia's "shadow fleet," including one in late May in the Atlantic with the help of Britain and other partners.—APP

**Swiss president to visit US amid push for trade deal**

ZURICH: Swiss President Guy Parmelin will visit the United States and meet with US Trade Representative Jamie Green next week, the government said on Thursday, as Bern seeks to formalize a preliminary deal with the Trump administration on tariffs. Parmelin, who is also Switzerland's economy minister, is going to the United States as part of a June 29 to July 9 visit to North America that will also take him to Canada and Mexico. Switzerland was last summer subject to the highest US tariffs in Europe when President Donald Trump set a 39 percent duty on products imported from the country. In November, Bern sealed the initial deal that cut the tariffs to 15 percent, mirroring the rate for the European Union. Switzerland later began talks to formalize that accord.—APP

# Pak, Iran to activate Joint Transport Committee to boost trade

She stated that Iran highly values the support and cooperation extended by its Pakistani brothers. Iranian Minister Farzaneh Sadegh also raised specific concerns regarding the clearance of trucks and containers at the border

DINA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and Iran on Thursday agreed to fully activate the Pakistan-Iran Joint Transport Committee and take coordinated measures to resolve transport and logistics issues on a priority basis to enhance bilateral trade and regional connectivity. The understanding was reached during a high-level meeting between Iran's Minister of Roads, Urban Development and Transport, Farzaneh Sadegh, and a Pakistani delegation led by Federal Minister for Communications Abdul Aleem Khan during her visit to Pakistan, said a press release. The meeting focused on regional connectivity, trade promotion and enhancing bilateral cooperation. The Pakistani delegation included Federal Minister for Railways Hanif Abbasi, Federal Minister for Commerce Jam Kamal Khan and Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs Junaid Anwar Chaudhry. During the meeting, Abdul Aleem Khan expressed deep satisfaction over the restoration of peace in the region and commended the resilience and determination of the Iranian people. He emphasized that road and rail connectivity between Pakistan and Iran would be further strengthened in the future, noting that robust land links are essential for expanding trade opportunities between the two neighbouring countries. Both delegations held detailed discussions on various proposals aimed at improving bilateral logistics and agreed to fully activate the Pakistan-Iran Joint Transport Committee.



ISLAMABAD: Iranian Minister for Transport Ms. Farzaneh Sadegh called on Federal Minister for Communications Abdul Aleem Khan & Federal Ministers Hanif Abbasi, Jam Kamal and Junaid Anwar and held meeting.

Abdul Aleem Khan assured the Iranian delegation that all transport-related issues between the two countries would be addressed and resolved on a priority basis. Iranian Minister Farzaneh Sadegh expressed her sincere appreciation for Pakistan's positive and constructive role in

helping de-escalate regional tensions and facilitate the path toward a peace agreement.

She stated that Iran highly values the support and cooperation extended by its Pakistani brothers. Iranian Minister Farzaneh Sadegh also raised specific concerns re-

garding the clearance of trucks and containers at the border.

Senior officials from both sides attended the meeting, and the two countries agreed to undertake joint measures for the swift resolution of all outstanding issues along the Pakistan-Iran border.

# Iraq urges OPEC to raise its quota

BAGHDAD: Iraq has urged OPEC to increase its oil production quota considering the country's history of conflicts and the recent regional war that have damaged its industry, the oil ministry said Thursday. Like other oil producers, Iraq, a founding member of OPEC, was greatly affected by the Middle East war, as it is hugely dependent on oil exports, which make up about 90 percent of its budget revenues. Iraq's oil ministry said that the country "has consistently emphasized the importance of reassessing production baselines to ensure they are aligned with the sustainable production capacities of member countries," and in respect of "Iraq's unique security and economic circumstances." OPEC has "responded by launching a process to reassess" its members' states' capacities, the ministry said. Amid reports of a possible Iraqi exit from OPEC, oil ministry spokesperson Salim Al-Rikabi told AFP that Iraq "has no intention of withdrawing from the organization and remains committed to its mechanisms." He added that the cartel "has to raise Iraq's production quota. Otherwise, a decision will have to be made about whether to stay or leave the organization." Iraq has proceeded "to increase its production in line with its capacities and needs," he said. But the ministry said that "reports suggesting that Iraq is considering ending its membership in OPEC do not reflect the official position" of the government. An Iraqi exit would further weaken OPEC after the UAE pulled out of the cartel in May citing "national interests" and a broader plan to future-proof its economy. Iraq's ministry added that "any issues related to production baselines or sustainable production capacity are addressed through the established technical and consensus-based mechanisms" within OPEC. It noted a "high level of understanding" among OPEC members regarding Iraq's situation, given decades of wars, sanctions, and recent attacks that have damaged the sector during the Middle East War. All of these challenges will be considered to "ensure that Iraqi oil production reaches a fair level." The Middle East war and Iran's blockade of the Strait of Hormuz choked off shipments and prompted production cuts in key oil-producing countries including Iraq, shaking world energy markets. During the conflict, several oil fields were struck by drones mostly launched by pro-Iran armed groups. Before the war erupted on February 28, Iraq produced around four million barrels per day, and exported an average of 3.5 million bpd, mostly via Hormuz. After a recent deal between Washington and Tehran to end the fighting, Iraq now hopes to return within two months to its previous production levels.—DNA

# Nearly 250 farmers supported thru free courses in Romania

BUCHAREST: Almost 250 farmers and entrepreneurs were supported through free courses and coaching within the 'Business with Roots' project, and the first loans already granted and the new sessions for the digitalization & certification of farms will take place from autumn. According to a press release, the 'Business with Roots' project, developed by Patria Credit IFN SA in partnership with REDI Romania (Roma Entrepreneurship Development Association), marks the first months of implementation, consolidating its position as a skills accelerator for small entrepreneurs and farmers in rural areas. The initiative benefits from the support of the Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB), within the InvestEU Fund and the ESP+ Program, representing a model of good practices in which financial and technical education is directly coupled with financing instruments with subsidized interest rates. In the first half of the year since its launch, the project attracted and served almost 250 beneficiaries at national level. They accessed free training modules and personalized consulting sessions (1-to-1 coaching), specifically developed through active programs on the platform. Thus, the 'Efficiently manage farm finances and prepare to access financing' program for small farmers represents a strategic pillar focused on optimizing cash flows, controlling production costs and preparing documentation for obtaining financing, facilitating the transition of small producers to a bankable business model. At the same time, the 'Grow and expand your business' program for Roma entrepreneurs is a component dedicated to active legal entities, focused on scaling operations, strategic management, negotiation techniques and opening commercial channels to large retailers. A strategic novelty within the project is the launch of the 'Digitalization and Certification for Farmers' Program, aimed at supporting small producers in increasing productivity and adapting to the requirements of large retail chains. The new program guides farmers in the digital transformation of their business and in quality management, covering product traceability and certification standards specific to agricultural products. All training and coaching programs within the initiative are free of charge. The actual financing and access to the partially subsidized interest are conditional on meeting the standard eligibility criteria of the financial institution.—DNA

# Swedish minister brings baby to EU meeting

DINA

LUXEMBOURG: EU governments' ministers gathered for a long day's discussion of climate change policies on Thursday were surprised by a fresh-faced participant at their negotiating table: a three-month-old baby. Swedish climate minister Romina Pourmokhtari brought her son, Adam, to the EU council meeting in Luxembourg, to highlight the benefits of parental leave policies which don't force women to choose between work and family responsibilities. "I wanted to showcase being an example of not having to make that choice. Which, of course, also requires having a partner that's not a dinosaur, someone who's quite modern and up for it to tag along," Pourmokhtari told Reuters. An EU Council official confirmed it was the first time, to the institution's knowledge, that a baby had joined a meeting of EU ministers. Pourmokhtari, 30, was the youngest government minister in Sweden's history when she took office in 2022. She has just returned from parental leave, while her husband is on leave until Sweden's election in September and traveled with her to Luxembourg to care for Adam. Sweden has one of the world's most generous parental leave policies, funded by the country's system of high taxes, which has become a political flashpoint in the election campaign. Parents receive about 16 months of paid leave in total. Of this, 90 days are reserved for each parent individually and cannot be transferred to the other. If a parent does not take their allotted portion, those days are forfeited. These non-transferable periods — often called "dad months" — were introduced to encourage fathers to spend more time with their children. Pourmokhtari credits this policy, and support from her team, with making it "much less controversial" for her husband to care for Adam

while she works. She said supportive policies were not just a question of spending taxes on longer leave periods — and urged governments to also consider more flexible rules on parents sharing leave and affordable childcare. "It's creating a lot of value that shouldn't be underestimated. Value that might not always be economic — but in the end, might

also be economic, in not having burnt-out workers," she said, referring to the burden on many parents struggling to juggle work and family. Krzysztof Bolesla, Poland's deputy climate minister, said it had been no trouble having a baby in a political meeting. "I think it's great," he told Reuters. "It's not a handicap, it's just a part of life."



# Students celebrate in streets as Lebanese govt cancel exams

DUBAI: Elated students took to Lebanon's streets to celebrate after the cabinet agreed to exempt them from official exams on Thursday Official Baccalaureate exams were cancelled, ministers said, "due to the exceptional circumstances and difficult security conditions the country is facing". The decision came after education minister Rima Karami had previously insisted students carry on as normal, dates unchanged despite the ongoing hostilities and the death of university student Theodosia James Karam and her brother and father. The three had been killed in an airstrike sparking a wave of outrage as protesters demanded the exams be put on hold. The Minister of Education later confirmed in a statement on Thursday that the Cabinet had "decided to exempt students from official baccalaureate exams and the technical baccalaureate, relying instead on school grades."—APP

# China state refiners considering resuming Iran oil imports

SINGAPORE: China's state-owned refiners are considering resuming Iranian oil purchases, but competing alternative supplies and falling domestic fuel demand will temper their interest, said several industry sources. Any purchases would be the first since 2019 when Sinopec and PetroChina bought Iranian crude shortly after US President Donald Trump reimposed sanctions on Tehran's petroleum exports in his first term. PetroChina and Sinopec are examining the banking, insurance and shipping considerations needed to resume their Iranian transactions, said three of the sources, officials at Chinese state oil companies who spoke on condition of anonymity as the subject is sensitive. The decision follows Monday's US waiver allowing global customers to buy Iranian oil and petrochemical products and settle in US dollars after the memorandum of understanding signed last week that ended the US-Israeli war with Iran. "Let's see who might be the first to eat the crab," said one of the three sources, using a Chinese idiom referring to the first person to take up something new, who also pointed out there is no shortage of oil as exports from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Iraq are rising. It is also unclear which banks could provide financing and clearing for the deals and if Iran has the shipping capacity to deliver the cargoes, the source added.—APP

# Al-Jadaan calls for stronger global partnerships

VIENNA: Saudi Arabia's Minister of Finance, Mohammed Al-Jadaan, concluded his participation in the OPEC Fund for International Development Forum and the 47th Ministerial Council Meeting of the fund, held on June 23-24 in the Austrian capital, Vienna. The events were held under the theme "A Transformation That Empowers Tomorrow" and aimed to discuss ways to enhance responses to global challenges, bringing together leaders, ministers, and heads of multilateral development finance institutions. In his opening remarks, Al-Jadaan emphasized that the development challenge today is no longer limited to promoting economic growth alone but also includes building economies that are more resilient to global shocks, strengthening supply chain flexibility, and improving countries' readiness to deal with escalating risks. He said that no country can face global challenges on its own, stressing that development finance institutions, including the OPEC Fund for International Development, play a vital role in mobilizing resources, sharing knowledge, and supporting innovation to help countries address these challenges.—APP

Briefs

Journalist killed

RIYADH: A correspondent for Al-Arabiya was killed on Wednesday when an explosive device went off in his vehicle in Yemen, the network reported. Mohammed Aydah died in the blast in the city of Mukalla, in Hadhramout governorate. His body was transferred to Ibn Sina Hospital following the explosion, Al-Arabiya news website reported. The governor of Hadhramout, Salem Ahmed Al-Khanbashi, said he had ordered an investigation into the killing. - APP

Macron hosts Meloni after Trump rift

PARIS: Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, fresh from a spat with US leader Donald Trump, was set Thursday to meet French President Emmanuel Macron Thursday to tighten ties. One of Europe's most prominent right-wing leaders will arrive in the resort of Antibes on the French Riviera for her first bilateral summit with Macron. The talks, set to begin Tuesday afternoon, mark the first Franco-Italian summit since a treaty on a strategic alliance came into force in 2021, elevating relations to a level comparable to that between France and Germany. "This summit will provide an opportunity to deepen Franco-Italian cooperation in several strategic sectors, notably defense, nuclear energy, and space," the French presidency said. "We need each other," it said ahead of the talks at the Villa Eilenroc, a dazzling 19th-century residence overlooking the Mediterranean. Relations have often been strained between Macron, a pro-European centrist, and Meloni, who leads a coalition of right and far-right parties. - APP

Minister Asif stands by remarks

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Defence Minister Khawaja Asif has welcomed criticism from PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari over his remarks on Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), but said he remains firm on his position. Speaking on Geo News' programme "Aaj Shahzeb Khanzada Kay Sath", Asif said politics was being played over reserved seats for refugees in Azad Kashmir and that politicians were insulting those who had sacrificed during the war. "I welcome Bilawal's criticism, but I stand by my point of view," the defence minister said. Asif said that if his party issued a "shut up call", he would remain silent on the matter. He also said it was for the government to decide whether issues surrounding the matter.

# Iran criticises Nato chief's comments on US support in war

Esmail Baghaei condemns Nato chief's admission of "active complicity" in "unlawful war"

DNA

TEHRAN: Tehran said on Thursday that Nato was complicit in the US-Israeli war against Iran, after the bloc's chief noted its support for the United States in the conflict. Responding to US President Donald Trump's criticism of allies for not supporting the war, Nato boss Mark Rutte told Fox News that hundreds of American planes launched from bases in Italy. Trump's second term has been marked by tensions with Nato allies, who have voiced skepticism over the need for the conflict in the Middle East. "Country after country, ally after ally after ally, have made their bases available for Epic Fury," Rutte told US TV channel Fox News, referring to the US military operation in Iran. "Five hundred US planes took off from US bases in Italy to support Epic Fury," he said, referring to the US name for the operation against Iran. Trump had told Rutte on Wednesday he was "let down" by members of the alliance who did not back his war against Iran. Rutte also told Fox News

that Romania "cut down on commercial air flights and airplanes because they had to use the airports for the tanker facilities" during the Iran war. Iran's foreign ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei condemned the Nato chief's admission of "active complicity" in the "unlawful war". "This is a clear and damning admission of Nato's active complicity in an unlawful war of aggression against a sovereign UN Member State," Baghaei wrote on X. He accused Nato of "a flagrant violation of peremptory norms of international law and the core principles of the UN Charter". Italy was quick to distance itself from Rutte's words, which the defence ministry said gave "a completely misleading message by confusing

the type of flights that were authorised". It said Italy had allowed only "technical and logistical" US flights during Epic Fury under existing agreements with the United States. Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan bin Abdullah Al Saudi has spoken by phone with his Iranian counterpart Abbas Araghchi, said the Saudi Foreign Ministry. The pair "reviewed the latest developments" in continued US-Iran negotiations "as well as the progress made to implement the agreed understandings" between the two sides, the ministry said in a readout of the call. "They also discussed regional developments and emphasised the importance of continuing efforts to advance di-

logue and diplomatic solutions that serve the shared interests of all countries and peoples of the region," the ministry said. Some 20 million barrels of crude oil have exited the Strait of Hormuz in the last 24 hours, US Energy Secretary Chris Wright said at the Reuters Global Energy Forum in New York. Wright blamed Iranian mines in the vital waterway for any delay in a return to normal oil shipping levels, according to Al Jazeera. Meanwhile, Esmail Baghaei, spokesman for the Iranian Foreign Ministry, has warned that "contradictory statements" by US officials on the MoU "will do nothing to reduce the accumulated distrust of Iranians" towards Washington. Instead, they "will merely serve as a reminder of past breaches of faith", Baghaei wrote on social media, without specifying which exact statements he was referring to. "The US ruling establishment must bear in mind that the principle of 'commitment for commitment' requires the fulfilment of reciprocal obligations and the avoidance of interpretations that are entirely at odds with the explicit wording of the memorandum of understanding text," he said.



## Oil extends decline on rising Middle East supply

Prompt-month Brent crude futures for August delivery fell \$1.22, or 1.65%, to \$72.52 a barrel

DNA

BEIJING/SINGAPORE: Oil prices extended their decline on Thursday to near levels last seen before the start of the US-Israel war against Iran, as rising supply expectations from the Middle East outweighed demand concerns. Prompt-month Brent crude futures for August delivery fell \$1.22, or 1.65%, to \$72.52 a barrel as of 0337 GMT, while US West Texas Intermediate lost \$1.02, or 1.45%, to \$69.32 a barrel. Both contracts hit their lowest since February 27. August Brent was trading lower than September, which was priced at \$73.59, signalling ample short-term supply. "The speed of this decline has caught plenty off guard as markets price in a much faster return of Middle Eastern barrels than most had anticipated just a fortnight ago," IG analyst Tony Sycamore said in a note. Brent had fallen more than \$3 on Wednesday as supply concerns eased, and WTI settled down nearly \$3. US Energy Secretary Chris Wright told a forum on Wednesday that flows through the Strait of Hormuz were close to what they were before the start of the Iran war, saying at least 20 million barrels had exited the strait in the last 24 hours. He added a return to complete normalcy would take a few weeks because

the strait needs to be demined. Rising Middle Eastern supply, together with Iran set to boost sales following a temporary reprieve from US sanctions, drove down prices of physical crude oil cargoes around the world. An initial accord last week to end the US-Israeli war with Iran, which began on February 28, has allowed traffic through the strait to restart. The accord set up a 60-day period of negotiations to tackle more difficult issues including Iran's nuclear programme. Wright said oil would continue to flow through the strait even if the deal did not hold, and that Iran would not be able to close it again. Oman on Wednesday opened temporary routes to ease tanker departures from the Strait of Hormuz, with the International Maritime Organization and Omani authorities coordinating movements. Qatar's prime minister visited Oman for talks on initiating negotiations over the strait's future management with Iran, Iraq and Gulf states. Macquarie analysts expected oil to normalise quickly toward pre-war levels as supply chains adapt and the Strait of Hormuz reopens. They forecast Brent and WTI prices to average \$67 and \$62 per barrel, respectively, in the third quarter, down from the second quarter's average of \$94 and \$87 per barrel.

## Magnitude 6.9 quake hits northern Japan, no tsunami warning

TOKYO: A magnitude 6.9 earthquake struck northern Japan on Thursday, the country's weather agency said, adding that there was no tsunami warning. There were no immediate reports of major damage. The quake occurred off the northern region of Iwate, with the depth of the epicenter at 50 kilometers, the Japan Meteorological Agency said. One local woman in the town of Hashikami, where the shaking was strongest, told AFP that the only damage in her home was a photo frame falling down. Footage on public broadcaster NHK showed regular traffic in Hachinohe city with traffic lights still functioning as normal. Japan is one of the world's most seismically active countries, sitting on top of four major tectonic plates along the western edge of the Pacific "Ring of Fire." The archipelago, home to around 125 million people, typically experiences hundreds of jolts every year and accounts for about 18 percent of the world's earthquakes. The vast majority are mild, although the damage they cause varies according to their location and the depth below the Earth's surface at which they strike. It is haunted by the memory of a massive 9.0-magnitude undersea quake in 2011, which triggered a tsunami that killed or left missing around 18,500 people and wrecked the Fukushima nuclear plant. On April 20 this year, a tremor measuring 7.7 hit the country's north in Pacific waters off Iwate prefecture. This prompted authorities to issue a special advisory on Monday warning of an increased risk of earthquakes of magnitude 8.0 or stronger. - APP

## Israeli strike on Lebanon kills two

BEIRUT: An Israeli strike on a vehicle in southern Lebanon killed two people on Wednesday, Lebanese state media reported, with militant group Hezbollah calling it another "violation" of a truce between the two sides. Hezbollah drew Lebanon into the Middle East war on March 2 with rocket fire at Israel to avenge the killing of Iran's supreme leader in US-Israeli strikes. Israel responded with airstrikes and a ground offensive that Lebanon says have killed more than 4,100 people. Lebanon's state-run National News Agency said that "two people were killed" when an Israeli drone targeted their vehicle near the town of Kfar Rumman.

The Israeli military had said earlier that it targeted "two armed Hezbollah terrorists in the area of Ali Al-Taher Ridge" near the city of Nabatieh "who posed a threat," vowing that it will "continue to operate to remove immediate threats." It then said it also targeted "a vehicle carrying suspects... crossing the security zone in the Ali Al-Taher Ridge area, posing a threat to (Israeli) soldiers." Hezbollah accused Israel of a new ceasefire "violation" on Wednesday after an Israeli drone killed two people in southern Lebanon a day after two people died in Israeli gunfire. "For the second time in less than 48 hours, the Israeli enemy army deliberately targeted Lebanese citizens who were inspecting their homes" near the town of Kfar Rumman, the Iran-backed group said in a statement. Hezbollah said it "reiterates that the enemy's actions constitute a blatant violation of the ceasefire to which it has adhered thus far, and that it is monitoring and documenting these violations." - APP

## President Trump, Republican senator engage in shouting match over Iran war

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump faced pointed criticism over the Iran war on Wednesday in a closed-door meeting with fellow Republicans, shortly before his administration asked Congress for tens of billions of dollars to pay for the conflict. Several Republicans in the closed-door meeting said Trump engaged in a shouting match with Republican Senator Bill Cassidy, who said the administration needed to explain a framework deal Trump signed last week that provides financial incentives for Iran but does not accomplish any of the goals he laid out at the war's beginning. "The American people need to know more than we are being told," Cassidy told reporters. "It does not appear, although I don't know for sure, that the course of this is going the way that we were told." The high-volume exchange with a member of Trump's own party was another example of how the war has weighed on Trump ahead of November elections that will determine control of Congress. Just one in four Americans believes the war was worth its costs, a Reuters/Ipsos poll found, and Trump's approval rating is at its lowest level since he returned to office last year. The exchange came one day after the Senate voted to direct Trump to end the war in a largely symbolic rebuke. Cassidy was one of four Republicans to back the resolution, along with opposition Democrats. - APP

## United States-Iran deal may leave Netanyahu as biggest casualty

A White House official said Trump and Netanyahu had a strong relationship and that Israel's military forces had been "incredible partners" in a war that had "decimated the Iranian regime's military capabilities"

BEIRUT: The biggest casualty of the US-Iran deal may not be Israel's Iran strategy, but the political brand Benjamin Netanyahu spent decades building as the Israeli leader who could uniquely bend Washington to his will on Iran, analysts, former US officials and diplomats say. Netanyahu shaped his political identity on an audacious assertion: that he alone could keep the US and Israel in strategic lockstep on Iran. Cultivating Republican support, he cast himself as the only Israeli leader capable of influencing successive US presidents and insisted that only sustained military pressure could contain Tehran. At the height of his power, he was described by diplomats as the "American whisperer" - the Israeli leader who could pick up the phone and ensure Washington's strategic calculus aligned with that of Israel. No other Israeli prime minister, they note, addressed Congress as often or built such enduring political capital across the American political system. But analysts say Washington and Tehran's interim pact to end the war that the US and Israel launched in February shows how that narrative has been reversed. Rather than shaping Washington's Iran policy, Netanyahu is now forced to accept it, as US President Donald Trump pursues a settlement that increasingly treats Israeli objections as constraints. At home, the reckoning is equally stark, said former US official Dennis Ross. Netanyahu is increasingly boxed in between a US president intent on ending the conflict and a domestic base resistant to concessions, particularly in Lebanon, he said. Withdrawal risks political backlash while escalation risks confrontation with Washington. The war Netanyahu hoped would cement his legacy as the leader who confronted Iran may instead be remembered as the conflict that dismantled a central

source of his power. Isolated abroad, constrained by his closest ally and vulnerable ahead of an autumn election, he now finds the political asset on which he built his career has become his greatest liability. At the outset of the war with Iran, Netanyahu promised ultimate victory. He delivered neither the collapse of Iran's ruling system, nor the defeat of Lebanon's Hezbollah, nor safe return for residents of northern Israel. "The US-Iran deal is a decisive blow to Netanyahu," said Aviv Bushinsky, a former Netanyahu adviser. "Not only did he lose the war with Iran, he has also lost Trump as a friend. He is now isolated not only internationally, but locked in a major dispute with Trump," he said. Netanyahu's office did not respond to a request for comment. In a press conference this month, the Israeli premier described his relationship with Trump as one between partners who "agree many times and sometimes disagree." There had been a systematic campaign to diminish Israel's "huge achievements" against Iran and its proxies, he said. A White House official said Trump and Netanyahu had a strong relationship and that Israel's military forces had been "incredible partners" in a war that had "decimated the Iranian regime's military capabilities." A State Department official said the United States maintains an "iron-clad" commitment to Israel's security, stressing that "this is not changing." The official added that Israel retains the right to defend itself, particularly against Hezbollah, "a terrorist organization that threatens its citizens and undermines the Lebanese government," and cannot be expected to withdraw from Lebanon until that threat is addressed. Normalization and regional integration remain a top priority for the Trump administration, added the official. - APP

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