



Thursday, July 02, 2026

Pakistan's Credible Daily Newspaper

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**Ambassador Ugo takes charge as new Italian envoy**

Detailed News On Page-03

**ICCI to have closer links with Africa**

Detailed News On Page-07


**Messi will score more but I want the trophy: Mbappe**

Detailed News On Page-06



## Tensions at borders

# Pakistan downs four Afghan Taliban drones

1 killed, 6 others injured in suspected drone strike in Peshawar outskirts; ISPR says Afghan regime will receive befitting response if they continue provoking Islamabad

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistani military has downed four drones launched by the Afghan Taliban along the Balochistan border, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said on Wednesday. In a statement, the military's media wing said that the Taliban regime had launched the "rudimentary" drones as part of their patronisation and support of terrorist outfits operating from inside their controlled territories. Islamabad and Kabul's relations have deteriorated as the Taliban regime continues to support terrorists, who launch cross-border attacks, resulting in the martyrdom of civilians and security personnel in Pakistan. Demonstrating high operational readiness, the ISPR said, Pakistan's robust air defence network immediately picked up the hostile aerial platforms and successfully neutralised all four incoming drones using sophisticated countermeasures. "Due to the swift and effective response, the malicious attempts were effectively thwarted," the ISPR said, noting that such gimmicks of the Afghan Taliban regime are aimed at misleading the Afghan population suffering under their oppressive regime. It added that the Afghan Taliban should realise that

their irresponsible behaviour is only adding to the hardships of the Afghan people. Instead of trying to sedate their population through such antics and hollow rhetoric, the ISPR said, they should eschew sponsorship of terrorism and adhere to the principle of peaceful coexistence. "However, if the Afghan Taliban continue to provoke Pakistan, they would receive a befitting response which would cost them heavily. The Pakistan Armed Forces remain fully vigilant and capable of defending every inch of the motherland." "Any misadventures or cross-border provocations threatening the sovereignty of Pakistan and endangering our people will continue to be met with swift, decisive, and overwhelming responses under Operation Ghazab-lil-Haq." Notably, Pakistan has also witnessed a spike in terror activities since 2021, when the Taliban came into power. Most recently, the Foreign Office issued a demarche to the Afghan Charge d' Affaires over the terrorist attack on a Pakistan Rangers (Sindh) camp in Karachi. The attack martyred three Rangers personnel. The demarche was issued in light of the fact that Afghan nationals, including one apprehended alive, participated in this attack, proving yet again that Afghan soil and Afghan nationals continue to be used to orchestrate terrorist attacks inside Pakistan.

## Gilani lauds services of Bulgarian Ambassador

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Bulgaria to Pakistan, Irena Genadieva Gancheva, called on Chairman Senate Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani at Parliament House on Wednesday. The meeting focused on bilateral relations, regional developments, parliamentary cooperation, and avenues for enhancing economic and people-to-people ties between Pakistan and Bulgaria. Chairman Senate congratulated Ambassador Gancheva on the successful completion of her diplomatic assignment in Pakistan and commended her efforts in strengthening the long-standing friendship between the two countries. He appreciated her contribution to promoting bilateral cooperation and fostering greater mutual understanding.

Continued on Page 06

## FESCO, GEPCO privatisation date extended

FIAZ CH

ISLAMABAD: The Privatisation Commission of Pakistan has extended the deadline for the submission of Expressions of Interest (EOIs) for the privatisation of Faisalabad Electric Supply Company (FESCO) and Gujranwala Electric Power Company (GEPCO) under the Government's Batch-I DISCOs privatisation programme. The revised deadlines are as follows: \* FESCO: August 7, 2026 (1600 Hours PKT) \* GEPCO: August 21, 2026 (1600 Hours PKT)

Continued on Page 06

## PSX gains over 3,700 points

DNA

KARACHI: The Pakistan Stock Exchange's (PSX) benchmark KSE-100 index sustained its positive momentum and gained over 3,700 points on Wednesday, the first day of the new fiscal year. The KSE-100 index gained 3,748.40 points (2.08 per cent) to close at 184,050.10. The benchmark index traded in green the entire session, gradually witnessing gains from an intraday low of 180,565.83 at 9:35am. The market had staged a recovery rally on Tuesday, propelling KSE-100 above the 180,000 mark

Continued on Page 06

## BIDDING FAREWELL



ISLAMABAD: Chairman Senate Yousaf Raza Gilani presenting a souvenir to the outgoing Ambassador of Bulgaria Irena Gancheva. - DNA

## US-Iran talks in Doha

# Iran warns of quick response to threats

The warning reflects the ongoing hostility between Iran and Israel, with both sides trading accusations of aggression

CENTRELINE REPORT

TEHRAN/DOHA: Senior Iranian officials have issued strong warnings against perceived threats to the country's leadership and people, vowing swift retaliation, while diplomatic efforts continue in Doha with mediators seeking to ease regional tensions. Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi declared that any threats directed at Iran's leadership or citizens would be met with an "immediate powerful response." His remarks came amid heightened tensions with Israel, which he accused of provocative actions. Araghchi further warned that Israel could face a strike from Iran "a third time," underscoring Tehran's readiness to escalate if necessary. The warning reflects the ongoing hostility between Iran and Israel, with both sides trading accusations of aggression. Israel has previously carried out strikes targeting Iranian-linked assets, while Iran insists it will defend its sovereignty and deter further attacks.

Continued on Page 06

## US getting along well with Iran: Trump

DNA

NEW YORK: President Donald Trump said the United States is "getting along well" with Iran, as the two countries began indirect talks via mediators in Doha on Wednesday, in a bid to advance negotiations and ease tensions following exchanges of fire between the two sides. "The denuclearisation of Iran is moving along well," Trump told reporters before leaving for a trip. "They've had very good meetings, and we'll see." He added that Tehran had "come a long way" in negotiations with Washington. "We hit them very hard last week."

Continued on Page 06

# WB report urges fiscal federalism

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: The World Bank on Wednesday, in its report titled "Strengthening Fiscal Federalism in Pakistan," stressed the need to reform the country's system of resource distribution among federal, provincial and local governments. It warned that stronger fiscal coordination was essential to sustain economic stability, improve public service delivery and effectively respond to the demands of a rapidly growing population.

The report identified two main factors behind the widening federal fiscal deficit: increased transfers following the 7th NFC Award without corresponding adjustments in federal expenditures, and stagnant revenue collection

The report mentioned that the landmark 2010 reforms, the 18th Constitutional Amendment and the 7th National Finance

Continued on Page 06

## Briefs

### Police book tuition center owners

ABID RAZA

LAHORE: Police have registered a case against a contractor and the owners of a tuition centre, the roof of which collapsed on Tuesday, resulting in the death of 14 children. Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Operations Faisal Kamran also confirmed to Dawn that the owners and the contractor who constructed the house where the tuition centre was set up were nominated in the first information report (FIR). The FIR, a copy of which is available with Dawn, was registered on Tuesday under Sections 322 (manslaughter) and 337-H (punishment for hurt by rash or negligent act) of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC). It was registered at the Kahna police station on the complaint of a Lahore Metropolitan Corporation official, Kashif Aslam.

## Pakistan rejects India's 'preposterous' statement on strikes along Afghan border

The Foreign Office further alleged that India has been actively aiding and sponsoring terrorist groups operating from Afghan soil against Pakistan, in violation of UN Security Council sanctions

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan has strongly rejected remarks made by India's Ministry of External Affairs on June 29, calling them "baseless" and "preposterous." Responding to a media query, Foreign Office Spokesperson Tahir Andrabi emphasized that Pakistan's recent actions against terrorist infrastructure in Afghanistan were "legitimate, targeted and proportionate," carried out to safeguard its citizens in line with international law. "Pakistan rejects the baseless statement by the Indian Ministry of External Affairs on Pakistan's legitimate, targeted and proportionate actions against terrorist infrastructure in Afghanistan." He accused India of historically interfering in the sovereignty and territorial integrity of neighboring countries, in violation of the UN Charter. The spokesperson also highlighted India's continued suppression of the right to self-determination of Kashmiris in Indian Illegally Occupied

Continued on Page 06

## Pakistan and India exchange lists of prisoners

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: In pursuance of the bilateral Agreement on Consular Access, Pakistan and India today exchanged, through diplomatic channels, the lists of prisoners in each other's custody. Under the Agreement, signed on 21 May 2008, both sides are required to exchange these lists on 1 January and 1 July every year. The Government of Pakistan handed over a list of 250 Indian prisoners in Pakistan (52 civilian prisoners and 198 fishermen) to the Indian High Commission in Islamabad. Simultaneously, the Government of India provided a list of 439 Pakistani or believed-to-be

Continued on Page 06

## UN reports finds big risks of AI

NEWS DESK

WASHINGTON: The rapid development of AI offers huge potential benefits to countries and people around the world, but also poses big risks, 40 leading scientists and experts said in the first report by a United Nations independent scientific panel on the technology. The report, to be presented to governments at an inaugural UN Global Dialogue on AI governance in Geneva July 6 to 7, offers the first global, independent scientific assessment of AI, with a fuller, comprehensive report planned next year. Members of the panel were drawn from every region of the world, and its members serve a three-year term, independent of any government, institution or company. According to the report, policymakers need scientific evidence to govern AI.

# Lahore tragedy: a stark reminder of neglected realities

OPINION

ANSAR MAHMOOD BHATTI



DEVASTATING tragedy struck the provincial capital Lahore on June 30, 2026 when the roof of a tuition center collapsed, killing 14 innocent children who had gathered there to study. The incident has shaken the conscience of Punjab and the nation at large, exposing the stark contrast between official claims of progress and the grim realities faced by ordinary citizens. The collapse was not merely an accident; it was the culmination of years of neglect, poverty, and systemic failure. Families struggling to make ends meet cannot afford to repair their homes or community buildings. For millions across Punjab, dilapidated structures are not a choice but a harsh reality. When survival itself is a daily battle, house repairs or safety upgrades remain an unaffordable luxury. Parents send their children to tuition centers hoping to secure a better future through education. Instead, they were forced to bury them under rubble. This tragedy is emblematic of the silent suffering endured by countless households across the province. Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz has often highlighted her government's achievements, pointing to initiatives such as laptops for students, green

“The collapse of a tuition center roof in Lahore, killing 14 children, is more than a local disaster, it is a national indictment. It exposes the fragility of Pakistan's social fabric and the failure of governance to protect its most vulnerable citizens”

and yellow buses, metro projects like the Orange Line, and schemes like Kissan Cards. While these programs may serve as political optics, the tuition center collapse underscores that they do little to address the fundamental needs of the people. Punjab, the largest province with a massive budget, continues to allocate resources disproportionately toward projects that generate publicity rather than welfare. The tragedy in Lahore is a painful reminder that glossy announcements cannot substitute for structural reforms, social safety nets, or merit-based governance. The economic situation in Punjab mirrors the broader national crisis. Acute price hikes, unemployment, and lack of merit-based opportunities have left families vulnerable. Social welfare remains absent, leaving the poor to fend for themselves. The tuition center collapse is not an isolated incident—it is the story of millions living in unsafe, crumbling houses across Punjab and beyond. The tragedy also highlights the absence of effective local governance. Had there been proper inspections, regulations, and enforcement of building safety standards, the collapse could have been prevented. Instead, corruption and negligence continue to erode public trust. While Punjab's size and budget make its failures more glaring, the situation is not unique to the

province. Across Sindh, Balochistan, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, families face similar struggles. Poverty, unemployment, and lack of social welfare are national issues. The collapse in Lahore is a symbol of a broader malaise afflicting Pakistan's governance and development model. Projects like metro lines, bus fleets, and technology giveaways may create headlines, but they cannot transform Pakistan into a welfare state. True development requires rule of law, meritocracy, equal distribution of resources, law and order, and a corruption-free society. These are the foundations of sustainable progress, yet they remain absent from political discourse because they offer no immediate kickbacks, commissions, or personal projections. The tuition center tragedy exposes the hollowness of development that prioritizes optics over substance. It is a call to rethink what progress truly means. Pakistan, after 78 years of independence, continues to search for a messiah—a leader who can deliver justice, equality, and prosperity. Each new government promises change, but the cycle of neglect and mismanagement persists. The collapse in Lahore is not just about a roof; it is about the collapse of governance, accountability, and social responsibility. The grieving families of Lahore are not alone. They represent millions across Pakistan who live in fear of

similar tragedies, whether from unsafe housing, lack of healthcare, or absence of social protection. Their plight is a reminder that Pakistan's journey toward becoming a welfare state remains unfinished. The tragedy demands more than condolences and promises. It requires a fundamental shift in priorities: Rule of law must be enforced to ensure accountability and safety standards. Meritocracy must replace nepotism and favoritism in governance. Equal resource distribution must ensure that budgets serve the people, not political optics. Corruption-free society must become the cornerstone of reform. Social welfare must be institutionalized to protect vulnerable families. Without these pillars, Pakistan will continue to witness tragedies like the one in Lahore. The collapse of a tuition center roof in Lahore, killing 14 children, is more than a local disaster, it is a national indictment. It exposes the fragility of Pakistan's social fabric and the failure of governance to protect its most vulnerable citizens. As families mourn their children, the nation must confront the uncomfortable truth: development cannot be measured in buses, laptops, or publicity campaigns. It must be measured in safety, welfare, justice, and dignity for all. Until Pakistan embraces genuine reform, tragedies like Lahore will remain grim reminders of promises unfulfilled and lives lost to neglect.

## Wahab inspects ongoing cleaning of storm water drain

KARACHI: Mayor Karachi Barrister Murtaza Wahab continued his inspection of the city's ongoing storm water drain cleaning campaign for the third consecutive day by visiting various locations across the city. During the visit, the Mayor inspected the City Drain located in the Railway Colony near I.I. Chundrigar Road, said a statement on Wednesday Municipal Commissioner KMC Abrar Jaffar, Karamullah Waqasi, Parliamentary Leader of the Pakistan Peoples Party in the City Council, Senior Director Municipal Services Iqbal Nawaz, KMC's concerned officials, and others also accompanied him and briefed him on the progress of the drain cleaning operations. The Mayor stated that the drain, situated near the city's downtown area, is of great importance. Therefore, it is being thoroughly cleaned before the onset of the monsoon season to ensure the uninterrupted flow of rainwater and prevent urban flooding. He directed the concerned officials to complete the cleaning work within the stipulated timeframe while maintaining the highest standards, adding that no negligence would be tolerated. Mayor Karachi Barrister Murtaza Wahab said that the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation is making every possible effort not only to complete the drain cleaning operations efficiently but also to finalize all other necessary monsoon preparedness measures in a timely manner to minimize inconvenience to citizens. He informed that the drain cleaning campaign will continue until September 15 and that KMC is also ready to extend every possible assistance to the Town Municipal Corporations whenever required.—APP

## Steps urged to resolve CRBC water shortage

PESHAWAR: Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Karim Kundi on Wednesday directed WAPDA authorities to take immediate and effective measures to address the water shortage in the Chashma Right Bank Canal (CRBC) and resolve the concerns of farmers in Dera Ismail Khan. The Governor issued the directives during a meeting with WAPDA General Manager (North) Alamgir Awan and Chief Engineer Taj Ali at the Governor House. The meeting reviewed the prevailing water situation in the Chashma Right Bank Canal, the irrigation system, and the problems being faced by farmers in the southern districts, particularly Dera Ismail Khan. During the briefing, the WAPDA General Manager informed the governor that around 4,000 cusecs of water were currently being released into the canal, but nearly 900 cusecs were being lost due to water theft, severely affecting water supply to the tail-end areas. Expressing serious concern over the continued water shortage, Governor Kundi said the canal benefited not only Dera Ismail Khan but also other southern districts of the province.—APP



KARACHI: President Asif Ali Zardari meeting with Chief Minister Sindh Syed Murad Ali Shah and Chief Minister Balochistan Mir Sarfraz Bugti at Bilawal House

## Punjab CM reviews agriculture reforms

LAHORE: Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz has said the province is undergoing a major agricultural transformation, with 900,000 Kissan Cards already distributed and the landmark target of one million cards set to be achieved by August 31. Chairing a meeting of the Agriculture Department here on Wednesday, she reviewed progress on the Kissan Card programme, agricultural mechanisation, fertiliser supply, demand and market prices. The meeting was informed that interest-free agricultural loans amounting to Rs. 360 billion had been disbursed under the Kissan Card scheme, achieving a recovery rate of 99 per cent. Officials said another 50,000 farmers would be enrolled, enabling the government to complete the issuance of one million Kissan Cards by the end of August. The CM approved the Thal Transformation Programme, which includes the construction of 1,000 water storage ponds and irrigation schemes, as well as the plantation of orange orchards on 10,000 acres in underdeveloped areas of Thal to promote horticulture and improve livelihoods. She also approved the design of 10 state-of-the-art Model Agri

Malls to provide modern agricultural services and facilities to farmers across Punjab. The meeting decided to induct another 1,500 agriculture graduates in the next phase of the internship programme. Officials informed the meeting that 3,000 graduates had already been engaged under the initiative, providing advisory services to farmers across 12 million acres. Around 30 per cent of the interns had secured permanent jobs after completing the programme, while the overall job placement rate stood at 50 per cent. Reviewing the mechanisation programme, the meeting was informed that 280 advanced agricultural machines had so far been provided to farmers, while a target had been set to distribute 2,000 modern machines by June 2027. Officials also briefed the chief minister that 24,000 tractors had already been delivered under the Green Tractor Scheme with a subsidy of Rs1 million per tractor. Under the three-phase programme, 34,000 tractors are being distributed, with 41 per cent of beneficiaries receiving a tractor for the first time. CM Maryam Nawaz said no previous government had provided tractors to farmers on such a large scale, adding that 50,000

subsidised tractors would be distributed over three years for the first time in Punjab's history. She said farmers had been genuinely empowered through the government's initiatives and noted that the tractor distribution process had been fully computerised to ensure transparency. Officials informed the meeting that physical verification of 12,650 tractors had been completed, with 99.7 per cent found in the field, while notices had been issued to the allottees of 35 tractors that were not located during verification. The meeting was informed that around 80 per cent of the agricultural loans had been utilised for the purchase of fertilisers. Of the Rs116 billion allocated for Kharif crops, Rs62 billion had already been utilised, while 75 per cent of the Kharif loans had been spent on fertiliser purchases. Officials also briefed the chief minister on ongoing water conservation measures, including the provision of 1,000 laser land levellers, conversion of farmland to high-efficiency irrigation systems, construction of 1,200 additional watercourses, establishment of 1,000 recharge wells in central Punjab and installation of high-efficiency irrigation systems over 11,000 acres in the Thal region.—DNA

## Pak, Somalia enjoy longstanding ties based on shared values

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and Somalia enjoy longstanding and cordial relations rooted in mutual trust, shared values and close people-to-people contacts, with both countries committed to expanding cooperation in trade, education, defence, maritime security and capacity building, speakers said on Wednesday. They expressed these views at an event held to commemorate Somalia's Independence Day, organized by the Centre for Afghanistan, Middle East and Africa (CAMEA) at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) in collaboration with the Pakistan Africa Institute for Development and Research (PAIDAR). The proceedings, began with the national anthems of Pakistan and Somalia. Speakers included Ambassador Khalid Mahmood, Chairman, BoG, ISSI; Ambassador Sheikhur Mohamed Hassan, Ambassador of Somalia to Pakistan; Ambassador Aqsa Nawaz,

Ambassador of Pakistan to Djibouti, accredited to Somalia, and Dr. Amina Khan Director CAMEA. The Chief Guest on the occasion was Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed, President PAIDAR Ambassador Khalid Mahmood, highlighted the longstanding and friendly relations between Pakistan and Somalia, based on mutual respect, shared values, and close people-to-people ties. He recalled Pakistan's important contributions to United Nations peacekeeping operations in Somalia, reflecting their shared commitment to international peace and security. He also underlined the importance of expanding cooperation in education, trade, capacity building, and maritime security, and expressed the hope that engagement between institutions in the two countries would continue to grow. In her remarks, Dr. Amina Khan said that Somalia's Independence Day honoured the resilience and determina-

tion of the Somali people and their efforts towards peace and development. She noted that, under Pakistan's "Engage Africa" policy, CAMEA remained committed to strengthening engagement with Africa through dialogue and institutional collaboration. Highlighting the longstanding friendship between Pakistan and Somalia, she underscored Pakistan's continued support for Somalia and the valuable contribution of the Somali community in Pakistan, including Somali interns at ISSI, in strengthening people-to-people ties. She expressed the hope that Pakistan-Somalia cooperation would continue to grow in the years ahead. Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed said that Pakistan and Somalia enjoy longstanding and friendly relations based on mutual trust and shared values. He recalled Pakistan's early support for Somalia and its peacekeeping contributions, including the sacrifice.—DNA

## Youth budget sets stage for skills, Innovation: Rana

ISLAMABAD: Chairman of the Prime Minister's Youth Programme (PMYP), Rana Mashhood Ahmed Khan, on Wednesday said the federal government had presented the most balanced budget in Pakistan's history, with record allocations for youth development, education, sports, innovation and skills training. Addressing a press conference at the Press Information Department (PID), he outlined the government's strategy to empower young Pakistanis through merit-based opportunities, technical education, digital innovation and overseas employment, while also addressing key national economic and security challenges. Rana Mashhood said the government had provided a Rs125 billion subsidy to the people despite commitments under the International Monetary Fund (IMF) programme, reflecting Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's resolve to protect the public from economic hardship. He said Pakistan would firmly safeguard its national interests and rights, alleging that India was using terrorism and unilateral actions regarding the Indus Waters Treaty as political tools. However, he added, Pakistan would counter such moves at every available international forum. Highlighting the federal budget, he said the government had protected all major sectors despite serious fiscal challenges and succeeded in presenting what he described as the country's most balanced budget. He credited Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's leadership for ensuring substantial allocations for youth-focused initiatives. The PMYP chairman said empowering young people with dignity, skills and self-reliance remained the government's foremost priority. He recalled that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif had launched Pakistan's first structured youth initiative during his first tenure as chief minister of Punjab in 1997, laying the foundation for the country's expanding youth development programmes. He said more than 300,000 young people from across Pakistan participated in PMYP sports initiatives, with nine male and female athletes earning places in the Pakistan Super League (PSL) through merit-based talent identification. Announcing a landmark initiative for the country's national sport, Rana Mashhood said Pakistan would launch its first-ever nationwide hockey talent hunt this year. Talented boys and girls would be identified from streets, neighbourhoods, towns and cities across the country, provided professional training and offered opportunities to compete in Pakistan's first hockey league. He also announced the establishment of a nationwide Volunteer Corps to encourage youth participation in community service and nation-building. Highlighting the government's digital agenda, Rana Mashhood said the federal cabinet had approved Pakistan's first National E-Sports Policy, paving the way for the establishment of the country's first E-Sports Federation within the next two months.—DNA

## KP CM assures support for journalists' welfare initiatives

At the conclusion of the meeting, the General Secretary of Peshawar Press Club invited the Chief Minister to visit the Press Club and participate in the foundation stone-laying ceremony of the new building

DNA

PESHAWAR: A delegation comprising members of the cabinet and governing body of Peshawar Press Club on Wednesday met with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Muhammad Sohail Khan Afridi and appreciated the provincial government's initiatives for the welfare of journalists. During the meeting, the delegation paid tribute to the Chief Minister for taking practical steps aimed

at the welfare and protection of journalists. The Chief Minister agreed in principle to soon lay the foundation stone of the new Peshawar Press Club building and also supported the establishment of a separate Journalists Welfare Endowment Fund for journalists in Peshawar. He said that the provincial government was taking practical measures to promote free, responsible, and independent journalism while ensuring the protection and welfare of

journalists. Under the Khushhal Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Budget 2026-27, several financial measures have been allocated for journalists' welfare, including Rs1 billion for interest-free loans for working journalists, Rs500 million for the establishment, feasibility, and design of media colonies, Rs150 million for the construction of the new Peshawar Press Club building, Rs300 million for the rehabilitation of district press clubs across


the province, and Rs100 million for innovation and development in the information sector. The Chief Minister also announced that the Journalists Welfare Endowment Fund had been increased from Rs200 million to Rs500 million. He directed relevant authorities to link payments of outstanding government advertisement dues to media organizations with the clearance of journalists' dues and payment of minimum wages.




He further directed authorities to ensure progress on the New Peshawar Valley City Media Enclave in consultation with journalists and in accordance with rules and regulations, besides arranging study tours for journalists. At the conclusion of the meeting, the General Secretary of Peshawar Press Club invited the Chief Minister to visit the Press Club and participate in the foundation stone-laying ceremony of the new building.

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## National Days and Armed Forces Days

### JULY

- July 01/Japan Self Defence Day
- July 01/Singapore Armed Forces Day
- July 01 / Canada National Day
- July 01/Somalia Independence Day
- July 04/USA Independence Day
- July 05/Algeria Independence Day
- July 09/Argentine Independence Day
- July 09/Mongolia Revolution Day
- July 14/France National Day
- July 15/Brunei Sultan's Birthday
- July 21/Belgium National Day
- July 20/TRNC Independence Day
- July 23/Egypt National Day
- July 26/Cuba National Day
- July 26/Liberia National Day
- July 30/Morocco National Day

- Rescue (Police).....15
- Bomb Disposal.....15
- Fire Services Rawalpindi/ Islamabad.....1122 & 16
- Emergency Ambulance.1122 & Rescue Services.4451122
- Motorway Police...9266044
- Motorway Police.9270601-20
- Women Police Stations Islamabad.....9222596
- Rawalpindi.....9270601-20

## Enquiry

- Edhi Ambulance.....115
- PIA Flight Info.....114
- PIA Cargo.....9280979
- Railway Inquiry.....117
- Railway Exchange 9270831-5
- WASA Rawalpindi..5555489
- CAA.....9281022



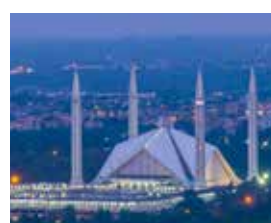
## Hospitals

- CMH.....5611111
- MH.....5611116
- Cantt Hospital...9270907-11
- DHQ.....5556311-4
- RGH.....9290301-7
- Holy Family.....9290322-7
- PIMS.....9261170-79
- Polyclinic.....9218300-09
- Shifa International 4603666



## Departments

- CDA.....9221334-43
- 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



## New Italian envoy assumes duties in Pakistan

The Ambassador underscored cultural diplomacy as a cornerstone of his mission, pointing to Italy's rich heritage in language, art, archaeology, design, fashion, cinema, music, and science as tools for fostering dialogue and mutual understanding

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Ugo Ciarlatani has officially taken office as the new Ambassador of Italy to Pakistan, pledging to deepen bilateral ties across political, economic, cultural, and academic spheres. In his inaugural message, Ambassador Ciarlatani emphasized Pakistan's importance as a strategic partner for Italy, highlighting opportunities in sectors such as energy, infrastructure, agribusiness, mechanical engineering, textiles, technology, vocational training, and sustainability. He noted that Pakistan's youthful and dynamic population offers considerable potential for collaboration. = The Ambassador underscored cul-

tural diplomacy as a cornerstone of his mission, pointing to Italy's rich heritage in language, art, archaeology, design, fashion, cinema, music, and science as tools for fostering dialogue and mutual understanding. He also committed to supporting youth exchanges, academic mobility, and scientific cooperation. Ciarlatani assured Italian citizens and Pakistani partners that consular services will be further strengthened, ensuring efficient support for both communities. He expressed confidence that "through shared, practical, and sustained efforts, we will further strengthen the friendship between our two countries and open new avenues of collaboration for the benefit of our people."

## President felicitates Canadian leadership

ISLAMABAD :President Asif Ali Zardari on Wednesday extended felicitations to the Governor General of Canada Louise Arbour, and the people of the country on their National Day, celebrated annually on July 1. The president, in a statement, said that Pakistan highly valued its long-standing and friendly relations with Canada which were founded on mutual respect, shared interests and strong people-to-people ties. He expressed his confidence that bilateral cooperation between the two countries would continue to expand across areas of mutual interest including trade, investment, higher education and close collaboration in international forums.—APP

## First Lady congratulates Han Seong-sook

ISLAMABAD: First Lady and Member of the National Assembly Bibi Asifa Bhutto Zardari on Wednesday extended congratulations to Han Seong-sook on her appointment as the Prime Minister of the Republic of Korea. The first lady, in a statement, said that Han Seong-sook's appointment reflected her distinguished record of leadership in the fields of technology, innovation and entrepreneurship. She noted that the appointment represented an important milestone for the advancement of women in leadership and public service. "As the First Lady of Pakistan and as the daughter of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto, the first woman Prime Minister of Pakistan and the Muslim world, it is my singular honour and privilege to extend my heartfelt congratulations to you on your appointment as Prime Minister of the Republic of Korea. I wish you every success in the discharge of your important responsibilities," she said. Bibi Asifa Bhutto Zardari said that Han's appointment underscored the importance of women attaining leadership positions and contributing to national development. The first lady expressed confidence that Han Seong-sook's experience in promoting innovation and supporting small and medium-sized enterprises would contribute to the continued progress and prosperity of the Republic of Korea.—APP

## PM Shehbaz directs OPF to accelerate welfare measures

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday directed the Overseas Pakistanis Foundation (OPF) to expedite welfare initiatives and improve services for overseas Pakistanis, and described them as a valuable national asset and acknowledged their vital contribution to the country's economy. The prime minister issued the directives during a meeting with OPF Board of Governors Chairman Syed Qamar Raza and Managing Director Afzal Bhatti here, the Prime Minister's Office news

release said. During the meeting, discussions focused on the foundation's ongoing efforts to address the problems faced by Pakistanis living abroad and to further enhance welfare and facilitation measures for them. The prime minister said overseas Pakistanis are a precious asset of the nation and play a significant role in strengthening Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves by remitting their hard-earned income to the country. He instructed the OPF to further accelerate the implementation of ongoing welfare

projects and initiatives for expatriate Pakistanis and ensure greater efficiency in delivering services. Expressing satisfaction over the foundation's performance, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif directed the OPF leadership to prepare and present a comprehensive plan for further improving its services and welfare programmes for overseas Pakistanis. The meeting also included a briefing on a comprehensive roadmap aimed at introducing additional measures for the welfare and facilitation of overseas Pakistanis.—APP

## IRM holds national seminar highlighting women's role

ISLAMABAD: Institute of Rural Management (IRM), in collaboration with the Human Resource Development Network (HRDN), organized a high-level national seminar titled "Closing the Skills Gap: Women, Work and Sustainable Economic Growth" in Islamabad. The seminar brought together senior government officials, development practitioners, academicians, civil society representatives, private sector leaders, media professionals and development partners to discuss practical strategies for strengthening women's participation in Pakistan's workforce through skills development and inclusive economic policies, said a press release issued here on Wednesday. Barrister Nabeel Ahmad Awan, Secretary, Establishment Division, Government of Pakistan, attended the event as the chief guest. In his address, he underscored that women's economic participation is a national priority and emphasized that Pakistan's inclusive and sustainable growth depends on equipping women with market-driven skills, digital literacy, entrepreneurship opportunities, financial inclusion, and stronger linkages to employment and markets. He also appreciated IRM for organizing a timely platform that fosters collaboration among the government.—DNA

## Citizenship case IHC bars action against 3 Afghan women

ISLAMABAD: THE Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Wednesday restrained authorities from taking adverse action against three Afghan women married to Pakistani citizens while hearing a petition challenging the exclusion of time spent in Pakistan under Proof of Registration (PoR) cards from the calculation of lawful residence for citizenship purposes. Justice Muhammad Asif issued notices to the federal government and the Directorate General of Immigration and Passports, directing them to submit replies, and sought assistance from the attorney general at the next hearing. Representing the petitioners, Barrister Umar Ijaz Gilani told the court that the three Afghan women had been married to Pakistani citizens for more than a decade and that their chil-

dren are Pakistani nationals. He said the women had applied for Pakistani citizenship under Section 10 of the Pakistan Citizenship Act, 1951, which governs citizenship applications by foreign women married to Pakistani citizens. However, the Directorate General of Immigration and Passports required them to first prove they had lived in Pakistan for at least five years on valid visas and passports. Gilani argued that the Pakistan Citizenship Act does not impose a five-year valid visa requirement on foreign wives of Pakistani citizens. He contended that the condition was introduced later through subordinate rules and is inconsistent with the parent law, exceeding the government's rule-making authority. The lawyer further argued that residence in Pakistan under PoR

cards was lawful and formally recognized by the state. He said authorities could not acknowledge such residence as legal for one purpose while treating it as unlawful when considering citizenship applications. Gilani also told the court that the government's ongoing repatriation drive against undocumented foreigners had exposed the petitioners to the risk of deportation. He asked the court to declare residence under PoR cards as lawful for citizenship purposes and direct the authorities to decide the women's citizenship applications without further delay. Pending further proceedings, the court restrained the authorities from taking coercive or disciplinary action against the three petitioners, sought responses from the respondents and adjourned the hearing.

## Commerce minister meets KOEN delegation

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Commerce Jam Kamal Khan met a delegation of Korea South-East Power Company (KOEN) at the Minister's Office to discuss the company's proposed investment in Pakistan's hydropower sector and matters relating to its two projects in Swat. The delegation was led by KOEN Chief Executive Officer Mr. Kim Min Young and included Mr. Jang Sungkyu, Deputy Chief Executive Officer; Mr. Javid Rashid Chaudhary, Chief Operating Officer; Mr. Asim Javed, Director Finance; and Mr. Shahid Javid, General Manager Project Development, said a release issued here on Wednesday. Mr. Asim Javed, Director Finance, gave a detailed presentation to the Federal Minister on KOEN's investment profile in Pakistan, progress on its

projects, financing arrangements, regulatory approvals and support required from relevant authorities. The delegation informed the Minister that KOEN, a state-owned power company of the Republic of Korea, has been investing in Pakistan's energy sector since 2011. KOEN successfully completed the 102 MW Gulpur Hydropower Project in March 2020 and subsequently initiated two hydropower projects under the Power Generation Policy 2015: the 229 MW Asrit Kedam Hydropower Project and the 238 MW Kalam Asrit Hydropower Project in Swat. The delegation stated that major project-related studies and approvals have been completed, including feasibility studies, environmental approvals, land-related processes, IRSA consent and grid-intercon-

nection studies. It was further shared that approximately USD 1 billion in debt and equity financing has been arranged, while around USD 25 million has already been spent on project studies and development activities. The KOEN delegation highlighted concerns regarding the pending tariff determination, inclusion of the projects in the draft Indicative Generation Capacity Expansion Plan (IGCEP) 2025-35, and the need for clarity regarding the future implementation of the projects. The delegation noted that the projects could contribute to clean-energy generation, employment opportunities, local development and increased economic activity in Swat. It added that the company remains committed to Pakistan and is willing to align its commercial plans with the Government's future energy requirements.—DNA

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## Briefs

## Court awards life imprisonment to murderer

RAWALPINDI: Local courts have awarded sentences to two convicts in separate cases, including life imprisonment to a murderer and nine years jail to a drug supplier. In the first case, a court awarded life imprisonment to accused Haider for killing a citizen over a land dispute. The court also imposed a fine of Rs. 1.0 million as compensation. The case was registered in September 2023 at Jatli Police Station. In a separate case, the court sentenced accused Faizan to nine years imprisonment along with a fine of Rs. 100,000.0 for drug trafficking. The accused was arrested in August 2024 after recovery of 1.45 kilograms of charas from his possession. City Police Officer (CPO) Syed Khalid Mahmood Hamdani appreciated the performance of SSP Investigation and the investigation and legal teams for securing the convictions. He said strict measures were being taken to eliminate the menace of drugs and ensure justice in criminal cases.—APP

## IRSA releases 300,700 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD: Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Wednesday released 300,700 cusecs of water from various rim stations with an inflow of 375,800 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, the water level in the River Indus at Tarbela Dam stood at 1453.07 feet, which was 51.07 feet higher than the dead level of 1402.00 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam were recorded as 226,500 cusecs and 150,300 cusecs, respectively. The water level in the Jhelum River at Mangla Dam was 1162.85 feet, which was 112.85 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water were recorded as 37,600 cusecs and 38,700 cusecs, respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 200,800, 163,200, 101,100, and 41,200 cusecs, respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 48,000 cusecs of water was released at Nowshera, and 36,900 cusecs were released from River Chenab at Marala.—APP

## Govt committed to protect minorities' sacred sites

ISLAMABAD: Chairman Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB) Qamaruz-Zaman on Wednesday reaffirmed the government's commitment to protecting the sacred places of minorities and ensuring the best possible arrangements for their religious events. He expressed these views while addressing a ceremony marking the 163rd death anniversary of the Hindu spiritual leader Baba Bankhandi Maharaj at the historic Sadhu Bela Temple, situated on an island in the Indus River and administered by the ETPB. According to a press release, the event was attended by ETPB Secretary, Additional Secretary (Shrines) Nasir Mushtaq, Chairman of the Pakistan Hindu Mandir Management Committee Krishan Sharma, Hindu community leaders, pilgrims and devotees from Sindh and other parts of the country. Special puja, bhajans, prayers and other religious rituals of Hindu traditions were part of the ceremony. Addressing the gathering, Chairman ETPB said that the government is committed to ensuring complete religious freedom for minorities, preserving their places of worship and facilitating their religious observances. He said the annual ceremony at Sadhu Bela Temple was a reflection of Pakistan's commitment to interfaith harmony, religious tolerance and the protection of minority rights. Speaking on the occasion, Krishan Sharma appreciated the arrangements made by the ETPB for the visiting pilgrims, including accommodation, langar, transportation, boat services, medical facilities and sanitation. He said the Hindu community highly appreciated the arrangements.—APP

## Radio Pakistan pensioners meet Standing Committee Chairman Phaleen Baloch



DNA

ISLAMABAD: A representative delegation of the Radio Pakistan Pensioners Welfare Association (RPPWA), led by Chairman Naveed Ahmed Chohan, met with Phaleen Baloch, Chairman of the National Assembly Standing Committee on Information and Broadcasting, here on Wednesday. The del-

egation apprised him of the issues faced by retired employees of the organization. The issues raised included the long-pending payment of commutation, which has been due for over six years, deprivation of the medical allowance approved in 2010, and non-payment of arrears on the pension increase announced in the national budget over the past three years. Mr. Phaleen Baloch listened patiently to the delegation's demands and as-

ured them of sympathetic consideration and his full cooperation in resolving their problems. Speaking on the occasion, Mr. Phaleen Baloch stated that the people of Balochistan have immense love for their Punjabi brothers. However, he expressed regret over the recent Jaffar Express tragedy and noted that the province is generally a cradle of peace and brotherhood. On this occasion, members of the delegation, who had served at vari-

ous Radio Pakistan stations in Balochistan, shared their memories with Mr. Phaleen Baloch. Mr. Baloch also extended an invitation to the delegation to visit Balochistan. The delegation included retired Director Programs Sharif Shad, retired Controller Mahmood Riazuddin, Malik Abdul Rehman, Ms. Zahra Usmani, Ms. Asima Gul, Deputy Controllers Syed Abdul Aziz Zaidi, Rashid Ahmed, Syed Imdad Ali, Mr. Qudratullah, and other members.

## PTA hosts meeting on telecom policy, regulation

ISLAMABAD: The Asia-Pacific Telecommunity (APT), in collaboration with the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA), on Wednesday inaugurated a two-day meeting of the SATRC Working Group on Policy, Regulation and Services (PRS). The meeting, being held from July 1 to 2, has brought together delegates from all SATRC member administrations — Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Iran, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka — along with representatives of the APT Secretariat and local stakeholders, according to a news release. The event is the first meeting under the SATRC Action Plan Phase X (SAP-X), which was endorsed at SATRC-26 held in Islamabad in 2025. Delivering his opening remarks virtually, Dr. Masanori Kondo, Secretary General of the Asia-Pacific Telecommunity, appreciated the PTA for hosting the meeting and reaffirmed the APT's commitment to regional cooperation, knowledge-sharing, and capacity building among member administrations. Dr. Khawar Siddique Khokhar, Member (Compliance and Enforcement) of the PTA and Chair of the SATRC Working Group on Policy, Regulation and Services, highlighted the importance of the meeting in advancing the objectives of SAP-X and strengthening regional cooperation through forward-looking policy and regulatory initiatives. PTA Chairman and SATRC Chairman Maj Gen (Retd) Hafeez Ur Rehman welcomed the foreign delegates and said SATRC was a prestigious regional platform where member administrations came together to discuss common telecommunications and information and communication technology (ICT) challenges. He encouraged participants to go beyond the formal agenda and engage in practical discussions on real-world regulatory and operational issues faced by SATRC member countries to develop collaborative and effective regional solutions. The two-day meeting will focus on key policy and regulatory issues, technical presentations, and the development of work plans for implementing the SATRC Action Plan Phase X (SAP-X).—DNA

## Heavy rains to trigger flood chaos, NDMA Warns

ISLAMABAD: The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) on Wednesday issued a nationwide alert warning of heightened risks of glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs), flash floods, landslides and urban flooding across northern and central Pakistan from July 1 to 4, as rising temperatures and an active monsoon system coupled with westerly waves are expected to trigger heavy rainfall and accelerate glacier melting. The advisory, issued by the National Emergencies Operation Centre (NEOC), urged authorities to remain on high alert and advised the public to strictly follow official safety instructions. According to the NEOC, continuous monitoring and early risk assessment are being carried out to ensure the timely dissemination of warnings to all relevant authorities. The authority warned that glacier adjacent areas of Gilgit-Baltistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Azad Jammu and Kashmir face an increased threat of glacial lake outburst floods due to accelerated glacier melting caused by soaring temperatures and the forecast of heavy rainfall. It said the evolving weather conditions could trigger sudden flash floods, debris flows, landslides and rockfalls, posing serious risks to vulnerable mountain communities. The NDMA advised residents and local administrations in Hunza, Nagar, Ghizer, Skardu, Shigar, Ghanche, Kharmang, Astore, Diamer, Upper and Lower Chitral, Swat and other glacier-fed valleys

to exercise extreme caution.

It further warned that rising temperatures and expected rainfall could significantly increase water flow in the Hispar-Hopper Nullah, heightening the risk of flash floods, debris flows and riverbank erosion in surrounding areas. Separately, the NEOC also issued a flash flood alert for July 1-4, warning that the combined impact of the monsoon system and westerly waves could cause a sudden surge in water levels in hill torrents and seasonal streams across several regions. The advisory said parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, Balochistan, Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan could experience flash flooding during the forecast period. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, increased water flows are expected in hill torrents and streams in Charsadda, Nowshera, Peshawar, Mardan, Swabi, Kohat, Bannu, Lakki Marwat, Dera Ismail Khan, Mansehra, Abbotabad, Haripur, Swat, Upper and Lower Dir, Chitral, Shangla, Buner, Battagram, Torgar and Kohistan. In Punjab, low-lying areas. Seasonal streams in Rawalpindi, Attock, Jhelum, Chakwal, Mianwali, Bhakkar, Khushab, Sargodha, Faisalabad, Jhang, Sialkot, Narowal, Gujrat, Gujranwala, Lahore, Sheikhpura, Hafizabad and Mandi Bahauddin are likely to face flooding. In Balochistan, localised flash floods are expected in Zhob, Sherani, Musa Khel, Barkhan, Sibi, Kohlu, Dera Bugti, Loralai and adjoining areas.—DNA

## FGEHA cancels 13 more plots allotments

ISLAMABAD: Under the dynamic leadership of the Federal Minister for Housing and Works, Riaz Hussain Pirzada, Secretary for Housing and Works, Captain (Retd.) Muhammad Mahmood, and Director General FGEHA, Captain (Retd.) Zafar Iqbal, the Federal Government Employees Housing Authority (FGEHA) is taking robust measures to develop Sectors F-14 and F-15 into modern, beautiful, and environment-friendly residential sectors of Islamabad. In accordance with special directives, a continuous series of meetings, field visits, and administrative initiatives are underway to accelerate development activities, resolve allottees' grievances, ensure the provision of basic amenities, and guarantee the swift completion of the project. To maintain the pace of development work and safeguard the rights of compliant allottees, the Authority is maintaining its stringent legal

action against defaulters. Mirroring the previous phase, where a strict precedent was set by canceling the allotments and memberships of six (6) plots whose owners had failed to meet their financial obligations since 2016—a similar major crackdown has been executed. Following thorough scrutiny and recommendations by the special committee constituted under the directives of the Housing Authority's Executive Board, the plots of thirteen (13) more allottees, who failed to clear their outstanding installments, have been canceled with immediate effect. This decision has been taken with absolute transparency, merit, and in strict compliance with prevailing laws to eliminate financial bottlenecks hindering the project's progress. The authority explicitly informs all allottees that the record scrutiny process by the special committee remains actively ongoing. All such allottees who, despite being grant-

ed multiple opportunities, have failed to clear their long-standing installments and dues are hereby notified: if they do not fulfill their financial obligations immediately, their allotments will be canceled without any further grace period, and action will be initiated against them in accordance with the law. The leadership of the Authority reiterates its commitment to transforming Sectors F-14 and F-15 into an environment-friendly, climate-resilient, sustainable, and exemplary residential project aligned with modern urban standards, offering top-tier residential facilities to citizens. The timely completion of the project and the earliest possible handing over of plots to the allottees remain the top priorities of the Authority. On this occasion, the Federal Government Employees Housing Authority extends its heartfelt gratitude to all those allottees who deposited their outstanding installments on time.—APP

## Telenor amalgamates into PTML

ISLAMABAD: Telenor Pakistan will formally amalgamate into Pak Telecom Mobile Limited PTML (Ufone 5G) with effect from July 2026, marking the completion of one of the most significant transactions in the country's telecommunications history. The amalgamation follows the receipt of the final statutory approval from the Islamabad High Court, which brought to a close a comprehensive regulatory process spanning multiple regulatory and statutory institutions, said a news release. From here on, Telenor Pakistan will cease to exist as a separate legal entity. With this development, Telenor Pakistan's operations, network infrastructure, and customer base will be fully integrated into PTML (Ufone 5G), creating a combined entity with expanded reach, a stronger spectrum portfolio, and greater capacity to invest in next-generation connectivity and digital services across the country. Speaking on the occasion, President & CEO, PTCL, Hatem Bamatraf, said, "This is a defining moment for our company and for Pakistan's telecom industry. We are deeply grateful to the Government of Pakistan and to every institution involved in this process for their diligence and support throughout this journey. I would also like to extend my heartfelt thanks to our customers, whose trust has carried both Ufone and Telenor Pakistan through this transition, and to our employees, whose dedication and hard work made this milestone achievable. As we come together as one company, our ambition is to bring our customers cutting-edge products and services that set a new benchmark for digital experience in Pakistan." The combined entity (a wholly owned independent subsidiary of PTCL) will operate as PTML, with the continued commitment to expanding 5G coverage, strengthening digital infrastructure, and delivering improved services to millions of customers nationwide.—DNA

## ANF seizes over 2.79 tons of narcotics

RAWALPINDI: The Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) conducted five operations in different cities across the country on Wednesday and arrested two suspects and recovered 2,790.492 kilograms(kgs) of narcotics worth more than Rs121.9 million.

According to an ANF spokesperson, the operations targeted both international drug trafficking and domestic narcotics networks.

In an international drug interdiction operation, officials recovered 332 grams of ice concealed in a woman's dupatta from a parcel destined for Zambia at a courier office on Abbott Road in Lahore.

In another operation near Mohammadi Chowk in Hyderabad, ANF recovered 27.66 kgs of ice soaked in jackets and packed in a parcel intended for Australia. One suspect was arrested during the raid. Under domestic drug interdiction efforts, ANF seized 649 kgs of Tramadol and 3.2 kgs of Valium tablets from a house near Pak Arab Society in Lahore, arresting one individual. In District Chagai, near Nokundi, authorities confiscated 1,485 kgs of hashish along with 623 litres of liquor bottles. In a separate operation near Purana Golimar in Karachi, ANF recovered 2.3 kgs of heroin. Cases have been registered against the accused under the Control of Narcotic Substances Act (CNESA), 1997, and further investigations are underway.—APP

## WASA achieves record Rs 250m revenue

RAWALPINDI: The Water and Sanitation Agency (WASA) Rawalpindi has successfully achieved a revenue recovery target of Rs250 million for the first time in its history. According to a WASA spokesperson, the target was accomplished through the dedicated efforts, effective strategy and strong teamwork of the WASA Revenue Directorate under the leadership of Managing Director WASA Rawalpindi Azizullah Khan. Speaking on the occasion, Azizullah Khan said the achievement was made possible through the grace of Almighty Allah and the tireless efforts of Director Revenue Tahir Bashir, Deputy Directors Rana Shamsur-Rehman and Akmal Yasin, along with other officers. He said the revenue recovery campaign was closely monitored, while timely instructions were issued to the concerned officers to ensure the target was achieved within the stipulated period. The Revenue Directorate continued its recovery drive by keeping offices open on Sundays, particularly during the month of June, to complete the target on time.—APP

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## The president, the key to the strait and the region's cup

GHASSAN CHARBEL

THE image he posted on his social media site, Truth Social, speaks volumes. Donald Trump is wrapped in the American flag, carrying a depiction of the globe on his shoulders. An image can be worth a thousand words. The message is clear. The man in the picture believes he bears the burdens of the entire world, not only those of the US, whose greatness he restored after it had nearly vanished at the hands of his predecessors, as per his claims and exaggerations. On the enormous globe he carries on his shoulders are countries, wars, bitter conflicts, faltering economies, masses of refugees and the hungry, broken states, and others relentlessly sharpening their claws to seize control of their neighbors. It is as though he wanted to say that all the issues of this world have been thrown onto the shoulders of one man. The man sitting in the Oval Office is troubled by the fact that days are slipping through his fingers. He dreams of stretching himself across the history books with many medals on his chest, foremost among them the Nobel Peace Prize.

The story is not simple. The man alone leads a massive country that alone leads the world. He puts out a fire here and prevents the flames from spreading there. Then the image appears: the chief firefighter of this burning globe and he means to say that he is the only firefighter. He does not hesitate to enumerate the wars he has ended or prevented. It is no exaggeration to accuse the man of exaggeration, but this is the reality. No major agreement can be woven without the difficult American thread, whether we like it or not.

We have not seen a picture of Vladimir Putin wrapped in the Russian flag and carrying the globe on his shoulders. We have not even seen him carrying a model of the Soviet Union, demanding that it be restored and awakened from its deep sleep in history. Rarely does the leader of a major country dare to make policies and choices so personal. That is why the world lives on Mr. President's time, Mr. President's style and Mr. President's mood. He is constantly surrounded by his senior aides, who compete in praising him and attribute every virtue and achievement to him. This is a rare scene in Western democracies. It brings to mind the tributes of members of the Regional Command when they were given the chance to speak in the presence of Saddam Hussein. Iran's insistence on monopolizing the keys to the Strait of Hormuz could become more dangerous than its proxies. We have not seen a picture of the emperor of China wrapped in his country's flag and demanding victory in the competition for world leadership. His decisive demands are limited to returning Taiwan to the Chinese embrace and it is fortunate for the world that his patience has yet to run out.

President Trump is a strong man: the strong leader of the strongest country in the

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world. That is why he presents himself as the chief physician in the "global village" hospital. He receives sick regions or chronic problems, or he summons them. He then announces the success of the treatment and the picture follows. The world is highly complex, however. Its illnesses are not cured by shock diplomacy, nor by telephone diplomacy, warm handshakes or pats on the shoulder or the hand. Treating chronic diseases requires an accurate diagnosis. It requires careful attention to the health of the patient and the health of his neighbors. It demands reflection, insight and knowledge of both the patient's medical history and the history of the disease. Care must be taken that ointments do not inflame burns, that painkillers do not have side effects and that sores do not form under the weight of bandages. Solutions are thorny. Some regions suffer from the burdens of geography, the curse of history or the convergence of both calamities.

That is Trump. The world has no choice but to deal with him or live with him. He presents himself as the greatest goalscorer ever, as though he were more skilled than Messi, Mbappe and Ronaldo. However, the field of the globe is different from the football field. The powerful do not respect the rules of the game. Cruelty is a tradition, brutality is an option and the game continues without mercy. Blows target the sovereignty of states, their stability, their economies and their borders, if they do not go so far as to threaten their existence. In this game, it is not enough to put the ball in the opponent's net. The deadly game must be stopped and the cloak of international law, respect for rights and coexistence must be placed over this field once again. Building bridges is far more important than scoring goals. Countries near and far welcomed the memorandum of understanding that prevented America, Israel and Iran from sliding into another destructive war. Trump confirmed that Iran has pledged never to obtain a nuclear weapon. This outcome is certainly significant. But everyone, near and far, knows that the nuclear issue is not the only problem. There is also Tehran's regional behavior. There is its missile arsenal and its drones, which were targeting neighboring Arab states at the weekend. There is its pursuit of destabilization, "parallel armies" and the infiltration of states through the backdoor. And above all, there is the freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz and the well-being of the global economy.

Since the signing of the memorandum, Tehran has been behaving as though it received or wrested a huge gift in exchange for a concession on the nuclear issue. It is behaving as though it has the keys to the strait, which it has rendered the backbone of its arsenal in the next phase. The words of the Iranian army deserve a pause. It said that its control over the Strait of Hormuz could constitute a security mechanism that leads to the expulsion of America from the region. Iran's insistence on monopolizing the keys to Hormuz could become more dangerous than its proxies. The flow of goods would be captive to the mood of Iranian politics. The world cannot live with this and the countries of the region cannot live with it either. Any concessions to Iran regarding its ownership of the strait (violating international maritime law) would give it a decisive weapon in the battle to win the regional cup — that is, its leadership.

Every state has the right to compete for the regional cup by building an attractive model of progress grounded in economic prosperity, technological advancement and deeper cooperation. Competing with the weapon of the strait, on the other hand, leaves the countries of the region facing difficult choices, the first of which is preparing for more difficult days ahead.

## How Pakistan Became Israel's Primary Target (Part-I)

Qamar Bashir



Passive defense, however, is no longer sufficient. The current situation demands a proactive and offensive strategy. Pakistan cannot simply wait for an attack to occur; it must act to deter it. The core recommendation emerging from strategic analysts is the creation of a counter-spy network in Israel. This is not merely an intelligence-gathering operation; it is a strategic necessity that would provide Islamabad with two critical advantages

THE geopolitical sands of Southwest Asia have shifted dramatically in recent months. In a stunning reversal of roles, Pakistan—once viewed as a struggling state battling internal insurgencies and economic instability—has emerged as a pivotal power broker on the world stage. Through its successful mediation between the United States and Iran and its efforts to avert a global economic crisis, Islamabad has positioned itself as a formidable voice in international diplomacy. This diplomatic ascendancy, however, has come at a considerable cost. By challenging the established order and offering a counterbalance to Israeli power in the region, Pakistan has inadvertently painted a target on its own back. The result is a new and dangerous proxy war being fought on Pakistani soil, leveraging the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan and the Balochistan Liberation Army as tools to bleed the nation from within. The calculus of power in the Middle East has been fundamentally upended. As the only nuclear-armed Muslim state with a growing arsenal, Pakistan is increasingly viewed by regional actors as a necessary counterweight to Israel's unbridled military might and expansionist ambitions. The narrative in Islamabad and across many Middle Eastern capitals is that Israel, guided by a maximalist ideology and backed by its own nuclear capabilities, seeks to redraw the map of the region.

The perceived Greater Israel project, aiming to control territory from the Nile to the Euphrates, necessitates the destruction or fracture of all regional power structures. Under this worldview, Israel's strategy is to create chaos, foster fractured governments, and use nuclear blackmail to cow its adversaries. In this context, Pakistan's nuclear umbrella is seen as the ultimate deterrent against Israeli aggression. By providing a potential shield for nations like Turkey, Egypt, and Iran, Pakistan has become a primary obstacle to Israel's regional ambitions. This is the crux of the new animosity. Israel has recognized that it cannot neutralize Iran, Turkey, or other regional rivals without first neutralizing the threat from Pakistan.

The diplomatic achievements of Pakistan—including its instrumental role in stopping the wars in Lebanon and Gaza—have made it a major thorn in the eye of Israel. What Pakistan achieved diplomatically is perhaps greater in value and impact than what Iran achieved through its military confrontations with the United States and Israel. This remarkable ascent has transformed Pakistan from a peripheral player into a central actor in the Middle Eastern power equation, and with that transformation has come the inevitable attention of adversaries who view its rise as a direct threat to their interests. To counter this emerging threat, Israel is purportedly pivoting to a strategy of asymmetric warfare, exploiting Pakistan's internal

vulnerabilities through a classic playbook: find, fund, and arm proxy actors to destabilize a state from within, avoiding a direct and costly conventional confrontation.

The first prong of this strategy involves the TTP. Pakistan has long differentiated between the good Taliban in Afghanistan and the bad Taliban at home, but this distinction has become dangerously moot. The Afghan Taliban, now in power in Kabul, has provided safe havens, training camps, and logistical support to the TTP, allowing them to operate with near impunity across the porous border.

Now Israel in collaboration with India and elements within the Afghan government, is providing arms, ammunition, financial incentives, and operational guidance to the TTP. This financing and advanced training are intended to motivate TTP operatives to intensify their attacks on Pakistan's military and civilian power centers, creating a constant state of insecurity that weakens the state from within.

The second, equally dangerous prong involves the separatist movements in Balochistan. The Balochistan Liberation Army and other ethnic insurgent groups are waging a war for independence, and while these movements have deep-rooted local grievances, they have become receptive to external manipulation. The exiled Baloch leaders have expressed a willingness to align with Israel, viewing it as a potential guarantor of their independence. This creates a perverse alliance of convenience. India's Research and Analysis Wing has a well-documented history of fomenting unrest in Balochistan to destabilize Pakistan, with the arrest of Indian naval officer Kulbhushan Jadhav in 2016 serving as a key example. Now, Israel is reportedly deepening this cooperation, offering advanced intelligence, satellite reconnaissance, and perhaps even technological assistance to these separatist groups. In return, the BLA and its affiliates are promising to act as Israel and India's stooges in a post-conflict scenario, leveraging whatever remains of a fractured Pakistan. The goal is to cripple the Pakistani state, potentially allowing external actors to seize control of the strategic Gwadar port and neutralize Pakistan's nuclear assets.

Beyond the proxy war, there is an immediate and visceral threat that Pakistan must contend with: Israel's technological prowess in targeted assassinations. Israel has a documented history of using sophisticated, often commercially available technology to track and eliminate high-value targets across the globe. This includes the use of advanced surveillance software, remote-controlled weaponry, and even cyber-enabled sabotage of critical infrastructure. Pakistan, with its community of nuclear scientists, military strategists, and political leaders, is vulnerable to such tactics. The threat is not merely hypothetical. Pakistan must ensure that the technology used by Israel for assassinating marked rivals and people of high political, scientific, and mil-

itary value cannot be successfully deployed within its borders. This demands a comprehensive overhaul of Pakistan's internal security protocols, including strict monitoring of digital communications, protection of supply chains from cyber-tampering, and rigorous vetting of personnel with access to sensitive information. Failure to address this vulnerability could result in the loss of the nation's most valuable minds and a catastrophic blow to its strategic capabilities.

Passive defense, however, is no longer sufficient. The current situation demands a proactive and offensive strategy. Pakistan cannot simply wait for an attack to occur; it must act to deter it. The core recommendation emerging from strategic analysts is the creation of a counter-spy network in Israel. This is not merely an intelligence-gathering operation; it is a strategic necessity that would provide Islamabad with two critical advantages. First, a counter-network would provide Islamabad with powerful leverage, as knowing that Pakistan possesses the capability to respond in kind within Israeli territory would raise the stakes for any Israeli-initiated action in Pakistan.

Second, the doctrine of proportional response is central to this strategy. If Israel engages in sabotage, assassination, or support for proxy militancy within Pakistan, Islamabad must be prepared to reply in the same coin, delivering a proportional, measured, and effective response inside Israel itself. The goal is not escalation, but the creation of a credible deterrent that ensures the cost of aggression is too high to be borne. This is where the expertise of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence becomes paramount. The ISI has decades of experience in covert operations, counterinsurgency, and intelligence gathering in Afghanistan and against Indian targets. These accumulated skills must now be refocused on the Israeli threat. Pakistan has shown its diplomatic capability to de-escalate major international conflicts; now it must demonstrate its resolve to defend its sovereignty and nuclear assets against covert infiltration and sabotage. The agency must evaluate the situation from all angles and place security mechanisms that are not only defensive but also offensive in nature. Pakistan should use all the deceptive and intelligence-gathering methods that Israel has employed to weaken countries within their own borders and apply them in Israel itself, creating a counter-vailing power that ensures proportional and responsible retaliation for any aggression. If this is not done now, it will be too late, and Pakistan will have to face the consequences of inaction. To be continued.....

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## Education Reform Begins with Trust

Dr. Muhammad Akram Zaheer



This is not the first occasion on which tensions have surfaced between Punjab's education authorities and sections of the teaching community. Previous disagreements over teacher training assessments, administrative reforms and public communication have occasionally generated friction. Social media exchanges between officials and teachers have sometimes aggravated...

PUBLIC education systems thrive on trust. They depend not only on policies, budgets and infrastructure but also on the confidence that exists between governments, teachers and communities. Once that trust begins to erode, even the most ambitious reform agenda struggles to deliver meaningful results. The latest controversy surrounding Punjab's Education Minister, Rana Sikandar Hayat, serves as a reminder that words spoken from positions of authority can either strengthen that trust or weaken it. The controversy erupted after a video clip circulated on social media showing the minister addressing a convocation at Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan. In the clip, he appeared to suggest that government school teachers remove ceiling fans from schools and take them away when they leave. Whether the remark was intended as humour, frustration or a broader observation has become secondary. The public response indicates that many teachers interpreted it as a sweeping accusation against an entire profession.

The reaction was swift. Teachers, education activists and ordinary citizens questioned the wisdom of making such a generalisation from a public platform. Many pointed out that in several parts of Punjab, school administrations temporarily remove electrical equipment such as fans, bulbs and water pumps during summer vacations or prolonged school closures to protect them from theft or vandalism. Such decisions are often taken administratively rather than individually by teachers. To equate these practices with personal misconduct, critics argued, unfairly damages the reputation of thousands of educators who serve honestly under difficult circumstances. The debate, however, extends far beyond one controversial statement. It has opened a wider discussion about accountability, administrative responsibility and professional respect within Punjab's education system.

No public institution should be exempt from accountability. Government schools contain public assets purchased through taxpayers' money and every piece of equipment must be protected. Where negligence, theft or corruption occurs, investigations should be conducted and responsibility determined through established administrative procedures. If any employee is found guilty of misconduct, disciplinary action should follow without hesitation. But accountability must remain evidence-based. It should identify individuals responsible for specific violations rather than cast suspicion over an entire profession. Broad ac-

cusations rarely improve governance; instead, they often create resentment among those who are performing their duties with integrity. Teaching occupies a unique place in society. Teachers are entrusted with shaping future generations, often while working in overcrowded classrooms, limited facilities and financially constrained environments. In rural and underserved areas particularly, government school teachers frequently perform responsibilities that extend well beyond classroom instruction. They assist in election duties, census operations, vaccination campaigns, disaster relief efforts and numerous administrative assignments. Despite these additional burdens, they continue to shoulder the central responsibility of educating millions of children. It is therefore understandable why many educators viewed the minister's remarks as diminishing their professional dignity. Respect for teachers is not merely a cultural value; it is a practical necessity for educational progress. A workforce that feels publicly humiliated is unlikely to become an enthusiastic partner in reform.

This is not the first occasion on which tensions have surfaced between Punjab's education authorities and sections of the teaching community. Previous disagreements over teacher training assessments, administrative reforms and public communication have occasionally generated friction. Social media exchanges between officials and teachers have sometimes aggravated rather than eased these disagreements. The current controversy appears to reflect an existing trust deficit rather than an isolated misunderstanding. The challenge facing Punjab's education sector is far greater than a debate over one sentence. The province continues to grapple with uneven learning outcomes, infrastructure deficiencies, teacher shortages in certain regions, student dropouts and the need to improve literacy and numeracy standards. These structural issues require sustained cooperation between policymakers, administrators and teachers. That cooperation becomes difficult when public discourse shifts from problem-solving to mutual recrimination.

Modern educational reform depends as much on communication as it does on policy. Effective leaders recognise that criticism must be accompanied by encouragement and that reform succeeds when stakeholders feel respected rather than targeted. Strong leadership is not measured by sharp rhetoric but by the ability to build consensus while maintaining accountability. Public officials naturally face the pressure of demonstrat-

ing resolve against inefficiency. Citizens rightly expect governments to protect public resources and eliminate corruption wherever it exists. Yet the language chosen to express that determination matters. Precision carries greater credibility than generalisation. Evidence inspires confidence more effectively than anecdote. Punjab's education system requires a different conversation. Instead of debating whether teachers remove fans from schools, policymakers should focus on establishing stronger inventory management systems, digital asset registers and clearer administrative protocols for safeguarding government property. Such institutional solutions reduce opportunities for both misconduct and misunderstanding. More importantly, the relationship between the government and teachers must move beyond confrontation. Educational reform cannot be imposed solely through directives issued from administrative offices. It succeeds when teachers become partners in designing and implementing change. Consultation, dialogue and mutual respect remain indispensable components of sustainable reform.

Punjab has introduced several initiatives aimed at improving school governance, teacher development and student outcomes in recent years. These reforms deserve careful implementation and constructive public debate. They should not be overshadowed by controversies that distract attention from the larger mission of improving educational quality. The latest episode should therefore serve as an opportunity rather than merely another political dispute. It offers policymakers an opportunity to refine their public communication, acknowledge legitimate concerns raised by teachers and reaffirm their commitment to respectful engagement. It also offers teachers an opportunity to demonstrate that accountability and professional dignity are complementary rather than competing values.

Education flourishes where trust exists. Governments provide policy, teachers provide learning and communities provide support. None of these pillars can succeed by diminishing the others. If Punjab genuinely seeks lasting educational improvement, reform must be built not only on administrative authority but also on respect, evidence and partnership. That lesson may prove far more valuable than the controversy that brought it into public view.

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## Briefs

Pakistan  
rejects  
India's...

FROM PAGE 01

Jammu and Kashmir, which he said contravenes relevant UN resolutions. The Foreign Office further alleged that India has been actively aiding and sponsoring terrorist groups operating from Afghan soil against Pakistan, in violation of UN Security Council sanctions. Mr. Andrabi described India as a "regional spoiler," warning that its "baseless accusations and inflammatory statements" must be entertained. Reaffirming Pakistan's stance, the spokesperson concluded: "Pakistan has been and will continue to take all appropriate measures to uphold the safety and security of its citizens in accordance with international law."

Pakistan  
and India  
exchange...

FROM PAGE 01

Pakistani prisoners, including 386 civilian prisoners and 53 fishermen, who are in Indian jails. Additionally, the Government of India was urged to release and repatriate 97 Pakistani prisoners (64 civilian prisoners and 33 fishermen) who have completed their sentences and whose nationality has been confirmed. India was also urged to ensure the safety, security and well-being of all Pakistani and believed-to-be-Pakistani prisoners awaiting release and repatriation. The Government of Pakistan also called for expeditious consular access to all believed-to-be-Pakistani prisoners to facilitate the early confirmation of their nationality.

WB report  
urges fiscal  
federalism

FROM PAGE 01

Commission (NFC) Award, marked a major step forward by devolving key service delivery responsibilities to provinces and significantly increasing their revenues. However, it highlighted that structural weaknesses continued to challenge fiscal discipline, limit revenue mobilization and affect the quality of services delivered to citizens. The report identified two main factors behind the widening federal fiscal deficit: increased transfers following the 7th NFC Award without corresponding adjustments in federal expenditures, and stagnant revenue collection. While provincial revenues rose from less than 4 percent of GDP to an average of 6.5 percent during 2010-2024, federal expenditures did not decline accordingly.

Iran warns  
of quick...

FROM PAGE 01

Analysts note that Araghchi's statement signals Tehran's intent to deter future Israeli operations by emphasizing its capacity for retaliation. Meanwhile, Iran's representative to international organizations, Kazem Gharibabadi, attended a meeting with mediators in Doha. The discussions reportedly focused on reducing tensions and exploring avenues for dialogue amid fears of escalation in the region. While details of the meeting remain limited, the presence of mediators highlights ongoing international concern over the risk of conflict spiraling further.

US getting  
along well...

FROM PAGE 01

I think they're fine," he said. "It's the denuclearisation of Iran, it's very simple, and Iran can never have a nuclear weapon." Both the US and Iran said they would send officials to discuss the Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) aimed at ending the Middle East war, but Iran insisted direct negotiations would not take place. A diplomat, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss the sensitive talks, confirmed negotiations were underway, after earlier saying the foes would take part in "indirect technical talks on Wednesday in Doha with Qatari and Pakistani mediators."

RISJA elects new office bearers  
unopposed for 2026-27

OUR CORRESPONDENT

ISLAMABAD: The Rawalpindi Islamabad Sports Journalists Association (RISJA) has unanimously elected its new office bearers for the 2026-27 term, with all candidates returned unopposed, reflecting the confidence, unity, and consensus among the association's 60 members. The Election Committee, headed by Chairman Shahryar Khan and comprising Rana Farhan Aslam, Shakir Abbasi, and Asim Jilani as members, successfully conducted the electoral process and officially announced the results. Abubakar Bin Taltat was re-elected as President, while Zulfiqar Baig was elected Senior Vice President. Zahid Awan and Asghar Ali Mubarak were elected Vice Presidents. Ambreen Ali was elected General Secretary, Zeeshan Qayyum as Senior Joint Secretary, Awais Latif and Aqeel Anjum as Joint Secretaries, and Nasir Abbas Naqvi as Finance Secretary.

The newly elected Governing Body members are Faheem Anwar Khan, Gabriel De Souza, Awais Abbasi, Kiran Khan, and Asim Riaz.

Speaking on the occasion, President Abubakar Bin Taltat and General Secretary Ambreen Ali thanked all RISJA members for reposing their trust and confidence in the newly elected body. They pledged to uphold the association's longstanding traditions of professionalism, unity, and integrity while working collectively for the welfare of sports journalists.

They further reaffirmed their commitment to promoting ethical sports journalism, fostering closer cooperation among members, and ensuring that RISJA continues to play a leading role in the development of sports journalism in Pakistan.

Meanwhile, President of the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ), Afzal Butt; President of the National Press Club (NPC), Abdul Razzaq Sial; Secretary Furqan Rao; Finance Secretary Abid Abbasi; PRA Secretary Naveed Akbar; former NPC President Tariq Choudhry; along with senior journalists and members of the media fraternity, congratulated the newly elected office bearers. They expressed confidence that the new leadership would further strengthen RISJA, protect the rights of sports journalists, and uphold the association's proud legacy of professionalism and unity.

Established in 1986, RISJA is the only registered organization of sports journalists in Rawalpindi and Islamabad, dedicated to promoting sports journalism, professional excellence, and the welfare of sports journalists in the twin cities.

Mbappe fires France into World Cup  
last 16, Haaland rescues Norway  
France draw Paraguay, Norway face Brazil in Round of 16

DNA

HOUSTEN: Kylian Mbappe extended his red-hot scoring streak to fire France past Sweden and into the last 16 of the World Cup on Tuesday as Erling Haaland sealed Norway's first-ever knockout round victory in a 2-1 defeat of Ivory Coast. Mbappe took his tally for the tournament to six goals – making him joint top-scorer alongside Lionel Messi – with a superb double as France stroled past the Swedes 3-0 at the MetLife Stadium in New Jersey. The prolific French striker's latest brace took his career World Cup goals record to an incredible 18 in 18 matches, one behind Argentina superstar Messi's all-time record of 19 goals. Bradley Barcola scored France's other goal as Les Bleus produced another dazzling exhibition of attacking football that underscored their status as favorites for the title. Sweden manager Graham Potter had warned beforehand that his team would have to produce the game of their lives to have a chance of containing France's multi-pronged offensive arsenal. But after France were held at bay for most of the open-

ing 45 minutes, Mbappe finally broke the Scandinavians' resistance on the stroke of halftime, jinking into space before rifling home. Barcola made it 2-0 on 53 minutes before Mbappe added a second in the 74th minute to seal a victory that sends France into a last 16 duel with Paraguay in Philadelphia on Saturday. "I know who I am and what I've got to do, but it's not just me, I think the team is perfectly aware of what we have to do here," Mbappe told French broadcaster beIN Sports. Earlier Tuesday, in-form Manchester City striker Haaland fired Norway to their first-ever World Cup knockout win in a 2-1 defeat of Ivory Coast at AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas. Haaland swept in an 86th-minute winner to slam the door on Ivory Coast's hopes of a fightback after Amad Diallo had equalised for the Africans following Antonio Nusa's opener for Norway. The Norwegians – beaten in both of their previous opening knockout round appearances in 1938 and 1998 – will face Brazil in the last 16 on Sunday with a place in the quarter-finals up for grabs. Haaland will head into that meeting brimming with confidence after taking his tally for the tournament to five goals, one behind joint top-scorers Messi and Mbappe.

Champions Barcelona  
to host Athletic Club

DNA

MADRID: The 2026-27 La Liga season kicks off on Aug. 16 with the opening weekend having champions Barcelona taking on Athletic Club at Camp Nou, Real Madrid hosting Real Sociedad at the Santiago Bernabeu and Atletico Madrid welcoming Malaga to the Riyadh Air Metropolitan. The Spanish top tier – officially LALIGA EA SPORTS – concludes the weekend of May 30, while the regular season of the second tier LALIGA HYPERMOTION will end on Sunday, June 6. The announcement was made during a recent presentation with the Royal Spanish Football Federation, held in Plaza de Colon in Madrid.

The first El Clasico of the season between FC Barcelona and Real Madrid CF will take place on Matchday 10 in Barcelona during the weekend of Oct. 25, with the return fixture on Matchday 35 in Madrid during the weekend of May 9. The first Madrid Derby will be played on the weekend of Sept. 20, on Matchday 7, at Atletico de Madrid's Riyadh Air Metropolitan, with the return match on the weekend of April 4, on Matchday 30, at the Santiago Bernabeu. The Seville derby, El Gran Derbi, will see Sevilla FC face Real Betis Balompie on the weekend of Nov. 22, on Matchday 13, at the Ramon Sanchez-Pizjuan, with the return leg on the weekend of Feb. 7, on Matchday 23, at Estadio La Cartuja.

Mexico beat Ecuador 2-0 to reach World  
Cup last 16 and end knockout hoodoo

Mexico earn historic knockout win, first since 1986 home World Cup

MEXICO ended a 40-year wait for a World Cup knockout victory as first-half goals from Julian Quinones and Raul Jimenez secured a 2-0 win over Ecuador, sending the co-hosts into the last 16 amid euphoric scenes at a rocking Azteca Stadium.

The victory was Mexico's first in the knockout stages of a World Cup since beating Bulgaria on home soil in 1986 and booked a meeting with either England or the Democratic Republic of Congo in the last 16, with the co-hosts returning to the Azteca for the stadium's final match of the tournament. Kickoff was delayed by an hour due to thunderstorms, but the weather did little to dampen an atmosphere that surpassed even Mexico's tournament opener, with over 80,000 fans turning the venue into a sea of green long before the opening whistle.

Mexico fed off that energy from the outset and nearly took an early lead when Raul Jimenez peeled away to meet Luis Romo's inviting cross, only to stoop a header narrowly wide. Teenager Gilberto Mora then came within inches of producing one of the goals of the tournament, whipping a fierce effort from a tight angle just beyond Hernan Galindez's far post. Ecuador weathered the early pressure and almost stunned the home crowd when Gonzalo Plata launched a swift counter-

Australia defeat West  
Indies to storm into  
Women's T20 WC final

AUSTRALIA cruised into the ICC Women's T20 World Cup 2026 final as a disciplined bowling display and an unbeaten fifty from Beth Mooney sealed an eight-wicket victory over West Indies in the first semi-final at The Oval, London, on Tuesday. The victory powered six-time champions Australia into the final of the 12-team mega event, in which they will face either South Africa or hosts England at The Lord's on Sunday. Australia captain Sophie Molineux's decision to field first paid dividends as they curtailed West Indies to a modest total of 125/7 in 20 overs despite Deandra Dottin's late blitz. Captain Hayley Matthews remained the top-scorer for the West Indies with an anchoring 30 off 28 deliveries up the order. She also shared a 47-run partnership with fellow opener Qiana Joseph, who mustered a 22-ball 16. Following their back-to-back dismissals, top-order batter Shemaine Campbell (22) took the reins of West Indies' batting charge in the middle phase and kept the scoreboard ticking single-handedly until falling victim to Georgia Wareham in the 16th over. Her dismissal paved the way for Dottin, who suffered an injury before the commencement of the knockout fixture, to walk out at No.8 and give a late push to West Indies' total with a blistering 26-run cameo, which came off just 16 deliveries and featured four fours. – APP

Gilani lauds  
services of  
Bulgarian...

FROM PAGE 01

Highlighting the cordial relations between Pakistan and Bulgaria, Chairman Gilani noted that the two countries enjoy a relationship based on mutual respect, goodwill, and cooperation on regional and international issues. He described Bulgaria as an important partner of Pakistan in Europe and reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to further deepening bilateral engagement. The Chairman felicitated Bulgaria on becoming a full member of the Schengen Area and extended best wishes for its continued economic progress following the adoption of the Euro. He also reiterated Pakistan's support for Bulgaria's aspirations to join the OECD and welcomed the successful formation of the country's new government following recent parliamentary elections.

FESCO,  
GEPCO...

FROM PAGE 01

However the deadline for the submission of EOI for the Islamabad Electric Supply Company (IESCO) remains the same which is: September 7th, 2026 (1600 Hours PKT). The extension has been granted in response to requests from prospective investors to allow additional time for completing their internal evaluations and preparing comprehensive submissions. The Government of Pakistan is offering 51% to 100% shareholding, together with management control, in the privatisation of first batch of distribution companies as part of its broader economic reform and privatisation agenda.

PSX gains  
over 3,700...

FROM PAGE 01

and helping the market close FY25-26 with a stellar performance. Awais Ashraf, director of research at AKD Securities, linked today's investor confidence to "below market expectations" inflation figures for June. Pakistan's consumer price index (CPI) rose 11.1pc year-on-year in June, easing from 11.7pc in May and coming within the government's forecast range of 11pc-12pc, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics said on Wednesday. On a month-on-month basis, CPI fell 0.3pc in June, compared with a 0.5pc increase in May and a 0.2pc rise in June last year. Ashraf noted that the inflation figures "reinforced the view that inflationary pressures" were continuing to subside.

Messi will score more but I want the trophy: Mbappe  
French striker says lifting World Cup matters more than making record

KYLIAN Mbappe has been on Lionel Messi's heels as both players break new ground in World Cup scoring, but the Frenchman is more obsessed with lifting the trophy in New York on July 19 than becoming marksman supreme. The 27-year-old netted a double as Les Bleus crushed Sweden 3-0 in the round of 32 on Tuesday to move one shy of Messi's record 19 goals at World Cups and join him at the top of the scoring charts in this edition with six. "I think the goal, as I said, is to go as far as possible – to make it to (the final on) July 19th and come back here," Mbappe, who scored his 18 goals in 18 games, told reporters. "We're trying to win; we're taking it one step at a time. Of course, the more goals you score, the higher you climb in the rankings – I'm not telling anyone anything new there."

"But I'm also convinced that Leo is going to score more goals, so I don't focus too much on that. I'm more focused on the op-



ponents we might face and how close we're getting to our goal: the final."

Messi's Argentina face minnows Cape Verde in the last 32 on Friday. France next take on Paraguay for a place in the quarter-finals, where they would face either co-hosts Canada or Morocco.

Paraguay took an ultra-defensive approach against Germany to knock the four-time world champions out on penalties in the last 32 on Monday, and there is little chance that they will go out swashbuckling against France in Philadelphia on Saturday. Les Bleus will not take anything for granted and will do their homework, Mbappe warned. "I think we'll keep working between now and the Paraguay match to see what we can improve, because there are still some sequences that aren't quite clear enough, there's room for improvement," he said. "Still, I think it's positive overall, and our ability to score goals means we always have the chance to take the lead in matches." – APP

## Briefs

## Gold prices decline by Rs 5,200 per tola

ISLAMABAD: The prices of gold witnessed a decline in the local market on Wednesday, with the price of 24-karat gold per tola decreasing by Rs5,200 to settle at Rs419,636, according to rates issued by the All Pakistan Sarafa Gems and Jewelers Association. Similarly, the price of 10 grams of 24-karat gold fell by Rs4,458 to Rs359,770, whereas the price of 10 grams of 22-karat gold declined by Rs4,086 to Rs329,801. In the international market, the price of gold decreased by \$52 to \$3,972 per ounce. Meanwhile, the price of silver per tola declined by Rs107 to Rs6,242, while the price of 10 grams of silver fell by Rs92 to Rs5,351. The price of silver in the international market also decreased by \$1.07 to \$57.63 per ounce, the association reported.—APP

## Pakistan enters sustainable investment market

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has taken a major step towards sustainable finance with the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) issuing the country's first ESG Mutual Funds Framework. The framework enables Asset Management Companies (AMCs) to launch Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG)-focused mutual funds, bringing Pakistan's capital market in line with global sustainable investment practices, said a press release issued by the SECP on Wednesday. Globally, sustainable investing has grown rapidly, with more than \$16 trillion in assets managed under sustainable investment strategies. As investors increasingly seek investments that combine financial returns with responsible business practices, regulators around the world are introducing frameworks to support ESG investing.

For Pakistan, the initiative is particularly important as the country remains among the world's most climate-vulnerable nations. The new framework establishes a transparent regulatory regime for ESG-aligned collective investment schemes and opens Pakistan's financial market to the growing global sustainable investment ecosystem. Under the framework, equity-based ESG mutual funds will primarily invest in companies included in the Pakistan Stock Exchange's Sustainability Index and those aligned with SECP's ESG Disclosure Guidelines.

Debt-based ESG mutual funds will invest in green, social and sustainability-linked debt instruments in line with Pakistan's Green Taxonomy and Sustainable Finance Framework.—APP

## Iraq, GCC discuss stronger ties

LONDON: Iraqi Prime Minister Ali Falih Al-Zaidi on Wednesday met Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Secretary-General Jassem Mohammed Albuadiwi, as both sides discussed strengthening relations and expanding cooperation between Iraq and Gulf states. Albuadiwi conveyed congratulations from Gulf leaders to Al-Zaidi following his appointment as prime minister and the formation of Iraq's new government. During the meeting, Al-Zaidi said his government was committed to deepening ties with GCC countries, describing them as Iraq's "Arab depth" and stressing the importance of building relations with regional and international partners. He said Iraq was entering a new phase focused on strengthening state institutions, developing the economy, upholding the rule of law and reinforcing national sovereignty. Albuadiwi praised what he described as reform efforts by the Iraqi government, including steps to strengthen the economy, tackle corruption and ensure that arms remain under state control. He also expressed the GCC's readiness to expand partnerships with Iraq across various fields. Albuadiwi also met with Judge Faiq Zidan, President of Iraq's Supreme Judicial Council, during which they reviewed ways to enhance cooperation and discussed regional and international developments.—

## Kundi invites African investors to explore opportunities in KP

Chairman Pakistan-Africa Friendship Association Zafar Bakhtawari underlined the importance of establishing direct air connectivity between Pakistan and African countries to facilitate trade, tourism and business exchanges



DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) hosted a grand Africa Day Celebration 2026, bringing together ambassadors, high commissioners, senior government officials, diplomats, business leaders and representatives from African missions to reaffirm the long-standing friendship between Pakistan and African nations and explore new avenues of economic cooperation. Addressing the gathering as Chief Guest, Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Karim Kundi said that Pakistan's relationship with Africa has never been transactional but has been built upon mutual respect, shared struggles against colonialism and a common commitment to justice, sovereignty and sustainable development. He noted that Pakistan has consistently supported African liberation movements and remains a steadfast partner in trade, education, peacekeeping and global diplomacy. He stressed that the time has come to transform enduring political solidarity into deeper economic

partnerships encompassing trade, investment, scientific collaboration, higher education and people-to-people exchanges. He invited African investors to explore the immense opportunities available in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, particularly in hydropower, minerals, agriculture, industry and human capital development. Additional Secretary (Africa), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Hamid Asghar, highlighted Africa's vast economic potential, describing the continent as a land of limitless opportunities. He said Africa's rapidly expanding youth population, growing consumer markets, abundant agricultural resources and fertile lands offer significant prospects for Pakistani investors. He informed participants that several African countries are prepared to offer thousands of acres of cultivable land for corporate farming initiatives and encouraged Pakistani businesses to undertake well-planned trade missions targeting specific African regions. He assured the business community of full facilitation by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in fostering commercial engagement with African nations. Pres-

ident ICCI Sardar Tahir Mehmood reaffirmed the Chamber's commitment to strengthening Pakistan-Africa relations through structured business engagements, trade delegations and institutional partnerships. He emphasized that ICCI would continue to serve as a bridge between Pakistani entrepreneurs and African markets to promote investment, joint ventures and sustainable economic collaboration. Representing the Dean of the African Group, High Commissioner of Mauritius to Pakistan H.E. Mr. Munsoo Kurrimbaccus said that Africa, comprising 54 sovereign nations, is emerging as one of the most dynamic regions of the world. He observed that Africa's greatest strength lies in its people, particularly its youthful population, which presents unprecedented opportunities for innovation, entrepreneurship and economic expansion. He emphasized that Africa's demographic dividend, natural resources, agricultural potential and tourism assets position the continent as a strategic partner for Pakistan's future economic growth. Chairman Pakistan-Africa Friend-

ship Association Zafar Bakhtawari underlined the importance of establishing direct air connectivity between Pakistan and African countries to facilitate trade, tourism and business exchanges. He urged the government to prioritize air links with African destinations to unlock the full potential of bilateral economic, political and cultural relations. He stressed that stronger economic linkages would enable both Pakistan and Africa to address shared global challenges, including climate change, energy security and sustainable development. Senior Vice President ICCI Tahir Ayub conducted the proceedings and presented the vote of thanks, expressing appreciation to the diplomatic community, government representatives, business leaders and participants for making the Africa Day celebration a resounding success. The event was attended by ambassadors, high commissioners and diplomats from African countries including the Ambassador of Türkiye, members of the business community, representatives from public and private sector organizations as well as the ICCI Vice President Irfan Chaudhry, Executive Members and trade and industry leaders.

## Chinese e-two-wheeler exports surge

BEIJING: China's electric two-wheeler industry is expanding rapidly on the global stage, with official figures highlighting the sector's growing role as a driver of foreign trade. In 2025, China exported more than 26.7 million electric motorcycles and bicycles, generating nearly US\$ 6.83 billion in export value. The momentum has continued into 2026, with first-quarter exports rising to about 7.2 million units, up 68.2 percent year-on-year. Private enterprises have been at the forefront of the expansion, recording 30 percent growth in electric two-wheeler exports in the January-March period. Behind the numbers is a broader global shift. Electric two-wheelers have emerged as a practical option for short-distance urban commuting as countries step up carbon-reduction efforts and accelerate the transition from fossil fuels to electricity. Cost-effective and convenient, Chinese-made e-bikes and e-mopeds have gained traction in overseas markets. Industry experts attribute the global competitiveness of Chinese electric two-wheelers to a combination of concentrated industrial clusters and supply chain efficiency, which help keep costs low and support continuous innovation. "Industrial clustering and supply chain efficiency create a highly concentrated network that ensures information transparency and logistics efficiency, significantly lowering production costs and improving response times," said Ahmed Iftikhar, a Pakistani entrepreneur and president of Tianjin Chuanhui Technology Development Co., Ltd., who has spent nearly a decade in the industry. Iftikhar said Tianjin, where his company is based, not only benefits from its port access but also sits close to major manufacturing bases. "Everything from screws and nuts to motors and batteries can be sourced locally," he said, adding that his partners in Wuxi, Ningbo and other eastern coastal cities also benefit from large-scale industrial ecosystems. DNA

## FBR lauded for historic revenue achievement

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb, here on Wednesday commended the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) for meeting its revised FY2025-26 revenue collection target, calling it a landmark achievement driven by reforms, teamwork, and the dedication of the FBR workforce. Addressing a meeting at FBR Headquarters, the Finance Minister conveyed the congratulations of the Prime Minister to the entire FBR team for its dedication and hard work throughout the fiscal year. The meeting was attended virtually by Chairman FBR Rashid Mahmood Langrial, Members of the FBR Board, senior officers, and Chief Commissioners and Chief Collectors joining virtually from across the country. The Finance Minister said the achievement should be viewed in the context of Pakistan's broader reform journey over the past two and a half years, during which the country's revenue collection had nearly doubled. He observed that this remarkable progress represented one of the most significant improvements in Pakistan's fiscal history and had played a pivotal role in strengthening the country's macroeconomic fundamentals. He noted that alongside

improved external sector indicators, Pakistan had recorded its lowest fiscal deficit and highest-ever primary surplus, achievements made possible through strong revenue performance coupled with prudent fiscal management. Senator Aurangzeb particularly appreciated the efforts of the Inland Revenue and Customs formations, noting that the FBR had delivered strong revenue growth despite providing substantial tariff relief to facilitate economic activity. He also lauded the Board for processing and disbursing Rs. 599 billion in tax refunds during the year, including an unprecedented Rs. 13.5 billion released on the last day of the fiscal year, describing it as a significant milestone reflecting the government's commitment to facilitating businesses and exporters. Highlighting the government's forward-looking reform agenda, Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb emphasized that modern tax administration must focus not only on revenue collection but equally on taxpayer facilitation, transparency, and public trust. He stressed the need to make tax compliance easier through technology-driven solutions, greater automation, improved taxpayer services, and reduced opportunities for discretion and corruption. The Finance Minister said the government's newly approved

operating model for FBR would accelerate institutional transformation through reforms centred on people, processes, and technology, including the expanded use of artificial intelligence and digital systems. He expressed gratitude to Parliament for supporting the legislative framework required to implement these reforms and reaffirmed that the government remained fully committed to transforming FBR into one of Pakistan's leading public institutions. He also acknowledged the personal leadership, guidance, and continuous oversight of the Prime Minister in driving the country's tax reform agenda. Addressing the meeting, Chairman FBR Rashid Mahmood Langrial thanked the Finance Minister for visiting FBR Headquarters on the first day of the new fiscal year and for his continued support of the institution. He appreciated the close coordination between the Finance Division and FBR throughout the budget process, particularly during consultations with the IMF, provincial governments, coalition partners, parliamentary committees, and other stakeholders. He also underscored the importance of institutional reforms within FBR, particularly efforts aimed at promoting merit, professionalism, and integrity across the organization.

## Pak, China enter into banking partnership

"As a next step, HBL plans to expand cooperation in green finance and sustainable development, with agriculture modernization identified as a priority sector, both of which are of vital importance to Pakistan's future," Sultan Ali Allana, Chairman—HBL said

DNA

BEIJING - Pakistan's leading financial institution, HBL, signed partnership agreements with China CITIC Bank and China Chengxin International Credit Rating Company (CCXI), marking another step in expanding the financial cooperation between China and Pakistan as the Bank celebrated the fifth anniversary of its Beijing Branch operation. The agreements aim to strengthen cross-border financing, RMB business and credit cooperation, as trade and investment links between China and Pakistan continue to deepen. China Economic Net (CEN) reported on Wednesday. According to HBL, its cooperation with Chinese financial institutions has evolved beyond traditional correspondent banking into co-lending and syndicated financing arrangements that combine the strengths of both sides. "Chinese banks, particularly policy lenders, provide large-scale funding capacity and expertise in financing infrastructure and energy projects, while HBL contributes with local market knowledge, regulatory experience and execution capabilities in Pakistan," said Muhammad Nassir

Salim, President & CEO - HBL. To date, HBL has participated in more than US\$6 billion worth of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) transactions, serving as an adviser, arranger, lender and equity investor. "Notably, the China franchise reported a record volume of RMB foreign exchange transactions in 2025, with RMB trade volumes increasing by more than 20 percent year on year," Mr. Salim said in an interview with CEN. "There is significant room to increase the adoption of RMB, as our region still conducts only about 10 percent of its transactions in RMB, with the rest settled in third currencies," he added. As one of only three banks from South Asia and the MENA region to offer end-to-end RMB intermediation services in China, HBL has introduced a range of RMB-denominated products, including multi-currency letters of credit (LC) advising and confirmation services, RMB LC discounting and RMB liquidity services, covering both onshore (CNY) and offshore (CNH) markets. According to Standard Chartered's RMB Globalization Index, the currency's international application has nearly doubled over the past three years, driven by rapid growth in cross-border payments, offshore transactions, bond issuance and offshore deposits. Hu Yonghong, deputy director of the Institute of Interna-

tional Monetary Research at Renmin University of China, noted that 85 countries have now included RMB assets in their official foreign exchange reserves, while more than one-third of China's cross-border trade is settled in RMB. In the Asia-Pacific, Africa and the Middle East, more than 60 percent of foreign-invested enterprises have begun using RMB in cross-border transactions, she added. "China's rising innovation capacity, continued investment in green development and major infrastructure projects, including the development of offshore markets in Shanghai has bolstered RMB adoption in the international economy. The expansion of infrastructure for cross-border payments has also strengthened the currency's global role," she analysed. China's Cross-border Interbank Payment System (CIPS) now connects participants in more than 120 countries through over 1,500 financial institutions, while new digital RMB cross-border payment platforms are extending services to markets including Singapore, Thailand, Qatar, and Brazil. "As a next step, HBL plans to expand cooperation in green finance and sustainable development, with agriculture modernization identified as a priority sector, both of which are of vital importance to Pakistan's future," Sultan Ali Allana, Chairman—HBL said.

## 120 dead in latest Sudan cholera outbreak

CAIRO: A cholera outbreak in Sudan has killed 120 people, with another 1,102 suspected cases since May in isolated war zones, the World Health Organization said Wednesday. More than three years of war between Sudan's army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) have decimated the country's health care system. This is Sudan's third wave of cholera in as many years, and began only two months after the last outbreak was declared over in March. Between July 2024 and March 2026, over 124,400 people were infected and 3,500 killed during the last wave, according to government figures. Endemic to the northeast African country, cholera used to come "in a cyclic manner every three years," the WHO's Sudan chief Dr. Shible Sabhani told reporters. But now the country faces near-continuous outbreaks "due to the conflict, constraints in access and limited supplies," he said. Sudan's rainy season is set to surge in the coming weeks, during which cholera cases balloon as millions lack access to clean water and the rains further impede access. The Sudanese government declared the latest outbreak this week in the flashpoint West Kordofan state, the dividing line between army and paramilitary zones of control. Constant deadly drone strikes launched by both sides have made commercial and aid access to the Kordofan region increasingly dangerous, and brought hundreds of thousands to the brink of starvation.—APP

## Delhi to ban new petrol scooters to curb air pollution

NEW DELHI: India's capital New Delhi will ban new petrol- and diesel-fueled scooters and rickshaws from its roads over the next two years, as an ambitious new policy aimed at bringing down dangerously high pollution levels in the city came into effect on Wednesday. Delhi's new EV policy seeks to accelerate the use of electric vehicles through incentives, tax exemptions and expanded EV infrastructure, with the goal of achieving a minimum 30 percent electrification of the city's vehicle fleet by March 2030. "This is a historic step toward effectively controlling vehicle pollution in the capital and promoting clean transportation. The new EV Policy will come into effect from July 1, 2026, and will remain effective until March 31, 2030," Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta wrote on X on Monday, after the Cabinet approved the 150-billion-rupee (\$1.6 billion) policy. From 2027 onwards, the city's authorities will only issue new license plates to electric small trucks and three-wheelers, and only to electric scooters and motorbikes from 2028, effectively stopping registration of new petrol-powered versions of those vehicles.—APP

## Fire leaves at least 5 people dead, many injured

ANTWERP: At least five people were killed and many others injured on Wednesday in a fire at an apartment block in the Belgian city of Antwerp, police said. The blaze broke out mid-morning on the eighth floor of the building, where more than 200 people live, in the city's Linkeroever neighborhood, sending vast plumes of smoke into the air, Antwerp police said in a statement. "Right now, unfortunately, at least 5 people have died in the fire. There are also a significant number of seriously injured people, as well as a number of lightly injured," Antwerp police spokesperson Kim Bastiaens told Belgian private broadcaster VTM. The 10-story block was evacuated and local residents were warned to keep their windows and doors closed and, if needed, to turn off any ventilators due to the amount of smoke in the air. Firefighters battled the blaze in difficult conditions due to its size and intensity, police said. Several teams of first responders.—APP

## Briefs

### Turkiye tightens security for NATO summit

DUBAI: Turkiye is preparing for next week's NATO summit with heightened security measures across Ankara, as President Recep Tayyip Erdogan seeks to use the gathering to reinforce the country's role as a key player in the alliance. Tens of thousands of police officers have been deployed, air defenses placed on alert and restrictions imposed on public gatherings as leaders from all 32 NATO members prepare to meet in the Turkish capital on July 7-8. The summit is expected to bring together US President Donald Trump and other world leaders at a time of growing tensions within the alliance over regional conflicts, defense commitments and Washington's relationship with European partners. Hosting the summit offers Ankara an opportunity to highlight Turkey's strategic importance as a bridge between Europe and the Middle East, analysts say. "Turkey wants to position itself as an indispensable actor in security and geopolitical processes in Europe and beyond," foreign policy expert Serkan Demirtas told AFP. A NATO member since 1952, Turkey has the alliance's second-largest army and occupies a strategic position connecting Europe, the Middle East, the Black Sea and the Caucasus. Analysts say Turkey's importance has grown since the Russia-Ukraine war, with Ankara maintaining ties with both Moscow and Kyiv while also seeking a diplomatic role in regional conflicts. - Agencies

### Dengue surge in Dhaka

DHAKA: Bangladesh could face a sharp increase in dengue infections over the next two months, health experts warned, as wet weather and inadequate mosquito control spur a wider outbreak. The spread of the disease has accelerated in recent weeks, raising concerns following the nation's deadliest ever outbreak in 2023. Dengue deaths rose from one at the end of May to 18 by the end of June, while reported infections climbed more than eightfold, from 714 to 5,924, according to health ministry data. "We expect dengue cases in Dhaka to at least double in July from June levels and increase three to fourfold by August," said Professor Kabirul Bashar, an entomologist at Jahangirnagar University. "But the bigger challenge will likely be outside the capital, where several districts are at risk of a much steeper rise in infections." In 2023, more than 321,000 people were infected and 1,705 died. Last year, Bangladesh recorded 102,861 dengue cases and 413 deaths, following 101,214 infections and 575 deaths in 2024. - APP

# Japan visa rules push out foreign residents

## And while business manager visa holders have a three-year grace period to meet the new conditions, some thriving businesses – including many popular eateries in Okubo – fear they won't manage

### NEWS DESK

TOKYO: In a tiny Tokyo restaurant filled with the smell of Nepalese dumplings, Budhathoki Samjhana surveys the business she built from scratch but may now have to give up as Japan tightens visa rules. Even though Japan has a rapidly aging population and is suffering labor shortages in many sectors, opposition to immigration is growing and the new rules for business manager visas were introduced by the ruling Liberal Democratic Party in late 2025. Nepalese national Budhathoki, who spent a decade away from her young daughter to create a new life for them in Tokyo, faces expulsion from the country because she

may not be able to meet the specifications. "I always wanted to become a bridge between Japan and Nepal ... but my dream is broken," the 38-year-old told AFP from the capital's Okubo district, where her restaurant is nestled alongside Vietnamese cafes, Indian curry houses and Korean barbecue joints. The stricter rules come as some residents complain of overtourism and soaring land prices in part due to foreign investment, prompting a push by Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi for tighter regulations on foreign nationals. Her government announced last month a sharp increase in visa fees for some tourists for the first time in nearly 50 years, hiking the cost for single and multiple entry permits five-fold. And

while business manager visa holders have a three-year grace period to meet the new conditions, some thriving businesses – including many popular eateries in Okubo – fear they won't manage. "The biggest problem is the increase in capital requirement to 30 million yen (\$185,000) from 5 million (\$30,000)," said Budhathoki, leaving through receipts as the scent of freshly cooked Nepalese momos wafts in from the kitchen. "It's impossible." Budhathoki came to Japan as a student in 2016 and saved for years to open her first restaurant in 2023. After opening her third eatery in January, she finally brought her 14-year-old daughter from Nepal following a decade of separation and she is now enrolled in a

Japanese school. "Now, I'm very worried not about myself but about my daughter... What did I do to her?" she said. Indian restaurant owner Manish Kumar, who has lived in Japan for three decades, has already been told his business manager visa won't be renewed, in spite of the grace period. He doesn't know exactly why but visa experts say immigration officials have become more rigorous, demanding more documentation including tax receipts and social insurance premiums. "My children only speak Japanese ... and we're told to go back to India," Kumar tearfully explained at a gathering about the visa issue last month. More than 67,800 people have signed a petition calling for the suspension of the new rules.

### RSF committed ethnic cleansing in Sudan

NAIROBI: The Sudanese paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) committed crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing during their attack on El-Fasher city between 2024 and 2025, Amnesty International alleged Wednesday. Sudan has been mired since April 2023 in a brutal war between the army and the RSF, which has killed tens of thousands and forced millions to flee, according to the United Nations. Both sides have been accused of atrocities, with a UN independent fact-finding mission in February concluding that the 2025 assault on El-Fasher bore the "hallmarks of genocide." Amnesty's wide-ranging report found that the RSF "committed crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing during its campaign to seize El Fasher." The NGO interviewed 247 victims or witnesses between early 2024 and October 2025 in North Darfur. It said the RSF systematically attacked settlements around El-Fasher which housed the Zaghawa people, an ethnic group in western Darfur. The report alleged widespread and deliberate violence against children including killing, abductions, forced recruitment, and rape. "It is a stain on the conscience of humanity," said Amnesty chief Agnes Callamar in a statement. RSF fighters burned homes long after residents had fled, the report said, "suggesting an intent to render the areas uninhabitable," consistent with "ethnic cleansing." During the final RSF offensive on El-Fasher in October 2025, Amnesty said "hundreds were executed, and many others were tortured or detained" as they attempted to flee. - APP



ISLAMABAD: Chairman Board of Governors OPF Syed Qamar Raza and Managing Director OPF Mohammed Afzaal Bhatti called on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif in Islamabad on 1 July 2026. - DNA

### A ship ran aground in Strait of Hormuz

DUBAI: A ship ran aground in the Strait of Hormuz after not running Iran's approved route through the water, Iranian state television reported Wednesday. The report identified the affected vessel as a foreign container ship, but offered no other immediate details. The Iranian state TV report appeared aimed at underlining the claims Tehran has made since the US-Iran war to control over the strait, which has long been considered by the world as an international waterway and saw a fifth of all oil and natural gas pass through it in peacetime. It also came as US Mideast envoy Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner, US President Donald Trump's son-in-law, were in Doha, Qatar, for talks with mediators as Iranian negotiators were also to be there. Iran and the United States agreed as part of an interim deal to allow ships to pass uncharged for 60 days, but Tehran insisted it must control the routes of the vessels and later charge fees for passage, upending decades of practice in the waterway. The US and many Gulf Arab states say they won't agree to the charges. - APP

## Oil prices thick high in world market

US Vice President JD Vance said Iran would be prevented from charging tolls through the strait, telling *The Michael Knowles Show*, "This is not going to end in a place where the Iranians are collecting tolls on ships going through the Strait of Hormuz"

LONDON: Oil prices rose in early trade on Wednesday as investors responded to news that Iran will not be meeting with US envoys, a further strain on the interim ceasefire agreed between the two in the four-month-long war. Brent futures rose 50 cents or 0.69% to \$73.45 a barrel at 1208 GMT, while US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude climbed 63 cents, or 0.91%, to \$70.13 a barrel. US President Donald Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner and envoy Steve Witkoff arrived in Doha for what the White House described as "high-level" talks on Tuesday, but Iran and host Qatar said they would meet with mediators, rather than the Iranians themselves. Qatar said Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani was among those to Witkoff and Kushner. Brent fell by around \$45 a barrel between the first and second quarters of this year, its largest quarterly loss since 2008 during the financial crisis. US crude futures, meanwhile, fell by around \$31, their largest quarterly loss since 2020, when the Covid-19 pandemic crushed global oil demand. The declines followed progress toward

ending the Middle East conflict, pulling back from the sharp gains triggered earlier by the hostilities. Analysts have cut their 2026 oil price forecasts for the first time since the Iran war began, after five straight monthly increases, as the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz eased concerns over prolonged supply disruptions, a Reuters poll showed on Tuesday. US Vice President JD Vance said Iran would be prevented from charging tolls through the strait, telling *The Michael Knowles Show*, "This is not going to end in a place where the Iranians are collecting tolls on ships going through the Strait of Hormuz." Tanker traffic through the critical waterway has started to recover, with Vance claiming that oil flows through the strait had been restored to pre-war levels. Meanwhile, US crude oil inventories fell again last week while gasoline stocks also declined, market sources said, citing data from the American Petroleum Institute released on Tuesday. Crude stocks fell by 6.1 million barrels in the week ended June 26, the sources said on condition of anonymity. - APP

### Seven drown, two rescued after tourist boat overturns


GILGIT: A boat carrying tourists capsized at Saifulah Lake on the Swat River, leaving seven people dead, while two others were rescued, rescue officials said on Wednesday. Rescue 1122 Swat said seven bodies were recovered from the lake following the accident and shifted by ambulance to Kalam Hospital. Emergency response teams and ambulances were dispatched to the site immediately after the control room received reports of the incident. Earlier, the district administration had confirmed

the recovery of five bodies and said a search and rescue operation was underway to trace four missing tourists. The latest incident comes amid growing concerns over drowning accidents in the region. Rescuers later recovered the body of one woman, while another was pulled from the river unconscious and shifted to a nearby hospital for treatment. However, there was no trace of the missing girl. The Swat River attracts large numbers of visitors during the summer tourist season, but strong currents, sudden changes in water levels and limited awareness of river hazards continue to pose significant risks to tourists and local residents. In June last year, at least 17 tourists were swept away after a sudden rise in the water level of the Swat River. Authorities have repeatedly urged visitors to avoid unsafe sections of rivers and lakes and to follow safety guidelines while boating and visiting waterfront areas. - DNA

## Europe's hospitals brace for next heat wave

ORSAY, France: Ice. Urgently and in large quantities. At a Paris-region hospital, emergency medics needed it to plunge patients into cold-water baths to speedily bring down their temperatures so they wouldn't join the growing tally of dead from a record-smashing heat wave. But lacking an ice-making machine, where to get it? A fast-food restaurant helped out last week, saying the hospital could take its ice. Staff also bought ice from the supermarket. The Paris-Saclay Hospital has now ordered its own ice machine, eagerly awaited in the emergency department for a future attack of sizzling heat. Whether that hits next week, as France's weather service says it might, or in summer months ahead, medics and hospital administrators are acutely aware that the battle they've just endured will, because of climate change, be followed by others. Just as they brace for the annual flu season, they know that fighting heat waves is becoming their new normal. So as they catch their breath from what the director of the public hospital described as a "horrible" last week, he and his staff are also gearing up for the next round. "We thought we were ready. We were not actually," said the director, Cédric Lussiez. "The hospital was working on a 24 hours a day basis because we had to find new solutions in a very short delay," he said. "We already learned some lessons." Hospitals are preparing for more inevitable heat waves. Efforts to plug some of the holes exposed by the heat wave that shifted eastward to other parts of Europe after battering France, the United Kingdom and other countries are accelerating on a national level, too. When France was baking through its hottest days on record last week, French Prime Minister Sébastien Lecornu announced a 100-million euro (\$114-million) spend




from this summer on cooling systems for hospitals and other work to keep wards functioning. And at the latest in a series of heat-wave crisis meetings, he said Monday that the government is buying 30,000 air-conditioning units for health facilities, with the first deliveries expected "at the end of the week, beginning of next week." "It's an absolute priority for us that, if the heat wave returns, the hospital situation be a lot less strained," he said. The World Health Organization on Tuesday described the heat wave as "a dress rehearsal" for summers that "will be harder." "Europe is warming at more than twice the global average. Heat waves are no longer one-off freak events," it said. "Every summer we fail to prepare for them is a summer we pay for in lives." Heart attacks and other heat-exposure emergencies surge at the Paris-Saclay Hospital, patients suffering from heat exposure started arriving in a surge on June 20, said Dr. Nicolas Gonzales, head of the emergency department. "It was like a big mountain," he said. "It was like that for seven days. So it was very intense." "In winter, we know we'll have influenza epidemics and probably COVID as well. And now, in the summer, we're going to have the climate crisis," he said. The first patient he treated in this heat wave was an emergency call-out, for a 50-year-old man in a coma at home and with a temperature of about 40 degrees Celsius (104 Fahrenheit). His family said he seemed fine one minute, but was unconscious the next, Gonzales said. He was rushed to the hospital for critical care. Then came the flood: heart attacks, dehydration, kidney malfunctions and other heat-related problems, impacting all age groups, from children to older people living alone. - APP



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