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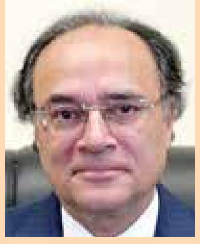
I cannot order Israeli PM arrest but the Federal Govt can do

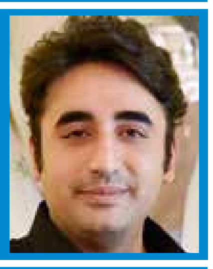
Detailed News On Page-08

Aurangzeb in US to seek fiscal support



Detailed News On Page-08

Bilawal says PPP to serve Kashmiris



Detailed News On Page-04

Briefs

Pakistan credit rating improved

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: Credit ratings agency S&P Global raised Pakistan's long-term sovereign credit rating to "B" from "B-" on Wednesday, citing stronger institutional stability and effective implementation of reforms under an IMF programme. Pakistan's rating outlook was held at "stable" as sustained official financing is expected to help the country meet its external obligations while allowing it to continue rolling over commercial credit lines over the next 12 months. The agency said the government's efforts to widen the tax base have improved revenue collection and accelerated fiscal consolidation, supporting a gradual decline in the country's debt burden. Reforms backed by the IMF have helped restore macroeconomic stability, rebuild foreign exchange reserves and ease strains on Pakistan's fiscal and external positions, S&P said. Tax reforms and continued foreign inflows have also strengthened the country's fiscal and external buffers against potential external shocks, the rating agency said. The upgrade comes as Pakistan seeks additional external financing, including a proposed $10 billion exchange stabilisation facility from the United States, Reuters reported earlier on Wednesday, citing a source.

ICC members to vote on firing Khan

NEWS DESK

WASHINGTON: Member states of the International Criminal Court (ICC) will vote on Friday on whether to fire chief prosecutor Karim Khan for alleged sexual misconduct in a case that has damaged the tribunal's credibility at a time when the US has ramped up its attacks on the court. Khan, 56, denies any wrongdoing. The vote on his fate comes just a week after Washington announced a renewed diplomatic campaign to dismantle the ICC, which it says is a threat to US sovereignty. "The court is already in a precarious state," Mark Ellis, the executive director of the International Bar Association and a longtime ICC observer, told Reuters. "The Khan situation is a separate but very significant part of the overall perception of the court's credibility," he added.

Moroccan national dies in Italy

NEWS DESK

RABAT: Morocco's foreign ministry said it was concerned by the death of a national during a police arrest in Bologna in Italy and urged a "thorough investigation." Moroccan-born Abderrahim Fakir died on Sunday after police were called to the Pilastro neighborhood on the outskirts of the northern Italian city to deal with a man who was behaving aggressively and damaging a vehicle. The Moroccan ministry called on Tuesday night for the necessary explanations regarding the death to be provided and for responsibility to be established. The death triggered anti-police protests in Bologna on Monday that left dozens of officers injured. Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni called for a full investigation into the death and also condemned the subsequent clashes with police.

Pakistan strongly condemns Houthi threats against Saudi Arabia

It may be mentioned here that Iran had asked Houthis to block Saudi Arabia shipping route. In return the Houthis had promised to entertain the Iranian request

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad has issued a firm statement denouncing the continued threats posed by the Houthis militia against the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and commercial shipping lanes in the Red Sea. The government declared that such actions endanger regional stability, undermine freedom of navigation, and jeopardize the uninterrupted flow of global commerce. According to the statement, threats against commercial shipping and trading with Saudi Arabia are "unacceptable" and constitute violations of established principles of international law. Pakistan expressed particular concern over reports of threats directed against vessels engaged in lawful trade with the Kingdom, stressing that such acts challenge the rules-based maritime order. Pakistan reaffirmed that any hostile act against Pakistani-flagged vessels or maritime interests would be regarded as a grave threat to national security and sovereignty.
The government emphasized that, consistent with the Charter of the United Nations and international law, Pakistan reserves the right to take all necessary measures--including lawful use of force--in the exercise of self-defence to protect its maritime assets and national interests. The statement also highlighted Pakistan's deep concern over attempts to drag Saudi Arabia into the wider Middle East conflict. Islamabad reiterated its unwavering support for the security, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and prosperity of

Continued on Page 06

Saudi Arabia takes up Red Sea issue with allies

DNA

RIYADH: The Saudi foreign minister, Prince Faisal bin Farhan, held talks on Tuesday with his counterparts from Spain, Italy and Germany on Houthi threats to shipping in the Red Sea and efforts to deescalate wider tensions in the Middle East. In separate calls, Jose Manuel Albares of Spain and Antonio Tajani of Italy condemned threats to southern parts of Saudi Arabia from the Houthi militia in Yemen, the Saudi Press Agency reported. The ministers emphasized the importance of efforts to preserve maritime security in the Red Sea and the Arabian Gulf, and rejected any actions that endanger safe navigation. Prince Faisal also spoke with Germany's Johann Wadephul about the security and economic implications of the ongoing conflict between the US and Iran. The Saudi Foreign Ministry on Monday condemned claims by a Houthi military spokesperson that the militant group

Continued on Page 06

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif and Chief of Army Staff And Chief of Defence Forces Field Marshall Syed Asim Munir visit stalls at exhibition in the Indus RAS Expo 2026 in Islamabad on 22 July 2026. – DNA

Trump threatens to target Iran bridges

DNA

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump has threatened that the US would destroy an Iranian bridge or power plant any time its forces attack a ship in the Strait of Hormuz. Potential targets would include ones "located next to, or in," the capital Tehran, he said in a post on Truth Social. The military response would follow any form of attack on shipping in the vital waterway, "whether it be by missile, rocket, drone, or any other device or weapon". His threat follows the US launching strikes on Iran for the 11th consecutive night, with Tehran warning the US against targeting its nuclear facilities.

Continued on Page 06

PML N seeking Constitutional Amendment, says Bilawal

DNA

BAGHA: Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari on Wednesday claimed that the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) wanted to make three-time former prime minister Nawaz Sharif the premier of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK).

DETAILED NEWS ON PAGE 4

Addressing a public rally in LA-3 Mirpur City, PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari, whose party is a key coalition partner in the federal government, said: "They (PML-N) want

Continued on Page 06

Temporary relief

Petrol pump owners defer nationwide strike after negotiations

Govt commits to resolving petroleum dealers' margin; petroleum dealers support strike postponement

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: The All Pakistan Petrol Pumps Owners Association (APPPOA) on Wednesday postponed its planned nationwide strike after successful negotiations with the federal government, while the Petroleum Dealers Association also endorsed the decision. Petrol pump owners and dealers had earlier announced a 24-hour nationwide shutdown from Thursday in protest against the government's decision to revise petroleum product prices on a daily basis. Speaking at a joint press conference with Petroleum Minister Ali Pervaiz Malik, representatives of the petroleum sector said they had received assurances that their concerns would be addressed. The dealers said the government committed to increasing petroleum dealers' margins and expressed confidence that the matter would be

Continued on Page 06

Pakistan seeks alternative crude oil sources

NEWS DESK

ISLAMABAD: Amid reports of the Strait of Hormuz being closed and the Houthis' declaration prohibiting Saudi oil exports via the Bab el-Mandeb Strait from Yanbu on the Red Sea, Pakistan has moved to identify alternative crude oil suppliers outside the Gulf region. The unfolding situation has intensified concerns over the country's energy security and the reliability of its oil import supply. At an emergency meeting with chief executive officers (CEOs) and managing directors (MDs) of

Continued on Page 06

Security forces neutralize 10 more terrorists

Sanitization operations are being conducted to eliminate any other Indian sponsored terrorist found in the area. Relentless Counter Terrorism campaign

DNA

RAWALPINDI: In continuation of security forces operations against the terrorists nexus of Indian sponsored Fitna al Hindustan and Fitna al Khwarij, comprehensive joint operations are being carried in different parts of Balochistan to weed out remnants of terrorists and their facilitators.
In last 48 hours security forces have conducted multiple intelligence-based area sanitization and targeted operations in District Surab and District Mastung of Balochistan, during which ten terrorists were killed. During the conduct of these operations, security forces effectively engaged the terrorist locations, killing seven terrorists in District Surab. Whereas three terrorists were killed and two female Suicide Bombers along with facilitator were also apprehended in District Mastung belonging to Indian-sponsored Fitna al Hindustan. Weapons, ammunition and improvised explosive devices used by terrorists were also recovered from the terrorists.
Sanitization operations are being conducted to eliminate any other Indian sponsored terrorist found in the area. Relentless Counter Terrorism campaign under vision "Azm e Istehkam" (as approved by Federal Apex Committee on National Action Plan) by Security Forces and Law Enforcement Agencies of Pakistan will continue at full pace to wipe out menace of foreign sponsored and supported terrorism from the country.

US plans to announce nuclear agreement with Saudi Arabia

Trump administration to submit agreement to Congress but approval not needed for deal

AGENCIES

WASHINGTON: The United States plans to announce an agreement with Saudi Arabia on Wednesday that would give Riyadh a civilian nuclear programme, according to media reports, amid renewed fighting between the Gulf oil giant and Houthis in Yemen. Citing two unnamed US officials, the New York Times reported Tuesday the Trump administration plans to formally sign and announce the deal with the Saudis on Wednesday. President Donald Trump's administration said the deal will provide billions of dollars for the US nuclear industry. The Trump administration plans to submit to Congress in the coming days the pact with Saudi Arabia that does not include safeguards the US has said would stop materials being used in nuclear weapons programmes, two sources told Reuters. The sources said the administration will submit to Congress a document known as a 123 Agreement signed by US Energy Secretary Chris Wright and the Saudi Minister of Energy Abdulaziz bin Salman. The two signed a preliminary agreement in Riyadh last year.

Continued on Page 06

War against Iran has cost US $37.5bn so far

Hegseth says $37.5 billion included certain aspects of war

DNA

WASHINGTON: The cost of the United States' war in Iran has risen to $37.5 billion so far, US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said on Tuesday, as he faced skeptical lawmakers for the first time since heavy bombings resumed to seek urgent funding for the unpopular conflict. With just six months before midterm elections in which President Donald Trump's Republicans may face an uphill battle to keep their House of Representatives and Senate majorities, Democrats are riding high in public opinion polls as they attempt to link the unpopular Iran war with affordability.

Continued on Page 06

Bilawal unveils PPP's vision for AJK, pledges right to rule

Chairman Bilawal said it was deeply disappointing that neither its leadership nor its speakers addressed the controversy or distanced themselves from those remarks. Even today, he said, ministers are adamant on their damaging statements. If such individuals remain in the federal cabinet, despite these statements, it creates the impression that the federal government itself endorses those views

DNA

MIRPUR: Chairman Pakistan Peoples Party Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, addressing a mammoth election rally in Mirpur, Azad Jammu and Kashmir, said that Mirpur is like a second home to him. He said the relationship between the PPP and the people of Mirpur spans three generations, adding that he was proud to see a new generation of young Kashmiris ready to dedicate themselves to the cause of Kashmir and Pakistan. Chairman Bilawal said that, as Pakistan's youngest ever Foreign Minister and Chairman of the PPP, he had worked alongside the late Barrister Sultan, father of Yasir Sultan, who had himself worked closely with Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto. He said that it is now their responsibility to carry forward the mission of their elders. Likewise, he said, Qasim Majeed has worked alongside him, just as his father had worked alongside Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto. Chairman Bilawal expressed the hope that both candidates would continue serving the people of Kashmir together, united as brothers. Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari said that the upcoming election is among the most significant in Kashmir's history, as the future of the region depends upon the decision the people make. Addressing the people of Kashmir, he said his wish is for them to make a choice that secures a brighter future and reduces the hardships they face. He said Quaid-e-Awam Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto made historic decisions by giving Pakistan a unanimous, federal and truly Islamic Constitution, while also laying the foundations of the country's nuclear capability, the only one in the Muslim Ummah. Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto, he said, made history by defeating two dictators, and her achievements will forever be remembered. Chairman Bilawal said that it is now his generation's turn to leave its mark on history. He said he wants history to remember that Bilawal Bhutto Zardari secured the right to rule, the right to ownership, and the right to employment for the people of AJK. He noted that the people of Gilgit-Baltistan have already endorsed the same manifesto, and the PPP would honour every promise made to them. Chairman Bilawal pledged to ensure justice for both the people of Kashmir and the refugees if the PPP is entrusted with a two-thirds majority. However, he said, the question of the right to rule goes much deeper than the issue of the refugee seats. Since 1947, Kashmir has survived on promises rather than solutions. Quaid-e-Awam Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto had vowed to struggle for Kashmir for a thousand years if necessary, and the PPP remains committed to that promise.Turning to the party's second principle, Chairman Bilawal said the PPP firmly believes that the people are the rightful owners of their natural resources, whether in Sindh, Balochistan, Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa or Kashmir. The mountains, rivers and land belong to the people alone. Referring to the policies being pursued by Modi in Occupied Jammu and Kashmir, he said the PPP wants to make it absolutely clear that the ownership of Kashmir's resources rests solely with the Kashmiri people. On employment, Chairman Bilawal said the PPP is the only party with a proven record spanning three generations. Quaid-e-Awam Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto created employment opportunities not only within Pakistan but also across Europe and the Gulf, enabling generations of Pakistanis to build better futures abroad. Even today, he said, the people of Mirpur continue contributing to Pakistan's economy through remittances made possible by those initiatives. Chairman PPP said Kashmir needs a government that can guarantee its people the right to rule, ownership of their land, and employment opportunities for its youth. He urged party workers to take the PPP's manifesto to every household across Kashmir so that the people may secure the same rights enjoyed elsewhere in Pakistan. Chairman Bilawal said that differences of opinion strengthen democratic societies, and every citizen has the right to express their views. However, he said, the current situation in Kashmir is being handled in an inappropriate manner. Chairman PPP said he has directed the PPP President AJK to formally write to the Election Commission, questioning how a free and transparent election can take place when internet services remain suspended and digital election campaigns cannot be conducted. He said the PPP has consistently sought to improve the situation rather than inflame it. Unfortunately, he added, the irresponsible statements made by certain federal ministers have only worsened tensions. Referring to the PML-N rally held in Muzaffarabad a day earlier, Chairman Bilawal said it was deeply disappointing that neither its leadership nor its speakers addressed the controversy or distanced themselves from those remarks. Even today, he said, ministers are adamant on their damaging statements. If such individuals remain in the federal cabinet, despite these statements, it creates the impression that the federal government itself endorses those views. Since neither the former Prime Minister nor the current Chief Minister condemned those remarks during yesterday's rally, the PPP has every reason to believe they now represent official PML-N policy. Chairman Bilawal appealed to the people across every constituency of Kashmir to break with old political loyalties and vote for Kashmir by stamping the arrow. He said that before every election in AJK, the PML-N resorts to divisive rhetoric on Kashmir, whereas the PPP has always rejected the politics of hatred and division. They may believe they already have 12 seats in their pocket, he said, but the people will show them that Kashmir decides its own destiny. Chairman Bilawal said he travelled to Dadyal through Kahuta, and the roads there were certainly not paved with "milk and honey." He said that the PML-N behaves as though Raiwind alone represents Punjab, while ignoring the realities of Cholistan, Dera Ghazi Khan, Rajanpur, Vehari, Bhakkar and Potohar. Chairman PPP said the entire Kashmir awaits the decision the people of Mirpur will make. The people must decide whether they wish to secure greater rights for Kashmir or surrender those rights to the rulers of Raiwind. He urged the electorate to stamp the arrow if they believe in the right to rule, the right to ownership, and in defending the identity of Kashmir against those who seek to question it. Chairman Bilawal expressed confidence that, just as in GB, the PPP would emerge victorious in AJK. He urged the people to elect Yasir Sultan, Qasim Majeed, Sohaib Arshad and Afsar Shahid if they truly seek prosperity, progress and a stronger future for Kashmir.

CM Afridi vows terrorists' elimination

PESHAWAR: Chief Minister, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Muhammad Suhail Afridi on Wednesday strongly condemned the attack on tribal elder and Peace Committee member Haji Izzat Gul in Hangu, expressing profound grief over his martyrdom The Chief Minister extended heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family, stating that the attack was not only an assault on a respected tribal leader but also on peace, stability and tribal traditions. He described the incident as a cowardly act deserving the strongest condemnation. Afridi paid tribute to Haji Izzat Gul's valuable contributions to maintaining peace and combating terrorism, saying his sacrifices would always be remembered. He also acknowledged the remarkable role and sacrifices of tribal elders in the fight against terrorism, calling them unforgettable and worthy of the nation's respect. Reaffirming the government's resolve, the Chief Minister said terrorists would never succeed in their malicious designs and that the government, together with the public would continue efforts to eradicate terrorism completely. He also announced a Shaheed Package for the family of Haji Izzat Gul, assuring that the sacrifices of martyrs would not go in vain and that all possible measures would continue to ensure lasting peace across the province.–**APP**

Kalash community celebrates passage of Kalash Marriage Act

PESHAWAR: The passage of the Kalash Marriage Act by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly marks a historic milestone for Pakistan's only indigenous Kalash community. For the first time, the legislation provides a comprehensive legal framework governing marriage within the Kalash community, strengthening the protection of its unique culture, identity, family structure, and legal rights.

To commemorate this landmark achievement, a ceremony was held at the Speaker's Chamber of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly, where a delegation from the Kalash community, led by Wazir Zada Kalash, President of the Insaf Minority Wing Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and former Member of the Provincial Assembly, called on Speaker Babar Saleem Swati. The delegation included Stephen Kent, Country Director of Norwegian Aid, Sarmad Iqbal, Rizwan Ali, and Qamar Naseem, Chief Executive Officer of Blue Veins. Chief Whip of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly Akbar Ayub Khan, Secretary of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly Syed Waqar Shah, Principal Secretary to the Speaker Mian Sarir, and other officers were also present. During the ceremony, the delegation thanked Speaker Babar Saleem Swati and all the honourable Members of the Provincial Assembly for the unanimous support extended towards the approval of the Kalash Marriage Act. As a gesture of appreciation, members of the Kalash community cut a celebratory cake in honour of the Speaker and acknowledged the Assembly's significant role in the enactment of this historic legislation.–**APP**

ISLAMABAD: Fallowing the hundreds of fish were seen floating near Rawal Dam on 19 July 2026, Capital Development Authority (CDA) workers and volunteers take part in CDA's Rawal Lake Cleanses Drive, in the Federal Capital.

Kundi stresses investment-friendly environment

PESHAWAR: Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Karim Kundi on Tuesday said Pakistan's role on the global stage had become more significant than ever, urging stronger economic diplomacy, sustainable peace and an investment-friendly environment to unlock the country's economic potentialAddressing a conference titled "From Marka-e-Haq to Global Mediation, Diplomacy and Economic Opportunities" at the Governor House, he said the recent regional and international developments had demonstrated Pakistan's responsible conduct, diplomatic maturity and balanced approach. The conference was organized by the International Research Council for Religious Affairs in collaboration with the Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF). The Governor said Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif and Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir had played an effective role in advancing Pakistan's diplomatic engagement at the international level. He said Khyber Pakhtunkhwa served as a historic gateway connecting South Asia, Central Asia and the Middle East, adding that with effective planning the province could emerge as a major hub of regional trade, investment and connectivity. Kundi said the province possessed vast reserves of minerals, oil, gas, hydropower resources, precious stones and immense tourism potential. Establishment of oil refineries in the province, he added, would promote industrialization, create employment opportunities and help reduce unemployment. He termed economic diplomacy a key pillar of Pakistan's development, saying tourism, education, technology, cultural exchanges and trade could further strengthen the country's economy and international image. The Governor said overseas Pakistanis were the country's best ambassadors and could play a vital role in economic stability. He stressed the need to facilitate overseas Pakistanis, industrialists, businessmen and farmers, saying effective economic reforms could also reduce dependence on international financial institutions. He said the country's youth were its greatest asset and emphasized providing them with quality education, modern technology, technical skills and entrepreneurial opportunities. Kundi called for organizing similar academic and diplomatic forums in major world capitals, including Washington, Beijing, Brussels, Geneva, Vienna, Moscow and London, to project Pakistan's positive narrative more effectively. He also underscored the importance of providing one-window facilities and a conducive environment for investors, saying the prevailing law and order situation in the Dera Ismail Khan Daraban Economic Zone remained a major hurdle to investment.–**DNA**

Jaffar lauds role of Turbat varsity for ranking

QUETTA: Governor Balochistan Jaffar Khan Mandokhel on Tuesday said that the University of Turbat has emerged as a proud higher education institution in various respects He said that it is the only university in Pakistan where more than half of the total number of students are female, which is a powerful symbol of social change and educational progress. He expressed these views while presiding over the 10th Senate meeting of the University of Turbat. Provincial Education Minister Raheela Hameed Khan Durrani, Balochistan High Court Justice Sardar Ahmed Halimi, Turbat University Vice Chancellor Professor Dr Gul Hassan, Provincial Secretary Higher Education Saleh Baloch, Higher Education Commission Representative Dr Zahoor Bazai, Principal Secretary to Governor Balochistan Abdul Nasir Dotani, Pro Vice Chancellor Dr Kamal Ahmed, Dean Faculty Dr Abdul Saboor (Tamgha Imtiaz), Dean Faculty Dr Tahir Hakim, Registrar Gangozar Baloch, Director Riaz Ahmed and Director Ijaz-e-Ahmed, along with all Senate members were present on the occasion. The Governor said that another achievement that deserves praise is the remarkable progress of the university in ranking and scoring saying that it is encouraging that the next five-year plan of the University of Turbat is also very clear and it has increased its ranking and scoring performance to 91.4 percent, for which the credit went to the Vice Chancellor Prof. Dr. Gul Hassan and his entire team. He mentioned that however, this is not the final destination of success because excellence is a continuous process. Talking to the participants, Governor Balochistan said that it is necessary to clarify the constitutional and administrative position of the University Senate, the Senate enjoys the same status within the university as the cabinet enjoys in the government. It is the most legitimate decision-making body of the university, so whenever the Senate reaches a decision after due deliberation, the said decision becomes final and its implementation is mandatory. This institutional framework ensures transparency, accountability and continuity in our universities. Respect for the decisions of the Senate is in fact respect for the rule of law, institutional integrity and the collective wisdom of the academic community. Governor Mandokhel, in a message to the students of the University of Turbat, said that your greatest strength is your love of learning and bookishness. Continue your passion–**APP**

Call for autonomous LGs to fortify democracy

LAHORE: Speakers at a citizens' forum on local governance have called for restoration of constitutionally empowered and autonomous local governments (LGs), saying strong grassroots institutions are essential for strengthening democracy, improving public service delivery and increasing citizens' participation in decision-making. The Citizen Forum for the Restoration of Constitutional Local Governance, organised by HomeNet Pakistan in collaboration with AwazCDS-Pakistan at a local hotel, brought together lawmakers, former councillors, civil society representatives, legal experts, academics, governance practitioners, media professionals, youth leaders and development experts to discuss reforms for Pakistan's local government system. Participants stressed that political, administrative and financial autonomy for local governments was necessary to improve accountability, transparency and public participation, while enabling institutions to deliver essential services and support sustainable development. Delivering the keynote address, Ume Laila Azhar said inclusive and representative LGs were critical for ensuring the participation of women, home-based workers, marginalised communities and other citizens in governance processes. She said stronger local democracy could improve public services, promote social inclusion and contribute to sustainable community development.

Members of the Punjab Assembly Rukhsana Kausar and Sumbal Malik Hussain called for greater authority and resources for elected councillors so they could effectively address community-level challenges. They supported measures aimed at strengthening the role of union councils and other local institutions Former councillor Rukhsana Kausar said empowered local representatives were better positioned to resolve everyday civic issues such as sanitation, sewerage and gas supply. She added that women representatives often maintained close links with communities and had a better understanding of residents' concerns. Other speakers, including Farzana Abbas, Anwar Hussain, Ishtiaq Chaudhry, Arshid Mahmood Mirza, Salman Abid and Humera Aslam, called for decentralisation, evidence-based policymaking, regular local government elections and the transfer of political, administrative and financial powers to grassroots institutions. They also stressed the need for adequate financial resources for local governments, saying that without proper funding, elected institutions would remain unable to provide effective public services. The forum also launched the Citizen Forum, a multi-stakeholder platform that will work with parliamentarians, policymakers, political parties, civil society organisations, academia, media and development partners through research, policy dialogue and advocacy for constitutional, inclusive and accountable local governance. Participants called for greater representation of women, youth, persons with disabilities, workers, farmers, religious minorities and transgender persons in local government institutions. They said recommendations from the consultation would be shared with government bodies and lawmakers to support reforms for stronger and more effective local governance across Pakistan.–**APP**

Daily Islamabad POST
METROLITE
Thursday, July 23, 2026

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

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PIMS................9261170-79
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Shifa International 4603666

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Met Office..........9250360-6
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TMA......................5770886
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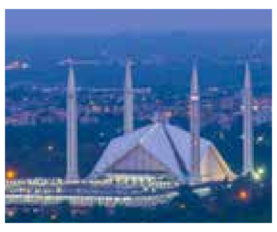

Islamabad Metropolitan

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

Water Tank

Islamabad......0321-5744480

ISSI-PAIDAR celebrating Egypt's revolution Day

Umeed-e-Sehar reiterated that Pakistan's fight against illicit trade requires consistent enforcement, evidence-based policymaking and constructive public discourse

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Centre for Afghanistan, Middle East & Africa (CAMEA) at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI), in collaboration with Pakistan Africa Institute for Development and Research (PAIDAR), organized an event to commemorate Egypt's Revolution Day. Ambassador Moin ul Haque, highlighted Egypt's rich civilizational heritage and its pivotal role in the Arab, African, and Islamic worlds. He underscored the longstanding Pakistan–Egypt friendship, founded on shared history, mutual respect, and close cooperation, while emphasizing Egypt's importance in Pakistan's 'Engage Africa' policy.. Dr. Ihab Abdelhamid Hassan described the 23 July 1952 Revolution as a defining milestone in Egypt's modern history that embodied the principles of national independence, sovereignty, and social justice. He noted that the Revolution also inspired liberation movements across the Arab world, Africa, and the Global South. Highlighting the longstanding and multifaceted Pakistan–Egypt partnership, he noted the growing momentum in bilateral relations through high-level exchanges and the successful 10th round of bilateral political consultations. Dr. Amina Khan in her remarks highlighted the significance of the 23 July 1952 Revolution as a defining milestone in Egypt's history. She underscored the longstanding Pakistan-Egypt friendship and their shared perspectives on regional issues. She also reaffirmed CAMEA's commitment to strengthening Pakistan's engagement with Africa through research and dialogue. Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed highlighted Egypt's central role in the Arab world and described it as the region's centre of gravity. He noted that Egypt was among the few countries visited by Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah. He said the 1952 Egyptian Revolution was a turning point that inspired nationalist movements across the Arab world and reaffirmed the strategic importance of Pakistan–Egypt relations. Ambassador Aamir Shoukat highlighted the enduring and multifaceted Pakistan–Egypt relationship, underlining the close political dialogue between the two countries and the recent revival of bilateral consultations. He praised Egypt's remarkable development and emphasized the importance of expanding cooperation in trade, investment, academic exchanges, and think tank collaboration. Ambassador Hamid Asghar Khan highlighted Egypt's unparalleled civilizational, cultural, and intellectual heritage, describing Cairo as a centre of history, learning, and religious diversity. In his concluding remarks, Ambassador Khalid Mahmood, highlighted the significance of Egypt's Revolution Day and emphasized Egypt's important role as an influential partner in promoting peace, security, and development. Misleading Narratives Should Not Distract from Pakistan's Fight Against Illicit Trade: Umeed-e-Sehar 22 July 2026: Umeed-e-Sehar has expressed concern over recent discussions in the Senate that sought to question the government's tobacco policy, warning that misleading narratives risk diverting attention from Pakistan's real challenge - the country's growing illicit economy. The organization said that these arguments have surfaced at a time when the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has significantly intensified enforcement against illicit trade, raising concerns that vested interests are attempting to undermine the government's crackdown on illegal businesses. The organization noted that while public debate is an important part of policymaking, discussions must remain evidence-based and should not inadvertently advance narratives that benefit illicit operators. At a time when enforcement agencies are making tangible progress against tax evasion and illegal trade, shifting the focus away from illicit markets only weakens national efforts to protect public revenues and strengthen Pakistan's documented economy. Umeed-e-Sehar observed that the FBR has substantially enhanced enforcement operations against illicit trade across multiple sectors, including tobacco, sugar, fertilizer and cement. According to official FBR data, authorities conducted 66 raids during May 2026, seizing more than 81.8 million illicit cigarette sticks, with an estimated duty and tax impact exceeding Rs.331 million. These actions reflect one of the strongest enforcement drives in recent years and demonstrate the government's commitment to dismantling the illicit economy. "It is unfortunate that misleading narratives are being promoted during discussions in the Senate at a time when Pakistan is witnessing one of its strongest enforcement drives against illicit trade", said Muhammad Jamil Arif, spokesperson for Umeed-e-Sehar.

Motorway Police seize non-custom paid cigarettes

ISLAMABAD: National Highways and Motorway Police (NHMP) on Wednesday foiled a major smuggling attempt and seized non-custom paid cigarettes worth approximately Rs2.2 billion during an operation near Chakri. According to an NHMP spokesperson, the operation was carried out on the basis of intelligence information, leading to the interception of 11 trucks transporting the contraband from Peshawar to Lahore. During the search, Motorway Police recovered a large quantity of non-custom paid cigarettes valued at around Rs2.2 billion and took 11 truck drivers into custody.–APP

ESCO notifies power suspension programme

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad Electric Supply Company (IESCO) on Wednesday issued a power suspension programme for Thursday in various areas of its region due to necessary maintenance and routine development work According to an IESCO spokesperson, in Islamabad Circle, electricity supply will remain suspended from 6 am to 10 am, Kurri, Rehara, CM Pak Zong, IT Park, feeders. In Rawalpindi Cantt Circle, power supply will remain suspended from 6 am to 10 am, LTC, New Mandra, Old Mandra, Hamid Jhangi, Old Rawat, New Rawat, AOWHS, Suparco, CWO, feeders. Similarly, in Jhelum Circle, power supply will remain suspended from 6 am to 10 am, Hayat Sir Road, Karyala, Metro City, Grand City, Bolani, feeders. In GSO Circle, power supply will remain suspended from 6 am to 1 pm, Cap. Nasir, Col. Akram, Mangla Cantt, Dina-3, Dina-4, from 09:00 am to 04:00 pm, 132kv AWC HMC Taxila and 132KV Sangjani-Burhan, from 08:00 am to 06:00 pm, 132KV Kahuta City- Palandri, 132KV New Wah-Bahtermore along with related earth switch, and surrounding areas.–APP

HEC holds workshop on future skills

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Higher Education Commission (HEC), Pakistan, organized the National Workshop on Quality Computing Education and Future Skills at HEC Secretariat, here, focusing on equipping students with future-ready IT skills and bridging the gap between higher education and market needs The workshop brought together distinguished policymakers, vice chancellors, academics, industry leaders, representatives of accreditation bodies, technology experts, and students to deliberate on enhancing the quality of computing education and equipping graduates with future-ready competencies aligned with national development priorities and the evolving demands of the global digital economy. Addressing the participants, Dr Niaz Ahmad Akhtar, Chairman, HEC, underscored that the future of Pakistan's digital economy depends on the provision of quality computing education. Referring to the Prime Minister's vision for digital transformation, he highlighted HEC's key initiatives aimed at strengthening computing education, including the implementation of the Computing Curriculum 2025, integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into academic programmes, promotion of Outcome-Based Education (OBE), and implementation of the National Skills Competency Test (NSCT) to enhance graduates' competencies, industry readiness, and employability. Delivering the welcome remarks, Prof. Dr Habib Bokhari, Member of Research, Development & Innovation, HEC, stated that the workshop was organized to raise awareness among students, parents, academia, and industry about the importance of quality computing education, emerging technologies, future-ready skills, and evolving career opportunities. He reaffirmed HEC's steadfast commitment to modernizing computing curricula, strengthening academia-industry collaboration, enhancing quality assurance mechanisms, and equipping graduates with the knowledge and competencies required to meet the demands of a rapidly evolving digital economy. The event was graced by Mr. Hassan Saqlain, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, as the Chief Guest. Senior officials from the Ministry of Information Technology & Telecommunication (MoITT), Pakistan Software Export Board (PSEB), Pakistan Software Houses Association (P@SHA), National Computing Education Accreditation Council (NCEAC), Virtual University of Pakistan, vice chancellors from universities, IT students from various higher education institutions, and representatives of HEC participated in the workshop. The workshop featured an interactive panel discussion moderated by Mr. Hidayatullah Kasi, Deputy Director (Curriculum), HEC. The panel comprised representatives from PSEB, P@SHA, NCEAC, members of the National Curriculum Review Committee (NCRC) for Computing, and HEC. The discussion focused on the skills demanded by the IT industry and the future workforce, aligning computing curricula with emerging technologies and evolving market needs, strengthening accreditation systems and quality assurance mechanisms, promoting faculty development, industry immersion, and collaborative research, and expanding industry-led internships, capstone projects, professional certifications, and other initiatives to enhance graduate employability. Representatives from academia and industry also shared valuable insights on bridging the gap between higher education and market requirements, particularly in the fields of artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, cloud computing, software engineering, data science, and digital innovation. They highlighted the need for continuous curriculum review, faculty capacity building, experiential learning, and stronger collaboration with the technology industry. At the conclusion of the event, shields of appreciation were presented to the Chief Guest, moderator, panelists, and other distinguished contributors in recognition of their valuable support and contributions to the success of the workshop. In addition, the top 17 achievers of the National Skills Competency Test (NSCT) 2026 were honored with shields and certificates of appreciation in recognition of their outstanding performance. The awards acknowledged their academic excellence and encouraged merit, innovation, and excellence in computing education.

PSW launches app to digitalize trade management

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Single Window (PSW) has officially launched its Mobile App as part of its continued commitment to enhancing digital access to cross-border trade facilitation services. The application is now available for download on both the Apple App Store and Google Play Store, extending the reach of the PSW platform by enabling the trading community to access essential trade services through a convenient and secure mobile experience, said press release here Wednesday. Designed to complement PSW's existing digital ecosystem, the Mobile App provides importers, exporters and customs clearing agents with a flexible and user-friendly platform to stay connected with their trade activities anytime, anywhere. Users can conveniently monitor declaration progress, track regulatory compliance activities, and receive real-time updates on customs clearance directly from their smartphones. Beyond status tracking, the application provides visibility into regulatory and financial certificates while enabling users to perform a range of time-sensitive actions and initiate system-based requests. These include declaration cancellation, dray-off requests, provincial cess exemption/waiver requests, bank guarantee release requests, and other operational services. The app also offers integrated payment management capabilities, allowing users to generate Payment Slip IDs (PSIDs), view paid and pending PSIDs, access payment details, and make payments through their linked Personal Deposit (PD) accounts. By providing single-point mobile access to critical trade information and transaction updates, the PSW Mobile App reduces dependence on desktop-based operations and empowers business executives, logistics managers and supply chain teams to oversee trade activities without geographical or workplace constraints Ready access to trade-related information enables stakeholders to respond promptly to regulatory requirements, complete pending actions in a timely manner, and improve operational planning, ultimately contributing to faster clearance of import consignments and export shipments. The application also strengthens engagement between PSW and the trading community by providing built-in channels for customer support Users can conveniently lodge complaints, submit feedback, and directly contact the PSW Call Centre through the app, ensuring quicker resolution of operational issues and improved service delivery. The launch of the PSW Mobile App marks another important milestone in Pakistan's digital trade transformation journey.–DNA

Sherry lauds security forces for eliminating 10 terrorists

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Vice President, Senator Sherry Rehman on Wednesday commended the security forces for successfully eliminating 10 terrorists and arresting two female suicide bombers during an intelligence-based operation in Balochistan In a statement issued here, she said the security forces had thwarted the nefarious designs of terrorists through their professionalism, bravery and timely action. "The entire nation salutes the sacrifices, courage and unwavering resolve of our security forces in the fight against terrorism," she added. Sherry Rehman emphasized that there was no room for terrorism or extremist elements on the soil of Pakistan, reaffirming the nation's commitment to eradicating the menace of extremism. She said the sacrifices rendered by the country's security forces in the fight against terrorism were a source of pride for the nation and would always be remembered with gratitude.–APP

PMD warns of high flood level in river Chenab

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD) Wednesday issued a high flood advisory for River Chenab, warning that high flood levels are expected to persist over the next six to eight hours before gradually receding as rainfall over the major catchments continues to decrease. According to the Flood Forecasting Division of the PMD, heavy rainfall observed over the River Chenab catchment, along with hydrometeorological conditions and Sialkot weather radar data, has resulted in high flood conditions. Although rainfall has now decreased across the major sub-catchments, river flows are expected to remain high for the next six to eight hours before gradually declining. The advisory said River Chenab at Marala is expected to remain at a high flood level during the next six to eight hours, while water levels are likely to recede gradually thereafter if the current rainfall trend continues. It added that Khanki and Qadirabad are also expected to attain high flood levels during the next 10 to 18 hours The PMD warned that riverine (Kacha) areas adjacent to the river may experience hazardous conditions and advised the public to minimize movement near riverbanks and flood-prone locations while high flows persist. It further cautioned that standing crops, fodder fields and livestock in low-lying floodplain areas may remain exposed to inundation until river levels begin to recede.–APP

Briefs

Pakistan, Iran agree to expand rail connectivity, trade coop

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Railways Muhammad Hanif Abbasi said on Wednesday that Pakistan and Iran have reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening bilateral relations, expanding railway cooperation and enhancing regional connectivity.

During a meeting with Iranian Interior Minister Eskandar Momeni, Hanif Abbasi welcomed him to Pakistan and said the visit was an important step towards further deepening the longstanding brotherly ties between the two neighbouring countries Iran's Ambassador to Pakistan, Dr. Reza Amiri Moghadam, also attended the meeting, said a news release. The minister paid tribute to the resilience, determination and steadfastness demonstrated by the Iranian nation, government and leadership during the recent crisis. Hanif Abbasi also expressed respect for Iran's Supreme Leader and paid homage to the innocent civilians who lost their lives during the crisis. The two leaders reaffirmed their resolve to further strengthen the religious, historical and cultural bonds between Pakistan and Iran and stressed the importance of promoting peace, stability, diplomatic engagement and mutual cooperation across the region. The meeting focused on expanding railway cooperation, improving cross-border connectivity and facilitating bilateral trade through enhanced rail links. Hanif Abbasi informed the delegation that work on the upgradation of Main Line-3 (ML-3) is expected to commence during the current fiscal year, with completion anticipated by December 2029.

He said ML-3 would serve as the principal railway corridor linking Pakistan and Iran and would significantly boost bilateral trade and regional connectivity upon completion The minister also appreciated the cooperation extended by the Iranian government and Iranian Railways in the restoration of the Zahedan-Taftan railway section. He said Taftan Railway Station had been designated as a customs clearance station at the request of Iranian Railways, a move that would facilitate cross-border freight movement and shunting operations. The two sides also discussed the revival of the Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul (ITI) freight train service to promote regional trade and connectivity.–APP

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Industries and Production, Haroon Akhtar Khan, attended the MOU signing ceremony between StarCharge Energy Pakistan and Bahum Global.

HEC holds national workshop on quality computing education

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Addressing the participants, Dr. Niaz Ahmad Akhtar, Chairman, HEC, underscored that the future of Pakistan's digital economy depends on the provision of quality computing education. Referring to the Prime Minister's vision for digital transformation, he highlighted HEC's key initiatives aimed at strengthening computing education, including the implementation of the Computing Curriculum 2025, integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into academic programmes, promotion of Outcome-Based Education (OBE), and implementation of the National Skills Competency Test (NSCT) to enhance graduates' competencies, industry readiness, and employability.

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Marri criticizes KP govt's rain preparedness

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Peoples Party Parliamentarians (PPPP) Central Spokesperson Shazia Marri on Wednesday criticised the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government over its handling of the aftermath of recent heavy rains, calling for immediate relief and compensation for affected families. In a statement, Marri said the recent rainfall had exposed shortcomings in the province's infrastructure, including roads, drainage systems and other civic facilities, causing hardship for residents. She said despite being in power for an extended period, the provincial government had failed to improve basic public infrastructure and services, blaming the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) government of prioritising political rhetoric over public welfare. The PPPP spokesperson also criticised the PTI's performance on governance and institutional matters, stating the party had failed to meet public expectations and had focused on political confrontation instead of addressing citizens' concerns. Expressing grief over the loss of lives in Peshawar and other parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa due to the recent rains, Marri extended condolences to the bereaved families and prayed for the recovery of those injured. She also expressed sympathy with families that suffered financial losses, saying the PPP stood with those affected during the difficult period.–APP

Tomato prices reach Rs 500 per kg

RAWALPINDI: Tomato prices have witnessed a sharp increase in Rawalpindi, reaching up to Rs 500 per kilogram in different markets of the city, causing concern among consumers. According to market sources, the increase in tomato prices is mainly due to reduced supply and a gap between demand and availability. The limited arrival of tomatoes in wholesale markets has resulted in a significant rise in prices at the retail level. Talking to APP, citizens said that tomatoes were available at around Rs200 per kilogram about two weeks ago, but the price had increased by nearly Rs300 within a short period, putting additional pressure on household budgets. Consumers said that tomatoes are an essential ingredient in daily cooking and the sudden increase in prices has made it difficult for many families, particularly those with limited incomes, to manage their kitchen expenses. –APP

Beyond kindness: Animal welfare as public responsibility

SYEDA AALEEN HUSSAIN

FOR a long time, animal welfare in Pakistan was viewed as a matter of personal kindness rather than public responsibility. It was associated with volunteer of feeding stray dogs or a passerby feeling sympathy for an overworked donkey on a hot afternoon. Compassion toward animals was often treated as a noble gesture, but not as a social priority.

That perception, however, is beginning to change. Across the country, more people are recognizing that protecting animals is not merely an act of charity; it is a reflection of our values as a society. How we treat the most vulnerable beings around us says a great deal about who we are. This change is increasingly visible in our laws, policies, and judicial decisions. Pakistan is gradually moving away from outdated and often cruel practices such as the mass poisoning and culling of stray dogs. Instead, animal welfare is finding a place within broader discussions of public health, environmental protection, and governance. Organizations such as Environmental and Animal Rights Consultants (EARC-Pakistan), co-founded by advocate Altamush Saeed, have played an important role in advancing these conversations and strengthening legal protections for animals. A recent Islamabad High Court judgement on the management of stray dogs in the Islamabad Capital Territory reflects this evolving approach. The Court emphasized that public safety and animal welfare must be pursued together rather than treated as competing interests. Rejecting indiscriminate poisoning, shooting, and mass culling, it directed authorities to adopt humane and scientifically recognized measures, including catch-neuter-vaccinate-release programmes, rabies prevention, responsible waste management, public awareness campaigns and stronger institutional oversight. Significantly, the Court observed that animals are sentient beings capable of suffering and that a civilized society must protect them from unnecessary cruelty. The judgment reflects a growing recognition that animal welfare is linked not only to compassion, but also to public health, environmental balance, and the values of a just society. Animal welfare is also gaining importance during times of crisis. In the past, livestock were often left behind during floods and other disasters, causing severe losses for farming communities. Today, initiatives such as Pakistan's first Disaster Zone Farm Animal Shelter are helping address this challenge. These efforts are guided by the "One Health, One Welfare" approach, a global paradigm promoted by organizations like the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization), WHO (World Health Organization) and WOAH (World Organisation for Animal Health) to unite human health, environmental protection, and animal welfare under a single policy framework. By doing so, they safeguard livelihoods, strengthen rural economies, and support food security. Yet policies and institutions alone cannot create a more humane society. Laws can punish cruelty, but they cannot teach compassion. That responsibility belongs to each of us, often through simple acts such as placing water outside during extreme heat, slowing down when animals cross the road, or speaking up against abuse. As Pakistan moves forward, its progress should be measured not only by roads, buildings, or economic indicators, but also by how it treats it's most vulnerable and voiceless inhabitants. Recognizing our responsibility toward animals is not simply good for them; it is essential for building a kinder and more civilized society.

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Government's daily petrol price adjustment sparks nationwide criticism

Ansar Mahmood Bhatti

THE government's recent decision to revise petrol prices daily has ignited a storm of criticism across Pakistan. Instead of stabilizing the economy or ensuring transparency, this policy has placed an unbearable burden on ordinary citizens, transporters, and businesses. The move is widely seen as impractical, unfair, Under the new mechanism, petroleum prices are adjusted every 24 hours. This means that consumers wake up each day uncertain about how much they will pay at the pump. For families already battling inflation, this unpredictability makes budgeting nearly impossible. Transporters, delivery services, and small businesses are particularly vulnerable, as fuel costs directly affect their daily operations.

Ordinary people feel that austerity measures are imposed only on them, while ministers, bureaucrats, and government officials continue to enjoy fuel quotas and perks without restrictions. If the government insists on daily adjustments for the public, critics argue that the same principle should apply to officials' fuel allowances. Why should the common man suffer daily fluctuations while the ruling elite remains insulated?

Pakistan presents a unique paradox: a nation run on IMF loans and foreign grants, yet its ruling elite lives in luxury. Politicians' lavish lifestyles convoys of expensive cars, extravagant residences, and unchecked privileges—paint a picture far removed from the hardships faced by the average citizen. This glaring gap between the haves and have-nots underscores the deep-rooted inequality. While the majority struggles to afford basic necessities, corruption continues to thrive across institutions. Not a single department is free from allegations of misuse of funds or abuse of power. The perception is clear: austerity is for the poor, while luxury remains the privilege of the powerful.

The policy has also provoked strong reactions from stakeholders. Petrol pump owners have threatened a nationwide strike, arguing that daily adjustments create logistical chaos and erode consumer trust. Transporters are preparing similar protests, warning that rising fuel costs will force them to increase fares, further burdening commuters.

In a country with a fragile economy, strikes of this scale could paralyze daily life. Supply chains, public transport, and essential services would all be disrupted. Pakistan simply cannot afford such instability at a time when its economy is already under severe strain.

Experts and citizens alike are urging the government to reconsider this policy. A more practical approach would be to revise fuel prices on a weekly or fortnightly basis. This would provide some predictability for households and businesses, while still allowing the government to respond to fluctuations in international oil markets.

Daily adjustments, on the other hand, only amplify uncertainty and frustration. They risk alienating the public further and could ignite widespread unrest.

At its core, this controversy highlights Pakistan's chronic governance issues. Policies are often designed without considering their impact on ordinary citizens. Meanwhile, the ruling elite remains shielded from the consequences of their decisions.

The government must recognize that economic reforms cannot succeed if they disproportionately target the poor while sparing the privileged. Transparency, accountability, and fairness are essential if Pakistan is to move beyond its cycle of debt, corruption, and inequality.

Citizens across the country have expressed anger and despair. For daily wage earners, even a small increase in petrol prices translates into higher transport costs, reduced income, and greater hardship. Students commuting to universities, workers traveling to factories, and families relying on public transport all feel the pinch.

The frustration is compounded by the perception that government officials remain untouched by these hardships. Their fuel quotas, luxury vehicles, and taxpayer-funded perks stand in stark contrast to the struggles of ordinary people.

The looming strikes by petrol pump owners and transporters could push the country into chaos. If fuel supplies are disrupted, the ripple effects will be felt across every sector—from agriculture to industry, from education to healthcare. A weak and struggling economy cannot withstand such shocks.

The government must act swiftly to prevent this crisis from escalating. Dialogue with stakeholders, revision of the pricing mechanism, and a fairer distribution of austerity measures are essential steps.

The daily petrol price adjustment policy has become a symbol of misplaced priorities. Instead of easing the burden on citizens, it has deepened their struggles. With strikes looming and public anger mounting, the government must act swiftly to revise this mechanism before the situation spirals out of control.

Xi's BRI, CPEC and the Enduring Pakistan–China Bond

Qamar Bashir

Energy projects became the financial and operational backbone of CPEC's first phase. Major plants at Sahiwal, Port Qasim and Hub, together with Thar coal, Karot hydropower, Suki Kinari hydropower and several wind and solar facilities, added substantial generation capacity to Pakistan's electricity system. According to the 2025 global BRI engagement assessment, Pakistan has received more than $41.5 billion in cumulative Chinese energy-sector engagement since 2013, the highest recorded for any BRI country under that dataset

PRESIDENT Xi Jinping's development vision extends beyond China's national transformation to a broader framework of international connectivity, cooperation and shared prosperity. This vision took institutional shape in 2013 with the launch of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), one of the largest international development and economic-cooperation programmes of the modern era. In Xi Jinping's Belt and Road Initiative seeks to address one of the greatest impediments confronting developing countries: inadequate infrastructure. Weak transportation networks, unreliable energy supplies, high logistics costs and limited digital connectivity have historically constrained investment, trade and industrialization across Asia, Africa, Europe and Latin America. By improving physical, commercial, financial and digital connectivity, the BRI aims to help participating countries expand trade, attract investment, create employment and accelerate modernization. The financial scale of the initiative demonstrates the breadth of President Xi's vision. The cumulative Chinese engagement in BRI countries between 2013 and 2025 reached approximately $1.399 trillion. This consisted of around $837 billion in construction contracts and $561 billion in non-financial investments.

The year 2025 alone recorded approximately $213.5 billion in Chinese BRI engagement, including $128.4 billion in construction contracts and $85.2 billion in investments. Energy-related engagement reached about $93.9 billion, while metals and mining accounted for approximately $32.6 billion and technology and manufacturing reached nearly $28.7 billion. The BRI now encompasses 150 participating countries and has expanded into the Digital Silk Road, Green Silk Road and Health Silk Road, together with cooperation in renewable energy, science, innovation, education and sustainable development.

For Pakistan, President Xi's global vision found its most consequential expression in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), widely regarded as a flagship project of the BRI. CPEC is also one of the six principal economic corridors envisioned under the initiative. Although commonly described as a network linking Kashgar in China's Xinjiang region with Gwadar on Pakistan's Arabian Sea coast, it is considerably broader. It covers transportation, energy, Gwadar Port, industrial cooperation, Special Economic Zones, agriculture, mining, digital connectivity, science, education, healthcare and socioeconomic development.

CPEC was initially announced in 2015 with projects worth approximately $46 billion, while its projected portfolio was subsequently reported to have expanded to around $62 billion. According to Pakistan's official CPEC Secretariat, approximately 43 projects worth about $25 billion have been completed, while nearly 9,000 megawatts of electricity-generation capacity have been added under the corridor. Major connectivity projects included the Havelian–Thakot section of the Karakoram Highway, the Multan–Sukkur Motorway, the Lahore Orange Line Metro Train and the cross-border optical-fibre cable connecting Khunjerab with Rawalpindi. These projects improved national connectivity, reduced travel times, facilitated freight movement and strengthened Pakistan's communications infrastructure.

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Gwadar occupies a central position in CPEC's long-term vision. The Eastbay Expressway has improved the port's connection with Pakistan's highway network, while the New Gwadar International Airport is intended to strengthen regional access. The Gwadar Free Zone and Smart Port City Master Plan provide foundations for future commercial, industrial and urban development.

Gwadar could eventually provide western China with a shorter potential route to the Arabian Sea and reduce dependence on longer maritime routes passing through the Strait of Malacca. However, this strategic possibility should not be mistaken for a fully operational alternative at present. It requires efficient port utilization, modern logistics, upgraded road and rail links, viable energy-transit infrastructure and sustained commercial demand.

Social projects—including the Pak-China Friendship Hospital, the Technical and Vocational Institute, desalination and drinking-water schemes, schools, fisheries assistance and community-development programmes—demonstrate that CPEC is gradually moving beyond physical infrastructure. Its ultimate test will be whether development produces visible employment, skills and business opportunities for the people of Gwadar and Balochistan.

CPEC 2.0 must therefore concentrate on industrialization and productive investment. Infrastructure creates opportunities, but factories create wealth. Special Economic Zones at Rashakai, Allama Iqbal Industrial City, Dhabeji and Bostan are intended to attract manufacturing, promote technology transfer, create employment and integrate Pakistan into regional and global supply chains. Their success will depend upon reliable energy, policy continuity, simplified regulations, skilled labour and an export-oriented strategy. Pakistan must encourage Chinese companies to establish manufacturing facilities and joint ventures rather than limiting cooperation to construction and imports. Greater local sourcing, technology transfer and participation by Pakistani small and medium-sized enterprises would distribute CPEC's benefits more widely.

Agriculture presents another promising frontier. Modern irrigation, improved seeds, mechanization, livestock development, food processing and cold-chain logistics could raise productivity, reduce post-harvest losses and increase rural incomes. Digital cooperation in artificial intelligence, cloud computing, e-commerce, smart cities and information technology could similarly help Pakistan's young population participate in the knowledge economy.

CPEC must consequently be treated not as an end in itself but as a platform for national transformation. This principle is consistent with the people-centred development philosophy presented in President Xi's Up and Out of Poverty: governments can create opportunities and improve infrastructure, but communities must build productive capacity and become active participants in development.

China's experience offers Pakistan several enduring lessons: policy continuity, disciplined implementation, capable institutions, accountability, investment in education and research, merit-based governance and sustained action against corruption. Above all, development must remain people-centred so that economic growth improves ordinary lives rather than enriching only a narrow section of society.

As Pakistan and China celebrate 75 years of diplomatic relations, established on 21 May 1951, their partnership remains one of the most enduring relationships in contemporary international affairs. It has survived wars, geopolitical realignments and leadership transitions because it rests upon mutual trust, sovereign equality and support for each other's core interests. CPEC-2.0 is aimed at extending beyond conventional infrastructure into renewable energy, artificial intelligence, biotechnology, climate resilience, advanced manufacturing, mineral processing, healthcare, higher education and scientific research. This would transform the relationship from one centred primarily on connectivity into a partnership driven by knowledge, innovation and productive capacity. For Pakistan, the most meaningful tribute to 75 years of friendship would go beyond commemorative ceremonies and official declarations. It would be a national commitment to policy continuity, institutional reform, human-capital development and disciplined implementation. By combining China's cooperation with Pakistan's own resolve, CPEC can transform its estimated $62 billion vision into a sustainable pathway towards industrial strength, regional connectivity and shared prosperity.

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

Rise, Reign and Reminder

Muhammad Mohsin Iqbal

Messi's World Cup story gleams even brighter in its culmination. With twenty-one goals, the highest total in the competition's history, and numerous assists, he inspired Argentina to triumph in 2022. In 2026, the Albiceleste fought their way to the final once more, only to suffer a narrow 1-0 defeat to Spain after extra time. Messi's eight goals in that campaign, crowned by a hat-trick...

IN this boundless universe, every rise save that of Almighty Allah, the Most High, carries within it the seed of its own fall. This profound truth, as old as creation itself, has once more been revealed to the watching eyes of humanity during the recently concluded Football World Cup. The planet's finest talents converged upon the grand stage, their skills dazzling millions and earning fervent admiration from supporters across every continent. Among them all, two luminous figures stood pre-eminent; Cristiano Ronaldo of Portugal and Lionel Messi of Argentina. For more than fifteen years these extraordinary athletes have reigned supreme, their legendary rivalry illuminating the beautiful game with unmatched brilliance. Both had scaled the loftiest peaks of sporting glory, yet both departed their final matches in this tournament with eyes dimmed by sorrow and hearts burdened by the sting of defeat.

Cristiano Ronaldo, born in 1985, and Lionel Messi, born in 1987, represent the pinnacle of modern football. Ronaldo embodies athletic perfection—explosive pace, powerful heading, deadly accuracy from penalties and distance, and a versatility that allowed him to conquer multiple leagues with distinction. His career spans Sporting CP, two spells at Manchester United, glorious years at Real Madrid, Juventus, and now Al-Nassr, where he continues to defy time.

With well over 1,300 senior appearances and nearly 970 official goals, he stands as the all-time leading scorer in men's football history. His record of 146 international goals for Portugal and 140 in the Champions League underscores a hunger for victory that few have matched.

Messi, meanwhile, enchants with an almost otherworldly mastery of the ball. His close control, visionary passing, free-kick artistry, and ability to orchestrate play from deep positions have produced over 910 senior goals and a staggering tally of assists, often leading creative statistics even in the twilight of his career. Primarily loyal to Barcelona before moves to PSG and Inter Miami, he has dominated wherever he has played. Both men have graced six World Cups between 2006 and 2026. Ronaldo scored in every single tournament—a singular achievement—netting eleven goals across his appearances and guiding Portugal to a best finish of fourth place in 2006. In 2026, Portugal reached the round of sixteen before falling to Spain; Ronaldo contributed three goals in what proved his farewell to the global stage.

Messi's World Cup story gleams even brighter in its culmination. With twenty-one goals, the highest total in the competition's history, and numerous assists, he inspired Argentina to triumph in 2022. In 2026, the Albiceleste fought their way to the final once more, only to suffer a narrow 1-0 defeat to Spain after extra time. Messi's eight goals in that campaign, crowned by a hat-trick, added fresh chapters to his record of thirty-plus appearances and indelible influence.

Their rivalry has enriched football immeasurably. Ronaldo's raw power and longevity give him the edge in total goals and appearances, while Messi frequently surpasses in efficiency, dribbles completed, and sheer creative impact. In big moments and knockout ties, both have delivered memories that will endure for generations. Yet beyond the statistics lies something deeper. Ronaldo has long been the more open and engaging with fans and the public—his warmth, ready smile, and visible affection winning him a special place in the collective heart. Messi, more reserved and introspective, allows his sublime talent to speak for him. In victory and in adversity alike, Ronaldo's softened manner at the height of his fame reveals a truth often overlooked; true greatness is measured not only by trophies but by humility and love for one's fellow man. Fortune has smiled upon both off the pitch as well. Through prodigious salaries, lifetime endorsement deals with Nike and Adidas, and successful business ventures, each stands among the wealthiest in their profession. Ronaldo's net worth approaches 1.4 billion dollars, bolstered by the expansive CR7 brand—luxury hotels such as the Pestana CR7, gyms, fashion lines, fragrances, and more—alongside a fleet of supercars, private jet, and one of the richest club contracts ever signed.

Messi's fortune, estimated near 1.1 billion, includes the MiM Hotels, his beverage brand, retail stores, substantial real estate holdings in Barcelona and Miami, and equity in Inter Miami. Their philanthropy matches their success. Ronaldo has given millions to hospitals during the pandemic, cancer centres, children's surgery, and disaster victims, often donating blood and auctioning personal items. Messi's foundation focuses on education and opportunity for underprivileged youth, while he too has supported hospitals, UNICEF initiatives, and humanitarian causes in Argentina and beyond. Both have quietly and publicly channelled tens of millions toward uplifting others.

As the curtain falls on another World Cup, Ronaldo and Messi depart the international arena not as diminished men, but as titans whose rises illuminated an era. Their final defeats remind us that earthly crowns are transient. In Ronaldo especially, whose open heart and gracious bearing endeared him even at the summit of his powers, we see the grace that endures beyond victory. In this universe, all must one day descend—yet the memory of such spirits, and the lessons they impart, linger long after the final whistle.

How a 64-team World Cup could transform soccer's economics

But the financial implications could prove even more significant. By making qualification easier for many of the game's biggest nations, a 64-team tournament could reduce the commercial value of qualifying competitions while increasing the importance of FIFA's own flagship event

DALLAS: The first 48-team World Cup has barely finished, but Gianni Infantino has already acknowledged the possibility that soccer's biggest tournament could one day grow larger still, a move that could fundamentally alter the economics of the sport.

Speaking to Swiss television during the tournament, the FIFA president said a 64-team World Cup was among the ideas that could be examined once the finals were over, reopening debate over how large the game's showpiece event can realistically become. The logistical implications of another expansion are obvious. A bigger tournament would require more stadiums, more hotels, more transport and, most likely, more time.

But the financial implications could prove even more significant. By making qualification easier for many of the game's biggest nations, a 64-team tournament could reduce the commercial value of qualifying competitions while increasing the importance of FIFA's own flagship event.

If broadcasters place less value on qualifying campaigns, soccer's six regional confederations could become increasingly dependent on FIFA's own distributions, potentially shifting more financial influence — and power — toward the global governing body. "I don't think it's a good idea for the World Cup itself, and it's not a good idea for our qualifiers either. So I'm not supporting that idea," UEFA President Aleksander Ceferin said last year. The European governing body's position has not changed since then.

Asian Football Confederation President Sheikh Salman bin Ibrahim Al Khalifa has also voiced opposition, questioning last year whether further expansion might end. FIFA did not reply to requests for comment.

"I think it is important that when you want to organize a World Cup, you do it for the whole world — not just Europe and South America," Infantino said when discussing the idea of an expanded tournament. "If you don't give smaller countries a chance to participate in the World Cup, they'll lack the incentive to keep improving."

CHALLENGES ON AN ENTIRELY DIFFERENT SCALE: The 2026 tournament in Canada, Mexico and the United States was the first since 1998 to move away from the 32-team format, expanding to 48 nations and 104 matches over more than five weeks. If the competition retained the same basic structure, with four-team groups followed by a 32-team knockout stage, a 64-team World Cup would comprise 128 matches – 24 more than in 2026 and double the total staged under the old 32-team format.

Unless FIFA compressed the schedule or staged more games simultaneously, that could add roughly another week to a tournament already lasting more than five weeks. Plans are in place for Spain, Portugal and Morocco to stage most of the 2030 finals, with Uruguay, Argentina and Paraguay each hosting a single opening-round match to mark the tournament's centenary. Accommodating 64 teams across six host nations presents a formidable organizational challenge. Doing so in a single country could prove even more demanding.

Saudi Arabia, due to host the tournament alone in 2034, already faces significant scheduling questions. Ramadan is expected to begin in mid-November that year, making the November-December window used for the 2022 World Cup in neighboring Qatar difficult to replicate and potentially forcing another unprecedented reshaping of the global football calendar.

A 64-team tournament would magnify those challenges, requiring more stadiums, training facilities, hotels, transport capacity and volunteers while placing additional pressure on infrastructure in a country still developing its tourism industry.

The Saudis have proposed 15 venues for the existing 48-team format, with eight stadiums in Riyadh, four in Jeddah and others in Khobar, Neom, and Abha. Construction and renovation work is already under way ahead of the 2027 Asian Cup.

DOMESTIC PRESSURE: An expanded World Cup would also place greater strain on an already congested international calendar and increase pressure on domestic leagues, many of which have aligned themselves with Europe's traditional August-to-May season. Japan's J-League is about to begin its first August-to-May campaign, while US Major League Soccer plans a similar switch from next year.

Any future winter World Cup would therefore disrupt an ever-growing number of competitions rather than primarily Europe's major leagues, as was the case in 2022. World Cups can be costly for national federations, even rich ones like France. The French Football Federation had been expecting to spend 24.5 million euros ($28 million) at this year's World Cup, with federation president Philippe Diallo saying Les Bleus would probably need to at least reach the semifinals not to lose money.

At the April FIFA Congress in Vancouver, Diallo said FIFA needed to provide greater financial support to participating nations. If a 48-team tournament is already stretching the finances of participating federations, a longer 64-team event could increase those costs further.

Player welfare concerns would also intensify, with more matches adding to the workload of elite players. A 64-team tournament would give more nations access to football's biggest stage but could also reignite debate over competitive balance, tournament length, fan costs and whether the World Cup risks losing some of the exclusivity that has long underpinned its appeal. Whether the idea progresses beyond discussion may depend in part on how the first 48-team World Cup is ultimately judged. –APP

World Cup final draws record 63 million US viewers, signals soccer's mainstream moment

NEARLY 63 million Americans tuned in to watch Spain beat Argentina in the Fifa World Cup final on Sunday, shattering viewership records and underscoring soccer's growing appeal in the US after decades of efforts to broaden its audience.

Held in New Jersey, the final remained scoreless until Spain broke through in the 106th minute to secure a 1-0 victory. Fox's English-language broadcast attracted 38.9 million viewers, while Comcast's Telemundo and its Peacock streaming platform pulled in another 23.9 million viewers for the Spanish-language coverage, the companies said. The combined audience far exceeded the 22.3 million US viewers who watched the 2022 World Cup final in Qatar.

The strong viewership capped what analysts said was a solid run for the tournament's broadcasters, with Fox and Comcast paying roughly $485 million and $600 million, respectively, for rights packages that included the World Cup, according to media reports.

Several knockout-stage matches also outperformed recent championship games in other major US sports. The Round of 16 meeting between England and Mexico drew nearly 45 million viewers, well above the roughly 27 million who watched Game 7 of Major League Baseball's World Series, when the Los Angeles Dodgers beat the Toronto Blue Jays in extra innings, and the nearly 25 million who tuned in for Game 5 of the NBA Finals, where the New York Knicks ended a 53-year title drought by defeating the San Antonio Spurs.

While the figures remained below the nearly 126 million viewers who watched Super Bowl LX, when the Seattle Seahawks defeated the New England Patriots, they marked a significant milestone for a sport long overshadowed in the US by American football, basketball and baseball.

The tournament, co-hosted by the US, Canada and Mexico for the first time, benefited from prime-time kickoff slots for American audiences. Fans were also drawn by what could be the final World Cup appearances of a generation's biggest stars, including Argentina's Lionel Messi and his long-time Portuguese rival Cristiano Ronaldo. The last time the US hosted the tournament was in 1994. Fox One, which had the English-language streaming rights in the US, recorded 2.8 million sign-ups in June. – APP

Pak, Xizang to cooperate in climate action and mountain ecology

BEIJING: Pakistan's Federal Minister for Climate Change and Environmental Coordination, Dr. Musadik Masood Malik, met with Xu Zhitao, Vice Chairman of Xizang Autonomous Region, on the sidelines of the 5th China-Xizang Trans-Himalaya Forum for International Cooperation, with both sides agreeing to expand collaboration in environmental protection and sustainable development. Welcoming the Pakistani delegation, the Vice Chairman briefed the minister on Xizang's history, economic progress, and cultural heritage, highlighting a development model built around ecological conservation. He noted that the region, home to 47 national parks, has witnessed remarkable socio-economic transformation in recent decades while keeping environmental protection at the heart of its development strategy. He also pointed to Xizang's cultural and religious diversity, including the historical presence of a small Muslim community of Kashmiri origin. Dr. Malik thanked his host for the warm hospitality and reaffirmed the Strategic Cooperative Partnership between Pakistan and China. He observed that Pakistan and Xizang share similar mountain ecosystems and stand to gain significantly from knowledge-sharing and institutional partnerships. – APP

China-Pakistan corn partnership vital for Food Security: Experts

The conference underlined that with official market clearance in place and joint research initiatives expanding, China-Pakistan corn cooperation stands as a key anchor of the agricultural agenda under CPEC framework

BEIJING: Highlighting the deepening agricultural cooperation between China and Pakistan, foreign and Chinese researchers gathered here to stress the pivotal role of bilateral partnerships in expanding corn production, seed technological innovation, and cross-border grain trade.

The exchange took place during the 2026 Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei Fresh Edible Corn Industry Development Conference, held alongside the Sino-Foreign Fresh Edible Corn Technical Exchange and Industrial Cooperation Seminar and the 12th Beijing Fresh Edible Corn Festival in Tongzhou District, Beijing, CEN reported. Delivering a presentation titled "Resource Dilemma and Livelihood Evolution of Pakistan's Maize Industry," Prof. Audil Rashid Dean of Science and Chairperson of Department of Botany at the University of Gujrat, Pakistan, emphasized that expanding technical and trade linkages with China offers a vital path forward for rural farmers. Prof. Rashid noted that the bilateral agricultural relationship has entered an accelerated phase following the execution of the official trade agreement.

With both governments having signed the phytosanitary protocol and Chinese customs (GACC) granting access for Pakistani corn shipments local producers now possess a clear regulatory gateway to supply the vast Chinese market. He highlighted that while Pakistan maintains substantial production capacity in field maize, joint ventures with Chinese institutes in high-value fresh edible varieties such as sweet and baby corn can enhance farm income and rural livelihoods. Outlining China's recent breakthroughs in crop research, Lu Baishan, senior researcher at the Maize Research Institute under BAAFS, presented on "Fresh Edible Corn Technological Innovation and New Variety Breeding." Lu showcased how innovations in elite germplasm selection, stress resilience, and post-harvest quality retention are driving high-yield production. He affirmed that Chinese scientific institutions remain committed to exchanging technical expertise, modern breeding protocols, and resilient crop varieties with international partners like Pakistan to support sustainable regional agriculture. – APP

Petrol pump owners defer nationwide...

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resolved within the next two weeks. APPPOA Information Secretary Nadeem Khan said the strike call was deferred after the government assured stakeholders that their demands would be met. He added that pump owners expected the issue of commissions to be settled within two weeks and added that the daily fuel pricing mechanism would be operated on a trial basis during the same period. Addressing the press conference, Malik said the government had assured petrol pump owners and dealers that their concerns would be addressed within two weeks, adding that further consultations would be held if outstanding issues remained unresolved. He said a summary on the proposed adjustment in dealers' margins would be submitted to the federal cabinet, while the daily fuel pricing mechanism would be reviewed with petroleum sector organisations after the trial period.

The minister said the government wanted to ensure transparency in the pricing system and avoid any perception of unjustified profiteering. He noted that fuel prices had moved in line with international market trends and said any benefit generated under the existing pricing formula would be passed on to consumers promptly and transparently. Malik said the government had provided targeted subsidies worth billions of rupees since February 28 and developed a targeted subsidy mechanism to support consumers. He also acknowledged the role of petroleum dealers and other stakeholders in helping implement the system transparently.

Pakistani Scholars strengthen horticultural expertise at Summer School in China

WUHAN: The 2026 International Summer School on Horticultural Plant Biology concluded at Huazhong Agricultural University (HZAU), Wuhan, China, bringing together over 50 students and scholars from Pakistan, Australia, the United Kingdom, the United Arab Emirates, and China for a two-week program of academic exchange and cultural immersion.

It was jointly organized by the China Scholarship Council (CSC) and the China Education Association for International Exchange (CEAIE), and co-hosted by the National Key Laboratory for Germplasm Innovation and Utilization of Horticultural Crops, the College of Horticulture & Forestry Sciences, and the Department of International Cooperation and Exchanges at HZAU.

The summer school focused on cutting-edge frontiers in horticultural plant biology, according to a report carried by Gwadar Pro. The academic program featured nine specialized lectures covering research frontiers such as plant epigenetics and chromatin remodeling, photosynthesis and chloroplast development, and plant small RNAs.

Participants were then divided into groups for six hands-on laboratory exercises to gain hands-on experience in citrus developmental biology, plant cell-to-cell communication, and tomato molecular marker development. Beyond the laboratory, attendees visited agricultural technology companies for industry inspections to observe modern agricultural innovation and technology commercialization. Cultural excursions to the Hubei Provincial Museum and the Yellow Crane Tower, as well as workshops on traditional Chinese flower arranging, paper cutting and tea ceremonies, provided participants with an in-depth immersion into Chinese heritage. During the closing ceremony, certificates were presented to all participants by university officials.

Shoaib Munir, Ph.D., Associate Professor at HZAU and a native of Pakistan, who served as coordinator of the event, highlighted the significance of the program for the modernization of the horticulture sector in Pakistan. "Such training exposes young researchers to advanced technologies, global research trends, and new approaches for sustainable agriculture. The participation of Pakistani scholars highlights the global potential of Pakistani talent."

Hassan Bin Munir, a Ph.D. scholar from PMAS Arid Agriculture University Rawalpindi with expertise in controlled environment agriculture attended the summer school to enhance his knowledge of conservation horticulture, plant biology and advanced research techniques.

He noted that sessions on plant stress physiology and modern molecular approaches to horticultural crops were particularly valuable to him, as were laboratory exercises demonstrating how modern technologies can be integrated into horticultural research. "Through the lectures, laboratory sessions, and discussions with experts, I gained insights into genome editing, molecular markers, genomic technologies, and their practical applications in crop improvement," he explained. "These experiences are directly relevant to my work in hydroponics and controlled environment agriculture and will help improve research and production practices."

Arsalan Ishaque, a Ph.D. student in Plant Breeding and Genetics at Universiti Putra Malaysia and originally from Balochistan, Pakistan, attended the summer school as his first visit to China. "It was way beyond expectations," Ishaque shared. "China has truly emerged as a global superpower, which reflects in its technological advancements. Latest techniques and novel research methodologies were shared in the lectures, especially on the development of citrus fruits."

He participated in laboratory training sessions at a molecular cell biology Lab, where he had the opportunity to observe live cell models using confocal microscopy.

"It was a wonderful experience to see live cell models using confocal microscopy, leading to innovations at the molecular level. I came to China to learn the modern techniques being used in the field of plant sciences, and it helped me to imbibe the latest nuances." – APP

Briefs

Pakistan strongly condemns...

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the "brotherly Kingdom of Saudi Arabia." While maintaining a strong stance on defending its own interests, Pakistan reaffirmed its commitment to dialogue, diplomacy, and regional de-escalation. The government urged all parties to respect international law and ensure the safety and security of international maritime shipping. It may be mentioned here that Iran had asked Houthis to block Saudi Arabia shipping route. In return the Houthis had promised to entertain the Iranian request.

Saudi Arabia takes up Red Sea issue...

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had imposed a maritime blockade on the Kingdom, and accused the Houthis of dragging Yemen into the wider regional conflict. Houthi attacks on international commercial shipping in the Red Sea have worsened the situation of the Yemeni people by limiting their ability to travel and causing economic conditions in areas controlled by the armed group to deteriorate, the ministry added. The Kingdom called on the international community to fulfill its responsibilities regarding the implementation of Security Council resolutions, foremost among these Resolution 2216 on Yemen itself, and Resolution 2722 on the rights and freedom of navigation in the Red Sea.

US plans to announce nuclear...

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A provision in the deal, which would last 30 years, would have American companies build a uranium enrichment facility in Saudi Arabia if a joint study determined it warranted, the Wall Street Journal reported. But some US lawmakers from both parties and Israeli officials have voiced opposition to a civilian nuclear project for Saudi Arabia, over fears it could be converted to eventually develop nuclear weapons. With renewed fighting between the United States and Iran, Houthis threatened to expand the war this week, announcing they would blockade Saudi ports. Saudi Arabia and the Houthis traded fire last week for the first time in years, threatening a 2022 truce, but the rebels have largely remained on the sidelines since Israel and the United States attacked Iran in late February.

War against Iran has cost US...

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Hegseth told lawmakers at a hearing in Washington that the $37.5 billion included certain aspects of the war as well as anticipated costs through September 30. It was unclear how the Pentagon arrived at the figure. A source told Reuters in March thatTrump's administration estimated the first six days of the war had cost at least $11.3 billion. Trump asked Congress last month for nearly $90 billion in additional funding, most of it related to the Iran conflict, setting the stage for another fight with lawmakers frustrated with the war and facing the November midterms. Both Republican and Democratic lawmakers have complained since the US and Israel began bombing Iran on February 28 that Trump and his team have not kept them informed about the conflict or his plans. "The president is threatening escalation and war crimes, and suggesting this could be another forever war," Senator Patty Murray, the top Democrat on the Appropriations Committee, said at the hearing. Trump has repeatedly issued severe threats against Iran, including against civilian infrastructure, which critics say would be a war crime. Trump's Republicans hold such slim margins in House and Senate that appropriations bills typically need Democratic support to pass.

Pakistan seeks alternative crude oil sources

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the country's oil refineries, the federal minister for petroleum and natural resources briefed industry representatives on the evolving regional security situation arising from the renewed conflict involving the United States, Iran and the Houthis. The minister directed refinery managements to immediately identify alternative sources of crude oil to ensure uninterrupted supplies to Pakistan, top officials who attended the meeting told The News. Following the meeting, refineries began contacting international trading companies to assess the availability of crude oil from the United States, Singapore and Nigeria and Central Asian States. These markets are being explored as alternative supply sources because shipments from these locations can bypass the Strait of Hormuz. Imports from Oman's ports are also being evaluated, although industry officials consider this option relatively risky under the circumstances.

Trump threatens to target Iran bridges

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US Central Command (Centcom) said the wave of strikes were "designed to continue degrading Iran's ability to threaten commercial shipping" in the Strait of Hormuz. Iranian state media reported that air defences were activated in the capital Tehran. Explosions were also reported in the north-western city of Tabriz, the south-eastern ports of Chabahar and Konarak, and in the southern city of Bushehr, home to Iran's only nuclear power plant. Iran, which has retaliated against the US and its Middle East allies, warned of reprisals after Trump said the US would soon hit an underground nuclear site near Natanz. Iran and the US agreed a ceasefire in April, but hostilities resumed last week as both countries battled over control of the vital Strait of Hormuz waterway. Centcom said US forces had targeted Iranian military operations centres, maritime capabilities, aircraft hangars, drone storage facilities, and military logistics infrastructure.It also accused Iran of attacking "more than 30 commercial vessels" passing through the Strait of Hormuz over the past three months. "The unwarranted attacks have endangered hundreds of innocent mariners and undermined freedom of navigation," it said, adding the waterway remained "open for commercial vessel transit". Kuwait's army said on Wednesday that its air defences had engaged with drone attacks from Iran, while Bahrain and Jordan said they had also intercepted drone and missile strikes.

PML N seeking Constitutional...

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a citizen of Raiwind who has served as prime minister three times to also become the premier of AJK." The PML-N wanted to amend the Constitution to pave the way for Pakistan's prime minister to appoint the AJK premier, Bilawal added. he PPP leader's remarks came a day after PML-N President Nawaz Sharif, on a lighter note, had said he would ask Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to make him the prime minister of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) if the party won the upcoming elections. Elections for the AJK Legislative Assembly is slated to be held in three phases, starting from July 27. According to AJK Chief Election Commissioner Ghulam Mustafa Mughal, Mirpur Division will vote first on July 27, Muzaffarabad Division on August 2 and Poonch Division on August 10. Addressing the election rally, the PPP leader said: "This election in AJK is not a general election but perhaps the most important election in history. The future of AJK is linked to the polls."

PEMRA awards FM Radio license to ICCI

Sardar Tahir highlighted ICCI's sustained efforts to facilitate policy reforms, improve the investment climate, strengthen public-private dialogue, and create a more business-friendly environment that supports sustainable economic growth

DNA

ISLAMABAD: In a major milestone for Pakistan's business community, the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) has been granted an FM Radio Licence by the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA), paving the way for the country's premier business chamber to launch its own radio platform dedicated to promoting entrepreneurship, investment, economic awareness, and ease of doing business The Licence was formally presented to ICCI President Sardar Tahir Mehmood by Chairperson PEMRA, Ms. Ambreen Jan, at the PEMRA Headquarters. Executive Director General PEMRA, Wakil Khan, Director General Faqir Afzal Khan Deputy Director Hassan Durrani were also present on the occasion. Chairperson PEMRA congratulated the ICCI leadership on securing the FM Radio Licence and appreciated the Chamber's contributions towards promoting economic development and supporting the business community. She expressed confidence that the ICCI FM Radio would emerge as a vibrant and credible platform for disseminating authentic business information, promoting entrepreneurship, encouraging investment, and fostering constructive dialogue on issues vital to Pakistan's economy. She noted that the initiative would play a meaningful role in facilitating businesses and contributing to the country's economic prosperity. Sardar Tahir Mehmood termed the award of the FM Radio Licence a historic achievement for ICCI, saying it reflects the Chamber's commitment to adopting modern communication tools to better serve entrepreneurs, SMEs, exporters, investors, and the wider business community. He said the FM Radio would broadcast informative programmes on trade, industry, taxation, investment opportunities, entrepreneurship, innovation, technology, skills development, and government policies, while providing a credible platform to highlight the concerns and aspirations of the private sector. He highlighted ICCI's sustained efforts to facilitate policy reforms, improve the investment climate, strengthen public-private dialogue, and create a more business-friendly environment that supports sustainable economic growth. Secretary General Ghulam Murtaza also shared his views on leveraging the FM Radio to enhance awareness, facilitate timely dissemination of business information, and connect entrepreneurs with relevant stakeholders and institutions. Meanwhile, business leaders from across the country, particularly from Islamabad, congratulated ICCI President Sardar Tahir Mehmood and his entire team on this momentous achievement, expressing confidence that the platform would effectively amplify the voice of the business community and make a meaningful contribution to Pakistan's sustainable economic growth.

Briefs

Gold prices surge by Rs 4,600 per tola

ISLAMABAD: The prices of gold witnessed a significant increase in the local market on Wednesday, with 24-karat gold per tola gaining Rs4,600 to settle at Rs433,836, according to rates issued by the All Pakistan Sarafa Gems and Jewellers Association.
Similarly, the price of 10 grams of 24-karat gold increased by Rs3,944 to Rs371,944, whereas 10 grams of 22-karat gold rose by Rs3,615 to Rs340,961.
In the international market, the price of gold increased by $46 to $4,114 per ounce.
Meanwhile, the price of silver per tola increased by Rs7 to Rs6,403, while the price of 10 grams of silver rose by Rs6 to Rs5,489.
The price of silver in the international market also increased by $0.07 to $59.24 per ounce, the association reported.–APP

PSX turns bearish, sheds over 1,703 points

ISLAMABAD: The benchmark KSE-100 Index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) turned around to bearish trend on Wednesday, losing 1,703.64 points, a negative change of 0.97 percent, to close at 174,429.93 points against 176,133.57 points recorded on the previous trading day.
During the session, the ready market recorded a trading volume of 695.697 million shares with a traded value of Rs25.404 billion, compared to 1.003 billion shares valuing Rs35.702 billion in the previous session. The market capitalization stood at Rs19.626 trillion, down from Rs19.790 trillion a day earlier Out of 493 active companies in the ready market, 108 advanced, 353 declined, and 32 remained unchanged.
Trust Brokerage led the volume chart with 134.167 million shares, followed by Cnergyico PK with 99.431 million shares and TPL Properties with 49.826 million shares. The top gainers included The Thal Industries Corporation Limited, which surged by Rs95.31 to close at Rs1,048.37, and PIA Holding Company LimitedB, which gained Rs92.67 to settle at Rs17,600.00.–APP

Rupee gains 01 paisa against Dollar

ISLAMABAD: The Rupee on Wednesday appreciated by 01 paisa against the US Dollar in interbank trading and closed at Rs 277.91, compared to the previous day's closing of Rs 277.92.
According to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the dollar in the open market were recorded at Rs 278.90 and Rs 279.10, respectively. The price of the Euro against the rupee decreased by Rs 0.48 paisa and closed at Rs 317.01 against the previous day's closing of Rs 317.49, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP). The Japanese Yen came remained constant at Rs 1.70, whereas the exchange rate of the British Pound witnessed a increase of Rs 1.78 and closed at Rs 371.75 compared to the previous day's Rs 373.53. The exchange rate of the Emirate Dirham remained constant at Rs75.67.–APP

Extreme heatwave grips Tunisia

TUNIS: In Tunisia long power outages across the country have added to the strain of an intense heatwave, with temperatures as high as 49C, leaving many fearing for their livelihoods. For days, the STEG state electricity and gas company has been issuing daily heat alerts listing neighborhoods where it would cut electricity to reduce pressure on the national grid. STEG Chief Executive Faycel Trifa said heavy air conditioner use had pushed the electricity network to its limit. Another company official told state television that electricity demand may have reached a record six gigawatts on Tuesday, after hitting 5.6 gigawatts only days earlier. Power and water cuts have affected parts of Tunisia in previous summers, but this year's outages have spread across much of the country. Some residents said their electricity had gone off for up to six hours at a time, others said even longer. "It feels like God has opened the gates of hell," said an employee at a pastry shop in Tunis, where cakes sat in the dark and the refrigerators had stopped running. The outages have become one of the country's main talking points, both online and in the streets. Some now say they avoid elevators for fear of being trapped inside. President Kais Saied called the repeated outages abnormal and said those responsible for the failures should be held accountable. - Ageing grid - TEG said the controlled outages were necessary to prevent a nationwide blackout. Hela Tlili, a professor at Tunis El Manar University who has done extensive work on renewable energy, said the power system was struggling under record summer demand and peak tourism. She also said the electricity network had not kept pace with high consumption. "Demand is growing much faster than production," she said. Tunisia still relies heavily on natural gas to generate electricity, but declining domestic production has increased its dependence on imports, while financial pressures have strained the state utility. Tlili also pointed to an aging grid and years of insufficient maintenance. Scientists say human-driven climate change is increasing the length, intensity and frequency of heatwaves. Tunisian business groups fear the outages are hurting the economy. Employers' organization CONECT said the lack of precise schedules for planned cuts made it difficult for companies to prepare for production. An employee at a factory in a Tunis suburb who requested anonymity said work had almost stopped for two days because of the repeated outages. One butcher raised concerns over the potential damage to his equipment by the cuts as well as a drop in voltage: "They're going to ruin my refrigerator." Tlili said Tunisia also needed to speed up the development of renewable energy. The country has vast solar potential and favorable conditions for wind power, but the biggest challenge would be storing electricity, Tlili said. That would require significant public investment, she added, arguing that Tunisia needs "a change of paradigm" diversifying its energy resources.–APP

Indonesia gets first Russian oil shipment

JAKARTA: Indonesia has received its first shipment of Russian crude oil as part of a deal to import up to 150 million barrels to stock up national reserves in the wake of shortages in Asia due to the closure of the Strait of Hormuz.
Southeast Asia's biggest economy imported about 60 percent of its fuel needs last year, with around 20 percent coming from the Middle EastJakarta has been working to secure alternative supply sources in the wake of the US-Israeli war on Iran, which has caused major disruptions to global energy shipments from the Gulf. Indonesia and Russia struck the oil supply deal in April, after they agreed to expand energy security cooperation following a meeting between President Prabowo Subianto and Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow. "We have completed the first phase (of imports) ... Other countries should not interfere with our national sovereignty. We need oil," Energy and Mineral Resources Minister Bahlil Lahadalia told reporters in Jakarta on Tuesday. Purchases of Russian crude have been a subject of scrutiny following Moscow's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, which prompted the US and European countries to impose restrictions on such deals. Though Washington previously prohibited countries from buying sanctioned Russian oil and petroleum products as part of reciprocal trade deals, it imposed a temporary waiver amid the Hormuz crisis, allowing countries to make such purchases to keep global oil prices down. But as the waiver officially expired in mid-June and the disruptions on global oil supply continue, it remains unclear whether those earlier restrictions were restored–APP

Jam invites Samsung to export mobile phones from Pakistan

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Commerce Jam Kamal Khan invited Samsung to transform Pakistan into a regional manufacturing, refurbishment and export hub for mobile phones, assuring the company that the government would facilitate them in promoting exports, value addition and industrial investment The Minister extended the invitation during a meeting with a delegation led by the Country Head of Samsung Pakistan at the Ministry of Commerce. Senior officials of the Ministry were also present, said a release issued here on Wednesday. During the meeting, Jam Kamal Khan encouraged Samsung to look beyond Pakistan's domestic market and export Pakistan-manufactured smartphones to emerging markets, particularly to Africa and other regions. He said Pakistan should leverage its growing manufacturing base to become part of global supply chains rather than serving only local demand. The Minister also appreciated the proposal of Samsung establishing certified mobile phone refurbishment facilities in Pakistan. He said a regulated refurbishment ecosystem would not only strengthen local industry but could also create export opportunities for professionally refurbished devices while generating employment and promoting technical expertise. The Samsung delegation briefed the Minister on the progress of Pakistan's mobile phone manufacturing sector and highlighted the company's investment in local assembly. The delegation highlighted changes in the taxation structure and the narrowing of the tariff differential between Semi Knocked Down (SKD) and Completely Built Unit (CBU) of mobile phones which had significantly reduced the competitiveness of locally manufactured mobile phones. They requested the government to maintain a reasonable tariff differential to encourage continued investment and local manufacturing. The delegation also expressed concerns over the commercial import of used mobile phones, stating that it undermines domestic manufacturing despite Pakistan having sufficient production capacity. It proposed replacing commercial imports of used phones with certified refurbished phones under which original equipment manufacturers would establish authorized refurbishment facilities in Pakistan, enabling consumers to purchase quality-assured devices backed by warranties. Responding to the proposals, Jam Kamal Khan said Pakistan's mobile phone industry had made significant progress over the past few years and future policy should focus on genuine manufacturing, higher local value addition, technology transfer and export growth. He observed that the country now possesses sufficient manufacturing capacity and that industrial policies should encourage investment rather than dependence on imported used products. The Minister acknowledged the industry's concerns regarding taxation and said these would be examined within the broader fiscal framework. He emphasized, however, that any incentives should be linked with investment, localization, exports and value addition. Jam Kamal Khan further directed the industry to submit detailed proposals on certified refurbishment, export potential, investment commitments and international best practices to support the formulation of the revised Mobile Device Manufacturing Policy. He stressed that any decision regarding commercial imports of used mobile phones should be evidence-based, phased and supported by the availability of certified locally refurbished alternatives to safeguard consumer interests. Reaffirming the government's commitment to industrial development, the Minister said Pakistan offers significant opportunities for global technology companies and expressed confidence that stronger collaboration with leading manufacturers such as Samsung would contribute to investment, employment generation and increased exports.–DNA

Ukraine to export drones to US

KYIV: Ukraine has agreed to export drones to the United States to participate in the Pentagon's Drone Dominance program, a source familiar with the matter told Reuters on Wednesday. The agreement comes as Kyiv and Washington have been negotiating a wider drone deal for Ukrainian unmanned aerial vehicles, whose success in the war against Russia has driven high demand from other countries to learn from their experience and purchase models for testing. Six Ukrainian companies have received permission to export about 100 drones each, the source said, speaking on condition of anonymity. There was no immediate official comment from Kyiv or Washington on the matter. Ukraine has already signed drone deals with a number of European and Middle Eastern states. Kyiv has also moved to loosen wartime restrictions on its arms exports, although the government still retains a tight hold on what is sent abroad. Drone Dominance is a billion-dollar competition run by the US Department of Defense, in which small attack drones from dozens of manufacturers participate in challenges designed to simulate battlefield adversity.–APP

Six killed in Algeria forest fires

ALGIERS: Wildfires in Algeria have killed six people, the interior ministry announced, with several fires still raging across the North African country gripped by a heatwave. "In the wake of the fires that affected certain provinces of the country in recent days, six deaths have been registered," the ministry said in a statement. It said it had ordered the provinces to launch "a general operation to survey and inventory all recorded damage" in order to "permit the public authorities to take responsibility for compensating those affected by the forest fires." The ministry said it had deployed resources to fight the remaining fires. Much of northern Algeria has been gripped by an intense heatwave, sparking hundreds of forest fires. Dozens have been killed by wildfires in recent years.–APP

Trams collide on iconic Rotterdam bridge, 15 hurt

ROTTERDAM: Two trams collided on a key bridge in Rotterdam on Wednesday leaving at least 15 hurt, one seriously, officials said. The Erasmus Bridge is a major landmark in the Dutch port city, spanning the Maas River, and a major transport hub. Webcam footage of the bridge showed a tram steaming into the back of another, sending debris flying across the lanes of traffic and damaging both trams. An AFP reporter on the scene saw extensive damage to both trams, with mangled metal and shattered glass. Authorities have cordoned off the scene and the bridge has been closed to all traffic in both directions. Scores of emergency personnel rushed to the scene to evacuate the injured with stretchers and wheelchairs. Rotterdam authorities initially said 18 were injured, but revised this down to 15, according to national broadcaster NOS. The seriously injured person has been taken to hospital. "We have seen the footage and are deeply shocked," said Rotterdam transport company RET.–APP

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Pakistan 'seeks' $10bn in US backstop facility to boost reserves

Facility, if agreed to, will bolster Pakistan's reserves and reduce reliance on multilateral financing

DNA

WASHINGTON: Pakistan has asked the United States for a $10 billion exchange stabilisation facility, according to a source briefed on the matter, which, if approved, could provide a lifeline for the cash-strapped South Asian economy.
The request, which is being reported for the first time, follows Pakistan's role in brokering talks over the US-Iran war, which raised its diplomatic profile and stirred hopes that it could seek economic gains from Washington and other partners.
In the request to US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, Islamabad is seeking a Bilateral Exchange Stabilisation Support Facility between the US and the Pakistani government worth $10 billion with a maturity of up to five years. The facility, if agreed to, would bolster Pakistan's reserves, ease pressure on the rupee and reduce its reliance on multilateral financing, even as Islamabad undertakes tighter fiscal and monetary policies in line with its International Monetary Fund programme. The US Treasury declined to comment on the reported request. Pakistan's finance ministry did not immediately respond to Reuters' request for comment outside of Asia business hours. Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb met with Bessent in Washington on Tuesday and said he had raised the vulnerability of the country's economy to regional geopolitical developments, the ministry said in a statement that did not mention the request.
"Senator Aurangzeb sought greater US support for Pakistan's road to market, underpinned by improved access to international capital markets, higher foreign exchange reserves, and enhanced sovereign credit ratings," it said, adding that both sides reaffirmed their commitment to deepening bilateral economic cooperation, promoting greater US investment, and advancing strategic projects. Pakistan remains under $7 billion IMF discipline that has required politically unpopular tax increases, spending restraint and reforms. Exchange stabilisation facilities are rare US Treasury backstops, usually routed via the Exchange Stabilisation Fund, that provide dollars, swaps or guarantees to support reserves and steady currencies. These facilities are different from the permanent standing dollar swap lines that the US Federal Reserve has with some major central banks and act as an international supply line of US dollars to underpin financial stability.
A 2025 Argentina package was the first new foreign-government exchange stabilisation facility operation since Uruguay in 2002, aside from Mexico's long-standing swap line, dating to the 1940s and now sized at $9 billion. Pakistan narrowly avoided default in 2023 with a $3 billion IMF standby deal and later secured a $7 billion Extended Fund Facility, along with a separate $1.3 billion loan to build up its resilience to climate change and natural disasters. But its reserves still depend on official financing, rollovers and deposits from China and Saudi Arabia. That leaves Islamabad exposed to shifts in bilateral support and IMF disbursement delays. That vulnerability was exposed in April when Pakistan repaid about $3.5 billion, one-fifth of its reserves, to the United Arab Emirates with Saudi Arabia providing $3 billion in fresh support. State Bank of Pakistan said in January that reserves could return to near their 2021 record, reaching $20 billion by the end of 2026.

Briefs

Lebanon PM says Beirut working for 'complete Israeli withdrawal'

ZAWTAR AL-GHARBIYAH, Lebanon: Beirut is working toward a "complete Israeli withdrawal" from areas it occupies, Lebanese Prime Minister Nawaf Salam said on Wednesday on a visit to a village where Lebanon's army recently deployed.
"We will continue mobilizing our political and diplomatic efforts to secure a complete Israeli withdrawal from the south," he said in Zawtar Al-Gharbiya, one of several "pilot zones" intended to demonstrate that the Lebanese army can remove and disarm Iran-backed Hezbollah as part of a Washington-sponsored deal with Israel. The Lebanese military had begun deploying in the village on Tuesday. Israeli forces were previously present on its outskirts.
Salam made his statement a day after Lebanese President Joseph Aoun met with his US counterpart Donald Trump at the White House, where Aoun said he "stressed the urgent need for a full Israeli withdrawal from Lebanese territory."
Under the agreement signed last month, Lebanon's army is meant to disarm Hezbollah in the "pilot zones" it will operate in, banning military activity from any non-state group to pave the way for future Israeli withdrawals from other areas. The group has repeatedly rejected the agreement and refuses to lay down its weapons.
However, the military said on Tuesday that Israeli forces "opened fire in the vicinity of these units," adding that the incident would hinder the deployment.
The Israeli military said it had only fired "warning shots into the air" after Lebanese soldiers entered an area that was "not part of the pilot area."
Hezbollah drew Lebanon into the Middle East war by attacking Israel in support of Tehran on March 2, prompting major Israeli airstrikes and a ground invasion. After planting a Lebanese flag in the village, Salam said that "in parallel with the army's deployment, we will continue opening roads, removing rubble, and securing essential services, enabling our people to return safely and with dignity to their homes and villages."
Israeli strikes on Lebanon have killed more than 4,300 people since March, according to the Lebanese authorities, while Israeli forces have demolished scores of buildings in the south.
The violence has dropped off sharply since the signing of a framework agreement between the United States and Iran last month and the Lebanon-Israel deal. – APP

Pakistan, Bangladesh vow to cement ties

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar on Wednesday met Foreign Minister of Bangladesh and President-elect of the 81st Session of the United Nations General Assembly Khalilur Rehman, on the sidelines of the 33rd ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) Ministerial Meeting in Manila.
During the meeting, they reviewed the positive trajectory of Pakistan–Bangladesh relations and the renewed impetus provided by the Deputy Prime Minister's visit to Bangladesh last year. They also reaffirmed their shared commitment to further strengthening bilateral ties. The two sides welcomed growing engagement between the two countries, including enhanced people-to-people contacts and improved connectivity following the commencement of direct flights this year, and agreed to sustain this positive trajectory. They also exchanged views on regional and international issues of mutual interest.

Ukraine's Zelensky fires his military chief

KYIV: President Volodymyr Zelensky on Tuesday fired Gen. Oleksandr Syrskyi as commander-in-chief of Ukraine's armed forces and named his replacement, following days of mass protests in Kyiv, the country's capital, and other cities across the nation demanding his removal. It was the second major change Zelensky has made under street pressure, after protests last summer forced him to undo a law weakening Ukraine's anti-corruption watchdogs.
Zelensky appointed Mykhailo Drapatyi as the new army chief, according to a statement on social media. "Our shared wish is one – victory over the enemy and conditions at the front and in pressure on Russia that would force Russia toward peace," Zelensky said.
The Ukrainian leader said he made the decision after a series of meetings with military commanders. They began shortly after protests broke out demanding the reinstatement of former Defense Minister Mykhailo Fedorov, seen by demonstrators as a driver of military modernization, and the removal of Syrskyi, who they said embodied the army's old, Soviet-style command culture. Zelensky thanked Syrskyi for his achievements in Ukraine's fight against Russia and praised him for the defense of Kyiv and for operations in Kharkiv and Kursk. – APP

India Opp leader Rahul released

News Desk

NEW DELHI: India's opposition leader Rahul Gandhi has been released after being detained outside Prime Minister Narendra Modi's residence as part of education system protests that have pushed into Wednesday. The demonstrations, led by the social media-driven Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) movement, have emerged as one of the biggest challenges to Modi's government since his re-election in 2024, with protesters demanding Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan's resignation and broader reforms to the examination system.
Gandhi had staged a sit-in protest on Tuesday, accusing the government of ignoring students' demands and condemning a police crackdown on demonstrations in New Delhi a day earlier.

Mamdani says NYC can't arrest Netanyahu

NEW YORK: New York Mayor Zohran Mamdani said late Tuesday that the city would not be able to execute or arrest warrant issued by the world's top war-crimes court for Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu, but urged the federal government to do so. In the video Mamdani described the Israeli prime minister as a "war criminal" and said he is not welcome in New York City. "It is clear that we do not have the independent legal authority to enforce this warrant," he said in a video posted on X. "The federal government however does and I call on them to join the ICC and execute this warrant," he added, referring to the International Criminal Court.
Mamdani had told the New York Times earlier this month that he and the city's legal department were discussing arresting Netanyahu if he comes to New York City for the UN General Assembly in September. President Donald Trump on Monday told Netanyahu in a social media post that he "will not be arrested, in any way, shape, or form, while in the United States of America." The post did not directly mention Mamdani. Mamdani had said throughout his mayoral election campaign last year that he would seek to order the city's police to arrest Netanyahu under the criminal court's warrant over Netanyahu's role in the war in Gaza.
In his video message Tuesday, Mamdani said his administration has reviewed all avenues available and determined the city can't execute the arrest warrant. "I want to be equally clear, Benjamin Netanyahu is not welcome in New York City, nor is any other war criminal at large," he said. Danny Danon, the Israeli ambassador to the UN, responded by telling the mayor "enough."
"You were elected to serve New Yorkers, not Hamas' propaganda," he said in a statement on social media. "Do your job!" The world's top war-crimes court issued arrest warrants for Netanyahu and others in 2024, accusing them of crimes against humanity in connection with the war in Gaza. They said there was reason to believe Netanyahu and former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant have used "starvation as a method of warfare" by restricting humanitarian aid and have intentionally targeted civilians in Israel's campaign against Hamas in Gaza – charges Israeli officials deny. – APP

Nadra officials arrested for helping Afghans

Nazir Siyal

KARACHI: The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) said on Wednesday that four suspects, including officials of the National Database and Registration Authority (Nadra), had been arrested in Karachi for their alleged involvement in making false documents for Afghan nationals. In a press release, a spokesperson for the agency identified the suspects as Nadra Assistant Director Imamul Haq, Nadra Deputy Assistant Director Fayyaz Ahmed, Junaid Ahmed, a watchman working for the authority, and a private agent Muhammad Umar Shah. He added that law enforcement agencies had seized important records and other evidence as part of the operation, adding that the scope of the investigation had been expanded. "Further significant revelations and arrests are expected during the investigation, and all facilitators and key figures linked to this network will be brought to justice," he said.
The spokesperson said that preliminary investigations showed that the suspects were involved in facilitating the issuance of fake identity documents for Afghan citizens, altering records and other illegal activities. "Initial evidence points to links between this network and terrorist elements, a matter that is currently under further investigation," the FIA spokesperson said.

MANILA: On the sidelines of the ASEAN ministerial meetings in Manila, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov met with Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Pakistan Mohammad Ishaq Dar. – DNA

Canada cancels joint bridge-opening event with US

WASHINGTON: A planned joint US-Canada ceremony Friday celebrating the opening of the Gordie Howe International Bridge connecting Detroit and Windsor, Ontario, is no longer expected to take place after President Donald Trump announced a 50 percent tariff on most Canadian goods. In announcing the tariffs, Trump accused Canada of unfairly discriminating against US automobiles, alcohol and dairy products, escalating tensions with one of the United States' closest allies.
"In light of trade action threatened by the United States earlier this week, it would be inappropriate to proceed with a celebratory event between the two countries," said Jenna Ghassabeh, a spokesperson for Canadian Infrastructure Minister Gregor Robertson, in an emailed statement.
The move came after US and Canadian officials reached an agreement earlier this month to open the Gordie Howe International Bridge following delays tied to disagreements between the two countries. Canada now plans to hold its own ceremony Friday. It is now unclear whether the United States will hold a separate ceremony. Two US officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations said they still expect the bridge to open to traffic July 27 but are less certain than they were before.
"We remain committed to opening the bridge on July 27th, and to celebrating this milestone among Canadians on July 24th," said Ghassabeh. The 1.5-mile-long (2.4-kilometer-long) bridge spans the Detroit River and connects Detroit with Windsor. A ribbon-cutting ceremony had initially been scheduled for June 12 but was abruptly postponed after officials said the United States and Canada were still working to resolve "outstanding issues."
Canada financed construction of the bridge under an agreement allowing it to recover the cost through toll revenue. The Trump administration had sought changes to that arrangement. The project, negotiated under former Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder, has been under construction since 2018 and cost nearly $4.4 billion.
The bridge is named after Canadian hockey great Gordie Howe, who spent 25 seasons with the Detroit Red Wings. It is expected to become another major economic artery between Canada and the United States.
In February, Trump demanded in a social media post that Canada give the US government at least half ownership of the bridge and agree to other unspecified demands, part of his broader clashes with Canada over trade.
Those tensions resurfaced this week. The White House said the tariffs would take effect in 30 days, leaving time for negotiations. Trump has previously delayed or backed away from some threatened import taxes. – APP

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