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Aurangzeb says ties with the US given new dimensions

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Planning minister says CPEC work to be spurred

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WHO chief visits Congo to assess Ebola

Detailed News On Page-07



JICA chief meets PM

PM seeks enhanced collaboration with Japan, says Shehbaz

Jica expresses readiness to expand cooperation across multiple development sectors in Pakistan

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday welcomed the technical cooperation by Japan International Cooperation Agency (Jica) in Pakistan's minerals sector, underscoring that the development of the sector was one of the government's key priorities. He was talking to a 9-member delegation led by Jica President Dr Tanaka Akihiko that called on him at the PM House. The prime minister said Pakistan highly valued its longstanding partnership with Japan and Jica, spanning more than seven decades. He expressed confidence that the Jica president's visit to Pakistan would further strengthen bilateral relations between the two countries. PM Shehbaz said that Pakistan had overcome difficult economic challenges through teamwork and was now rapidly advancing reforms aimed at achieving sustainable economic growth. He noted that, as a result of the government's reform agenda, public revenues had doubled within just three years. He emphasised that providing young people with skills, technical training, and dignified employment opportunities, as well as empowering women, remained among the government's highest priorities. The prime minister said that reforms had been undertaken in the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (Smeda), transforming it into an active and effective institution to promote the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). He added that Jica's cooperation with Smeda would be instrumental in promoting SMEs and increasing Pakistan's exports. The prime minister also expressed his condolences to the Jica president over the loss of precious lives in the recent earthquake in Japan. Dr Akihiko thanked PM Shehbaz for his message of condolence regarding the tragic loss of life caused by the earthquake in Japan. He said that Jica and Pakistan shared a long history of partnership and cooperation.

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Prime Minister calls for early disposal of DISCOs

A comprehensive and effective strategy should be adopted to ensure the participation of investors meeting international standards in the privatisation of Discos

NEWS DESK

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday directed relevant authorities to adopt a "comprehensive strategy" to attract international investors for the privatisation of state-owned power distribution companies (Discos) and complete the restructuring of the Privatisation Commission within one month. "A comprehensive and effective strategy should be adopted to ensure the participation of investors meeting international standards in the privatisation of Discos," the PM said while presiding over a review meeting in Islamabad, according to a statement issued by his office. But, consumers' interests should also be prioritised in the privatisation process, he instructed. The premier further stated that all stages of the privatisation process should be completed within the stipulated timeframes and in accordance with established rules and international best practices while ensuring profitable outcomes.

Iran reaches accord with Oman on Hormuz

NEWS DESK

TEHRAN: Iran announced it has reached a new agreement with Oman to manage maritime traffic in the Strait of Hormuz, a vital global oil route. Under the proposed framework, Tehran will oversee inbound shipping while Muscat handles outbound flows. Officials say the arrangement is designed to reduce tensions and ensure safer passage for vessels in the region. The deal comes amid wider U.S. efforts to de-escalate with Iran, including recent sanctions relief for several IRGC-linked entities. Energy markets reacted with optimism, as Brent crude prices dipped, reflecting hopes that stability in Hormuz could ease global supply concerns.

India panel warns Meta over Modi video removal

DNA

NEW DELHI: An Indian parliamentary panel called on Wednesday for Meta chief Mark Zuckerberg to apologise for the temporary removal of a video of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. India, the world's most populous country, is Meta's largest market by users, with hundreds of millions of people using Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp. Modi's video, addressing students during youth-led protests during youth-led protests on July 23, was briefly removed from Meta-owned Facebook and Instagram, but was later restored.

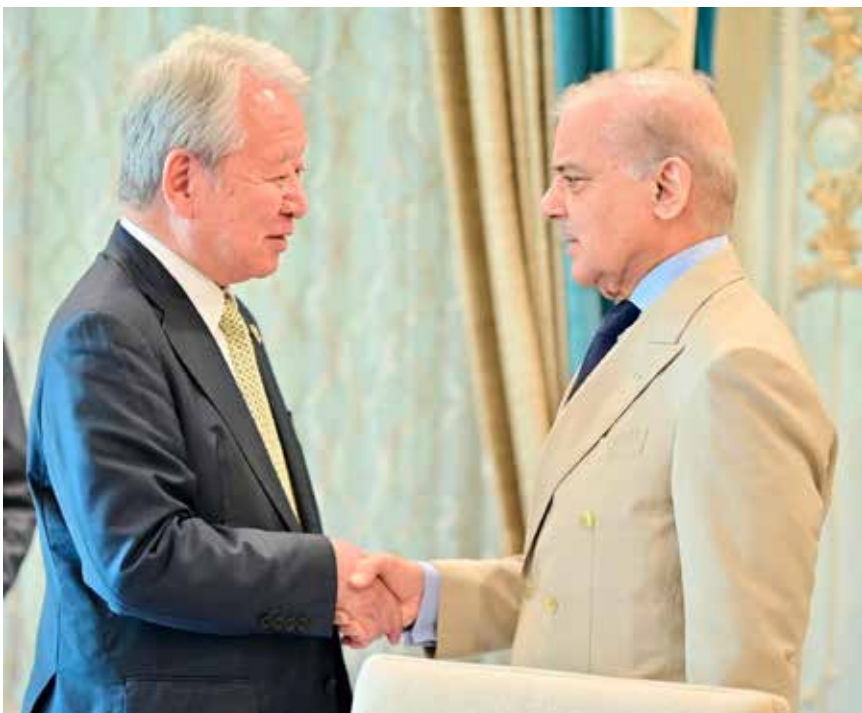
Continued on Page 06

Kashmir event in Pak embassy in Beijing

DNA

BEIJING: The Embassy of Pakistan in Beijing observed Youm-e-Istehsal-e-Kashmir today to reaffirm Pakistan's unwavering political, diplomatic and moral support for the just struggle of the Kashmiri people for the realization of their inalienable right to self-determination. Youm-e-Istehsal-e-Kashmir is observed on 5 August every year to denounce India's illegal and unilateral actions of 5 August 2019 in

Continued on Page 06



ISLAMABAD: A delegation led by President of Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) Dr. Tanaka Akihiko called on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif in Islamabad. – DNA

Terrorism challenge

Pakistan and US reaffirm joint resolve to confront TTP, BLA

Islamabad, Washington commit to ensuring counterterrorism collaboration for safety of their citizens, says FO

DNA

WASHINGTON: Pakistan and the United States have reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening counterterrorism cooperation, pledging to jointly confront the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and other terrorist outfits threatening the safety of their citizens and regional stability. The two nations made the pledge during the fourth US-Pakistan Counterterrorism Dialogue held in Washington, the Foreign Office said in a statement on Wednesday. US Coordinator for Counterterrorism Ambassador Gregory LoGerfo and Ministry of Foreign Affairs Special Secretary Ambassador Nabeel Munir led the dialogue, it added. During the dialogue, Islamabad and Washington pledged united action against terrorist groups, including banned Daesh (ISIS-K), al-Qaida (AQ), the TTP, and

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US lifts curbs on entities linked to IRGC

NEWS DESK

WASHINGTON: The United States has lifted sanctions on three entities linked to Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), a move framed as part of broader de-escalation efforts in the Middle East. According to diplomatic sources, this step is tied to ongoing negotiations over the Strait of Hormuz, the world's most critical energy chokepoint. The proposed framework would allow Iran to oversee inbound maritime traffic while Oman manages outbound flows,

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D 8 Secretary General meets Amb Usluer

DNA

ISTANBUL: The Secretary-General of the Developing-8 Organisation for Economic Cooperation (D-8) paid a courtesy visit today to Ambassador Dr. Ayse Sozen Usluer, Head of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs Representation Office in Istanbul. During the meeting, the Secretary-General reiterated the Organisation's sincere gratitude to the Government of the Republic of Türkiye for its unwavering and unstinting support in hosting the D-8 Secretariat in Istanbul since its inception. The Secretary-General specifically thanked Ambas-

sador Usluer for her office's continued facilitation and coordination, which enables the smooth operation of a large number of diplomatic missions within this historic and majestic city. The discussions provided an opportunity for an engaging and comprehensive exchange on the D-8's journey. The dialogue covered the Organisation's historical evolution, its current strategic direction, and its future trajectory. Both sides emphasized the D-8's growing role as a formidable platform for economic cooperation and integration among major developing countries. Furthermore, the conversation highlighted

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Briefs

Hasina to return to Dhaka in December

NEWS DESK

NEW DELHI: Ousted former Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said Wednesday that she plans to return to her country from exile in India in December despite facing a death sentence in Bangladesh over a bloody crackdown on protesters in 2024. In an audio address to an event in New Delhi marking the second anniversary of the uprising that toppled her government, Hasina said it was her duty to her people to return voluntarily despite her conviction in absentia on charges of crimes against humanity.

Several PTI leaders, supporters arrested

Severe traffic jams around Governor House, Metropole Hotel and Shaheen Complex disrupt commuters

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: Several Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leaders and supporters, including the party's Sindh chapter General Secretary Dr Masroor Sial, were arrested following a protest near Fawara Chowk on Abdullah Haroon Road in Karachi on Wednesday. Clashes between police and PTI supporters erupted when the latter gathered near Fawara Chowk to stage a protest seeking the release of their incarcerated leader Imran Khan. Khan, who has been in jail since August 2023, faces multiple cases ranging from corruption to terrorism since his ouster from power via the opposition's no-trust motion in April 2022. The former ruling party organised countrywide protests today to mark three years since the imprisonment of the party founder and demand his release. Karachi police baton-charged PTI protesters and fired tear gas shells to disperse them at Fawara Chowk. PTI activists,

meanwhile, pelted police with stones. Following the clashes, a severe traffic jam was reported around Governor House, Metropole Hotel and Shaheen Complex in Karachi, causing major disruption for commuters. Meanwhile, shops in the surrounding areas remained closed, adding to the inconvenience faced by citizens. Reacting to the police action in Karachi, PTI Sindh chapter President Haleem Adil Sheikh condemned the detentions. "Sindh police took action against democratic values," he added. Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah has taken notice of the severe traffic jam in several parts of Karachi and directed the inspector general police and the additional inspector general of Karachi to ensure the immediate restoration of the traffic flow. The chief minister also ordered the deployment of additional traffic police personnel on the key arteries of the port city, read a statement issued by his spokesperson.

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DPM Ishaq Dar, Jordanian counterpart discuss ME

The FO said that the foreign ministers exchanged views on regional developments, in particular on the deteriorating situation in the occupied West Bank



DNA

AMMAN: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar met his Jordanian counterpart on Wednesday, with the "deteriorating situation in the occupied West Bank" coming under discussion, according to the Foreign Office (FO). The FO said Dar met Jordan's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of

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Protecting Jerusalem is fundamental pillar of any peace: Saudi FM

NEWS DESK

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan said on Wednesday that protecting Jerusalem is the fundamental pillar of any peace. "Protecting Jerusalem is not only a religious or humanitarian issue but a fundamental pillar for any just and lasting peace," Prince Faisal said speaking from Amman where the Ministerial Meeting in Support of Jerusalem and its Holy Sites was being held. The meeting, which brought together Arab and Islamic countries, addressed Israel's illegal policies and measures in occupied

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AUGUST 2026

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Families of shuhada honoured

DERA ISMAIL KHAN: The Police Martyrs' Day was observed in Dera Ismail Khan on Wednesday with a ceremony honouring martyred police personnel, during which senior civil and military officials reaffirmed their commitment to supporting the families of martyrs and continuing the fight against terrorism.

Regional Police Officer (RPO) Ghulam Mubashir Maken and District Police Officer (DPO) Ziauddin Ahmed laid a floral wreath at the Police Martyrs' Memorial at Ejaz Shaheed Police Lines and offered prayers for the personnel who lost their lives in the line of duty. The ceremony was attended by DSF Commander Brig. Rizwanul Haq, Deputy Commissioner Hikmatullah Wazir, senior officers of the armed forces and law enforcement agencies, police officials, civil society representatives, police veterans and families of martyred personnel.

Addressing the gathering, RPO Ghulam Mubashir Maken said Dera Range had lost 377 police personnel in the line of duty, while 359 others had sustained serious injuries. He said the sacrifices of police, the armed forces, other security agencies and civilians had played a key role in restoring peace and stability, and assured the families of martyrs of the department's continued support.

The RPO also distributed appointment letters to children of martyred police personnel who had been recruited as assistant sub-inspectors (ASIs), saying the initiative reflected the police department's commitment to the welfare of martyrs' families. DPO Ziauddin Ahmed said 261 police personnel from Dera Ismail Khan had embraced martyrdom while 225 others had been injured in the line of duty during operations to maintain law and order and combat terrorism.—APP

SDPI urges focused climate finance platform

ISLAMABAD: The Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) on Wednesday called for a focused, government-led climate finance platform with strong provincial ownership and meaningful community participation to help Pakistan unlock international funding for a just energy transition. The call came during a high-level consultation in Islamabad attended by local and international experts, policymakers and development partners. The consultation featured two roundtable discussions on strengthening policy credibility to mobilize climate finance and embedding justice and equity into Pakistan's energy transition framework. Dr Crispian Oliver, Senior Advisor at the Country Platforms Hub, said successful country platforms are government-owned rather than donor-driven and should pursue long-term sectoral transformation. Drawing on South Africa's experience, he said regulatory reforms helped mobilize an \$8.5 billion concessional finance package that unlocked nearly \$100 billion in private investment while bringing around 10 gigawatts of new private electricity generation online within two years. SDPI Research Associate Nismah Rizwan said the global climate finance gap continues to widen, with at least \$6.5 trillion needed by 2030 and around \$8 trillion by 2035 to keep the Paris Agreement's 1.5°C target within reach. She noted that Pakistan's Climate Prosperity Plan identifies a country platform as its primary implementation mechanism.—APP



ISLAMABAD: A woman sang the memorandum during a rally to mark anniversary of Youm-e-Istehsal at Constitution Avenue.

Ahsan for expediting CPEC 5 corridors implementation

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Professor Ahsan Iqbal on Wednesday directed all ministries to expedite the implementation of the five corridors under CPEC 2.0, namely the Corridors of Growth, Livelihood, Innovation, Green Development and Regional Connectivity. He issued these directives while chairing the 91st meeting of the CPEC Projects Review and National Steering Committee, which brought together key stakeholders to review progress in infrastructure, power, petroleum, water resources, food and agriculture, Joint Working Group (JWG) meetings and Special Economic Zones (SEZs), a news release said. The minister said CPEC 2.0 offered immense opportunities to build on the successes of CPEC 1.0 by leveraging investments made in energy and physical infrastructure. The Pakistan Mission in Beijing and the respective JWG conveners briefed the forum on prepara-

tions for the upcoming JWG meetings and the 15th Joint Cooperation Committee (JCC) meeting. The forum was informed that the calendar had been finalized in consultation with the respective conveners and shared with the Pakistan Mission in Beijing to facilitate coordination with the Chinese side. During the meeting, the Ministry of Maritime Affairs (MoMA) and the Government of Sindh briefed participants on the latest progress of the Karachi Coastal Comprehensive Development Zone (KCCDZ) project. Expressing concern over implementation delays, the minister directed all stakeholders to submit their observations within a week and resolve all outstanding issues without further delay. He emphasized that the memorandums of understanding (MoUs) must be implemented in accordance with agreed terms and applicable rules, stressing that agreements should translate into timely implementation rather than remain confined to paperwork. He urged

all relevant institutions to take ownership of their commitments and directed the Government of Sindh, MoMA and the Board of Investment (BOI) to hold a meeting with the Chinese company to resolve technical issues and expedite the project's implementation through regular coordination. Reviewing progress on the initiative to train 1,000 agriculture graduates in China, the minister stressed that the expertise acquired by the graduates must be effectively utilized for the benefit of Pakistan's agricultural sector. He directed the relevant authorities to present at the next meeting a comprehensive plan outlining the areas of specialization, deployment and future roles of the trained graduates. Emphasizing the need to align training with national priorities, he called for greater focus on biotechnology, seed development, high-yield crop varieties, digital extension services, AI-driven agriculture and cooperative farm management.—DNA

CM, JICA president agree to expand coop in public welfare sectors

LAHORE: Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif on Wednesday met President of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Dr Akihiko Tanaka, who called on her along with a delegation. The chief minister warmly welcomed the JICA delegation on its arrival in Lahore. The meeting reviewed the progress of JICA-supported development projects in Punjab and discussed ways to further strengthen bilateral cooperation for public welfare. Both sides explored opportunities for collaboration in priority public sectors, including education, healthcare, women's empowerment and human resource development. They also reviewed progress on the Faisalabad

Water Supply Project and discussed future development initiatives between the Punjab government and JICA. Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz expressed keen interest in replicating the Faisalabad water supply, sanitation and urban infrastructure model in other cities of Punjab with JICA's support. She also appreciated JICA's contribution to maternal and child healthcare programmes in the province. The meeting underscored the importance of promoting education and bringing girls as well as children from underprivileged areas into schools. The chief minister paid tribute to JICA for its continued partnership and valuable contribution to Punjab's development. Speaking on the occa-

sion, Maryam Nawaz said the Punjab government highly valued JICA's cooperation in the province's development. She noted that JICA's sustained support in water supply, healthcare, education, nutrition and women's empowerment was commendable. She further appreciated JICA's assistance in technology transfer, professional training and institutional reforms aimed at strengthening governance and public service delivery. The CM said the Punjab government was keen to further expand its partnership with JICA to achieve sustainable development goals relating to clean water, gender equality, quality education, good health and adequate nutrition. She also acknowledged JICA's efforts in promoting women's development and creating decent employment opportunities in Punjab. JICA President Dr Akihiko Tanaka reaffirmed the agency's commitment to strengthening cooperation with Punjab in the fields of education, healthcare, women's empowerment and human resource development.

Bugti terms India's abrogation of Articles 370, 35A unilateral

QUETTA: Balochistan Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti on Wednesday said that, on behalf of himself and the people of Balochistan, he expressed full solidarity with the people of occupied Jammu and Kashmir on Youm-e-Istehsal. In his special message on the occasion of Kashmir Exploitation Day, he said that India's abrogation of Articles 370 and 35A on August 5, 2019 was illegal, unilateral and contrary to international laws, which was aimed at affecting the identity, rights and historical status of the Kashmiri people. The Chief Minister said that for the past several decades, the people of occupied Kashmir have been facing oppression, repression and serious violations of human rights. He said that the attempts to turn the Kashmiri people into a minority in their own land are not only condemnable but also a clear violation of UN resolutions and international laws. Mir Sarfraz said that the people of Balochistan strongly condemned these steps of India and fully support the right of the Kashmiri people to self-determination. He stressed that the only just and lasting solution to the Kashmir issue is possible only in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the United Nations (UN) Security Council and the aspirations of the Kashmiri people. The Chief Minister of Balochistan said that the international community should take effective notice of the human rights violations in occupied Kashmir, highlight the atrocities committed against the Kashmiri people and increase pressure on India to abide by its international obligations. He said that the Balochistan government, in full solidarity with the federal government, with the determination and consistency with which Pakistan has been supporting the Kashmiri people politically, diplomatically and morally for the past several decades, would continue this struggle in the future as well. He said that the people of Pakistan and Balochistan would never leave their Kashmiri brothers and sisters alone and will continue to provide moral support at all levels in their struggle for the right to self-determination, freedom and justice. The Chief Minister said that Kashmir Exploitation Day is a day to renew the resolve that Pakistan and the people of Balochistan stand with the Kashmiri people in every difficult moment and would continue their full moral and diplomatic support until they achieve their legitimate rights.—APP

CASS hosts seminar on lessons from Iran-Israel-US conflict

Ambassador Asif Ali Durrani (Retd), former ambassador of Pakistan to Iran presented the geopolitical takeaways from the conflict. He stressed that enduring peace cannot be achieved through military means alone. It requires coherent political objectives, effective diplomacy, and geopolitical manoeuvring

NA

LAHORE: The Centre for Aerospace and Security Studies Lahore organised a semina titled "One Conflict, Three Battlefields: Aerial, Geopolitical and Cognitive Lessons from Iran-Israel-US Conflict". The event was attended by academics, intellectuals, serving and retired officers, and domain experts. Ms Nidra Shahid, Associate Director, CASS Lahore, delivered the opening address. The first

speaker, Air Marshal Abdul Moeed Khan (Retd), VC Air University, focused on the aerial and operational military lessons emerging from the conflict. He emphasised that asymmetric capabilities, including drones, missiles, and distributed air defence systems, alongside artificial intelligence (AI), commercial technologies, and networked sensors are transforming the future of aerial warfare. H further underscored the growing significance of the low-altitude 'air littoral' which was aptly utilised by

Iran during the conflict. He stressed that innovation, adaptability, and indigenous technological development will be central to sustaining operational resilience i future conflicts. The second speaker, Ambassador Asif Ali Durrani (Retd), former ambassador of Pakistan to Iran presented the geopolitical takeaways from the conflict. He stressed that enduring peace cannot be achieved through military means alone. It requires coherent political objectives, effective diplomacy, and ge-

opolitical manoeuvring. He further emphasised the importance of energy security especially in light of Iranian operations in the Strait of Hormuz. He also underscored the fragility of external security guarantees and stressed the need for regional security frameworks and confidence-building measures. The third speaker, Mr Fahd Husain, Executive Director Express 24/7 TV, elucidating on the cognitive lessons. He emphasised that the Iran-Israel-US conflict was fought simultaneously in

the physical and cognitive domains, making information superiority a decisive component. He also noted that AI-generated content, social media, OSINT, commercial satellite imagery, and increasing use of smartphones by the general population are transforming the information environment and making public opinion the strategic centre of gravity in modern wars. Future military effectiveness will thus, depend upon successful integration of military operations with cognitive warfare.—APP

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National Days and Armed Forces Days

AUGUST

Aug 01/China
Armed Forces Day

Aug 01/Switzerland
National Day

Aug 01/Lebanon
Armed Forces Day

Aug 01 /Syria
Armed Forces Day

Aug 4/Bukino Faso
National Day

Aug 09 /Singapore

Aug 15/DPR Korea
Independence Day

Aug 15/India
Independence Day

Aug 15/Poland
Armed Forces Day

Aug 17 /Indonesia
Independence Day

Aug 24/Ukraine
Independence Day

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Independence Day

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Republic
Independence Day

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Cantonment Board 9270151-3

Islamabad Metropolitan

Corporation.....9209224

Potohar Town.....9209224

Rawal Town.....5773343

Water Tank

Islamabad.....0321-5744480



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Kashmir affairs and Gilgit Baltistan, Amir Muqam leading a rally to mark anniversary of Youm-e-Istehsal at Constitution Avenue in the Federal Capital.

PRCS launches ‘Red Million Movement’ to mobilize 1m volunteers

Chairperson Pakistan Red Crescent Society, Mrs. Farzana Naek, described the Red Million Movement as “an initiative that is very close to my heart”

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Red Crescent Society (PRCS) today launched its flagship ‘Red Million Movement’, a nationwide initiative to mobilize, engage, and empower one million youth and volunteers to strengthen humanitarian action across Pakistan. The initiative aims to inspire citizens, particularly young people, to become agents of positive change by promoting volunteerism, community resilience, and humanitarian values in line with the Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. The launch ceremony was held at the PRCS National Headquarters in Islamabad and attended by the Heads of Delegation in Pakistan of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), Norwegian Red Cross, and the Turkish Red Crescent (K Z Ilay).

representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the German Red Cross, PRCS management and staff, and youth volunteers from across the country. Addressing the ceremony, Chairperson Pakistan Red Crescent Society, Mrs. Farzana Naek, described the Red Million Movement as “an initiative that is very close to my heart.” She said serving vulnerable communities is a shared responsibility and that “humanity is embedded in our DNA. Serving people in need is a sacred responsibility that defines who we are.” She said the initiative marks the beginning of a nationwide movement that will unite youth, volunteers, educational institutions, communities, and partners to build a network of one million trained volunteers ready to serve before, during, and after emergencies. She emphasized that the initiative goes beyond volunteer enrollment by focusing on continuous capacity building through NDRT batches and other specialized trainings. She said PRCS is building a strong pool of trained volunteers to respond whenever humanitarian needs arise and thanked PRCS staff, Movement Partners, educational institutions, government stakeholders, media organizations, and volunteers for their steadfast support. “Together, let us Rise Together for Every Life, Everywhere. I invite every Pakistani to join this movement. Be One. Be the Million.” In his opening remarks, Secretary General PRCS, Mr. Muhammad Abaidullah Khan, said the Red Million Movement is a national commitment to build one million trained and compassionate volunteers, while appreciating the Chairperson’s visionary leadership in promoting volunteerism as a way of life. During the ceremony, volunteers reaffirmed their commitment to humanitarian service by taking the Volunteer Oath, administered by the Head of Youth and Volunteer Department, Mrs. Misbah Mushtaq. The Honorable Chairperson officially launched the Red Million Movement in the presence of PRCS management and Movement Partners, marking the beginning of a nationwide volunteer mobilization campaign. A documentary showcasing PRCS volunteers’ contributions to disaster response, emergency operations, climate resilience, community awareness, and humanitarian services was screened. The ceremony concluded with a live National Disaster Response Team (NDRT) Simulation Exercise (SIMEx), organized by the Disaster Management Department. The exercise demonstrated key emergency response functions, including coordination, deployment, rapid assessment, first aid, relief distribution, cash assistance, mobile health services, and post-distribution monitoring. The demonstration was highly appreciated by the Chairperson, Movement Partners, and participants.

FGEHA holds solidarity walk to mark Youm-e-Istehsal

ISLAMABAD: Federal Government Employees Housing Authority (FGEHA) organized Solidarity Walks here on Wednesday at its Head Office to commemorate Youm-e-Istehsal-e-Kashmir (Kashmir Exploitation Day). The event was aimed at expressing unwavering solidarity with the people of Jammu and Kashmir and highlighting the historical, humanitarian, and international significance of the Jammu and Kashmir dispute. The walk was attended by FGEHA officers, officials, employees, and members of the local community. Participants carried the national flags of Pakistan and Kashmir and reaffirmed their support for the Kashmiri people’s right to self-determination, as well as for peace, justice, and human dignity. Addressing the participants, the speakers observed that certain days in the history of nations transcend the boundaries of a calendar date and become an enduring part of their collective memory. They noted that August 5 was one such day, as it not only affected the political and constitutional status of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) but also had far-reaching implications for regional politics, diplomacy, and prospects for lasting peace in South Asia. During the walk, it was highlighted that August 5, 2019 marked a significant turning point in the history of South Asia when the special constitutional status of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir was altered. The participants observed

Pakistan develops 14 high-quality cotton varieties

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan approved 14 cotton varieties during 2021-2025 featuring improved fibre quality, higher ginning outturn, heat tolerance, drought tolerance and bollworm resistance, strengthening the country’s cotton seed portfolio and supporting the textile value chain. According to official documents available with Wealth Pakistan, the approved varieties were developed by two major cotton research institutions – the Central Cotton Research Institute (CCRI), Multan, and the Central Cotton Research Institute (CCRI), Sakrand, Sindh. CCRI Multan accounted for 11 varieties, while CCRI Sakrand contributed three varieties. The approved cotton varieties from CCRI Multan include Bt CIM-663, Bt CIM-678, Bt CIM-785, Bt Cyto-535, Cyto-226, CIM-775, CIM-343, Cyto-537, Cyto-511, Bt CIM-775 and Bt CIM-990. The three varieties developed by CCRI Sakrand are Bt CRIS-682, Bt CRIS-674 and CRIS-644. The newly approved varieties recorded ginning outturn (GOT) ranging from 38.2% to 42.3%, staple length of up to 29.6mm and fibre strength of up to 33.5. The cotton quality is measured not only by yield but also by indicators such as micronaire, fibre strength and ginning outturn, which are important to spinners, ginners and textile manufacturers. Micronaire measures fibre fineness and maturity, influencing spinning performance, dye absorption and fabric quality. The ideal micronaire range for most spinning mills is between 3.5 and 4.9, and all the approved varieties fall within this range. Fibre strength, which determines the force a cotton fibre can withstand before breaking, directly affects yarn strength, spinning efficiency and fabric durability. Fibre strength between 28 and 30 is considered good, between 30 and 32 very good and above 32 excellent. The approved varieties recorded fibre strength ranging from 28.3 to 33.5, covering good, very good and excellent quality categories. Similarly, ginning outturn, or the percentage of lint obtained after ginning seed cotton, ranged from 38.2% to 42.3% among the approved varieties. A GOT of 38% to 40% is generally considered good, while anything above 40% is regarded as excellent. Among the approved varieties, CIM-775, released by CCRI Multan in 2023, recorded the highest ginning outturn at 42.3%. It also had a staple length of 27.1mm, a micronaire value of 4.8 and a fibre strength of 28.6. The variety was identified as highly tolerant to cotton leaf curl virus (CLCuV). Bt Cyto-535, approved in 2021, recorded a ginning outturn of 41.5%, a staple length of 28.4mm, a micronaire value of 3.97 and a fibre strength of 28.85. According to the documents, the variety possesses good fibre characteristics, large bolls and high-yield potential. Cyto-537, released in 2023, also demonstrated strong fibre characteristics, recording a ginning outturn of 41%, a staple length of 28.3mm, a micronaire value of 3.8 and a fibre strength of 31.5. It was listed as a high-yielding variety with good fibre quality. Cyto-226 recorded the highest staple length among the approved varieties at 29.6mm. Released in 2021, it achieved a ginning outturn of 40.3%, a micronaire value of 4.89 and a fibre strength of 28.44. The documents describe it as a high-yielding variety with good fibre traits. The documents also highlight a strong emphasis on developing climate-resilient and pest-resistant cotton. Bt CIM-663, approved in 2021, was developed as a heat-tolerant, high-yielding variety with a ginning outturn of 40.2%, a staple length of 28.6mm, a micronaire value of 4.1 and a fibre strength of 30.4. Bt CIM-678, also approved in 2021, was described as heat-tolerant, high-yielding, and characterised by early and uniform maturity.—DNA

Aug 5 reminds of Indian atrocities in IIOJK: Sanaullah

ISLAMABAD: Advisor to the Prime Minister Senator Rana Sanaullah Khan has said that August 5 serves as a reminder of the atrocities being committed against the people of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK). In his message on the occasion of ‘Youm-e-Istehsal-e-Kashmir’ (Kashmir Exploitation Day), the Advisor said that on August 5, 2019, India unilaterally revoked the special status of IIOJK. “This usurpation by India was a direct assault on the Kashmiri people’s right to self-determination,” Sanaullah said. “Pakistan rejects every attempt to unilaterally alter the status, demographic composition, or political identity of Jammu and Kashmir.” He stated that the human rights situation in IIOJK has further deteriorated since August 2019. “Extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, military operations, and prolonged detentions have created a deep sense of insecurity among the local population of Jammu and Kashmir,” he said. “On this tragic day, I express complete solidarity with my Kashmiri brothers and sisters. Kashmir is Pakistan and Pakistan is Kashmir. The Kashmir freedom movement is the movement for the completion of Pakistan.” Sanaullah paid tribute to the “eternal sacrifices of Kashmiris and their decades-long struggle for freedom.” “The courage, resilience, and unwavering commitment of the Kashmiri people to justice is a guiding light for us,” he said. “We will continue our moral, political, and diplomatic support for the just struggle of the Kashmiri people.” He called on the United Nations to take notice of the ongoing human rights violations in IIOJK and urged the international community to resolve the longstanding dispute in accordance with UN Security Council resolutions. “The Kashmir issue is not just the issue of Kashmiris, but an issue of humanity and global justice,” he said.—APP

SECP clears Rs1.5b capital injection for Hugobank

ISLAMABAD: Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) has approved the issuance of shares to the sponsor shareholders of HugoBank Limited, enabling a fresh equity injection of Rs1.5 billion that marks a significant step toward the launch of one of Pakistan’s first digital retail banks. The capital injection will allow HugoBank to meet the State Bank of Pakistan’s (SBP) Minimum Capital Requirement (MCR), a key regulatory condition for commencing commercial banking operations, said a press release issued by the SECP on Tuesday. The HugoBank has secured the State Bank of Pakistan’s In-Principle Approval (IPA) to establish a digital retail bank in Pakistan. The bank is being established through Starlight Holdings (Private) Limited, with its sponsors committing approximately US\$60 million in capital and technology support to develop a state-of-the-art digital banking platform. HugoBank is backed by a consortium of Pakistani and Singaporean investors, led by Singapore-based Atlas Consolidated in partnership with The Getz Group and Pakistan’s Muller & Phipps. Digital retail banks operate without traditional branch networks and rely on technology-driven platforms to offer banking services through mobile applications and online channels. Their business model is expected to lower operating costs, improve customer convenience, and expand access to formal financial services, particularly for underserved and unbanked segments of the population. The entry of HugoBank is expected to intensify competition in Pakistan’s rapidly evolving digital financial services market. Industry experts believe that digital banks can accelerate financial inclusion by offering faster account opening, low-cost digital payments, instant fund transfers, digital savings products, and technology-enabled lending solutions. HugoBank on Wednesday announced that it had received approval from the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) to initiate pilot operations. The pilot approval allows HugoBank to test its products, systems, and operational readiness under real world conditions with a limited customer base. The bank can now work to ensure the highest standards of security, compliance, and user experience before a full public launch, according to a press release issued here on Wednesday.—APP

Briefs

Sindh officials' presence seek for K-IV project progress review

ISLAMABAD: The 12th meeting of the National Assembly Standing Committee on Water Resources was held today under the Chairmanship of Ahmad Atteeq Anwer, MNA at Parliament House in Islamabad. The Chairman, WAPDA, informed the Committee that the portion of the K-IV Project falling within WAPDA's domain is expected to be completed by 2027. He further stated that the funds required for this component of the project have already been secured. The Committee directed the, at its next meeting, the Chief Secretary, Government of Sindh, the Secretary, Irrigation Department, Government of Sindh, the CEO of KW & SC, and the Project Director (PD) of the K-IV Project shall ensure their presence.

After detailed deliberations on "The WAPDA Security Force Bill, 2026" (Government Bill), the Committee directed that a comprehensive comparative study on the proposed legislation be shared with the Committee before its next meeting.

The meeting was attended by MNA's Shamaila Rana, Mehmood Qadir Khan, Syed Javed Ali Shah Jilani, Mir Munawar Ali Talpur, Shazia Marri, Saba Talpur (on Zoom), Mian Khan Bugti (on Zoom), Riaz Ul Haq (on Zoom), Mian Muhammad Mueen Watto (Federal Minister for Water Resources) and Rana Ansar (Parliamentary Secretary for Water Resources) besides the officials of the Ministry of Water Resources.—APP

Minister vows unwavering support for Kashmir cause

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination, Syed Mustafa Kamal, on Wednesday reaffirmed Pakistan's unwavering support for the Kashmiri people achieve their internationally recognized right to self-determination. In his message on Youm-e-Istehsal, observed on August 5, the minister reiterated Pakistan's continued political, moral and diplomatic support for the people of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK). He said August 5 serves as a reminder of India's violation of United Nations resolutions and reflected the oppression and hardships endured by the Kashmiri people. The minister said the sacrifices of the Kashmiris would not go in vain. "Every sorrow of Kashmir is our sorrow," he said.

Kamal urged the international community to pressurize India to fully comply with the United Nations resolutions on Jammu and Kashmir. He reaffirmed Pakistan's steadfast support for the Kashmiri people, saying India should know that Kashmiris are not alone, and Pakistan will continue to stand by them until they attain their right to self-determination.—APP

PSX turns bullish, gains over 2,931 points

ISLAMABAD: The benchmark KSE-100 Index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) turned around to a bullish trend on Wednesday, gaining 2,931.71 points, a positive change of 1.66 percent, to close at 180,014.93 points against 177,083.22 points recorded in the previous trading session. The ready market witnessed a trading volume of 740.558 million shares, compared to 711.271 million shares traded in the previous session, while the traded value expanded sharply to Rs 35,907 billion from Rs 25,874 billion. Market capitalisation increased to Rs 20,090 trillion from Rs 19,833 trillion recorded a day earlier. Out of 496 companies that traded in the ready market, 303 posted gains, 158 suffered losses, while 35 remained unchanged, reflecting an overall bullish momentum across the bourse. Trust Brokerage led the volume chart with 52,879 million shares, followed by WorldCall Telecom with 42,520 million shares.—APP

Pak's economic future lies in innovation & connectivity

ICCI President inaugurates GOPKZ Industry Connect, calls for innovation-led industrial growth

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: President Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI), Sardar Tahir Mehmood, has said that Pakistan's economic transformation depends on building stronger linkages between industry, innovation, investment and entrepreneurship, stressing that collaborative platforms are essential for creating a competitive and globally connected economy. He expressed these views while addressing the soft opening and cake-cutting ceremony of GOPKZ Industry Connect as the chief guest here at the Chamber House on Wednesday. Welcoming participants, Sardar Tahir Mehmood said that Pakistan's private sector possesses the resilience, talent and entrepreneurial spirit required to compete globally, provided businesses are offered the right ecosystem for growth. He said initiatives like GOPKZ Industry Connect create valuable opportunities for entrepreneurs, manufacturers, startups, investors and institutions to exchange ideas, develop partnerships and unlock new avenues of investment and industrial cooperation.

The ICCI President said that the future belongs to economies that embrace innovation, technology and public-private collaboration. He reaffirmed ICCI's commitment to serving as a bridge between Pakistan and the international business community by facilitating investment, supporting



entrepreneurship, promoting sustainable industries and strengthening global business linkages. Speaking on the occasion, Muhammad Shahroz Habib, Group Executive Vice President GOPKZ, said the vision behind GOPKZ is to establish a unified ecosystem where businesses, innovators, investors and policymakers can collaborate for Pakistan's economic progress. He

said the platform has been designed to showcase Pakistan's industrial potential, encourage innovation and facilitate meaningful partnerships capable of generating long-term economic value. ICCI Senior Vice President Tahir Ayub said that ICCI is committed to promoting investment, facilitating international partnerships, encouraging innovation, supporting sustainable

industries, and creating platforms where businesses can thrive in an increasingly interconnected global marketplace. Those present included ICCI Vice President Muhammad Irfan Chaudhry, Executive members Waseem Chaudhry, Zulqurnain Abbasi, former SVPs Khalid Chaudhry, Naveed Malik, ICCI senior members Aizaz Mohammad, Sajid Iqbal and other.

Rawalpindi Cantonment Board organizes solidarity walk

DNA

RAWALPINDI: On the occasion of Youm-e-Istehsal-e-Kashmir, the Rawalpindi Cantonment Board (RCB) organized a dignified solidarity walk on Bank Road to express unwavering support for the people of Jammu and Kashmir. The walk was attended by a large number of Cantonment Board officers, employees, and citizens. The walk was led by Additional Executive Officer, Rawalpindi Cantonment Board, Mr. Zia Hussain, and Secretary, Rawalpindi Cantonment Board, Mr. Imran Habib, along with other officers and staff members. Participants carried banners and placards bearing mes-

sages in support of the Kashmiri people's right to self-determination and expressed solidarity with the people of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu Kashmir by raising slogans in their favor. Speaking on the occasion, Additional Executive Officer Mr. Zia Hussain stated that the observance of Youm-e-Istehsal-e-Kashmir aims to express solidarity with the Kashmiri peoples, support their legitimate right to self-determination and raise global awareness about the ongoing human rights violations in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir. He emphasized that the people and institutions of Pakistan stand firmly with their Kashmiri brothers and sisters and will continue to extend

moral and diplomatic support to their just struggle. He further stated that the Kashmir dispute should be resolved in accordance with the aspirations of the Kashmiri people and the relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions. The Rawalpindi Cantonment Board reaffirmed its unwavering support for the Kashmiri people and reiterated its commitment to advocating their right to self-determination. Later, the Additional Executive Officer and other officers of the Rawalpindi Cantonment Board also participated in the central Youm-e-Istehsal-e-Kashmir ceremony and solidarity walk held at D-Chowk, Islamabad, to reaffirm Pakistan's continued solidarity with the people of Kashmir.

Islamabad to get two new underpasses

ISLAMABAD: The federal government has unveiled a fresh push to accelerate infrastructure development, strengthen emergency response services and improve the financial sustainability of the Capital Development Authority (CDA), with Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi directing officials to fast-track key public projects across the federal capital. Chairing a high-level meeting at CDA Headquarters, Naqvi reviewed the progress of ongoing development schemes and discussed a range of new projects aimed at improving urban mobility and public services. He announced that two new underpasses would be constructed to ease traffic congestion and facilitate smoother movement across Islamabad. Construction of the Kashmir Chowk Underpass and the Faisal Mosque Underpass is scheduled to begin next month. The minister also expressed strong displeasure over the continued absence of a fully functional Emergency 1122 system in Islamabad, describing the situation as unacceptable. He directed authorities to undertake emergency measures to establish an effective Capital Emergency Services institution without delay and instructed officials to complete all legal formalities so that work on four new emergency service centres could begin as soon as possible. The meeting also focused on strength-

ening the CDA's financial position through sustainable revenue generation. Various proposals to increase the authority's permanent revenue stream were reviewed, with Naqvi stressing the need for a long-term revenue model that would enable the civic agency to achieve greater financial self-reliance. He observed that while development projects remain a top priority, ensuring the institution's financial stability is equally important. The minister instructed officials to expedite practical revenue-enhancing initiatives and ensure measurable progress in the near future. Naqvi further directed that work on the Expressway Service Road Project be completed strictly within the approved timeline, underscoring the importance of timely execution of public infrastructure projects. Officials also briefed the meeting on the progress of several mega development projects underway in Islamabad and outlined future planning initiatives aimed at improving the capital's infrastructure, public services and urban management. The discussions reflected the government's broader focus on enhancing civic facilities, reducing traffic bottlenecks and building a financially resilient municipal administration capable of supporting Islamabad's growing development needs.—APP

Consultation held on data governance policy

The Pakistan Digital Authority will review the proposals before finalising the Draft National Data Governance Policy 2026.

The policy will include a phased implementation plan, capacity-building initiatives and administrative measures to establish a modern and sustainable national data governance framework

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Information Technology and Telecommunication Shaza Fatima Khawaja on Wednesday chaired a high-level consultation on the draft National Data Governance Policy 2026 in Islamabad. The meeting was organised by the Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunication (MoITT) in collaboration with the Pakistan Digital Authority (PDA), said a news release. Senior officials from federal ministries, provincial governments, public sector organisations and other stakeholders attended the session. Speaking at the meeting, the minister described the draft policy as a key step towards Pakistan's digital transformation. She said the government was the country's largest holder of data and needed a strong national framework to manage, protect, share and use government data responsibly. Shaza Fatima said input from all government institutions was important to ensure the policy was practical, easy to implement and

in line with the country's digital priorities. Pakistan Digital Authority Chairman Dr Sohail Munir said the policy would support Pakistan's National Digital Master Plan (NDMP), sector-wide digital transformation and the development of Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI). He said the policy did not propose unrestricted data sharing or the centralisation of all government data on a single platform. He added that ownership and protection of data would remain with the relevant institutions. The "WASL" framework, he said, would enable secure data exchange and interoperability through proper data classification. Representatives from federal and provincial governments, along with public sector organisations, presented recommendations on data governance, interoperability, legal alignment, data classification and the policy's implementation. The Pakistan Digital Authority will review the proposals before finalising the Draft National Data Governance Policy 2026. The policy will include a phased implementation plan, capacity-building initiatives and administrative measures to establish a modern and sustainable national data governance framework.

Babu passenger, Sandal Express trains restored

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Railways Muhammad Hanif Abbasi on Wednesday announced the restoration of two suspended passenger trains, saying the decision had been taken in response to persistent public demand and in the interest of the national railway system. The Babu Passenger train operating between Lahore - Lala Musa will resume service from August 20, while the Sandal Express, running from Multan to Sargodha via Jhang, will be restored from August 21, said a news release. The minister said both trains had remained suspended since the COVID-19 pandemic. Hanif Abbasi said the restoration of the two services reflected the government's commitment to improving rail connectivity and facilitating passengers. He said Pakistan Railways would restore more train services during the current year to further strengthen the rail network. The minister said that passenger facilities would also be enhanced in line with the vision of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, with special emphasis on improving service standards and ensuring greater convenience for commuters.—APP

Pakistan to continue political, diplomatic for Kashmiris

ISLAMABAD: Chairman of the Prime Minister's Youth Programme Rana Mashhood Ahmad Khan on Wednesday reaffirmed Pakistan's political, diplomatic and moral support for the people of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir, marking Youm-e-Istehsal-e-Kashmir. In a message issued on the occasion, he said August 5 symbolizes solidarity with the Kashmiri people against India's August 5, 2019 actions, urged the international community to play its role in resolving the Kashmir dispute in accordance with United Nations Security Council resolutions, and reiterated Pakistan's commitment to supporting the Kashmiri people's right to self-determination. Rana Mashhood Ahmad Khan said India's decision to revoke the special constitutional status of Jammu and Kashmir on August 5, 2019 violated United Nations resolutions and international law. He said the Kashmiri people's struggle is a just movement for justice, peace and fundamental human rights.—APP

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When hatred follows refugees across borders

DR. AZEEM IBRAHIM

FOR generations, refugee protection rested on a simple assumption: Those fleeing persecution could cross an international border, find safety in another country and begin rebuilding their lives. The physical act of crossing a frontier marked the transition from danger to protection. That assumption is becoming increasingly outdated. In the digital age, persecution is no longer confined by geography. Refugees may escape the governments, militias or armed groups that forced them from their homes but they cannot always escape the narratives that justified their persecution. Social media has created a world in which misinformation, hate speech and coordinated online campaigns can cross borders far more easily than people. As a result, the threats refugees face increasingly extend beyond the country they fled. The recent surge of online hostility toward Rohingya refugees in Malaysia illustrates this transformation. Reports of community schools closing following online threats and intimidation are more than an isolated national story. They highlight a broader shift in the nature of displacement itself. Refugees are no longer protected simply because they have reached another country. The digital environment of the host state has become an equally important part of their security. This represents a challenge that the international refugee system was never designed to confront. Social media has collapsed the distance between the country of origin and the country of refuge. The 1951 Refugee Convention and the institutions built around it emerged in the aftermath of the Second World War. Their focus was necessarily physical. Refugees required protection from persecution, safe asylum, legal status and the principle of non-refoulement, ensuring they would not be returned to danger. These principles remain fundamental and continue to save countless lives. Yet the architects of the modern refugee system could not have anticipated a world in which the same false narratives that fueled persecution in one country could be reproduced, amplified and exported across digital platforms to another. The Rohingya offer perhaps the clearest example. Years before the 2017 mass displacement from Myanmar, social media had already become an important vehicle for spreading anti-Rohingya propaganda. False stories, conspiracy theories and dehumanizing narratives circulated widely, contributing to an environment in which discrimination and violence became easier to justify. While social media was far from the sole cause of the crisis, numerous investigations have concluded that online platforms played a significant role in amplifying hatred. Today, a similar pattern is emerging beyond Myanmar's borders. In Malaysia, where many Rohingya sought refuge, online hostility has reportedly intensified in recent months, contributing to fear within refugee communities and disrupting access to education. Community schools have faced closure because of security concerns, leaving children particularly vulnerable. The consequences extend well beyond the internet. Digital hostility is increasingly shaping real-world outcomes. This is what makes the issue so significant. Social media has transformed refugee politics by collapsing the distance between the country of origin and the country of refuge. The information environment no longer stops at the border. A refugee may physically leave persecution behind but online narratives can ensure that suspicion, hostility and misinformation arrive first. This creates a dangerous cycle. Digital misinformation fuels public anxiety. Public anxiety generates political pressure. Governments respond by tightening restrictions or reducing support. Refugees become more

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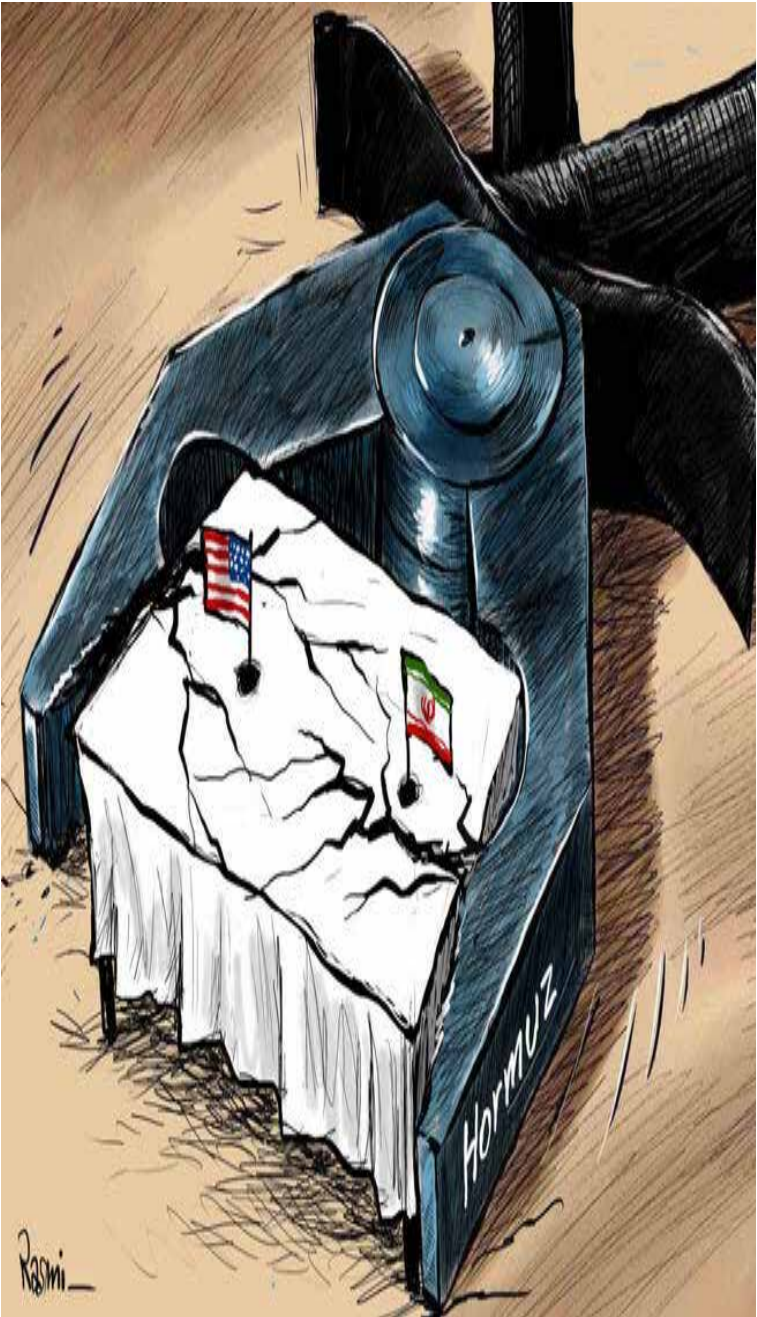
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isolated, limiting opportunities for education, employment and social integration. That exclusion then reinforces negative stereotypes, creating further resentment and additional misinformation. The result is a self-sustaining spiral in which online hostility and offline discrimination continually reinforce one another. The implications extend far beyond the Rohingya. Around the world, refugees increasingly find themselves at the center of digitally amplified political debates. Economic uncertainty, housing shortages and social tensions create fertile ground for misinformation. Refugees, who often lack political representation and legal protection, become convenient targets for narratives that portray them as threats to national identity, public security or economic stability. The speed with which such narratives spread fundamentally alters the politics of asylum. In previous decades, public attitudes toward refugees were largely shaped by traditional media, political leaders and direct interaction with local communities. Today, algorithms reward emotionally charged content, while misinformation can reach millions of people before it is challenged or corrected. Refugee communities rarely possess the resources or institutional capacity to respond effectively. This asymmetry places them at a profound disadvantage. The consequences are particularly severe for children. When schools close because of security fears, education is interrupted. When parents fear harassment, they become reluctant to send children into public spaces. Over time, educational disruption contributes to poverty, social exclusion and diminished opportunities for future employment. Ironically, these outcomes may deepen the very social problems that hostile online narratives claim to fear. The challenge for policymakers is that refugee protection has traditionally focused on physical security. Governments invest in border management, asylum systems and humanitarian assistance. International organizations monitor displacement, coordinate aid and advocate for legal protections. These measures remain indispensable. But they are no longer sufficient. Protecting displaced populations in the 21st century requires more than shelter, food and legal status. Dr. Azeem Ibrahim If digital campaigns can undermine public acceptance of refugees, intimidate vulnerable communities and influence political decision-making, then the information environment itself has become part of refugee protection. This does not mean governments should attempt to police legitimate public debate on migration. Democratic societies will continue to disagree about immigration and asylum policy. Nor does every critical discussion of refugee policy constitute hate speech. The issue is narrower but equally important. When coordinated misinformation, targeted harassment or deliberate incitement threaten the safety and dignity of refugee communities, they cease to be merely questions of online content. They become questions of civilian protection. International organizations therefore need to expand how they think about refugee security. Protecting displaced populations in the 21st century requires more than shelter, food and legal status. It also requires recognizing that digital spaces can become environments in which vulnerability is either reduced or intensified. Early warning systems for refugee crises should include monitoring coordinated online campaigns that target displaced communities. Humanitarian organizations should work more closely with governments, researchers and technology companies to understand how digital narratives influence conditions on the ground. Host governments should recognize that successful refugee integration depends not only on economic opportunities but also on maintaining an information environment that does not reward dehumanization. The Rohingya are not the only refugees confronting this challenge. They are simply among the first to demonstrate its scale. The defining image of 20th century refugee protection was the border crossing. Escape meant reaching another country. The defining challenge of the 21st century may be different. In a world where hatred travels at the speed of an algorithm, crossing the border is no longer enough. Refugees may leave persecution behind but, unless the international community adapts, the persecution can follow them.

China's Rise and America's Decline

Qamar Bashir



This difference in strategic emphasis produced an enormous opportunity gap. Estimates based on Congressional Research Service figures and Brown University's Costs of War project suggest that the direct and broader fiscal costs of American wars since World War I may approach \$18 trillion in 2026 dollars. The total includes direct military operations, post-9/11 homeland-security expenditures, war-related increases in Pentagon spending

THE contrasting trajectories of China and the United States reveal a fundamental lesson of national development: civilian infrastructure creates lasting wealth, while prolonged warfare consumes it. For decades, China concentrated overwhelmingly on economic development, industrial capacity, education, research, infrastructure and technological self-reliance. The United States, despite possessing greater wealth and formidable innovative capacity, repeatedly diverted enormous resources toward overseas wars, military deployments and the maintenance of global strategic dominance. The consequences are now visible in their respective economic priorities and physical landscapes. China has avoided a major, sustained kinetic war for nearly five decades. During the same period, the United States fought or intervened militarily in Vietnam, Lebanon, Grenada, Panama, Iraq, Somalia, the Balkans, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, Yemen and, most recently, Iran, while maintaining hundreds of military installations across the world. This difference in strategic emphasis produced an enormous opportunity gap. Estimates based on Congressional Research Service figures and Brown University's Costs of War project suggest that the direct and broader fiscal costs of American wars since World War I may approach \$18 trillion in 2026 dollars. The total includes direct military operations, post-9/11 homeland-security expenditures, war-related increases in Pentagon spending, interest on borrowed funds and present and future obligations toward veterans. Even this amount does not fully capture the economic consequences of higher energy prices, disrupted trade, inflation, lost productivity or the lifetime costs of caring for wounded personnel. Half of that estimated burden—\$9 trillion—would almost equal the entire amount that the American Society of Civil Engineers says is required between 2024 and 2033 to bring the country's major infrastructure categories into good condition. The organization estimates that America faces a \$3.7 trillion infrastructure financing gap over that period. Had only half of the historical war expenditure been invested efficiently at home, the United States could have closed that gap, repaired its roads and bridges, modernized public transportation, expanded healthcare facilities and still retained trillions for housing, education and scientific research. More than 41,000 American bridges are presently classified as being in poor condition, while approximately one-third require some form of repair or replacement. Roads face an estimated funding gap of nearly \$684 billion. Transit agencies confront a repair and modernization backlog exceeding \$140 billion. Water systems continue to lose treated water through aging pipes, communities still struggle with lead contamination, and electricity networks remain vulnerable to extreme weather, cyberattacks and rising demand. These are not signs of

a country lacking resources. They are signs of a country that has allocated its resources elsewhere. China made a different choice. It constructed the world's largest high-speed railway network, extending approximately 48,000 kilometres, together with a vast expressway, port, airport, electricity and telecommunications systems. It developed globally competitive industries in electric vehicles, batteries, solar panels, wind turbines, nuclear power, shipbuilding, telecommunications and high-speed rail. It invested heavily in universities, laboratories, space exploration, satellite systems and advanced manufacturing. Its infrastructure became the foundation upon which industry, trade and productivity could expand. China's economic growth at the extraordinary 8-10% translating to rapid expansion transformed the country from a largely agrarian economy into the world's leading manufacturing power. By contrast, the mature American economy normally grows between 1% and 3%. This slower growth is not caused exclusively by military expenditure, but recurrent wars, growing debt and the diversion of public investment have undoubtedly imposed significant opportunity costs. China has now extended its development approach abroad through the Belt and Road Initiative. Across approximately 140 participating countries, Chinese companies and financial institutions have supported ports, roads, railways, power plants, pipelines, telecommunications networks and industrial zones. Cumulative Chinese BRI investment and construction engagement reached an estimated \$1.4 trillion through 2025. China is therefore converting national capacity into commercial access, supply chains, political influence and long-term economic partnerships. The American model remains different. Washington generally supplies loans, guarantees, grants, insurance and technical assistance, leaving partner governments and private companies to construct and operate projects. Although the United States supports important ventures such as the Lobito Corridor in Africa, its state-supported overseas infrastructure programme remains much smaller than China's. America's most visible global presence continues to be military, whereas China's is increasingly associated with ports, railways, energy projects and trade. At home, the consequences of American priorities are becoming harder to ignore. Millions remain inadequately insured or exposed to medical bills capable of destroying household savings. Higher education can leave students burdened with debt for decades. Homeownership is increasingly beyond the reach of ordinary working families. Public transportation remains inadequate in many metropolitan areas, forcing households to maintain expensive vehicles. Families facing high housing, insurance, food, healthcare and education costs often live from paycheck to

paycheck despite working full-time. Against this background, the proposed increase in American defence resources from roughly \$1 trillion in FY2026 to \$1.5 trillion in FY2027 demands serious examination. The increase is approximately \$441 billion, while proposed reductions in nondefence discretionary programmes amount to only about \$73 billion. Consequently, civilian cuts would offset less than one-fifth of the military increase. The remaining amount would require additional revenue, further reductions or new borrowing. War costs are not necessarily included within the regular defence budget. When a new conflict begins, the Pentagon can seek emergency supplemental appropriations. For the Iran war, the administration submitted a package of \$87.6 billion, including approximately \$67.1 billion for military operations and weapons replenishment. Such emergency financing, when not matched by taxation or expenditure reductions, enlarges the deficit and ultimately adds to the national debt. The public consequently pays twice: first for the military operation and later through interest on the money borrowed to finance it. Military capability remains necessary. China itself continues modernizing its armed forces, nuclear deterrent, navy, missile systems, cyber capabilities and space assets. No major power can ignore national defence. The real issue is proportion, purpose and strategic discipline. Defence should protect national development; it should not consume the resources required to sustain it. A military that weakens the society and economy behind it ultimately undermines its own foundation. The Iran war may therefore offer Washington an opportunity for strategic reconsideration. America's greatest long-term strength will not be measured only by aircraft carriers, overseas bases or missile inventories. It will be measured by the condition of its bridges, affordability of its homes, accessibility of healthcare, quality of its schools, reliability of public transportation and leadership in science and technology. China's rise demonstrates that patient investment in productive capacity can generate influence more durable than military intervention. If the United States wishes to preserve its position, it must restore balance between power projected abroad and prosperity created at home. The choice is not between defence and development. It is between a defence policy that protects national prosperity and one that gradually consumes it. —The writer is Press Secretary to the President (Rtd) Former Press Minister, Embassy of Pakistan to France Former Press Attaché to Malaysia Former MD, SRBC | Michigan, USA

A day to remember: Ethiopia plants 800 million trees in dingle day

Dr. Oumer H. Oba



By the end of the day, they had planted 800 million young trees. No country has ever planted so many in a single day. The effort was not a sudden burst of enthusiasm

ON 3rd August 2026, about one in every five Ethiopians put down their usual work and picked up a shovel. Be it a minister, diplomat, farmer or student, everybody went out to plant hope for our future generations. According to the official estimates, more than 26 million people took part in the largest single-day plantation in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE). By the end of the day, they had planted 800 million young trees. No country has ever planted so many in a single day. The effort was not a sudden burst of enthusiasm. It is part of the Green Legacy Initiative, launched in 2019 by Prime Minister H.E. Dr. Abiy Ahmed for fast-tracking afforestation and reforestation efforts to achieve food security, avert land degradation and promote green economy. The first target was four billion seedlings. Ethiopia beat it, planting 4.7 billion, including 350 million in one day, according to the Ministry of Agriculture. Every year since, the target has climbed higher, and tree planting has become part of what it means to be Ethiopian. The numbers are hard to take in, but it is an absolute reality. In 2020, even as the pandemic spread, the country planted 5.9 billion seedlings. It managed 6.8 billion the following year and 7.2 billion in 2022, as the

work widened from planting trees to repairing whole landscapes. In both 2023 and 2024 the figure reached 7.5 billion, taking the running total past 32 billion trees, the ministry's figures show. This is not simply a matter of planting saplings and hoping for rain. Native trees and fruit trees now make up 57% of what goes into the ground, so communities can earn something from them as well as benefit from the shade and the soil they hold together. On top of that, 85% of seedlings survive, and these stats are not just on the paper but ensured through digital monitoring. Half of all planting sites are due to be recorded by GPS. The goal for 2025 was to push the running total past 40 billion trees, and the target for 2026 is eight billion in a single year. To this day, Ethiopia has planted more than 48 billion seedlings and the effect is already visible. In 2019, when the initiative began, forests covered 17.2% of Ethiopia. By 2023 that had risen to 23.6% as reported by the Ministry of Agriculture. For a country long troubled by drought and a changing climate, these growing forests are more than a policy. They are an attempt to plant a safer future, one that the children of today's planters will live in, and breathe. The harder work, though,

comes after the crowds go home. A seedling in the ground is only a promise; it becomes a forest only if it is watered, protected from grazing animals and left standing for years. That is a quieter task than a national planting day, and a far longer one but what the programme has already achieved is a change in habit. Planting trees has moved from the margins of policy to something close to a national ritual, repeated every year by tens of millions of people, from cabinet ministers to schoolchildren. Few countries have persuaded so many of their citizens to take part in a single environmental effort for so long, and fewer still have kept raising the target each time. That is perhaps the real legacy: not one record-breaking day, but the idea that restoring a landscape is ordinary work, done a little at a time, by everyone. Ethiopia has spent seven years planting something that will secure the future of not only its own citizens but also entire Africa and the world. The verdict will not come from officials or their figures. It will come from a generation that will simply walk in these forests, breath fresh air and reap the fruits from the grown up trees.

—The writer is Dr. Oumer H. Oba, is the Ambassador of Ethiopia to Pakistan .

Briefs

PM seeks enhanced collaboration...

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He affirmed that Jica was ready to further expand its cooperation with Pakistan in a range of sectors, including health, education, urban and rural development, vocational and technical training, and industrial development. Dr Tanaka stated that cooperation would be further strengthened in line with the development priorities of Pakistan's federal and provincial governments. He remarked that Japan, along with the broader international community, appreciates Pakistan and its leadership's efforts to promote peace in the Middle East. The meeting was attended by Federal Ministers Ahsan Iqbal, Ahmad Khan Cheema, Musadik Malik, Hanif Abbasi, Awais Leghari, Shaza Fatima Khawaja, Special Assistants to the Prime Minister Syed Tariq Fatemi and Haroon Akhtar, as well as senior officials from relevant government institutions.

Several PTI leaders, supporters arrested

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CM Murad further directed the DIG Traffic to personally monitor the situation in the field, stressing that the smooth flow of traffic must be ensured under all circumstances. It is pertinent to mention here that the PTI has long been demanding the release of Khan, but the campaign gained momentum earlier this year after the jailed former prime minister was diagnosed with central retinal vein occlusion (CRVO), a serious eye condition. The former prime minister has been taken to the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (Pims) in Islamabad on multiple occasions from Rawalpindi's Adiala Jail for treatment of his right eye. PTI's request to transfer Khan to Shifa International Hospital in Islamabad for specialised eye treatment was rejected after the Islamabad High Court dismissed a petition filed by the former premier's lawyers.

US lifts curbs on entities linked to IRGC

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effectively granting Tehran significant leverage over global oil shipments. This arrangement has raised concerns among Gulf states, who fear Iran could use its control to impose fees, inspections, or restrictions on rivals. At the same time, Washington insists it will not accept any deal that gives Iran unilateral authority over the strait. The sanctions relief coincides with an interim agreement signed in Versailles between President Donald Trump and Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian. Under the memorandum of understanding, Iran agreed to dilute enriched uranium in exchange for temporary sanctions relief and freedom to export oil. The deal sets a 60-day negotiation window to resolve nuclear and maritime issues, with failure potentially reigniting conflict.

D 8 Secretary General meets Amb Usluer

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the bloc's significance in coordinating common positions on core developmental priorities at relevant international and multilateral fora, reinforcing the commitment of member states to amplify the voice of the Global South in global economic governance. The meeting concluded with a shared commitment to further strengthening the partnership between the D-8 Secretariat and the Turkish host authorities.

UN says Gaza 'unsafe' as Israeli strikes hit tented classrooms and civilian homes

Israeli troops also placed new cement blocks nearby, marking a further expansion of restricted areas beyond the terms of the October ceasefire

UNITED NATIONS: Gaza remains unsafe for civilians as deadly Israeli attacks continue, including on schools and canvas classrooms, despite the October Israel-Hamas ceasefire that ended two years of war, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) warned Tuesday. "Today in Gaza City, our partners reported that a sixth-grade student was taken to the hospital after being hit by a bullet and injured in a tented classroom," UN Deputy Spokesperson Farhan Aziz Haq said, highlighting a spate of school shootings and attacks in Occupied Palestinian Territory, from Gaza

to the West Bank. "We stress that under international humanitarian law, civilians and civilian infrastructure must be protected and should not be targeted," he said. "Learning spaces must remain safe and protected environments for both students and teachers." Following a war that left most of Gaza damaged or destroyed, UN partners are reporting fresh attacks on civilian infrastructure. Farhan Haq said humanitarian partners had already mobilised support for those displaced after Israeli forces reportedly demolished homes and the last remaining school in what was previously a four-school

compound in Beit Lahia as well as tents sheltering nearly a dozen families. Israeli troops also placed new cement blocks nearby, marking a further expansion of restricted areas beyond the terms of the October ceasefire. Since then, Israeli attacks have led to 1,209 fatalities and 3,943 injuries in Gaza. Across the occupied West Bank meanwhile, more than 80 Palestinian schools are currently subject to demolition or related orders, the UN Deputy Spokesperson said. Israeli authorities demolished parts of a school in the Masafer Yatta area of southern Hebron, where more than 1,000 Pal-

estinian residents are under pressure to leave, he said. "So far this year, our education partners have reached more than 60,000 students in the West Bank through remedial and catch-up learning programmes," Farhan Haq said. Efforts have rehabilitated 30 schools, provided transportation assistance and other protective measures to more than 2,600 students and education personnel in high-risk areas and delivered education-specific cash assistance, psychosocial support and legal aid, Mr. Haq said. He emphasized that funding remains critically low. — APP

Arshad Nadeem named in Lausanne Diamond League entry list

Nadeem will face stiff competition from Indian rival Neeraj Chopra, Peters and Pathirage



KARACHI: Pakistan's Olympic gold medalist Arshad Nadeem has been named in the entry list for the men's javelin throw at the Lausanne Diamond League, scheduled for August 21. As per the entry list, unveiled by the event organisers earlier today, Nadeem will face stiff competition from Indian rival Neeraj Chopra, two-time world champion Anderson Peters of Germany and recently-crowned Commonwealth Games gold-medalist and world leader Rumesh Pathirage. The lineup further features the likes of Germany's Thomas Rohler and Keshorn Walcott of Trinidad at the 2026 edition of the Diamond League promises to be one of the strongest in recent years. Notably, Nadeem will enter the competition following an underwhelming outing at the Commonwealth Games 2022 in Glasgow, which saw him fail to defend his gold medal as he finished ninth in the 12-man final. The 29-year-old, who clinched the gold medal at the previous edition of the Games in 2022 with a sensational throw of 90.18 metres, started his defence with a foul. He eventually got onto the leaderboard with a 77.41-metre throw in his second attempt but had slipped down to the ninth spot by the end of the round. Nadeem needed to improve his standing in his third attempt to stay in contention but only managed a slender throw of 75.39 metres and remained in ninth spot, which resulted in him being knocked out of the medal race. Lausanne Diamond League 2026 javelin throw entry list Anderson Peters (Grenada), Arshad Nadeem (Pakistan), Curtis Thompson (USA), Jakub Vadlech (Czechia), Julian Weber (Germany), Keshorn Walcott (Trinidad and Tobago), Neeraj Chopra (India), Rumesh Pathirage (Sri Lanka), Simon Wieland (Switzerland) and Thomas Röhler (Germany). — APP

Pakistan name 20-member squad for FIH Men's Hockey World Cup 2026

FIH Men's Hockey World Cup 2026 scheduled to commence from August 15

DNA

LAHORE: The Pakistan Hockey Federation (PHF) on Wednesday unveiled a 20-member squad and team management for the FIH Men's Hockey World Cup 2026, scheduled to be played in Amstelveen, the Netherlands, and Belgium from August 15 to 30. Having secured qualification for the prestigious tournament, Pakistan are set to compete on hockey's biggest international stage. The announced squad features a balanced blend of experienced internationals and promising young talent as the Green Shirts aim to make a strong impression at the World Cup. The 20-member squad includes Waqar, Muhammad Abdullah, Muhammad Sufyan Khan, Moeen Shakeel, Abdul Waheed Ashraf Rana, Abdul Hanan Shahid, Zakaria Hayat, Arshad Liaqat, Adeel Latif, Ahmad Nadeem, Ghazanfar Ali, Imad Shakeel Butt, Muhammad Hamaduddin Anjum, Rehman Abdul, Afraz, Umar Mustafa, Abu Bakar Mahmood, Ali Raza, Abdul Matan and Muhammad Imad. The two goalkeepers named in the squad are Waqar and Ali Raza. The team management comprises Team Manager Muhammad Owais Qarni, Head Coach Bob Johan Veldhof (Netherlands), Assistant Coach Christopher John Bowen (Great Britain), Assistant Coach Adnan Zakir and Video Technician Ashraf Sultan. The announcement comes around a week after experienced midfielder Ammad Butt was removed as captain of the national men's hockey team after 14 years in the role. In a statement on July 29, the PHF announced Abu Bakar as the new captain of the Pakistan national hockey team on the recommendation of its Professional Development Committee.

Pakistan and US reaffirm joint...

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the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) and its affiliates. "The two governments committed to ensuring their counterterrorism collaboration to keep both of their nations safe and secure, and as part of an enduring vision of regional peace, prosperity, and stability," the FO said. The two sides underscored shared interests in the counterterrorism partnership and the two countries' determination to confront terrorism. Delegations also exchanged views on the current threat environment, explored avenues to enhance collaboration, and discussed steps to strengthen border security and disrupt terrorist facilitation networks. Pakistan has witnessed a sharp rise in terrorist activities, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, since the Afghan Taliban returned to power in Afghanistan in 2021. Islamabad has consistently maintained that India supports militant groups operating from Afghan territory to carry out attacks inside Pakistan. It has also repeatedly called on the Afghan Taliban-led administration to take effective action against terrorist organisations using Afghan soil to launch cross-border attacks. After Islamabad said Kabul failed to fulfil its responsibility, it launched Operation Ghazab li-Haq in February this year in response to cross-border militant attacks from Afghanistan.

KP Sports adviser inaugurates family park at DHQ Hospital Battagram

BATTAGRAM: Adviser to the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Sports and Youth Affairs, Taj Muhammad Khan Tarand, on Wednesday inaugurated a newly established family park at the District Headquarters (DHQ) Hospital Battagram, aimed at providing a peaceful and comfortable environment for patients' attendants and visitors. The inauguration ceremony was attended by Member of the National Assembly Prince Muhammad Nawaz Khan Alai, Deputy Commissioner Battagram Muhammad Shoaib Khan, and other government officials. Following the inauguration, the dignitaries toured the park, reviewed the available facilities, identified missing amenities, and directed the authorities concerned to complete and operationalize the remaining facilities at the earliest. On the occasion, MNA Prince Muhammad Nawaz Khan Alai announced a grant of Rs5 million from his Electoral Development Programme (EDP) fund for the further expansion and improvement of the family park. Addressing the ceremony, Taj Muhammad Khan Tarand said the park had been established to provide a calm

and pleasant atmosphere for patients' family members and attendants, enabling them to find comfort while accompanying their loved ones during treatment. He said the upgradation of DHQ Hospital Battagram had significantly improved healthcare services in the district. He added that advertisements for sanctioned doctors' positions and other vacant posts would be issued soon, creating employment opportunities for residents and further strengthening the hospital's capacity. The adviser expressed confidence that continued improvements at the hospital would ensure the availability of quality healthcare services within Battagram, reducing the need for patients to travel to Islamabad or Peshawar for treatment. He also thanked Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Health Minister Mian Khaliq-ur-Rehman for his support, saying the progress achieved at the hospital was made possible through the minister's efforts. Tarand emphasized that DHQ Hospital Battagram was a valuable public asset and urged citizens and officials alike to contribute to its protection, maintenance, and continued development. — APP

Can Iraq rein in Iran-backed armed factions before Sept. 30 deadline?

LONDON: Fresh violence by Iran-backed militias in Iraq have cast new doubt on Prime Minister Ali Al-Zaidi's ambitious pledge to bring all weapons under state control by the end of September, underscoring the enormous challenge of curbing armed factions that have long operated beyond Baghdad's authority. The renewed violence, including attacks blamed on Iran-aligned groups and the government's inability to fully enforce its authority against powerful militias, has become the first major test of Al-Zaidi's strategy since taking office in May. It has also heightened concerns among Iraq's Gulf neighbors that the country could once again become a launchpad for a wider regional conflict. Those concerns were amplified this week when Jordan warned Iraq that it could launch military operations against Iran-backed militias if attacks originating from Iraqi territory threaten Jordanian security. On Monday, Amman publicly warned Baghdad that it would launch army operations against Iran-backed militias if they attacked Jordanian territory, in a blunt ultimatum to Al-Zaidi's government to take quick and effective measures to curb these armed groups. The warning follows a rapid rise in regional violence, including recent interceptions of Iranian ballistic missiles and drones over Jordanian and Gulf airspace, including Saudi Arabia, which targeted US installations. It marks a shift in Amman's defensive posture amid continued tensions between Washington and Tehran. Jordan is not alone in ramping up pressure on Al-Zaidi, who since taking office in May

has made bringing all weapons under state control the centerpiece of his agenda — a message aimed as much at a domestic audience as at foreign actors, namely Iran, involved in the situation. According to Iraqi sources, Al-Zaidi threatened last week to resign if Iran-aligned armed groups do not cooperate with his government's efforts to bring all weapons under state control. While the rumor has not been confirmed, it underscores the growing frustration surrounding efforts to rein in Iran-backed militias. On June 29, Iraq's government gave pro-Iran armed groups until Sept. 30 to disarm, coinciding with the end of the US-led anti-Daesh coalition's mission. "After this date, all weapons outside the state framework will be subject to legal redress," government spokesman Haidar Al-Aboudi said. As part of the disarmament plan, the government is reportedly weighing a broader structural overhaul that would fold the Popular Mobilization Forces, Federal Police, Rapid Response Force and Border Guards into a single Federal Security Ministry. But beyond public ultimatums, Baghdad appears to be favoring quieter tools — restructuring the security sector while squeezing factions' logistics, financing and command networks in an effort to erode the political cover that shields them. "The process has produced some movement, but not disarmament," Hayder Al-Shakeri, a research fellow at Chatham House, told Arab News. "Some groups have agreed to reorganize or come under tighter official control, but the rogue ones still keep their own weapons and command structures." The PMF is an umbrella of dozens of most-

ly Shiite armed factions established in 2014 after Iraq's top cleric, Ali Al-Sistani, called on volunteers to fight Daesh. The most powerful and militarily capable factions — Kataib Hezbollah, Harakat Al-Nujaba, Kataib Sayyid Al-Shuhada, Asaib Ahl Al-Haq and others — operate under a loose coalition known as the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, which commands roughly 50,000 fighters and arsenals that include long-range missiles and anti-aircraft systems. Some, like Asaib Ahl Al-Haq, hold seats in parliament and government. Others, like Kataib Hezbollah, remain purely armed actors closely tied to Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps. Saraya Al-Salam, followed by Asaib Ahl Al-Haq and Kataib Al-Imam Ali — have pledged to disengage from the PMF and hand over weapons. For years, these groups have straddled the line between state and non-state actors — officially part of Iraq's security architecture, yet retaining independent chains of command, arsenals and — in some cases — political wings. That duality has made them central to Iraq's post-Daesh stability while also cementing a "state within the state" that critics say undermines sovereignty and accountability. Under mounting domestic and international pressure, some factions — Saraya Al-Salam, followed by Asaib Ahl Al-Haq and Kataib Al-Imam Ali — have pledged to disengage from the PMF and hand over weapons. Others, chiefly Kataib Hezbollah and Harakat Al-Nujaba, have rejected disarmament outright, insisting any handover must follow the full withdrawal of foreign troops. Since the eruption of conflict involving Iran, Israel and the US, Tehran has relied increas-

ingly on the services of its Iraqi proxies. Reporting from Reuters in June indicated Iran's Revolutionary Guard set up covert cells inside Iraq that operate independently of established factions and report directly to the IRGC, complicating any effort to identify a single, negotiable chain of command. Late last month, Saudi Arabia accused Iran-aligned Iraqi militias of launching drone attacks on its oil facilities in the Eastern Province, prompting a coordinated US-Saudi retaliatory strike that reportedly killed at least 20 PMF fighters and wounded 32 others across seven Iraqi provinces. Al-Zaidi was forced to postpone a planned visit to Riyadh, where he was supposed to sign a number of security and business agreements, after his National Security Council convened an emergency session. The episode underscored both the political influence and military strength of Iraq's Iran-aligned militias, as well as the narrow room for maneuver available to Al-Zaidi. As Renad Mansour, director of the Iraq Initiative at Chatham House, put it, disarming these factions remains "an impossible task." Some groups, in fact, maintain political and economic wings that they keep separate from their armed activity, since operating under a recognized name could jeopardize those interests. According to analysts, this dynamic — combined with Baghdad's push to formally link factions to the state — is likely to produce more unfamiliar brands in the coming weeks, letting groups that reject integration, or claim to have already disarmed, keep operating with relative freedom while avoiding an open clash with the security services. — APP

DPM Ishaq Dar, Jordanian counterpart discuss ME

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Foreign Affairs and Expatriates Ayman Safadi on the sidelines of a Ministerial Meeting in Amman to discuss the situation in occupied Jerusalem. The FO said that the foreign ministers exchanged views on regional developments, in particular on the deteriorating situation in the occupied West Bank. Dar appreciated Jordan's role in safeguarding the Islamic and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem and its support for the Palestinian people, it added. "The two leaders welcomed the growing momentum in Pakistan-Jordan bilateral relations and reaffirmed [their commitment] to further enhancing cooperation across political, defence, economic, educational, cultural and people-to-people domains," it added. Dar and Safadi also discussed the situation in the region, including the recent developments in the conflict between the United States and Iran.

Protecting Jerusalem is fundamental pillar...

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Jerusalem and its holy sites amid ongoing escalation, according to the Saudi Press Agency (SPA). "The Kingdom confirms that justifying violence and inciting it on the basis of religious or doctrinal claims is a serious deviation from the shared values of the Abrahamic religions and runs counter to the principles of equality in human dignity and the sanctity of human life." Prince Faisal stressed that all unilateral measures taken by Israel in the Palestinian territories are null and void while also denouncing Israeli violations in Gaza. Before the meeting, the Saudi foreign minister met with his Jordanian counterpart, Ayman Safadi. "They also exchanged views on regional developments, particularly the latest situation in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, as well as the ongoing efforts in this regard," the ministry said in a post on X.

India panel warns Meta over Modi video removal

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Meta has said it was caused by technical error. Nishikant Dubey, who heads the parliamentary committee on communications and information technology, said the panel blamed Meta. "Deleting the prime minister's video was not the work of an intermediary, but that of a publisher," Dubey said, a lawmaker in Modi's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). "Zuckerberg will have to apologise within three days." Joel Kaplan, chief global affairs officer at Meta, said he met with India's Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw on Wednesday and apologised. "I apologised to the minister on behalf of Meta for the error restricting PM Modi's post," Kaplan said in a statement.

Kashmir event in Pak embassy...

FROM PAGE 01

Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK). A solemn ceremony was held at the Embassy. Messages of the President of Pakistan, the Prime Minister, and the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister were read out. Pakistan's leadership condemned India's illegal and unilateral actions, as well as the grave and systematic human rights violations in IIOJK. The leadership reaffirmed Pakistan's steadfast support for the Kashmiri people and called for the implementation of the relevant UN Security Council resolutions, which provide for the final disposition of Jammu and Kashmir dispute in accordance with the will of its people through a free and impartial plebiscite under UN auspices.

Briefs

Gasoline, diesel exports from Belarus to Russia hit new record

MOSCOW: Supplies of gasoline and diesel from Belarus to Russia hit a new monthly record in July amid fuel shortages driven by unplanned outages at Russian oil refineries following months of relentless Ukrainian drone strikes, according to two industry sources and Reuters calculations. Russian gasoline output had fallen early in July to a level equivalent to only around 65 percent of the seasonal average consumption, while diesel production had dropped to roughly the level of domestic demand, according to industry data and Reuters calculations. Amid rising wholesale and retail fuel prices, the Russian government introduced a ban on diesel exports, while allowing exemptions for previously concluded contracts and shipments under inter-governmental agreements. Similar export restrictions on gasoline and jet fuel were already in place. According to source-based data, gasoline shipments from Belarus to Russia by rail rose 13 percent last month from June to 212,000 metric tons, while diesel deliveries doubled to 162,000 tons. Jet fuel deliveries from Belarus to Russia totalled about 13,100 tons in July, down from 16,000 tons in June. Belarus supplies fuel to Russia from its two refineries, which process Russian oil and have a combined capacity of 24 million tons per year, or 480,000 barrels per day.—APP

Pope will visit Uruguay, Argentina and Peru

VATICAN CITY: Pope Leo XIV will make his first trip to Latin America as pontiff in November, returning to a region where he spent much of his ministry, with visits to Uruguay, Argentina and Peru, the Vatican announced Wednesday. The Nov. 6-17 trip will include stops in Montevideo, Paysandú and Florida in Uruguay; Buenos Aires, Córdoba and Luján in Argentina; and Lima, Chiclayo, Cusco and Pucallpa in Peru. The visit is especially significant because of Leo's longstanding ties to Peru. The first US-born pope spent decades there as a missionary and church leader and served as bishop of Chiclayo from 2015 to 2023. He also holds Peruvian citizenship. His return to Chiclayo, the diocese he led before his election, is expected to be one of the key moments of the trip. Leo will also visit Argentina, the homeland of his predecessor, late Pope Francis. Despite repeated invitations, Francis, the first Latin American pope, never returned to Argentina during his 12-year papacy. The Vatican said Leo will be in Uruguay from Nov. 6-8, Argentina from Nov. 8-11 and Peru from Nov. 11-17. A detailed itinerary will be released later. The Latin America trip will follow Leo's Sept. 25-28 visit to France, his first trip to the country as pope and part of an increasingly active travel schedule in the early months of his pontificate.—APP

Pak embassy observes Youm-e-Istehsal Kashmir in Beijing

The leadership reaffirmed Pakistan's steadfast support for the Kashmiri people and called for the implementation of the relevant UN Security Council resolutions, which provide for the final disposition of Jammu and Kashmir dispute in accordance with the will of its people through a free and impartial plebiscite under UN auspices

DNA

BEIJING: The Embassy of Pakistan in Beijing observed Youm-e-Istehsal-e-Kashmir today to reaffirm Pakistan's unwavering political, diplomatic and moral support for the just struggle of the Kashmiri people for the realization of their inalienable right to self-determination. Youm-e-Istehsal-e-Kashmir is observed on 5 August every year to denounce India's illegal and unilateral actions of 5 August 2019 in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK).

A solemn ceremony was held at the Embassy. Messages of the President of Pakistan, the Prime Minister, and the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister were read out. Pakistan's leadership condemned India's illegal and unilateral actions, as well as the grave and systematic human rights violations in IIOJK. The leadership reaffirmed Pakistan's steadfast support for the Kashmiri people and called for the implementation of the relevant UN Security Council resolutions, which provide for the final disposition of Jammu and Kashmir dispute in accordance with the will of its people through a free and impartial plebiscite under UN auspices.

Mr. Qian Feng, Director of the Research Department at the National Strategy Institute, Tsinghua University, and Mr. Cheng Xizhong, Senior Research Fellow at the Charhar Institute, underscored the need for a just and peaceful resolution of the Jammu and Kashmir dispute in accordance with the relevant UN Security Council resolutions and the aspirations of the Kashmiri people. Speaking on the occasion, Mr. Aizaz Khan, Chargé d'Affaires of the Embassy, strongly condemned India's illegal and unilateral actions and the continuing oppression of the Kashmiri people by the Indian occupation forces. He stated that India's actions



were in blatant disregard of international law and the relevant UN Security Council resolutions. He also drew the international community's attention to the persecution and marginalization of Muslims in India and the particular tar-

geting of Kashmiri youth in IIOJK. The ceremony also featured the screening of a documentary and a photographic exhibition highlighting the grave human rights violations committed by the Indian occupation forces against



the people of IIOJK, particularly since 5 August 2019. The event was attended by a large number of participants from academia, think tanks and the media, as well as members of the Pakistani community.

More than 800,000 displaced Lebanese returning home after war

BEIRUT: More than 800,000 people displaced by war in Lebanon have begun returning to their hometowns following a lull in violence amid the Israel-Hezbollah war, the United Nations said. The announcement late on Tuesday came as Lebanon and Israel began a new round of US-sponsored talks in Rome aimed at ending the fighting, which are scheduled to run until Thursday. UN humanitarian agency the OCHA said "821,077 people had begun the return to their areas of origin as of 30 July," but added that more than 360,000 remained displaced, around 26,000 of them in government shelters. Hezbollah drew Lebanon into the wider Middle East war in March by firing rockets at Israel in support of its backer Iran. Israel responded with heavy airstrikes and a ground invasion that Lebanon says have killed more than 4,300 people and displaced more than a million at the peak. Violence has decreased since the signing in June of a preliminary US-Iran agreement on the wider regional conflict, which includes a ceasefire in Lebanon, and following a US-sponsored deal between Israel and Lebanon. But Lebanon continues to report intermittent Israeli strikes and shelling, as well as detonations of explosives and demolitions in southern villages, with Israeli troops occupying a swathe of the area. The OCHA said damage to water and electricity infrastructure from the war has severely affected access to water for more than 700,000 people in south Lebanon, home for most of those displaced by the war. During negotiations in Washington in June, Israel and Lebanon agreed to a framework deal that involves the disarmament of Hezbollah, a gradual withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanon's south and the deployment of the Lebanese army to the region, starting in test areas known as "pilot zones." But Hezbollah has rejected the agreement and refuses to disarm, with leader Naim Qassem saying the direct negotiations will bring "nothing but shame, humiliation, and successive compromises" for Lebanon.—APP

Gulf shipping traffic steady amid uncertainty of US-Iran peace talks

SINGAPORE: Shipping traffic at the key Middle Eastern maritime chokepoints of the Strait of Hormuz and the Bab El-Mandeb was little changed on Tuesday from the previous day, ship-tracking data showed. Eight vessels transited the Strait of Hormuz, including five tankers and three bulk carriers, shipping data from Kpler showed, the same as the previous day. Six of the vessels, three tankers and three bulk carriers, were entering the strait, while a gas carrier and a tanker were exiting. Roughly 130 to 140 ships would typically transit the waterway before the US-Israeli war with Iran began on February 28 and Iran responded by closing the strait. Additionally, a liquefied natural gas tanker controlled by Abu Dhabi National Oil Co. reappeared outside the Strait of Hormuz on Tuesday, carrying

a cargo loaded from Das Island, according to LSEG and Kpler data. The tanker Mubarez departed Das Island, United Arab Emirates, on July 14 after picking up a cargo there, both LSEG and Kpler reported. It was last seen inside the strait on July 16, according to the ship-tracking data. The tanker is currently off the western coast of India, both companies' data showed. LSEG data shows a discharge location of India's Dahej terminal in Gujarat, with an arrival date of August 5. This is the third time the Mubarez LNG tanker has exited the strait carrying cargoes from Das Island since the war began. The previous two cargoes were delivered to China and India. In response to a request for comment, ADNOC said the company does not comment on the position, movements, or routing of its vessels as a matter of policy. In the Bab al-Mandab, 20 vessels crossed the strait on Tuesday, with 10 entering and 10 exiting the waterway, Kpler data showed, the same as the previous day. Six tankers, three dry bulk carriers and a gas carrier entered the Bab al-Mandab, while seven tankers and three bulk carriers exited, the data showed. Some vessels may still be sailing with their transponders turned off, which are not considered in the counts. Qatar said on Tuesday that mediators were making progress in efforts to end the US-Iran war, driving oil prices lower, although Tehran has denied President Donald Trump's assertion that talks are already under way.—APP

Oil extends fall as investors await outcome of US-Iran negotiations

SINGAPORE: Oil extended losses on Wednesday as investors waited to see if efforts to end the Iran war and restore traffic through the blockaded Strait of Hormuz were making progress. Brent crude futures were down 32 cents, or 0.4 percent, to \$79.04 a barrel at 09:30 a.m. Saudi time. US West Texas Intermediate futures dropped 58 cents, or 0.8 percent, to \$75.19 a barrel. Both benchmark contracts settled more than 5 percent lower on Tuesday. Qatar said on Tuesday mediators were making progress in efforts to end the war, driving oil prices lower, although Tehran has denied US President Donald Trump's assertion that talks are underway. Brent closed below \$80 a barrel on Tuesday for the first time since July 13. "While the immediate geopolitical premium has unwound, the broader supply picture warrants caution," said Priyanka Sachdeva, head of market insights at Phillip Nova. "If diplomatic efforts fail and physical supply is ultimately affected, the current pullback could prove short-lived, with tighter inventories amplifying the impact of any future supply shock," Sachdeva added. Before the war started, some 20 percent of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas transited through the strait.—APP

Jordan makes no purchase in 120,000 metric ton barley tender

HAMBURG: Jordan's state grain buyer is believed to have made no purchase in an international tender for 120,000 metric tons of animal feed barley which closed on Wednesday, European traders said. Participants were believed to be trading houses Bunge and Olam. Market uncertainty about Black Sea exports caused by recent attacks on grain ships and ports by Russia and Ukraine was believed to have reduced participation in recent wheat and barley tenders from Jordan, traders said.—APP

WHO chief visits Congo to support Ebola efforts

KINSHASA: The head of the World Health Organization arrived in Congo on Wednesday as aid workers said the world's fastest-growing Ebola outbreak is spreading at an "alarming" rate and some health workers are striking over lack of pay. WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus was scheduled to meet with partners and President Félix Tshisekedi in the capital, Kinshasa, the WHO country office told The Associated Press. It was his second visit since the outbreak was declared in mid-May. The Ebola outbreak had 3,874 confirmed cases, including 1,751 deaths, as of Monday, according to data published overnight by Congo's Ministry of Health. In Ituri, the outbreak's epicenter, families said many frontline workers have gone on strike, worsening access to health care that was already challenged by rebel conflict in one of Congo's most remote and vulnerable

areas, its east near the borders of South Sudan, Uganda and Rwanda. While some frontline workers say they have started receiving payment in the last week for work done since the outbreak began, they are demanding improved wages. Anicet Baluku, a resident of Bunia, Ituri's capital, blamed the death of his two brothers from Ebola on the strike. "We urge the authorities to quickly find a solution to prevent other families from experiencing the same tragedy," he told the AP. The outbreak has eclipsed all other Ebola outbreaks in history in its speed of transmission and is the second-largest outbreak on record, behind the 2014-2016 West Africa outbreak that recorded more than 28,000 cases, including over 11,000 deaths. The Bundibugyo virus that is causing this outbreak has no approved treatment or vaccine, and local officials believe it began in a remote

area long before it was declared on May 15. Nearly three months later, the outbreak is still "spreading at an alarming and unprecedented rate," medical charity Doctors Without Doctors said Wednesday. "The response is expanding but is still not reaching communities quickly enough to break transmission chains," the group said. The head of the Africa Centers for Disease and Control, Dr. Jean Kaseya, said Tuesday while visiting Bunia that contact tracing isn't working, with at least 60 percent to 70 percent of new cases coming outside of people being monitored after exposure to patients. Late detection of cases has been a key contributor to the 45 percent fatality rate, officials say. The 77 new cases reported in the previous 24 hours included 44 deaths, according to the health ministry. At least 717 patients are in isolation while 749 patients have recovered.—APP



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Briefs

UN alarmed
by surge
in Iran
executions

GENEVA: UN rights chief Volker Turk said Wednesday he was "alarmed" by the surge in executions in Iran since March, with the death penalty being used by Tehran to "instill fear."

"Since March 19, 2026, at least 56 people have been executed on national security-related charges, including 27 individuals in cases linked to protests at the start of the year," Turk said in a statement. "Over 100 others are at risk of execution on similar charges. Executions for drug-related offenses are also continuing at an alarming rate."

On March 19, Iran executed three people convicted of killing police officers and carrying out operations in favor of the United States and Israel — the first officially announced executions relating to the nationwide anti-government demonstrations that peaked on January 8 and 9.

"I am alarmed by the rise in executions and death sentences issued in Iran since March, and that capital punishment continues to be used to instill fear among the population and suppress dissent," said Turk.

"Persistent lack of fair trial and due process guarantees are deeply troubling. Confessions have allegedly been obtained under torture and other ill-treatment," he said. Several executions have reportedly been carried out in public, with some reportedly conducted only weeks after arrest, said Turk. "Twelve defendants were reportedly sentenced to death following a single three-hour closed-door hearing," he added. In late December, a protest movement initially sparked by the high cost of living rapidly evolved into widespread anti-government demonstrations.

Iranian authorities reported more than 3,000 deaths, but attributed the violence to "terrorist acts" orchestrated by the United States and Israel. Rights groups based abroad put the toll higher and accused the security forces of firing at demonstrators. — APP

Israel
allocates
funds for
West Bank

TEL AVIV: Israel's finance minister, Bezalel Smotrich, announced on Tuesday that \$37 million would be allocated to develop more than 70 alleged Jewish heritage sites in the West Bank.

"This is a Zionist act of the highest order. A people without a past has no future," Smotrich said on X. The move occurs amid increased illegal settlement expansion in the occupied territory. The funding was approved by a government steering committee. The allocation follows an earlier \$83 million program approved in May that forms a wider effort to expand Israeli authority over sites designated as Jewish heritage locations throughout the West Bank and Jordan Valley.

Smotrich did not specify the sites included in the plan. However, he has previously sought to control sites such as Solomon's Pools near Bethlehem. In May, he made an explicit threat to "erase" the agreements that confirmed Palestinian ownership of the site more than 30 years ago. Since his tour of the site, Israeli incursions into the area have increased. The move coincides with the approval of the first reading of a bill to establish a "Judea and Samaria Heritage Authority" by the Knesset in May. The proposal also seeks to guarantee, by law, funding for the authority's activities within the budget of the Ministry of Heritage. Palestinian officials have criticized the plans, arguing that they are designed to increase Israeli control over occupied territory and facilitate further settlement expansion. Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem are considered illegal under international law. — APP

Islamabad, Washington hail
major headway in trade talks

Fin Min Aurangzeb, US trade representative pledge to work towards early conclusion of agreement

DNA

WASHINGTON: Pakistan and the United States on Wednesday acknowledged major progress in negotiations over the proposed reciprocal trade framework, pledging to work towards an early conclusion of the agreement. The development emerged during Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb's virtual meeting with US Trade Representative Ambassador Jameson Greer to review progress on ongoing negotiations aimed at strengthening bilateral trade and economic cooperation, the finance ministry said in a statement. Islamabad and Washington had reached a trade agreement in July last year ahead of President Donald Trump's August 1 deadline that resulted in

the imposition of higher tariffs against various countries on a reciprocal basis. Following negotiations between Pakistani officials and the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR), Washington agreed to lower the proposed reciprocal tariff on Pakistani exports from 29% to 19%. However, the arrangement was disrupted in February when the US Supreme Court ruled 6-3 that the White House had overstepped its constitutional authority by imposing sweeping tariffs under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA), effectively nullifying the policy. The Trump administration later relied on Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1974 to introduce a temporary 10% global tariff for up to 150 days. During today's meeting, the finance minister welcomed "the steady progress made by the

respective negotiating teams" and appreciated the constructive engagement over time. Fin Min Aurangzeb highlighted the importance of maintaining the momentum of negotiations in view of Pakistan's economic priorities.

He emphasised that a strengthened trade and investment partnership with Washington would contribute to Pakistan's export-led growth strategy, support economic resilience, and create greater commercial opportunities for businesses in both countries. The finance minister also underscored the importance of continued collaboration with the US Export-Import Bank (EXIM) to facilitate bilateral trade and investment. For his part, Ambassador Greer acknowledged Pakistan's continued engagement throughout the negotiations and appreciated the progress made on labour and

regulatory reforms, including measures relating to forced labour compliance. He reaffirmed Washington's commitment to sustaining the trajectory of bilateral trade discussions and expressed confidence that the remaining issues could be resolved through continued technical engagement. The finance minister emphasised the importance of maintaining close coordination and accelerating technical-level discussions to build on the progress already achieved. Pakistan and the US agreed to continue working closely to finalise the remaining elements of the framework and continue regular engagement to conclude the reciprocal trade framework soon. Federal Secretary for Commerce Jawad Paul and senior team members of the Office of the USTR also attended the meeting.

Türkiye to
reintegrate
PKK
militants

ANKARA: Türkiye's ruling alliance submitted a draft law to parliament on Wednesday meant to achieve peace with the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) in part by protecting many former militants from prosecution, and suspending prison sentences for many of those convicted of membership. The bill, which is expected to pass the assembly later this week, aims to end a decades-old conflict in part by facilitating the return to Türkiye of potentially thousands of former PKK militants based in northern Iraq. Türkiye's intelligence agency MIT would verify the group's disarmament and a committee — including the vice president. — APP



ISLAMABAD: A high-level defence delegation of the Federal Republic of Somalia, led by H.E. Ambassador Ahmed Moallim Fiqi, Minister of Defence, called on Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmed Baber Sidhu, Chief of the Air Staff, Pakistan Air Force, at Air Headquarters. — DNA

President, PM vow
continued diplomatic,
support for Kashmiris

Pakistan renews solidarity with Kashmiris to mark seven years since India abrogated Article 370 in IIOJK

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari has reaffirmed unwavering solidarity with the people of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) on Yous-e-Istehsal Kashmir and paid tribute to their courage, resilience and commitment to their just struggle for the realisation of their inalienable right to self-determination. Today marks seven years since India revoked the special constitutional status of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK). The government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi had scrapped Article 370 and split the disputed region into two federally administered union territories. "Seven years have passed since India's illegal and unilateral actions of August 5, 2019, which sought to alter the internationally recognised disputed status of Jammu and Kashmir in violation of international law and the relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions," the president said in a message. He said these actions could not change the legal status of the dispute, nor could they weaken the resolve of the Kashmiri people. For seven years, President Zardari said millions of Kashmiris had continued to live under severe restrictions that had affected every aspect of daily life. "Families have endured uncertainty, young people have seen their opportunities constrained and entire communities have continued to bear the burden of prolonged conflict and instability. Despite these hardships, the people of Jammu and Kashmir have remained steadfast in their pursuit of justice and their legitimate right to

determine their own future." President Zardari said Pakistan remained unwavering in its moral, political and diplomatic support for the people of IIOJK.

"We will continue to raise our voice at every international forum until the Jammu and Kashmir dispute is resolved in accordance with the relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions and the aspirations of the Kashmiri people." He highlighted that a just and lasting peace in South Asia was closely linked to the peaceful resolution of the Jammu and Kashmir dispute. "I urge the international community, particularly the United Nations, to play its role in addressing the grave human rights situation in IIOJK and in advancing a just and peaceful settlement of this longstanding dispute."

"To my Kashmiri brothers and sisters, I say: Pakistan stands firmly with you. Your courage in the face of adversity inspires us. You are not alone. The people of Pakistan will continue to stand by you until your legitimate right to self-determination is realised," the president said and prayed to Allah Almighty to grant the people of Jammu and Kashmir strength, patience and steadfastness, and bless them with justice and lasting peace.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif reaffirmed that peaceful and just resolution of the Jammu and Kashmir dispute remained a cornerstone of Pakistan's foreign policy and Pakistan would continue to extend its diplomatic, political and moral support and raise the voice of the Kashmiri people at every regional and international forum. He said Pakistan called upon the international community to urge India to end its human rights violations in IIOJK, reverse its illegal and unilateral measures introduced since August 2019.

AJK polls: PML-N, PPP win one seat
each in Muzaffarabad constituencies

Noreen Arif of PML-N secures victory in LA-27 Muzaffarabad-I; PPP's Bazil Ali wins LA-28 Muzaffarabad-II

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) secured one seat each as unofficial and unconfirmed results emerged on Wednesday from two Muzaffarabad Division constituencies in the Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) Legislative Assembly elections. Polling was held on Tuesday in LA-27 Muzaffarabad-I and LA-28 Muzaffarabad-II after voting was postponed on August 2 due to adverse weather conditions. The second phase of the AJK polls was conducted on Sunday across 19 of the 21 constituencies, comprising seven seats in Muzaffarabad Division and 12 reserved for Kashmiri refugees settled in Pakistan. According to unofficial and unconfirmed results from all 197 polling stations in LA-27 Muzaffarabad-I, the PML-N's Noreen Arif won the seat with 18,919 votes. The Istehkam-e-Pakistan Party's (IPP) Sardar Tabarak Ali finished second with 18,621 votes. In LA-28 Muzaffarabad-II, PPP's Bazil Ali Naqvi secured victory with 28,170 votes while PML-N's Chaudhry Shehzad finished second with 26,864, according to unofficial results of 174 polling stations. With voting completed in the two postponed constituencies, results for all 21 seats contested in the second phase of the elections have now been announced. Following the announcement of results, the number

of PML-N's seats rose to 15, while the PPP secured 6 seats in the second phase of the AJK Legislative Assembly elections. In a statement, an AJK Election Commission spokesperson said polling in all constituencies of Poonch Division would be held as scheduled on August 10 and urged voters not to pay attention to rumours. The spokesperson advised voters to exercise their right to vote according to the announced schedule, adding that the Election Commission would promptly inform the public if any changes became necessary. PPP leader Sherry Rehman alleged that polling staff in LA-27 had been found at the house of a PML-N supporter along with ballot papers. She said videos related to the alleged rigging had been submitted to election authorities as evidence and urged the AJK Election Commission to initiate immediate administrative and legal action, conduct a transparent investigation and hold those responsible accountable. The PPP leader said that it is highly questionable that the polling staff concerned had continued performing election duties despite what she described as clear evidence of irregularities. Rehman said the incidents had raised serious questions over the transparency and impartiality of the election, as well as the credibility of the institutions overseeing the process. She also demanded that all those responsible for influencing the electoral process be held accountable in accordance with the law.

India floods kill over 100

NEW DELHI: Floods and landslides triggered by monsoon rains have killed more than 100 people across India since July, official data showed Wednesday, with thousands forced to flee their inundated homes. While the annual monsoon brings rainfall that farmers depend on, scientists say climate change is making the phenomenon more erratic, unpredictable and deadly across the South Asia region.

India's northeastern state of Assam is among the hardest hit by the annual rains, with at least 87 people killed, according to Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma.

In the state's worst-affected Sivasagar district, some 47 people have been killed as several areas remain under water.

State authorities have appealed for financial donations from the public to support relief and rehabilitation efforts.

"The devastation here is unlike anything these areas have witnessed before," Sarma posted on X. "Material losses can be restored, but no compensation can replace a loved one." AFP images showed residents

using rafts and inflated boats to reach higher ground with the help of the state's disaster response officials. In India's southern state of Kerala, Chief Minister VD Sathesaran said at least 15 people have been killed and another seven were missing after heavy rains over several days. More than 300 relief camps have been set up in the state, sheltering over 10,000 people, after rains triggered landslides and swollen rivers breached their banks. In the Himalayan territory of Jammu and Kashmir, at least 31 people have been killed in several short bursts of extremely intense rainfall, according to a report by the public state broadcaster.

Monsoon-related disasters are an annual occurrence across India after the region's long summers when many parts of the country face water scarcity and drought.

Neighbouring Sri Lanka has also seen unusually heavy monsoon rains that have caused flash floods and mudslides, claiming the lives of at least eight people since Monday, according to the Disaster Management Center. — Agencies

Search teams recover famed
climber Purja's body and 3 others

ISLAMABAD: Search teams backed by military helicopters recovered the bodies of renowned British-Nepali mountaineer Nirmal Purja and three other missing climbers on Wednesday, bringing the number of bodies recovered from Broad Peak to seven nearly a week after an avalanche swept away a 10-member international expedition, officials said Wednesday. The Alpine Club of Pakistan said the operation was one of the most technically demanding recovery missions ever carried out on the mountain. It said the bodies of Purja, Chinese climber Zhong Wang and Nepali climbers Nima Sherpa and Kilu Sherpa were brought to Broad Peak base Camp. Search teams brought down three other bodies on Aug. 1. The bodies will be transported to a military hospital in Skardu when weather conditions permit, local officials said.

In Nepal's capital, Katmandu, family members, friends and supporters of the climbers gathered Tuesday evening for a candlelight vigil. Buddhist monks chanted prayers as mourners observed a moment of silence before lighting candles in memory of those killed in the avalanche. The climbers, who came from Nepal, Oman, Pakistan, China, Britain and the United States, were swept away by an avalanche last Thursday in Pakistan's northern Gilgit-Baltistan region, in what the Alpine Club has described as one of the country's deadliest mountaineering disasters. Pakistan Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar expressed condolences to the families of those killed, saying he was deeply saddened by the tragedy and Pakistan remained committed to the ongoing operation in coordination with the embassies of Nepal, Oman, Britain and the United States. Mountaineering accidents are common in northern Pakistan because of avalanches, falling ice and rock, extreme altitude and rapidly changing weather. A Chinese climber died last year after being struck by falling rocks while descending K2, the world's second-highest mountain. — DNA