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Syria looks for close links with Pakistan, says foreign minister

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Briefs

5 terrorists killed in Panjgur

DNA

QUETTA: Security forces killed five terrorists during an intelligence-based operation (IBO) in the Killi Suran area of Panjgur under Operation Raddul Fitna 3, it emerged on Thursday. Security forces said that intelligence was received regarding the movement of terrorists planning an attack. They said that five terrorists were killed in the incident while several others were wounded. Security forces also said that a large quantity of weapons, ammunition and equipment was recovered from the terrorists. They added that the killed terrorists were involved in robbery, extortion, kidnapping for ransom, targeted killings and attacks in Panjgur and surrounding areas. Security forces said operations under Operation Raddul Fitna 3 would continue as part of efforts to eliminate militant threats and restore security in the region. Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi commended security forces for thwarting the "nefarious designs" of the terrorists affiliated with Fitna-al-Hindustan, according to a statement issued by his ministry.

New Bangladesh President to sworn in today

DNA

DHAKA: Bangladeshi lawmakers elected veteran Bangladesh Nationalist Party leader Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir as the country's new president on Thursday, making the long-time opposition figure the head of state after his party came to power in a major political transition. The BNP returned to power in February in the long wake of the fall of Sheikh Hasina's Awami League government in 2024. While the presidency is largely ceremonial, Alamgir will serve as head of state and commander-in-chief of the armed forces. Executive authority remains with the prime minister and cabinet in the South Asian nation of about 173 million people. Alamgir, 78, defeated Oli Ahmed, a retired army colonel and chairman of the Liberal Democratic Party and candidate of the Jamaat-e-Islami-led 11-party opposition alliance, in a parliamentary vote.

Fazl hints at unified opposition

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: Jamiat Ulama-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman on Thursday announced a "united opposition" after meeting National Assembly opposition leader and Tehreek Tahafuz Ayeen-e-Pakistan (TTAP) chief Mehmood Khan Achakzai. The development came a day after Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), a key coalition partner in the centre, and the opposition parties had agreed to cooperate on legislative matters in parliament. The JUI-F chief, along with a delegation comprising Kamran Murtaza and Maulana Abdul Wasay, held an important meeting with TTAP chief Achakzai, PTT's Asad Qaisar and Akhunnada Hussain Yousafzai in the chamber of the opposition leader. Speaking to journalists outside Parliament House after the meeting, Fazl said: "JUI-F and TTAP have agreed to form a joint opposition."

In the National Assembly Bills related to military sail smoothly

Lawmakers endorse legislation aimed at aligning defence institutions with recent constitutional changes; office of the chief of defence forces further strengthened

SAIFULLAH ANSAR / DNA

ISLAMABAD: The National Assembly on Thursday passed by majority vote the Defence Forces Act 2026, and the National Command Authority (Amendment) Bill, following their approval by the federal cabinet earlier. The bills were approved by the cabinet during a meeting chaired by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, where the government endorsed draft legislation aimed at implementing legal and administrative changes arising from the 27th Constitutional Amendment. The cabinet approved the draft Defence Forces Act 2026, which seeks to establish the necessary legal and administrative framework concerning the office of the Chief of Defence Forces and the Chief of Defence Forces Headquarters. In the same meeting, the federal cabinet also approved amendments to the National Command Authority Act 2010. The draft and amended National Command Authority Act was subsequently brought before the National Assembly for consideration and was approved through a majority vote. The 27th Amendment, which was passed in November last year, brought changes to the judicial structure and military command, resulting in the abolition of the office of the Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee and

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Cabinet approves drafts of two bills

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The federal cabinet approved on Thursday the drafts of two bills pertaining to the military and nuclear command structure. A statement released by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) following a federal cabinet meeting in Islamabad said the drafts of the Defence Forces Act, 2026 and amended National Command Authority Act, 2010 had been approved. The statement said the Defence Forces Act's draft had been prepared in continuation of the tweaks made to the Constitution under the 27th Amendment and "aims to determine the relevant administrative matters regarding the office of the Chief of Defence Forces and the Chief of Defence Forces Headquarters". Regarding amendments to the National Command Authority Act,

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Iran slams new curbs

US urges allies, China to cooperate on Iran sanctions

China has pushed back against US President Donald Trump's threat of an "economic warfare" campaign against Iran, stating that more sanctions will not solve the outstanding issues

NEWS DESK

WASHINGTON: The United States will impose "the toughest sanctions in history" on Iran, US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said on Thursday as he urged Beijing to cooperate with Washington. Bessent said he would hold a press conference on Monday to discuss details. "It is a one-two punch. We have the blockade (on Iran), and we are going to have the toughest sanctions in history," Bessent told CNBC. "It is going to work in Iran and we are going to collapse this regime." "It is time for our allies and the rest of the world to make a decision," he said. President Donald Trump warned on Wednesday of economic consequences against

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Pakistanis injured in Houthi attack have returned safely

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar said on Thursday that six Pakistani sailors injured in an attack by Yemen's Houthi rebels in the Red Sea earlier this month have returned to Pakistan. The Aug 11 attack had targeted a Tanzania-flagged vessel, Tihamah, causing deaths and injuries among its crew.

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Pakistan values relations with Syria says PM Shehbaz

Foreign Minister of the Syrian Arab Republic, Mr. Asaad Hassan Al-Shaibani, called on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif

ANSAR M BHATTI



ISLAMABAD: Foreign Minister of the Syrian Arab Republic Mr. Asaad Hassan Al-Shaibani called on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif in Islamabad on 20 August 2026. – DNA

ISLAMABAD: Foreign Minister of the Syrian Arab Republic, Mr. Asaad Hassan Al-Shaibani, called on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif. Welcoming Mr. Al-Shaibani and his delegation, the Prime Minister conveyed his best wishes for President Ahmed al-Sharaa, and recalled his recent interactions with him. He also reaffirmed Pakistan's steadfast support for the sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity of Syria. While recalling the historic and multifaceted ties between the two countries, the Prime Minister emphasized the need to translate the longstanding Pakistan-Syria friendship into enhanced cooperation across politics, defence, trade, investment, education, and human resource development. He stated that the resumption of direct flights between the two countries would enhance people-to-people exchanges and facilitate a

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ASEAN DAY CELEBRATED



ISLAMABAD: Chief guest Aurangzeb Khan Khichi, Federal Minister for Culture, National Heritage, Heads of Missions of ASEAN countries cutting cake to celebrate the ASEAN Day. – DNA

Imran may be sent abroad, claims minister

MAHNOOR ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: The government on Thursday hinted that PTI founder Imran Khan could be sent abroad for medical treatment if required, and that it had moved the Supreme Court only to seek clarification on whether the relief granted in the recent order was limited to one individual or applicable to other prisoners as well. The statement was made by Parliamentary Affairs Minister Dr Tariq Fazal Chaudhry during a heated Senate session after Opposition Leader Allama Raja Nasir Abbas raised the issue of inadequate health facilities for former premier and detained PTI leaders, including Dr Yasmin Rashid and Ejaz Chaudhry, and sought relief for all political prisoners.

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Imran shifted to hospital SC returns govt's review petition

Govt to file review petition again after addressing SC Registrar Office's objections, say sources

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court (SC) on Thursday returned a review petition filed by the federal government against the top court's order to shift incarcerated former prime minister Imran Khan to Islamabad's Shifa International Hospital for medical examination and treatment. Supreme Court (SC) Registrar's Office raised objections to the federal government's plea filed by the Islamabad chief commissioner, said sources. The review petition will be filed again after addressing the Registrar Office's objections, they said. Meanwhile, in a post on X, PTI Secretary General Salman Akram Raja has said the "federal government has withdrawn" its review petition against

Continued on Page 06

PM Shehbaz extends olive branch to opposition

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said on Thursday that the federal government was ready to hold negotiations with the opposition, stating that "it takes two to tango". Addressing the federal cabinet meeting, the prime minister said it was now up to the opposition to decide when it wanted to come to the negotiating table. "We are ready for meaningful dialogue."

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KP govt to outsource low-performing schools

PESHAWAR: The provincial government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) is going to outsource low-performing schools to improve their performance. In this regard, a briefing on the Phase-I outsourcing of low-performing public-sector schools was held at the Elementary & Secondary Education Foundation (ESEF), KP, chaired by Qaisar Alam, Managing Director, ESEF. The meeting was attended by Habib Ur Rehman, Director Programs, Shafqat Ul Mulk, Project Manager (PIU), Muhammad Khalid, Procurement Specialist (PIU), Roman Gul, M&E Specialist, Said Zada, Coordinator, Outsourced Schools; and members of the Chief Secretary's Technical Assistance Team. Director Programs Shafqat ul Mulk briefed the participants on the status of the 500 schools under Phase-I and presented the roadmap for the next phase covering an additional 1,500 schools. Under Phase-I, 445 schools are projected to be operationalized, while 55 schools are proposed for the next phase, subject to assessment.—APP

KP introduces 'Show of Papers' practice for students

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has directed all educational boards across the province to introduce the "Show of Papers" practice to improve transparency and accountability in the examination system. According to a notification issued by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Education Department on Thursday, students will now be able to apply to review their answer sheets in connection with their examination results. Under the new policy, all educational boards in the province have been directed to accept applications from students seeking to review their answer sheets without discrimination. The initiative aims to give students an opportunity to examine their answer sheets and ensure greater transparency in the declaration of examination results. The Education Department said the successful "Show of Papers" model introduced by the Kohat Board has been approved for implementation by other educational boards across the province.—APP

Japan provides grant assistance for project

KARACHI: The Government of Japan has announced to provide Grant Assistance for Grassroots Human Security Projects (GGP) of up to USD 55,734 (equivalent to PKR 15.5 million) to a local NGO for the purchase of a new school bus for special students in Karachi. The GGP grant contract was signed on Thursday at the Consulate-General of Japan in Karachi between the Consul General of Japan in Karachi, HATORI Masaru, and Habiba Habib, President of the Institute of Behavioral Psychology (IBP) School of Special Education in Karachi.—APP

Kazakhstan ambassador pays farewell call on President Zardari

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari has appreciated Ambassador of Kazakhstan Yerzhan Kistafin's contribution to strengthening Pakistan-Kazakhstan relations during his five-year tenure in Pakistan. Receiving the Ambassador for a farewell call at Aiwan-e-Sadr, the President said bilateral relations had witnessed significant progress during his tenure, culminating in the historic State Visit of President Kassym-Jomart



Tokayev to Pakistan in February 2026, the first by a Kazakh President to Pakistan in 23 years, which elevated bilateral ties to a Strategic Partnership. The President stressed the need for effective implementation of the agreements and MoUs signed during the visit and for translating political goodwill into greater trade and investment. He said the target of US\$1 billion in bilateral trade within two years was achievable through

sustained engagement. He highlighted opportunities in agriculture, energy, mining and minerals, IT, pharmaceuticals, textiles and defence production, while stressing the importance of stronger road, rail, air and maritime connectivity. President Zardari appreciated President Tokayev and the Government of Kazakhstan for the US\$1 million grant to the Pakistan Education Endowment Fund and welcomed the opening of the first Kazakhstan-Pakistan Artificial Intelligence Centre in Gujranwala. The Ambassador informed the President that Kazakhstan is working to establish railway connectivity with Pakistan and that six sectoral working groups covering trade, transport, energy, agriculture, IT and education were already operational.

He said Kazakhstan has established campuses of several leading international universities, providing students from countries including Pakistan with opportunities to study at reputed international universities at considerably lower cost. He noted that around 1,000 Pakistani students are currently studying in Kazakh universities. The Ambassador said that Kazakhstan could serve as a potential market for Pakistani fruits, particularly mangoes, guava, falsa and other tropical fruits. —DNA

MSS hosts strategic get-together, advisory board session

Dr. Fauzia Khan, Chief Advisor & Head of Curriculum Implementation Wing / Member, School Education & Literacy Department (SELD), Sindh, emphasized aligning MSS modules with official Sindh education policies, integrating Middle-Tech and Matric-Tech vocational streams, introducing early career orientation, and implementing diagnostic progress tracking

DNA

KARACHI — Meezan School System (MSS) hosted a strategic get-together and Advisory Board session for its Sindh Chapter at the Pearl-Continental (PC) Hotel, Karachi, bringing together prominent educationists, policy leaders, and public sector stakeholders to review blueprints for its upcoming academic footprint and nationwide scaling. The session was chaired by M. Adnan Mukhtar, Chief Executive Officer of Meezan School System, who presented the core vision, development updates, and operational readiness for the upcoming soft launch. Director of Academics Faiza Fatima briefed the assembly on MSS's academic framework, focusing on blended learning methodologies, foundational literacy benchmarks, and modern curriculum scaffolding. The gathering featured valuable consultative insights from distinguished advisory members and public sector leaders: Dr. Fauzia Khan, Chief Advisor & Head of Curriculum Implementation Wing / Member, School Education & Literacy Department (SELD), Sindh, emphasized aligning MSS modules with official Sindh education policies, integrating Middle-Tech and Matric-Tech vocational streams, introducing early career orientation, and implementing diagnostic progress tracking. Dr. Rana Hussain, Senior Education Policy Advisor and Former Sindh Minister for School Education & Literacy, advocated for modern educational technology and targeted foundational literacy from Early Childhood through Grade .

Ms. Farah Sohail, Member of the Provincial Assembly (MPA), Sindh, highlighted the importance of continuous, segmented teacher-training programs and engaging regional educational partners across Sindh. Dr. Maroof Bin Rauf, Assistant Professor at the Department of Education, University of Karachi, underlined value-based education and proposed academic collaboration with the University of Karachi for faculty development and model campus development. Ms. Uzma, Director of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Directorate, SELD Sindh, underscored the necessity of adhering to standardized provincial ECCE benchmarks across all emerging cam-



pus. The Sindh Chapter get-together concluded with a joint commitment to align institutional frameworks with regional public sector

standards, advance teacher-enablement initiatives, and execute strategic campus rollouts across Karachi and the wider province.

Minister stresses capacity building of field staff

LAHORE: Local Government Minister Zeeshan Rafique, during a meeting regarding the Suthra Punjab program at the Civil Secretariat, stressed capacity building of field monitoring officers (FMOs) and tehsil managers saying that FMOs should regularly check the attendance of sanitation workers at the level of union councils. The meeting was also attended by Secretary Local Government Zaid Bin Maqsood, Special Secretary Shahid Zaman Lak and DG Suthra Punjab Authority Umar Javed, while the Managing Directors of the district agencies participated

through video link. On this occasion, a detailed review of the performance of the district agencies and other issues was taken. Local Government Minister Zeeshan Rafique said that all possible steps are being taken to achieve the cleanliness targets. He warned that strict action will be taken against absenteeism and laxity in waste collection. "Regular shifting of waste from waste enclosures and temporary collection points (TCPs) should be ensured", he urged. The Minister for Local Government said that after every

rain in the monsoon season, the roadsides should be cleaned immediately. "For this, both mechanical and manual sweeping methods should be used", he added. He said that complaints received on the helpline and app should be redressed as soon as possible. Zeeshan Rafique while directing to activate anti-littering strategies against littering said that the cleaning process in commercial areas should continue till night. "There should be no negligence in collecting waste from railway tracks as well", he directed.—APP

RCCI President urge to boost academia industry linkage

RAWALPINDI: RCCI President Usman Shaukat participated in the 1st International Education Tourism Summit & Expo, organized by the Islamic Chamber of Commerce and Development (ICCD) as part of its Tea for Tourism Series, powered by the Sustainable Tourism Forum & Expo (STF). In his address, RCCI President Usman Shaukat emphasized the importance of strengthening industry-academia linkages, aligning education with market needs, developing a skilled workforce, and expanding vocational and technical training to prepare Pakistan's youth for emerging opportunities.—APP

NUST hosts delegation of university leaders

ISLAMABAD: National University of Sciences & Technology (NUST) hosted a delegation of Vice Chancellors, Pro-Vice Chancellors, senior Deans and statutory heads of public sector universities from AJK, GB, KP and the Rawalpindi region. The delegation was received by Pro-Rector Academics, Dr Osman Hasan and Chief of Finance & Business Development, Mr Rao Sabir Ali Khan. During the visit, the delegation was briefed on NUST's academic ecosystem, research and innovation landscape, and key institutional initiatives. The participants also visited selected facilities including the National Science and Technology Park (NSTP) and the School of Interdisciplinary Engineering and Sciences (SINES).—APP

Efforts afoot to at passenger facilities at Karachi airport

ISLAMABAD: Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Raja Osama Sarwar on Thursday said the government was undertaking a series of infrastructure and operational improvements at Karachi airport to enhance passenger facilities, safety and operational efficiency. Responding to a Calling Attention Notice regarding infrastructure facilities and the operational condition of Jinnah International Airport, Karachi, he said digital passenger information screening software had been introduced at the airport, while a runway had also been developed and expanded. He said a new lighting system had been installed to facilitate aircraft landing at night and improve operational safety.

Raja Osama said several other projects were part of the government's plan, including a dedicated isolation bay to deal with hijacking or other security threats, improvements to the Air Traffic Control (ATC) building and an upgraded baggage-handling system. He said the government had already completed several major projects at Karachi airport. A new runway had been constructed around eight months ago, with capacity to handle 38 aircraft, while two taxiways had also been built to reduce aircraft descent and landing times. The parliamentary secretary said consultancy for a new Air Traffic Control tower had been completed and work on the project had commenced. He

said the airport could not be completely shut down for renovation as it had to continue serving passengers and maintaining flight operations. Therefore, improvements were being carried out in phases. He said the next phase included replacement of tiles, improvement of counters and terminal lighting, and expansion of parking capacity, which was being increased threefold. Raja Osama said the government was also working to improve electronic facilities at the airport. He said international passenger processing facilities would be expanded and their timing improved to facilitate travellers. He said firefighting and fire-protection arrangements were also being strengthened, while renovation of all toilets at the airport had been initiated. He added that an additional water source would be provided as a backup to ensure uninterrupted water availability at the airport. The parliamentary secretary said e-gates would also be introduced to facilitate passengers and enable eligible travellers to complete exit procedures more conveniently.—APP

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Gilani calls for strong governance in universities

Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani said education was one of the strongest pillars of national unity and sustainable development. As Chairman Senate, he emphasized that universities across all regions of Pakistan have a vital role in promoting social harmony, strengthening democratic values and contributing to national progress.

ISLAMABAD: Chairman Senate Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani on Thursday emphasised the need for effective leadership, sound governance and strategic planning to strengthen Pakistan's higher education sector and transform universities into centres of excellence, research, innovation and entrepreneurship. Addressing a gathering on "Strategic Planning and Leadership Excellence" as Chief Guest, organised by the Higher Education Commission (HEC) through the National Academy of Higher Education, the Chairman Senate said that universities today have responsibilities far beyond imparting knowledge. He said higher education institutions must equip young people with critical thinking, creativity, ethical values, leadership skills and the capacity to respond to a rapidly changing world. The Chairman Senate appreciated HEC, particularly the National Academy of Higher Education, for bringing together Vice Chancellors and Pro Vice Chancellors from Azad Jammu & Kashmir, Gilgit-Baltistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the Rawalpindi region. He termed the initiative timely and important, saying that such programmes provide an opportunity for university leadership to exchange experiences, strengthen governance practices and develop effective institutional strategies. Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani observed that strategic planning is not merely an administrative exercise but an essential



requirement for institutional growth and excellence. He stressed that strong universities require a clear vision, transparent governance, responsible use of resources and an institutional culture that promotes innovation, collaboration and research. He particularly appreciated the participation of women universities in the programme, saying that the advancement of women through higher education is fundamental to national development. "When we invest in women's education and leadership, we strengthen families, communities, institutions and the economy," he remarked, adding that women educators and academic leaders across Pakistan have consistently demonstrated

excellence and leadership. The Chairman Senate said Pakistan's progress was closely linked with the strength of its universities. He called for transforming higher education institutions into stronger centres of research, innovation, entrepreneurship and policy development, enabling graduates to make meaningful contributions to society and the national economy. Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani said education was one of the strongest pillars of national unity and sustainable development. As Chairman Senate, he emphasized that universities across all regions of Pakistan have a vital role in promoting social harmony, strengthening democratic values and contributing to national

progress. He said institutions in Azad Jammu & Kashmir, Gilgit-Baltistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, Sindh and Balochistan all have an important role in building a stronger, more prosperous and united Pakistan. The Chairman Senate commended HEC for investing in institutional leadership and strategic capacity building, noting that initiatives of this nature enable university leaders to develop strategies that respond effectively to international developments as well as Pakistan's national priorities. He urged Vice Chancellors and Pro Vice Chancellors to foster a culture of excellence, collaboration, inclusivity and innovation within their institutions. He called for universities that encourage discovery, promote research, support entrepreneurship and prepare students to become responsible citizens and future leaders. The Chairman Senate congratulated the participants and organizers, expressing hope that the discussions and exchange of experiences would contribute meaningfully to strengthening higher education across Pakistan. "Let us build universities that not only educate minds, but also develop character, leadership and a spirit of service to the nation," he said. The Chairman Senate prayed for Pakistan's peace, prosperity and continued progress and reiterated his commitment to supporting initiatives aimed at strengthening education, institutional capacity and national development.

Chinese dairy products, export opportunities for Pakistan

GUANGZHOU: China's dairy import market, valued at \$12.78 billion in 2025 with 2.66 million tonnes of products imported, is emerging as a promising frontier for Pakistani dairy exporters as bilateral agricultural co-operation between the two nations continues to expand. According to the Dairy Association of China, China's dairy imports grew 13.7 percent year-on-year in value in 2025. Major import categories include milk powder, whey products, cheese and cream. The growth reflects rising domestic demand for high-quality dairy products, presenting significant opportunities for international suppliers, China Economic Net reported on Thursday. Recognizing this potential, the Agro & Food Division of the Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP), in collaboration with the Consulate General of Pakistan in Guangzhou, organized a webinar on "Unlocking China's Dairy Market – Opportunities for Pakistani Exporters" on August 18. Muhammad Imran, Trade and Investment Counsellor, briefed participants on

the size and potential of China's dairy market, evolving consumer demand, import and distribution channels, regulatory requirements and opportunities for Pakistani exporters to develop sustainable commercial ties with Chinese importers and distributors. Pakistan's dairy sector is well-positioned to meet China's growing demand. According to the Economic Survey of Pakistan 2025-26, the country ranks among the world's top milk-producing nations, with gross milk production reaching 74.69 million tonnes in fiscal year 2025-26, up from 72.34 million tonnes the previous year. Buffaloes remain the country's largest milk source, producing 44.41 million tonnes, followed by cows at 28.10 million tonnes. The country has the capacity to produce UHT milk, milk powder, cream, butter, ghee and other value-added products. Shehzad Amin, CEO of the Pakistan Dairy Association (PDA), highlighted the strength of Pakistan's dairy sector, including its large livestock and milk-production base, established processing facilities,

and the capacity to produce a wide range of value-added dairy products. He also underlined the export capabilities of Pakistani dairy companies, their compliance with international quality and Halal requirements, and the approval of Pakistani dairy establishments by China's General Administration of Customs (GACC) for exports to China. Bilateral dairy co-operation has already gained tangible momentum. In April 2025, Pakistan marked a historic milestone with its first-ever export of camel milk powder to China. A China-Pakistan joint venture, Royal JW Foods, which focuses on buffalo industry development and dairy processing, exported its first batch of concentrated buffalo milk to China in 2025. The company plans to launch more high-value-added buffalo milk products including yogurt, cheese and butter for the Chinese market. Approximately 20 Pakistani and Chinese companies participated in the webinar to explore pathways to bridge the wide trade gap and build sustainable business partnerships.—APP

Youth experience Chinese poetry, oracle bone script

NANJING: More than 30 international students including from Pakistan gathered at the Nanjing World Literature Hall, a landmark cultural venue in China's first UNESCO "City of Literature," to experience Chinese poetic culture, calligraphy and hands-on creativity during a Qixi Festival cultural celebration. Other students were from Zambia, Morocco, Iran, Ghana, India and Bangladesh. The Qixi Festival, falling on the seventh day of the seventh lunar month, is China's most romantic traditional festival, commemorating the legendary love between the Cowherd and the Weaver Girl, China Economic Net (CEN) reported on Thursday. Originally known as the "Qiqiao Festival" or "Begging for Skills Festival," it was a day when young women prayed for wisdom and dexterity in needlework. The event is part of the 2026 Qixi Garden Party, which runs from August 15 to 23,

offering a crossover integrated experience that blends classical poetry, contemporary music, ancient scripts and intangible heritage crafts. International students sang along to classical verses including Li Bai's "Ascending the Phoenix Terrace in Jinling," the nomadic ballad "Chile Song," and Xin Qiji's "Green Jade Table; Lantern Festival" set to original music by a local composer, with live performances bringing the ancient poetry to life through contemporary melodies. Participants also tried their hand at writing Qixi-themed characters in oracle bone script, the earliest known form of Chinese characters dating back over 3,000 years. Donning traditional Hanfu attire, they ground ink and brushed characters such as "Qixi", "Cowherd and Weaver Girl", "Joy from Heaven" and "Blossoming Moon". Through each stroke of these ancient scripts, they traced the ori-

gins of Chinese civilization and gained a tangible connection to its cultural heritage. Among them was Urooj Rehmani from Pakistan, who was trying her hand at Oracle Bone Script for the second time. She expressed a deep interest in Chinese history and culture, noting that she regularly learns Chinese songs and recites classical poems in her daily life. Beyond the rhythmic rhymes, she noted, the profound meanings and emotions conveyed through the verses resonate deeply with her. "Through this event, I gain a more direct appreciation of the unique charm of Chinese traditional culture and a more intuitive understanding of the beautiful sentiments behind the Qixi Festival," she said. The celebration also featured a festive garden fair with artist booths and interactive experiences showcasing intangible cultural heritage crafts.—APP

Rare Jinnah photographs remind youth of Pak's struggle: Khichi

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for National Heritage and Culture Division, Aurangzeb Khan Khichi Thursday said that rare photographs of Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah are not merely a record of history but also a powerful message for Pakistan's younger generation, reminding them of the struggle, dedication and sacrifices behind the creation of Pakistan. He expressed these views while inaugurating a rare and historic photographic exhibition, "Quaid-i-Azam: The First Governor-General of Pakistan 1947-1948," at the National Art Gallery of the Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA). The exhibition, held as part of PNCA's commemorative activities marking Pakistan's 79th Independence Day, presents a visual chronicle of the life and official engagements of the country's founding leader through the lens of his official photographer, Ziauddin Barni. The federal minister emphasized the importance of preserving and presenting historical material to strengthen national awareness and inspire younger generations to understand the values of leadership, determination, public service and commitment embodied by Quaid-i-Azam. He said such exhibitions provided young people an opportu-



nity to connect with Pakistan's history in a meaningful and visual manner and helped keep the legacy of the nation's founder alive for future generations. The exhibition is being held under the patronage of PNCA Director General Muhammad Ayoub Jamali and has been curated by Mariam Ahmed. It was first showcased in 2023 at the Mohatta Palace Museum, Karachi, in collaboration with Dawn Media. – DNA

Ulemas' role essential in resolving social disputes

ISLAMABAD: Religious scholars can play a significant role in resolving social and family disputes by using their position of trust within communities to encourage parties to settle their differences through mutual consent and reconciliation, said Ayesha Rasool, Senior Consultant (Research & Opinion), Ministry of Law and Justice. Addressing the inaugural ceremony of a 40-hour Certified Civil, Commercial and Shariah-Integrated Mediation Training Programme at COMSTECH, she stressed the importance of mediation and reconciliation before approaching courts for the resolution of family and social disputes. The five-day training programme, being organized by the International Mediation and Arbitration Centre (IMAC), Ministry of Law and Justice, in collaboration with the OIC Arbitration Centre (OIC-AC), Türkiye, will continue from August 20 to 24. The programme is the first of its kind in Pakistan and aims to equip Ulama and religious scholars with professional mediation skills based on the principles of reconciliation and Shariah. Ayesha Rasool said the tradition of consulting religious scholars, elders and community leaders for resolving family and social disputes existed in society even before recourse to courts. Therefore, Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) should not remain confined to courts and should also involve Ulama and community leaders. She highlighted the growing number of family disputes and said more than 45,000 cases relating to divorce and family disputes had been registered since January 2026, with an average of around 300 such cases being registered daily. She said the training covered the basic principles of mediation, negotiation skills, dispute analysis, documentation and Shariah-compliant reconciliation procedures. The curriculum had been developed in line with international standards and included practical exercises, case studies and group discussions. Ayesha Rasool said the programme was aimed at providing participants with an understanding of the legal and practical aspects of mediation. Upon completion, the participants would be able to serve as certified mediators. She urged participants not to limit the training to obtaining certificates but to practically apply their knowledge in their respective communities to promote peaceful resolution of disputes and contribute to peace in society. Former Federal Secretary or Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony Dr Atta-ur-Rehman highlighted the importance of mediation training in promoting peaceful dispute resolution.—APP

GDA proposes Pishukan jetty & marine silt project

ISLAMABAD: The Gwadar Development Authority (GDA) has submitted comprehensive proposal to Balochistan government on August 19 for a project comprising permanent dredging and expansion of the breakwater to provide a permanent solution to the recurring accumulation of marine silt at the Pishukan jetty in Gwadar district. Under the proposed project efforts will be made to secure approval of the project and arrange the required funding so that the necessary financial resources could be provided and the dredging issue at Pishukan Fishing Jetty could be resolved on a permanent basis, Gwadar Pro reported on Thursday. In this regard provincial legislator Gwadar Maulana Hidayat-ur-Rehman and Director General Gwadar Development Authority (GDA) Moin-ur-Rehman Khan made an emergency visit to Pishukan Fishing Jetty, where they reviewed in detail the difficulties faced by boats in entering and leaving the jetty, ongoing dredging work, and proposed plans for the permanent rehabilitation of the facility. GDA Chief Engineer Haji Syed Muhammad, Director Town Planning and PD Pishukan Jetty Shahid Ali, Executive Engineer Muhammad Akbar Baloch, representatives of the MPA, relevant officials, political and social figures, and representatives of the fishing community were also present. During the visit, the MPA Gwadar and DG GDA inspected various sections of the jetty and assessed the difficulties faced by large boats while returning due to the accumulation of marine silt. They directed that the ongoing dredging and excavation work be accelerated and that the route used by boats for their return be completely cleared on an emergency basis to provide immediate relief to the fishing community. The officials also reviewed proposed measures for the permanent rehabilitation of Pishukan Fishing Jetty.—APP

Security forces operation hailed

ISLAMABAD: Speaker of National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq on Thursday paid tribute to the security forces for their successful operation in Panjgur, in which five terrorists were killed. The Speaker lauded the courage and bravery of the security forces in the fight against terrorism, saying the nation was proud of its security forces and their sacrifices for the country's peace and security. He said the entire nation stood shoulder to shoulder with the security forces in the fight against terrorism and would continue to support efforts aimed at eliminating the menace. Ayaz Sadiq said the terrorists would never be allowed to succeed in their nefarious designs.—APP

Govt gets 750 acres land for Gwadar Eastbay Expressway

ISLAMABAD: In another groundbreaking development, Gwadar Development Authority (GDA) has acquired 750 acres of land for the construction of Gwadar Eastbay Expressway Phase-II, starting from New Gwadar International Airport (NGIA) to Gwadar Port. The purchase of land has taken effect last week under Gwadar master plan through public sector development programme 2026-2027, Gwadar Pro reported on Thursday. Gwadar Eastbay Expressway Phase-II was approved during the 8th Joint Working Group (JWG) on Gwadar under CPEC in 2025. Under Public Sector Development Program (PSDP), federal government has also allocated Rs 200 million for the construction of Eastbay Expressway Phase II. Secretary Ministry of Planning Development & Special Initiatives, being the convener of the JWG on Gwadar chaired the meeting. PCI of the project was already approved from CDWP (Central Development Working party) for funding through Grant-in-Aid. Its total estimated cost is Rs 30.13 billion, 95 percent financed through Chinese grant-in-aid under CPEC. China Harbour Engineering Company Ltd (CHEC) will undertake the construction of the expressway. The second phase of the expressway is planned as a 13.8-kilometer, six-lane (four paved lanes) dual carriageway. It will directly link the New Gwadar International Airport (NGIA) with the existing Eastbay Expressway, enabling smooth, high-speed cargo transport to Gwadar Port. The plan also includes supporting infrastructure like a toll plaza, drainage, lighting, fencing, and security towers. This road project is seen as vital to enhancing Gwadar's role in logistics and improving port operations. The Eastbay Expressway Phase I had already completed and operated on June 03, 2022. It is a six-lane road around 19 kilometre long, as the main artery of Gwadar Port through which the entire traffic of the port flow realizing the dream of making Gwadar logistic and economic hub of the region in line with objectives of CPEC. Eastbay Expressway Phase I cost USD 168 million and it provides primary connectivity of the Port and its Free Zone I and Free Zone II with Makran Coastal Highway (N-10) and Motorway 8 (CPEC's Western route) for smooth logistic transportation of import, export, and transit goods to Khujrab, border of China. Gwadar Eastbay Expressway Phase I was approved by ECNEC on January 12, 2015. Contract Agreement was signed between GPA & CCCC on September 24 2017.—DNA

Briefs

Efforts afoot to mitigate flood-related losses

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Commerce Jam Kamal Khan on Thursday said that the government has taken coordinated measures to mitigate flood-related losses and support recovery of rice, maize, and potato exports. In a written reply, the minister said that the Export Enhancement Roadmap for Agriculture and Food Processing has been principally approved, targeting an increase in agrofood exports from USD 7.1 billion to USD 13 billion by 2029-30. He said that an Implementation Plan with defined actions and timelines is being finalized by the Ministry of Commerce in consultation with relevant stakeholders. Additionally, the ministry and Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP) have been facilitating the exporters of rice, maize and potato in their participation in trade exhibition and promotional activities in Pakistan and abroad, he added.—APP

IRSA releases 389,000 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD: Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Thursday released 389,000 cusecs of water from various rim stations with an inflow of 421,200 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, the water level in the River Indus at Tarbela Dam stood at 1550.00 feet, which was 148.00 feet higher than the dead level of 1402.00 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam were recorded as 242,500 cusecs and 241,900 cusecs, respectively. The water level in the Jhelum River at Mangla Dam was 1214.05 feet, which was 164.05 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water were recorded as 38,600 cusecs and 7,000 cusecs, respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu, and Sukkur was recorded as 347,600, 331,000, 282,800, and 200,400 cusecs, respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 32,000 cusecs of water was released at Nowshera, and 84,100 cusecs were released from River Chenab at Marala.—APP

Direct air connectivity vital to boost Pak-Maldives trade

Tourism, blue economy, agriculture can transform pakistan-maldives trade ties: ICCI President

DNA

ISLAMABAD: High Commissioner of the Republic of Maldives to Pakistan, His Excellency Mohamed Thoha, has called for stronger business-to-business relations between Pakistan and Maldives, saying that the two countries should translate their cordial diplomatic relations into tangible trade, investment and tourism opportunities. Addressing a business interaction at the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI), along with Second Secretary Ismail Mufeed, he said there was considerable scope to expand commercial cooperation and urged the business communities of both countries to identify serious and result-oriented partnerships. The High Commissioner stressed the importance of direct or charter air connectivity between Pakistan and Maldives to facilitate tourism, business travel and commercial exchanges. He said Pakistani businesses should view Maldives as a major international tourism destination attracting more than 2.4 million visitors annually. He identified tourism, hospitality, fisheries, tuna and seafood, the blue economy, marine expertise, agriculture and Islamic tourism as promising areas of cooperation, while also inviting serious Pakistani investors to explore opportunities in agricultural development aimed at strengthening food security and productivity in Maldives. ICCI President Sardar Tahir Mehmood in his welcome address said Pakistan and Maldives share friendship, mutual respect and



enormous untapped economic potential, with Pakistan having export opportunities worth more than US\$600 million in the Maldivian market. He said the negligible level of imports from Maldives should be viewed as an opportunity to expand and diversify bilateral trade. He highlighted food and agriculture, pharmaceuticals, textiles and garments, construction materials, engineering goods, IT and digital services, fisheries, healthcare and education, along with tourism and hospitality, as promising sectors. He further emphasized cooperation in the blue economy, including fisheries, marine tourism, coastal development and maritime services, saying that trade relations grow when businesses meet, de-

velop trust and pursue concrete ventures. He assured the High Commissioner that ICCI would work closely with the Maldives High Commission and TDAP to transform bilateral goodwill into practical trade, investment and tourism opportunities. Speaking on the occasion, Abdul Salam Shah, Director General, Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP), said Pakistan and Maldives enjoy close and longstanding diplomatic relations, including cooperation at the United Nations, SAARC and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), but bilateral trade of around US\$9-10 million remains far below its potential. He invited Maldivian business delegations to participate in TDAP's Food

and Agriculture event in November 2026, Textile Expo on April 2, 2027, and Women Entrepreneur Network flagship event in 2027, saying these platforms would provide valuable opportunities for direct business-to-business engagement. ICCI Senior Vice President Tahir Ayub, who moderated the event, expressed confidence that business-to-business relations between the two countries would strengthen significantly. Those present included ICCI Vice President Irfan Chaudhry, Executive Members Waseem Chaudhry and Imran Minhas, former Executive Member Chaudhry Mohammad Ali, Ghazanfar Lashaari, Assistant Director TDAP and a large number of business leaders.

Nehal meets MoS/SAPM Fahd

ISLAMABAD: Governor Sindh Nehal Hashmi met with Minister of State/Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Digital Media Fahd Haroon at his office here on Thursday. The meeting was held in a cordial atmosphere and focused on matters of mutual interest, Pakistan's evolving digital landscape, opportunities for digital growth and the broader role of digital media in the country. The two sides exchanged views on key areas of digital development and governance, with emphasis on leveraging digital media to support innovation and public engagement.—APP

Nayyara Noor remembered

ISLAMABAD: The fourth death anniversary of iconic Pakistani playback singer Nayyara Noor, popularly known as the "Bulbul-e-Pakistan," was observed on Thursday. Born in 1950, Nayyara Noor was one of Pakistan's top playback singers. She sang numerous film songs, Ghazals and patriotic songs. Her famous songs include 'Watan Ki Mitti Gawah Rehna', 'Aye Jazba-e-Dil Gar Mein Chahun', 'Roothay Ho Tum', and 'Kabhi Hum Bhi Khoobsurat Thay'. In recognition of her contribution to the arts, she was awarded the Presidential Pride of Performance Award in 2006. Her mesmerizing voice continues to hold a special place in the hearts of music lovers. She passed away in Karachi on August 20, 2022.—APP

CUI ranked No 1 universities' rankings

ISLAMABAD: COMSATS University Islamabad (CUI) has emerged as the highest-ranked Pakistani university in the U.S. News & World Report Best Global Universities 2026-2027 Rankings, securing 410th position globally with an overall score of 52. CUI leads Pakistani universities in the global ranking, followed by Quaid-i-Azam University at 451st, The University of Lahore at 479th, University of Management and Technology (UMT) at 573rd and National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST) at 590th position globally. The ranking underscores Pakistan's growing presence in international, research-based university assessments.—APP

Terrorism grave crime against humanity: Ayaz

ISLAMABAD: Speaker of National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq Thursday said that terrorism is a grave crime against humanity and a serious threat to global peace and security. He paid rich tribute to the innocent civilians, brave personnel of the security forces and law-enforcement agencies who embraced martyrdom in acts of terrorism, saying that their sacrifices will always be remembered. He expressed these views in his message on the occasion of the International Day of Remembrance and Tribute to the Victims of Terrorism, observed every year on August 21. Ayaz Sadiq said that Pakistan has been fighting the scourge of terrorism for decades, during which the entire nation has rendered unparalleled sacrifices. He said that the sacrifices of the brave soldiers and innocent civilians who embraced martyrdom in the fight against terrorism constitute an indelible chapter in the national history. He reaffirmed that the sacrifices of the martyrs will never go in vain and that the nation will always hold its martyrs and their families in the highest esteem and respect. Ayaz Sadiq has said that Pakistan's security forces and law-enforcement agencies are playing a commendable role on the front lines in the fight against terrorism with courage and professionalism. He said that the entire nation stands shoulder to shoulder with its brave security forces and that their sacrifices for the defence, peace and security of the country are a source of immense pride for the nation. Ayaz Sadiq said that the Indian-backed Fitna al-Khawarij and Fitna al-Hindustan are pursuing nefarious designs to undermine Pakistan's peace, security and stability. He said that terrorist elements seek to spread fear and terror by targeting innocent civilians and undermine peace and stability in the country; however,

they will never succeed in their nefarious designs. He said that every conspiracy against Pakistan and every attempt to create unrest in the country will be decisively thwarted through collective efforts by the nation and state institutions. Ayaz Sadiq said that national unity and effective cooperation among state institutions are essential in the fight against terrorism. He said that indiscriminate action against terrorists and their facilitators will continue and that those seeking to undermine the country's peace and stability will not be allowed to succeed. The Speaker emphasized the need to further strengthen the national resolve for the complete eradication of terrorism. Ayaz Sadiq said that under Operation Azm-e-Istehkam, the security forces are continuing effective operations against terrorist elements. He reaffirmed that the struggle against terrorism will continue until its complete eradication. Ayaz Sadiq expressed confidence that the entire nation, together with the Security Forces, will remain united in the fight against the scourge of terrorism and ensure lasting peace, stability and security in Pakistan. Deputy Speaker Syed Ghulam Mustafa Shah, in his message on the occasion, said that the International Day of Remembrance and Tribute to the Victims of Terrorism provides an opportunity to remember and pay tribute to the innocent civilians and brave security personnel who laid down their lives for the peace and security of the country. He said that the suffering of families affected by terrorism and their sacrifices are unforgettable. Deputy Speaker said that the people of Pakistan have demonstrated extraordinary resolve, courage and resilience in the fight against terrorism. Mustafa Shah said that the entire nation stands with its security forces in the fight against terrorism.—APP

Naqvi praises security forces

ISLAMABAD: Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi on Thursday praised the security forces for a successful intelligence-based operation carried out under Operation Radd-ul-Fitna 3 in the Kali Suran area of Panjgur, where five militants linked to Fitna al-Hindustan were killed. In his statement, Naqvi commended the forces for their professional conduct and operational performance, saying the action helped prevent the plans of terrorist elements targeting peace in the region. He said the security forces acted in a timely manner and successfully neutralized the threat posed by the militants. He said the operation reflected the preparedness and commitment of the forces in dealing with terrorism and maintaining stability in Balochistan. Mohsin Naqvi stated that the successful actions carried out by security forces against groups working against peace in Balochistan deserve recognition. He said such operations demonstrate the determination of state institutions to counter terrorism and protect the public. The minister also appreciated the courage of the personnel involved in the operation. He noted that intelligence-based actions remain an important part of efforts aimed at disrupting terrorist networks and preventing attacks. Referring to the broader fight against terrorism, Naqvi said the people of Pakistan stand united against terrorist groups and continue to support the security forces in their mission. He added that national unity is essential in confronting threats to peace and security. The Interior Minister reaffirmed the government's support for security personnel serving in challenging conditions across the country. He said the sacrifices and efforts of the forces play a key role in maintaining law and order and ensuring the safety of citizens.—APP

Mechanism to repatriate bodies of Pakistani: Awn

ISLAMABAD: Minister of State for Overseas Pakistanis Mohammad Awn Saqlain on Thursday said the government had a mechanism in place to repatriate the bodies of Pakistani workers who die abroad, with Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) facilitating the process where its flights operate. Responding to questions in the National Assembly, he said 799 bodies of Pakistani workers had been reported over the past two years, while the overall number of Pakistani citizens who died abroad was higher. The figures presented to the House related specifically to Pakistani workers in countries including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, other Gulf states and European countries. He said the government provided compensation of up to \$1 million in cases of death or disability of eligible workers, according to the applicable mechanism. The minister said PIA continued to facilitate the transportation of bodies from countries where the national airline operated. In countries where PIA did not operate, the ministry used an alternative mechanism involving the Overseas Pakistanis Foundation (OPF) and other relevant officials to arrange repatriation. He explained that the bodies were brought to Pakistan through arrangements with other airlines and relevant organisations, as PIA had previously transported such bodies free of cost. Responding to a supplementary question by Aliya Kamran, the minister said the government had increased the pension-related facility for overseas Pakistani workers. He said details of the initiative would be provided to members separately. He added that the government reviewed and extended facilities

annually, with increases ranging between 13 and 15 per cent, depending on the nature of the facility. In response to another supplementary question by Shazia Marri, the minister said Community Welfare Attachés (CWAs) were deployed in Gulf countries as well as Europe to assist Pakistani workers and address their issues. He said the CWAs maintained proper records of cases involving accidents, prisoners and other difficulties faced by Pakistani workers abroad. In cases where workers were imprisoned or fined, the matter was examined by a committee, which arranged payment of fines where required to secure their release. He said the government had also established a compensation mechanism through the OPF for Pakistani workers who suffered accidents or disabilities abroad. He said overseas workers who died or suffered disability were covered under the relevant certification and insurance arrangements, while the OPF played its role in providing compensation to eligible workers and their families. Replying to another question, Minister of State for Overseas Pakistanis Mohammad Awn Saqlain urged the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh governments to establish dedicated courts for overseas Pakistanis to resolve their land and property disputes. He said Overseas Pakistanis Courts were operational in Islamabad and in 36 districts of Punjab. He said these courts were hearing cases involving land and property disputes of overseas Pakistanis residing abroad. The minister said no such court had so far been established in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, despite a request already being under consideration by the provincial government.—APP

Dar calls for further strengthening Pakistan-Switzerland relations

Brazilian envoy lauds Pakistan's mediation efforts between US-Iran

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's Ambassador to Switzerland, Marghoob Butt, paid a courtesy call on Deputy Prime Minister/Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq. DPM/FM emphasized the importance of further strengthening Pakistan-Switzerland relations and enhancing bilateral cooperation across diverse areas, including trade, investment, and business-to-business engagement. Earlier, Deputy Prime Minister/Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar received a telephone call

from the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Federative Republic of Brazil, Ambassador Mauro Vieira. The Brazilian Foreign Minister commended Pakistan's constructive role and efforts towards mediation in the US-Iran context, underscoring the importance of dialogue and

diplomacy for global peace and security. He also felicitated DPM/FM on Pakistan's signing of the Makkah Joint Defence Agreement. DPM/FM thanked him for his kind sentiments and appreciated Brazil's important role in advancing South-South cooperation and commitment

towards peace and stability. The two sides underscored the importance of sustained high-level contacts and close coordination at the UN and other multilateral forums, reaffirming their commitment to multilateralism, dialogue and diplomacy. Both sides also exchanged views on regional and international developments and agreed to remain closely engaged to further advance Pakistan-Brazil relations. DPM/FM invited the Brazilian Foreign Minister to visit Pakistan, while H.E. Mauro Vieira reciprocated with an invitation to visit Brazil.



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SCAN TO VISIT WEBISTE

How to wield power

Dr. AZEEM IBRAHIM

FOR much of modern history, one of the greatest advantages governments possessed over insurgencies was control of the sky. Rebel movements could acquire rifles, explosives and artillery. With sufficient foreign support, some obtained sophisticated missiles and armored vehicles. But building an air force required resources almost exclusively available to states. Combat aircraft cost millions of dollars, while pilots, airfields, maintenance, fuel and logistics created an even greater barrier. That distinction is beginning to disappear. From Ukraine to Myanmar, inexpensive drones and improvised aircraft are dramatically reducing the cost of projecting military power from the air. The result is not simply another technological development in warfare. It represents a structural shift in the balance between states and the armed groups fighting them.

Myanmar provides an important glimpse of where this revolution may lead. UN investigators recently reported an intensification of aerial attacks by Myanmar's military, including the use of relatively inexpensive technologies such as motorized paragliders alongside conventional aircraft and drones. Resistance organizations have themselves become increasingly sophisticated users of commercially available drones. Myanmar's conflict is therefore particularly significant because it demonstrates that the transformation of air warfare is no longer confined to technologically advanced militaries.

The country is poor, its infrastructure has deteriorated after years of conflict and many resistance organizations operate with extremely limited resources. Yet the battlefield is becoming increasingly vertical. That should concern governments far beyond Southeast Asia. Inexpensive drones and improvised aircraft are dramatically reducing the cost of projecting military power from the air. The fundamental change is economic rather than technological. Modern combat aircraft can cost tens of millions of dollars even before weapons, maintenance and training are considered. Even relatively inexpensive precision-guided munitions can cost sums beyond the reach of most armed movements.

Commercial drones fundamentally alter that calculation. A relatively inexpensive unmanned aircraft equipped with a camera and modified to carry explosives can conduct surveillance or attack targets at a fraction of the traditional cost. First-person view drones can potentially destroy equipment worth hundreds or thousands of times more than the weapon used against it.

Ukraine has demonstrated the consequences at enormous scale. Drones costing relatively modest sums have been used against tanks, artillery systems, air defenses and infrastructure worth millions. But Myanmar may ultimately tell us more about the future of many conflicts. Ukraine receives billions of dollars in military assistance and possesses a substantial industrial and technological base. Most of the actors involved in the world's civil wars do not. Myanmar demonstrates what happens when similar technologies diffuse downward into conflicts involving poorer governments, militias and

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insurgencies. The result is the democratization of air power. This does not mean that a commercial drone suddenly provides an insurgent organization with capabilities comparable to a modern air force. Fighter aircraft can travel farther, carry vastly larger payloads and operate with levels of sophistication that cheap drones cannot replicate.

But insurgents do not need parity. They just need sufficient capability to impose costs. That distinction could fundamentally alter the dynamics of civil war.

Historically, technological superiority allowed governments to attack insurgents from positions of relative safety. Aircraft could strike bases, supply routes and concentrations of fighters, while rebel forces possessed few means of responding. Cheap drones erode that asymmetry. An armed organization can now observe troop movements from above, attack military positions, disrupt logistics and threaten expensive equipment without possessing anything resembling a conventional air force. More importantly, these capabilities are extraordinarily difficult to monopolize. Commercial supply chains provide cameras, batteries, motors and electronic components. Software and technical knowledge circulate internationally. Civilian technologies can be modified in workshops rather than specialized weapons factories. Innovation therefore occurs from the bottom up. That has profound implications for conflicts in the Middle East, Africa and Asia.

Armed groups in Sudan, Yemen, Somalia, the Sahel or eastern Congo do not need to replicate the sophisticated drone programs developed by major powers. They need only adapt inexpensive technologies sufficiently to local conditions. The barrier to entry will continue falling. One consequence may be longer wars. Civil wars frequently end when one side establishes overwhelming military superiority or when both sides conclude that victory has become impossible. Cheap technology complicates the first pathway. The falling cost does not necessarily make warfare more precise or humane. It can simply make attacks more frequent. If weaker forces can continually acquire inexpensive systems capable of destroying expensive government assets or disrupting offensives, states may find it increasingly difficult to translate superior resources into decisive victories. A government can destroy dozens of drones. Its opponent may simply build or purchase dozens more.

Governments will consequently need to rethink air defense. Protecting military bases alone will not be enough. Critical infrastructure, civilian facilities and urban areas may require defenses against threats costing a tiny fraction of the systems designed to stop them. International arms control faces an even greater problem. Fighter aircraft and ballistic missiles can be tracked, regulated and subjected to export controls. Many drone components are also ordinary civilian products. Controlling their proliferation will therefore be extraordinarily difficult. The history of warfare is often told through increasingly sophisticated weapons: the tank, the jet aircraft, the precision missile and now AI. The next transformation may follow the opposite trajectory.

The technologies reshaping warfare are becoming cheaper, easier to manufacture and available to a much wider range of actors. Ukraine demonstrated what inexpensive drones can accomplish in a major interstate war. Myanmar is showing what happens when the same revolution reaches a fragmented civil conflict. That may ultimately prove more consequential. The future of warfare is not simply becoming more technologically advanced. It is becoming affordable.

Makkah Agreement set to trigger a regional grassroots movement

Dr. Dania Koleilat Khatib

EVERY parent cherishes the hope of bestowing upon their children an education superior to that which circumstance once permitted them, believing that knowledge alone can lift a family from the constraints of limited means and open doors long closed. Islam itself places the highest value upon learning, for the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) declared that the seeking of knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslim, male and female alike. The first revealed word of the Holy Qur'an was "Iqra"—Read—and this divine command admits of no distinction of gender. In the early days of Islam, women of learning stood among the foremost transmitters of knowledge; Mother of the Believers...

THE signing of the Makkah Joint Defense Agreement by Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Turkiye this month triggered several reactions. Some countries welcomed it, others had a more reserved approach and some were outright alarmed at seeing three important Muslim countries come together. Since the agreement was announced, hundreds of articles have been published and hundreds of interviews given to analyze its implications for regional and even global security. However, few have examined its effects on the grassroots level.

The agreement has awakened a new consciousness among the people of the region. For the first time, they feel they have the power of self-determination. A new movement has already been born in Lebanon and it has the potential to spread across the region. This is very important. People believe they can own their security and their fate. They do not need to be attached to a foreign power, whether that is the US, Russia or China. This comes after a century of relying on foreign powers for protection.

During and after the First World War, US President Woodrow Wilson spoke about self-determination as being the cornerstone of global peace. But the Middle East did not enjoy self-determination. This was more of a slogan to cover for Western dominance. The Levant, for example, had to endure the Sykes-Picot Agreement and the Balfour Declaration. After the Second World War, the region had to choose either the Soviet camp or the American one. Even after the fall of the Soviet Union, the region still had to have external protection. Today, the countries of the region are realizing their own power if they come together. They no longer need to rely on foreign powers. States in the region have finally realized that security stems from themselves, not from a foreign power. It is also about a new mentality in the region. It is based on cooperation, balance and stability. The region has long been torn between compet-

ing ideologies and competing camps. The states and people of the region always had to choose a camp. In the 1950s, it was the pan-Arab, pro-Soviet or pro-West camp. More recently, it has been either the pro-West or the Iranian camp. The Makkah Agreement changes things. This alliance is based on coming together to achieve prosperity and security for all. States in the region have finally realized that competition and confrontation lead to nowhere. They have also realized that the security they seek stems from themselves, not from a foreign power.

"The region is witnessing a transformation. The agreement between Saudi Arabia, Turkiye and Pakistan opens the door for a new era of regional relations that will deliver prosperity and security to its people, and we don't want Lebanon to be left behind," said Amine Bashir, a Lebanese lawyer and activist. He is starting, along with other like-minded activists, the "Justice and Freedom Movement."

According to Bashir, the Makkah Agreement opens a new chapter in the region and Lebanon should seize the opportunity to realize its own self-determination. He added the new movement is not taking the side of one axis over another, simply because it does not view the Makkah Agreement as involving an axis.

The pact is not aimed against anyone but is rather focused on benefiting its members. The agreement sets the concept of balanced partnerships. Hence, it is in the interest of Lebanon to have a position within this framework. What is interesting about this movement is that it comes from the grassroots, from activists in touch with ordinary people.

This tells you a lot about the Makkah Agreement and why it is set to be a success. It is not about regional leaders meeting up and signing a piece of paper. It is about the will of the people. People in the region are fed up with empty slogans that lead them nowhere. They want to see concrete re-

sults. This pact transcends fake ideologies or ethnicities. It talks to every one of us. It talks about how people can live in dignity and peace, how they can prosper by relying on themselves and how they can craft a better future for their children.

This pact transcends fake ideologies or ethnicities. It talks about how people can live in dignity and peace.

For Lebanon, the Makkah Agreement is very important. In its manifesto, the Justice and Freedom Movement states that it believes that the upcoming phase will witness a shift from a policy of axes to a policy of partnerships and from dependency on foreign powers to independence and self-reliance. It is a platform that can give Lebanon leverage when negotiating with Israel. In the activists' view, Lebanon should be part of this framework in order to be able to talk with Israel on an equal footing and not be forced to accept humiliating conditions. Bashir said Lebanon has a chance — instead of being pulled by competing axes — to be part of an attempt to create stability in the region.

This nascent movement is only an example of how people think. The same way those in Lebanon think that the Makkah Agreement could be their salvation, I am sure many Iraqis, Syrians, Jordanians and others think the same. The fact this agreement transcends leaderships and trickles down to the grassroots means it is sustainable. Popular acceptance of the Makkah Agreement will give it momentum to grow bigger and stronger. Again, it is not only about three leaders meeting and signing a piece of paper, it is about the people of the region wanting to take their fate into their own hands.

– Dr. Dania Koleilat Khatib is a specialist in US-Arab relations with a focus on lobbying. She is co-founder of the Research Center for Cooperation and Peace Building, a Lebanese nongovernmental organization focused on Track II.

Educating Daughters, Protecting Their Dignity

Muhammad Mohsin Iqbal



The most trying passage of their professional lives is frequently the conduct they encounter while working alongside men. Not all five fingers are equal. The majority of men treat their female colleagues with proper respect, and their behaviour is worthy of praise. Yet there is no scarcity of those who regard working women with disdain or who allow their eyes and words to stray beyond...

EVERY parent cherishes the hope of bestowing upon their children an education superior to that which circumstance once permitted them, believing that knowledge alone can lift a family from the constraints of limited means and open doors long closed. Islam itself places the highest value upon learning, for the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) declared that the seeking of knowledge is obligatory upon every Muslim, male and female alike. The first revealed word of the Holy Qur'an was "Iqra"—Read—and this divine command admits of no distinction of gender. In the early days of Islam, women of learning stood among the foremost transmitters of knowledge; the Mother of the Believers, Hazrat Aisha (May Allah be pleased with her), was a scholar of profound insight whose counsel was sought by the Companions themselves. Yet in later centuries, among many communities, greater store was set by the schooling of sons, while the instruction of daughters was frequently held contrary to local custom and tradition. Many households regarded a girl's place as confined to the domestic sphere, deeming formal learning unnecessary or even undesirable for her.

The present age, however, has witnessed a heartening and steady advance in the education of girls, in keeping with the true spirit of the faith. Female literacy among those aged ten and above has risen to fifty-four per cent according to the latest figures of the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, while the long-standing gender gap has narrowed from nearly twenty-three percentage points a quarter-century ago to some fifteen points. School attendance among females now stands at fifty-seven per cent. In examinations at every level, girls frequently secure higher places than their male counterparts. Professional studies, too—medicine, law, teaching, and the sciences—attract them without hesitation. This progress is not merely a statistical triumph; it is the gradual fulfilment of an Islamic ideal

long obscured by custom.

Having completed their studies, most young women desire to put their learning to practical use, whether as physicians, teachers, or in other fields of employment. Islam does not forbid a woman from earning an honest livelihood when necessity or the service of society requires it, provided her dignity remains intact. The greater number enter paid work to meet household needs or to ease financial strain; some pursue lighter occupations that allow them to balance duty and domestic life. Working women command genuine admiration for the manner in which they discharge the duties of office or profession and, at the same time, the responsibilities of the household. Female labour-force participation remains modest at roughly twenty-eight per cent, yet those who do enter employment often shoulder this double burden with quiet resolve and remarkable fortitude. Their contribution strengthens families and enriches the wider community, provided the moral safeguards prescribed by faith are observed.

The most trying passage of their professional lives is frequently the conduct they encounter while working alongside men. Not all five fingers are equal. The majority of men treat their female colleagues with proper respect, and their behaviour is worthy of praise. Yet there is no scarcity of those who regard working women with disdain or who allow their eyes and words to stray beyond the bounds of honour. The Holy Qur'an commands both believing men and believing women to lower their gaze and guard their modesty, for in this lies purity of heart. Almighty Allah has placed within women a particular sensibility—a kind of inner radar—by which they discern when a man's gaze is not honest. Those compelled by necessity to earn a livelihood face the sternest trial in this regard, for the faith teaches that a woman's honour is sacred and must never be violated. The Prophet (peace be upon him)

warned against even the lustful glance, describing it as one of the poisoned arrows of Satan.

There can be no doubt that the Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act has been placed upon the statute book and is in force. A regular Ombudsperson has been appointed to hear complaints. In the year just past the Federal Ombudsperson Secretariat received nearly thirteen hundred cases and resolved more than eleven hundred of them. Still, as the proverb truly observes, habits are not easily relinquished. Observations persist of older men who will not forgo improper glances, even though sisters and daughters of like age reside under their own roofs. Such conduct stands in clear opposition to Islamic teaching, which forbids lustful looks and requires every believer to protect the honour of others as he would protect his own. Such dispositions ought to be firmly discouraged through both moral instruction and the steady application of the law.

At the same time, women who labour in offices and workplaces should themselves observe the values of haya—that refined sense of modesty and self-respect which is the ornament of faith—together with the rules of etiquette and the modest bearing that our religion, our traditions, and the example of the righteous prescribe. Restraint in speech, dignity in manner, and an outward conduct that neither invites nor tolerates impropriety form the necessary counterpart to the duty of men. Only when both men and women uphold these shared Islamic principles of mutual respect, lowered gazes, and guarded honour can the advance in female education yield its full and proper fruit, allowing the talents of an entire generation to serve their families and society without the shadow of unnecessary trial. In this balanced observance lies the true flourishing of a community guided by faith rather than by the fleeting customs of the age.

Briefs

Bills related to military sail smoothly

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creating the new position of chief of defence forces. Following the constitutional changes, Chief of Army Staff (COAS) Field Marshal Asim Munir became the country's first chief of defence forces. The Commander of the National Strategic Command post was also created, a four-star office that oversees the operational integration of Pakistan's strategic forces. PM Shehbaz had promoted Gen Raza – who was previously serving as the Chief of the General Staff – from the Lieutenant General's rank to the rank of "Four-Star General" and simultaneously appointed him to the coveted post. The government and the opposition have been at odds since the 2024 elections, after which the PTI had demanded a judicial commission to probe May 9, 2023, and November 26, 2024 protests. The 2023 protests were held across the country after PTI founder and former prime minister Imran Khan was arrested and the 2024 demonstration in Islamabad was held to demand his release. Both protests had turned violent.

Pakistan values relations...

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large number of pilgrims who undertake religious visits to Syria from Pakistan. The Prime Minister reaffirmed Pakistan's support for Syria's unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity and said Pakistan would firmly support Syria's position on the Golan Heights. The Syrian Foreign Minister conveyed the greetings of Syrian President Ahmad al-Sharaa to the Prime Minister, and briefed him on Syria's ongoing political transition and reconstruction efforts. He thanked Pakistan for its consistent support to Syria throughout the past years and expressed his government's keen interest in revitalizing bilateral engagement, including through early institutional mechanisms for cooperation.

SC returns govt's review petition

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the SC's order to transfer Imran to hospital. "There is no excuse whatsoever for not complying with the SC order of 18th August. Imran Khan must be transferred to Shifa International Hospital forthwith," he added. The development comes a day after the federal government filed a review petition in the Supreme Court against its decision to transfer the jailed former prime minister to a private hospital. The petition was filed by the Islamabad chief commissioner through the advocate general for the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT). Imran, 73, has remained in prison since August 2023 following convictions he and his party describe as politically motivated. Since his ouster in April 2022 following a no-confidence vote, he has faced multiple legal cases.

Imran may be sent...

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Chaudhry, who had earlier assured the House that the SC's judgment would be implemented in letter and spirit, said that under the law, convicted prisoners with health issues were moved to a government hospital. "It is nice to know that the government has acquired a hospital in the United Kingdom," PTI Senator Mohsin Aziz quipped, alluding to former prime minister Nawaz Sharif's treatment in the UK after his conviction. To this, Chaudhry replied that the government would ensure medical treatment for Imran in a government hospital or, if needed, another hospital. "If the need arises to send him abroad, we will do that as well," he said. "We have only approached the Supreme Court for guidance to know whether this facility is for one person or other prisoners too."

Messi scores emotional first goal since father's death

Messi's father and longtime representative Jorge died aged 68 on August 8 in Argentina

LIONEL Messi scored his first goal since the death of his father earlier this month in Inter Miami's 2-2 draw with Philadelphia Union on Wednesday. Messi's father and longtime representative Jorge died aged 68 on August 8 in Rosario, Argentina. In the 26th minute at Subaru Park, Messi shook off his marker and sent a left-footed shot into the net to give Miami a 2-1 first-half lead before being embraced by his teammates. The 39-year-old also assisted on his team's first goal on a hot and humid night in Pennsylvania. Messi paid an emotional tribute to his father last week, saying he did not know how to continue without him. The draw ended a three-game losing streak for defending MLS Cup champions Miami. The goal was Messi's 13th of the season, putting him one behind Dallas striker Peta Musa in the race for the MLS Golden Boot, which he won last season. Messi also captained Argentina to this year's World Cup final, where they lost to Spain. More national football federations and Fifa officials have withdrawn their support for the

soccer body's president Gianni Infantino after the exit of Chief Operating Officer Kevin Lamour, which one Fifa vice-president described as the "final straw". Fifa said on Monday that Lamour had left the organisation, weeks after he publicly criticised Infantino's plan to sell a stake in the

commercial rights of the World Cup and other tournaments. His exit prompted Hungary's Sandor Csanyi – one of eight Fifa vice-presidents and a member of the Fifa Council – to withdraw his support for the embattled Infantino, who is under pressure from three confederations to resign. "The final straw was the unexpected dismissal of Kevin Lamour," Csanyi wrote in a letter to Infantino, seen by Reuters. "Kevin performed his duties to a high professional and ethical standard and, as a highly competent executive, made a significant contribution to the trans-

professional judgement, ethical standards and leadership." Fifa did not respond to a request for comment. Lamour had said that staff had been "deceived" over the plan which he described as the project of one person.

Other Fifa vice-presidents who have attacked Infantino's conduct are Uefa president Aleksander Ceferin, AFC President Sheikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al-Khalifa and Concacaf President Vittorio Montagliani. Montenegro's Dejan Savicevic, a Fifa Council member since 2017 and president of the country's football association, said they had also withdrawn their earlier letter of support for Infantino's candidacy.

Infantino is up for reelection in March as he seeks a fourth term until 2031, and Savicevic wrote a letter to Fifa Secretary General Mattias Graström outlining his concerns.

"The recent developments within Fifa are extremely worrying and have shown serious lack of communication and transparency not only to the member associations... but also to the internal members, Fifa Council included, and structures which should hold the foundations of Fifa," he wrote.



parent operation of the organisation. "The fact that his dismissal was prompted by his criticism of the above-mentioned initiative – an initiative that you yourself ultimately acknowledged to have been misguided – points to serious shortcomings in

Spain Denies Reports of Emergency Plan to Pressure Morocco Amid Migration Tensions

Madrid Rejects Claims of a Government Strategy Against Rabat, Reaffirming Morocco's Role as a Key Partner on Migration and Regional Cooperation

MADRID: The Spanish government has categorically denied media reports claiming that Madrid is preparing an emergency plan aimed at deterring Morocco in the event of a new migration crisis along the two countries' border. The controversy emerged after Spain's public broadcaster RTVE reportedly aired information on its "Ma aneros" programme suggesting that the government was considering a comprehensive emergency strategy to respond to a potential migration crisis involving Morocco. A related post published on the broadcaster's X account was subsequently deleted. Moncloa Palace Rejects Reports as "Completely False" Sources at the Moncloa Palace, the official residence

and office of the Spanish prime minister, told Spanish political affairs website Elektro Mania that the reports were inaccurate. The sources categorically rejected the existence of any government-commissioned plan or report designed to confront or pressure Rabat, describing the information as "completely false". The denial was further reinforced by reports that Spain's electricity grid operator Red Eléctrica and gas infrastructure company Enagás had not received any government instructions related to preparations for using energy supplies as a potential pressure tool against Morocco. Madrid Maintains Strategic Rapprochement with Rabat The controversy comes against the backdrop of a major transformation in

Moroccan-Spanish relations over recent years. Madrid's recognition of Morocco's autonomy initiative for the Sahara as the most serious, realistic and credible basis for resolving the regional dispute marked a significant turning point in bilateral relations and paved the way for closer political, economic and security cooperation. Since then, Rabat and Madrid have strengthened coordination on several issues of mutual interest, particularly migration management, security, trade and regional stability. Migration Cooperation Remains a Key Priority Spanish media reports have nevertheless highlighted continuing political debate within Spain over the country's migration policy and its cooperation with Morocco. La Gaceta de la Iberofera reported that the

government of Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez has no plans to impose sanctions on Morocco following recent developments in Ceuta and does not intend to reverse its position on Morocco's territorial integrity. The report said Madrid remains committed to the rapprochement with Rabat initiated more than four years ago and continues to regard Morocco as an essential partner in managing migration flows towards Spain. Energy Pressure Claims Also Rejected. The controversy intensified after reports suggested that the Spanish government had requested assessments of electricity, gas and fuel supplies to Morocco to determine whether energy could potentially be used as an instrument of pressure during a future migration crisis. – APP

IFC and Bank Alfalah Partner on Diversified Payment Rights Issuance

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The International Finance Corporation (IFC) and Bank Alfalah Limited have signed a Project Agreement marking a key milestone toward IFC's upcoming investment of up to US\$100 million in Pakistan's first-ever Diversified Payment Rights (DPR) note, to be issued by Bank Alfalah under its DPR Program. This landmark transaction will introduce a new source of competitively priced, long-term international financing for Pakistan's banking sector and represents an important step in deepening the country's debt capital market. Approved by IFC's Board on May 27, 2026, the arrangement will enable Bank Alfalah to access international debt capital markets through a secured structure backed by diversified future foreign-currency receivables. Importantly, the market-based structure does not require a sovereign guarantee and may also facilitate mobilization of additional financing from international private investors. The transaction builds on IFC's advisory support to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) and the Ministry of Finance between December 2022 and August 2024 to establish the regulatory and fiscal framework for DPR issuances. Bank Alfalah is the first Pakistani bank to launch a DPR program under this framework, creating a pathway for potential wider adoption across the banking sector. DPR structures have been successfully used in several emerging markets, including Türkiye, El Salvador and Guatemala, to help financial institutions diversify funding sources and access international capital.

Football fans want FIFA chief to step down

GENEVA: A collection of soccer fan groups from around the world launched a petition Thursday calling for Gianni Infantino to resign as FIFA president after he tried to sell future World Cup profits to private investors. The petition with the hashtag InfantinoOut also calls for "FIFA to be rebuilt so that the current debacle can never happen again." "The shameful attempt by one individual – the FIFA President himself – to sell off the World Cup to private investors exposed a betrayal football will never forget," the petition said about Infantino's plan for a commercial spinoff, which he dropped amid a furious backlash. The fan groups include Football Supporters Europe, Football Supporters Africa and, in North America, the Independent Supporters Council, plus about 40 national fan groups worldwide. Infantino has resisted calls to leave office despite European soccer body UEFA saying it has no confidence in him. He has also been criticized by the leadership of North America's CONCACAF and the Asian Football Confederation. "Gianni Infantino has demonstrated a profound failure of leadership, incompatible with democratic governance," the fan petition states. "The concentration of power around the FIFA Presidency, combined with opaque decision-making, personality cult clientelism, and zero accountability has destroyed any remaining trust in the world governing body." – APP



MOGHADESHU: Amb. Aqsa Nawaz concurrently accredited to Somalia, met H.E Abdusalam Abdi Ali Minister for Foreign Affairs Somalia, in Mogadishu at the Somali FO and presented copy of her credentials. The two sides discussed ways to strengthen bilateral relations in all areas of mutual interest. – DNA

A living archive of Pakistan's railway heritage

MONIBA IFTIKHAR

ISLAMABAD: A family stood in the soft shade of towering banyan and peepal trees at the entrance of the Golra Sharif Railway Museum. The ancient trees spread their wide branches like a natural canopy, sheltering the historic site beneath them. A light breeze moved through the leaves, creating a gentle rustling sound that seemed to whisper stories from the past. Sunlight filtered through the dense foliage in broken patterns, forming a shifting mosaic of gold and shadow across the ground. For the visiting family, this calm and almost timeless environment immediately created a sense of wonder and anticipation. The children, in particular, looked around with wide, excited eyes, eager to explore what lay beyond the old iron gates of the museum. Everything about the place from the quiet surroundings to the aged trees suggested that they were about to step into a different era. As they entered the museum grounds, their excitement deepened. Around them stood rusted steam locomotives, vintage railway carriages, old mechanical signals and a variety of historical railway equipment. Each object seemed frozen in time, as if carefully placed to preserve memories of a long-gone age.

The children pointed enthusiastically at the massive engines, amazed by their size and structure, while their parents paused to admire the intricate craftsmanship of the machinery. The entire space felt like a gateway into a forgotten world where history still breathed through iron and wood. Golra Railway Museum Curator Arsalan Shahid, who accompanied the visiting family, explained to APP that every item displayed in the museum carried its own story. He emphasized that the museum was not merely a collection of outdated railway equipment but a living archive of Pakistan's railway heritage. His words transformed the silent machines into symbols of human effort, journeys undertaken, and decades of technological change. The museum itself was established in 2003 under the vision of Ishfaq Khattak, who was then the Divisional Superintendent of Rawalpindi. It was created with the purpose of preserving more than 150 years of railway history before it could fade away or be lost entirely. Today, it stands as one of the few dedicated railway heritage institutions in the country, bringing together the technological, cultural, and social history of Pakistan Railways under one roof. The family's first stop was inside the two main galleries of the museum, where the story of railway development unfolded in detail. The first gallery focused on the technical and operational

aspects of railway history. It displayed items dating back to the 19th century, showing how railway systems once functioned without modern digital technology. Among the notable exhibits were Morse code telegraph machines that were once essential for communication between railway stations. There were also original rifles used by railway guards, tools for track maintenance and a KW Hour Meter manufactured by Ferranti of England. A Western Electric control-room telephone from the United States further illustrated how communication once depended on wired systems and manual operation. The children listened carefully as Arsalan Shahid explained how railway workers once relied entirely on mechanical systems, manual signals, and physical communication methods to ensure trains ran safely and on time. For them, raised in a digital world, these old technologies seemed almost unbelievable. The second gallery offered a more cultural and social perspective on railway life. It displayed Victorian-style waiting room chairs, antique crockery used by railway officers at Mari Indus Station, and even a classic piano. These objects reflected a time when railway travel was not just about transportation but also a social experience filled with interaction and comfort. A collection of vintage clocks attracted special attention. Among them was a long-pen-

dulum clock made by Gillett & Johnston of Croydon, London, in 1899. Surrounding it were various station clocks of different shapes and designs, all symbolizing the importance of punctuality in railway operations. Another fascinating exhibit was a multilingual tea advertisement printed in English, Urdu, Hindi, Bengali and Gurmukhi. It included a tea recipe and information about its benefits, showing how railway networks once served as powerful channels of mass communication across the subcontinent. The pre-partition section of the gallery created a more reflective atmosphere. Old photographs, official documents, and personal belongings transported visitors back to a time before the creation of Pakistan. Among these were items associated with Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, linking the railway system to key moments in the nation's history. Outside, the museum opened into a vast display of locomotives, carriages and railway equipment. Two historic saloons stood out prominently. Saloon No. 38, once used by the last Viceroy Lord Mountbatten and later by Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, reflected the importance of rail travel for political and national leadership. Its polished teak wood interiors and elegant furnishings still carried the charm of a bygone era.

Cabinet approves drafts of two bills

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the statement said it was "a necessary process" following the 27th Constitutional Amendment. It said both drafts will be presented in Parliament for approval during its ongoing session, which was summoned by President Asif Ali Zardari around a week ago and began on August 17. The 27th Constitutional Amendment, enacted in November last year, fundamentally altered Pakistan's higher defence architecture by abolishing the office of the Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee and creating the new position of chief of defence forces, concurrently held by the chief of army staff.

PM Shehbaz extends olive branch...

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For this, I am inviting the opposition from this forum for talks to resolve all matters via dialogue," said PM Shehbaz. He said constructive engagement could help strengthen the country's democracy and support its economic development. The prime minister's latest offer comes despite previous rounds of talks with the major opposition party, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), failing to yield a breakthrough. The renewed offer follows the Supreme Court's ruling ordering Adala jail authorities to shift incarcerated PTI founder Imran Khan to Shifa International Hospital, a long-standing demand of the former ruling party. Imran, 73, has remained in prison since August 2023 following convictions he and his party describe as politically motivated. Since his ouster in April 2022 following a no-confidence vote, he has faced multiple legal cases.

Pakistanis injured in Houthi...

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At the time, Dar had said that 3 nationals were killed and that reports had been received of one other being injured. In a post on X on Thursday, DPM Dar said, "The six Pakistani sailors injured in the recent Houthi attack on a Tanzanian-flagged commercial vessel have safely returned to Pakistan, while the mortal remains of the two Pakistani sailors who tragically lost their lives have also been repatriated." He appreciated the role of the Consulate General of Pakistan in Jeddah and the embassy in Riyadh for facilitating the return and repatriation from Yemen in the absence of a diplomatic mission in the country. He also lauded the efforts of the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) in facilitating the arrival and cooperation of the Saudi Foreign Ministry regarding "medical assistance and arrangements provided in Jeddah".

US urges allies, China...

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any country that provided "any type of lifeline to Iran" as the United States looks to resolve a war it began alongside Israel nearly six months ago. "I think oil markets are misinterpreting what this economic pressure means," Bessent said. Oil prices climbed to more than three-week highs on Thursday. "We have asymmetric information, and I'm not sure why oil has popped up on this," Bessent said. "If we are doing the maximum economic pressure, then that means that likely there will not be a large-scale kinetic restart." When asked if the United States could target China for doing business with Iran, Bessent said many conversations were best to have in private. "We are confident that everyone wants the Strait (of Hormuz) reopened, and for energy prices to come back down," he said. "Keep in mind that the Chinese get 50 percent (of their) energy from inside the Gulf. So it would do them a big service to get with the program."

Briefs

Gold price rises Rs13,700 per tola

ISLAMABAD: The price of gold in the country witnessed a sharp increase on Thursday, with the price of 24-karat gold rising by Rs13,700 to Rs471,936 per tola, according to the All Pakistan Sarafa Gems and Jewellers Association. The price of 24-karat gold for 10 grams increased by Rs11,746 to Rs404,609, while the price of 22-karat gold for 10 grams rose by Rs10,768 to Rs370,905. In the international market, gold was quoted at \$4,495 per ounce, up by \$137 from the previous session. Meanwhile, the price of silver also witnessed an increase, with 24-karat silver rising by Rs369 per tola to Rs7,169. The price of 24-karat silver for 10 grams increased by Rs317 to Rs6,146, while international silver was quoted at \$66.90 per ounce, up by \$3.69. The gold rates were based on interbank exchange rates, with purity set at 999 for 24-karat gold, the association said.—APP

PSX extends bearish trend, sheds over 254 points

ISLAMABAD: The benchmark KSE-100 Index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) continued its bearish trend on Thursday, losing 254.59 points, a negative change of 0.14 percent, to close at 176,591.77 points against 176,846.36 points recorded in the previous trading session. The ready market witnessed a trading volume of 665.194 million shares, compared to 787.894 million shares traded in the previous session, while the traded value decreased to Rs30,792 billion from Rs39,568 billion. Market capitalisation declined to Rs19,787 trillion from Rs19,815 trillion recorded a day earlier. Out of 492 companies that traded in the ready market, 144 posted gains, 312 suffered losses, while 36 remained unchanged, reflecting continued selling pressure across the market. Energyco PK led the volume chart with 221.431 million shares, followed by F. Nat. Equities with 25.116 million shares and Globe Residency with 18.821 million shares. Among the top gainers, PIA Holding Company Limited B surged by Rs197.00 to close at Rs17,797.00, while Sazgar Engineering Works Limited advanced by Rs127.76 to settle at Rs1,880.04. On the losing side, Unilever Pakistan Foods Limited declined by Rs113.97 to close at Rs25,160.00, while Sapphire Fibres Limited fell by Rs39.72 to Rs1,053.02. In the futures (DFC) market, turnover stood at 146,304 million shares with a traded value of Rs8,308 billion, compared with 182,776 million shares worth Rs10,709 billion in the previous session. Of the 311 companies traded in the DFC market, 82 advanced, 223 declined, and 6 remained unchanged.—APP

FTO office circulates upgraded regulation draft

ISLAMABAD, Aug 20 (APP): The Federal Tax Ombudsman Secretariat has circulated the draft Federal Tax Ombudsman (Investigation and Disposal of Complaints) Regulations, 2026 for consultation with relevant stakeholders.

The existing Federal Tax Ombudsman (Investigation and Disposal of Complaints) Regulations, 2001 were promulgated approximately twenty-five years ago. Since then, the legal and institutional framework governing the Ombudsman system has undergone significant development, particularly with the enactment of the Federal Ombudsmen Institutional Reforms Act, 2013. During the intervening years, the environment in which tax administration operates has changed substantially. The number of taxpayers has increased, tax laws and administrative arrangements have become more complex, and the number and nature of complaints received by the Federal Tax Ombudsman have also increased and evolved. Rapid developments in technology and digitisation, and continuing changes in the manner in which public services are delivered, have further created the need for an updated procedural framework.—APP

Pakistan gemstone expos to boost exports

Haroon Akhtar stressed that effective implementation of investor-friendly policies was essential to unlocking the sector's potential, adding that the provinces would be taken on board to ensure coordination and uniform implementation of policies. He said the government was also working on digitising data and mapping gemstone and mineral resources to develop a comprehensive database that could facilitate investment and improve resource management

ISLAMABAD: The government is set to introduce a comprehensive strategy to expand Pakistan's gemstones industry through organised mining, improved value addition, stronger branding and greater access to international markets, with dedicated expos and training facilities also planned to support the sector. Advisor to the Prime Minister on Industries and Production Haroon Akhtar Khan, while chairing a high-level meeting of the Steering Committee on development and promotion of the gemstones sector, said blocks for mining topaz, ruby and other high-value gemstones would be identified in different parts of the country to promote systematic and quality mining operations. The meeting reviewed measures to attract investment, enhance value addition, improve market access and increase gem-

stone exports. It was attended by Prime Minister's Coordinator for Industries and Production Rana Ihsan Afzal, Secretary Industries and Production, senior officials, and representatives of the Pakistan Minerals Development Corporation (PMDC) and Geological Survey of Pakistan (GSP). Haroon Akhtar stressed that effective implementation of investor-friendly policies was essential to unlocking the sector's potential, adding that the provinces would be taken on board to ensure coordination and uniform implementation of policies. He said the government was also working on digitising data and mapping gemstone and mineral resources to develop a comprehensive database that could facilitate investment and improve resource management. Emphasising the importance of value addition, the advi-

sor said Pakistan needed to strengthen the marketing and branding of its gemstones to increase exports and establish strong "Made-in-Pakistan" brands in international markets. He said an effective strategy would be developed to promote Pakistani gemstone brands globally and enhance the country's presence in international markets. The committee was informed that dedicated gemstone expos would soon be organised in Karachi and Islamabad, providing local miners, traders, exporters and businesses an opportunity to connect with international buyers and develop new business linkages. It was further informed that Pakistan was maintaining close coordination with Thailand and Iran to promote the gemstones sector and explore opportunities for international cooperation and market access.

To facilitate trade, Customs and other relevant departments are working with stakeholders, while amendments to relevant HS codes are also being undertaken jointly by Customs and the private sector to facilitate gemstone trade. The committee was informed that around 12,000 training programmes had so far been conducted in the gemstones and jewellery sector, while three additional training courses were currently underway. A dedicated training centre for the gemstones and jewellery sector would soon be established in Quetta, while Centres of Excellence for the sector would be set up in Gilgit-Baltistan, Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Islamabad. Haroon Akhtar reaffirmed the government's commitment to skills development, value addition, investment, branding and export promotion to unlock Pakistan's significant gemstones potential and strengthen its position in international markets.—APP



ISLAMABAD: Deputy Chairman Senate Syedaal Khan Nasar giving Best Group of the Year Award to Chairman Al Sadat Group, Syed Sadat Hussain Shah on the occasion of the International SMEs Excellence Awards 2026. MNA Ms. Farah Naz Akbar, President FPCCI Atif Ikram Sheikh are also present.

Tensions mount ahead of Iraq disarmament deadline

He warned both the prime minister and the "men of the resistance" against "the consequences of hasty, ill-considered or provocative judgements", and called for an end to the "unjustifiably confrontational language used in some statements, remarks and media appearances"

BAGHDAD: As the deadline set by Prime Minister Ali al-Zaidi's government to bring all weapons under state control approaches, tensions have risen in Iraq. With some factions doubling down on their refusal to surrender their arms, others have begun to back away from their earlier support for the government's disarmament initiative. A third camp is seeking to lower the temperature and is urging the authorities not to insist on the end-of-September deadline.

Al-Zaidi, however, appears determined to stick to it, even at the cost of his life. A dramatic advertisement broadcast by Al Iraqiya, the official state television channel, called for weapons to be surrendered and emphasised the strength of the state's own arms. This created a firestorm of escalatory statements from opponents and supporters of the initiative. Within days came reports of a plot to assassinate Faig Zidan, president of Iraq's Supreme Judicial Council, followed by reports that Abbas al-Yaqoubi, the Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF) intelligence official responsible for the Baghdad belt, had been arrested. So far, events have hardly favoured al-Zaidi. The Coordination Framework, the political coalition underpinning his government, includes factions with sharply divergent views on efforts to bring all weapons under state control. Some have declared their readiness to relinquish their arms in exchange for preserving their political gains, hoping to trade their weapons for ministerial representation in the government. Others have stated openly that they will not surrender their weapons, particularly after finding themselves excluded from the distribution of ministerial portfolios. Abu Alaa al-Walaili, secretary general of Kataib Sayyid al-Shuhada and a leading figure within the Coordination Framework, put it bluntly: "Whoever wants to hand over his weapons, we are ready to buy them." A few in the Coordination Framework support the government's efforts to assert control over weapons, but their voices have been largely buried. Outside the Coordination Framework, the picture is more complicated. Kataib Hezbollah Iraq and Harakat al-Nujaba continue to insist that they will not surrender their arms to the state. In a statement published on X, Kataib Hezbollah's security official dismissed al-Zaidi's remarks about bringing weapons under state control as "empty bravado". The group, he said, had endured 100 days of such rhetoric "in the hope that he would grasp the governing domestic, regional and international realities, and listen to the advice of seasoned politicians". The statement also raised the possibility of invoking the principle of "an eye for an eye, and the aggressor bears the greater blame". Before that statement, Sheikh Akram al-Kaabi, secretary general of Harakat al-Nujaba, wrote on X that the mission of the "weapons of the resistance" extended beyond confronting the US military presence in Iraq. Their purpose, he argued, also included resisting the "malicious American project", whose principal aim was "to steal and plunder Iraq's wealth under the guise of so-called investment". Confronting that project, he said, was "one of the foremost duties undertaken by the Iraqi resistance". —APP

Gaza seed bank rebuilds after wartime destruction

With agricultural supplies cut off and prevented from entering through the crossings, the only safeguard we had was to build a food basket based on heirloom seeds that already existed within Gaza." For Al-Mukhalalati, the bank is not only a way of continuing food production on what agricultural land remains, but is a means of preserving Gaza's agricultural heritage for the future. "We consider this project a ray of hope amid the complete darkness hanging over the agricultural sector," he said

DEIR EL BALAH: From a small makeshift tent in the central Gaza Strip, a dedicated team works to carefully store and document some of the war-shattered territory's most precious commodities: local seeds. Shelves of unassuming plastic tubs line the walls of the Al Qarara Seed Bank, each holding indigenous seeds seen as a way of reviving Gaza's devastated farming sector and preserving its agricultural heritage. The seed bank in Deir el-Balah is rebuilding its stocks of Gaza's heirloom seeds that were destroyed during the Israel-Hamas war which erupted in October 2023. Unlike hybrid varieties often sold commercially, heirloom seeds can be saved and used year after year and are often better adapted to their local environment. "During the war, they were what helped us survive," said Saleem Muhanna, who manages the project which was founded in 2017 with support from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). "Heirloom seeds give continuity. They provide 80 to 90 percent of the same yield repeatedly. That is why we relied on heirloom seeds," he told AFP. The bank holds seeds for wheat and barley; leafy crops such as Swiss chard, spinach and parsley, as well as some vegetables like courgette and okra. The war that erupted following Hamas's attack on Israel in October 2023 took an immensely heavy toll. The fighting "completely

destroyed the bank and led to the loss of many seed varieties," explained 27-year-old Hanadi Muhanna, Saleem Muhanna's daughter who also manages the project. "In addition, because we were repeatedly displaced, it was difficult to start over again," she added. "Eventually we settled in Deir el-Balah and managed, thankfully, to establish a small tent. We created something simple using basic means." A collection of large hessian sacks, plastic barrels, and smaller mismatched tubs now hold what remain of the stocks, each like the rest of life in the coastal Palestinian territory, Gaza's agricultural sector was shattered by the conflict. Despite a US-backed ceasefire since October 2025, bloodshed has continued, with the Israeli military continuing to target Palestinians it says are militants. Israel says it now controls more than 60 percent of the Gaza Strip, up from about half when the ceasefire took effect, and has refused to start withdrawing until Hamas fully disarms. Before the war, agriculture including crop production, herding and fishing, accounted for approximately 10 percent of Gaza's economy, according to the United Nations' Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO). Just three percent of the cropland in Gaza remains accessible and undamaged, the FAO said Tuesday. Tight Israeli controls on the entry of all goods into the territory

Japan train hits station workers, killing four

TOKYO: A train hit and killed four workers in Japan on Thursday, authorities said, a rare incident in a country renowned for its normally excellent rail safety record. Local media reported that the four workers were removing weeds from the train tracks at Shin-Kanuma Station in Kanuma city north of Tokyo when the express train struck them. "The four were confirmed dead," a fire department official told AFP. Another official said that when emergency services arrived, three workers were trapped under the train, while one was on the platform. The workers, all men, were in their 50s and 60s, Jiji Press reported. None of the roughly 50 passengers on the train suffered injuries. The six-car train was the Spacia X express on the Tobu Nikko Line, connecting Greater Tokyo with popular tourist destination Nikko in the Tochigi region, media reports said. The Tokyo-bound train was approaching its stop at Shin-Kanuma when the accident occurred, broadcaster NHK said, citing the operator. "We heard this loud rumbling noise. Then the train came to an emergency stop with such sudden braking that it was impossible to stand," a 40-year-old man who was on the train told NHK. "There was an announcement saying 'we will stop to identify where the noise came from', and then we were left unable to get off for a while," the man was quoted as saying. Local media reported that the workers were part of a seven-person crew removing weeds from around the train tracks. Japanese railways have one of the best safety records in the world. Fatal accidents from malfunctioning trains are extremely rare in Japan due to high levels of maintenance and training, and use of advanced technology.—APP

Policies seek to unlock \$10b fisheries potential

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs Muhammad Junaid Anwar Chaudhary said work was under way on the National Fisheries and Aquaculture Policy, aimed at unlocking the sector's potential to generate up to \$10 billion through appropriate policies. He was chairing a meeting to review the performance, progress and achievements of the Ministry of Maritime Affairs and its attached departments. The minister stressed the need to improve the ease of doing business in the maritime sector by simplifying procedures and ensuring meaningful consultation with businesses and other stakeholders. He directed the ministry and its attached departments to incorporate their views and recommendations into policies and initiatives related to sea-based economic activities. The meeting was informed that work on establishing a one-window operation, modelled on the Khidmat Centres, had been completed. The facility would provide multiple government services to the business community through a single platform, helping reduce procedural delays and improve access for investors and maritime-sector businesses. Junaid Chaudhary also highlighted the development of a 100-acre off-dock terminal at Gwadar Port, saying it would facilitate trade with the Central Asian Republics (CARs) and strengthen regional logistics connectivity. The terminal is expected to improve cargo handling and logistics links and further enhance Gwadar's role as a gateway for trade with landlocked Central Asian countries, he added.—APP

'Godfather' of French migrant camps held

LONDON: A convicted people smuggler living in the English county of Leicestershire has been arrested and charged, the BBC reported on Thursday. Twana Jamal Khdir, once described as the "godfather" of the French migrant camps, was charged with a set of immigration offenses. The Iraqi Kurd previously served a prison sentence in France on charges of people smuggling. The BBC revealed last month that he is living in the UK. He was arrested in a joint operation spearheaded by the Midlands Criminal Financial Investigations team and assisted by Leicestershire Police. Khdir appeared at Leicester Magistrates' Court after being charged by the Crown Prosecution Service. He pleaded guilty to entering the UK without valid entry clearance, but not guilty to seeking to obtain leave to enter or remain by deceptive means. Khdir, who was remanded in custody, is set to appear at Leicester Crown Court on Oct. 5. French authorities sentenced him to five years' imprisonment in 2016. He was described as one of the most successful people smugglers ever caught in the country. Aged 36 at the time, Khdir had earned up to \$136,000 weekly while arranging the movement of immigrants across the English Channel to the UK.—APP

Congo set to receive 70,000 Ervebo vaccines

The Democratic Republic of Congo has been allocated 70,000 doses of Merck's Ervebo vaccine for Ebola, the World Health Organization said on Thursday, as the country attempts to contain its biggest ever outbreak of the deadly disease. Last week Congo had requested a release of Ervebo vaccines from the global Ebola virus disease vaccine stockpile, managed by the International Coordinating Group (ICG) on Vaccine Provision, according to WHO. The health agency said the group allocated 70,000 Ervebo doses for Congo, of which 20,000 shots will be used in a late-stage trial to understand the impact of the vaccine on the Bundibugyo virus. The ongoing outbreak is caused by the Bundibugyo species of Ebola, which has no approved vaccines or treatments. "It is not known whether Ervebo may be protective against the Bundibugyo virus in humans," WHO said, stressing the importance of clinical trials to provide important new evidence. Ervebo is approved to prevent disease caused by the more common Zaire ebolavirus strain. The number of confirmed Ebola cases in the Democratic Republic of Congo now exceeds 5,000, according to government data.

Congo's 17th Ebola epidemic became the country's biggest on record in late July by case count, with the death toll now at 2,378 — surpassing the previous worst outbreak in 2018-2020. Earlier this week, WHO's director-general Tedros Ghebreyesus said the Ebola outbreak in eastern Congo remains a global emergency. The ICG is a partnership between the WHO, the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Médecins Sans Frontières and UNICEF.—APP

Turkmenistan sets out key priorities

ISLAMABAD: Turkmenistan is preparing an ambitious agenda for the 81st session of the United Nations General Assembly, placing peacebuilding, preventive diplomacy, sustainable development, international security and multilateral cooperation at the center of its international efforts. "Ashgabat Advances New Initiatives on Peace, Preventive Diplomacy, Sustainable Development and International Cooperation." Building on its policy of permanent neutrality, Turkmenistan intends to present a series of international initiatives designed to strengthen dialogue, trust and cooperation in addressing global and regional challenges, said a release issued on Thursday.—APP

Briefs

President greets Hungarian president

DNA

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari on Thursday congratulated András Baka on his election as the President of Hungary and conveyed his best wishes to the Hungarian people on their National Day.

In his message, the president expressed confidence that Pakistan-Hungary relations, founded on mutual trust and shared interests, would continue to strengthen in the years ahead.

President Zardari said he looks forward to working closely with President-elect Baka to further broaden bilateral cooperation, particularly in political and parliamentary exchanges, trade and investment, development cooperation, climate action, education, culture as well as migration and mobility. The president also conveyed his best wishes for President-elect Baka's good health, well-being and success, as well as for the continued progress and prosperity of the people of Hungary.

Deadly overnight storms batter Germany

BERLIN: A woman died and at least two other people were injured as severe storms caused extensive damage overnight across parts of Germany. In Waldorf, in the southwestern state of Rhineland-Palatinate, a woman was struck by a falling tree and fatally injured, the German news agency dpa reported Thursday. Another woman suffered serious injuries in the accident, police said.

The women, 58 and 47, were walking together when a storm rolled in and they sought shelter under a covered seating area. Both women were struck when a tree was uprooted and fell onto the seating area. The 58-year-old died at the scene, a police spokesperson said. The 47-year-old was taken to a hospital.

A tornado struck the town of Fürstenwalde, 78 kilometers (49 miles) southeast of Berlin. Roofs were torn off and several cars were damaged by falling trees, and one person was injured, according to dpa.

In Hähr-Grenzhausen in the Westerwald district in western Germany, a storm tore walls from buildings. At least two homes were affected, according to dpa. Falling pieces of building facades and flying debris caused additional damage, and several trees were uprooted. A widespread power outage also hit the area, while strong gusts of wind overturned a truck on the A61 highway. There were also numerous weather-related emergency calls overnight in Hesse, Thuringia and Bavaria. — APP

Dar, Syrian FM discuss regional developments

FO says Al-Shaibani's visit marks first FM-level engagement between both countries in nearly two decades



SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad Hassan Al-Shaibani held talks with Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Ishaq Dar in Islamabad on Thursday, with the two sides discussing bilateral cooperation and regional developments.

DPM Dar received FM Al-Shaibani at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where the two held a warm and constructive restricted meeting, the Foreign Office said in a statement. The two foreign ministers reaffirmed the deep-rooted brotherly ties between Islamabad and Damascus and discussed ways to further advance cooperation in areas of mutual interest.

The restricted meeting will be followed by delegation-level talks, where the two sides will review the entire spectrum of Pakistan-Syria bilateral relations and explore avenues for further strengthening cooperation.

The delegation-level discussions will also cover regional developments, with both sides expected to exchange views on the evolving situation in the region.

According to the FO, FM Al-Shabani's visit marks the first foreign minister-level engagement between Pakistan and Syria in nearly two decades.

FM Al-Shaibani arrived in Islamabad late Wednesday on an official visit to Pakistan at the invitation of DPM Dar. He is accompanied by a high-level official delegation. The visit is taking place from August 19 to 20 and is aimed at further strengthening Pakistan-Syria relations and advancing cooperation between the two countries.

The FO had earlier said the visit would provide an opportunity for the two sides to hold in-depth discussions on bilateral relations, explore avenues for enhanced cooperation and exchange views on regional and international developments.

PTA, Google to collaborate

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) and Google on Thursday signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to strengthen children's online safety. A press release issued by the authority said the agreement was aimed at strengthening awareness, digital safety and responsible use of online platforms among children, parents, teachers and caregivers across Pakistan. It said they would collaborate on a child safety programme focused on "awareness, education and capacity-building, equipping parents and teachers with practical tools and resources to help children navigate the digital world safely". "Key initiatives include developing awareness content in English and local languages, conducting training programmes in educational institutions and supporting a nationwide outreach campaign to connect millions of families with localised online safety resources and tutorials," it said. The statement said that on the occasion, PTA Chairman (ret'd) Maj Gen Hafeezur Rehman highlighted the "importance of collective efforts and stakeholder collaboration to protect children in an increasingly digital environment". Dr Khawar Siddique, a member of authority's compliance and enforcement team, emphasised the "importance of promoting digital literacy and responsible use of online platforms to promote a safer digital environment for children and families" in the country.

US debt explodes past \$40tr as Washington's fiscal crisis deepens under Trump, Biden

Indebtedness has increased by \$3.8 trillion, for total growth of \$11.6 trillion across President Trump's two terms so far

WASHINGTON: Total US debt has topped \$40 trillion for the first time, the Treasury Department said on Wednesday, drawing fresh warnings that a fiscal crisis is brewing as ballooning costs for social safety-net programmes and interest payments far outstrip revenues held back by tax cuts. The Treasury's latest daily cash and debt balances statement showed total public debt outstanding at \$40.047 trillion on Tuesday, a total that includes Treasury securities held by the public of \$32.266 trillion and intra-governmental debt holdings of \$7.782 trillion. The federal government's IOU has now more than doubled in less than a decade, from \$19.95 trillion when President Donald Trump was sworn in for the first time in January 2017. Roughly one-third of that increase occurred during two years of frantic government borrowing to fund the COVID-19 pandemic responses undertaken by Trump and former President Joe Biden, while the fiscal policy choices of both presidents combined with long-running tax-and-spending imbalances account for the rest. Budget watchdog groups have anticipated crossing the threshold for weeks and issued stark warnings that a full-blown debt crisis could erupt unless lawmakers confront an unsustainable fiscal outlook and raise taxes, cut spending or both. "Forty trillion dollars of debt doesn't exist solely on the government's ledgers; it is felt throughout the economy and finds its way to the pocketbooks of people one way or another," said Maya MacGuineas, president of

the nonpartisan Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget.

"The more we borrow, the more we exacerbate inflation, squeeze out other priorities in the budget, and leave ourselves vulnerable to emergencies at home and turmoil abroad," MacGuineas said in a statement just after the Treasury data was released.

She said the \$400 trillion figure was reached less than five months after debt reached \$39 trillion, and has quadrupled in less than 20 years after taking until 1981 to reach \$1 trillion for the first time. "It is staggering how predictable the fiscal decline of a global power can become," MacGuineas added. Global US creditors may already be growing wary, with demand from foreign investors holding nearly one third of Treasuries declining over the past year.

Days after a \$25-billion auction of 30-year Treasury bonds went off at the highest yield since 2021, yields on so-called long bonds on Tuesday hit their highest levels in nearly two decades as investors demanded greater compensation in the face of hefty US government bond issuance. Yields move inversely to bond prices. On Wednesday, US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent took a bold step to push long bond yields back down, announcing a doubling of buyback sizes for 10- to 30-year Treasuries to at least \$4 billion per operation. Higher Treasury yields at the longer end tend to push up interest rates for mortgages, car and commercial loans. With the mountain of debt showing no signs of abating, Trump on Wednesday repeated his frequent demand for lower rates. — APP

***Consistent
energy
policies vital
to: minister***

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Petroleum Ali Pervaiz Malik on Thursday stressed the need for consistent and predictable energy policies to attract major investment in Pakistan's upstream exploration, particularly offshore projects. Addressing the Energy Conference 2026, the minister said Pakistan was reviving offshore exploration after two decades under the leadership of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. Friendly countries, Mari Petroleum, Pakistan Petroleum Limited (PPL) and Oil and Gas Development Company Limited (OGDCL) are participating in the effort.

He said the government must provide investors with policy consistency and medium-term visibility, particularly when companies are making major investments in high-risk exploration. "If we expect them to invest over a hundred million dollars for one well, we must provide them consistency of policy and medium-term visibility," he said. Ali Pervaiz Malik said investors should also be allowed to retain profits from successful exploration and reinvest those earnings in developing the required infrastructure.

Iran trying to avert confrontation with Iraq

TEHRAN: Iran is pushing proposals to avert a confrontation between Iraq's government and Tehran-aligned armed factions over their weapons, with Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf taking the effort to Baghdad ahead of a Sept. 30 disarmament deadline. Iraqi sources said Ghalibaf's visit to Baghdad on Wednesday goes well beyond its stated parliamentary purpose, with talks focused on political and security issues — chiefly the fate of armed factions' weapons as the deadline to bring all arms under state control approaches. The sources said Ghalibaf was carrying Iranian proposals aimed at averting a direct confrontation between the Iraqi government and Tehran-aligned factions. — APP

Turkiye says it will keep supporting Syrian military

ANKARA: Türkiye will continue supporting Syria's efforts to develop its own military capacity and infrastructure, the defense ministry said on Thursday, after Israel carried out air strikes on a Syrian air base and warned Ankara against what it called "dangerous adventures" there. Türkiye on Thursday denied having any military presence at an air base in north Syria struck by Israel earlier this week. The denial came two days after Syria accused Israel of striking a disused military air base near the northwestern city of Aleppo that was damaged during the civil war and has been out of service since 2012. Israel said a Turkish military delegation had recently visited the site, with a Syrian war monitor saying it was part of efforts to reactivate the base. "There was no Turkish military delegation at the Abu Al-Duhur air base before or during the attack carried out by Israel," a defense official told journalists, speaking on condition of anonymity. Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu's office also said Turkish forces had recently toured the base, with the prime minister himself warning that Israel would not tolerate a "threat" from a Turkish presence there. "We will not tolerate a Turkish military entrenchment moving southward, because it threatens us," Netanyahu told an army radio podcast. But Turkish defense ministry spokesman Rear Admiral Zeki Akturk said the strikes were "unacceptable" and that Ankara would act "resolutely" to protect Syria's efforts to establish post-war stability. "Israel's attack on the Abu Al-Duhur air base is aimed at harming Syria's stability, security, unity, integrity and infrastructure. - DNA

Russian strikes kill 16 in Kyiv, surrounding region

The country has repeatedly appealed to its allies for additional support as Russia steps up its strikes – firing a record number of missiles in July, according to AFP analysis of Ukrainian air force data.

KYIV: Russian bombardments killed at least 16 people in Ukraine's capital and surrounding areas overnight, authorities said Thursday, with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky urging a global response to Moscow's "escalation" of the four-year war. In the early morning hours, rescuers in Kyiv were sifting through the rubble of destroyed buildings, including a damaged children's hospital, while grieving families watched as two bodies were pulled out of an apartment block. "There used to be a building here, and now it's gone," said 45-year-old resident Maria Abramova. She had only just reached her children's room after the air raid alert sounded when explosions rang out, blowing her windows out and "nearly killing" her husband. The ballistic missiles that Moscow increasingly fires at Kyiv fly up to thousands of kilometers per hour and reach the capital within minutes of an air raid warning. The first explosions rang out over Kyiv less than three minutes after the official warning late Wednesday night — leaving locals basically no time to reach a shelter. Kyiv has struggled to intercept the salvos of ballistic missiles, which can only be effectively shot down by US-designed Patriot air defense systems. The country has repeatedly appealed to its allies for additional support as Russia

steps up its strikes – firing a record number of missiles in July, according to AFP analysis of Ukrainian air force data. “Unfortunately, while Moscow is investing in ballistic missiles and escalation, the world does not always respond appropriately to such attacks,” Zelensky said. ‘Massive attack’ Fifteen people were killed in the capital, mayor Vitaly Klitschko said, and another person was killed in the Kyiv region. The attack also damaged warehouses in Boryspil, outside Kyiv, authorities said. The attack lasted nine hours in the capital, which had been bracing for a strike for a few days.

“It was a massive attack – the Russians prepared for a long time and combined various types of ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and drones,” Zelensky said. Russia launched at least 44 missiles, of which 39 were shot down, according to the air force. Moscow said it hit “military-industrial facilities, a transportation and logistics center, and warehouses” in Kyiv and its region. Poland, Romania, Moldova: The attacks also prompted security responses in neighboring countries, including NATO members Poland and Romania. Poland’s military command said it had mobilized aircraft and activated air defenses aimed at protecting its airspace, particularly in areas bordering Ukraine. – APP

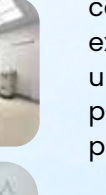


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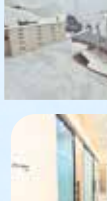
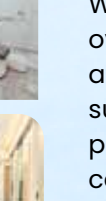
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