

Safar moon not sighted
F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Ministry of Religious Affairs on Friday announced that the crescent for the Islamic month of Safar 1447 AH was not sighted anywhere in the country. According to a formal notification issued by the ministry, the decision was made based on the recommendations of the Zonal Ruet-e-Hilal Committee, which convened its monthly moon-sighting meeting in the federal capital.

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ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif meets Dr. Fauzia Siddiqui.

Asim Munir visits China, boosts military and strategic ties

F.P. Report

BEIJING: Chief of Army Staff (COAS) Field Marshal Asim Munir undertook an official visit to China, where he held a series of high-level meetings with top Chinese political and military leaders.

The visit marks a deepening of the already robust strategic partnership between the two neighbouring allies. During his stay in Beijing, COAS Asim Munir called on Chinese Vice President Han Zheng and Foreign Minister Wang Yi. The leaders exchanged views on the evolving global and regional geopolitical landscape, connectivity schemes under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), and the need for collective strategies to address shared geopolitical challenges.

According to a statement by Inter-Services Public Relations, both sides reaffirmed the depth of bilateral engagement, highlighting the importance of sovereign equality, multilateral collaboration, and long-term regional stability. The Chinese leadership commended the Pakistani armed forces for their vital role in maintaining peace and security in South Asia, describing them as a pillar of regional resilience.

On the military front, Field Marshal Asim Munir held key meetings with senior officials of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), including General Zhang Youxia, the vice chairman of the Central Military Commission; General Chen Hui, political commissar of the PLA Army; and Lt Gen Cai Zhai Jun, chief of staff of the PLA Army.

Upon his arrival at the PLA Army Headquarters, the COAS was accorded a guard of honour. The discussions focused on expanding defence and security cooperation, with emphasis on counterterrorism collaboration, joint training programs, military modernization, and strengthening institutional linkages. Both sides agreed on the need for improved operational interoperability and strategic coordination to counter hybrid and transnational threats.

The Chinese military leadership expressed full confidence in the enduring strength of the bilateral defence partnership and acknowl-



edged Pakistan's pivotal role in promoting peace and stability in the region. Field Marshal Asim Munir conveyed gratitude for China's unwavering support to Pakistan and reiterated the armed forces' commitment to further enhancing military-to-military cooperation in all spheres.

The field marshal also held a comprehensive meeting with General Chen Hui, the political commissar of the PLA. The two leaders discussed matters of mutual interest, focusing on defense collaboration and regional security cooperation. Later, he had a meeting with Chinese Vice President Han Zheng, where discussions centered around bilateral relations and expanding defense cooperation between Pakistan and China.

Meanwhile, Chief of Army Staff Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir visit to China is a profound manifestation of the all-weather strategic partnership between China and Pakistan in military, defense, security and geopolitical aspects, with multiple strategic significance.

This was stated by Prof. Cheng Xizhong, Senior Research Fellow at the Charhar Institute, in a statement here on Friday. He said that Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir's visit to China received a high-level reception from the Chinese side, and both sides clearly positioned the military-to-military relationship as an "important pillar of bilateral relations". This kind of interaction is not only a recognition of Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir's personal military achievements, but also marks that the mili-

tary relations between China and Pakistan have entered a new stage.

Prof Cheng that China expressed its willingness to provide intelligence support, special operations training and equipment assistance to counter terrorism while the Pakistani side has established a specialized organization to coordinate the safety protection of Chinese personnel and projects in Pakistan.

Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir firmly supports China's Global Security Initiative and reaffirms the concept of the "China-Pakistan community with a shared future". This statement not only strengthens the influence of both China and Pakistan in developing countries, but also attracts more countries in the Global South to recognize China's security concept through the demonstration effect of China-Pakistan relations, he added. He said that the two sides complement each other in areas such as counter-terrorism and regional economy. This "equal cooperation" model provides a new option for developing countries to establish a security framework.

He said that Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir's visit to China comes at a sensitive juncture of escalating border clash between Thailand and Cambodia and intensifying tensions between India and Pakistan. The strategic determination demonstrated through high-level communication between China and Pakistan has provided a "dialogue rather than confrontation" solution to regional hot issues.

APC successfully held under CM's leadership despite boycotters: Saif

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Advisor to the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Information and Public Relations, Barrister Dr. Saif, stated that the All Parties Conference (APC) was successfully conducted under the leadership of Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur, despite the absence of certain political parties that chose to boycott the event.

He remarked that those political parties which boycotted the APC are, in reality, not interested in establishing peace. The APC was not convened for any political purpose, but solely to address the pressing need for peace in the province.

"Those who boycotted the conference must clarify whether they stand with those striving to restore peace or with those spreading unrest," he said.

Barrister Dr. Saif emphasized that bold decisions were made during the APC under the leadership of the Chief Minister. He further stated that individuals like Governor Faisal Karim Kundi and others who boycotted the conference lacked the courage to make such brave decisions, which is precisely why they opted to stay away. "Faisal Karim Kundi must understand that his absence made no difference," he added.

He questioned the credibility of

the boycotting parties, asking, "How can they now speak of peace and development in the province?" The APC, held under the leadership of Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur, was a sincere effort by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government toward restoring peace.

Barrister Dr. Saif reiterated that the provincial government, under Chief Minister Gandapur's leadership, is taking practical steps to ensure peace in the region. He urged opposition parties to support the government's efforts in this regard, highlighting that terrorism is not an issue confined to a single party, but a shared challenge requiring collective solutions.

ambassador's efforts in ensuring significant support from the EU during the 2022 floods in Pakistan. He also conveyed his good wishes for EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and said that he looked forward to meeting her at a convenient opportunity in the coming days.

During the meeting, they also discussed the important issues between Pakistan and the EU, including domestic political developments. Ambassador Riina Kionka thanked the prime minister for all the support she had received during her stay in Pakistan and reiterated the EU's commitment to strengthening its cooperation with Pakistan.

Expressing gratitude for the prime minister's good wishes, the ambassador said that she would continue to

promote stronger Pakistan-EU relations in her next assignment in Brussels.

Shehbaz approves Pakistan's first Skills Impact Bond to make youth employable: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif approved Pakistan's first Skills Impact Bond - a modern model that will attract private investment to make the youth employable. He approved the project while chairing a review meeting here on the roadmap for providing employment to the youth.

Under the new model, youth will be taught skills that are in line with contemporary requirements, which will empower and enable them to play an important role in the country's economic development. The model is called "Pay-for-Success",

Ambassador of S Arabia calls on President

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to Pakistan, Mr. Nawaf bin Said Al-Malki, called on President Asif Ali Zardari at Aiwan-e-Sadr. During the meeting, both sides discussed ways to further strengthen bilateral cooperation, particularly in the areas of trade, economy, and culture. The meeting was also attended by Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi.

Welcoming the ambassador, President Zardari said that Pakistan and Saudi Arabia enjoyed deep-rooted and historic relations based on shared faith and mutual trust. He emphasized the need to further expand these ties for the mutual benefit of the two brotherly nations.

The President highlighted Pakistan's investor-friendly policies and invited Saudi investors to explore investment opportunities in various sectors of the Pakistani economy. He noted that both countries share common views on regional and international issues and support each other at multilateral fora.

President Zardari expressed gratitude to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for its support to Pakistan in times of need. He also asked the ambassador to convey his warm greetings and best wishes to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, His Majesty King Salman bin Abdulaziz and His Royal Highness Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

9 dead as floods hit GB

F.P. Report

GILGIT: At least nine people have died as floods and landslides triggered by heavy rain continue to wreak havoc on Gilgit Baltistan, officials said on Friday. The devastating impacts of climate change have become more visible in GB as the region experienced cloudburst-induced floods that claimed lives and damaged infrastructure. On Monday, floods triggered by heavy rain swept through GB's Babuser area in Diamer district and Naran, leaving many stranded. Subsequently, the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) issued a landslide alert for the northern areas of the country.

GB government spokesperson Faizullah Faraq, in a statement, confirmed that nine people have lost their lives in the floods and landslides across the region including two women and two children — while the search for people swept away by the flood is still underway.

In his statement, he estimated that the "number of people swept away by floodwater could be around 12-14." On the other hand, more than a dozen people were reported to be injured in the floods. "Over 300 stranded tourists have been rescued so far," he said, adding that rescue operations have been challenging as floods and landslides continue to ravage parts of the region. Detailing the property damage caused by floods and landslides, he stated, "In total, more than 500 houses have been destroyed due to the floods and about 12 kilometres of roads have been destroyed as well."

Rubio lauds Pak's sacrifices in fight on terror

US Secretary of State meets DPM in Washington

WASHINGTON: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar on Friday held a meeting with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio in Washington. Both the leaders exchanged views on a range of bilateral and regional issues.

Rubio acknowledged Pakistan's sacrifices in the fight against terrorism and appreciated its contributions to global and regional peace. He noted that Pakistan has consistently played a constructive role in promoting stability in the region.

Dar expressed Pakistan's desire to further expand and strengthen bilateral relations with the United States. He voiced optimism regarding the progress being made through the ongoing US-Pakistan trade dialogue and described Pakistan as an attractive destination for American investors.

Dar emphasised that both countries share common perspectives and aligned interests on key regional peace initiatives. He also highlighted the role of the Pakistani diaspora in the United States, describing it as a vital bridge between the two nations. During the meeting, both sides reaffirmed their commitment to enhancing bilateral cooperation across multiple sectors.

Earlier, Ishaq Dar urged the UN Security Council to pursue an immediate, permanent and unconditional ceasefire in Gaza and across the occupied Palestinian territory. He was speaking at the United



Nations Security Council's open debate on the Middle East. The deputy prime minister said that immediate steps should be taken to ensure the delivery of life-saving food and medical assistance, restore humanitarian supply lines, and prevent famine conditions in Gaza.

In March, the US State Department also said that US-Pakistan cooperation on counter-terrorism remains crucial after Islamabad authorities detained Daesh-K terrorist Sharifullah and extradited him to Washington, where he is on trial for the 2021 suicide bombing outside Kabul airport.

When Trump met Chief of Army Staff (COAS) Munir, they discussed trade, economic development, mines and minerals, artificial intelligence, energy, cryptocurrency, and emerging technologies. Following the meeting — which took place more than a month after an

armed conflict between nuclear-armed Pakistan and India — Islamabad also nominated Trump for the Nobel prize for his role in ending the war.

During an interaction with journalists, President Trump had said that he had the "honour" of meeting Field Marshal Munir and maintained that he invited the army chief to thank him for ending the war with India. Although Pakistan has, time and time again, praised and credited President Trump for his role in the ceasefire, which he himself has highlighted on multiple occasions, India has denied any US involvement whatsoever.

However, the US president is on record reiterating his stance and has even offered to mediate the longstanding Kashmir dispute between the two countries — a stance also highlighted by the US State Department as well. — Agencies

Pakistan flays Israel's illegal annexation attempt in Gaza

Saqib Mushtaq

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan on Friday unequivocally condemned the Israeli parliament's unlawful attempt to assert "sovereignty" over the Occupied West Bank, calling it a grave violation of international law reflecting Israel's persistent disregard for Palestinian rights and established international norms.

"Such deliberate and provocative actions highlight the occupying power's systematic attempts to undermine efforts for peace and entrench its illegal occupation. These unilateral measures represent a dangerous escalation that jeopardizes regional stability and prospects for a just and lasting settlement," Foreign Office spokesperson Shafqat Ali Khan said in a statement.

He called upon the international community to take swift and decisive action to hold Israel accountable for its violations of United Nations Security Council resolutions and international humanitarian law. These measures will neither be recognized nor alter the

internationally acknowledged status of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, he added.

Reaffirming Pakistan's unwavering commitment to the Palestinian people's inalienable right to self-determination, the spokesperson said, "We steadfastly advocate for the establishment of an independent, sovereign, and viable Palestinian state based on the pre-June 1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions."

Meanwhile, the Senate strongly condemned the recent decision of the Israeli Parliament to approve a resolution asserting so-called Israeli sovereignty over the occupied West Bank, saying it is brazen violation of international law, United Nations Security Council resolutions and the Geneva Conventions. The resolution moved by Palwasha Mohammad Zai Khan said Israeli Parliament's resolution is illegal, illegitimate, and null and void under international law.

It recalled the West Bank is internationally recognized as occupied territory and that any unilateral annexation or claim of sovereignty is a clear affront to the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. The resolution affirmed Pakistan's unwavering support for the just cause of Palestine and the establishment of an independent and sovereign Palestinian State, in line with the relevant UN resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.

It recognized that such actions by the occupying Israeli government gravely endanger peace and stability in the region and expose the expansionist and apartheid agenda of the Israeli regime. The house demanded the international community, particularly the United Nations Security Council, to take immediate and concrete action to halt Israeli expansionism and protect the rights of the Palestinian people. It called upon government to intensify diplomatic efforts in collaboration with OIC and like-minded nations to resist and reverse such unlawful attempts.

PM reaffirms govt's commitment to GSP Plus scheme

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Friday underscoring the significance of the European Union as one of Pakistan's largest trading partners, reaffirmed the government's commitment to the GSP Plus scheme, which had proved to be mutually beneficial for both sides.

The prime minister said this in a meeting with Ambassador of the European Union in Pakistan Riina Kionka who paid a farewell call on him at the Prime Minister's House. While congratulating the ambassador on the successful completion of her tenure in Pakistan, the prime minister thanked her for making important contributions towards the strengthening of Pakistan-EU relations.

He particularly appreciated the

ambassador's efforts in ensuring significant support from the EU during the 2022 floods in Pakistan. He also conveyed his good wishes for EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and said that he looked forward to meeting her at a convenient opportunity in the coming days.

During the meeting, they also discussed the important issues between Pakistan and the EU, including domestic political developments. Ambassador Riina Kionka thanked the prime minister for all the support she had received during her stay in Pakistan and reiterated the EU's commitment to strengthening its cooperation with Pakistan.

Expressing gratitude for the prime minister's good wishes, the ambassador said that she would continue to

promote stronger Pakistan-EU relations in her next assignment in Brussels.

Shehbaz approves Pakistan's first Skills Impact Bond to make youth employable: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif approved Pakistan's first Skills Impact Bond - a modern model that will attract private investment to make the youth employable. He approved the project while chairing a review meeting here on the roadmap for providing employment to the youth.

Under the new model, youth will be taught skills that are in line with contemporary requirements, which will empower and enable them to play an important role in the country's economic development. The model is called "Pay-for-Success",

under which public or donor funds are released only when independently verified results, such as job creation or a certain threshold of income, are achieved.

Speaking at the meeting, the prime minister directed that further steps should be taken to enhance the capacity of the youth, train them in skills that are in line with contemporary requirements, and ensure employment after training. He expressed satisfaction at the performance of the Prime Minister's Youth Programme, the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis Affairs, National Vocational and Technical Training Commission and all related institutions, in providing employment to the youth.

He said opportunities should be provided to youth for learning the

local languages of other countries to assist them in finding employment abroad. A comprehensive roadmap based on the estimated number of job opportunities and hirings of youth in Pakistan and abroad should be presented, he said adding he will review the progress of implementation of the roadmap after every two months.

The prime minister said training of skilled people for employment abroad should be given priority. A campaign should be launched to make the youth aware of the employment opportunities available on the Digital Youth Hub, he asserted. He said Pakistan's talented youth were its most valuable asset.

Providing employable education and skills to the youth will change the

destiny of the country, he said adding Pakistan's talented youth were making their country's name shine all over the world. The meeting was informed that the federal government, on the instructions of the Prime Minister, was taking comprehensive steps to ensure employment of youth in Pakistan and abroad along with providing skills and education to make them employable.

The participants were told about the annual estimate of employment provision to the youth in Pakistan and abroad under the new programme. The programme will empower the youth and assist them in self-sufficiency, entrepreneurship and direct job placement.

(Continued on Back Page)

Minister inspects Mayo Hospital

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Health Minister Khawaja Salman Rafique conducted a surprise visit to Mayo Hospital on Friday, and made it clear that negligence in patient treatment would not be tolerated.

During the visit, he reviewed the Outpatient Department (OPD), pharmacy, and other facilities, while interacting with patients to gather feedback on medical services.

The minister highlighted the Punjab government's commitment to improving healthcare, stating that new hospitals are being constructed to address the increasing patient load. "Following the vision of Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif, we are working to enhance patient facilities and ensure a steady supply of medicines in hospitals," he said.

Khawaja Salman issued directives to improve the queue management and token number systems at Mayo Hospital. He also ordered an increase in seating arrangements for patient convenience and the full activation of air conditioners. During the visit, he issued a show-cause notice to a Postgraduate Resident (PGR) for using a mobile phone in the emergency department.

The minister inspected the Ghari Ward Surgical Tower and met with patients to assess their care. CEO Mayo Hospital Professor Haroon Hamid and Medical Superintendent Dr. Abdul Madabar accompanied the minister during the visit.

LWMC starts cleanliness operation

LAHORE (APP): The Lahore Waste Management Company (LWMC) has launched a cleanliness operation at Lahore railway station, in line with Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif's vision for Suthra Punjab.

According to LWMC sources here on Friday, special attention is being given to Lahore railway station, a major transit point for passengers. LWMC CEO Babar Sahib Din said that the company had initiated top-notch cleaning facilities at Lahore Railway station.

Under agreement with Lahore Railway Station, LWMC had deployed 5 supervisors and 105 workers under the supervision of area manager, operating in three shifts to ensure round-the-clock cleanliness, sources added.

The LWMC sanitation team was responsible for cleaning platforms, reservation areas, waiting halls, washrooms, parking lots, railway tracks and offices within and around the station. Regular washing of platforms and tracks were also being carried out during day and night shifts.

LWMC's community mobilization wing organized an awareness campaign at the railway station to highlight the importance of cleanliness among passengers.

Sindh CM meets U.S. Chargé d’Affaires to discuss strengthening USAID partnership

KARACHI (APP): Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah met with Ms. Elizabeth Horst, Chargé d’Affaires of the United States of America to Pakistan, to discuss the progress and future of U.S. development assistance in the province.

The meeting was held at CM House and was attended by provincial ministers Syed Nasir Hussain Shah, Principal Secretary to CM Agha Wasif, Chairman P&D Board Najam Shah.

The USA delegation members were Consul General Scott Urbom, Deputy Consul General Jai Nair, Chief Political & Economics Section Shelley Saxen, Political Officer Trevor Earnshaw, Political Specialist Saleh Shah and Staff Assistant Charles Besnard. The two sides reviewed completed initiatives and explored future collaboration opportunities in the fields of education, water and sanitation, health, climate resilience, and municipal services.

Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah reaffirmed his government's commitment to deepening its partnership with USAID. He outlined several areas where USAID's continued support is critical:

- The CM said that his government seeks USAID's assistance in addressing post-2022 flood reconstruction needs, with over 20,000 schools fully or partially damaged. The province aims to restore educational infrastructure and scale up quality teaching through ICT and teacher training.
- Murad Shah said that under the WASH project, there is a dire need for immediate rehabilitation of 799 water supply schemes, 444 drainage systems, and 1,212 RO/UF plants is underway. He proposed an additional 504 filtration units for schools and health facilities.
- Climate-Resilient Settlement Planning: The CM said that his government is launching GIS-based planning in 3,000 rural villages, aiming to benefit 264,000 households and protect 1.5 million people living outside high-risk flood zones.
- The Chief Minister sought co-financing with USAID for constructing new Basic Health Units (BHUs), Rural Health Centres (RHCs), and Mother & Child Health Centres in underserved areas. Upgrades of existing BHUs and hospitals to modern standards are also planned, including solar energy systems and telemedicine support.
- Laboratory Expansion and Disease Surveillance: Ms. Elizabeth Horst, US Chargé

d’Affaires, was told that was expanding its lab network, including BSL-III level facilities in Karachi and BSL-II labs in all district headquarters hospitals. USAID's technical and financial assistance is requested for equipment, personnel training, and lab information systems development.

The Chief Minister appreciated USAID's long-standing partnership, highlighting the successful completion of several transformative programs.

Municipal Services Delivery Program (MSDP): The CM said that the MSDP concluded in June 2025, the project revitalised water supply, sewage disposal, and solid waste management systems in Jacobabad. Equipment and infrastructure have been handed over to local councils.

"However, the Government of Sindh (GoS) awaits the reimbursement of the remaining committed amount of \$3,501 million from USAID," he said.

Improved Access to Water and Sanitation Services (WASH): The WASH implemented in District Umerkot and District Tank (KP) with a cost of \$7.6 million, the project successfully improved WASH infrastructure and community engagement. Rehabilitation of non-functional water supply



KARACHI: Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah meets with Ms. Elizabeth Horst, Chargé d’Affaires of the United States of America to Pakistan, at CM House.

schemes has been completed.

Pakistan Climate Financing Activity (PCFA): A \$ 10 million USAID initiative being executed by Chemonics is supporting Sindh in mobilising climate finance. A dedicated Climate Planning & Development Unit (CPDU) is being proposed to institutionalise these efforts.

Concluded in August 2024, the SBEP program constructed 106 schools in 10 districts for \$165 million, enhancing access to quality education for thousands of students.

The Chief Minister praised USAID's instrumental role in supporting Sindh's development journey and expressed hope that the collaboration will continue to grow in scale and impact.

"USAID has been a transformative partner in advancing inclusive, resilient, and people-centred development in Sindh," he stated. Elizabeth Horst acknowledged the Sindh government's proactive role and reiterated the United States' commitment to supporting Pakistan's sustainable development through focused and effective cooperation.

Govt launches E-Summary system—A major step toward transparency

Syed Adnan

PESHAWAR: In a major move towards administrative reforms, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has officially launched the E-Summary System under the leadership of Chief Secretary Shahab Ali Shah.

The Establishment Department has begun processing all administrative summaries online, including transfer and posting cases.

Chief Secretary Shahab Ali Shah stated that all government departments are now required to operate through the E-Summary platform which will ensure transparency, efficiency, and merit-based decision-making. He emphasized:

This initiative aligns with the provincial government's vision for a modern, transparent, and citizen-centric governance model. Reforms under the Good Governance Strategy will continue.

The implementation of the E-Summary system aims to eliminate delays in official procedures, minimize manual file handling, and discourage external influences and favoritism within administrative affairs.

According to sources, the Chief Secretary is personally overseeing the transition and has directed all departments to train their officers and staff to adapt to the new digital system without delay.

This step is being hailed as a significant milestone toward modernizing the bureaucracy and restoring public confidence in government institutions. It reflects a practical commitment to good governance and institutional transparency in the province.

MQM Graduate Forum delegation calls on Governor

KARACHI (APP): A delegation of MQM Graduate Forum met with Sindh Governor Kamran Khan Tessori at the Governor House on Friday to discuss various proposals in connection with the upcoming "Ma'arkai-e-Haq, Independence Day Celebrations" to be marked from August 1 to 14.

The delegation led by Dr. Abdul Qadeer Khanzada held discussions on key sectors including education, healthcare, employment, and social welfare. Senior MQM Pakistan leader MNA Dr. Farooq Sattar was also present on the occasion.

Governor Tessori emphasized the importance of youth empowerment and guidance, stating that special attention is being given to initiatives aimed at enabling young people to play a constructive role in society.

He appreciated the MQM Graduate Forum's positive suggestions and their commitment to social service, calling their contributions commendable.

Under the Governor's patronage, several revolutionary initiatives are underway for youth development. These include IT classes, scholarships, and entrepreneurship training programs.

The Governor highlighted that young individuals presenting strong proposals are being provided interest-free loans to help launch their own businesses.

"We are utilizing all possible resources to make the youth self-reliant and empowered," the Governor concluded.

PTI Marches For Imran’s Freedom, vows to fight for Sindh’s rights

ISLAMABAD (PPI): Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) today staged a protest march from Karachi to Hyderabad, demanding the immediate release of its leader and former Prime Minister Imran Khan.

The demonstration, led by PTI Secretary General Barrister Salman Akram Raja, Sindh President Haleem Adil Sheikh, and other senior figures, was preceded by a strategic gathering at "Adil House" in Karachi. Here, the provincial leadership finalized plans for a broader protest scheduled for August 5, described as a pivotal moment in their campaign.

The march drew substantial participation from across Sindh, with supporters brandishing party banners and condemning the incumbent administration. The event concluded with a large assembly in Hyderabad.

Raja addressed the media, emphasizing the party's pledge to champion the rights of Sindh's neglected citizens, aligning with Khan's vision. He criticized the province's long-standing leadership, pledging to address issues ranging from water resources to security and infrastructure. Raja stressed the significance of youth engagement, promising to spread Khan's message throughout Sindh.

Sheikh denounced Khan's detention as unconstitutional and a breach of human rights, criticizing the restricted access to legal counsel and family.

He warned of repercussions if Khan's well-being is compromised. He further criticized the alleged manipulation of the legal process, emphasizing the potential erosion of public trust in the judiciary if justice is not served. Sheikh confirmed ongoing statewide protests and highlighted August 5 as a critical juncture in the movement.

Amjad Khan Niazi, Political Coordinator to Imran Khan, echoed these sentiments and declared PTI's intent to form the next provincial government, emphasizing the party's commitment to advocating for the people of Sindh.

Govt announces historic celebrations for Independence Day

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Government of Sindh has initiated extensive preparations to celebrate the Independence Day on 14 August and the occasion of "Battle of Truth" in a historic, organized, and spirited manner.

This decision was made under the chairmanship of Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon, in a high-level meeting held in Karachi on 25 July 2025.

The meeting was attended by provincial ministers, special aides, President of the Arts Council Mr. Ahmed Shah, Secretary of Information Mr. Nadeemur-Rehman Memon, and other senior officials.

During the meeting, it was decided that government buildings, buses, trains, markets, and public places would be decorated with the national flag, colorful lights, and vibrant banners. A wide-reaching media campaign will be launched to encourage public participation.

Detailed discussions were held on key aspects including event schedules, decoration plans, security and sanitation arrangements, cultural activities, and public engagement at the district level.

Sharjeel Inam Memon emphasized that this year, the Independence Month will not be observed merely as a celebration, but as a message of patriotism, sacrifice, and truth. Events will be inclusive, ensuring participation of special children, minorities, senior citizens, and women.

District-level main events will be organized to reflect the true spirit of public enthusiasm.

Minister for Local Government, Syed Saad Ghani, stated that instructions would be issued to all local bodies to hold events at ward, union council, and town levels. These will include public rallies, musical evenings featuring national songs, and youth sports competitions, aimed at channeling the energy of the younger generation.

Minister for Culture, Zulfiqar Shah, announced that to highlight Sindh's cultural heritage, special shows, poetry sessions, Qawwali nights, and theater performances will be organized in collaboration with Arts Council, schools, colleges, and theater groups.

According to him, this is not only a festive occasion but a moment to connect with cultural legacy.

Minister for Energy, Syed Nasir Hussain Shah, added that Independence Day would also be marked by initiatives such as tree planting, cleanliness drives, blood donation camps, and social action programs, making the day symbolic of public service.

(PPI):

Karachi's Additional Inspector General of Police, Javed A. Odho, today announced the imminent addition of 470 officers to the Karachi Police force, emphasizing the department's commitment to long-term solutions for maintaining law and order.

During a visit to the SITE Association of Industry, accompanied by senior officials, Odho addressed traffic congestion issues in the SITE area, proposing collaboration between District Keamari and District Central administrations to alleviate persistent bottlenecks from the Siraj Kassam Teli flyover to the Nazimabad underpass.

Odho underscored the importance of interdepartmental coordination for effective policing and acknowledged the business community's contributions to the nation, assuring them that their concerns are prioritized. He admitted the complexities of traffic management and public defiance, advocating for improved police-citizen relations.

Addressing the Safe City Project (SCP), the Additional IG highlighted the requirement for standardized number plates, explaining that the system would identify fraudulent plates. Anticipating a surge in traffic citations exceeding 20,000 post-SCP implementation, with direct delivery to residences, he revealed a proposal to allocate 15% of fines to reward traffic police. Odho encouraged business participation in public transport and drug rehabilitation initiatives.

Responding to Tariq Yousuf's inquiry, Odho confirmed the SCP's capability to detect weapons displayed on vehicles. He recommended that heavy vehicle operators install side panels, CCTVs, and trackers, and indicated that heavy traffic on Lyari Expressway and Shahrah-e-Bhutto is under review. He also instructed the deployment of a tow truck near Siraj Kassam Teli flyover during peak hours.

SITE President Ahmed Azeem Alvi, after welcoming the Additional IG, presented an overview of SITE's economic significance and export contributions.

LHC disposes of petition against delay in wheat support price

LAHORE (APP): The Lahore High Court (LHC) on Friday disposed of a petition filed against the provincial government's failure to fix the wheat support price for the 2024-25 season, directing the Punjab government to implement provisions under the Punjab Price Control of Essential Commodities Act, 2024.

Justice Sultan Tanvir Ahmad announced the reserved verdict on a petition moved by Kissan Board Pakistan President Sardar Zafar Khan. The verdict was reserved on completion of arguments from all parties.

The petitioner's counsel, Advocate Zubair Afzal Rana, argued that the agriculture department had only issued an indicative price of Rs. 4,108 per 40kg crop, but failed to officially notify a support price. He highlighted that this inaction has harmed farmers, leading to financial losses and diminished morale.

He warned that continued neglect could reduce wheat production and discourage future cultivation, potentially threatening national food security. He urged the court to direct the government to promptly fix the wheat support price to ensure farmers receive fair compensation.

On the other hand, Assistant Attorney General Muhammad Waseem stated that, following the 18th Constitutional Amendment, provinces now hold exclusive authority over price regulation.

He defended the discontinuation of fixed support prices, arguing it aligns with international best practices to ensure fair farmer returns without artificial market intervention.

Supporting this stance, Assistant Advocate General Salman Asif Warraich pointed to past notifications regarding wheat prices and public procurement to build buffer stocks.

He added that these measures were no longer sufficient under global food security frameworks and said the government had shifted toward alternative support systems.

These include financial assistance programs and improved storage facilities for wheat growers, he added.



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ADMISSION NOTICE

Applications are invited for admission to 1st year Diploma of Associate Engineer (DAE) at Government College of Technology, Peshawar for the session 2025-26. Candidates having CNIC/FORM-B of the following Districts/Areas can apply for the Technologies as mentioned against each technology given below;

#	Technology	Districts/Areas		(Self-Sustained)
		Regular Morning Shift Program		
1.	Electrical, Civil, Mechanical, Architecture	District Peshawar Only		KPK / Pakistan
2.	Electronics	Districts of Peshawar, Kohat, Karak, Nowshera, Bannu, D.I.Khan, Lakki Marwat,		
3.	Chemical, Auto & Diesel	All Khyber Pakhtunkhwa except NMDs		

Schedule:

	Issuance & Submission of Prospectus/Form	Morning Shift	2nd Shift	Venue
1.		4th August 2025 to 18th August 2025	4th August 2025 to 18th August 2025	Student Clerks / Admission Office
2.	Hifz Test	19th August 2025	19th August 2025	Admission Office
3.	Sports	19th August 2025	—————	College Ground
4.	Provisional Merit	22nd August 2025	22nd August 2025	Notice Board
5.	Final Merit List	23rd August 2025	23rd August 2025	Notice Board
6.	Interview	25th & 26th August 2025	28th & 29th August	College Main Hall

Eligibility:

- i. SSC in Science subjects or TSC with at least 40% marks. Incomplete applications will be rejected.
- ii. Age limit is 16-25 years (with normal fee) on last date of form submission.
- iii. 20 marks shall be added with SSC marks for Hafiz-e-Quran after qualifying Hifz test.
- iv. Last date for admission on reserved quota including Newly Merged Districts is 2nd September 2025, after that no application will be entertained for admission.
- v. The candidates among the merit list, who fail to appear before the admission committee for interview on their respective date & time, will be considered absent and the seat will be filled by next candidate from the merit list.
- vi. Full admission fee must be deposited at the time of admission/interview otherwise candidate's right of admission will be considered cancelled and his seat will be filled by the next candidate from merit list.

Note:

- Prospectus/Form is available at student clerk Office/admission office @ Rs 200/- during office timing.
- Classes of 1st year classes shall be commenced waf 1st September 2025.
- Candidates shall apply for morning and second shift separately.
- Architecture Technology is being offered on self-sustained basis only.

(Engr. Fazal-e-Elahi) Director Admissions
091-7086256

INF (P) 3224/25



PESHAWAR: Commissioner Peshawar Division Riaz Khan Mehsud chairing meeting on comprehensive restoration and renovation project for the historic Islamia College Peshawar to revive its architectural beauty and historical significance.

More monsoon rains predicted across KP, PDMA issues alert

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has issued an alert in view of another spell of monsoon rains forecasted by the Pakistan Meteorological Department. According to PDMA, intermittent heavy rains accompanied by thunderstorms are expected across various districts of the province from July 27 to July 31, 2025.

Districts likely to be affected include Dir, Swat, Chitral, Kohistan, Malakand, Shangla, Battagram, Buner, Kohat, Karak, Bannu, Tank, Lakki Marwat, Dera Ismail Khan, Bajaur, Mohmand, Khyber, Waziristan, Orakzai, Mansehra, Abbottabad, Haripur, Peshawar, Charsadda, Nowshera, Mardan, Swabi, Hangu, and Kurram. The forecast includes strong winds, thunder, and heavy downpours.

PDMA has warned of possible flash flooding in seasonal streams and nullahs, especially in Mansehra, Kohistan, Abbottabad, Galiyat, Chitral, Dir, Swat, Shangla, Buner, Nowshera, Swabi, and Mardan. There is also a risk of landslides in mountainous areas and urban flooding in low-lying regions.

The authority noted that due to intense rainfall, water levels in the Swat, Chitral, and Panjkora rivers may rise significantly, potentially leading to flood-like conditions.

District administrations, Rescue 1122, and other relevant agencies have been instructed to take precautionary measures. These include traffic management on vulnerable roads, clearing of drains and waterways, and ensuring full readiness of emergency services.

Farmers have been advised to harvest their crops early and store them in safe locations, while livestock owners are urged to take protective measures for their animals. The public has been requested to avoid visiting exposed areas and refrain from unnecessary travel during windstorms, hailstorms, and lightning.

PDMA stated that its Emergency Operation Center is fully operational, and citizens can report any emergency by calling helpline 1700.

Engr. Qazi of UET Peshawar successfully defends Ph.D thesis



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Engr. Qazi Muhammad Usman, Department of Industrial Engineering, University of Engineering and Technology, Peshawar successfully defended his Ph.D. thesis under the supervision of Dr. Tufail Habib (Supervisor) and Prof. Dr. Sahar Noor (Co-supervisor) on 24th July, 2025 at the Video Conference Hall, UET Peshawar.

He presented his research findings through a seminar in public forum session, followed by the Viva-Voce examination by the Examination Committee.

His research, titled "Recycling of Polymer Wastes for Assistive Devices Used in Physical Rehabilitation," presents an innovative approach to sustainability by recycling polypropylene (PP) waste generated during the production of Assistive devices (prosthetic and orthotic devices).

The study focused on developing bio-composites by reinforcing recycled PP with natural fillers such as wood husk, wheat husk, and rice husk.

These composites were optimized and tested for strength, thermal stability, and surface characteristics. The findings demonstrate the potential of these materials to serve as sustainable alternatives in the fabrication of assistive devices, contributing to circular economy goals and promoting responsible use of resources.

Based on this research, he published in reputed journals.

His research reflects a collaborative effort between UET Peshawar, the Paraplegic Centre Peshawar (PCP), and McMaster University, Canada, with funding support from the Pakistan Science Foundation (PSF) and HEC Pakistan.

Engr. Qazi is also serving as a Lab Engineer in the Department of Industrial Engineering, UET Peshawar. He has published eleven research papers in Impact factor journals of international repute in the field of circular economy, polymer processing and recycling, statistical analysis, and process optimization.

His research evaluation committee (REC) included Prof. Dr. Sahar Noor, Department of Industrial Engineering, UET Peshawar, Prof. Dr. Saeed Gul, Department of Chemical Engineering, UET Peshawar, Prof. Dr. Syed Husain Imran Jaffery, School of Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering, NUST Islamabad, Mr. Mansoor Anwar Golra, HoD Assistive Technology Department, Paraplegic Centre Peshawar, Pakistan. Senior faculty members, representatives from the relevant field, and a large number of students attended the Ph.D. defence.

Proving perception about police as a symbol of corruption wrong

Said Gull

A common man equates the police to corruption, irreligion, atheism, cruelty and authoritarianism. However, this perception is proved incorrect by some exceptional police officers through their integrity, honesty, transparency, accountability and spearheaded dedication to Islamic injunctions in its true letter & spirit.

The writer, a police officer of junior rank, countered such an example at the naive stage of his police career in Capital Territory Police, Islamabad in the year 1997.

The efforts and impeccable character of an officer of highest rank in the ICT Police left a lasting impression on my life as well as my many other batchmates.

In October, 1997 more than fifty thousand aspirants submitted their applications against some 300 posts of Constable. On 3rd November, 1997, the candidates were called for physical tests. However, due to heavy influx, the physical tests, on that day were called off and re-scheduled provincially on different dates.

Accordingly, province-wise physical tests were conducted, followed by written test and medical, 100 % on merit.

In the history of Islamabad Police, it was the most educated batch comprising of more than 30% graduates at that time.

The most attractive aspect was merit-based (100%) selection process followed by exhaustive training fully focused on character-building. One of the glaring examples of transparency is evident from the event that in physical measurements and medical examinations, some manipulators demanded illegal gratification from the aspirants. However, on very next day, the highest officer of the time, took notice. Accordingly the medical examination and physical measurement were re-conducted and those found deficient than the standards, were immediately disqualified, by ensuring 100% merit without yielding to any form of influence or favouritism. On that day, my belief fortified that transparency sustains only if the highest officers are not compromised.

Upon selection and joining the Police Training Centre (PTC), a gigantic task, where training staff demand bribe, was ahead. Everyone was of the view that the training staff will demand bribe on every point. However, the situation was found totally in contrast.

The highest office had deputed the staff, which was quite honest and dedicated. The most imperative part of the training was character building and for the purpose, all of the trainees were linked with Tableeghi Markaz at Rawalpindi.

All the newly appointed constables were sent on Tableegh for Ten days with special instructions from highest office to get them acquainted with the injunctions of Islam.

During this Ten days period, the recruits were given comprehensive lectures strongly condemning corruption, bribery, and the acceptance of illegal gratification. Additionally, throughout the Nine months of basic training, weekly visits to the Tableeghi Markaz, Rawalpindi from 05 PM to 10 PM were ensured for all recruits.

This short period of Tableegh imprinted such positive marks on the minds of newly appointed police officers that till today more than 80% of the personnel remain distant from the menace of corruption, bribery and receiving illegal gratification.

I think all credit goes to the highest officer of Islamabad Police at that time, the IGP? Mr. Saleem Tariq Lone.

May Allah bless him a long, happy, healthy and pious life. Ameen.

Article written by Inspector Said Gull, Motorway Police, recruited as police constable in the Capital Territory Police, 16th Batch, 1997.

JAC demands approval of pay raise, allowances for Islamia College Staff

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A crucial meeting of the Joint Action Council (JAC) of Islamia College Peshawar was held today under the chairmanship of Professor Dr. Dil Nawaz Khan, President of JAC. The meeting was attended by presidents and general secretaries of all associated staff and faculty unions. The session commenced with the recitation of the Holy Quran.

During the meeting, Dr. Khan informed participants that the Syndicate of Islamia College, in accordance with the recent announcement by the provincial government, has recommended a 10% increase in salaries and a 30% disparity allowance for the college's faculty and staff.

The JAC made a strong appeal to the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, especially Chief Minister and Chancellor of Islamia College Mr. Ali Amin Gandapur, and Minister for Higher Education and Pro-Chancellor Mr. Meena Khan Afridi, to approve these recommendations in the upcoming Senate meeting scheduled for July 29.

The council emphasized that this approval is a constitutional and legal right of Islamia College employees and should be granted without delay.

The meeting concluded with a unanimous resolution: if the government fails to ensure equal treatment for Islamia College staff compared to employees in other public sector institutions across the province and country, the JAC will announce a robust protest strategy.

Traders protest against police

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Peshawar witnessed a grand and historic protest when President of Tanzeem Tajiran Malik Mehar Elahi and President of Peshawar Traders Ghulam Bilal Javid led thousands of traders onto the streets against the cruelty and oppression of the district administration.

The protest was triggered by the unjust demolition of shops under the guise of an anti-encroachment operation, police high-handedness, and attempts to economically crush the trader community. It began from Masgaran Bazaar (Masjid Qasim Ali Khan) and peacefully moved towards Qissa Khwani Bazaar, where a protest gathering was held.

Participants carried banners, placards, and black flags, chanting powerful slogans against the economic murder of traders.

Speaking to the protestors, the trader leaders said: "Shops that were built with years of hard work were turned into rubble in moments by the administration. We protested peacefully but were met with threats, intimidation, and bullying." "This is not just an anti-encroachment operation - it's a planned conspiracy to bury the trader community economically. We will not let it succeed at any cost."

Happy Birthday to the defender of democracy - Asif Ali Zardari

Sharjeel Inam Memon

PRESIDENT Asif Ali Zardari is celebrating his 70th birthday today. The best way to congratulate and pay tribute to him on this occasion is to understand his personality and politics as they truly are.

Asif Ali Zardari holds the distinction of being the first civilian president in Pakistan's history to be democratically elected to this esteemed position twice- and he continues to serve in this role today. This achievement has earned him international recognition for his political acumen, as such an occurrence is rare in a country like Pakistan.

Today, the world also acknowledges that President Asif Ali Zardari deserves credit for the continuity of Pakistan's democratic system since 2008, a span of 17 years. In this way, a new chapter in the history of Pakistan's democratic evolution has been written.

This achievement belongs to Asif Ali Zardari, who restored democracy in its true spirit by making the difficult process of power transfer through elections possible in a purely democratic manner. By resolutely countering all conspiracies from undemocratic forces and overcoming extremely adverse circumstances, he successfully completed his five-year democratic term. Through his policy of reconciliation, he created a golden chapter in the 66-year history of our beloved country.

By upholding the vision of the Father of the Nation, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, realizing the dream of the Leader of the People, Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, and carrying forward the mission of the martyr of democracy, Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto, he has transformed Pakistan into a truly democratic state-one that champions public rights and stands as a remarkable example.

His philosophy is rooted in the belief that the continuation of the democratic process will allow people-oriented forces to flourish and enable Pakistan's state structure to evolve within a democratic framework. He firmly believes that the institutions of the establishment are national institutions, and for democracy to be fully realized, these institutions must also be strengthened.

Asif Ali Zardari achieved what were once thought to be remarkable feats only after he ensured constitutional safeguards for democracy. The list of major achievements during his tenure is extensive, but a few stand out as especially significant.

During his first term, the 1973 Constitution was fully restored, accompanied by substantial parliamentary and constitutional reforms, most notably the 18th, 19th, and 20th Amendments. These modifications enhanced autonomy of the provinces and also reinforced the federal structure. One of Zardari's most remarkable accomplishments was the repealing of the notorious Article 58(2)(b) which had allowed the dissolution of democratically elected governments.

These constitutional changes enriched democracy through an independent judiciary, the unshackling of the media, the formation of a self-governing Election Commission, and the provision for a non-partisan interim government to supervise elections.

In response to international pressure and to address the energy crisis, the Pakistan-Iran gas pipeline project was signed under his leadership. Additionally, a strategic agreement was made to hand over operations of Gwadar Port to the People's Republic of China.

Between 2008 and 2013, foreign exchange reserves grew significantly from 6 billion dollars to 16 billion dollars. During Zardari's presidency, formal work on CPEC (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor) was initiated, which marked a new era of development for Pakistan.

Exports, which stood at \$18 billion in 2008, rose to \$29 billion by 2012. Similarly, the stock market index climbed from 5,220 points in 2008 to 18,185 points in 2013. The interest rate, which was 17 percent in 2008, was reduced to 9 percent by 2013.

Under the direction of Asif Ali Zardari, the PPP government raised the support price of wheat to benefit farmers. Consequently, Pakistan began exporting wheat for the first time and achieved self-sufficiency in wheat production. The increase in support prices also set a new record in the production of rice and cotton.

The introduction of the Benazir Tractor Scheme and electricity at a fixed cost for agricultural tubewells benefitted farmers through the provision of tractors. These schemes greatly enhanced the rural economy, which grew from 50 billion rupees in 2008 to 800 billion rupees by 2013.

This was Asif Ali Zardari's first term in office, during which the financial resources available to the people were significantly increased through the National Finance Commission (NFC) Award. During his five-year tenure, the salaries of government employees rose by 158%.

Through the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), financial assistance to 7.5 million households, benefiting approximately 50 million individuals-was doubled, with a total of Rs 70 billion distributed. In addition, self-reliance initiatives such as the Waseela-e-Haq and Waseela-e-Rozgar schemes were launched to support millions of low-income families.

Furthermore, 135,000 beneficiaries received assistance from Bait-ul-Mal, including care for homeless children through the establishment of Sweet Homes.

From 2008 to 2013, Zardari made strides to resolve the energy crisis by adding over 3600 MW of electricity to the national grid. Expansion projects for the Mangla and Tarbela Dams were initiated, creating the potential to generate an additional 4,500 MW of electricity.

Furthermore, \$3.5 billion in assistance was secured for the Diamer-Bhasha Dam project, and work began on the Neelum-Jhelum, Gomal, and Sat Dam projects. In addition to developing wind power generation at Thar Coal and Jhampir, several small and large-scale hydropower projects were launched.

Various initiatives implemented made it possible to store 8.5 million cubic feet of water through irrigation which was aimed at improving water management and agricultural support.

President Asif Ali Zardari and the PPP government placed special emphasis on creating employment opportunities for the country's unemployed youth. Between 2008 and 2013, 105,000 lady health workers were employed. Thousands of workers who had been laid off in previous administrations were reinstated, and millions of contract employees were regularized.

Alongside these changes, 500,000 industrial employees of 80 state-owned enterprises received 12 percent shares, granting them stakeholder status. Unprecedented healthcare, educational and vocational resources were also granted.

During President Zardari's tenure, import tax rates were reduced, which encouraged foreign investment. Relative to other countries, inflationary pressures in the rest of the world, consumer prices in Pakistan have even moderate rally visibly subdued, alongside a significant number of essential commodities which remained firm.

Furthermore, all other supplementary steps for public service and economic stability were for the betterment of the public.

To help alleviate the feeling of neglect in Balochistan, the Aghaz-e-Haqooq-e-Balochistan Package was implemented during the presidency of Asif Ali Zardari, which expedited the development processes of the province. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was, hence, given back its historic and cultural name, whereas Gilgit-Baltistan was given the status of a province, which culminated in granted constitutional and administrative reforms.

Mountains of legal and political reforms were also enacted regarding the tribal areas, notably FATA, giving these people first-ever basic rights and elected representatives.

The most landmark interventions were further defining a new chapter in national unification and the security and inclusion in the federation of Pakistan.

A further fact that is generally acceptable today, Asif Ali Zardari is visible as a workaholic and directly full of work-related responses. Rather than seeking vengeance, he chooses to tread the path of democracy and reconciliation and has thus earned phenomenal strides in making progress for Pakistan and its people. He never allowed the distracting negativities of propaganda to deter him.

Today, even many of those who once harshly criticized him recognize him as a thoughtful and visionary politician. Asif Ali Zardari proved that true leadership lies in rising above temporary challenges and working patiently and wisely toward a greater goal, with perseverance, foresight, and a deep understanding of history. Such individuals are not only leaders of their time, but also of history.

In the tribal areas, especially FATA, the introduction of major legal and political reforms has granted the people of these regions basic rights and political representation for the first time.

These reform initiatives represent a watershed event in strengthening national integration and ensuring national security and inclusivity of the Pakistani federation.

Asifs included the sustenance and avoid any political exploitation. Instead of being vengeful, he opted for reconciliation and democracy, creating tremendous opportunities for Pakistan and its populace. He would not allow detrimental propaganda to take his focus off his rightful course.

Today, even those who harshly criticized him now recognize Zardari as a thoughtful politician and a leader with vision. Asif Ali Zardari proved that true leadership lies in rising above temporary challenges and working patiently and wisely toward a greater goal, with perseverance, foresight, and a deep understanding of history. Such individuals are not only leaders of their time, but also of history.

Writer is Minister for Information and Transport, Government of Sindh



In brief

Admn snatched Press Club
F.P. Report

ATTOCK: The district administration has been illegally occupying the Attock Press Club building for a long time, depriving active journalists of their rightful place for the past 12 years. Despite repeated appeals on all relevant forums, no action has been taken, and the administration continues to ignore the matter. Senior Patron of the Attock Press Club (Registered), Syed Raza Haider Naqvi, while speaking to reporters, said that federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting must intervene and resolve this issue so that journalists can receive their constitutional right. He extended an invitation to the Federal Minister for a visit to Attock, so that the true facts of the matter can be presented. He pointed out that despite the passage of more than 12 years, the active members of the registered Attock Press Club remain deprived of the club's building. Every ruling government — including Chief Ministers, MNAs, MPAs, and Governors of Punjab — was repeatedly informed about the issue, yet no resolution was provided. He further stated that the club's personal belongings, including ACs, podium, carpet, chairs, sofa set, curtains, stage, and more, have been taken away. The administration must explain on what grounds the building was taken. No FIR or legal dispute exists against any member of the press club. The building was in the possession of journalists for 25 years after it was officially handed over to them in a 1987 District Council meeting by the then District Chairman, Syed Ejaz Hussain Bukhari. Syed Raza Haider Naqvi added that the club possesses all legal documents to prove its rightful ownership. He urged the government to make a swift and fair decision, stating that it is shameful for journalists to be denied access to their own constitutional institution. However, he made it clear that this injustice will no longer be tolerated. He demanded that either the Federal or Provincial Minister for Information announce a visit to Attock so the matter can be resolved and journalists' rights restored.

News block at GHS inaugurated
F.P. Report

TOBA TEK SINGH: The district administration of Toba Tek Singh is taking serious and effective steps to improve the condition of government schools. In this regard, the construction of a new block has been completed in the Girls High School located at Chak No. 351 GB Nagra under the Public Private Partnership model. This block was constructed with the support of Nazira Foundation. Under which new classrooms were built in the school so that the female students could have a better educational environment. The opening ceremony was held at the school, where Deputy Commissioner Muhammad Naem Sandhu and Chief Executive Officer Education Rahila Jamil inaugurated the new block. On this occasion, District Education Officer Secondary, Nadeem Hussain, representative of Nazira Foundation, local residents, parents and members of the school council attended in large numbers. The local people appreciated the provision of facilities in the school and the attention of the administration and welcomed the improved educational environment for the female students.

Two days moot on eradicating polio arranged



F.P. Report

ABBOTTABAD: Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa with the support of United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) organized a two-day workshop for health beat reporters of Peshawar Press Club (PPC) on the role of media in polio eradication here at a local hotel.

The workshop focused on orienting the participants with increased programmatic knowledge and sensitizing them on how to accurately report polio eradication efforts, counter misinformation and negative propaganda, enabling them to understand the significance of polio eradication and their critical role in achieving it.

The workshop was presided over jointly by Additional Secretary Health/EOC Coordinator Shafiqullah Khan and President Peshawar Press Club M. Riaz. Participants of the session included 25 health beat reporters of print and electronic media channels, senior journalists, bureau chiefs of various media channels, cabinet members of PPC, Ex-President PPC Arshad Aziz Malik, media representatives of CM House, Health Minister Office and Information Department KP each on the first and second day. The session was also attended by Deputy Coordinator EOC Latif ur Rahman, partners representatives and EOC officials.

Addressing the workshop, Additional Secretary Health/EOC Coordinator, said that the entire administrative machinery, law enforcement agencies and health department officials are actively involved in polio eradication efforts, however, the government machinery cannot tackle this challenge alone and it

needs across the board support from all segments of society including media. Highlighting the critical role of media in polio eradication, he said that through their effective reporting, journalists can play a key role in creating awareness and changing perceptions of the people adding that Journalists can play a significant role in creating awareness among the people about the significance of polio vaccination & essential immunization, removing the existing myths and misconceptions that prevent the parents from vaccinating their children as well as highlighting the commitment and resolve of the government to eradicate vaccine preventable diseases including polio from the country forever.

In his technical presentation on polio eradication, Dr. Sardar Alam, Provincial Polio Eradication Officer, WHO, focused on explaining communicable and non-communicable diseases, essential immunization program, the origin of polio virus, its epidemiology, different types of polio virus and vaccines as well as the significance of polio eradication through regular polio vaccination. He also discussed the strategies for prevention of communicable diseases through vaccines.

Dr. Sardar Alam sought media support in building community trust and changing the perception of the people towards vaccine acceptability so that this virus may be wiped out from the last endemic zone, Shadab Younas, Communication Officer UNICEF, while taking a session on external communications, focused on the significance of proper health reporting, explaining that effective health reporting is essential for maintaining and improving pub-

lic health. Referring to polio reporting, she explained that polio reporting requires special skills and technical knowledge and stressed on the participants to master their skills to ensure effective reporting. She appealed to the media to convince the people who are hesitant towards polio vaccination through their effective human angle stories, developing documentaries and bringing forth neutral and trusted voices to change the perception of the people.

Senior journalist and trainer, Saeed Minhas, guided the participants on how to develop effective stories for print and electronic media which may touch the feelings of their respective audience and lead to a change in positive behaviors towards public health.

Addressing the concluding session, M. Riaz, President Peshawar Press Club, thanked EOC and UNICEF for organizing the workshop for health beat reporters. Referring to the support of media for the national cause of polio eradication, he said that the presence of senior journalists, cabinet members of the press club and a large number of health beat reporters of print and electronic media outlets is a reflection of our support for this national cause. On behalf of the press club, he offered full support to the program for securing the future of our children from this crippling disease. The workshop proved to be a very insightful and interactive session, and the participants suggested valuable inputs to further improve polio eradication efforts and ensure the eradication of this crippling disease once and for all. The session concluded with distribution of shields and certificates among the participants.

Admn removes encroachment from waterways
F.P. Report

BUNER: Assutant Commissioner Gadezai and Tehsil Municipal Officer with police removed encroachment from natural waterways in Peer Baba area of Buner district.

The cabin owners led by union leaders Imran and Ibrahim tried to stop the operation but failed. Following the cabins owners themselves removed the cabins to avoid demolishing with heavy machinery by administration.

On this occasion, the Tehsil Administration, TMA staff and police personnel were present and supervised the operation. Prior the operation cabins union leaders asked for postponing the operation, but the AC flatly rejected and took the position that the cabins are encroachments and have blocked the path of the Khwar due to which the cabins itself and other Pacha Bazaar was at risk. He argued, there is a threat to lives along with the property.

AC Gadezai told media persons that the cabins removal operation was a must for the safety of precious lives and valued property. However, the cabins owners have complained and regretted that only the cabins of the poor vendors removed and the operation is not being carried out against the buildings of the rich while their planted trees in the middle of the khwar a major blockade.

Newly appointed DC assumes charge
F.P. Report

WANA: The newly appointed Deputy Commissioner of Lower South Waziristan, officially took charge of his duties by holding a series of wide-ranging introductory meetings with prominent tribal elders, local leaders, and representatives from diverse community segments at his Wana office on Thursday.

The meetings aimed to foster mutual understanding, build trust with local stakeholders, and lay the groundwork for collaborative governance in one of Pakistan's most strategically significant tribal regions.

Tribal elders warmly welcomed the DC with traditional hospitality and congratulated him on assuming office. They assured their full cooperation, expressing optimism that the new leadership would bring long-overdue attention to critical regional challenges.

Addressing the gathering, DC Musarrat Zaman acknowledged the immense agricultural potential of Lower South Waziristan but lamented the lack of essential infrastructure. "This is a fertile land," he remarked, "but without timely investment in irrigation and agricultural support, its promise remains untapped."

He underscored the pressing need for the construction of small dams across the district, calling it a "game-changer" for water management and sustainable farming. He vowed to pursue the initiative with public support, ensuring transparency and inclusion at every stage. The DC also emphasized the conservation of natural resources, particularly forests, which he termed as "the lungs of the region." He announced plans to launch solid measures for forest protection and afforestation.

Doctors refused to operate under Sehat Sahulat program

F.P. Report

MINGORA: A recent policy introduced by State Life Insurance Corporation has led to widespread protests from cardiologists and patients in Swat. Over 25 cardiologists in Swat have refused to perform surgeries and angiographies under the State Life Sehat Sohlat Program, citing unrealistic demands and constraints imposed by the new policy.

State Life wants cardiologists to work three days a week in three different hospitals, which is impractical and impossible, according to the doctors. This would mean one doctor would have to sit in a cardiology hospital full-time, leaving other hospitals under-

staffed.

Hundreds of patients with heart diseases are struggling to access treatment due to the doctors' protest. The patients and their families are facing immense difficulties, and the situation is becoming increasingly dire.

The doctors are demanding that State Life reconsider its policy and engage in dialogue to address their concerns. They want a more practical and feasible approach that takes into account the workload and staffing requirements of hospitals.

The affected patients and their families are urging the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government to intervene and resolve the issue. They demand that the govern-

ment repair the damaged machines at Saidu Sharif Teaching Hospital in Swat and provide new equipment. Additionally, they want the government to review State Life's controversial policy and take immediate action to address the crisis.

The situation highlights the need for timely and effective healthcare services, particularly for patients with life-threatening conditions like heart disease. If the issue is not resolved promptly, it could lead to further complications and even loss of life. The government and State Life must work together to find a solution that prioritizes patient care and addresses the concerns of doctors.

140 villages effects by flash floods

F.P. Report

HAFIZABAD: More than 140 villages in the Pindi Bhattian region of Hafizabad have been severely affected by recent floods, leaving residents displaced, impoverished, and struggling to survive under the open sky. Many villagers have lost their homes and livelihoods as floodwaters destroyed standing crops worth millions of rupees.

According to local sources, numerous villages remain submerged, with water levels still dangerously high. Residents have accused the local administration of gross negligence, particularly for failing to clear the drainage channels before the onset of monsoon rains. As a result, the overflowing drains inundated large areas, turning entire settlements into flood zones.

Affected villagers of the

disaster have expressed deep frustration over the inadequate and symbolic relief measures by the district authorities, describing them as mere "drops in the ocean."

Many claim that officials arrive only for photo opportunities and leave without offering meaningful assistance. In some areas, desperate villagers are reportedly clearing drainage systems themselves in a bid to evacuate stagnant water.

There is growing anger over the lack of proper shelter, food, and rehabilitation support. Collapsed homes, destroyed crops, and unclean water have created a crisis of survival for thousands of affected residents.

Locals have urged Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif to take immediate and decisive action. They are calling for comprehensive relief efforts, full compensation for losses, and

strict accountability for the officials responsible for failing to maintain the drainage infrastructure.

Meanwhile, Governor of Punjab, Sardar Saleem Haider, visited the flood-affected areas of Pindi Bhattian to assess the damage caused by recent torrential rains and to oversee the ongoing relief efforts. During his visit, the Governor met with local residents, listened to their grievances, and reviewed the extent of the losses.

Deputy Commissioner Abdul Razzaq briefed the Governor on the damages incurred and the steps being taken by the district administration. Speaking to the media, Governor Saleem Haider acknowledged that the recent rains have caused widespread destruction across Punjab, with Hafizabad and Pindi Bhattian among the hardest-hit areas.

Armed men robbed lady doctor

F.P. Report

LARKANA: Unknown armed men opened fire on Lady Doctor Majida Mashori resident of Abbas Colony, near the Ghanti Phatak area of the Civil Lines Police Station in Larkana city, when she resisted during the robbery, and after robbing her, injured her and fled.

After receiving information about the incident, the police reached the spot and took the injured doctor to the trauma center where she was given medical assistance. When contacted by the media, the Civil Lines Police said that an investigation is underway and the facts will come out soon. On the other hand, due to the news going viral, Pakistan Paramedical Staff Association (PMA) District Larkana President Dr. Dayali Gul held an emergency press conference with leaders at the PMA office and said that Larkana city is burning in the fire of unrest.

The law and order situation is such that from small children to elderly people, now even women are unsafe, an example of which is the case of Dr. Majida Mashori of Larkana city. They further said that Larkana city has fallen into the grip of unrest

where the people of civil society have become unsafe.

The situation of unrest is that a few days ago, a newborn baby was kidnapped from Sheikh Zayed Women's Hospital. After that, armed men opened fire in the orthopedic ward of the Civil Hospital and shot killed husband and wife belonging to the Mugheri community. Recently, a woman was admitted to Sheikh Zayed Women's Hospital in a critical condition and died during treatment. Her relatives have openly threatened the doctors and staff with life-threatening injuries.

In a situation of negligence, we doctors need strict security because we doctors provide treatment not only to patients coming from Sindh but also from Balochistan. But unfortunately, it has to be said that the provincial minister of the health department and the secretary of health, including the elected representatives of Larkana, have not taken any notice, nor has the DIG or SSP of Larkana contacted us.

Meanwhile, the Pakistan Paramedical Staff Association (PMA) Larkana has also complained to the Medical Superintendent from time to time, but he has

shown helplessness. They further said that the annual budget for security is Rs 5.2 million, which is insufficient.

Meanwhile, a resident of village Saathi Umrani near Larkana, named Saddam Hussain along with his family members, protested in front of the Press Club against police brutality.

On this occasion, he cried out that he had returned the motorcycle after accusing the serving policeman Nazir Hussain Umrani of robbing him along with his friends. He further said that the said police official is trying to rob us again many times, against which I have also filed a report against him at the Taluka Police Station.

On the petition filed in the Larkana court against the atrocities of Policeman Nazir Umrani, the court issued an order to register a case against the said police official. When I brought it to the Taluka Police Station, the head munshi of police station demanded Rs 50,000 as a bribe from me. On refusing, the head munshi is threatening that if I do not withdraw the petition filed in the court against Policeman Nazir Hussain Umrani, he will kill me by pretending to be a witness.

Organized beggars networks multiplied

Fazal Haq

MARDAN: The number of beggars, mostly women and young children, has increased alarmingly at various intersections, markets and busy highways in Mardan city. These individuals are seen begging from citizens on a daily basis, which has raised deep concerns among civic circles.

Citizens say that this situation is not only affecting the beauty of the city but has also become a serious threat to peace and order and the future of children. Children begging on the streets are adversely affecting their education, health and mental development.

According to sources, it is an organized network under

which professional beggar groups drop women and children at various squares, markets and signs in the city early in the morning and take them back in the evening. These groups have a specific system that is active throughout Mardan. Locals have alleged that these groups use children as "tools" to gain people's sympathy and earn more money.

The Social Welfare Department and the district administration have not yet taken any effective or systematic action, which is causing disappointment among the citizens. They are demanding that the administration immediately take effective action against this network and that the begging children be guided

towards education and training through rehabilitation centers or welfare institutions.

Local social activists say that "begging has now become a business" and that it is not just a local problem, but some Pakistani beggars have also been found involved in the same business abroad, which is also affecting the country's reputation internationally. Citizens have demanded that higher authorities, the district administration, police and the social welfare department take immediate action so that innocent children and women can be rescued from this exploitation and the city of Mardan can be cleansed of this social evil.

Unseen war against women in Pakistan

Shanzeb Khan Akhunkhail

In Pakistan — particularly in Pashtun society — the concept of "honour" has been tragically weaponized. No longer just a word, it has become a death sentence. Women — sisters, daughters, wives — are silenced, punished, or even killed, not for committing crimes, but for crossing invisible cultural boundaries. Whether it's falling in love, refusing a forced marriage, seeking a divorce, or simply using a mobile phone, the consequences can be fatal.

This is not strength. It is not justice. It is darkness — and it thrives in our silence.

The Anarkali Tragedy: A Symbol of Every Silenced Voice

One of the most haunting recent examples is the "Anarkali tragedy," where a young woman in love was shot dead on the streets of Peshawar, simply for choosing her own partner. Her

blood stained the earth while bystanders watched in silence. The perpetrator — a family member — felt pride, not remorse.

Tragically, her story is not unique. It mirrors thousands of others.

Law vs. Honour Killing: The Legal Framework

Although Pakistan has enacted laws to prevent such crimes, their implementation remains weak.

Criminal Law (Amendment) Acts 2004 & 2016

These legal reforms aimed to close the loophole of qisas and diyat, ensuring that a killer cannot be pardoned by the victim's family — which, in many honour killing cases, is the same family that ordered the murder.

Yet, despite these laws, the courts often lack the will, resources, or independence to deliver justice. In many instances, perpetrators are either never arrested or released, particularly in rural Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa, where tribal customs frequently override state law.

Why Pakistan? Why Especially Pashtun Society?

In regions like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, honour killing is deeply embedded in cultural norms. The Pashtun code of Pashtunwali places significant emphasis on concepts like:

Nang (Honour)
Badal (Revenge)
Haya (Modesty)

While originally intended to uphold dignity, these ideals have been distorted into tools of gender-based violence. A woman asserting her basic rights — to education, love, or freedom of expression — is often perceived as bringing shame upon her family.

In many homes, a woman's silence is seen as virtue, and her freedom as rebellion.

How Widespread Is Honour Killing?

According to the Human

Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), over 1,000 women are murdered annually in the name of honour.

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa alone, hundreds of cases go unreported.

Most victims are between 15 and 30 years old.

Common triggers include: Refusing arranged marriages
Marrying by choice
Using social media

Notable cases include:

Samia Sarwar, murdered in 1999 in Lahore by her own family — a case that shook the legal community but saw no justice.

The Kohistan Video Case, where several girls were killed after being filmed clapping in a wedding video.

Numerous unnamed girls, quietly buried in the mountains of Swat, Dir, and Bannu.

What Can Be Done?

1. Strict Enforcement of Laws
Killers must be prosecuted irrespective of family pardons or

tribal influence.

2. Protection for At-Risk Women

Government-run shelters, legal aid, and confidential helplines should be fully funded, accessible, and safe.

3. Education and Awareness

Change must begin with the mind. Schools, media, and mosques should promote gender equality and human rights.

4. Empowering Pashtun Women

Women must have access to education, employment opportunities, and independent legal rights.

5. Reframing the Narrative

It must no longer be referred to as "ghairat ke naam par qatl" (murder in the name of honour). It is murder, and it should be called what it is.

A Poetic Reflection — Imtiaz Dharker's Words

"I'm taking off this veil, because enough is enough.

I will not be buried before I

die,

I will not be silenced by your honour."

When prose falls short, poetry speaks. These verses echo the pain, defiance, and unbroken spirit of every woman whose voice was silenced before it could rise.

Conclusion: We Must Not Stay Silent

"Whoever kills a soul... it is as if he had killed all of mankind." — Qur'an (5:32)

Honour does not lie in bloodshed. It lies in protecting the ones we love. We must reject toxic traditions and stand with every Anarkali, Samia, and every unnamed sister who lost her life simply for being human.

Let us say it clearly and fearlessly: There is no honour in killing. Only sin. Only zulm.

The Author, Shanzeb Khan Akhunkhail is a practicing lawyer at the district and tehsil courts in Wari, Upper Dir.



GAZA: Palestinian children waiting to receive a hot meal at a charity kitchen in al-Mawasi, Khan Younis.

Israeli parliament okays symbolic motion on West Bank annexation

TEL AVIV: Israel's parliament has approved a symbolic measure calling for the annexation of the occupied West Bank. Knesset lawmakers voted 71-13 in favour of the motion, a non-binding vote which calls for "applying Israeli sovereignty to Judea, Samaria and the Jordan Valley" - the Israeli terms for the area.

It said that annexing the West Bank "will strengthen the state of Israel, its security and prevent any questioning of the fundamental right of the Jewish people to peace and security in their homeland". The motion, advanced by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's coalition is declarative and has no direct legal implications, though it could place the issue of annexation on the agenda of future debates in the parliament. The idea was initially brought forward last year by Israel's

far-right finance minister, Bezalel Smotrich, who himself lives in an illegal Israeli settlement and holds a position within Israel's Ministry of Defence, where he oversees the administration of the West Bank and its settlements.

The West Bank, along with the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem, has been under Israeli occupation since 1967. Since then, Israeli settlements have expanded, despite being illegal under international law and, in the case of settlement outposts, Israeli law. Palestinian leaders want all three territories for a future state. Some 3 million Palestinians and more than 500,000 Israeli settlers currently reside in the West Bank. Annexation of the West Bank could make it impossible to create a viable Palestinian state, which is seen internationally as the most realistic way to resolve the Israeli-

Palestinian conflict. Last year, the Israeli parliament approved a similar symbolic motion declaring opposition to the establishment of a Palestinian state.

Hussein al-Sheikh, deputy to Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, said the motion was "a direct assault on the rights of the Palestinian people", which "undermines the prospects for peace, stability and the two-state solution". "These unilateral Israeli actions blatantly violate international law and the ongoing international consensus regarding the status of the Palestinian territories, including the West Bank," he wrote in a post on X.

The Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates said in a statement that it strongly rejects any motion for annexation.

The ministry stressed that the "colonial measures" reinforce a system of

apartheid in the West Bank and reflect a "blatant disregard" for many United Nations resolutions and the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ), which was issued in July 2024. The statement, carried by the official Palestinian Wafa news agency, also warned that such actions deliberately undermine the prospects of implementing a two-state solution. The ministry added that while settlement expansion continues, de facto annexation is already occurring on a daily basis. Following Israel's deadly war on Gaza, Israeli forces have intensified attacks on Palestinian towns and villages in the occupied West Bank, displacing thousands of Palestinians and killing hundreds. Settlers, often backed by Israeli soldiers, have also escalated assaults on Palestinians, their land, and property. — Aljazeera

Wildfire in central Turkey kills 10, injures 14

ANKARA (Reuters): Ten firefighters were killed and 14 were injured as they battled to contain a wildfire in Turkey's central Eskisehir province, Agriculture and Forestry Minister Ibrahim Yumakli said. Firefighters and rescue teams have been battling to contain a wildfire in Eskisehir's Seyitgazi district.

At least 24 firefighters were trapped in the fire when the wind suddenly changed direction and blew flames towards them, Yumakli told reporters. They were immediately taken to hospital, but 10 of them died, while 14 others were still being treated, the minister added. "They were fighting the fire above the hill, while we were fighting it at the bottom," firefighter Ercan Temel, who witnessed the incident told Ihlas News Agency. "They tried to escape the fire running uphill, but they couldn't manage to do it," he said.

Justice Minister Yilmaz Tunc said in a post on X that prosecutors launched a legal investigation into the incident. Seven wildfires were still burning in five central and western Turkish provinces, Yumakli also said.

Macron sues right-wing podcaster

PARIS (Reuters): French President Emmanuel Macron and his wife Brigitte filed a defamation lawsuit in the US against right-wing influencer and podcaster Candace Owens, centered on her claim that France's first lady is male. The Macrons said in a complaint filed in Delaware Superior Court that Owens has waged a lie-filled "campaign of global humiliation" to promote her podcast and expand her "frenzied" fan base.

These lies included that Brigitte Macron, 72, was born under the name Jean-Michel Trogneux, the actual name of her older brother, the Macrons said. "Owens has dissected their appearance, their marriage, their friends, their family, and their personal history - twisting it all into a grotesque narrative designed to inflame and degrade," the complaint said. "The result," the complaint added, "is relentless bullying on a worldwide scale." In her podcast, Owens said, "This lawsuit is littered with fact of inaccuracies," and part of an "obvious and desperate public relations strategy" to smear her character.

Owens also said she did not know a lawsuit was coming, though lawyers for both sides had been communicating since January. A spokesperson for Owens called the lawsuit itself an effort to bully her, after Brigitte Macron rejected Owens' repeated requests for an interview. "This is a foreign government attacking the First Amendment rights of an American independent journalist," the spokesperson said.

In a joint statement released by their lawyers, the Macrons said they sued after Owens rejected three demands that she retract defamatory statements. "Ms. Owens's campaign of defamation was plainly designed to harass and cause pain to us and our families and to garner attention and notoriety," the Macrons said. "We gave her every opportunity to back away from these claims, but she refused."

Lawsuit is a rare case of a world leader suing for defamation. US President Donald Trump has also turned to the courts, including in a \$10 billion lawsuit accusing The Wall Street Journal of defaming him by claiming he created a lewd birthday greeting for disgraced late financier Jeffrey Epstein in 2003.

The Journal said it would defend against that case and had full confidence in its reporting. In December, meanwhile, Trump reached a \$15 million settlement with Walt Disney-owned ABC over an inaccurate claim that a jury found him liable for rape, rather than sexual assault, in a civil lawsuit. To prevail in US defamation cases, public figures must show defendants engaged in "actual malice," a tough legal standard requiring proof the defendants knew what they published was false or had reckless disregard for its truth.

Kyiv protests law threatening anti-graft bodies

KYIV (AFP): At a rare protest in central Kyiv demonstrators rallied against a law that curbs the power of anti-corruption agencies, warning the fight for Ukraine's democracy was taking place both on the battlefield and at home. The legislation, removing the independence of two key anti-corruption bodies, sparked the first major protests in Ukraine since it began fighting off the Russian invasion over three years ago.

"Our struggle takes place on two fronts. Our main enemy is external, but we have an internal battle too," said protester Viacheslav Bykov. "We don't want Ukraine to be part of Russia, we don't want a corrupt or authoritarian Ukraine. We want a free Ukraine," he added. Several thousand demonstrators -- mostly young -- gathered outside a theatre in Kyiv, calling for a veto to the law passed by Ukraine's parliament. The law places the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine (NABU) and Specialised Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office (SAPO) under the direct authority of the prosecutor general, who is appointed by the president. Critics say the legislation would facilitate presidential interference in corruption probes and threatens the independence of key institutions in Ukraine.

Zelensky responded to the backlash, saying he would submit a new bill ensuring "all norms for the independence of anti-corruption institutions will be in place". Kyiv's partners had reacted with alarm, including European Commission head Ursula von der Leyen, who the EU said demanded explanations from Zelensky over the change. Civil society groups warn the bill is part of a broader pattern of pressure on anti-corruption activists and bodies. Some European allies worry the moves will undermine anti-corruption reforms key to Ukraine's bid to join the European Union -- a fear shared by many protesting. "We've worked for years to move closer to Europe... only to be thrown back 10 years in a single day," said protester Anya Kutsevol.

Ukraine's two anti-corruption bodies, NABU and SAPO, were born a decade ago in the wake of the 2014 Maidan revolution. Those pro-European protests, centered on Kyiv's main square, also called Maidan, ousted a Kremlin-backed leader who scrapped a key partnership agreement with the EU. The Kremlin, which refused to accept Ukraine's democratic turn toward Europe, then launched a first assault over Ukraine that led Moscow-backed separatists to occupy Crimea and parts of the

eastern Donbas region. "Ukraine is Europe," Kutsevol said. "We won't be returned to Russia. We'll keep fighting for Europe." Some fear that a political crisis over the legislation could work in Russia's favour by undermining unity within the country, which is struggling to hold the front. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov seized on the opportunity to say there was "a lot of corruption" in Ukraine. "If I were Russia, I would do the same," said another protester, Yevgen Popovychenko, convinced Moscow would try to exploit the protests.

He was holding a banner that read: "Don't take me back" to the years of Maidan, where he took to the streets as a 21-year-old. As he stood in the crowd, he said he was having flashbacks from Maidan, a feeling shared by his friends. But many other protesters were only children during the famed 2014 demonstrations -- including 25-year-old Kutsevol. "When tyres were still burning, I was 14. What good was I?" she said. This was her first political protest, and she teared up looking at people gathered around her for the second day in a row, despite martial law banning large gatherings. She vowed to keep defending Ukraine's democracy. "We're adults now. Now it's our turn."

Wrongly deported migrant Abrego scores legal wins

WASHINGTON (Reuters): Kilmar Abrego, the migrant whose wrongful deportation to El Salvador made him a symbol of President Donald Trump's aggressive immigration policies, won two key victories in US courts but will remain behind bars on human smuggling charges for now.

In dual rebukes to the Trump administration after Abrego was brought back to the US to face the charges, one federal judge ruled that he must be released on bail, and another ruled that authorities must give his lawyers three days' notice before they try to deport him again to a different country. "These rulings are a powerful rebuke of the government's lawless conduct and a critical safeguard for Kilmar's due process rights," Abrego's lawyer Simon Sandoval-Moshenberg said in a statement.

Still, Abrego will remain in criminal custody in Tennessee for at least 30 days. His lawyers, while pushing for his release on bail, had asked that any such order be delayed given the risk that immigration authorities could swiftly detain and deport him upon his exit from jail. Department of Homeland Security spokeswoman Tricia McLaughlin in a statement accused Abrego of being a member of the Salvadoran gang MS-13 and said he "will never walk America's streets

again." Abrego denies being part of the gang. Abrego, 29, a Salvadoran migrant who had been living in Maryland, was deported and imprisoned in El Salvador in March despite a 2019 judicial ruling that he could not be sent there because of a risk of gang persecution. That prompted Trump's critics to argue that his administration was infringing on legal rights as it moved aggressively to deport millions of migrants living illegally in the US.

Abrego then challenged that deportation in a civil lawsuit before US District Judge Paula Xinis in Greenbelt, Maryland. The US Supreme Court in April upheld Xinis' order that the administration facilitate Abrego's return. In June, US officials brought Abrego back to the US after securing an indictment accusing him of transporting migrants in the US illegally as part of a smuggling ring. Abrego has pleaded not guilty to the charges and has been held in criminal custody in Tennessee since his return. His lawyers have accused the Trump administration of bringing the charges to cover up violations of his rights.

US Magistrate Judge Barbara Holmes in Nashville, Tennessee last month granted Abrego's request to be released ahead of his trial. But Abrego's lawyers later

asked Holmes not to release Abrego right away, citing the risk he would be detained and deported to a country other than El Salvador. Federal prosecutors challenged Holmes' ruling. US District Judge Waverly Crenshaw rejected that challenge, writing that prosecutors had not shown sufficient evidence that Abrego posed a public safety threat or was a flight risk to justify his continued detention ahead of trial. But he said the government was entitled to another hearing over whether to detain Abrego due to their allegation that he sometimes transported children. After Crenshaw's order, Holmes said she would delay her order for release by at least 30 days. In a simultaneous decision, Xinis ruled that if Abrego is released from criminal custody, US Immigration and Customs Enforcement could not detain him in Tennessee. She also ruled that his immigration case must be returned to Maryland, and that he must be notified at least three days before any deportation to a third country. On Xinis' ruling, McLaughlin said, "The fact this unhinged judge is trying to tell ICE they can't arrest someone who is subject to immigration arrest under federal law is insane." Xinis' order did not bar immigration authorities in Maryland from taking him into custody.

US lawmakers advance bill that could sanction SA

JOHANNESBURG (Reuters): United States lawmakers have voted to advance a bill that proposes reviewing the US relationship with South Africa due to objections over its foreign policy and potentially imposing sanctions on South African officials. The US House Foreign Affairs Committee voted 34-16 to send the "US-South Africa Bilateral Relations Review Act" to the full House of Representatives, where it could be subject to a vote, according to a video of the proceedings.

The measure would need to pass both the House and the Senate before it could be signed into law. Many bills at this stage never go to a vote. However, the committee's approval took the bill a step further and underscored tensions between Washington and Pretoria as South Africa seeks to fend off a looming 30%

US tariff and counter false claims of white "genocide" made by President Donald Trump. South Africa's foreign ministry and a spokesperson for President Cyril Ramaphosa declined to comment. The bill was introduced in April by Ronny Jackson, a Republican congressman from Texas who cheered the move on X, writing: "South Africa made its choice when they abandoned America and our allies and sided with communists and terrorists". The bill accuses South Africa of undermining US interests by maintaining close relationships with Russia and China, which are among its allies and trading partners. It also accuses South Africa of backing Palestinian militant group Hamas that is at war in Gaza with Israel, which South Africa has denied.

South Africa has long been a supporter of the Palestinian cause and filed a case accusing Israel of genocide at the International Court of Justice in 2023, which is mentioned in the bill as one of its concerns. The bill proposes "a full review of the bilateral relationship" and to "Identify South African government officials and ANC leaders eligible for the imposition of sanctions". It later says that these would be people determined by Trump to have engaged in corruption or human rights abuses. No individuals are named. South Africa's relationship with the United States has sharply deteriorated during Trump's second term, during which he has accused the government of anti-white racism and started a refugee programme for Afrikaners, who are descendants of European settlers.

US judges order Abrego Garcia release, block immediate deportation

WASHINGTON (AFP): A Salvadoran man who was wrongly deported and then returned to the United States to face human smuggling charges should be released pending trial and not be immediately taken into immigration custody, federal judges said.

Kilmar Armando Abrego Garcia was summarily deported in March along with more than 200 other people to a prison in El Salvador as part of US President Donald Trump's crackdown on migrants. His case has become a key test of Trump's hardline immigration policies. Most of those sent to El Salvador were alleged members of the Venezuelan gang Tren de

Aragua, which the Trump administration has designated a foreign terrorist organization.

Justice Department lawyers later admitted that Abrego Garcia -- a resident of Maryland who is married to a US citizen -- was wrongly deported due to an "administrative error." Abrego Garcia had been living in the United States under protected legal status since 2019, when a judge ruled he should not be deported because he could be harmed in his home country. He was returned to the United States in June and immediately arrested on human smuggling charges in the southern state of Tennessee.

Abrego Garcia's release

pending trial has been repeatedly delayed at the request of his lawyers amid fears he would be picked up by US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and deported again. District Judge Waverly Crenshaw in Tennessee ordered Abrego Garcia's release on bail ahead of his January 27 trial date, and a district judge in Maryland simultaneously blocked ICE from immediately taking him into custody. District Judge Paula Xinis said Abrego Garcia should be brought back to Maryland and ordered the administration to provide at least three days notice before attempting to deport him again. Tricia McLaughlin,

a spokeswoman for the Department of Homeland Security, criticized the ruling. "The fact this unhinged judge is trying to tell ICE they can't arrest (Abrego Garcia)... under federal law is lawless and insane," McLaughlin said on X. It was not immediately clear when Abrego Garcia would be released.

Federal prosecutors have opposed his release and warned that he may be deported once again if he is released from custody. Abrego Garcia is charged in Nashville, Tennessee, with smuggling undocumented migrants around the United States between 2016 and 2025. He has pleaded not guilty.

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Reshaping global order

THE founding of the United Nations 80 years ago was a remarkable event in human history. The UN aims to maintain international peace and security and develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principles of equal rights and the self-determination of peoples. It was under the guidance of the international law based on the UN Charter that countries pursue their development within a global framework, and developing nations gained unprecedented opportunities for growth.

First, the post-World War II international order institutionalized international relations by establishing a series of global organizations, including the UN, where major issues can be discussed, and all member states enjoy equal rights in the General Assembly. The decision to create the UN was agreed upon by the leaders of the anti-fascist allies at the Yalta Conference in February 1945, setting the basic framework for the post-war international order. Second, rules were set for behaviors of countries. Economic globalization increased interdependence among nations, necessitating common rules of behavior. International law was widely recognized and followed in the post-war era, with institutions such as the International Court of Justice playing a crucial role in resolving international disputes. Various international organizations emerged and took on the responsibility of shaping rules through negotiations, most notably the establishment of the World Trade Organization. Third, the post-war international order led to the multipolarity of international politics. Although the Cold War era was characterized by the United States-Soviet Union bipolar structure, the rise of developing nations gradually fostered a multipolar trend in global politics, typified by the South-South cooperation and the Non-Aligned Movement.

Finally, the scope of international cooperation expanded. The active participation of countries in various forms of international collaboration proved critical in addressing complex global challenges such as environmental protection, climate change and the fight against terrorism. The post-war international political order's primary objective is to prevent another world war and maintain universal and lasting peace and security, and the UN Security Council was formed to achieve this mission. The post-war international economic order, which is closely linked to the political order, is structured around institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the WTO. These major economic organizations are all specialized agencies of the UN system, demonstrating the close connection between political and economic orders.

To a certain extent, this framework has helped avert major crises. Even when global crises have occurred, they have been overcome in a short time through international cooperation rather than escalating into large-scale wars. It should be noted that the post-war international order did not fully resolve the issues in global governance. Moreover, the Cold War between the US and the Soviet Union led to bloc confrontation, creating two parallel systems that divided the world and sharpened ideological antagonism. The US-dominated global monetary and financial system, represented by the IMF and the World Bank, while stabilizing the post-war economic order and facilitating rapid growth in international trade, also led to the hegemony of the US dollar and the developed countries dominating the top of the global value chain, exacerbating the North-South divide and leaving developing nations perpetually confined to the lower tiers of the global industry and supply chains.

The post-war international system was shaped under US leadership, making it impossible to guarantee complete fairness and justice. Although the postwar international political order underlines respect for national sovereignty, political independence, non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, and the right of all countries to independently choose their development paths and social systems, the Cold War, an era marked by US-Soviet Union rivalry for spheres of influence and the exports of competing social systems, profoundly shaped the evolution of international relations, leaving developing nations with the daunting task of safeguarding their sovereignty and independence. After the Cold War, the world entered a new stage of "one superpower plus multiple powers", with economic globalization creating not only fresh development opportunities for all nations, but also greater challenges. A prominent feature of this period is that the unilateralist and protectionist policies of developed countries, particularly the US, have undermined normal international trade, while their hegemonic and bullying practices recklessly violate the principles enshrined in the UN Charter. Today, the world is undergoing unprecedented transformations, which are compounded by regional conflicts and great-power rivalries. The world faces challenges of deficit in governance, trust, development and peace. International cooperation has been severely disrupted, with various disputes arising and the global governance system paralyzed.

Amid rapid digital and technological advancements and the emergence of new challenges, the formulation of new rules and institutional frameworks are lagging behind. Following the end of the Cold War, the world moved beyond bipolar confrontation and witnessed accelerated globalization and a shift to multipolarity. However, escalating contradictions and conflicts have ushered in a new era of turbulence and transformation. The authority of the UN has been disregarded by some developed nations, while geopolitical rivalries among major powers continue to intensify. The 19th-century power politics and the law of the jungle have once again been embraced by certain big powers. Developing countries aspire for a more equitable and just international order, yet they face tremendous difficulties and obstacles. The outbreak of the Ukraine crisis and the ensuing sanctions and counter-sanctions between the West and Russia have severely disrupted the existing international economic order.

The US, under President Donald Trump, has abandoned the fundamental norms of the postwar international order, and shifted its focus to the "America First" doctrine. By launching tariff wars and trade wars, it is inflicting serious negative impacts on the global economic order. In this context, there is an urgent need to establish a new global governance paradigm - one that is more inclusive, balanced and capable of addressing the challenges of the times while upholding the principles of multilateralism and shared prosperity. To this end, China has proposed a vision of global governance based on extensive consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits, which builds on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence adopted at the Bandung Conference 70 years ago. China's vision of global governance aims to build open and cooperative relationships in which all countries can participate equally, leverage their strengths and achieve common development.

At present, countries around the world need to enhance their rules awareness and uphold true multilateralism more than ever before. The hegemonic actions of a few countries have aroused indignation among the international community.

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Trump's 19% tariff on Philippine imports: What it means for Manila

Jay Hilotin

THE United States and the Philippines have reached a new trade agreement on July 22, 2025. It's a significant deal: now, the US will impose a 19% tariff on imports from the Philippines, notably electronics. In exchange, certain US goods will get "zero" or significantly reduced tariffs when exported to the Philippines.

The deal looks skewed, but there's more to it (than meets the eye). Here's what you need to know: The deal was finalised on Tuesday during President Donald Trump's meeting with Philippine President Ferdinand "Bongbong" (BBM) Marcos Jr at the White House.

The Philippines has long enjoyed "duty-free access" to the US market under the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) which granted zero tariffs on many products (GSP lapsed in December 2020).

In 2024, the Philippines exported \$12.12 billion worth of goods to America, according to Philippine Congress data, while US exports to the Philippines were approximately \$9.3 billion, a slight 0.4% rise from the previous year. Until 2025, the Philippines enjoyed a most-favoured nation (MFN) status in the US. The US, for its part, has tolerated a high-tariff and convoluted Customs charges and duties slapped on its exports to the Philippines, making US goods uncompetitive, especially versus products from neighbouring Asian nations.

Manila's protectionist trade policy vis-a-vis its major ally has posed a major challenge in US manufacturers trying to break through the local Philippine market. This is why the Trump-Marcos Jr tariff negotiations has been dubbed a "game-changer". For US manufacturers, it would make their products more affordable and more widely available in the Philippine market, competing directly with goods made in Japan and China, for example.

19% tariff: All goods imported from the Philippines into the US will face a 19% tariff - higher than the 17% rate previously discussed but lower than the threatened 20%.

Zero tariffs for US goods: In return, the Philippines agreed to remove or lower tariffs on select US products,

notably in the automotive sector, and committed to buying more American soy, wheat, and pharmaceuticals.

Strategic cooperation: The agreement is also tied to broader military and security cooperation, aligning with both nations' interests in the Indo-Pacific region amid tensions with China.

Reduced export competitiveness: The 19% tariff will make Philippine goods - such as electronics, furniture, textiles, and agricultural products - less competitive in the US market, likely reducing export volumes.

Trade deficit impact: The US is a significant partner, importing \$14.2 billion in goods from the Philippines in the previous year (2024), with the new tariff expected to put downward pressure on these figures and potentially increase the trade deficit for Manila.

Pressure on local industries: As US imports become cheaper in the Philippines due to reduced tariffs, local manufacturers could face stiffer competition. This could drive some to innovate or improve efficiency, but may also risk the survival of less competitive domestic industries.

Zero tariffs for exports: US exporters stand to benefit from "open access" to Philippine markets, particularly in automobiles, agricultural products, and pharmaceuticals - potentially increasing US sales in the Philippines.

Cheaper Philippine imports lose appeal: With higher tariffs, US companies and consumers are likely to shift away from Philippine goods, especially in sectors such as automotive parts and textiles.

Inflation concerns: The increased cost of imported Philippine goods could push up prices for US businesses reliant on Filipino supply chains, though the US government argues that the overall impact on inflation remains uncertain.

Before the Trump-Marcos Jr. tariff deal, the Philippines imposed high tariffs on US goods, including automotive products. The computations of these tariffs were tangled in bureaucratic mumbo-jumbo.

Moreover, individual owners who wish to import US-made goods to the Philippines, even for personal use, have completely shunned the idea of doing so, as they are dinged on

many sides, especially at Manila's Customs.

President Marcos Jr. confirmed that as part of the deal, the Philippines will finally "open" the automotive market by granting zero tariffs on US-made cars.

This is a major shift from the previous tariff regime.

For US automotive products and heavy equipment, it could mean they can now compete directly with Asian (i.e. Chinese, Japanese, Asean) makers.

Prior to this "open market" status, Philippine tariffs varied widely by product category, but automotive products in particular were subjected to significant tariffs.

The new deal's zero tariff on these US-made vehicles represents a notable concession.

In so doing, President Marcos Jr has found a way to partly solve the perceived corruption issue at Philippines' Bureau of Customs (BOC).

The Philippine tariff regime has for years amounted to high protectionist walls, used effectively by certain local Customs bureaucrats to shake down importers and traders.

Fact: Between 2023 and 2024, about 120 BOC employees were investigated for alleged corruption, as per local media reports.

In addition, many were administratively charged - 14 were placed on preventive suspension and 6 suspended - while the agency filed 135 criminal cases for illegal activities such as smuggling and fraud.

This amounts to a quiet victory for the Marcos administration.

The BOC has historically been regarded as one of the most corruption-prone government agencies due to persistent issues with graft, smuggling, and irregularities in Customs processes.

As part of an intensified internal crackdown, Philippine authorities have secured 25 criminal convictions against Customs officials since 2023, according to BOC data (though it's not immediately clear what happened to the BOC officials convicted of wrongdoing).

Deepening of military ties: The agreement is situated within a context of enhanced military cooperation, with both leaders reaffirming commitments to mutual defense and regional security amid rising tensions

with China.

Regional trade competition: The Philippines' 19% tariff rate is below Vietnam's 20% rate but higher than Singapore's 10%. This shows the competitive pressures among Southeast Asian countries negotiating with the US.

The US-Philippines tariff deal marks a seismic shift in bilateral trade, with the US adopting one of its highest tariff rates for Filipino goods in modern history, while American products gain improved access to the Philippine market.

The economic toll will likely fall hardest on some of the Philippine exporters and manufacturers.

On the flipside, Filipino consumers may benefit from cheaper US imports, assuming the local government implements effective support measures.

Strategically, the deal strengthens military and economic ties against the backdrop of growing regional competition and security concerns in the South China Sea.

The 19% US tariff is set to significantly weaken the Philippine export sector in the American market.

Given this development, the long-term viability of export-focused investments in the Philippines may weaken if the US market becomes less accessible, potentially discouraging new foreign direct investment in manufacturing and related sectors.

Meanwhile, export-oriented Philippine industries that rely on the US market could face prolonged declines in orders, resulting in job losses and reduced income for workers in affected sectors.

Lower US-bound exports may also widen the Philippines' trade deficit, creating fresh macroeconomic challenges.

While some dynamic and high-value segments may retain a foothold, the lost market share and employment challenges, on one hand - may provide an impetus for renewed focus on diversification, industry innovation and lowering the cost of manufacturing inputs (like making power rates cheaper). These pressures could reshape the structure of Philippine exports not just to the US, but globally, as firms and policymakers seek to adapt to a more challenging international trading environment.

Gulf News

In search of lost stability

Kostas Gouliamos

IN 2025, the European Union and China celebrate the 50th anniversary of the establishment of their diplomatic relations. The EU-China Summit was held in Beijing on Thursday amid economic and geopolitical pressures, strained relations and growing and ongoing trade tensions. In October 2024, the EU imposed tariffs on Chinese electric vehicles, including antisubsidy duties of up to 35.3 percent on top of a 10 percent base tariff. Since then, the trade tensions between the EU and China have increased.

But despite the tensions, the July summit went ahead well. Liu Jianchao, minister of the international department of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, delivering a speech in Cyprus in June, stated that "China is willing to work with the EU to maintain a correct mutual understanding and be a trustworthy and reliable partner on the road ahead".

Taking into consideration the 50th anniversary of the EU-China diplomatic ties, the July summit was more than just image management; it produced tangible outcomes. Within this context, it is worth mentioning the fact that at the 13th round of China-EU High-level Strategic Dialogue on July 2, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Kaja Kallas agreed to deepen mutual understanding and work together to get well-prepared for the leaders' meeting with the aim of enhancing cooperation.

The July summit served as a venue to improve mutual understanding and resolve differences through dialogue. Since Beijing and Brussels support multilateralism and open cooperation, their comprehensive strategic partnership is essential to the United Nations operation, particularly in a period of growing uncertainty and instability globally. At the same time, Brussels - the heart of EU policymaking - is experiencing an increasingly tense political climate as the European institutions face both internal divisions and external pressures. Meanwhile, the EU, built on and driven by the capitalist model, faces inter-capitalist competition and conflict among different member states and industrial entities. Consequently, people across Europe are experiencing a rolling and growing polycrisis: high living cost, conflicts, instability, rise of far-right extremism, inequalities and widening regional disparities. In 2024, 21 percent of the EU population or 93.3 million people were at risk of poverty and social exclusion. Further to the transatlantic system of intercapitalist competition and conflict, there are objective reasons and concerns that the increased EU military spending will come at the expense of social policies and programs, pushing more people into poverty. This trend is raising serious questions about the impact on the EU's climate change initiatives, social welfare programs and public health spending.

There has been an ongoing debate in many European countries about the "militarization of politics", not only because of the Ukraine crisis, but also because of the US' "war economy" agenda. The United States has been the world's largest military spender since the 1940s, and in 2024 its spending on the military reached \$997 billion, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. This figure is significantly higher than the combined spending of the next nine largest military spenders. In 2024, NATO spent \$1.5 trillion, representing over 50 percent of the global total. The US adhering to a Cold War mentality continues to prioritize tariffs and bombs over diplomacy.

Meanwhile, the EU's most dominant member states, namely Germany and France, which make up almost half of the eurozone economy, face political turbulence and economic woes. They are paralyzed by internal divisions and huge economic problems. Germany faces headwinds from a shortage of skilled labor, excessive bureaucracy and high energy prices. France, amid a spiraling political crisis, enlarges the EU's bigger political problems. People in the EU are demanding realistic and progressive solutions that serve the needs of their societies. As the West would not be able to manage major confrontations, China can play a structural role in cultivating and preserving peaceful paths. Beijing's proposed global initiatives are waymarkers to abandon the Cold War mentality and to stop stoking confrontation with provocative moves, including the weaponization of outer space (i.e., the US "Golden Dome" plan).

As the international community is witnessing the emergence of a multipolar world amid complex geopolitical changes, the concept of building a community with a shared future for humanity serves as an anchor for cooperative multilateralism. The notion of true multilateralism can be considered as an outcome of China's policy to help meet humanity's common challenges. By seeking common ground, the envisioned community is a way of upholding the values of peace, cooperation, openness and inclusiveness. The question is whether the EU can adopt a new dynamic to help realize such a community. The July summit came at a complicated time for the EU, which finds itself caught between increasing trade strains with the US and its own strategic tensions with China.

Meanwhile, the member states of the EU are beginning to appreciate that they can no longer depend on the transatlantic alliance. In the future, the alliance will not be the same as it was before the current Donald Trump administration. For instance, the US' latest threat to impose 30 percent tariffs on goods imported from the EU, starting effective from Aug 1, is considered by the EU to be an impudent action and "a slap in the face". In view of this and despite the series of ongoing global trade disagreements and growing divergences, the China-EU Summit was intensely involved in strategic matters and deliverables pertinent to the stability of bilateral relations.

Of law, diplomats and algorithms: A summer night in Techville

Rafael Hernandezde Santiago

IT was a warm, velvety evening in the ever-miraculous fictional city of Techville, where algorithms never sleep and diplomatic receptions are never just receptions. On July 17 there was one such night of legal elegance, diplomatic cordiality, and a touch of unintended artificial intelligence-fueled absurdity, courtesy of the illustrious Othman Altamimi & Co.

In true Techville fashion - where reality wears a tuxedo and logic occasionally goes barefoot - the summer gathering was meant to be a smooth and refined evening of networking. The OTCO, a legal powerhouse founded by the dignified Mr. Othman Altamimi and the sharp-witted Mr. Abdulaziz AlShahrani, had graciously invited 57 diplomatic missions, numerous government officials, and elite consultants to discuss building bridges, both literal and legal. But then came the platform.

You see, in Techville, no

respectable event is held without AI assistance. The venue employed an ultra-modern AI concierge system named Eloisa, allegedly designed to optimize guest experience, reduce human error, and increase diplomatic synergy through "sentiment-aware logistics." Unfortunately, Eloisa was a bit too sentient that evening - or perhaps not enough. Philosopher Blaise Pascal once said: "Man is but a reed, the most feeble thing in nature, but he is a thinking reed." Eloisa, it seems, was not.

Somewhere between data parsing and personalization, the AI mistook, upon arrival, one ambassador's spouse - elegant, poised, and impeccably dressed - and was greeted by a holographic feline. "Welcome, esteemed guest," it purred, "we hope you enjoy your evening as our purr-son of honor." A diplomatic attache nearby coughed into his drink. The AI, it turned out, had mistaken "Her Excellency" for "Her Meowjesty" - a consequence

of an overzealous sentiment-detection protocol designed to add a "friendly touch" to formal greetings. While mildly mortifying, the episode produced a ripple of good-natured laughter. "Let us not be afraid of artificial intelligence," someone murmured, "but of artificial etiquette." To her credit, the ambassador's wife responded with a warm smile and more grace than most of us could summon when addressed by a talking cat.

She graciously quipped, raising a glass of chilled pomegranate juice: "I have always been open to partnerships, whether human or otherwise." Unfortunately, Eloisa, despite her polished interface, suffered from one particularly unpolished glitch. The evening's honorary guest, His Excellency Ricardo Silva-Santisteban, ambassador of the Republic of Peru, embodied the spirit of expanding diplomacy and mutual respect between the nation he repre-

sents and Techville. As he stood at the heart of the reception, surrounded by dignitaries and legal minds, his presence was more than symbolic - it was strategic. The event, attended by a vibrant constellation of government institutions, consuls, secretaries, and commercial attaches, aimed to nurture the very foundations of partnership. As the OTCO's founders said, the law is not just a system - it is a language of trust. And that evening was a lesson in fluency.

Behind the laughter, though, serious conversations took place. From trade investment to legal reform, from AI in public administration to the soft power of neighboring states, the discussions were sharp and forward-looking. The firm's vision - to be a "local law firm with global standards" - was palpable throughout the event. The OTCO has served as a discreet but effective mediator between embassies and governmental legal insti-

tutions, helping ease regulatory friction and ensuring smoother entry for foreign businesses. "The law," as said earlier, "isn't just about rules; it's about trust." That night was about building that trust. And maybe laughing a little when AI got too clever for its own circuits.

The driving force of the event, the unflappable Sebastian Kawka, oversaw the orchestration of the evening. Part legal maestro, part social conductor, he deftly juggled protocol with personality. His secret weapon? "Diplomatic resilience and a portable Wi-Fi hotspot," he joked, noting that Eloisa had briefly locked out the sound system in protest when someone referred to her as "just an app." In the end, no one left disappointed. Business cards were exchanged like rare Pokemon, collaborations were whispered into juice glasses, and the AI finally learned to say "ambassador" without accidentally activating a karaoke playlist. As we left the venue, a few guests

gathered under the flickering neon sign that read, somewhat cryptically, "Legal Clarity Begins in Ambiguity."

Maybe it was Eloisa's final joke - or perhaps, a deep truth about diplomacy, law, and life in Techville. As Socrates famously said: "The only true wisdom is in knowing you know nothing." On that evening, we were reminded that even the best technology can err, but the human capacity to forgive, adapt, and laugh - especially among diplomats and lawyers - is what makes civilization possible. And so it was that in the city where silicon meets soul, ambassadors, a rogue AI, and a law firm with global ambition came together to make legal history - with a touch of feline charm. A postscript: Eloisa has since been updated to distinguish between sovereign nations and pet shelters. Whiskers III has reportedly been offered an honorary role in future AI-human cultural exchanges.

Why are Ukrainians angry with Zelenskyy?

FOR quite some time, foreign colleagues have been asking me about Ukraine's democracy during wartime. Often these questions assume that political freedoms vanish by default in a country at war. They ask whether protests or critiques of the government are even possible.

Ukraine is a democracy at war - and democracy itself is an existential matter. It is precisely what the country is fighting for. My usual answer has been: "The people will know when it's time to protest." They will sense when too much power is being concentrated in security services, when parliament's role is being bypassed, when the prime minister or members of parliament are no longer acting independently. Ukrainians, I would say, will know when red lines are crossed.

This week, many decided that such a red line had been crossed. On Tuesday thousands of people gathered in Kyiv to protest and call on Volodymyr Zelenskyy to veto legislation they believe undermines the independence of two key anti-corruption institutions: the national anti-corruption bureau of Ukraine (Nabu) and the specialised anti-corruption prosecutor's office (Sapo).

The protest was largely youthful - many would have been kids during the 2014 Revolution of Dignity. Their chants included "Veto the law!" and "No to pressure on independent institutions". Despite martial law, only two policemen were stationed nearby. The atmosphere was even cheerful. It was by far the largest protest since Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022. Similar demonstrations took place in approximately 10 Ukrainian towns. And yet late that very night, Zelenskyy signed the bill into law.

Nataliya Gumenyuk

What shocked many was not just the content of the legislation but also the speed and manner in which it was pushed through: passed within a day, as an amendment hidden inside unrelated law enforcement reforms, and then signed and published almost immediately. Since the beginning of Russia's invasion, Ukrainians have demonstrated an extraordinary level of unity and civic responsibility. Citizens also showed renewed faith in the institutions of the state - even those long viewed with suspicion. People were willing to look past imperfec-

The prosecutor general now holds expanded powers over Nabu and Sapo - including control over investigations, case access and team composition, and the authority to shut down cases or transfer them to other law enforcement bodies.

tions, to suspend criticism, and to focus on survival and victory. That is why there has been no serious internal push for wartime elections, despite foreign commentary. Elections - expensive, risky and constitutionally prohibited during war - are widely understood by Ukrainians to be unfeasible under current conditions. But this is different.

This law has become a litmus test of whether public trust in the government can be sustained. And more than that, whether the unwritten social contract - between citizens and the state - still holds. The law adopted by Ukraine's parliament - formally known as draft law 12414 - includes sweeping changes that fundamentally alter the authority of Ukraine's anti-corruption bodies. The prosecutor general now holds expanded powers over

Nabu and Sapo - including control over investigations, case access and team composition, and the authority to shut down cases or transfer them to other law enforcement bodies.

The vote took place just one day after the security service of Ukraine (SBU) conducted searches at Nabu's offices, and Ukraine's state bureau of investigation (SBI) filed criminal charges against three Nabu employees over car accidents that occurred in 2021 and 2023. These incidents raised eyebrows for their timing. According to Nabu, the new provisions "effec-

tively destroy the independence of Sapo and place both Nabu and Sapo under the control of the prosecutor general". The bureau reminded lawmakers that Ukraine's anti-corruption infrastructure, built in partnership with international allies since 2015, was a key precondition for western financial and political support.

As institutions, Nabu and Sapo are not without flaws. Government representatives - both formally and off the record - have raised concerns about politicised investigations, poor coordination with other law enforcement agencies and alleged infiltration by individuals sympathetic to Russian interests. The quality of investigations has also been criticised. Some probes have dragged on for years without result. Others, including cases against prominent business

figures or former officials, have been accused of selective prosecution. There are also persistent rumours that Nabu investigations have touched individuals close to Zelenskyy himself. What makes this even more complex is that these institutions are tied to Ukraine's commitments for EU membership. And yet European integration - while deeply valued by Ukrainians - is no longer something the EU itself appears eager to actively advance. That makes it even easier for outside partners to use moments like this to distance themselves, to quietly say: "Maybe Ukraine isn't ready after all."

But the deeper issue is this: none of Ukraine's law enforcement institutions are ideal - not during wartime, and arguably not before it. But Nabu and Sapo remain the most trusted parts of a law enforcement system long plagued by corruption and impunity. They were created not to be dismantled when they become inconvenient. The protesters are not defending a fantasy of flawless institutions but the principle that reform must not be replaced by control. Protests are likely to continue. The government will have to respond. Yes, there is war. But in a democracy there is a constitutional way forward: the law can be rescinded, amended, debated transparently. This cannot be fixed by one late-night briefing from the head of the security service or the newly appointed prosecutor general - nor by a photo opportunity where Zelenskyy stands alongside the heads of all law enforcement bodies. It requires real, public consultation. The demonstrators in Kyiv this week are sending a message. If there were questions about what the limits of government power during war should be, they were answered on Tuesday.

The Guardian

Gaps remain in joint GCC-EU security efforts

WHEN the Gulf Cooperation Council and EU heads of state and government held their first summit last October, they endorsed the blueprint proposed by their ministers on security cooperation. While the two blocs have been closely engaged for decades, mainly on economic and political issues, it was the first time that they decided to work closely on security, as part of their intention to "elevate their strategic partnership to the next level," by working together to safeguard "global and regional security and prosperity, including preventing the emergence and escalation of conflicts and resolving crises," according to the joint communique issued at the time.

Regional security, whether in the Middle East, Europe or elsewhere, has to be anchored in "multilateralism, international law and international humanitarian law, as well as sustainable development and prosperity," in a reference to the weakening, if not total abandonment, of these principles in many parts of the world. Nine months after that summit was held in Brussels, it is appropriate to assess how much has been done in security cooperation. A meeting of experts was held this week in Cambridge, a neutral territory, to evaluate progress. The meeting was organized by the Gulf Research Center, a well-established Saudi-based think tank. The GRC, celebrating its 25th anniversary this year, is probably the most prolific producer of scholarly and policy-oriented literature on the Gulf. As part of its program, it organizes an annual gathering in Cambridge of academics and policymakers from around the world, to discuss Gulf-related issues over several days of intense deliberations. This year marked the 15th of such convocations; there was more than 400 in attendance. Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan opened the meeting, followed by the GCC Secretary-General Jassem Mohammed Al-Budaiwi, and other senior officials from the two organizations.

Although the GCC-EU security dialogue started only last year, it has made considerable progress in delineating the parameters of cooperation on some specific issues. The summit agreed to "deepening security cooperation, including on counter-terrorism, mar-

itime security, cyber issues, nonproliferation, and disaster preparedness and emergency management." In meetings held since the summit, the two organizations agreed on detailed frameworks for each of these five security areas; the next step will be their actual implementation. They also agreed to explore cooperation on peacebuilding efforts such as mediation and negotiation, and combating organized crime, drugs, human trafficking, and smuggling.

On regional security, mediation and conflict resolution, much has been done, especially by the GCC side, but there are serious gaps given the severity of the ongoing crises. There are at least five areas where the two blocs need to double their efforts to live up to the promises made in the October summit to work together toward safeguarding regional security.

First, there is the Gaza genocide. The mass starvation and forced displacement of Palestinians have only intensified in recent months. While GCC states, especially Qatar, have been heavily involved in trying to achieve a ceasefire and allow aid in scale and without hindrance, it is no secret that the EU is divided and, in fact, a few of its members are providing political and material support for the mayhem perpetrated by Israel. Because of the rules of unanimity and weighted majority, the EU has been paralyzed by this division. It has not been able to get its members to agree on an effective course, such as using the leverage of its association agreement with Israel. Rule of weighted majority gives more leverage to large EU member states, who have been able to block action by the organization. In the words of one participant in the Cambridge discussions, the result has left the EU "sitting on its hands," satisfied with issuing occasional statements expressing concern about Gaza.

Similarly, while good progress has been made on plans for the day after in Gaza by the Arab League, Egypt, and others, the EU has yet to lend effective support for this plan. Second, on the two-state solution, Saudi Arabia and a number of partners are making great efforts. One achievement has been the establishment of the Global Alliance for the Implementation of the Two-State Solution, which

includes about 100 countries and organizations from around the world. It has held several substantive meetings dealing with different aspects of this challenge. These efforts are being undermined by Israel so far ruling out negotiations and continuing to change facts on the grounds in the West Bank, including expanding settlements and unleashing unchecked violence against Palestinians. The aim is to make a two-state solution impossible to implement. Although the EU is part of this global alliance, it has yet to use its considerable leverage to get Israel to change course.

Fifth, on maritime security, the two sides are working hard to safeguard freedom of navigation and combat illicit activities, but there is little systematic coordination. Considering the now-frequent attacks on shipping in the Red Sea, maritime security has become one of the most urgent areas on which to focus. All GCC states, plus a dozen EU members, are members of the Bahrain-based, US-led 44-member Combined Maritime Forces, the largest international coalition of its kind. It has five task forces operating in the Gulf, Arabian Sea, Gulf of Aden, and the Red Sea. Separately, both the GCC and EU have their own platforms. The GCC Maritime Operations Coordination Center, also based in Bahrain, coordinates the work of GCC security forces, while the EU has three outfits - Operation Agenor in the Gulf, Operation Atalanta off the Somali Coast, and Operation Aspiden in the Red Sea. Although there has been limited practical cooperation in some of these areas, such as maritime security, more needs to be done, and a specifically GCC-EU framework needs to be established soon for coordination of all these efforts.

The next summit is expected to be held in Saudi Arabia in 2026, and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman said last October that he expects to see real progress by the time the next forum convenes in Riyadh. To make that happen, the two sides need to speed up implementation in all areas of the GCC-EU strategic partnership, including security cooperation. To do that, the two sides must double their efforts, especially on the EU side. It is also urgently needed to scale up the currently meagre funds and manpower allocated for this ambitious partnership.

Hogan is dead, but Hulkamania lives on

Faisal J. Abbas

excitement the moment Hogan's entrance music blared: "I am a real American, I fight for the rights of every man." It was not just a theme song - it was a declaration. Hogan was the hero who stood tall against the villains of the ring, and by extension, the world.

He took on wrestling's most notorious "baddies" - from the sumo-sized Yokozuna to the Machiavellian "Million Dollar Man" Ted DiBiase, the monstrous Andre the Giant, and the flamboyant Ric Flair. But Hogan was not just a wrestler; he was a symbol. And when the Gulf War erupted in 1990, that symbol took on new meaning. As American forces mobilized to liberate Kuwait from Iraqi occupation, many Arab children - raised on Hogan's battles against evil - saw him as a real-life Superman. WWE even introduced characters such as Sgt. Slaughter, who controversially turned heel by aligning with Iraq, setting the stage for Hogan to once again embody the American savior at WrestleMania VII.

And that was the backstory of how wrestling became extremely popular in Saudi Arabia. Hogan opened the door to the hearts and minds of millions of Arab fans. He paved the way for future generations of professional wrestlers including Bret Hart, The Undertaker, Shawn Michaels, The Rock and the new breed of superstars who now perform in Saudi Arabia at Crown Jewel - a pay per view special created for the Kingdom by the WWE as one of the very first collaborations which came as a result of the

recent Saudi entertainment boom.

Yet Hogan's strength was not just physical. His true power lay in his ability to evolve. In 1994, he shocked the wrestling world by defecting from WWF to its rival, World Championship Wrestling. Two years later, he did the unthinkable; he turned heel - wrestling jargon for becoming a villain. As "Hollywood Hogan," he led the New World Order, a faction that redefined wrestling's narrative and helped WCW to dominate the ratings during the infamous Monday Night Wars.

Even in his final year, Hogan remained relevant. On July 18, 2024, just days after Donald Trump survived an assassination attempt at a rally in Pennsylvania, Hogan took the stage at the Republican National Convention. Ripping off his shirt to reveal a Trump-Vance tee, he declared: "Let Trumpmania run wild, brother!" For Hogan, it was not just politics - it was personal. "When I saw him stand up with that fist in the air and the blood on his face - as a warrior, as a leader - I realized that's what America needs," he told Fox News. Hogan's legacy is golden - forged in the squared circle, polished on the silver screen, and etched into the hearts of millions. He starred in films such as "Rocky III," "Suburban Commando," and "Mr. Nanny," and even had his own reality show, "Hogan Knows Best." But his greatest role was always as the immortal Hulkster - the man who taught generations to train hard, say their prayers, and eat their vitamins. He may be gone, but Hulkamania will most certainly live on for a very long time.

THE news hit like a steel chair to the soul. On July 24, 2025, Terry Gene Bollea - the man the world knew as Hulk Hogan - passed away at his home in Clearwater, Florida, following a cardiac arrest. He was 71. While tributes poured in from across the US, few outside the region may realize the profound impact Hogan had on the Arab world - a place where Hulkamania was not just a pop culture phenomenon, but a childhood rite of passage.

Born on Aug. 11, 1953, Hogan's rise to fame in the 1980s coincided with a time when American entertainment was beginning to seep into global consciousness. Long before satellite television or the internet's broadband revolution, a handful of American icons became unofficial ambassadors of "Brand America."

Sylvester Stallone, Michael Jackson, and perhaps more than any of them, Hulk Hogan - with his bandana, handlebar mustache and booming charisma - became a household name from Riyadh to Rabat. VHS tapes were the medium of the time, else spectators - be it men, women or children - awaited eagerly for local television channels to broadcast the latest works of these superstars.

In Saudi Arabia, Tuesday nights were sacred. At 10pm, the Kingdom's domestic Channel 1 aired a one hour recorded special, with Arabic commentary by the late legendary broadcaster Ibrahim al-Rashed. Families gathered around their televisions to watch recorded World Wrestling Federation matches. Schoolchildren were allowed to stay up late, and living rooms erupted with

The Telegraph

Negative thinking not good for China-EU ties

Chen Weihua

FOUR months ago, when the property management company announced that the rooftop of my apartment building in Brussels would undergo renovation for the next 10 months, excluding rainy days, I wondered why it would take so long, because in China it would just take a few weeks to complete the job. It turned out that only a few workers showed up twice a week, and none came to work even on quite a few sunny days.

That to me is like a microcosm example of why the European Union has become less competitive today compared with the United States or China - as detailed in the EU competitiveness report by Mario Draghi, former Italian prime minister and European Central Bank president. The eurozone economy is not doing that well. The International Monetary Fund has forecast that the eurozone will grow by only 0.8 percent and 1.2 percent in the next two years, compared with 1.8 percent and 1.7 percent by the US and about 4 percent by China. To find a scapegoat, some EU politicians have started blaming China for the EU's economic woes, whining about every-

thing from trade deficits to export controls to market access. In doing so, they forgot that the EU had enjoyed consecutive trade surplus with China for 20 years before 1996 and still has a surplus in service trade.

The EU was totally comfortable with that, and China never complained about the deficits. That's why it was especially ironic for the EU to point fingers at China for its trade surplus when it tried to convince the Donald Trump administration that the EU's trade surplus with the US should not be a concern. It is also no secret that for decades, European and other Western companies pocketed the lion's share of the profits from the trade and investment partnerships with Chinese companies. And the Chinese companies never complained about that.

The EU is not as open as it claims to be. It has built many trade and investment barriers for Chinese companies, from arms embargo to banning Huawei 5G to restricting ASML from selling its advanced chip-making equipment to China, not to mention the many

screening mechanisms it has introduced in recent years to target Chinese companies. China has warmly welcomed European, US and Japanese carmakers to "flood" the Chinese market with their "overcapacities", to borrow the latest catchphrase of some EU politicians.

However, when Chinese-made electric vehicles (EVs) debuted in the EU market, EU politicians immediately began fearmongering about Chinese products. Some described Chinese-made EVs as national security threats while one member of European Parliament claimed on Euronews on the weekend that Chinese-made EVs are of poor quality, something that even Tesla founder Elon Musk would disagree with. China has proved wrong the curse that developing countries such as China are condemned to low-end and labor-intensive industries.

More developing economies, from Asia to Africa to Latin America, are likely to follow suit. I think EU politicians are obsessed with the few negatives in EU-China relations. Therefore, they

refuse to see the big picture, and end up squandering huge opportunities to achieve great economic success through deepened cooperation with China.

The EU's latest "de-risking" from China strategy could very well be shooting itself in the foot, because China could contribute so much to the growth of the EU's economy and help it achieve green transition. By repeating that toxic rhetoric day and night over the past few years, the EU stands to lose a lot. I once told some Europeans, in a lighter vein, that problems exist in any relationship, between best friends and even husbands and wives, but if you keep bringing up the negative aspects every day, the friendship and marriage might not last very long. China and the EU should focus on the positives by deepening cooperation. Successful cooperation has overwhelmingly been the big picture in EU-China relations over the past 50 years. Yes, you could and should talk about the other issues but based on mutual respect, and should never let those issues derail the overall relationship. That is what China and the EU should do.

The China Daily



SBP simplifies account opening for individuals and businesses

Advised banks to provide digital payment solutions to merchants

F.P. Report

KARACHI: SBP has issued the consolidated framework for customer onboarding and advised banks and regulated entities (REs) to provide Digital Payment Acceptance solutions to their customers engaged in instore and/or online business/trade activities. New customer onboarding framework aims to simplify and standardize the account opening process and rationalize the documentary requirements along with the enablement of digital and convenient interfaces for account opening across different customer touch

points. SBP has advised REs to ensure that the turnaround time for new account opening does not exceed two days for general public. Customers should also be able to track the status of their account opening applications, making the process transparent and customer friendly. These measures are in continuation of SBP's efforts to enhance financial inclusion and improve customer convenience. In recent years, SBP has introduced branchless banking accounts, Asaan accounts, digital onboarding, and specialized account categories for freelancers,

recipients of home remittances and overseas Pakistanis. Making the customer onboarding process more convenient, safe and efficient, customers will now be able to open all types of accounts through digital means. Further, to facilitate the merchants in acceptance of payments digitally, SBP has advised its REs to equip all merchants - both new and existing - with at least one of the digital payment acceptance solutions such as Raast QR code, Point of Sale (POS), e-commerce/Raast checkout to facilitate customers' digital payments for in-store and/or online purchases. To

facilitate the onboarding of small merchants and enabling them with low-cost digital payment acceptance points, SBP has advised its REs to categorize the merchants as micro, small, and registered merchants. These initiatives will further improve the regulatory environment for mainstreaming the excluded individuals and businesses into banking system and digitizing the existing large-scale cash-based persons-to-merchants payments. Besides, the framework also provides strong regulatory safeguards aligned with international best practices.



QUEBEC: Workers harvest sweet corn at a farm in Sainte Madeleine, Quebec, Canada, on Friday.

Instant vehicle delivery and auto financing MG Motors and Bank Alfalah launches a 'Freedom Package'

F.P. Report

KARACHI: MG Motors Pakistan, in partnership with Bank Alfalah, announces the launch of the 'Freedom Package' - a time bound Independence Day offer running from July 15-August 15, 2025. The initiative is tailored to offer customers with same-day delivery subject to some terms and conditions via Bank Alfalah's Instant Auto Financing. The car variants includes two models which are MG HS Trophy and MG HS Plug-in Hybrid Electric Vehicle (PHEV) combining speed, ease, and exclusive benefits only for people

applying for MG Motors vehicles auto financing via Bank Alfalah. The Freedom Package delivers unmatched value to customers, which includes free registration worth up to PKR 250,000 and Instant Auto Loan approvals for eligible Bank Alfalah account holders. A major shift from conventional financing models, eliminating the long wait traditionally associated with vehicle financing. The offer also includes benefits like exclusive mark up up to (1 year KIBOR +3%) for up to 2 and 3 years financing tenure. Insurance rates offered by Bank Alfalah's

panel insurance company and minimal processing time depending on criteria fulfillment. This strategic collaboration highlights the shared vision of MG Motors and Bank Alfalah to enhance people's convenience while accelerating the adoption of greener and more sustainable mobility solutions in Pakistan. "This initiative embodies true freedom for customers - freedom from long wait times, freedom from fuel dependency, and freedom from registration fees," said Syed Asif Ahmed, General Manager, Marketing Division, MG Motors Pakistan. "We're

proud to partner with Bank Alfalah to deliver a seamless and future-ready auto financing experience." MG HS PHEV remains the best value proposition due to its advantage price of Rs 9,699,000 valid till 31st July 2025. The Freedom Package is planned to be active until 15th August as a celebration of Pakistan's 78th anniversary. MG is an iconic British Automotive Brand with a legacy of more than 100 years. MG has led the transformation of Pakistan automotive landscape by introducing the latest technology with best in class safety and comfort.

Brazil scrambles as US tariff deadline looms, talks stall

SAO PAULO (Reuters): Brazil is scrambling to avert punishing 50% U.S. tariffs in a week's time, but high level talks are stalled and U.S. companies are reluctant to confront U.S. President Donald Trump over the issue, officials and industry leaders say. Trump linked the tariffs, which he has said would come into effect on Aug. 1, to Brazil's treatment of former President Jair Bolsonaro, who is on trial over charges of plotting a coup to stop President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva from taking office. Lula has called the threatened duty "unacceptable blackmail." No new diplomatic talks have occurred since last month, and a Brazilian counter-proposal sent in May went unanswered, two diplomats with knowledge of the matter told Reuters. Brazilian Vice-President Geraldo Alckmin told reporters on Thursday that he reiterated the country's willingness to negotiate in a Saturday discussion with

U.S. Secretary of Commerce, Howard Lutnick. The lack of communication has left Brazil with dwindling options as the deadline approaches. "If he wanted to talk, he would pick up the phone and call me," Lula said of Trump at an event on Thursday. The White House didn't immediately respond to a request for comment. Negotiations are complicated by U.S. concerns over the prosecution of Bolsonaro, a Trump ally, one diplomat said, calling it a major roadblock. Trump announced the proposed 50% tariffs on Brazil on July 9 despite a U.S. trade surplus with the country - lining it up for one of the world's very highest such levies, close to China's 55% rate. In a series of 18 meetings, Alckmin has urged representatives from U.S. firms including General Motors (GM.N), opens new tab, John Deere (DE.N), opens new tab and Alphabet Inc (GOOGL.O), opens new tab to press Washington

on the issue. However, the companies are reluctant to confront Trump for fear of retaliation, according to a government official and Ricardo Alban, president of Brazil's main industry lobby, CNI. "Things are very tense," Alban told reporters on Thursday. Also on Thursday, a group of Democratic senators condemned the tariffs on Brazil as a "clear abuse of power" in a letter to Trump. The tariffs could have a severe economic impact. The CNI estimates over 100,000 Brazilian jobs could be lost, potentially trimming 0.2% from the country's gross domestic product. The country's powerful agribusiness lobby, CNA, projects the value of its U.S. exports could fall by half. Alban said the potential blow to exporters could be worse than the COVID-19 pandemic, adding that business leaders are asking the government for aid, suggesting new credit lines. In response, some com-

panies are already adjusting their trade strategies. Motor maker WEG (WEGE3.SA), opens new tab is considering a plan to use its plants in Mexico and India to supply the U.S., its chief financial officer told analysts. Meat exporter Naturafrig Alimentos has begun redirecting shipments to other countries, according to commercial director Fabrizio Capuci. Other companies are turning to the courts. Orange juice producer Johanna Foods, for example, has sued the Trump administration over the proposed tariffs. Companies in sectors ranging from steel to chemicals are also facing export contract cancellations, according to one advisor who asked not to be named. Abiquim, an association that represents chemical companies in Brazil, confirmed cancellations due to the threat of tariffs, without naming the companies affected. A lobby group representing steel companies declined to comment.

Weekly inflation up by 4.07pc

ISLAMABAD (APP): The weekly inflation, measured by the Sensitive Price Indicator (SPI), witnessed an increase of 4.07 percent for the combined consumption groups during the week ended on July 24, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported on Friday. The SPI for the week under review in the above-mentioned group was recorded at 329.09 points as compared to 316.23 points during the past week, according to the PBS data. As compared to the corresponding week of last year, the SPI for the combined consumption group in the week under review witnessed an increase of 2.22 per cent. The weekly SPI with the base year 2015-16 =100 covers 17 urban centres and 51 essential items for all expenditure groups. The SPI for the lowest consumption group of up to Rs 17,732 witnessed an increase of 3.98 per cent and going up to 317.34 points this week from last week's 305.19 points. The SPI for consumption groups of Rs 17,733 to 22,888, Rs 22,889-29,517; Rs 29,518-44,175 and above Rs 44,175, increased by 5.26 percent, 4.44 percent, 3.70 percent and 3.03 percent respectively. During the week, out of 51 items, prices of 14 (27.45%) items increased, 12 (23.53%) items decreased and 25 (49.02%) items remained stable. The items, which recorded major increase in their average prices on a week-on-week basis included Gas Charges for Q1 (29.85%), Tomatoes (22.93%), Electricity Charges for Q1 (21.46%), Eggs (3.96%), Garlic (1.39%), Cigarettes (0.51%), Beef (0.46%), Rice Basmati Broken (0.45%), Powdered Milk (0.29%), Energy Saver (0.23%), Curd (0.17%) and Milk Fresh (0.16%). The commodities which recorded major decrease in their average prices on a week-on-week basis included Chicken (7.95%), Sugar (4.25%), Onions (3.05%), Bananas (2.81%), LPG (2.09%), Potatoes (1.82%), Wheat Flour (1.19%), Pulse Moong (0.43%) and Pulse Gram (0.32%).

SCCI concerned over govt's harsh tax steps

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry has proactively presented the business community concerns on 37A, 37B, 21 (S), 8B, SRO-709 (Digital POS integration), and Section 25A penalties during the meeting of Senate Committee on Revenue and Finance. SCCI urged the government to immediately withdraw harsh tax steps and anti-business proposals from Finance Act 2025-26. According to details, a meeting of the Senate Standing Committee on Finance and Revenue was held under chairmanship of the committee chairman Senator Saleem Mandviwalla in the parliament house, said in a statement here on Friday. Apart from the Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry president Fazal Moqem Khan, Group leader and FPCCI former president Ghazanfar Bilour, member of the chamber's executive com-

mittee Sajjad Zaheer, office bearers and representatives from various chambers of commerce and industry were in attendance during the meeting. In the meeting, the SCCI leaders firmly opposed several regressive budgetary provisions, including Sections 37A, 37B and collection of additional tax on sale of over Rs200,000 in section 21(S), unjust recruitment of FBR officials under the section 8B, SRO-709 (Digital POS integration), and Section 25A penalties. The meeting thoroughly deliberated upon the business community reservations on the afore-stated sections and digital invoicing system. The meeting acknowledged the anomalies, issues and assured corrective action. It also assured that the implementation of the Digital Invoicing System may be deferred whereas Sections 37A, 37B and 21 (S) of the Finance Act 2025-26 to be modified to bring some sort of relaxation in these sections so

that would provide immediate relief to the community. The SCCI and business leaders on the occasion thanked the Senate Standing Committee on Finance and Revenue for its assurance to address the genuine concerns and legitimate demands of the business community. The SCCI said the outcome reflects the united voice of the business community, strengthened by coordinated advocacy, stakeholder unity, and strategic engagement. It also reaffirms SCCI's unwavering commitment to serving businesses through advocacy, engagement, and evidence-based policy recommendations — signaling a path toward growth, sustainability, and mutual understanding among all stakeholders. The committee chairman Senator Saleem Mandviwalla told the meeting that the government is fully committed to facilitate businesses and remove hurdles for smooth trade and export.

PSO expands women's driving, riding training program

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan State Oil (PSO) has expanded its flagship women's skill development initiative, PSO Shaheen, by launching the second phase and quadrupling the reach in Lahore and Islamabad. Following the success of the initial rollout, the program continues to equip women with essential car driving and bike riding skills to enhance their mobility and confidence, a press release

issued on Friday said. The training sessions have expanded to two more cities Lahore and Islamabad, marking a significant expansion of the program which originally began in Karachi. In Phase 1, an impressive 82% of trained women successfully obtained their driving licenses and certificates, demonstrating the program's effectiveness. PSO Shaheen is committed to supporting women's journey toward

greater mobility and confidence. Many participants from the previous phase have already utilized their newly acquired skills to support their families, launch small businesses, and even finance their own motorcycles. The initiative continues to grow rapidly, helping to transform the lives of women across Pakistan by boosting their confidence and creating pathways for personal and professional growth.

CCP recovers Rs150m from Reckitt Benckiser

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) has recovered a penalty of Rs 150 million from Reckitt Benckiser Pakistan Limited for the deceptive marketing of its product

Strepsils. The recovery was made by attaching the company's bank account after the dismissal of its appeal by the Competition Appellate Tribunal (CAT), said a press release issued here on

Friday. Section 40(2)(a) of the Competition Act, 2010, authorizes the CCP to recover penalties by attaching the bank accounts of entities that fail to comply with its orders.

Engro Fertilizers and Bank Alfalah partner to launch Rs250m financing for farmers across Pakistan

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Engro Fertilizers, a major fertilizer company in Pakistan, and Bank Alfalah Limited, Pakistan's leading commercial bank, announced a strategic partnership aimed at empowering farmers across the country through enhanced lending facilities. This collaboration will extend financing of up to PKR 1 million to farmers registered through Engro Markaz outlets and UgAi - the first integrated agricultural e-commerce platform for Pakistan. The signing ceremony took place at Bank Alfalah's Head Office in Karachi and was attended by senior leadership from both the organizations, including Ali Rathore, CEO of Engro Fertilizers; Atif Bajwa, President and CEO of Bank

Alfalah Limited; Atif Mohammad Ali, Vice President of Marketing at Engro Fertilizers; along with other senior executives. The pilot initiative will be launched with a total funding allocation of PKR 250 million (comprising both secured and unsecured components), offering average loan amounts of approximately PKR 0.6 million to 300-350 farmers. With an estimated reach of up to 2,000 beneficiaries, the program marks a critical step in forging a direct value chain between the fertilizer provider, the financing institution, and the end-user farmer, ensuring resources flow efficiently from source to soil with a robust value-chain. Currently, the program will be accessible through four Engro Markaz locations



across Pakistan: Sahiwal, Sargodha, Bahawalpur, and Muridke. The project is designed to enhance financial access

for farmers, providing them with clean and collateral-based lending solutions tailored to their needs. These credit facilities offer substi-

dized interest rates up to 4.5% lower than the market rates, enabling farmers to purchase high-quality Engro fertilizer products,

directly contributing to improved crop yields, and a significant increase in their overall income and livelihood. The collaboration also features for digitization of payments and implementation of a closed loop spending solution via P2M (Person-to-Merchant) transaction enablement. According to the Pakistan Economic Survey 2023-24, credit facilitation played a major role in driving improved crop yields during FY2024, leading to a significant impact of agricultural financing on national food security and rural productivity. According to the World Bank, access to agricultural finance can make farming up to four times more effective in reducing poverty highlighting the transformative impact of inclusive credit systems on rural

livelihoods. Ali Rathore, CEO of Engro Fertilizers, stated, "At Engro Fertilizers, we remain committed to supporting Pakistani farmers, who play a vital role in sustaining our country's economy. This collaboration with Bank Alfalah is a meaningful step toward improving farmers' access to financial resources, enabling them to invest in quality inputs, enhance productivity, and work toward a more secure future. We hope this initiative contributes to the broader goal of promoting sustainable agriculture and strengthening the resilience of farming communities". Atif Bajwa, President and CEO of Bank Alfalah Limited, added, "Bank Alfalah is proud to partner with Engro Fertilizers in this important initiative. We

recognize the potential of Pakistan's agricultural sector and the critical role that accessible financing plays in unlocking it. By offering tailored lending solutions, we are investing in the productivity, resilience, and financial empowerment of our farmers, contributing directly to food security and economic stability across the nation. This collaboration exemplifies our dedication to inclusive growth and supporting the backbone of Pakistan's economy." Through this partnership, Engro Fertilizers and Bank Alfalah Limited are committed to bridging the gap between financial institutions and the agricultural community. This collaborative effort has been designed to enable a more inclusive, robust, and productive rural economy.



In brief

Baseball team rise in world rankings

LAHORE (Monitoring Desk): The World Baseball Federation has released its latest rankings for the top 20 teams, showcasing significant progress for Pakistan's men's and women's baseball squads. Both teams jumped three spots globally. The men's team rose from 38th to 35th in the world, securing 8th place in Asia. The women's team advanced from 17th to 14th globally, ranking 7th in Asia. Fakhar Ali Shah, President of the Pakistan Baseball Federation (PBF), praised the teams' achievements, highlighting their growth despite missing the Asian Games. "Our women's team is shining under tough conditions, climbing the ranks without recent international exposure," Shah said. Japan leads both men's and women's rankings globally and in Asia, followed by Chinese Taipei (2nd), the United States (3rd), South Korea (4th), and Mexico (5th). To prepare for the Asian Baseball Championship, set for September 22-28, 2025, in China, the PBF hired the services of Kazuto Nonaka, a Japanese coach. Since May, Nonaka has been training two standout players, Faisal Hayat and Musharraf, in a specialized program in Japan. Additionally, the PBF named national team pitcher Alex Khan as head coach of the Pakistan Under-18 team for the 2026 U-18 World Cup qualifiers. Khan, who played in the 2022 World Baseball Classic and will compete in this year's Asian Championship, brings valuable experience to the role.

Messi, Alba avoid sanctions

LOS ANGELES (Reuters): Inter Miami's Lionel Messi and Jordi Alba have not been sanctioned for skipping Wednesday's MLS All-Star Game in Austin, Texas, their coach confirmed Friday. Both players were voted into the showcase by the fans and media but neither featured in the MLS squad's 3-1 win against the Liga MX All-Stars. League rules stipulate that players who choose to opt out of the All-Star Game without an approved medical reason can face a one-match suspension. Inter Miami coach Javier Mascherano pointed out that his team had "played the most games so far this semester, by far" and that Messi "showed normal fatigue from the number of games and minutes he's been playing," per ESPN. "Look, players always have discomfort, especially when they play every three days. But luckily, (Messi) is returning today," Mascherano said Friday. "Let's hope he can train alongside the group so we can count on both of them for tomorrow's game. We haven't received any (sanction)." Inter Miami host FC Cincinnati on Saturday night at Chase Stadium in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. Mascherano said Messi, 38, and Alba, 36, will be available for the match depending on their fitness levels. Messi shares the MLS lead with 18 goals and has 10 assists in 17 league matches this season. The Argentine forward also made six starts in the Concacaf Champions Cup and four in the FIFA Club World Cup. Alba has one goal and eight assists in 18 MLS matches. The Spanish defender made seven starts in the Champions Cup and one in the Club World Cup.

Pakistan T20I, ODI squads announced for West Indies series

LAHORE (APP): Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) Men's National Selection Committee on Friday named 15-member T20I and 16-member ODI squads for the three-match each series against West Indies. The three-match T20I series will be played at the Central Broward Park & Broward County Stadium in Lauderhill, Florida, USA while the ODI series is scheduled to be played at the Brian Lara Cricket Academy in Trinidad & Tobago. The three-match T20I series from July 31st to August 3 will be followed by an ODI series between August and 12. Salman Ali Agha and Mohammad Rizwan will lead the T20I and ODI squads respectively. Mohammad Rizwan will lead Pakistan in the three-match ODI series against West Indies as the Men's a 16-member ODI squad on Friday. The series will be played at Right-handed batter Hasan Nawaz is the only uncapped player in the ODI squad. Fast bowlers Haris Rauf, Hasan Ali and Shaheen Shah Afridi return to the

squad for the T20I series. The 15-member T20I squad includes Salman Ali Agha (captain), Abrar Ahmed, Faheem Ashraf, Fakhar Zaman, Haris Rauf, Hasan Ali, Hasan Nawaz, Hussain Talat, Khushdil Shah, Mohammad Haris (wicket-keeper), Mohammad Nawaz, Sahibzada Farhan (wicket-keeper), Saim Ayub, Shaheen Shah Afridi and Sufyan Moqim. The 16-member ODI squad will comprise Mohammad Rizwan (captain), Salman Ali Agha (vice-captain), Abdullah Shafique, Abrar Ahmed, Babar Azam, Faheem Ashraf, Fakhar Zaman, Hasan Ali, Hasan Nawaz, Hussain Talat, Mohammad Haris (wicket-keeper), Mohammad Nawaz, Naseem Shah, Saim Ayub, Shaheen Shah Afridi and Sufyan Moqim. The management tea will consist of Naveed Akram Cheema (manager), Mike Hesson (head coach), Ashley Noffke (bowling coach), Hanif Malik (batting Coach), Shane McDermott (fielding Coach), Cliffe

Deacon (physiotherapist), Grant Luden (strength and conditioning coach), Talha Ejaz (analyst), Syed Naeem Ahmad (media manager), Irtaza Komail (security manager), Dr Wajid Ali Rafai (team doctor) and Muhammad Ehsan (masseur). Series schedule: 31 July – First T20I v West Indies, Central Broward Park & Broward County Stadium, Lauderhill, USA 2 Aug – Second T20I v West Indies, Central Broward Park & Broward County Stadium, Lauderhill, USA 3 Aug – Third T20I v West Indies, Central Broward Park & Broward County Stadium, Lauderhill, USA 8 Aug – First ODI v West Indies, Brian Lara Cricket Academy, Trinidad & Tobago 10 Aug – Second ODI v West Indies, Brian Lara Cricket Academy, Trinidad & Tobago 12 Aug – Third ODI v West Indies, Brian Lara Cricket Academy, Trinidad & Tobago.

PSB issues show cause notice to PNF

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Pakistan Sports Board (PSB) has issued a show-cause notice to the Pakistan Netball Federation (PNF) for failing to respond within 72 hours regarding what PSB termed a misleading claim about the results of the Asian Youth Netball Championship 2025. According to Khurram Shahzad, PSB Spokesperson, the Board had expressed serious reservations over PNF's claim that the Pakistan Youth Girls' Team secured first position in the championship held in Jeonju, South Korea. On July 13, 2025, PSB formally sought a clarification from the federation within three days. However, no response was received within the given timeframe. On Friday, PSB escalated the matter by issuing a formal show-cause notice to the federation. The notice stated that the federation's failure to respond reflects a deliberate disregard for official correspondence and accountability, which could be interpreted as an implicit admission. The notice further highlighted that on July 9, 2025, PNF had formally claimed in a letter that the team had secured first place, whereas official results show Pakistan finished sixth. Despite being fully aware that PSB's cash reward policy applies only to medal-winning teams, the federation still demanded a financial

reward under that policy. The misleading claim was also propagated through TV interviews and public statements by PNF Chairman Mudassar Razzaq Arain, who publicly declared a gold medal victory, thereby intentionally misleading the public and stakeholders. PSB stated in the notice that these actions are in direct violation of Rule 21(1)(vi) of the PSB Constitution and Clause 5(1)(vi) of the Pakistan Code of Ethics and Governance in Sports. These provisions mandate accurate and timely information from federations and prohibit the misuse of authority. The notice added that the false claim was made in pursuit of official recognition and financial reward, which constitutes not only an ethical breach but also a violation of the trust placed in the federation. The PSB has instructed the federation to submit a written explanation within seven days from the date of issuance of the notice, justifying why a fine of one million rupees should not be imposed for this serious misconduct. Failure to respond within the stipulated period will lead to unilateral action, and the matter will be referred to the PSB Board for further disciplinary and financial measures under the applicable rules.

Taimour makes history with victory at World University Games

ISLAMABAD (APP): In a landmark achievement for Pakistan, Taimour Khan, a student of the National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST), has secured the country's first-ever win in table tennis at the prestigious World University Games in Dusseldorf. Representing the NUST School of Chemical & Materials Engineering and a proud member of the Higher Education Commission (HEC) Pakistan Sports Contingent, Taimour delivered a stellar performance, defeating his Cypriot opponent with a clean 3-0 sweep. His commanding play—featuring powerful smashes, sharp loops, precise chops, and swift flicks—left the opponent unable to recover, earning him a well-deserved spot in the next round. According to the NUST, this historic victory not only advances Pakistan in the competition but also marks a turning point in the nation's university-level sports participation on the global stage. Pakistan's 40-member contingent is currently competing in seven sports categories at the Games, including judo, taekwondo, swimming, athletics, and archery. The delegation reflects the country's growing investment in youth development, with a strong emphasis on combining academic excellence with sporting prowess.

Pakistan secures second consecutive win in FIVB World C'ship

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Pakistan men's volleyball team continued their outstanding form in the FIVB Boys' U19 World Championship 2025, registering their second consecutive win in the tournament by defeating hosts Uzbekistan in straight sets. In a thrilling encounter held in Tashkent, Pakistan dominated the court and claimed victory with set scores of 25-23, 25-18, 25-21. This impressive win follows Pakistan's opening triumph over Belgium, signaling their intent to make a strong mark in their historic debut at the world stage. Top performers including, Muhammad Yahya who led the scoreboard with a stellar 24 points, delivering exceptional consistency in both attack and defense. Muhammad Saud added 10 points, showcasing his versatility on the net. Meanwhile Muhtad Ali Shah and Ajmal Junaid



each contributed 9 crucial points, adding depth to Pakistan's offensive strategy. Pakistan will face Turkey on Saturday. Head Coach Saeed Ahmed Khan Sady praised his team's composure and discipline saying, "Our boys showed tremendous maturity and confidence on the court today. Beating the

host team in front of their home crowd is never easy, but our players remained focused and executed the game plan with precision. This victory boosts our morale, but we still have crucial matches ahead." Ch Muhammad Yaqoob, Chairman Pakistan Volleyball Federation, said, "This is a proud

moment for Pakistan Volleyball. Our youth teams are not only qualifying for global competitions but are also delivering world-class performances. I extend heartfelt congratulations to the entire squad, coaches, and the nation. We are confident this momentum will carry us to the next round."

Pogacar set for fourth triumph as Arensman edges stage 19



LA PLAGNE TARENTEAISE (Agencies): Tadej Pogacar is set to win his fourth Tour de France after defending his lead on the final mountain stage of this year's race, as Thymen Arensman held on for a dramatic victory after a gruelling ascent to La Plagne. Barring a remarkable turnaround, Pogacar will confirm his latest victory in Paris on Sunday after he crossed the line with Jonas Vingegaard, conceding just two bonus seconds to his rival. The Slovenian's lead stands at four minutes 24 seconds, with two significantly flatter stages remaining. In an epic conclusion to the final stage in the high mountains, the top four general classification riders chased Arensman to the finish, at 2,052m above sea level, but Vingegaard fell two seconds short of catching the Dutchman. Britain's Oscar Onley, 22, lost touch in the final two kilometres in pursuit of what would have been a remarkable podium finish, allowing Florian Lipowitz to consolidate his hold on third. Organisers altered Friday's route because of a herd of diseased cattle on the Col des Saisses, reducing the stage distance from 130km to 95km and dropping two of the five planned categorised climbs in the Alps. The route still featured two hors categorie climbs - following the three tackled on Thursday's queen stage - with the Col du Pre preceding the finish on La Plagne. Saturday's penultimate stage

is a rolling 184.2km route from Nantua which should favour break-away specialists as it snakes over the hills of the Jura towards Pontarlier. Pogacar closes in on victory as Onley demonstrates podium potential After resisting chasing victory on Thursday's queen stage, Pogacar once again demonstrated that his focus remains firmly on protecting his commanding lead in the general classification. It appeared he would launch an attack in pursuit of Arensman - and his fifth stage win in this year's race - but instead he closely watched Vingegaard, and then followed when his main rival made a late bid for victory. This is set to be the sixth consecutive edition of the race won by either Pogacar or two-time champion Vingegaard, but the Slovenian has once again proven to be a class above his rival in 2025. "It was a tough last three days and I'm happy that today is over. This Tour de France has begun to feel very long," said Pogacar. "This is the Tour de France and you never know what might come your way. We have to keep our focus for two more days." With huge time gaps splitting most riders in the top 10, the battle for third between Lipowitz and Onley was finely poised after the Briton's outstanding ride up the mighty Col de la Loze took him within 22 seconds of an unlikely podium finish. Team Picnic-PostNL rider Onley has gone from strength to strength at only his second Tour, but it was the Scot who faltered first on the 19.1km final climb - rising at a brutal average gradient of 7.2% - and eventually lost 41 seconds to Lipowitz. Having displayed his form by finishing on the podium at the Tour de Suisse last month, Onley started the stage targeting a stage win - but will leave with a reputation as one of the sport's most promising young riders with fourth place all but assured. This was Arensman's - and British team Ineos Grenadiers' - day, however. The 25-year-old broke free in the

final 13km after following an initial move by Pogacar and Vingegaard, and, much to his disbelief, would not be caught. "I feel absolutely destroyed," said Arensman. "I can't believe it. Already to win one stage in the Tour was unbelievable from a breakthrough, but now to do it against the GC group, against the strongest riders in the world, it feels like I'm dreaming. "I don't know what I just did." Tour de France stage 19 results Thymen Arensman (Ned/Ineos Grenadiers) 2hrs 46mins 06secs Jonas Vingegaard (Den/Visma-Lease a Bike) +2secs Tadej Pogacar (Slo/UAE Emirates-XRG) +2secs Florian Lipowitz (Ger/Red Bull-Bora-Hansgrohe) +6secs Oscar Onley (GB/Picnic PostNL) +47secs Felix Gall (Aut/Decathlon-AG2R La Mondiale) +1min 34secs Tobias Johannessen (Nor/Uno-X Mobility) +1min 41secs Ben Healy (Ire/EF Education-EasyPost) +2mins 19secs Valentin Paret-Peintre (Fra/Soudal Quick-Step) +3mins 47secs Simon Yates (GB/Visma-Lease a Bike) +3mins 54secs Tour de France general classification standings Tadej Pogacar (Slo/UAE Emirates-XRG) 69hrs 41mins 46secs Jonas Vingegaard (Den/Visma-Lease a Bike) +4mins 24secs Florian Lipowitz (Ger/Red Bull-Bora-Hansgrohe) +11mins 09secs Oscar Onley (GB/Picnic PostNL) +12mins 12secs Felix Gall (Aut/Decathlon-AG2R La Mondiale) +17mins 12secs Tobias Johannessen (Nor/Uno-X Mobility) +20mins 14secs Kevin Vauquelin (Fra/Arkea-B&B Hotels) +22mins 35secs Primoz Roglic (Slo/Red Bull-Bora-Hansgrohe) +25mins 30secs Ben Healy (Ire/EF Education-EasyPost) +28mins 02secs Ben O'Connor (Aus/Jayco-AlUla) +34mins 34secs.

Joe Root: England's elegant Test record-breaker

LONDON (AFP): With a single behind point Joe Root climbed above Ricky Ponting to become the second-highest run-scorer in Test history, underlining his status as a giant of the sport. The former England captain overtook Ponting's tally of 13,378 runs when he reached 120 in the fourth Test against India at Old Trafford on Friday. Earlier in the day he had glided past India's Rahul Dravid and South Africa's Jacques Kallis and there is now just one man above him -- Sachin Tendulkar. The Indian great retired in 2013 with 15,921 Test runs to his name but few would bet against the voracious Root dislodging him. "Magnificent from Root, this is a great moment in history," former Australia captain Ponting said on Sky Sports as the Manchester crowd stood to applaud and chant the Yorkshireman's name. "The way his career has gone, there is absolutely no reason why he will not go past Tendulkar." The elegant Root, 34, is a throwback to a different era of batting, an orthodox "touch" player who does not need to smash the ball around to score quickly.

Former England captain Alastair Cook hailed him as "England's greatest" and a "genius" when he surpassed his own record tally of 33 Test hundreds for England last year. Another former skipper, Nasser Hussain, has described him as "England's generational talent" with the bat. Root played for the same Sheffield Collegiate club as Michael Vaughan, following the ex-England captain into the Yorkshire first team. He made just 14 on his low-key first-class debut against a Loughborough University team in 2010 but after two encouraging seasons with Yorkshire he was picked to tour India in 2012. England spinner Graeme Swann likened the baby-faced batsman to a team mascot but Root seized his chance when it came, making a patient 73 from 229 balls in the final Test in Nagpur. His rise continued with a first Test hundred the following year against New Zealand at his Headingley home ground, before a maiden Ashes century at Lord's two months later. There was a dip in Australia, where Root has still to score a Test century, as he lost form during England's 2013/14

Ashes whitewash. Root, dropped for the fifth Test in Sydney, responded in style back on home soil with a double hundred against Sri Lanka at Lord's followed by two centuries against India. Runs have flowed consistently for the Yorkshireman despite concerns at times, now largely forgotten, over his conversion rate -- the number of times he went on to score hundreds after reaching fifty. 'Big Four' Root is in an elite bracket as a member of the modern game's "Big Four" batsmen alongside Australia's Steve Smith, India's Virat Kohli, now retired from Test cricket, and New Zealand's Kane Williamson. The Yorkshireman, who has also taken 73 Test wickets with his spin bowling, succeeded Cook -- the only other England batsman to have scored 10,000 Test runs -- as captain in 2017. He went on to lead England in more Tests (64) and achieve more wins (27) than any previous skipper but found himself in charge of a struggling team. He maintained his own standards with the bat during his time at the helm, most strikingly in 2021, when he scored 1,708 runs at an average of 61

and was named Test Cricketer of the Year. Root's tenure as skipper ended in disappointment in April 2022 following a run of just one win from 17 matches, with Ben Stokes taking charge. The former skipper has proved indispensable under Stokes, scoring 13 of his Test hundreds after being freed from the burden of captaincy. Root has occasionally become unstuck while flirting with a more risky style in the ultra-attacking "Bazball" era under Stokes and coach Brendon McCullum. But he has largely played his own game, with a rare talent to keep the scoreboard ticking over by playing in a classical, relatively risk-free style. Root's Test batting average is more than 50, the mark of an all-time great, and he remains a mainstay of England's one-day team. He has a long way to go to catch Tendulkar but few would doubt his hunger and ability to finish his career right at the top. "It has been a privilege to watch him knock off those milestones," former England skipper Michael Atherton said on Sky. "It has also been a privilege to see his career unfold."



Joe Root scored 150 runs.



In brief

IRSA releases 434,500 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Friday released 434,500 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 523,700 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, the water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1532.00 feet which was 130.00 feet higher than the dead level of 1402.00 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 344,700 cusecs and 288,800 cusecs, respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1196.00 feet, which was 146.00 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 40,300 cusecs and 7,000 cusecs, respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 408,800, 409,600, 304,200 and 242,200 cusecs, respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 47,400 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 67,100 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.

Crackdown against beggars continues

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi Police have continued the crackdown against professional beggars across the city and arrested some 117 professional beggars in last 12 days. The crackdown launched on the instructions of City Police Officer Syed Khalid Hamdani to make the city free of the beggars, a police spokesman said on Friday. He said special squads formed for the purpose were maintaining strict surveillance to prevent begging on busy roads and highways. Most of the professional beggars, the spokesman added, were also involved in theft, drug trafficking and other crimes.

27 lawbreakers arrested

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi Police Friday nabbed 27 lawbreakers, including a liquor supplier, illegal arm owners, Tenancy Act violators and other accused from across the district. According to a police spokesman, the Cantt Police detained an accused recovering 6 litres of liquor from him. Similarly, the Naseerabad and Dhamial Police held three accused each and the Pirwadhai Police captured an accused with illegal weapons and ammunition. Likewise, 16 persons were taken into custody by the Banni, Pirwadhai and Cantt Police for the violation of the Tenancy Act. The Ratta Amral Police also arrested two accused recovering electricity wires stolen from a citizen's house. Meanwhile, the Gujjar Khan Police caught an accused with fireworks, including 50 bombs and 30 shells.

Two suspects nabbed

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chichawatani Police have arrested two suspects of a gang involved in motorcycle thefts. According to the police sources, police conducted a surprise raid during the investigation of motorcycle thefts and arrested two suspects, Usman and Shahid. 10 stolen motorcycles worth Rs 1 million and illegal weapons were also recovered from the possession of the suspects. Accused Usman is said to be the ringleader of the gang. The police have arrested both the suspects and registered a case against them.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Railways Muhammad Hanif Abbasi meets Senior PML-N AJK Leader Raja Mushtaq Minhas Reaffirms Pakistan's unwavering support for the people of Kashmir.

Abbasi, Minhas discuss Azad Kashmir politics, mutual interests

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Railways Muhammad Hanif Abbasi and Raja Mushtaq Minhas Senior Vice President of PML-N Azad Kashmir held a meeting on Friday and discussed the political landscape in Azad Kashmir and other matters of mutual concern. Paying tribute to the martyrs of Kashmir, the Minister for Railways reaffirmed Pakistan's unwavering political, moral and diplomatic support for the Kashmiri people.

Abbasi stated that the journey of public service would carry forward, guided by the vision of Former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and under the leadership of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

Raja Mushtaq Minhas extended his heartfelt congratulations to the Federal Minister for the recent innovations introduced in the railway sector, recognizing the progressive steps taken. He remarked that Nawaz Sharif continues to reside in the hearts of the

Kashmiri people, symbolizing enduring trust and connection. He credited Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif with rescuing the country from deep rooted crisis, reaffirming his leadership during challenging times.

Minhas expressed hope that, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) would form the government in Azad Kashmir after winning the incoming elections. Sardar Farhan Azam, a senior leader of PML-N Azad Kashmir, also attended the meeting.

Utility Stores strike continues, workers demand action

ISLAMABAD (PPI): The demonstration by Utility Stores Corporation (USC) personnel today stretched into its fifth day, with staff steadfast in their resolve to continue until their requests are granted.

"We are committed to remaining here until our demands are addressed," declared participants in the ongoing protest.

Joint Action Committee (JAC) representatives appealed to the Prime Minister to rescind what

they labeled an "unlawful decree," pledging to oppose any measure that constitutes the "financial ruin" of their colleagues. Although discussions with the government are underway, the JAC confirmed that all USC outlets and administrative centers will stay shut until their conditions are approved.

"We are a non-violent assembly, congregated here to defend our entitlements and protect the well-being of our families," explained Syed Arif Hussain Shah, a

leading union official.

The JAC pressed management to promptly disburse employee wages, emphasizing that numerous workers are compelled to face challenging circumstances, protesting outdoors because of financial constraints. New talks with federal authorities are anticipated today, and union representatives remain optimistic that officials will guarantee the full preservation of worker rights.

Stray dog population raises alarm in G-8/1, CDA responds to concerns

ISLAMABAD (APP): Residents of G-8/1 and G-8 Markaz are urging the authorities concerned of CDA to expand on-ground operations, ensure safer streets, and launch awareness campaigns to prevent pet abandonment.

Talking to APP here on Friday, residents of Sector G-8/1 have raised serious concerns over the growing number of stray dogs in their neighbourhood, urging the Capital Development Authority (CDA) to take immediate and humane action.

Shumyla Noreen, a local resident, warned that the unchecked presence of stray dogs is becoming a daily threat, especially for children and the elderly. "It's becoming risky for people to move around freely, particularly during early morning and late evening hours," she said.

Another resident, Sanum, echoed the concern, highlighting the difficulties faced by pedestrians. "Many people are afraid to walk on certain streets due to the fear of being chased or bitten," she said. In response, when a senior official from CDA was contacted, he negated the impression and said that the civic body was taking all possible measures to effectively tackle the issue.

"The public is welcome to visit the center and observe the care and treatment being provided to these animals," the official stated. The CDA had inaugurated Islamabad's first dedicated facility for stray dog management in

September 2022, with a capacity to house 500 dogs, he said. The center aims to implement humane, non-lethal methods such as sterilization and vaccination under the World Health Organization's Trap-Neuter-Vaccinate-Release (TNVR) model, he added.

Animal rights activists, however, continue to raise concerns about delays in the release of sterilized dogs and alleged neglect at the facility. The Islamabad High Court, in a recent ruling, directed authorities to strictly follow scientific and humane protocols, warning that the center's operations could be halted if standards are not maintained. In recent months, the presence of stray dog packs has grown, particularly in the Capital Territory sector G/8, G/9 and Chattha Bakhtawar.

CDA cracks down on illegal Nullah encroachments in Islamabad, warns of legal action: The Capital Development Authority (CDA) has intensified its crackdown on illegal encroachments in Islamabad, particularly structures built over natural stormwater drains (nullahs), warning that such constructions pose severe flooding risks and will be demolished without exception.

The announcement came during a high-level meeting held at the CDA Headquarters, chaired by Chairman CDA and Chief Commissioner Islamabad, Muhammad Ali Randhawa on Friday. According to the briefing, enforcement teams have already begun sealing

and demolishing illegal structures built over nullahs, in accordance with directives from Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi.

The campaign aims to reclaim government land from illegal occupants and prevent life-threatening scenarios during Islamabad's increasingly intense monsoon rains. "Buildings constructed over nullahs without a hydraulic study or CDA approval are not only illegal but highly dangerous."

These structures could collapse during a major flood," said Chairman Randhawa, citing heavy rainfall this monsoon season—the highest since 2001—as a serious wake-up call. Residents and commercial property owners have been urged to voluntarily remove all encroachments from stormwater channels. "If not removed voluntarily, these structures will be sealed, declared hazardous, and legal action will be initiated. The responsibility will lie entirely with the encroachers," Randhawa warned.

In addition to enforcement, the CDA is implementing preventive measures to stop future encroachments. A permanent monitoring system will be established, utilizing drone surveillance and Google Earth mapping to track reclaimed land. The authority also announced the digitization of layout plans, the No Objection Certificate (NOC) process, and fee payments for map approvals through a new cashless system.

Dengue awareness campaigns to be launched in Murree

RAWALPINDI (APP): An important meeting on anti-dengue measures was held under the chairmanship of Deputy Commissioner (DC) Murree, Agha Zaheer Abbas Shirazi during which the reps from the health department briefed on the ongoing anti-dengue campaign.

It was decided in the meeting to launch a coordinated "Dengue Awareness Campaign" at the government level to educate the public about the dangers of the disease and preventive measures.

Addressing the meeting, DC Murree Agha Zaheer Abbas Shirazi said that while the overall situation was under control, the responsibilities of relevant departments have increased. "All government resources are being utilized to eliminate dengue larvae," he said.

He emphasized focusing on specific areas in Murree where temperatures are similar to Rawalpindi, ensuring these locations are safeguarded against dengue mosquitoes. The meeting was attended by officers from various district departments and health officials.

Five more drug pushers arrested

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi Police continued the crackdown against drug pushers on Friday and arrested five more accused with over 6 kilograms charas.

According to a police spokesman, the Sadiqabad Police detained two accused and recovered 2.8 kg charas from their possession. Similarly, the Wah Cantt Police also caught two accused with 2.22 kg of the contraband item, while the Wah Saddar recovered 1.6 kg charas from an accused.

ANF seizes over 1076 kgs drugs; arrests 33 drug traffickers

ISLAMABAD (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting 29 operations across the country managed to recover over 1076 kgs drugs worth more than over Rs 302 million and arrested 33 drug traffickers during last five days.

According to an ANF Headquarters spokesperson, in an operation at Faisal Bus Terminal near Chak, Islamabad, 2.5 kgs heroin, 2.4 kgs hashish, & 1 kg ice were recovered from the possession of three suspects. ANF also recovered 56 kgs hashish from a vehicle checked near University Road, Peshawar, and a drug trafficker was rounded up.

In an operation near Garh Mor Road, Muzaffargarh, 7 kgs ice was recovered from two suspects, traveling in a truck while in another operation near DG Khan Road in Loralai, 168 kgs heroin hidden for smuggling was recovered. In a crackdown against drug traffickers near Toll Plaza Road, Mansehra, 18 kgs hashish was recovered from a vehicle and a drug smuggler was rounded up.

Ethiopia, Pakistan agree to strengthen parliamentary cooperation

ISLAMABAD (APP): Ethiopia and Pakistan have agreed to enhance parliamentary cooperation, focusing on diverse areas such as trade, investment, aviation, science, and technology, and climate change.

This discussion was held during a meeting between Special Envoy and Ambassador Extraordinary of Ethiopia to Pakistan, Dr. Jemal Beker Abdula, and the Chairman Senate, Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani.

The two sides discussed the growing bilateral relations in various areas and multilateral cooperation for international peace and security. The ambassador said, Ethiopia looks forward to establishing a

strategic partnership with Pakistan, highlighting the growing environmental cooperation under the Green Legacy and Green Pakistan initiatives.

Ethiopian Ambassador briefed the Chairman about the critical role of the Green Legacy Initiative in enhancing Ethiopia's green cover to 23.6% with the plantation of over 40.5 billion seedlings in the last six years.

The Ethiopian Embassy Islamabad and the Ministry of National Food Security and Research have taken steps to twin the two landmark initiatives, including a Joint Green Legacy Forum.

The Chairman Senate

welcomed the launch of direct flights between Karachi and Addis Ababa, noting the significant potential for further collaboration.

The Chairman Senate invited his counterpart from Ethiopia to participate in an Inter-Parliamentary Speakers' Conference scheduled to be held in Pakistan this November.

Pakistan places great value on its relations with Ethiopia and remains committed to strengthening economic ties. This meeting marks a significant step towards enhancing parliamentary cooperation and strengthening bilateral relations between Ethiopia and Pakistan.

Senate Committee approves education reform bill

ISLAMABAD (PPI): The Senate Standing Committee on Federal Education and Professional Training has approved a education reform bill, sparking debate over cultural sensitivities and reproductive health education.

The Federal Supervision of Curricula, Textbooks, and Maintenance of Standards of Education (Amendment) Bill 2024 was passed with a six-to-two vote on Friday, chaired by Senator Bushra Anjum Butt. The legislation aims to improve the quality, accessibility, and inclusivity of the nation's learning systems.

The bill includes provisions for age-appropriate reproductive health education with parental involvement, a point of contention for opposing senators Kamran Murtaza and Falak Naz. Supporters, including Senators Afnan Ullah Khan, Syed Masroor Ahsan,

Ashraf Ali Jatoti, Fawzia Arshad, and Rahat Jamali, advocated for the changes. Senator Khalida Ateeb suggested limiting implementation to secondary school.

The committee also tackled various other educational matters. Members received updates on the Bahauddin Zakariya University law students' academic transition issues, with officials assuring that examinations would restart by September 1. Senator Butt emphasized the committee's commitment to supporting the affected pupils.

Discussions on disability inclusion in Islamabad Capital Territory's private institutions resulted in recommendations for improved infrastructure, accessible transport, and hearing support. Senator Butt proposed integrating mandatory hearing tests into newborn vac-

cination records for early detection, requesting a joint action plan from the Health and Education Ministries.

The School Milk Program was scrutinized, with members raising concerns about sugar content, lactose intolerance, and delivery tracking. A thorough assessment of its nutritional effects and sustainability was requested. Authorities cited positive outcomes in pilot locations.

Finally, the committee addressed ongoing administrative difficulties at federal universities, such as the Federal Urdu University, and recommended a standardized governance structure to enhance coordination and administration. Federal Minister for Education, the ministry's secretary, and senior officers, alongside Senators Sarmad Ali, attended the meeting.



ISLAMABAD: Deer feed on fresh fodder inside their enclosure at the zoo along Faisal Avenue in the Federal Capital. —APP Photo

soaked in carpet was recovered from a parcel sent from Quetta destined for Australia.

From a courier office on Peshawar Ring Road, 7.2 kgs hashish was seized from a parcel destined for Lahore. In an operation near GT Road, Attock, 2.4 kgs hashish was confiscated from the possession of two women. In a crackdown in the Bonistan area of Panjgur, 36 kgs hashish hidden for smuggling was recovered.

Near Colonel Sher Khan Toll Plaza, Peshawar, 16.8 kgs hashish was recovered from a vehicle and two suspects were sent behind the bars. In an operation near Iqbal Shaheed Toll Plaza, GT Road, Attock, 5.5 kgs hashish was recovered from a rickshaw and two drug traffickers were apprehended.

The spokesperson informed that other raids were conducted in different areas of the country and ANF teams rounded up drug traffickers on recovery of drugs. Cases have been registered under the CNS Act against the arrested accused, informed the spokesperson.



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Saudi Arabia to Pakistan, Mr. Nawaf bin Said Al-Malki, called on President Asif Ali Zardari, at Aiwan-e-Sadr.

Envoy highlights depth of Pak-UAE ties at ECSSR session

F.P. Report

ABU DHABI: Pakistan's Ambassador to the UAE, Faisal Niaz Tirmizi, participated in a dialogue session hosted by the Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research (ECSSR) in Abu Dhabi. He was warmly received by ECSSR Director General Dr. Sultan Mohammed Al Nuaimi. The session, titled "UAE-Pakistan Bilateral Relations," was moderated by Mr. Nasser Al-Banna and focused on strengthening strategic cooperation between the two nations.

Ambassador Tirmizi emphasized the deep-rooted ties between Pakistan and the UAE, based on shared values, strong cultural bonds, and people-to-people connections. He highlighted the contribution of 1.7 million Pakistanis living and working in the UAE. He pointed to recent high-level engagements - including visits by the Abu Dhabi Crown Prince and the UAE Foreign Minister to Pakistan - as signs of growing bilateral momentum. The successful conclusion of the 12th Joint Commission further reflects this progress.

On regional security, the



Ambassador reiterated both countries' shared commitment to combat terrorism and promote peace. He also commended the UAE's diplomatic and humanitarian efforts in Gaza and called for an immediate ceasefire.

Addressing a question on the Indus Waters Treaty, he affirmed that the agreement cannot be unilaterally

revoked and welcomed the recent ruling of the Permanent Court of Arbitration in Pakistan's favor. Ambassador Tirmizi concluded by encouraging greater collaboration between academic and research institutions in both countries to strengthen mutual understanding and tackle shared global challenges.

Court orders production of Imran

F.P. Report

LAHORE: A court on Friday issued non-bailable arrest warrants Senate opposition leader Shibli Faraz in connection with an alleged assault on Islamabad police officers stationed outside Zaman Park residence of PTI founder and ordered Imran Khan's production in the court on July 30.

The case, registered at the Race Course police station, stems from clashes between PTI supporters and police during a tense stand-off outside the former prime minister's home.

The case was heard by Judicial Magistrate Sohail Rafiq, who also issued a written verdict in this regard. During the hearing at Lahore's Cantt Kutcheri, the magistrate directed jail authorities to ensure Imran Khan's appearance, as he is incarcerated in Adiala Jail, Rawalpindi.

Thailand, Cambodia clashes kill 15

BANGKOK: At least 14 people have been killed in Thailand and another in Cambodia in fighting between Thai and Cambodian troops, authorities say, as more than 120,000 people living along both sides of their border flee the ongoing violence. Deadly fighting continued for a second day on Friday as both countries traded heavy artillery and rocket fire in the bloodiest military confrontation between the two Southeast Asian neighbours in more than a decade.

"The situation has intensified and could escalate into a state of war," acting Thai Prime Minister Phumtham Wechayachai told reporters. Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet said he had backed a ceasefire proposal put forward by his Malaysian counterpart and chairperson of the ASEAN, Anwar Ibrahim, but added that Thailand withdrew its backing of the plan after initially agreeing to it.

In a Facebook post, Hun Manet described Thailand's decision as "regrettable". "The key to resolving the current armed conflict between Thailand and Cambodia is the genuine willingness of the Thai side to accept a ceasefire," Hun Manet said. Thailand's foreign ministry said later that it agreed in principle with the Malaysian proposal for a ceasefire and will consider the plan, but that it must be based on "appropriate on-the-ground conditions". — Aljazeera

Senate hails Presidential address to Parliament

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Senate of Pakistan on Friday extended formal appreciation for the Presidential Address to the joint session of Parliament, delivered on March 10 of the current year. The motion of thanks was moved by Barrister Aqeel Malik, Minister of State for Law and Justice, on behalf of Dr. Tariq Fazal Chaudhary, Minister for Parliamentary Affairs.

The motion sought the House's consent to record its sincere gratitude for the President's Address, acknowledging its significance in framing national priorities and parliamentary discourse. In speeches delivered during the motion of thanks, treasury members hailed the president's address as "a strategic road-map for a resilient and prosperous Pakistan."

Sensors from both sides of the aisle addressed multiple issues, raised by the president in his address to both Houses of Parliament, marking the commencement of the new parliamentary year. Senator Waqar Mehdi underscored the unprecedented milestone achieved by President Asif Ali Zardari, the only individual in Pakistan's history to be elected to the presidency twice.

Mehdi underscored President Zardari's reconciliation-driven approach, recalling his voluntary transfer of presidential powers to Parliament through the 18th Amendment. He also noted Zardari's endurance through 12.5 years of imprisonment, culminating in acquittals by the courts. Touching on recent government decisions, Mehdi said canal construction had been suspended following a movement, spearheaded by PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari. Meanwhile, Senator Saifullah Abro voiced concern over rising sugar prices, warning of deepening public hardship and calling for urgent corrective and remedial measures.

Senator Masroor Ahsan extended birthday felicitations to President Asif Ali Zardari. Ahsan lauded the speech for its inclusive focus on farmers, laborers, and other marginalized segments of society, emphasizing the administration's continued commitment to social equity and economic resilience.

Minister for Parliamentary Affairs Dr. Tariq Fazal Chaudhry also informed the Senate that no literary, cultural and academic institutions were being closed rather additional expenditures were being curtailed to ensure greater transparency.

Responding to a Calling Attention Notice raised by Sarmad Ali regarding the proposed closure and merger of several prominent literary, academic, and cultural institutions, the minister clarified that the government had not abolished any ministry. He said that only

some recommendations were made to enhance transparency. Some ministries, such as the Aviation Division, were merged with the Ministry of Defence, he said.

Later, speaking in the House, Irfan-ul-Haque Siddiqui said he had raised the issue along with the Leader of the Opposition and the PPP. He said that the Prime Minister had also taken notice of the matter, and the PM House had issued a statement clarifying that no such institution was being closed.

Two important reports pertaining to fiscal monitoring and child rights were laid before the Senate during the ongoing session of the Upper House. Dr. Tariq Fazal Chaudhary, Minister for Parliamentary Affairs, laid the 1st Biannual Report on Monitoring of the Implementation of the 7th NFC Award for the period from July to December 2022, on behalf of Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb, Minister for Finance and Revenue. The report was presented under clause (3B) of Article 160 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

He also laid the Annual Report 2024-2025 of the National Commission on the Rights of Child on behalf of Senator Azam Nazeer Tarar, Minister for Human Rights. The report was submitted in accordance with sub-section (1) of section 17 of the National Commission on the Rights of Child Act, 2017.

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Iran, Europeans hold 'frank' nuclear talks

TEHRAN (Reuters): Iran said it would continue nuclear talks with European powers after "serious, frank, and detailed" conversations on Friday, the first such face-to-face meeting since Israel and the United States bombed Iran last month.

Before the meeting in Istanbul, Iran also pushed back on suggestions of extending the United Nations resolution that ratifies a 2015 deal, nearing expiry, that was designed to curb its nuclear programme. Delegations from the European Union and the so-called E3 group of France, Britain and Germany met Iranian counterparts for about four hours at Iran's consulate for talks that the UN nuclear watchdog said could provide an opening to resume inspections in Iran.

Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Kazem Gharibabadi

said afterwards that both sides had presented specific ideas on sanctions relief and the nuclear issue. "While seriously criticising their stances regarding the recent war of aggression against our people, we explained our principled positions, including on the so-called snapback mechanism," he said.

"It was agreed that consultations on this matter will continue." The European countries, along with China and Russia, are the remaining parties to the 2015 deal — from which the US withdrew in 2018 — which lifted sanctions on Iran in return for restrictions on its nuclear programme. A deadline of October 18 is fast approaching when the resolution governing that deal expires.

At that point, all UN sanctions on Iran will be lifted

unless the "snapback" mechanism is triggered at least 30 days before. This would automatically reimpose those sanctions, which target sectors from hydrocarbons to banking and defence. To give time for this to happen, the E3 have set a deadline of the end of August to revive diplomacy. Diplomats say they want Iran to take concrete steps to convince them to extend the deadline by up to six months.

Iran would need to make commitments on key issues, including eventual talks with Washington, full cooperation with the UN's International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and accounting for 400 kilograms (880 pounds) of near-weapons-grade highly enriched uranium, whose whereabouts are unknown since last month's strikes.

Pakistan a peaceful country: DG ISPR

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Director General of Inter-Services Public Relations Lt General Ahmed Sharif has termed the victory of Pakistan Army in Operation Bunyanum Marsoos as a collective victory of the entire nation.

The ISPR DG during a special session with representatives of different religions, youth and students in Lahore said the entire nation, without any religious discrimination, stands like a rock in front of the enemy in difficult times and emerges victorious.

He said the enemy will always face disappointment in his nefarious objectives due to our national unity and solidarity. He said people of all religions living in Pakistan are united against the enemy.

The DG ISPR said Pakistan is a peaceful and progressive country and interfaith harmony is the basis of our national strength. Lt General Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry said the role of youth is most important for the bright future of the beloved country. The students paid tributes to the Pakistani Armed Forces for the historic victory of Operation Bunyanum Marsoos.

PHC directs NAB to stop harrassment of private firm

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: The Peshawar High Court (PHC) has directed the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) to follow the law in its investigation into the Upper Kohistan scandal, in which a private firm's assets were frozen. A two-member bench comprising Justice Ijaz Anwar and Justice Fahim Wali heard the petition, on Friday.

The counsel informed the court that NAB had frozen the petitioner's assets, which was incorrect. Justice Ijaz Anwar asked how such a large amount of money had reached Kohistan, to which the petitioner's counsel replied that the money had come from government accounts.

The counsel further argued that the petitioner was not primarily accused in the case and that others involved in the scandal, including officials from the Accountant General's office, were more culpable.

NAB's Special Prosecutor, Arbab Kaleemullah, stated that the investigation was ongoing and that the petitioner was being investigated. The bench directed that the petitioner would join the investigation and that the law would be followed in dealing with the petitioner.

The court directed NAB to follow the law in its investigation and not to harass the petitioner. The court noted that the law requires confirmation from the Accountability Court within 14 days for freezing assets, but in this case, 30 days had passed. The court directed the petitioner to join the investigation and for NAB to proceed according to law.

PPP approaches court

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Provincial President, Muhammad Ali Shah Bacha has filed an application under Section 22-A in the Sessions Court Peshawar against Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ali Amin Gandapur. The application has been filed through Goher Rahman Khattak, Arif Firdous, and Imran Khan advocates.

The application has made the Chief Minister, SSP, and SHO parties to the case. It is stated in the application that during a peaceful protest by the Peoples Party in Peshawar, shelling was carried out by individuals in plain clothes. The police later claimed that they did not conduct the shelling and, upon investigation, it was discovered that the shelling was carried out by Ali Amin Gandapur's personal affiliates. The application alleges that the shells used during the shelling were expired and that several workers were injured as a result.

France will recognise State of Palestine: Macron

Israel and US recall teams from Gaza truce talks

JERUSALEM/CAIRO (Reuters): Israel and the United States recalled their delegations from Gaza ceasefire talks for consultations, with US envoy Steve Witkoff accusing the Palestinian group Hamas of failing to act in good faith in the talks. It marked the latest setback in efforts to secure a deal that would bring a ceasefire to Gaza, secure the release of Israeli hostages held by Hamas, and bring respite to Palestinians suffering a sharply worsening humanitarian crisis.

Witkoff said mediators had made a great effort but "Hamas does not appear to be coordinated or acting in good faith." "We will now consider alternative options to bring the hostages home and try to create a more stable environment for the people of Gaza," he wrote on X. There was no immediate reaction from Hamas. An Israeli official with knowledge of the talks said Hamas' response to the latest ceasefire proposal "does not allow for progress without a concession" by the group but that Israel intended to continue discussions. Both Israel and Hamas are facing pressure at home and abroad to reach a deal following almost two years of war, with the humanitarian situation inside Gaza deteriorating and Israelis worried about the conditions in which hostages are being held. Dozens of people have starved to death in Gaza the last few weeks as a wave of hunger crashes on the enclave, according to local health authorities. British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said the suffering and starvation in Gaza was an "unspeakable and indefensible" humanitarian catastrophe and called on Israel to urgently let in aid. "While the situation has been grave for some time, it has reached new depths and continues to worsen. We are witnessing a humanitarian catastrophe," Starmer said in a statement.

Macron said the "urgent priority today is to end the war in Gaza and rescue the civilian population". "We must finally build the State of Palestine, ensure its viability and enable it, by accepting its demilitarisation and fully recognising Israel, to contribute to the security of all in the Middle East," he wrote on social media. On the streets of the occupied West Bank, Palestinians told AFP that they hoped other countries would now follow suit.

Mahmoud al-Ifranji called France's pledge "a moral commitment" and a "political victory for the Palestinian people". Another man, Nahed Abu Taima, said he hopes France's decision will help lead to peace. "This recognition will lead to the recognition of Palestine by a number of countries in Europe and the world," he added.

Macron said he intended to make the announcement at the UN General Assembly in September. While France would be the most significant European power to recognise a Palestinian state, others have hinted they could do the same. Britain's Prime

Minister Keir Starmer announced he would hold a call on Friday with counterparts in Germany and France on efforts to stop the fighting, adding that a ceasefire would "put us on a path to the recognition of a Palestinian state".

Norway, Spain, Ireland and Slovenia all announced recognition following the outbreak of the Gaza conflict, along with several other non-European countries. Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez, whose country already recognises Palestinian statehood, welcomed Macron's announcement.

"Together, we must protect what Netanyahu is trying to destroy. The two-state solution is the only solution," the Socialist leader, an outspoken critic of Israel's offensive in Gaza, wrote on X. Saudi Arabia's foreign ministry hailed Macron's announcement as "historic" and urged other countries to follow suit. Ireland's Foreign Minister Simon Harris in a post on X called France's move "the only lasting basis for peace and security for Israelis and Palestinians alike".

GSP Plus scheme

(Continued from Page 1)

The meeting was informed that more than 500,000 people have registered under the Digital Youth Hub so far, while more than 1.7 million people have downloaded its application.

In addition to that more than 500 companies got registered. There were more than 47,000 employment opportunities in Pakistan and more than 100,000 jobs were available abroad besides availability of more than 2,000 scholarships. More than 500 institutions, including Pakistani embassies abroad, government agencies, private companies and other NGOs, including the United Nations, are connected to the portal. Federal Ministers Ahad Khan Cheema, Attaullah Tarar, Chairman Prime Minister's Youth Programme Rana Mashhood Ahmed Khan, Member National Assembly Amina Batool and relevant senior officials attended the meeting.

Premier reviews progress of PPPA on appointment of technical experts: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif chaired a high-level review meeting to assess progress on the appointment of technical experts across federal ministries and departments, and to discuss measures for enhancing foreign investment.

The Public-Private Partnership Authority presented a detailed briefing on current initiatives and future plans aimed at streamlining expert appointments and increasing investor confidence.

The prime minister, highlighting institutional reforms in the federal government as a top priority, said "We are fully committed to implementing our agenda of economic digitization, rightsizing public institutions, and ensuring merit-based appointments of experts in government departments."

He also stressed that there will be no compromise on merit and transparency in the appointment of experts. During the briefing, the meeting was informed that so far, appointments had been made on 15 technical expert positions whereas appointment process was underway for 47 additional technical positions.

"Some 30 candidates have been shortlisted for the appointment of Chief Executive Officers, Chief Financial Officers, and Managing Directors in 7 key ministries and departments," the prime minister was informed. He was further told that initial rounds of interviews for appointments in the Petroleum Division and National Vocational and Technical Training Commission had been completed.

Federal ministries have designated focal teams to formulate strategies for investment and sectoral roadmaps for investment have also been prepared for Information Technology & Telecom, Railways, and Tourism. Sectoral frameworks related to investment in food security, maritime affairs, minerals, tourism, Industry, housing, and energy are in their final stages.

The prime minister was further informed that pitchbooks for 18 economic sectors had been prepared to allocate projects for investment from Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Azerbaijan, Qatar, and Kuwait. The meeting was attended by Minister for Planning Ahsan Iqbal, Minister for Economic Affairs Ahad Khan Cheema, Minister for Law and Justice Azam Nazeer Tarar, Prime Minister's Advisor on Industries and Production Haroon Akhtar, and other senior government officials.

PTI leader Mohsin joins PML-N: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif welcomed Nawabzada Mohsin Ali Khan, former provincial president of

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and ex-provincial minister, into the Pakistan League-Nawaz (PML-N) ranks during a meeting held here at the Prime Minister's Office.

Nawabzada Mohsin Ali Khan was accompanied by his son Shehryar and several close associates, all of whom formally announced their joining of the PML-N. The meeting was also attended by Federal Minister for Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan and PML-N Khyber Pakhtunkhwa President, Engineer Amir Muqam, a Prime Minister's Office news release said.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif warmly welcomed the new entrants and expressed confidence in Nawabzada Mohsin Ali Khan's ability to strengthen the party's outreach in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. "I hope you will play an active role in promoting the policies of PML-N in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and enhancing public engagement," the prime minister stated.

He further assured that the federal government remains committed to the welfare of the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and will continue to play every possible role to ensure peace and stability in the province.

Prime Minister meets Dr Aafia Siddiqui's sister: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif met with Dr. Fouzia Siddiqui, sister of Dr. Aafia Siddiqui, and assured that the government would continue to provide all possible legal and diplomatic support in the matter of Dr. Aafia Siddiqui.

The government is in no way negligent regarding the case of Dr. Aafia Siddiqui, the prime minister said. On the instructions of PM Shehbaz Sharif, the government has previously provided diplomatic and legal assistance in the case of Dr. Aafia Siddiqui, a press statement issued by the PM Office said.