

PM fast-tracks Alibaba-backed AI projects

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday directed relevant ministries to complete by November all necessary measures for projects being undertaken with Alibaba to advance artificial intelligence, digitalisation, exports and public service delivery.

He issued the directives while chairing a review meeting on progress in AI, digitalisation and cooperation with Alibaba in Pakistan's economy and governance sectors.

The prime minister said the effective use of digitalisation, AI and modern technology could improve trade, exports, agricultural productivity, ease of doing business and the quality of public services.

He welcomed Alibaba's cooperation in facilitating the export of Pakistani agricultural commodities to Chinese markets and called for the modernisation of the agricultural sector. He also endorsed collaboration on a digitalisation programme.

PM Shehbaz directed to implement an early cancer detection system with Alibaba's cooperation and ordered the launch of an AI training programme for IT graduates under the Ministry of Information Technology's Ignite

programme in collaboration with the company.

He also directed the Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (OGRA) to introduce an analytics system, in partnership with Alibaba, to monitor the petroleum products supply chain. The Export Promotion Board was instructed to work with Alibaba to increase Pakistan's exports.

The prime minister said a memorandum of understanding had been signed with Alibaba at its headquarters in Hangzhou during his visit to China, adding that AI and digitalisation were central to national development.

The government's priorities included fully benefiting from the strategic partnership with Alibaba, providing small and medium-sized enterprises access to global markets and creating new opportunities for technology-driven development, he said.

The prime minister directed that all projects under the partnership should be implemented with clear targets, timelines and effective monitoring to ensure tangible results. He asked the relevant ministries to submit a progress report after completing the required measures by November. **NEWS DESK**



Pakistan rejects Taliban Angoor Adda claim

Security forces crush ISKP network: 50 killed, over 100 held in 67 operations; Nine terrorists killed in twin operations in Balochistan

The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting on Wednesday dismissed a statement by Afghanistan's defence ministry regarding the firing at Angoor Adda border area, terming it a 'fabrication of lies'.

Afghan security forces opened unprovoked fire on Pakistan Army border posts and residential areas in the border area in Lower South Waziristan on Tuesday. The attack, which violated border protocols, claimed the life of one local and injured five, while provoking a swift response from security forces.

Subsequently, the Afghan defence ministry claimed that Pakistani military personnel 'without any provocation or justification' launched drones targeting the Angoor Adda bazaar and the commissioner's office in Paktika province. It claimed that Afghan forces 'launched retaliatory strikes against a nearby Pakistani military base and outposts', alleging that Pakistan was the aggressor.

In response, the ministry's fact-checking account on X said: '[The] Afghan Taliban regime's latest fabrication of lies on Angoor Adda



border incident again confirms their deceitful character.

"Fact of the matter is that their cowardly forces initiated unprovoked fire and mortar shelling on unarmed civilians on [the] Pakistani side," the ministry said, adding that the actions were following the 'pattern and instructions of their proxy masters India'.

Pakistan's security forces gave an immediate and effective response, the ministry said, adding that they inflicted heavy casualties as well as material losses on the Afghan side, including the

destruction of seven posts.

"Such lies of [the] Taliban regime's so-called official spokespersons carry no value and are part of a litany of fabricated stories that they keep on telling, mostly to their own people suffering under their imposed and non-representative regime," the ministry said.

According to officials, the firing originated from posts located inside Afghan territory and targeted Pakistani border posts with small and heavy weapons.

Sources said that Pakistani forces launched an immediate and

effective retaliatory action, engaging multiple Afghan Taliban border posts, mortar positions and defensive bunkers with small and heavy arms, including artillery. The "intense and accurate response" forced the Afghan Taliban to abandon their posts and flee.

The border at Angoor Adda is one of the most important and sensitive crossings along the Pak-Afghan border, serving as a key trade route and one of the main points of public movement between the two countries.

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Governor rule for 6 months, emergency till peace

Minister says govt open to dialogue with opposition

Minister for Parliamentary Affairs Dr Tariq Fazal Chaudhry has said governor's rule in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KP) will end after six months, while the emergency will remain in place until peace is restored in the province.

Speaking in the National Assembly on Wednesday, Chaudhry said the government aimed to restore peace within six months and maintained that the measures were necessary to address security threats rather than seize political power.

He clarified that governor's rule had been imposed across KP under Article 234 of the Constitution, while the emergency had been declared under Article 232. He said 12 districts most affected by terrorism had been granted special status, allowing police and security agencies to seek federal assistance directly without going through the chief minister's or governor's secretariat.

Rejecting allegations of political victimisation, Chaudhry said the government was targeting terrorists and those involved in attacks on civilians and security personnel, not any political party. He maintained that the administration was willing to engage the opposition in dialogue to build consensus on national security, counter-terrorism and economic stability.

The minister also defended the government's approach to negotiations with Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), recalling talks held on October 2 under National Assembly Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq.

According to Chaudhry, Interior

Minister Mohsin Naqvi presented seven proposals concerning counter-terrorism cooperation, including condemnation of terrorism, elimination of terrorist safe havens, implementation of the National Action Plan and cooperation with federal authorities and law enforcement agencies.

He said PTI representatives had expressed willingness to cooperate but lacked the authority to finalise an agreement. The proposals were subsequently sent to the KP leadership, which suggested changes. Chaudhry claimed that Chief Minister Sohail Afridi rejected successive drafts, including a fourth version prepared at around 2:30am, leading to the breakdown of

negotiations. Chaudhry urged the provincial leadership to cooperate with security institutions, saying verbal condemnation of terrorism was insufficient without practical action. He also called on Afghan authorities to prevent cross-border infiltration and eliminate terrorist safe havens, claiming Pakistan had exhausted diplomatic options through negotiations in Doha and Istanbul.

The minister rejected allegations that governor's rule was intended to gain control over KP's mineral resources. He said the people of each province had the first right to their natural wealth, but developing these resources was necessary to generate revenue for healthcare, education and other public services.

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Justice Kayani quits, cites executive control

The 26th and 27th Amendments have affected the independence and institutional integrity of the high courts, Justice Kayani observed in his resignation

Lahore High Court's (LHC) Justice Mohsin Akhtar Kayani resigned on Wednesday, citing personal reasons, including health concerns following a recent surgery, and 'reasons of conscience'.

In his resignation letter to the president of Pakistan, Justice Kayani said it had been a privilege for him to serve at the Islamabad High Court (IHC) and LHC.

"These years of judicial service remain among the most meaningful and fulfilling of my life. During my tenure, I have disposed of more than 23,000 cases of various categories, endeavouring always to uphold the Constitution, safeguard fundamental rights, and administer justice without fear or favour," he continued.

However, he added, "in my considered view, the changes introduced through the 26th and 27th Constitutional Amendments have compromised the independence and institutional integrity of the high courts".

"I have witnessed what I regard as the executive's growing control over judicial institutions, extending to the appointment and transfer of judges. Such interference has, in my assessment, seriously eroded public confidence in judicial independence and the

fairness of the judicial process."

Justice Kayani stated that of particular concern was the plight of the ordinary litigant, "who is the principal stakeholder in the justice system, yet whose suffering continues to deepen".

The needs of those seeking justice had too often been neglected, while other actors had become the 'beneficiaries of a system intended to serve them', he said.

"In these

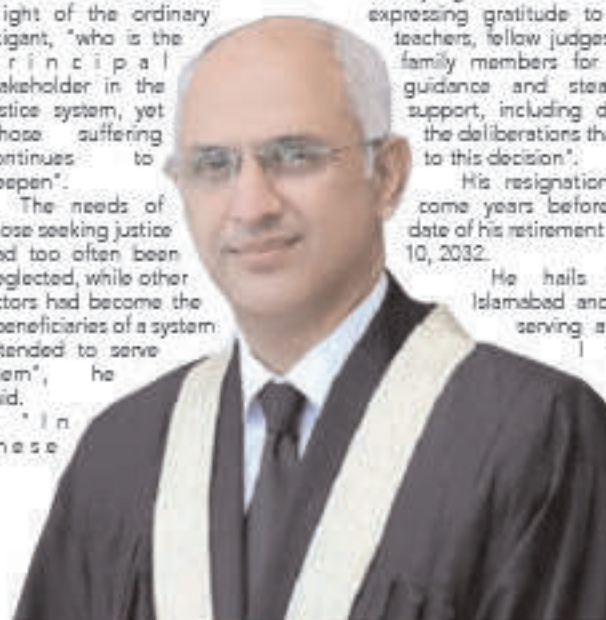
circumstances, my conscience does not permit me to continue on the bench. This is a painful decision, but it reflects my conviction that judicial office must remain inseparable from independence, fidelity to the Constitution, and the protection of human dignity.

"I, therefore, consider that the time has come for me to lay down my robes and return to legal practice, through which I intend to continue serving the people, protecting their rights, and promoting legal awareness," he added.

The judge ended his letter expressing gratitude to "my teachers, fellow judges and family members for their guidance and steadfast support, including during the deliberations that led to this decision".

His resignation has come years before the date of his retirement - Feb 10, 2032.

He hails from Islamabad and was serving at the IHC.



two other judges from the Sindh and Balochistan high courts, prompted him to challenge the inter-high court transfers.

The Supreme Court's constitutional bench upheld the transfers to the IHC, including that of Justice Dogar. The decision, however, triggered a broader legal battle.

Justice Kayani and other senior IHC judges approached the Supreme Court to challenge the administrative powers exercised by Chief Justice Dogar. They alleged that the office had been turned into a 'monocracy' and that judges could be excluded from the roster at will.

Following his own transfer to the LHC, Justice Kayani lost his seniority and was placed 10th on the high court's seniority list.

His resignation came days after he returned to the twin cities to preside over a single bench at the Rawalpindi registry following a reshuffle at the high court.

The new duty roster assigned him only to a single bench at the Rawalpindi registry despite his previous position as the IHC's senior puisne judge.

Justice Kayani was also one of the six IHC judges who had accused the country's intelligence apparatus of interference in judicial affairs, including attempts to pressure judges through abduction and torture of their relatives and secret surveillance inside their homes in a startling letter to the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) members in March 2024. **NEWS DESK**

FUEL PRICE UPDATE



PETROL
Increased by +Rs1.85 per litre
Rs377.91 / litre
↑ UP 1.85



HIGH-SPEED DIESEL
Increased by +Rs1.75 per litre
Rs399.82 / litre
↑ UP 1.75

World



IAEA finds no evidence Iran rebuilding nuclear sites

Money



Weir eyes long-term investment in minerals sector

Sports



Rauf fined for breaching ICC code of conduct

Glamour



Macklemore launches 'Free Palestine Tour'

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At least 64 dead in train crash in Spain

NATIONAL

DTM

Govt moves to ease business rules, attract investment



Adviser to the Prime Minister on Industries and Production Haroon Akhtar Khan, along with Sindh ministers Zia-ul-Hasan Larjar and Jam Khan Shoro, and Special Assistant to the Sindh Chief Minister on Investment and Public-Private Partnership Projects Qasim Naveed Qamar, on Wednesday announced initiatives to improve the ease of doing business and attract investment.

Haroon said the federal and provincial governments had been working together for the past year and a half to remove bureaucratic hurdles and make Pakistan more investor-friendly. Following a meeting with the Sindh government, the federal team plans to visit Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to advance the joint reform agenda.

"Businesses will no longer have to face bureaucratic hurdles by running from door to door," he said, adding that existing laws were being reviewed to facilitate investment and economic activity.

The adviser said amendments had been made to the Companies Act, while regulations governing restaurants, pharmacies and factories had also been revised. Under the proposed changes, licences would be issued within weeks. He added that the government was working to address the business community's concerns over institutional harassment and regulatory uncertainty.

Sindh Minister Jam Khan Shoro said a coordination committee formed by the prime minister had met in Sindh to discuss business-related difficulties. He said legislation aimed at ensuring the timely issuance of no-objection certificates (NOCs) had been sent to the Sindh cabinet.

Haroon stressed that investors needed security and confidence to bring capital into Pakistan, adding that even people with legitimate, declared wealth had previously been reluctant to invest. He said institutional reforms, including amendments to the National Accountability Bureau law, were intended to prevent harassment while maintaining accountability.

On investment and industrial development, Haroon announced that 6,409 acres of Pakistan Steel Mills land had been converted into a Special Economic Zone (SEZ). Investors would be offered land on renewable 30-year leases without advance payment, provided industries established there exported at least 50 per cent of their production. He acknowledged the Sindh government's cooperation in establishing the zone.

The adviser also outlined infrastructure plans aimed at improving connectivity between Karachi, the country's ports and other provinces. He said a ring road was being constructed to provide direct access to Karachi and the ports, while contracts for the remaining sections of the Sukkur and Khairpur projects were nearing completion. Work was also planned on the Sukkur-Hyderabad Motorway, which would connect with the port network.

Highlighting high freight costs, Haroon said rail transport could move goods at nearly half the cost of road transport. Freight train operations had begun, and the government was working to expand their number and capacity. He said the proposed ML-1 railway line would help reduce freight costs further, adding that negotiations with donor banks and financial institutions for financing the project were under way. Haroon said Karachi remained Pakistan's economic hub and that the government was committed to developing it into a leading financial centre. He also said the country had achieved stability and that relations between the coalition leadership and the establishment were harmonious. **NEWS DESK**

Minister Dharejo orders swift action on public complaints

Provincial Minister for Industries and Commerce Jam Ikramullah Dharejo spent a busy day at his office at the Sindh Secretariat, where he held meetings with various delegations and listened to their issues and concerns.

On the occasion, the provincial minister issued timely directives to the relevant officials for the prompt and effective resolution of public grievances and instructed them to ensure the necessary measures were taken. He also assured the visiting delegations of his full cooperation in resolving their problems.

Jam Ikramullah Dharejo reaffirmed the Sindh government's commitment to addressing public grievances, resolving difficulties faced by citizens, and ensuring the effective delivery of government services. He emphasized that the timely redressal of public complaints and the resolution of citizens' issues remained among the government's key priorities. **NEWS DESK**



Public service, democracy PPP's top priorities: Memon

Sindh Senior Minister and Provincial Minister for Information, Transport and Mass Transit, Sharjeel Inam Memon, has said that the focus of Pakistan Peoples Party's politics is public service and the supremacy of democracy and the Constitution.

The people want solutions to issues such as inflation, employment and basic facilities, while the Sindh government is continuously striving to provide basic facilities and employment to the people.

In a statement, he said that the establishment of industrial zones and other measures in the province are providing new employment opportunities to the people. The Sindh government is making efforts

to bring international investors forward for investment in industrial zones. If Sindh progresses, Pakistan's economy will also become stronger.

Memon said that all political parties would have to demonstrate seriousness, like the Pakistan Peoples Party, to face the challenges confronting the country. Political parties should focus their attention on public relief and practical

measures instead of rhetoric.

He said that Shahheed BB had dedicated her life to democracy, public rights and a strong federation. The Pakistan Peoples Party remains committed to her principles. The Sindh government is working to provide better transport facilities, development projects and basic services to the people. Our priority is to take such measures whose benefits reach the general public. **NEWS DESK**



Hashmi, UAE delegation discuss port investment

Sindh Governor Syed Nehal Hashmi met a high-level delegation from the United Arab Emirates' Abu Dhabi Ports Group to discuss ways to further strengthen trade and economic cooperation between Pakistan and the UAE.

During the meeting, the two sides explored investment opportunities in the blue economy, maritime trade, port development, logistics and supply chain sectors in Sindh. They also discussed avenues for expanding mutual cooperation in maritime commerce and port-related industries.

Governor Hashmi emphasized that promoting the blue economy was vital for Pakistan's economic growth and for creating new investment opportunities in the maritime sector. He underscored the importance of joint initiatives to further strengthen the longstanding friendly relations and trade ties between Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates.

The Abu Dhabi Ports Group delegation expressed interest in enhancing cooperation with Pakistan in logistics, maritime trade, port development and investment.

The meeting highlighted the potential for stronger bilateral collaboration to expand trade activities, attract investment and create new opportunities for sustainable economic growth.

The delegation included Salman Sohail Yasin, CEO, Etihad Cargo GSA Pakistan; Amir Munir, CEO, CEI Global Logistics Pakistan; Thorsten Pook, Managing Director, Middle East, Indian Subcontinent and CIS, Noatum Logistics; Shakeel Qureshi, Executive Director, Worldwide Group; and others. **NEWS DESK**



Experts call for innovation-based school learning

Education stakeholders have called for a dedicated budget and a formal policy on Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics (STEAM) education in Sindh to move beyond annual science festivals and integrate practical, innovation-based learning into mainstream schooling.

The call was made at a STEAM Policy Dialogue organised by the School Education and Literacy Department (SE&LD), through its Reform Support Unit (RSU), in collaboration with the Thar Education

build a lasting culture of scientific inquiry. They called for dedicated funding, a provincial STEAM policy and a coordinated science ecosystem that would enable students to engage in practical learning throughout the academic year. They also emphasised the need to provide students with exposure and opportunities at district, regional, provincial, national and international levels.

Teachers highlighted the shortage of facilities and resources needed to conduct science-related activities

assured participants of the department's support for STEAM initiatives and welcomed suggestions from stakeholders to strengthen science education.

The secretary also said 8,500 science teachers would be recruited and deployed in schools. He emphasised the need to link the curriculum with mainstream education and industry requirements to better prepare students for future opportunities.

Chief Executive Officer of TEA Farhat Shivani, Chief Manager Programmes of RSU Junaid Samoon, UNICEF representative Abeer Moqbool and Farhad Jarra and others also shared their views on strengthening STEAM education and promoting collaboration among education stakeholders.

The dialogue highlighted the need to translate the experience gained through science festivals into a long-term framework backed by policy, budgetary allocations, trained teachers and school-level resources, enabling students across Sindh to develop scientific thinking, creativity and problem-solving skills.

Students from Sindh who had participated in the Islamabad Science Festival also showcased their science models at the dialogue. Experts appreciated their work, highlighting the students' creativity, scientific thinking and potential to develop innovative solutions through practical learning.

In conclusion, a ceremony was also held to distribute Gauth AI subscriptions among the students and teachers who participated in the Islamabad Science Festival. Secretary Education Zahid Ali Abbasi and Campaigner CEO Farhad Jarra presented three-year Gauth AI subscriptions to the festival's winners, while participating students and teachers received annual subscriptions to support their learning, research and exploration of science and technology. **NEWS DESK**



Alliance (TEA). The dialogue aimed to examine how STEAM activities, initiated in 2017, could be translated into sustained classroom learning, institutional support and wider opportunities for students.

The dialogue brought together education officials, students, teachers, experts and representatives of science organisations to discuss gaps in school facilities, teacher capacity, curriculum integration and collaboration between educational institutions, government and industry.

Participants stressed that science festivals alone were not enough to

ties in schools, while students and experts shared their perspectives on making STEAM learning more accessible, relevant and engaging. Representatives of science organisations also discussed the importance of stronger institutional collaboration to support innovation and experimentation.

Secretary Education Zahid Ali Abbasi said the public-private partnership model was effective in expanding educational opportunities and highlighted the pivotal role played by children from Sindh at the Islamabad Science Festival. He

Sindhi language must adapt to digital era

An online discussion was organized by the Sindhi language authority under the title of "Digital era children and Sindhi language", in which eminent personalities expressed their views.

Speaking in this discussion, the famous broadcaster Naseer Mirza said that the Sindhi child is entering into a new digital era, in different eras, rhymed and prose materials were added to the curriculum for the interest of children, which were then presented on radio and television with electronic resources to attract the child, the language authority preserved children's educational songs through audio video CD, but now the world has developed even further, mobile applications on books and children's songs and it has become necessary to digitize the interest of children through animation.

Naseer Mirza further said that the curriculum that children read is now presented in the form of graphics and musical instruments in the discussion Writer and journalist Ghulam Mustafa Solangi's book "Digital Door Ja Digital Child", which he termed as a guide book for the society, parents and teachers, in which the advantages and potential disadvantages of the digital world are also told.

Renowned computing expert Professor Dr. Azhar Ali Shah said, "The world has now become a village, anthropologists have given different names to generations of different ages, today's youth are called Generation Z."

He said that screen time has been set according to age in different countries and their laws have been made, but we do not have any such rules, so the eyes stay on the screen all the time, which has a negative effect.

He further said that children who use mobile phones the material is helpful but some material can also be dangerous, the government, parents and teachers should keep an eye on them to keep the children safe. Renowned educationist and writer Dr. Parveen Musa Memon said, "Talking about this topic in the digital era is an important need of the time. Ghulam Mustafa Solangi has informed about the advantages and disadvantages of children living in the digital era in his book."

He said that today a child is given a mobile phone to keep him quiet, as a result of which the child stops talking, the mother's ear also becomes deaf, and away from the language, which is harmful for the mental development of any child. Parents should read this book. The author of the book Ghulam Mustafa Solangi said, "In the digital age, this kind of discussion on the digital child will give a positive message to the society."

In the current modern era, things have progressed a lot. Today, children who use mobile phones a lot can be taught about the advantages and disadvantages of digital through interesting and informative content through online classes.

They can also attract the child to the book. He said that the era has changed a lot. Teachers should keep an eye on the children's activities, especially the parents should stay close to the children.

He also said that I have tried to write about cyber threats in the book, but according to the current requirements, a separate organization should be established for the children and the parents should be informed about the cyber threats. **NEWS DESK**

Over 500 dolphins spotted off Gwadar coast

More than 500 dolphins were spotted leaping through the water near a boat during a fishing expedition off Gwadar, offering a spectacular glimpse of marine life in Pakistan's Arabian Sea waters.

The large pod has captured public attention and is being viewed as a positive sign for Gwadar's marine environment, highlighting the importance of conserving the country's coastal biodiversity.

The dolphins were seen moving and leaping near a boat during fishing activities in the waters off Gwadar, a coastal city in Balochistan. Their striking display has brought renewed attention to the marine life found along Pakistan's coastline.

The species identified in the report is scientifically known as

Tursiops aduncus. Commonly known as the Indo-Pacific bottlenose dolphin, it is found in coastal waters across parts of the Indian and western Pacific oceans. The presence of such a large group has been described as a positive development for Gwadar's marine environment and a reminder of the biodiversity supported by the Arabian Sea.

Pakistan's coastal waters are home to 26 species of cetaceans, a group that includes dolphins and whales. These waters also support turtles and other forms of marine life, making the Balochistan coastline an important part of the country's natural heritage. Dolphins and other marine animals play important roles in marine ecosystems. Protecting these species helps preserve biodiversity and maintain the ecological balance of coastal waters.

The sighting off Gwadar has further highlighted the richness of the region's marine environment and the need to safeguard it against threats to marine life. **INP**



NATIONAL

DTM

Poverty rate climbs to 28.9% as Pakistan loses earlier gains: Ahsan



Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Professor Ahsan Iqbal on Wednesday said Pakistan's poverty reduction momentum had suffered a serious setback after 2018, with the poverty rate rising to 28.9 per cent in 2024-25 from 21.9 per cent in 2018-19, amid political instability, economic crises, policy discontinuity and climate disasters.

Addressing an event titled "Pathways to a Poverty-Free Pakistan: Advancing Multidimensional Poverty Measurement for Evidence-Based Policy and Action," the minister called for evidence-based policies, targeted public investment and sustainable poverty reduction.

Among others, the event was attended by Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) Director Professor Sabina Alkire, government officials, development partners, researchers and academics.

Ahsan Iqbal said monetary poverty fell from 29.5 per cent in 2013-14 to 24.3 per cent in 2015-16 during the PML-N government's 2013-18 tenure, when economic growth, development investment, and human development remained key priorities under Vision 2025. However, political uncertainty, interrupted development policies, the COVID-19 pandemic, devastating floods and severe macroeconomic pressures, including the threat of financial default in 2022, had undermined earlier gains, he said, stressing that political stability, sustained economic growth and policy continuity were essential to reversing the trend.

Highlighting constraints on development financing, the minister said the federal Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) stood at Rs1,001 billion in 2017-18, equivalent to 19.6 per cent of the federal budget and 2.5 per cent of GDP. The allocation for 2026-27 remained around Rs1 trillion in nominal terms, despite population growth, rising prices and expanding development needs.

Had the 2017-18 share of the federal budget been exceeded, the development programme would now exceed Rs3 trillion, he said, warning that limited public investment was affecting education, healthcare, water security, infrastructure, skills development and economic opportunities, particularly in disadvantaged regions. The minister also called for completing the devolution process under the 18th Constitutional Amendment, noting that provinces received 57.5 per cent of the federal divisible pool under the 7th National Finance Commission Award and held primary responsibility for education, healthcare and social welfare. However, the expanded fiscal space had not consistently translated into the required improvements in essential public services.

He stressed that Article 140A must be implemented meaningfully by transferring political, administrative and financial authority to elected local governments, supported by functional Provincial Finance Commissions and transparent, needs-based resource allocations. Recalling Pakistan's collaboration with Oxford, Professor Iqbal said the country launched its first National Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) in 2016 in partnership with OPHI and the United

Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The index assessed overlapping deprivations in education, health and living standards beyond monetary poverty.

The MPI helped identify Pakistan's 20 poorest districts, including 11 in Balochistan, five in Sindh, three in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and one in Punjab, providing a basis for targeted development initiatives under the federal PSDP. Building on that experience, the government plans to develop the National MPI 2027 in collaboration with OPHI, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) and development partners, using data from the ongoing Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement Survey 2026-27.

The updated assessment would examine emerging challenges, including climate vulnerability, insecurity, youth deprivation, gender inequality, digital exclusion, early childhood development, nutrition, stunting and migration. The minister emphasised that new indicators and thematic studies must be backed by reliable data and sound methodology.

He said the proposed collaboration would also explore multidimensional poverty analysis at National and Provincial Assembly constituency levels, drawing on the 2023 Population and Housing Census. Such evidence could help elected representatives identify local development gaps, strengthen public accountability and build consensus on social investment. Ahsan Iqbal called on the Planning Commission, PBS, Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE), provincial planning departments, academia and development partners to integrate poverty evidence into development planning, PSDP prioritisation, social protection and monitoring of development outcomes. The proposed partnership would also examine the relationship between monetary and multidimensional poverty, strengthen institutional capacity and improve the use of poverty data in resource allocation and social protection targeting.

He said Pakistan's poverty reduction agenda under URAAN Pakistan must combine macroeconomic stability with sustained investment in human development, stronger institutional accountability and equal opportunities for citizens. The success of development policy, he added, should be measured not merely through public expenditure or completed projects, but by tangible improvements in education, health and livelihoods and by families' ability to escape multidimensional poverty. **NEWS DESK**

CCD eliminate two 'killers' of 5-year-old Aun

Two suspects allegedly involved in the rape and murder of five-year-old Aun Abbas were killed in an encounter with the Crime Control Department (CCD) police in Muridke tehsil of Sheikhupura district on Wednesday, police said.

According to a police spokesperson, four suspected robbers were allegedly engaged in a robbery on 34 Chak Road when they opened fire on a police mobile upon seeing it. In the ensuing exchange of fire, two suspects were killed, while the other two managed to escape. The killed suspects were identified as Asif and his friend Muneeb. Police said investigations into the child's death had revealed that the suspects were allegedly involved in sexually assaulting and murdering him.

According to police, the suspects were neighbours of Aun Abbas, and they had killed the child and disposed of his body in a village pond. Aun Abbas was the only brother of five sisters.

Police claimed to have recovered weapons from the deceased suspects. Their bodies were shifted to the Tehsil Headquarters (THQ) Hospital for legal formalities. Police have launched a search operation to arrest the two fleeing suspects, officials said.

Earlier on Oct 13, 2026, a suspect accused of sexually assaulting and murdering his 15-year-old niece was killed in an alleged encounter with a team of the Crime Control Department (CCD) in Rawalpindi, police said. The suspect, identified as Mumtaz Abbasi, a resident of Abbottabad, was killed during an exchange of gunfire near Alamabad Stop, close to Children's Park, in the jurisdiction of Ratta Amral Police Station. **AP**

Arrest warrants for Sohail Afridi, three PTI leaders

An anti-terrorism court has issued arrest warrants for suspended Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Sohail Afridi and three other Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leaders in a case related to the May 9 attack on Radio Pakistan.

Judge Wali Muhammad heard the case, during which the public prosecutor submitted the police challan before the court. The PTI counsel sought more time to prepare the case and requested the court to adjourn the hearing.

However, the court observed that the challan had been submitted and the accused had been nominated in the case. The court subsequently issued arrest warrants for Sohail Afridi, Taimur Saleem Jhagra, Kamran Bangash and Irfan Saleem. **NEWS DESK**



Lahore again ranks world's most polluted city



Lahore was ranked the world's most polluted major city on Wednesday morning as smog thickened over the city with the onset of colder weather.

In the past few years, air pollution has become one of the most pressing public health and environmental crises facing Pakistan. Various cities of the country, most notably Lahore, deal with smog, especially in the winter months. The phenomenon is attributed mainly to industrial emissions, vehicular pollution, stubble burning and air movement. According to the live air quality ranking published by Swiss air quality monitoring platform IQAir, Lahore recorded an Air Quality Index (AQI) of 296 at 10am on October 28, placing it at the top of the list of the world's major cities. Cairo ranked second with an AQI of 289, followed by Delhi at 272. Tashkent stood fourth with an AQI of 186, while Karachi ranked fifth at 173, according to the ranking.

The readings placed Lahore and Cairo in the 'very unhealthy' category under the US AQI scale, while Delhi's air quality was also in the same category. An AQI reading of 296 indicates a high level of air pollution that can pose health risks, particularly for children, older people and those with respiratory or heart conditions. **AP**

Ulema reaffirm fatwa against terrorism

A joint meeting of religious scholars, spiritual leaders and representatives of different faiths, organised by the National Paigham-e-Aman Committee, and the Provincial Paigham-e-Aman Committee, Balochistan, was held at Jamia Salafia Dawat-ul-Haq under the chairmanship of Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mehmood Ashrafi, Chairman of the Pakistan Ulema Council and Coordinator of the National Paigham-e-Aman Committee.

Maulana Ali Muhammad Abu Turab, Dr. Asif Mir, Mufti Yousaf Kashmiri, Maulana Syed Samiullah Agha, Maulana Qasim Haqqani, Allama Nazrullah Hussaini, Mufti Muhammad Jan Qasmi, Maulana Hizbulah Usmani, Maulana Samiullah Awan, Maulana Abdul Rahman, Maulana Abdullah Haqqani, Mufti Umar Farooq, Maulana Abdur Rahman Salafi, Pastor Simon Bashir, Sardar Jasbir Singh and other religious scholars, spiritual leaders and representatives of different faiths attended the meeting.

In a unanimous declaration, they reaffirmed the consensus fatwa against suicide attacks, terrorism, extremism and the killing of innocent people, while fully endorsing the national narrative of Paigham-e-Pakistan.

The declaration stated that suicide attacks are forbidden in Islam, the killing of innocent people is impermissible, and terrorism is contrary to the fundamental teachings of Islam and all religions. No individual, group or organisation has the right to engage in bloodshed, carry out armed actions against the state or take the law into its own hands in the name of religion, sect or any ideology.

Strongly condemning the use of innocent women, children, young people and students for terrorism and suicide attacks, the declaration stated that such acts are religiously forbidden, morally reprehensible and serious crimes against humanity. It added that those who mislead the younger generation and turn them into fuel for terrorism are enemies of human life and Pakistan's future.

The declaration expressed full support for the efforts of the Pakistan Army and national security institutions against Fitna al-Khawarij and Fitna al-Hinduzan. It stated that the entire nation stood alongside the Pakistan Army in eliminating terrorism and safeguarding national security

and stability. Protecting Pakistan's security, stability and the lives and property of its people was described as a shared national responsibility.

The declaration emphasised that peace in Balochistan is essential for sustainable peace in Pakistan and that establishing peace and stability in the province remains a top priority. Religious scholars, spiritual leaders and representatives of different faiths stand united against terrorism, extremism and sectarian violence. No one can be allowed to undermine peace in Pakistan, particularly in Balochistan, under the guise of religion or sect.

They pledged to continue joint efforts to promote inter-sectarian and interfaith harmony, religious tolerance, national unity and peace in Balochistan. They also expressed their commitment to addressing issues faced by mosques and religious seminaries and strengthening cooperation with the government and relevant institutions.

The declaration stated that religious scholars, faith leaders, teachers and prominent social figures would work together to protect the younger generation from extremist ideologies, hate propaganda and the influence of terrorist organisations. Mosques, religious seminaries, educational institutions and religious and social centres would be used to spread the messages of peace, tolerance, unity and national cohesion. Religious scholars and leaders of different faiths jointly appealed to young people and students not to fall prey to the misleading slogans, false promises and negative propaganda of terrorist and extremist elements, and not to allow themselves to be exploited by such groups under any circumstances.

During the meeting, a unanimous resolution paid tribute to Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir for his efforts and services towards unity in the Muslim world, Muslim Ummah cohesion, regional stability and global peace.

The resolution stated that his diplomatic efforts to promote peace and negotiations between the United States and Iran, improve relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran, and facilitate high-level talks among Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Türkiye and Iran in Tehran on October 26 were commendable. **NEWS DESK**

TB deaths lower than estimated figures, early diagnosis improving: NA told

Parliamentary Secretary for National Health Services, Regulation and Coordination Nelson Azeem on Wednesday informed the National Assembly that the government was strengthening tuberculosis (TB) diagnosis and treatment services across the country.

Responding to a Calling Attention Notice regarding the rising number of TB cases and an estimated 140 deaths per day, he said the figure was based on World Health Organization (WHO) estimates for countries with similar population and income levels and did not necessarily represent deaths directly attributable to TB.

He said available data suggested that the number of deaths directly associated with the disease was considerably lower.

He added that the government was working to further reduce TB-related deaths through early diagnosis and timely treatment.

The parliamentary secretary said the government was providing free treatment

to registered patients and had expanded diagnostic services to facilitate the early identification of cases.

Teams were also visiting households to test people and bring patients into the treatment network.

He said public hospitals, basic health units (BHUs), private clinics and other healthcare facilities were working together to improve access to diagnosis and treatment, particularly in underserved areas.

Responding to a supplementary question, Nelson Azeem said the number of reported cases appeared to be increasing partly because more patients were now being diagnosed through expanded testing. Previously, many patients had remained undetected and had not received timely treatment, he added.

He said international assistance, including funding from the Global Fund, was supporting disease-control efforts through the relevant government mechanism. The programme also provided nutritional assis-

tance of Rs10,000 to Rs12,000 to patients with drug-resistant TB, he added.

The parliamentary secretary said TB was more prevalent in rural areas because of poverty and poor hygienic conditions.

He said diagnostic and treatment facilities had been extended to the BHU level and were also available at federal government hospitals to enable earlier detection and prompt treatment.

He reaffirmed the government's commitment to improving TB control through expanded testing, free treatment and better access to healthcare services. **AP**

NA extends OGRA Amendment Ordinance for 120 days: The National Assembly adopted a resolution to extend the Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (Amendment) Ordinance, 2026 [V of 2026], for a further period of 120 days with effect from October 28, 2026.

The resolution stated: "That the National Assembly resolves to extend the

Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (Amendment) Ordinance, 2026 [V of 2026], for a further period of one hundred and twenty days with effect from October 28, 2026, under the proviso to subparagraph (ii) of paragraph (a) of clause (2) of Article 89 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan."

Two bills sent to committees for further consideration:

The National Assembly on Wednesday introduced two bills and referred them to the relevant committees for further consideration and review. The bills include the Petroleum Products (Petroleum Levy and Climate Support Levy) (Amendment) Bill, 2026, seeking to further amend the Petroleum Products (Petroleum Levy and Climate Support Levy) Ordinance, 1961, and the Railway Board Bill, 2026, which seeks to provide for the revamping and reconstruction of the Railway Board. **NEWS DESK**

Fresh supplies bring down LPG prices

Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) supplies have started arriving in Lahore, bringing down its soaring prices. Following the arrival of new stocks in the city, the price of LPG dropped by Rs 50 per kg.

However, it is still being sold at inflated rates. Even after the Rs 50 reduction, LPG is currently selling for Rs 550 per kg. Commenting on the fresh arrivals, local LPG dealers noted that a further significant drop in prices is expected today.

Meanwhile, the government-fixed rate for LPG stands at Rs 279 per kg.

Citizens remain concerned as the fuel is still being sold at almost double the official government rate.

Earlier, the LPG price had soared to Rs. 550 per KG, almost double the Rs. 279.34 per kilo rate fixed by the Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (OGRA).

The mafia in the LPG sector fleecing consumers with inflated rates by jacking price of the fuel. A difference between the government-fixed rate and the artificially engineered market price of the LPG.

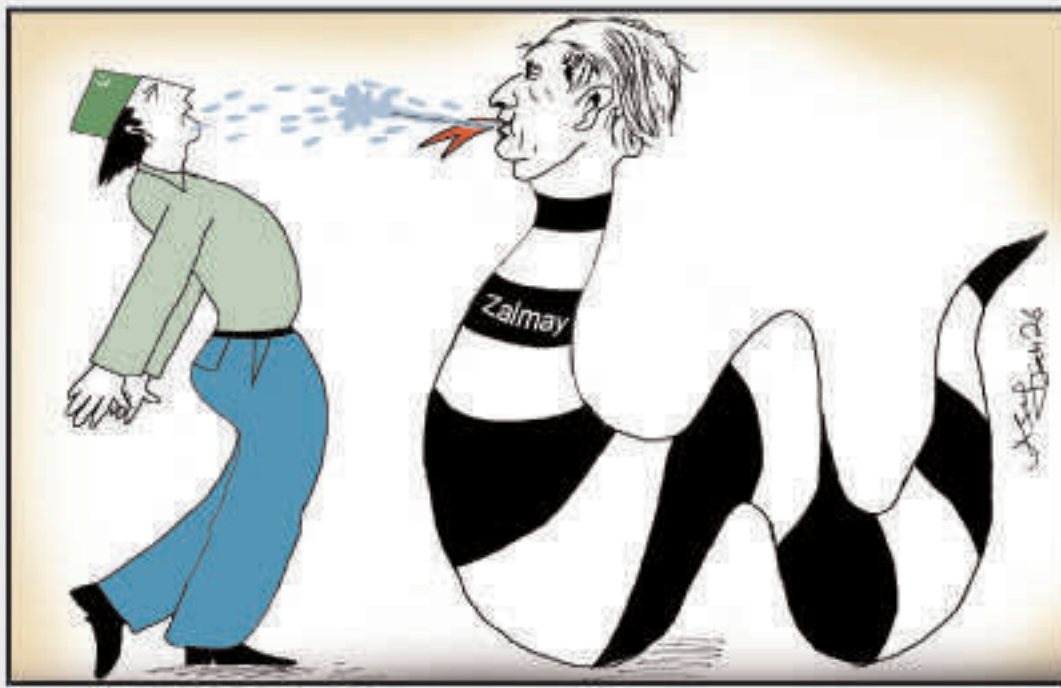
LPG Distributors Association Chairman Irfan Khokhar has said that the LPG companies charging inflated rates adding that the increased demand of the fuel being used for illegal profiteering. "There are countrywide reports of selling LPG between Rs 500 to 600 per kilogram," he said. The prices are apprehended to soar further with disruption in the supply, he said. "How could the market will stabilize if the government rates of the fuel not implemented," he said. He demanded curbing the alleged black-marketing of LPG and holding the people behind it, accountable.

It is pertinent to mention here that after the gas loadshedding, skyrocketing LPG prices have added further burden over the consumers as the fuel prices have hit hard to the low-income households with soaring cost of living. **AP**



EDITORIAL

DTM



Asim Munir's diplomacy offers hope

Chief of Defence Forces and Chief of Army Staff, Field Marshal Asim Munir, has emerged as an important diplomatic figure at a time when the Middle East faces the danger of a wider conflict. His participation in high-level talks in Tehran with Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian and officials from Saudi Arabia and Türkiye reflects Pakistan's efforts to encourage dialogue among countries whose cooperation is essential for regional stability. Pezeshkian called for greater unity among Muslim nations, arguing that regional challenges require collective responses rather than fragmented approaches. The discussions covered security, Palestine, Lebanon and the consequences of the ongoing US-Israeli war against Iran. While no detailed agreement was announced, the decision to continue consultations is a welcome development. Munir deserves credit for keeping diplomatic channels open at a time when mistrust and military confrontation threaten to push the region towards further instability. His engagement also highlights Pakistan's potential to serve as a bridge between regional powers and encourage solutions that do not depend entirely on outside actors.

The greater challenge now is to turn these diplomatic contacts into a sustained regional process. Iran, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and Pakistan have different strategic interests, but all have much to lose from a prolonged war and the disruption of vital trade and energy routes, particularly the Strait of Hormuz. Their participation in a common dialogue offers an opportunity to identify shared priorities and build confidence. Pakistan's role is especially important because it maintains relations with the major regional players and has an interest in preventing the conflict from spreading. Munir's engagement should therefore be seen not as a substitute for diplomacy by elected governments, but as a contribution to a broader national effort to promote peace. The support of civilian leaders, professional diplomatic engagement and continued consultation with all parties will be necessary to sustain this initiative. Field Marshal Asim Munir's latest engagement offers a constructive opening. Whether it produces meaningful progress will depend on the willingness of all sides to move beyond statements of unity and take practical steps towards de-escalation.

Energy cooperation must serve Pakistan

The renewed efforts to attract American investment in the energy sector offer an opportunity to strengthen bilateral relations and address the country's persistent energy challenges. However, the government must approach this opportunity with caution. Pakistan's experience with energy agreements in the past has shown that poorly negotiated contracts can impose heavy financial burdens on the national economy for years. The objective should not simply be to attract foreign investment, but to secure partnerships that are commercially sound, transparent and beneficial to Pakistan. Federal Minister for Petroleum Ali Pervaiz Malik's meeting with US Charge d'Affaires Natalie Baker is a welcome step towards expanding cooperation. Discussions covered energy security, fuel supplies, refinery upgrades and potential long-term agreements. Baker appreciated Pakistan's handling of fuel supplies amid regional uncertainty and expressed Washington's willingness to work with Islamabad. Interest from American companies in supplying liquefied natural gas (LNG) and investing in energy infrastructure could create new opportunities. Pakistan's efforts to improve domestic oil and gas production through technological partnerships, including the agreement between Oil and Gas Development Company Limited and Baker Hughes, also deserve attention.

Yet, the real test will be the terms of these arrangements. Pakistan has paid a high price for energy commitments that have restricted its financial flexibility and left consumers and taxpayers paying substantial costs. Long-term supply agreements, capacity payments, pricing formulas and foreign currency obligations require careful scrutiny. An agreement that appears attractive at the time of signing can become a liability if market conditions change or demand falls. The government must learn from past experience rather than repeat the same mistakes with a different set of partners. American investment could help modernize refineries, improve production from ageing fields, introduce advanced technology and diversify energy supplies. But these benefits must be assessed against their costs. Competitive bidding, independent financial assessments, clear contractual safeguards and parliamentary oversight should guide major agreements. T must also avoid excessive dependence on any single supplier and retain the flexibility to benefit from changing international prices.

Ban on the Two-Finger Test in Pakistan

Historically, medical reports and court proceedings included descriptions of women as "habituated to sex", "non-virgin" or women of "easy virtue". These labels were not just offensive to women; they influenced that way a survivor's allegation was understood. The banning of this practice shows how a woman's reputation does not determine whether she can be raped, and neither does her being sexually active mean that she has given permanent consent.

The two-finger test is also known as the virginity test and was used in rape or sexual assault cases to determine whether the survivor was a virgin or if they were habituated to sexual intercourse. The reasoning behind this was that a woman's sexual history could somehow indicate whether she had been raped.

Pakistan has constitutionally banned the "two-finger test" and hymen examination in rape cases, recognizing that these practices lack scientific merit and violate a victim's dignity. The legislation and court rulings underscore a critical shift away from using a survivor's sexual history to judge credibility, aiming to dismantle the harmful institutional habits and societal misconceptions surrounding sexual assault. Ultimately, these legal reforms demand a broader cultural change to ensure that rape investigations remain focused on the perpetrator's actions rather than the victim's morality.

Pakistan has finally declared that a victim's body cannot be used to determine whether they have been raped. The Lahore High Court, in the case of Sadaf Aziz and others v. Federation of Pakistan and others, (2021 P Cr. L J 205) held that the two-finger test and hymen examination without medical backing are now unconstitutional.

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Justice Ayesha Malik authored the judgment and also pointed out the negative impact that this type of testing has had on the mental health and dignity of victims. The judgment was reported by Dawn at the time.

The Supreme Court of Pakistan followed suit in the case of Atif Zareef, etc. vs. The State (PLD 2021 SC 550), where it held that observations about whether a vagina "admits two fingers easily" or whether a hymen is ruptured have no scientific or evidentiary relevance to determining whether rape has taken place or not. The Court also questioned the main assumption which lies behind these practices, which is that women who are sexually experienced may be less credible or may be more likely to have consented to sexual intercourse.

Section 13 of the Anti-Rape (Investigation and Trial) Act 2021 specifically prohibits two-finger virginity testing and says that it doesn't have probative value. It also says that evidence showing that a victim is generally of "immoral character" is inadmissible. This part is crucial because it shows that Parliament was not just trying to change a medical practice, but also the thinking behind it.

Enforcement of Section 13 of the Anti-Rape (Investigation and Trial) Act 2021 inside courtrooms is also important.

Previously, defense lawyers have a long history of relying on attacking a survivor's character to create doubt, using aggressive questions about her past, lifestyle, or relationships to undermine her credibility. Even though there are clear legal bans on virginity testing, defense strategies still try to raise the same doubts through indirect questions. This puts the burden on trial judges to strictly enforce Section 13 during trials in order to put an end to character-based arguments.

For a long time, police officers expected that a medico-legal certificate (MLC) would include a line about the victim's vaginal laxity or hymenal status. Investigative officers were used to these physical observations because they required minimal police work and shifted the focus of the investigation to the victim's morality instead of the perpetrator's actions. Even with the formal prohibition in place, eliminating this practice requires dismantling years of institutional habits. While the Anti-Rape Act mandates Special Sexual Offences Investigation Units (SSOUI) and Gender Protection Desks, many local police stations still don't have training nor basic understanding of trauma-informed interviewing.

Historically, medical reports and court proceedings included descriptions of women as "habituated to sex", "non-virgin" or women of "easy virtue". These labels were not just offensive to women; they influenced that way a survivor's allegation was understood. The banning of this practice shows how a woman's reputation does not determine whether she can be raped, and neither does her being sexually active mean that she has given permanent consent.

The two-finger test was actually about the belief that a woman's body can reveal her sexual history and that this could be used to determine if she is a credible rape survivor or not. This belief also has no medical backing. The World Health Organization, UN Human Rights, and UN Women have all stated that there is no scientific examination that can establish if a woman has had vaginal intercourse, and the appearance of the hymen also cannot prove whether she has had sex.

This shows how the real test is whether Pakistan is actually prepared to change the way it thinks about women who report rape. Now that Parliament and the courts have done their part, it is time for society to play its part too. This change is necessary so that Pakistan's can move on from backward practices such as this for good.

This acceptance is very important because true change can only happen when the thinking behind those practices changes too.



ANOUSHEY KHURRAM

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The Need for Strategic Autonomy in Pakistan's Foreign Policy-Part IV

This passage holds great importance at the time of writing this argument. Similar to the heating up of great-power rivalry in the early post-war years between the US and U.S.S.R., differences between China and the United States have also come out in the open with both sides pulling up their socks for a long-drawn strategic face-off (Moriyasu, 2021).

This puts Pakistan in virtually the same position as India must have found itself in its own time when Nehru was trying to balance his version of East against the West through the Non-Aligned Movement. The policy of not siding with any contestant but standing up for peace is the only viable policy for a developing country like Pakistan.

This is in line with Nehru's thinking when he was mapping the blueprints for India's foreign policy in his mind. The eastern traditions of community socialism and in the case of Pakistan, the Islamic heritage make it all the more pertinent that the economic welfare (Damodaran, 1981) of the people should supersede all other concerns in the pursuit of Pakistan's foreign policy.

The roots of strategic autonomy in India's foreign policy can be traced back even before the granting of independence. The traditions of Gandhian non-violent struggle and Nehru's flair with socialism came to heavily affect the shape of Indian foreign policy, which Nehru was crafting in his mind for post-independence India (Rana, 1969).

Detractors could argue why Pakistan must look towards India and the genesis of Indian foreign policy? The answer to this question can be had by making recourse to the fact that India made all the foreign policy choices, remaining non-aligned in face of perceived pressures from either of the two rival blocs of the cold war, while Pakistan joined the western camp and its system of alliances primarily because of the Indian menace.

The conflict between the cold war rivals was still a far cry from an actual military face-off. It was relegated to a much lower office because of the dawn of the nuclear age. As has been argued before that the security provided by the nuclear umbrella can be used by Pakistan to adopt a much more independent course of foreign policy.

Wouldn't it be helpful for Pakistan to learn a lesson from the same rival which forced Pakistan's hand to go nuclear? Isn't it a real "tragedy" that Pakistan has seen itself through the Indian mirror for far too long

(Kaplan, 2001)? In a world of adversity where you have to win a conflict, you don't talk down a strategy just because it has been employed by your rival.

If you are shrewd enough then you will try to acquire better weapons than your rival, and if you cannot get your hands on better weapons, then you will at least make sure that you have the same weapons as your rival. Wasn't this the same argument that led Pakistan to start its own nuclear program, after the Indian explosions of May 1974, codenamed "Buddha Smiles" (Aziz, 2020), to bring strategic balance to South Asia?

Commentators and pundits have been voicing the need for India and the United States to come together and cooperate even more closely (Center for American Progress Task Force on U.S.-India Relations, 2018), with added vehemence after border clashes between India and China in the summer of 2020.

Choosing sides has become more of a necessity for the Indian foreign policy establishment, especially in preparation for the post-Covid world (Abi-Habib, 2020). A formal alliance or a bilateral security treaty between the United States and India in the Indo-Pacific, may not become a reality too soon since there are many hiccups in the relationship (Baba and Ogawa, 2021).

India may not be willing to tie itself up with the United States alone (Jaishankar and Madan, 2021; Kaplan, 2014) but its possibility cannot be glossed over (Rachman, 2020). One thing is evident that there will be continued mutual reliance between the United States and India to protect their strategic interests (Tellis, 2020).

India's economic growth and regional clout do not sit well with China (Curtis, 2008). India is too big and too strategically situated for the United States to ignore (Dave, 2020). This has been evidenced by the growing cooperation between the two countries in areas of defense and intelligence sharing (Garamone, 2018; Thakker, 2020).

This presents an opportunity for Pakistan



UZAIR BIN FARID

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to pick up the Indian trail of strategic autonomy for its own regional benefits. The ups and downs of the US-Pakistan bilateral relationship are all too evident for Pakistan to keep sticking to its policy of being in the West's camp (Haqqani, 2013). Opportunities present themselves (Kugelman, 2021) and Pakistan should avail them to break free from the fold of great powers (Editorial, 2021) to establish its credibility as a reasonable cowboy who knows how to sling his gun.

International media and newspapers are replete with references to the start of a new Cold War, this time between the United States and China (Gladstone, 2020). The similarities between the two so-called Cold Wars are too common to ignore (Rachman, 2020) and their difference of geographic arena where the latest is playing out (The Economist Group Limited, 2021).

The start of the last Cold War between the United States and the USSR prompted India to start a movement of Non-aligned countries (Harshe, 1990), primarily to protect its own domestic and foreign interests. Pakistan also faces a stark opportunity in today's world of great-power rivalry (Friedman 2019). It can break off from the clutches of foreign policy needs of great powers and project a vision of foreign policy based on its domestic needs (Khattak, 2022).

The economic and social needs of the country should be reflected in the foreign policy choices of Pakistan. That can be accomplished by learning from the rival which has so often dictated and clouded Pakistan's foreign policy judgments. However, there is one unique side to the exercise of strategically autonomous foreign policy and that is Pakistan's relationship with China.

Pakistan's strategic relationship with China has helped it so many times in the past. Even during the Covid-19 pandemic, China has been generous enough to supply Pakistan with a million Sinopharm vaccine doses (Al Jazeera, 2021). Pakistan's strategic relationship with China should not hold it hostage to

making choices that would prove to be difficult to manage in the future.

Pakistan and China are too different. They only have common interests and contiguous geography. Pakistan should remain vigilant of the opportunities and pitfalls that its geography presents. Pakistan's geography should "inform" its maneuvers rather than "determine" them (Kaplan, 2015). As far as interests are concerned, it's fine that they bend together to help each other.

However, sooner or later, the ideological differences between the two countries are going to come to the surface of the relationship. One sticking point in the relationship will be the ethnic Uighur (Britannica, 2020) minority of the Xinjiang region. The persecution by the Chinese state of the Uighurs (Maizland, 2021) has invited condemnation from around the world (Besheer, 2020) but not from the leaders of Muslim countries especially Pakistan (I. Khan, 2019; Ma, 2019).

"Dismissive denials" are going to take Pakistan only too far. The probable end of America's war in Afghanistan (Folbab-Brown, 2021) and the feared take-over of its government by the Taliban (Boot, 2021) will be a harbinger for more destabilizing movements in the wider region. Threats are already being perceived in non-contiguous countries to Afghanistan, over a possible Taliban takeover which would stimulate other regional dynamics, like the Kashmir issue, for the worse (Migliani, 2021).

The possibility that a radical Taliban government in Afghanistan will motivate and inspire other latent movements of the region for self-determination and independence, as in the past, or look to expand, is a real one (Weinbaum, 1991; Scheuer, 2011). If such a scenario arises, Pakistan's search for strategic depth in Afghanistan may put it into a difficult position vis-à-vis its Taliban allies and China, since the threat of a revived East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) becomes a real one.

The ties of ETIM with Taliban and Al-Qaeda for that matter (Bajona, Fletcher and Xu, 2014) are only going to strengthen in post-US Afghanistan. These ties will be motivated by the extreme ideological underpinnings which have sustained the Taliban movement under extreme international military pressure for the last two decades.

Pakistan's strategic and foreign policy discourse has made extensive use of terms like "strategic-depth", "strategic-patience", "strategic-balance" and "strategic alliances".

It is time that Pakistan add one more term to describe its motivations of foreign policy choices and that is "strategic autonomy."

This addition will not only introduce a new dimension in Pakistan's foreign policy direction but also help in the practice and application of other strategic-driven objectives. Pakistan is bestowed with geography that makes the recourse to Hobbesian anarchy world of international domain more pertinent for understanding and making informed decisions.

The 21st-century dynamism of global politics and changing fortunes of power make it important for Pakistan to embrace a more reasonable, radical, and interest-driven course of foreign policy. This route can not be taken, however, if a special batch of diplomats specially trained to be nuanced and practicing a novel form of "cowboy diplomacy" are not put into the field.

"Shuttle diplomacy" of Henry Kissinger (Naftali, 2020), "quiet diplomacy" of Jaswant Singh and Vajpayee (Malone and Mulherjee, 2009), and the more recent "wolf-warrior diplomacy" of Chinese diplomats (Kazuihan 2020), are invitations enough for Pakistan's diplomats to embrace their own brand of "cowboy diplomacy", since Pakistan has always involved the most, in intercourse with the respective states of these brands of diplomacy.

Pakistan should embrace strategic autonomy not so much because it emanates from Pakistan's right to sovereignty. Rather, it should do so because embracing strategic autonomy by way of reasonable cowboy diplomacy will help Pakistan to exercise virtually full sovereignty. Learning from rivals and how they managed to protect their national interests by embracing strategic autonomy (Harshe, 1990), would be a wise choice of maneuvers.

Understanding the need for reasoned eloquence, keeping your distance, staying principled in an anarchic world, leveraging the impact of the US-Afghan war, and making adept use of cowboy diplomacy under the nuclear umbrella will help Pakistan waddle through the treacherous waters of a multipolar world. The need to invoke international law should be the last resort for Pakistan. The game should be played in such a manner that rules out the possibility of checkmate of Pakistan's move by other powers. At worst, Pakistan should strive to end the game at a stalemate.

OPINION

DTM



RAWALPINDI: Traditional drummers line Murree Road, seek work. ONLINE

Pakistan's Macro-Micro Security Dilemma

Modern forensic systems must be expanded. Intelligence coordination between federal and provincial institutions must improve. Counterterrorism prosecution mechanisms need transmutation. Border digitization security.id reduce infiltration risks. Most importantly, governance vacuums in neglected regions must be addressed because violent actors thrive where the state is absent, distrusted, or weak. Security ultimately is not about weapons alone.



MUHAMMAD UMAR

Muhammad Umar is an IR scholar with expertise in security studies and policy-making.

Pakistan often presents itself as a security state, and in many ways, that claim is justified. It possesses one of the world's most credible nuclear deterrents, a battle-tested military, and strategic capabilities robust enough to prevent any adversary from contemplating a full-scale invasion. Measured by conventional standards of state security, Pakistan is far from weak. It is difficult to coerce, expensive to attack, and nearly impossible to defeat outright.

So far, this strength conceals a deeper contradiction. A country that can deter war with a larger nuclear-armed neighbor still struggles to protect ordinary citizens in markets, mosques, schools, and on highways. The enlisted person guarding a stop in Balochistan, the shopkeeper in Quetta, and the worshipper attending Friday prayers often live under a level of insecurity that seems mutually exclusive with the image of a heavily securitized state. This falsehood reveals Pakistan's real security crisis: the state has become highly capable at defending itself from external threats while remaining insufficiently capable at protecting people from internal violence.

The core problem is not a complete absence of security. It is a failure to define security correctly. For decades, Pakistan's security doctrine has been shaped primarily by external threat perceptions. The unhealthiness of 1971, persistent hostility with India, and enduring conventional military imbalance pushed policymakers toward a strategic culture centered on deterrence. In that context, nuclear weapons, missile systems, and military modernisation were rational investments. They addressed an empirical problem: how to prevent a stronger mortal from imposing its will through force.

Since Pakistan became a declared nuclear power, no neighboring state has attempted a full-scale war aimed at dismantling Pakistani sovereignty. Even during severe military crises, the increase remained controlled. Deterrence imposed limits. It created caution. It raised the cost of war beyond acceptable thresholds. But rational motive solves only one kind of problem. A nuclear weapon cannot stop a suicide bomber. A ballistic missile cannot dismantle a sleeper cell.

Since Pakistan became a declared nuclear power, no neighboring state has attempted a full-scale war aimed at dismantling Pakistani sovereignty. Even during severe military crises, the increase remained controlled. Deterrence imposed limits. It created caution. It raised the cost of war beyond acceptable thresholds. But rational motive solves only one kind of problem. A nuclear weapon cannot stop a suicide bomber. A ballistic missile cannot dismantle a sleeper cell.

This distinction matters because modern insecurity increasingly comes not from conventional invasion but from fragmented, irregular, low-signature violence. Pakistan's deadliest security threats in recent decades have often emerged not as armored divisions crossing borders but as insurgent networks, sectarian militants, extremist cells, and organized violent groups operating within or across porous frontiers.

That is a different battlefield entirely. The tools required for this battlefield are not primarily missiles or fighter jets. They are intelligence integration, forensic capability, local policing, digitized border management, effective prosecution, judicial coordination, and governance capacity. These are less glamorous than weapons systems. They do not appear in military parades. They rarely generate symbolic prestige. But they determine whether citizens feel safe in daily life.

Too often, internal security remains reactive rather than preventive. Attacks happen, investigations begin, blame is allotted, and public attention eventually shifts elsewhere. Structural reform remains incomplete. Intelligence-sharing gaps persist. Prosecution rates remain inconsistent. Organizational vacuums continue to create space for violent actors. The result is a dangerous illusion: the state appears strong

because its external deterrent is strong, while internal vulnerabilities remain unresolved. A useful scrutiny emerges from the Gulf states.

Countries like the UAE, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia represent the backward model. They have heavily invested in micro-level security infrastructure: biometric identity systems, advanced surveillance, dense CCTV networks, digital monitoring, and highly visible domestic policing. Public spaces are tightly regulated. Internal order is maintained with exceptional efficiency. Terrorism and mass casualty attacks inside these states remain rare.

Most Gulf states lack fully independent strategic deterrence and depend heavily on external security guarantees, especially from the United States. Their cities may be secure from internal disorder, but their macro-security remains partially outsourced. If a major regional conflict escalates, they rely significantly on allies for protection. Pakistan and the Gulf therefore represent mirror images of the same dilemma. Pakistan is comparatively secure from major external aggression but vulnerable internally. The Gulf

is comparatively secure internally but strategically dependent externally. One has built strong walls around the state. The other has built strong controls within the state. Neither model alone solves the full security equation.

Security Is Not Singular

There are at least two forms of security. The first protects sovereignty. The second protects daily life. A state may succeed in one while failing in the other. Pakistan's mistake has been treating success in the first as information of success in both. That assumption is increasingly costly. When policymakers prioritize macro-security almost exclusively, they risk overlooking the fact that insecurity today often bleeds societies slowly rather than destroying them suddenly. Internal violence erodes trust, weakens economic confidence, discourages investment, fragments communities, and normalizes fear. Over time, chronic insecurity damages national resilience as surely as conventional war. The question, then, is not whether Pakistan should reduce investment in deterrence. That would be strategically unwise. External threats remain real, and deterrence continues to serve an essential function.

Pakistan needs an integrated security doctrine, one that preserves strategic deterrence while elevating human security to equal importance. Domestic protection must no longer be treated as secondary law enforcement. It should be recognized as a central national security.

Modern forensic systems must be expanded. Intelligence coordination between federal and provincial institutions must improve. Counterterrorism prosecution mechanisms need transmutation. Border digitization security.id reduce infiltration risks. Most importantly, governance vacuums in neglected regions must be addressed because violent actors thrive where the state is absent, distrusted, or weak. Security ultimately is not about weapons alone. It is about self-assurance, the confidence that citizens can move, work, worship, and live without constant fear. A nation's true strength cannot be measured solely by the range of its missiles or the size of its arsenal.

It must also be measured by something far more human: whether ordinary people can expect to return home safely at the end of the day. Pakistan has largely solved one half of the security equation. It has made it hard to conquer from the outside. The unfinished task is solving the other half. Until the state protects citizens with the same seriousness with which it protects borders, Pakistan will remain trapped in a paradox strong enough to deter war, yet not safe enough to guarantee peace at home.

Letters To The EDITOR

School uniforms and cost of conformity

Through the columns of your newspaper, I would like to raise concerns about the impact of school uniforms on students and their families. Although uniforms are intended to promote discipline, equality and a sense of belonging, their costs and restrictions on personal expression deserve greater attention.

First, school uniforms can place a financial burden on parents. Children grow quickly, and their uniforms often need to be replaced several times during their school years. Many schools also require separate uniforms for summer and winter, sports activities and special occasions. Parents must purchase these items according to school requirements, even when some uniforms are rarely used. For families with several school-going children, these expenses can become difficult to manage. Education is already costly for many households, and unnecessary spending on uniforms can add to their difficulties.

Schools should therefore consider affordable uniform policies, allow the reuse of uniforms in good condition and avoid requiring families to purchase expensive clothing from specific suppliers. Uniforms should never become a source of financial pressure or embarrassment for children whose parents cannot afford frequent replacements.

Another concern is the restriction uniforms place on students' freedom of expression. Clothing can be a way for young people to explore their personalities, develop confidence and express their individuality. When students are required to dress exactly alike, they have fewer opportunities to make personal choices about their appearance. Although discipline is important, it should not come at the expense of creativity and self-expression.

Schools can teach students to respect rules without making every aspect of their appearance identical. A reasonable dress code can maintain standards of decency, cleanliness and suitability while allowing some flexibility in colour, style and personal preference. Such an approach would encourage students to understand responsibility rather than simply follow instructions.

Furthermore, wearing the same uniform every school day for years can make school life feel unnecessarily restrictive. Students have different tastes, personalities and interests, and these differences should not be treated as problems. Education should prepare young people to think independently, respect diversity and develop their own identities.

Supporters of uniforms argue that they reduce visible differences between students from different economic backgrounds and create a sense of unity. These are valid considerations. However, uniforms alone cannot eliminate inequality, bullying or social divisions. Schools must address these problems through education, fair treatment and a respectful learning environment.

The purpose of schooling is to develop confident, responsible and creative individuals. School

administrations should review their uniform policies and consider whether the existing rules genuinely benefit students.

I believe schools should adopt affordable, practical and flexible dress codes instead of imposing unnecessarily rigid uniform requirements. Discipline and equality matter, but so do individuality, comfort and the financial circumstances of families.

UMAR IQBAL
Lahore

Playgrounds' evening supervision

The shortage of proper playgrounds forces many children and young people to use the grounds of nearby government schools for recreation and physical activity. This is a positive use of public facilities, as sports and exercise are essential for children's physical and mental health. However, the absence of caretakers and other Class-IV staff during evening hours raises concerns about children's safety, discipline and the protection of school property.

Children of different ages regularly gather in these playgrounds. Without responsible adults present, it may become difficult to prevent accidents, manage disputes or respond promptly to emergencies. Parents also need reassurance that their children can play in a safe environment. At the same time, school buildings, furniture and other educational resources must be protected from damage or misuse.

The district administration and education department should introduce a practical system of evening supervision rather than restricting children's access to playgrounds. One option is to arrange for designated school staff or other responsible personnel to remain available during specified hours.

School administrations could also establish sports committees comprising trustworthy members of the local community. Their names, designations and contact details should be recorded by the school, with relevant information shared with the local police station to facilitate communication in an emergency. Clear responsibilities and proper coordination would help make this arrangement effective.

Government school playgrounds are valuable community assets, particularly in areas where children have few alternative spaces for sports and recreation. With organised supervision and cooperation between schools, local communities and the authorities, these grounds can remain accessible while ensuring children's safety and protecting public property.

The authorities should treat this as a practical community need. A modest, well-managed system of evening supervision could encourage healthy activities, promote discipline and provide children with a safer place to play.

MUHAMMAD IQBAL AWAN
NAMAL,
Mianwali, Punjab

Funeral Overshadowed American Independence

4th July was supposed to be a day of celebration for the nation that assumed at the start of the year that its victory was inevitable. The ground realities have changed the circumstances and reversed the role; millions of people gathered in Tehran for the funeral, not for the celebration of winning the war. Despite having civilian loss and a shattered economy and infrastructure, the huge number tells a different story, and Washington can't deny it. Even while burying their martyrs, there was a kind of summons of victory by the addressees.

The targeted assassination of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in February 2026 by US-Israeli forces failed to break Iran, culminating in a historic strategic standoff. Through asymmetric maritime warfare and the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz, Tehran triggered global inflation and fractured NATO, forcing the Trump administration to negotiate terms. By July 4, 2026, as America marked its semiquincentennial, Iran's massive diplomatic funeral for Ayatollah Ali Khamenei symbolized a defiant geopolitical victory.

On 4 July 2026, the United States of America celebrated its 250th anniversary of independence; at the same time, Iran began preparations for the funeral of its spiritual leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and opened the gates of the Grand Mosalla in Tehran. On 28 February, the USA launched the strikes on Khamenei's residence; the results were disastrous and caused his death along with close family members. Iranian media is reporting that approximately fifteen to twenty million mourners have attended the funeral and ritual grief of their supreme

leader. Two nations and two different situations on the same day. One is celebrating a party that it did not fully justify, while the other is burying a man who stood with his nation till death.

This is not a small irony. It is the story of the year. Washington and Tel Aviv started their operations, Epic Fury and Roaring Lion, against Iran at the start of 2026 with the belief that war would be decisive and short. The death of their leader would be the last nail in the coffin, but Iranian leadership showed that they followed an ideology, not a person. They dragged on the war for months and brought the superpower to the negotiation table. Iran surprised its enemies with asymmetric warfare and maritime strategy, as the closure of the Strait of Hormuz was a major setback for the world.

The fuel prices and inflation climbed from Tokyo to Islamabad. The superpower with one of the world's largest militaries was unable to reopen one of the most crucial paths for the transport of goods and oil. Washington had to negotiate again and again and at last signed

an MoU in Versailles on 17 June. As a result, Hormuz was reopened, with the announcement that Iranian assets would be unfrozen and sanctions would be lifted gradually, according to Iranian media. In simple words, the USA had to agree to most of Iran's terms for the reopening of the strait that was already open before its attack.

A Fractured NATO

In the funeral of the Iranian supreme leader, delegates from more than one hundred states, including Pakistan, China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Afghanistan, participated. It showed that Iran was not isolated diplomatically on a global level.

While America was busy rehearsing the fireworks and traditional flag ceremonies over the National Mall, without any global headlines, the unity of NATO is badly affected in this war, and the states, including Germany, Spain, Italy, the UK, Australia, Japan, and South Korea, all rejected Trump's call for the military effort to reopen the Hormuz.

Germany's defense minister openly said that this is not our war. Donald Trump was furious with the role of NATO members and called them "cowards" and also gave a warning about leaving the alliance. This kind of language by the leader of a superpower showed the frustration about the fact that even his closest allies would not join him in every fight.

4th July was supposed to be a day of cel-

abration for the nation that assumed at the start of the year that its victory was inevitable. The ground realities have changed the circumstances and reversed the role; millions of people gathered in Tehran for the funeral, not for the celebration of winning the war. Despite having civilian loss and a shattered economy and infrastructure, the huge number tells a different story, and Washington can't deny it. Even while burying their martyrs, there was a kind of summons of victory by the addressees.

When an economically sanctioned state with comparatively weak military capabilities and a population of ninety million refuses to hand over its strait for free. It showed bravery and buried its leader before millions of people from all over the world; it was not just a survival but a strategic victory in these kinds of wars.

Missiles can destroy buildings and kill people, but they could never shatter the will and morale of a nation. Iranian officials and people showed that spirit and forced a superpower to negotiate on their own terms and conditions.

It is very difficult for commentators to declare who won the war, because no document will ever show it publicly. It is decided by the facts who requested the negotiation first, who accepted the demands of the adversary, and who is still standing tall enough, even in mourning, to call this July their own kind of independence day.



ABRAR HASHMI

Abrar Hashmi is associated with the Institute of Regional Studies, Islamabad. He is also a student of Government College University, Lahore.

NATIONAL

DTM

Dar, Oman FM vow to boost bilateral ties

Deputy Prime Minister/Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar and Foreign Minister of the Sultanate of Oman Sayyid Badr bin Hamad bin Hamood Al Busaidi, on Wednesday, underscored the importance of continued high-level exchanges to sustain the momentum in bilateral relations.

They also agreed to follow up on the understandings reached during Oman's foreign minister's visit to further strengthen cooperation in trade, investment and energy, the Foreign Office Spokesperson said in a press release.

The DPM/FM held a telephone conversation with the foreign minister of Oman. The Omani foreign minister thanked DPM/FM for the gracious hospitality extended to him during his recent visit to Pakistan.

The two ministers also exchanged views on regional developments and reaffirmed their shared commitment to regional peace and stability.

Separately, Dar extended heartfelt congratulations to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan and the Government and brotherly people of Türkiye, on the 103rd anniversary of the founding of the Republic of Türkiye.

*Pakistan and Türkiye

share an enduring bond rooted in shared history, mutual trust and deep affection between our peoples. Our two nations have consistently stood shoulder to shoulder in the most testing times, and this unwavering spirit of solidarity continues to define and enrich our relationship today," the DPM/FM posted on X handle.

Dar reaffirming Pakistan's commitment to further strengthening these ties, said that their bilateral ties had evolved into a comprehensive strategic partnership. He also wished Turkish brothers and sisters continued peace, progress and prosperity.

Moreover, Dar held a telephone conversation with Tajikistan's Foreign Minister, Siyodiddin Muhriddin. DPM Dar thanked his Tajik counterpart for the gracious hospitality and warm welcome extended to him during his visit to Dushanbe. He travelled there for the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Council of Heads of Government meeting, held on October 19-20, a DPM's Office news release said. The two ministers reaffirmed their resolve to work closely to further strengthen the enduring partnership between Pakistan and Tajikistan. They also agreed to expand mutually beneficial cooperation between the two countries. **NEWS DESK**



PM Shehbaz directs emergency measures for safe train travel

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday directed the urgent implementation of reforms in infrastructure, curriculum, teachers' training and other areas in all government schools in Islamabad, ordering the resolution of issues facing the institutions within a week.

Chairing a high-level meeting on reforms in the federal capital's government schools, the prime minister directed Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Ahsan Iqbal to ensure that the issues were resolved within the stipulated timeframe.

The prime minister directed the authorities concerned to mobilise all available resources to address infrastructure-related problems on an emergency basis, stressing that providing students with a safe learning environment was the government's responsibility.

He also directed the activation of a free lunch programme in government schools to ensure proper nutrition for students.

Emphasising improvements in teaching and learning facilities, the prime minister ordered the installation of smart boards in all government schools at the earliest. He also directed the formulation of a strategy to transform the Federal Directorate of Education into an effective and efficient institution.

The prime minister stressed that teachers in government schools should focus exclusively on teaching and educational activities and should not be assigned other tasks. He further directed that recruitment of teachers be carried out strictly on merit.

To improve students' access to education, the prime minister called for expanding the government school bus service. He also

directed the outsourcing of bus services for student transportation, along with third-party validation.

The prime minister instructed the authorities to promote solarisation in government schools and ensure that ramps were installed in all institutions to facilitate students with physical disabilities. He also called for the provision of quality medical facilities in government schools.

During the meeting, officials presented a survey report on the curriculum, infrastructure and other matters concerning government schools in the federal capital, conducted in accordance with the prime minister's directions issued in September 2026.

The meeting was informed that most government schools in Islamabad had basic facilities, including internet connectivity, clean drinking water and computer laboratories. However, infrastructure-related issues had been identified in some of the schools covered by the survey. The briefing also highlighted the need to empower head teachers and promote innovation in government schools.

Officials informed the meeting that 278 government buses were operating across Islamabad to facilitate the transportation of students attending government schools. Moreover, Shehbaz Sharif has directed the authorities concerned to take emergency measures to ensure safe and reliable train travel. He issued these directives while talking to Minister for Railways Muhammad Hanif Abbasi, who called on him in Islamabad today.

The Prime Minister reaffirmed that public relief, reforms and transparency in Pakistan Railways are among the government's top priorities. He also assured him of full support for introducing transformative reforms and revitalising Pakistan Railways.

During the meeting, overall administrative and financial matters, as well as reforms in the



Railways, came under detailed discussion. Hanif Abbasi briefed the Prime Minister on the performance of Pakistan Railways and the progress of ongoing development projects.

The two sides also exchanged views on key measures to improve freight services and provide modern facilities to passengers.

Meanwhile, Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday directed the Ministry of Housing and Works to ensure the timely completion of residential projects with full transparency. He also stressed the need to maintain high quality standards in all housing projects. The prime minister issued these directives during a meeting with Minister for Housing and Works Riaz Hussain Pirzada, who called on him at the Prime Minister House.

During the meeting, they discussed in detail matters related to the ministry and its ongoing development projects. Minister Pirzada briefed the prime minister on the progress of ongoing housing schemes. **NEWS DESK**

Justice Munib takes oath as acting Chief Justice



Justice Munib Akhtar, the Senior Puisne Judge of the Supreme Court of Pakistan, took the oath as Acting Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Pakistan on Wednesday. The oath was administered by Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar in a simple and dignified ceremony held at the Supreme Court of Pakistan, Islamabad.

Justice Munib Akhtar will act as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Pakistan while Justice Yahya Afridi, Chief Justice of Pakistan, remains abroad on an official visit. The ceremony was attended by Judges of the Supreme Court, Director General Federal Judicial Academy, Secretary Judicial Commission of Pakistan, Secretary Supreme Judicial Council and Law officers, Registrar, Supreme Court, conducted the proceedings of the oath-taking ceremony. Officers and staff of the Supreme Court of Pakistan were also present on the occasion. **NEWS DESK**

Drone attack on Hassan Khel police station foiled

A drone attack targeting Hassan Khel Police Station on the outskirts of Peshawar was foiled after an explosive device carried by a quadcopter became trapped in an anti-drone safety net installed on the station's roof, preventing it from reaching the building.

According to initial police report, the incident occurred on Wednesday morning when unidentified miscreants attempted to drop an explosive device on the police station using a quadcopter.

Reports said an energy drink bottle was used as the casing for the suspected explosive device, which also contained nails and bolts. The protective net prevented the device from reaching the roof, averting a potentially major incident.

Further details regarding

the security situation at the police station and those behind the attack attempt are awaited.

Police have started investigation into the incident.

The Peshawar Safe City Project's central command system has been linked with drone and anti-drone technology for enhanced security and surveillance, police officials said on Wednesday.

According to police officials, Pakistan's first integration of a drone unit and an anti-drone system with a Safe City project will enable authorities to monitor drone activity and respond to potential security threats more effectively.

The anti-drone system will monitor all drones flying within its radar coverage and provide coverage of up to five kilometres. It will also generate automatic alerts, while any suspicious drone activity will trigger an immediate notification to the Safe City control room.

The integration of drone and anti-drone technology with the central control room will enable round-the-clock aerial surveillance of sensitive locations, traffic and criminal activities.

Police officials said the

drone surveillance system would also be operational in Peshawar, Dera Ismail Khan, Bannu and Lakki Marwat.

The use of modern technology is expected to help authorities identify suspicious activities and potential terrorist threats in a timely manner.

Live feeds from Safe City drones will allow officials to monitor field operations directly, while the system will also provide operational support to the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD), police officials added.

Earlier, police foiled an attack by more than 30 terrorists on a police post in Hassan Khel, Peshawar, ARY News reported on Friday, quoting the Capital City Police Officer (CCPO).

The CCPO said the militants targeted the Speen Mela police post from two directions, launching an assault with heavy weapons from the Moosazai Dars side.

He said 16 Peshawar police personnel put up a strong resistance and successfully repelled the attack. The terrorists had also brought an improvised explosive device (IED), which police personnel defused, the CCPO added. **WP**

Punjab CM inaugurates uplift projects

Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif inaugurated several development and beautification projects worth billions of rupees in Mandi Bahauddin, including the Gujrat-Sargodha Road project, aimed at improving road infrastructure and public facilities.

According to a handout issued on Wednesday, the CM was given a detailed briefing on the 94.30-kilometre Gujrat-Sargodha Road project, which involves construction and rehabilitation of the road along with the construction of solid shoulders on the dual carriageway in Mandi Bahauddin district. The project has an estimated cost of Rs9.80 billion.

CM Maryam Nawaz also inaugurated the beautification project of Sader Bazaar, Mandi Bahauddin, completed at a cost of Rs6.99 crore. The project included restoration of the bazaar's traditional entrance gate, installation of buff tiles and street lights, and construction of a fountain to improve the area's appearance. She also inaugurated the rehabilitation and beautification project of the Old Grain Market, completed at a cost of Rs9.70 crore. The site has been transformed into a park featuring a memorial and modern facilities. The University of Rasul has been established at a cost of Rs9.79 billion. Construction of Academic Blocks I and II and the Student Services Centre has been completed, along with four student hostels, a hostel for bachelor faculty members and 53 residential units. Work on the university library is expected to be completed soon. The CM also visited the memorial commemorating the 1849 Battle of Chillianwala. **NEWS DESK**



PTA highlights gaps in online monitoring

Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) Chairman retired Lt Gen Hafeez Ur Rehman on Wednesday said regulation alone was insufficient to address the harmful effects of social media, stressing that parents, teachers and society must collectively take responsibility for protecting children online.

Addressing the concluding session of the Digital Tahaful Summit, he said ensuring a safe and secure digital environment in Pakistan was the PTA's top priority.

Highlighting the challenges faced by the regulator, the PTA chairman said the authority received between 1,000 and 1,500 complaints daily and processed them for necessary action. He said the PTA dealt with online content on the basis of complaints, as it lacked an automated system, a large team and artificial intelligence-based monitoring tools to proactively review social media content.

He added that the absence of a physical presence of international technology companies in Pakistan made the full enforcement of local laws challenging, a problem also faced by other countries in the region. Emphasising the role of parents, he said children today asked questions and sought logical explanations. He urged parents to develop friendly relationships with their children rather than resorting to scolding and reprimands. He also encouraged parents to involve their children in outdoor sports and activities and maintain open communication with them. **NEWS DESK**

Islamabad schools directed to end illegal transport charges

Parliamentary Secretary for Federal Education and Professional Training Rabia Naseem Farooqi informed the National Assembly that educational institutions under the Federal Directorate of Education (FDE) had been directed to stop collecting transport charges wherever these were being levied in violation of applicable rules.

Responding to a Calling Attention Notice moved by Aliya Kamran, Muhammad Usman Badini and Shahida Begum regarding additional fees and miscellaneous charges being collected by schools and colleges in Islamabad, she said the matter had been taken up immediately after it came to the ministry's notice. She said the directions had been issued with the consent of the federal education minister to address concerns over transportation charges.

Responding to a supplementary question, the parliamentary secretary said Article 25-A of the

Constitution guaranteed free and compulsory education for children aged five to 16 years.

She said free textbooks were being provided to children in all government schools in the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT), while no tuition fee was charged.

She added that the government had also introduced a free meal initiative for primary-level students.

Explaining the provisions relating to free education, she said the relevant law referred to a neighbourhood school and defined the neighbourhood area as being within a distance of six kilometres.

She said provisions concerning free education and transportation needed to be considered in accordance with the applicable legal framework.

Rabia Naseem Farooqi invited members to provide details of any school where free textbooks were not being supplied, saying the ministry would investigate such complaints and take prompt action. She said the government was committed to addressing concerns raised by lawmakers and improving educational facilities for children. Speaker National Assembly Sarder Ayaz Sadiq said the matter required further examination and referred it to the relevant committee for detailed consideration and recommendations. **NEWS DESK**



UHS opens private MBBS admissions for 2026-27

Applications for admission to private medical colleges in Punjab for the MBBS 2026-27 academic session opened on October 23, with November 6 set as the deadline.

According to the admission schedule announced by the University of Health Sciences (UHS), Lahore, candidates seeking admission to private-sector medical colleges must complete the application process within the stipulated timeframe.

Prospective applicants have been advised to carefully review the eligibility criteria, admission requirements and relevant instructions before submitting their applications.

Candidates have also been urged to apply well before the closing date to avoid last-minute difficulties and ensure that all required information is provided within the deadline. **NEWS DESK**

NATIONAL

DTM

Nushki College attack won't halt education: Bugti



Balochistan Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti on Wednesday vowed to eliminate terrorism from the province and bring those responsible for attacks on civilians to justice, saying violence would not deter the government from promoting education, peace and development.

Condemning the recent attack on a girls' college in Nushki, he said terrorists were attempting to deprive Baloch children, particularly girls, of education and opportunities for progress. He reiterated that the government would neither bow to intimidation nor allow educational institutions to close because

of security threats.

Bugti said terrorists affiliated with the banned Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) had entered the college and injured three students. Two girls with serious injuries were shifted to Quetta for specialised treatment, while a third, who sustained minor injuries, was treated in Nushki. He assured the victims and their families that the government was providing the best possible medical care.

The chief minister said targeting female students seeking education could not be justified under Baloch traditions or values. He accused militant groups of using propaganda to keep young people away from education and draw them towards extremism and violence.

He said terrorist groups had previously targeted teachers, professors and academics and were now attacking students. He urged intellectuals, academics and civil society to reflect on the consequences of such violence, stressing that education was essential to the province's future.

Bugti reaffirmed that the provincial government, in coordination with the Pakistan Army, Frontier Corps and Balochistan Police, would continue operations against militant groups. He said security forces had been targeting militant hideouts in mountainous areas and elsewhere, and operations would continue until terrorism was eliminated.

The chief minister also alleged that

extremist elements were attempting to indoctrinate young girls and persuade them to participate in violence. He said authorities had intercepted and rehabilitated several girls allegedly influenced by extremist narratives but declined to disclose further details.

Reiterating his commitment to education, Bugti said the provincial government had reopened 3,200 previously closed schools and would continue strengthening educational institutions. He said the government would not shut schools or colleges in response to terrorist threats.

As a gesture of solidarity with the injured students, he announced a sports gala at Balochistan University of Information Technology, Engineering and Management Sciences (BUIEMS), along with a separate sports festival at the Nushki college. The events, to be organised by the provincial Sports Department, would honour the students' courage and demonstrate that violence would not disrupt educational activities.

Bugti said the government remained willing to engage in dialogue with those prepared to work within the Constitution and the law, adding that peaceful and democratic expression remained possible.

He said the provincial government would continue investing in education, youth development, employment, entrepreneurship and livelihood programmes to expand opportunities for young people. The chief minister maintained that attacks on students would strengthen the government's resolve to combat terrorism and build a peaceful and prosperous Balochistan. **NEWS DESK**

Low social media compliance hampers anti-extremism efforts

Pakistan's efforts to counter online extremism face low compliance from social media companies, shortages of trained analysts and weak coordination, Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi said in a written parliamentary response released on Wednesday.

The assessment comes as militant groups expand their propaganda and recruitment activities. The Islamabad-based Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies reported this month that the Pakistani Taliban intensified both during July-September, using media productions to project influence beyond its traditional strongholds.

Pakistan has expanded its powers to regulate online content through amendments to its cybercrime law. Rights organizations have warned that broadly worded provisions could also be used against journalists and government critics, highlighting the distinction between combating violent extremism and restricting legitimate expression.

"The compliance rate of social media companies remains low," Naqvi said in his response to questions from lawmaker Syeda Shehla Raza. The response put compliance at 23.7 percent for content removal requests from the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) and 47.1 percent for requests from provincial Counter-Terrorism Departments (CTDs).

It reported platform-specific rates of 7.4 percent for X, 1.9 percent for YouTube and 38.1 percent for Facebook.

The document did not specify the reporting period, the number of requests underlying those percentages or whether all the material concerned extremist content. It also did not explain why particular requests had not been acted upon or include the companies' responses.

Naqvi said Punjab accounted for 97.7 percent of requests submitted by CTDs, while Sindh and Balochistan recorded no compliance despite making requests.

The response also identified shortcomings within Pakistani law enforcement, including insufficient personnel and technology to monitor publicly available online information and turn it into intelligence.

A "data-to-intelligence gap" prevented the conversion of "online information into actionable intelligence," it said, adding that conviction rates in cybercrime and illegal SIM cases remained very low.

The minister said the Social Media

Protection and Regulatory Authority, established under the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Amendment Act 2025, was not yet fully operational. Once functioning, it would take responsibility for social media regulation, including platform registration and content oversight, while the PTA would retain a content-blocking role, according to the response.

Naqvi called for faster operationalization of the authority, binding cooperation arrangements with platforms and penalties, including bans, for companies that failed to comply with Pakistani law.

These were recommendations set out in the parliamentary answer, which gave no implementation timetable or announcement of an imminent platform ban. The government has defended stronger online regulation as necessary to tackle disinformation. Human Rights

Watch, however, has warned that the amended law's vague criteria for removing content and criminalizing false information threaten freedom of expression.

Naqvi also proposed automated monitoring of banned organizations' online activities, a shared digital intelligence repository, regional forensic laboratories and specialist training for investigators and prosecutors. The response identified financial and legal constraints at the National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA), which coordinates policy but has no investigative, arrest or enforcement powers.

NACTA received an allocation of approximately Rs1.33 billion (\$4.8 million) for fiscal 2026-27 against a request for Rs2.98 billion (\$10.8 million), leaving it with less than half the funding sought. It has requested additional resources.

"NACTA intends to establish National Counter Terrorism Division to not only ensure operational role for the eradication of terrorism and extremism but also make sure effective CT coordination across the country," the response said.

It did not specify how the proposed division would be constituted or what legal changes would be required to grant operational powers. The minister separately reported that security forces conducted 5,143 intelligence-based operations between the beginning of 2026 and September 29, killing 2,410 people described as terrorists, injuring 806 and arresting 3,518. The figures were government-reported and could not be independently verified. **NEWS DESK**

Inquiry finds negligence in Peshawar school collapse

An inquiry into a school collapse that killed 35 people in northwestern Pakistan has blamed the owner for using substandard construction materials and identified negligence by government departments, the governor's office said on Wednesday.

The roof of the private school in Peshawar's Dir Colony collapsed during classes on October 15, killing 34 children and a female teacher. The disaster prompted authorities to order inspections of private schools across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

The findings raise questions about both construction standards and regulatory oversight. After the collapse, relatives of some victims said they had previously complained to the school's owner about rainwater seeping into classrooms. "The inquiry report held the school owner responsible for the use of substandard materials in the construction of the school building," the governor's office said in a statement. Governor Faisal Karim Kundi received the report at a meeting attended by senior education officials, the provincial chief secretary and members of the inquiry committee. The committee briefed him on the causes of the collapse, statements from relevant officials, departmental responsibilities and its findings and recommendations. The statement said Kundi was also informed of negligence by the departments concerned, but did not identify the officials involved or detail their failures. Kundi directed authorities to consult the provincial law department on the report's legal implications and take strict action against those responsible.

The statement announced no new arrests, prosecutions or disciplinary penalties. Police arrested the school owner after the collapse and registered a criminal case against the owners, shareholders and construction contractor. The case included an allegation of causing death without an intention to kill.

The governor's statement did not include a response from the owner or the departments criticized by the inquiry. It also provided no update on the province-wide school inspections ordered after the disaster. **NEWS DESK**

Governor rule for 6 months, emergency till peace

Continued from Page 1

He also called for political consensus on internal and external security, eliminating terrorism and strengthening the economy, describing the objectives as a "stable Pakistan, a secure Pakistan and a prosperous Pakistan".

Meanwhile, PTI Chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan criticized the imposition of governor's rule and emergency, alleging that the federal government was using constitutional measures to target political opponents.

Separately, Jamiat Ulama-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) chief Maulana Fazlur Rahman called for a new Charter of Democracy between the government and opposition, accusing the federal government of misusing the Constitution to impose emergency and governor's rule in KP. Fazl said Parliament represented the people, but political tolerance had declined and the country's situation was deteriorating. He urged political parties to resolve disputes through dialogue rather than confrontation. **NEWS DESK**

Pakistan rejects Taliban Angoor Adda claim

Continued from Page 1

Border violations from the Afghan side have become a routine matter as ties between the two neighbours have remained strained in the past few years over counterterrorism measures.

Over the last three to four years, Pakistani security forces have effectively contained the expansionist ambitions of Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), preventing the terror group from establishing a permanent operational footprint inside the country.

Operating out of sanctuaries in Afghanistan—principally within Kunar, Nangarhar, and Helmand provinces—ISKP has continuously utilised these eastern and southern hubs to coordinate logistics, plan cross-border infiltrations, and project force into Pakistan.

Following the collapse of Daesh strongholds in Syria, ISKP shifted experienced fighters to Afghanistan, strengthening its ranks and expanding its reach.

On 13 April 2017, the US dropped a MOAB on ISKP's cave and tunnel complex in Mamand Valley, Achin District, Nangarhar, targeting one of the group's strongholds. Additionally, Taliban Regime militants who could not secure positions on its payroll after the fall of Kabul in 2021 are moving to ISKP.

In response to ISKP's expansion attempts into Pakistan, aggressive intelligence-based operations by Pakistan have

thwarted the group's ambitions.

A total of 67 major operations resulted in more than 50 terrorists killed and over 100 arrested. One high-value target was neutralized, and three others were arrested.

ISKP carried out six attacks in Pakistan, resulting in 42 martyrdoms and 85 injuries. Notable attacks included a suicide bombing at a Shia Mosque in Tarlai, Islamabad, and a targeted attack on a Sessions Judge in Mastung, Balochistan.

Separately, security Forces neutralized nine Indian sponsored terrorists during two intelligence-based operations in Kachhi and Wadh Districts of Balochistan, on reported presence of terrorists belonging to Indian proxy, Fitna Al Hindustan.

"An intelligence-based operation was conducted in Kachhi district, during the conduct of operation terrorists' hideout was busted by security forces and after an intense fire exchange seven Indian sponsored terrorists were sent to hell.

Weapons and ammunition were also recovered," said a news release issued by Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR).

In another intelligence-based operation in district Wadh, security forces tracked and intercepted terrorist movement and after an intense fire exchange, two Indian sponsored terrorists were sent to hell. Weapons and ammunition were also recovered.

"Sanitization operations are being conducted to eliminate any other Indian sponsored terrorist found in the areas. **NEWS DESK**

Shahdara Dam construction likely to begin soon, CDA says

Construction of the long-awaited Shahdara Dam is expected to begin soon, with the project projected to add five to 10 million gallons per day (MGD) to Islamabad's water supply, subject to final design and technical assessments, the Capital Development Authority (CDA) said on Wednesday.

The project is planned to be completed within two years and is aimed at augmenting the capital's surface water resources amid rising demand, according to a CDA spokesperson.

The dam, he said will introduce an additional source of surface water into the city's supply system, under the supervision of Islamabad Water Director General Sarder Khan Zinri, the authority said.

He said the project had been under consideration for decades and would form part of broader efforts to improve water

availability and strengthen the city's long-term water security.

Federal Interior Minister Syed Mohsin Raza Naqvi and CDA Chairman Sohail Ashraf are overseeing efforts to expand Islamabad's water resources, the spokesperson said.

The project's expected contribution of five to 10 MGD remains subject to technical assessments, final design and operational arrangements. The spokesperson said it was also working to explore additional water sources and improve the efficiency and reliability of the existing supply network. Islamabad faces increasing pressure on its water resources as its population and demand grow. The Shahdara Dam project is expected to help address this challenge, although its eventual contribution will depend on the final project design and implementation. **NEWS DESK**

NTDC employees not civil servants: Supreme Court

The Supreme Court has held that employees of the National Transmission and Despatch Company (NTDC) do not become civil servants merely because the company adopts WAPDA rules and are not entitled to approach the Federal Service Tribunal.

However, the company's management is bound to ensure equal and fair treatment of its employees.

A three-member bench comprising Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar, Justice Musarrat Hsani and Justice Irfan Saadat Khan issued the judgment in the case concerning time-scale upgradation for two retired NTDC employees, Masood Ahmed Qureshi and Muhammad Afzal Gul, setting aside the Federal Service Tribunal's decision. In its detailed judgment, the Supreme Court directed the NTDC management and its Board of Directors to reconsider the applications of both retired employees fairly and independently and issue reasoned written orders within two months.

The court held that if similarly placed employees had been granted the benefit of time-scale upgradation, the two retired employees should also receive the same benefit, with their

arrears calculated and paid accordingly.

The judgment clarified that not every person employed by the state necessarily qualifies as a civil servant. Such status is determined under the relevant law, and employment in a public-sector organisation alone does not confer that status.

The court observed that NTDC was an independent public limited company, separate from WAPDA. Therefore, the provi-

sion of the WAPDA Act under which the authority's employees are treated as civil servants for the purposes of service tribunals did not automatically extend to a separate corporate entity such as NTDC.

It held that decisions concerning promotions, career progression and other terms of service of NTDC employees fell within the jurisdiction of the company's Board of Directors. The adoption of WAPDA rules for internal administrative matters did not alter

NTDC's distinct corporate status.

The court further observed that although NTDC employees were not entitled to approach the Federal Service Tribunal, this did not absolve the company's management of its responsibilities. The company was bound to implement its internal rules, policies and decisions and treat employees equally without discrimination. According to the case record, both employees had passed the departmental promotion examination and applied for time-scale upgradation. However, the relevant authorities rejected their applications on April 1, 2022.

Subsequently, on February 29, 2024, the Federal Service Tribunal accepted their appeals and directed that they be granted time-scale upgradation to Grade 18 with effect from August 12, 2004. NTDC challenged the tribunal's decision before the Supreme Court. The apex court set aside the tribunal's judgment and dismissed the appeals, while directing the company's management to reconsider the employees' cases and issue reasoned orders within two months. **NEWS DESK**



BACKPAGE

DTM

Pakistan announces \$10 million clean-air startup fund

Federal Minister for Climate Change Musadik Malik on Wednesday announced a planned \$10 million fund for clean-air startups.

Addressing the Pakistan National Clean Air Conference 2026, Malik said the government had decided to establish the fund from its own limited resources after seeking support from development partners. He said approval of the fund's board was expected the following day.

He described the proposed initiative as an obligation to future generations rather than a grant or loan, reaffirming the government's commitment to pursuing clean-air measures with or without external support.

The minister acknowledged the contributions of development partners, including the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, UNICEF and German development agency GIZ, in supporting climate-related initiatives.

The minister described air pollution as a human-induced crisis driven by policy choices and economic activities, stressing

that its health and economic consequences were borne most heavily by those with limited resources to protect themselves.

Malik said air pollution imposed an economic cost equivalent to 6.5 per cent of Pakistan's gross domestic product (GDP), reflecting the burden of illness, hospitalisation and related financial pressures on affected families.

The minister stressed the need to recognise that communities contributing to pollution through agricultural practices were themselves suffering its consequences, underscoring the importance of practical solutions that addressed both environmental challenges and the livelihoods of affected populations.

Emphasising the need to move beyond declarations, Malik said the clean-air agenda required engineering solutions, effective policies and financial commitments rather than slogans.

He reiterated the government's resolve to work with development partners to implement practical measures aimed at improving air quality, reducing pollution and protecting public health. **NEWS DESK**

One-China Stand: Pakistan closes airspace to Taiwan airlines

Pakistan has banned Taiwanese airlines from using its airspace as part of its strict adherence to Beijing's One-China policy, making it the first country to take such a step, Bloomberg reported on Wednesday.

"The aviation division follows the One China policy - only mainland China is allowed," the outlet cited Defence Minister Khawaja Asif as saying. He said that Islamabad now only permitted airlines from the People's Republic of China to fly over Pakistan, excluding Taiwan.

According to flight tracking data, Taiwanese carriers began rerouting flights over the weekend, with China Airlines Ltd and Eva Airways Corp no

longer flying over Pakistan since Sunday. The two carriers declined to comment to Bloomberg, while Taiwan's Civil Aviation Administration did not address the rerouting.

Islamabad's restrictions are even stricter than those imposed by China, which allows Taiwanese airlines to fly over its territory.

Beijing considers Taiwan a breakaway province while Taipei insists on its independence.

Pakistan severed official relations with Taiwan in 1951 in support of the One-China policy. Islamabad and Beijing have bolstered ties under Beijing's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative, through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, which has channelled billions of dollars into Pakistan.

China is also Pakistan's largest supplier of weapons and launched the China-Pakistan Information Corridor a day ago. **NEWS DESK**

LG polls greenlit in KP, 12 districts excluded

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has ordered local government elections in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and directed its relevant wing to prepare the election schedule for 11 districts where delimitation has been completed.

The decision was announced by Chief Election Commissioner Sikandar Sultan Raja, who read out the verdict reserved earlier by a five-member bench of the Election Commission.

According to the written order issued on Tuesday, the ECP directed the preparation of election schedules for 11 of the 16 districts where delimitation has already been completed. The commission also instructed its relevant wing to submit the election programme for approval.

The ECP further ordered that the delimitation schedule be issued for other districts where the process has not yet been completed, enabling local government elections to be held in a timely manner.

However, districts where an emergency is in force will not be included in the election or delimitation schedules,

according to the order.

The commission specifically directed that election schedules would not be issued for Bannu, Mohmand, Orakzai, Lakki Marwat and North Waziristan. Meanwhile, delimitation schedules will not be issued for Dera Ismail Khan, Tank, Bajaur, Khyber, Kurram and South Waziristan.

The ECP also directed the relevant authorities to finalise the number of village and neighbourhood councils, along with category-wise details of their seats.

Furthermore, the commission ordered that the delimitation process in Swat, Battagram, Peshawar and Allai be completed in accordance with the existing revenue boundaries.

The ECP instructed its relevant departments to complete the delimitation process in the remaining districts to ensure the timely conduct of local government elections across the province.

The ruling sets the process in motion for local government elections in eligible districts, while excluding specified areas from the immediate election and delimitation schedules. **NEWS DESK**

At least 64 dead in train crash in Spain

A high-speed train slammed into the rear of another train that had stopped, derailling two cars and killing at least 64 people on Wednesday in central Spain, authorities said.

The central government's office for Castilla La Mancha confirmed the death toll had risen.

The regional president of Castilla La Mancha, Emiliano García-Page, had said at least 80 people were injured and that the death toll "will surely rise" as rescue workers continue to search in the wreckage for survivors and bodies.

It was the second major train accident in Spain this year.

Spain's rail system operator ADIF said the crash occurred Wednesday morning in the province of Toledo. The accident was between two high-speed trains carrying hundreds of passengers and heading in the same direction from the capital Madrid to Seville in southwestern Spain, according to Esther Padilla, spokesperson for the Castilla La Mancha region.

One ran into the tail of the other that had stopped, knocking two of its cars off the track.

Padilla said that the cause of



the crash was not known. Rail service was suspended between Madrid, Ciudad Real and Andalusia.

The crash, which occurred in a flat stretch surrounded by olive fields in between the towns of Urda and Los Yébenes, left one car shredded into bits of metal and other material, scattering debris down a gravel slope.

Spanish Health Minister Mónica García said that emergency workers were focusing on rescuing survivors and bodies from the two most damaged train cars. She said that the injured are being sent to different hospitals in the area.

"It was a high-speed impact, so we are expecting this to be a

tragedy," García said.

The accident involved a train from Spain's state-owned RENFE company and the private rail company IRYO. It appeared the RENFE train rammed the IRYO train, Spanish media reported. García-Page said 24 died in the RENFE train, and six in the IRYO one.

Padilla said that 397 passengers were in the RENFE train and 147 passengers in the IRYO train.

Trains from those two companies were also involved in a deadly crash in January.

IRYO, an Italian-owned company, said in a statement that it has "activated its security protocols and is closely working

with authorities."

The mayor of the nearby town of Urda, Manuel Galán, told state broadcaster TVE that civil protection authorities had asked his town hall to prepare a sports pavilion to attend to injured passengers.

A military emergency brigade was deployed to help emergency services, firefighters and police. Ambulances and medical helicopters made trips to and from the site, while unscathed survivors were put on buses.

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez canceled his agenda to focus on the crash. He wrote on X that he was "dismayed by the serious train accident in Toledo." **AP**

Jl rejects fuel levy justification, demands public relief

Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan Emir Hafiz Naeemur Rehman has warned that his party will launch a long march to Islamabad in mid-November if the government fails to abolish the petroleum levy within 10 days.

Addressing a press conference at Idara Noor-e-Haq on Wednesday, Hafiz Naeemur Rehman said Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif had agreed during their meeting on Tuesday to expand the relief package for petroleum consumers, but Jl remained firm on its demand for the complete abolition of the levy. Karachi Jl Emir Murim Zafar Khan, Karachi Vice Emir and KMC Opposition leader Saifuddin Advocate, Karachi Vice Emir Muslim Pervaz and other leaders were also present at the press conference.

Hafiz Naeemur Rehman said he had conveyed the party's demand clearly to the prime minister, who had sought 10 days to make a decision. The government had argued that the levy was a major source of federal revenue, but the Jl Emir rejected this justification. He said the federal government collected around Rs150 billion monthly through the petroleum levy,

while its relief package amounted to Rs32 billion, according to the government. This meant consumers were paying at least Rs110 billion more each month than the amount being returned through relief measures, he added.

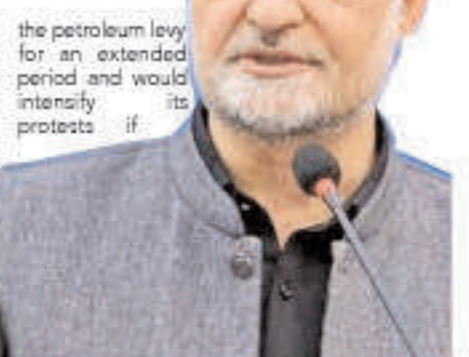
The Jl Emir criticised the government for relying on petroleum taxes instead of addressing weaknesses in tax collection and governance. He said that corruption amounting to Rs1.3 trillion annually in the FBR was undermining the tax system, while ordinary citizens continued to bear the financial burden. He questioned the rationale for imposing additional costs on the public when the government's own tax collection machinery was failing to fulfill its responsibilities.

Hafiz Naeemur Rehman also highlighted the rising profits for powerful business interests despite the economic difficulties faced by ordinary Pakistanis. He said that oil refineries' profits had increased by 1,100 per cent, while oil marketing companies and dealers were also earning higher margins.

He further criticised payments to IPPs, saying the government was paying around Rs1.8 trillion annually for electricity that was not being generated.

The Jl Emir lamented that, apart from his party, no political party, whether in the government or opposition, was raising its voice effectively against the financial burden on the public.

He said Jl had been campaigning against



the government failed to provide meaningful relief. "Preparations for the Islamabad march will continue. If the public does not receive relief, caravans from across the country will head to Islamabad in mid-November," he said.

The Jl leader also referred to Jl's campaign against IPPs, saying it had helped secure electricity relief for consumers, although power prices remained high.

He criticised the billing system for protected electricity consumers, arguing that even a small increase beyond the 200-unit monthly threshold could lead to a sharp rise in bills. He called on the government to end an unfair burden on low-income households. He said the government had held negotiations with 47 IPPs following Jl's campaign, resulting in an estimated Rs1.45 trillion benefit to the national exchequer. **SABAHI**

Netanyahu falls short, Arab bloc decisive

Results from Israel's hard-fought election pointed Wednesday to no clear winner as a leader of the Arab minority appealed to a hesitant opposition to join forces to end the divisive reign of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

With more than three quarters of the vote counted, Netanyahu's right-wing bloc was slightly ahead but still short of a majority in Tuesday's election, the first since the October 7, 2023 attack which has led Israel to wage war in Gaza and across the region.

Both Netanyahu, Israel's longest-serving prime minister who is allied with far-right and ultra-Orthodox Jewish parties, and Gadi Eisenkot, a former military chief leading a broad opposition bloc, vowed that they would seek to form the next government.

But neither looks set to reach the 61-seat threshold for a majority. With 77 percent of ballots counted, Netanyahu's bloc had 54 of the 120 seats in parliament and Eisenkot's opposition had 49.

The final results could still change but one place of clear gains was among Israeli Arab lists which were set to jump to 17 seats.

Voters from the community, descendants of Palestinians who stayed after Israel's creation and who make up around 20 percent of the population, have been enraged by the Netanyahu government's ultra-nationalist Jewish vision for the country and the Palestinian territories.

Yousef Jabareen, head of the leftist Arab-majority Joint List, said the Israeli public had voted for new leadership, and "anyone who wants to offer a substantive and genuine alternative to Netanyahu's blood-soaked government will have to talk to us".

"It's either the continuation of racism, the continuation of exclusion and the continuation of supremacy, or a genuine Jewish-Arab partnership," he said.

Eisenkot has resisted allying with Arab parties. Netanyahu during the campaign relentlessly attacked the opposition by saying it would put Arabs in power, running on the slogan: "Either the Right or Palestine."

Yair Golan, the head of Israel's main left-wing party and a member of Eisenkot's camp, became the first member of the opposition camp to call for an alliance with Arab parties.

"Netanyahu lost. I know how to count to 120," Golan said in a social media post.

"We must no longer accept Netanyahu's racist division between Jewish votes and Arab votes."

But Eisenkot's camp also includes right-wingers who share many of Netanyahu's hawkish views and have adamantly rejected working with Arab lawmakers.

Arab lawmakers could also give Eisenkot support in parliamentary votes on an ad hoc basis, enabling him to maintain a minority government without joining a coalition, although few observers believe such an arrangement would survive for long.

Iran conflict

A lack of a clear majority for either camp could mean weeks spent trying to cobble together coalitions, with possible new elections on the horizon if negotiations fail.

"Maybe everybody lost in these elections but the Arab parties. And for the Arab parties, it's unclear that they can make use of their huge success," Hebrew University of Jerusalem political scientist Gideon Rahat said.

A stalemate could in the immediate term benefit Netanyahu, who would remain caretaker prime minister until a new government is formed.

Both Netanyahu and Eisenkot appeared to indicate another factor was on the horizon — a Israeli attack alongside the United States on Iran.

Netanyahu ordered bombing campaigns against Iran both last year and earlier this year, reluctantly stopping only after President Donald Trump reached a now-moribund ceasefire. **APF**



GLAMOUR

DTM



Hall Yes! Swift, Lovett Take Nashville Crown

Taylor Swift signed her first publishing deal in Nashville at the age of 14. About 22 years and 14 Grammys later, she joined the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame along with Lyle Lovett, Shawn Camp, Lee Thomas Miller, Bruce Channel and J.I. Allison.

Swift added another honor to her trophy wall with her second hall of fame induction this year and was celebrated at the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame Gala on Monday in a crowded ballroom full of artists, writers and country music elite.

"I knew from the time I wrote my first song that even if it couldn't be my career, it would be my passion," Swift said.

She described soaking up the lessons from other writers like a sponge, learning how to push through writer's block and write about the human condition, even when her writing partner was hungover or going through a divorce.

Swift recalled her mom would regularly pick her up from high school and drop her off at a publishing house on Nashville's Music Row, where she poured out her emotions to one of her first co-writers, Liz Rose. She later would meet Nathan Chapman, who produced her self-titled debut album in 2006, released 20 years ago this month.

Swift, who took her talents to a much wider audience beyond country music, said her ability to "genre hop" was because she had learned the fundamentals of songwriting in Nashville.

"I'm so incredibly honored to be inducted into this sacred club," Swift said.

Brad Paisley, one of the first major artists to take her on tour after her debut album, introduced her as "the voice of a generation."

He joked that Swift "went to Brad Paisley High School" as a 17-year-old traveling the country while on tour with him. Swift later recounted that Paisley took a prank too far in 2007 when he filled her bus with thousands of crickets.

"For months I couldn't sleep. Just chirp, chirp, chirp," she said.

Lainey Wilson performed a bluegrass version of "Love Story" with fiddle and stand-up bass from Swift's second album, "Fearless."

Swift wasn't the only big star to be celebrated, as George Strait, the lauded "King of Country Music," was given the Career Maker Award from the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame. Strait, a Country Music Hall of Famer, is known for picking great songs from other songwriters and sending them to the top of country charts for five decades. **AP**

Meghan on TV menu for 'Junior MasterChef Australia'

Prince Harry's wife Meghan says she has agreed to feature as a special guest in television cooking sensation "Junior MasterChef Australia". Meghan, who was a guest judge on "MasterChef Australia" this year, is to appear in next year's contest for young cooks on Network 10.

"When they approached me to come back and work with this young group of talent, it was an easy yes," the Duchess of Sussex said in a statement Tuesday. "I love cooking with my own kids, so seeing what these young stars create in the kitchen is going to be a lot of fun." The series is to be filmed in Melbourne next year, according to Australian broadcaster ABC. Harry, the second son of King Charles III and estranged brother of heir to the throne Prince William, married Meghan, an American former actor, at Windsor Castle in May 2018. **AFP**



Katie Goodland Owns Red Carpet In Black

She has been by his side for some of the biggest moments of his career during his rise from a young unknown footballer to one of the sport's biggest names.

But while Harry Kane's childhood sweetheart Katie Goodland has largely remained out of the spotlight, when called upon she has nonetheless nailed red-carpet glamour with her classic style formula — wearing elegant black.

And last night's

appearance at the glittering Ballon d'Or ceremony at the London Palladium was no exception.

Katie, 33, exuded class in a black, off-the-shoulder gown as she watched her husband take football's top individual honour ahead of French superstar Kylian Mbappe and Spanish teen sensation Lamine Yamal. **NEWS DESK**



Jessica Simpson Goes Brunette



Jessica Simpson showed off a brand-new look as she stepped out with freshly dyed hair over the week-end.

On Saturday, the 46-year-old singer was seen at LAX as she arrived with warm brunette tresses styled in messy beach waves.

She gave a look at her eclectic, edgy style by pairing a pastel-yellow T-shirt with a red-and-blue plaid button-down with rhinestone details.

Simpson also wore distressed jeans with the hems rolled up to showcase her chunky black boots with sky-high heels.

The Dukes of Hazzard alumna accessorized with stacks of gold rings, and she sported retro circular sunglasses even inside the airport.

She was seen on what appeared to be a solo travel day, which comes after she enjoyed a series of sunny getaways over the summer.

The Blonde Ambition actress has been busy lately as she released new music, made acting cameos and focused on her fashion-design endeavors — in addition to changing up her look — since her split with ex-husband Eric Johnson. **NEWS DESK**

Macklemore Launches 'Free Palestine Tour'



US rapper Macklemore on Monday launched his new "Free Palestine Tour" in Dublin after being dropped as a supporting act by British pop star Ed Sheeran over pro-Palestinian comments.

Standing in lines outside the venue for the first show in the Irish capital, which promoters said had sold out, excited fans praised the 43-year-old's stance. "Macklemore's support for Palestine is huge. He's stood up and he's put himself on the line instead of taking the easy way out," said Michael Keating, a 31-year-old who works in insurance, told **AFP**.

"He's risking his popularity, his future, his family's future — everything just for peace. And it is very important."

The "Thrift Shop" star was removed from Sheeran's US tour after shouting "Free Palestine!" on stage and telling Palestinians they were "not forgotten."

Sheeran has said the decision to drop Macklemore was made by tour promoters, not him — provoking outrage among musicians and pro-Palestinian activists. "The USA is supposed to be the country of free speech and instead people are being shut down. (Sheeran) should have stood up for what Macklemore was doing," said Grainne Healy, a 60-year-old retiree who had come to the Dublin concert with a former schoolfriend.

Four other supporting artists, including American singer Finneas, also pulled out of Sheeran's tour in solidarity with Macklemore and Sheeran later broke his silence on the situation in Gaza at a concert in Philadelphia, calling it "unjustifiable and disproportionate." **AP**

MONEY

GOVERNOR SBP AT ICMA

'No short-term fixes'

Governor State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) Mr. Jameel Ahmad addresses the annual convocation ceremony of the Institute of Cost and Management Accountants of Pakistan (ICMA Pakistan).

In his speech to the next generation of accounting and finance professionals, the Governor detailed Pakistan's remarkable macroeconomic recovery since 2022, emphasizing that the country's economic fundamentals have significantly improved despite severe global and regional shocks. While encouraging the graduating students, he said I am also confident that you will utilize the skills and knowledge that you gained during your rigorous studies, and that your dedication, hard work, and commitment to excellence will help shape the future economic landscape of Pakistan.

In his address, the Governor noted that though challenges still abound, we have come a long way since 2022. Despite the significant supply shocks, we have managed to contain the impact on the domestic economy.



Inflation remained close to our target range in FY26. While it has gone up since then, it is projected to gradually ease towards the target range, supported by prudent monetary tightening. The external account remains stable, with the current account deficit expected to remain within 0 to 1 percent of GDP. Real GDP growth is also recovering gradually, from a contraction in FY23 to 3.7 percent in FY26; and we expect it to rise further in the ongoing fiscal year. These improvements in economic fundamentals and the growing resilience in the economy are being recognized by international credit rating agencies, our multilateral partners, as well as foreign investors.

Reflecting on the adjustments made during FY22 and FY23, the Governor emphasized that timely, decisive action, fiscal discipline and forward-looking, evidence-based policymaking had helped strengthen Pakistan's economic resilience. He noted that raising the policy rate and maintaining it for almost a year, alongside temporary measures to manage non-debt foreign exchange outflows, had been necessary to restore macroeconomic stability and avert a deeper external financing and debt crisis. He stressed that lasting economic progress could not be achieved through short-term fixes at the expense of long-term stability.

The Governor added that maintaining a positive forward-looking real policy rate had helped bring inflation down from over 30 percent to within the medium-term target range. Meanwhile, risk-based supervision had strengthened the proactive identification of financial stability risks, with financial sector adequacy and performance indicators improving despite the period of elevated policy rates.

Addressing the graduates directly, the Governor said, "when faced with such decision, let evidence guide your judgment, let professional ethics define your conduct, and let a long-term commitment to Pakistan's sustainable and inclusive development inform your action."

While concluding his address, the Governor underscored the accounting and finance profession's vital role in strengthening institutions, promoting accountability and ensuring informed decision-making. He highlighted its contribution to sound governance, responsible use of public resources and productive investment. He congratulated the graduates and wished them success in their future endeavours. **NEWS DESK**

Bulls rule PSX as index jumps 1,269



The benchmark KSE-100 Index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) continued with bullish momentum on Wednesday, gaining 1,269.55 points, a positive change of 0.77 percent, to close at 165,736.76 points against 164,467.20 points recorded in the previous trading session. The ready market witnessed a trading volume of 578.124 million shares, compared to 401,969 million shares traded in the previous session, while the traded value increased to Rs 26.203 billion from Rs 18.069 billion.

Market capitalisation increased to Rs 18.329 trillion from Rs 18.214 trillion recorded a day earlier.

Out of 496 companies that traded in the ready market, 269 posted gains, 180 suffered losses, while 47 remained unchanged.

Pervez Ahmed Co led the volume chart with 58,321 million shares, followed by TPL Properties with 38,349 million shares and Energen PK with 34,763 million shares.

Among the top gainers, Ghendhara Industries Limited surged by Rs 106.12 to close at Rs 1,167.28, while Rathan Maize Products Company Limited advanced by Rs 70.86 to settle at Rs 8,408.05. On the losing side, PIA Holding Company Limited declined by Rs 448.49 to close at Rs 13,551.50, while Khairpur Sugar Mills Limited fell by Rs 125.98 to Rs 1,133.86.

In the futures (DFC) market, turnover stood at 422.813 million shares with a traded value of Rs 17.391 billion, compared with 455.777 million shares worth Rs 14.653 billion in the previous session. Of 315 companies traded in the DFC market, 209 advanced, 105 declined and 1 remained unchanged. **NEWS DESK**

Gold price gains Rs 3,500 per tola

Gold prices in Pakistan increased on Wednesday in line with their gain in the international market. In the local market, gold price per tola reached Rs425,636 after a gain of Rs3,500 during the day.

Similarly, 10-gram gold was sold at Rs364,914 after it gained Rs3,001, according to rates shared by the All-Pakistan Gems and Jewellers Sarafa Association (APGJSA).

On Tuesday, gold price per tola reached Rs422,136 after a decrease of Rs1,300 during the day.

The international rate of gold increased by \$35 to reach \$4,031 per ounce.

Meanwhile, the price of silver also increased by Rs61 to reach Rs5,854 per tola. **NEWS DESK**

Rupee gains 3 paise against Dollar

Rupee on Wednesday appreciated by 3 paise against the US Dollar in interbank trading and closed at Rs 276.77, compared to the previous day's closing of Rs 276.80.

According to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the dollar's open-market buying and selling rates were Rs 277.55 and Rs 280.05, respectively.

The price of the Euro decreased by Rs 0.79, closing at Rs 307.85 against the previous day's rate of Rs 308.64, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP).

The Japanese Yen remained unchanged to close at Rs 1.75; while the British Pound declined by Rs 0.91 and closed at Rs 367.85 against the previous day's Rs 368.76.

The exchange rate of the Emirati Dirham reduced by 1 paise and closed at Rs 75.35, while the Saudi Riyal stood stagnant to close at Rs73.75. **NEWS DESK**

Weir eyes long-term investment in minerals sector

Pakistan is in talks with global mining technology firm Weir, a global engineering solutions provider headquartered in Scotland, over potential collaboration in its minerals sector, with the company expressing interest in building long-term ties with the government, the petroleum ministry said on Wednesday.

The development came during a meeting between Federal Minister for Petroleum Ali Pervaiz Malik and JD Singleton, Director, Communication EMEA and Pakistan Executive Sponsor at Weir, to discuss opportunities for collaboration in Pakistan's minerals sector.

During the meeting, the two sides discussed Pakistan's emerging mineral sector opportunities, the role of advanced mining technologies, and potential areas of strategic collaboration.

Ali Pervaiz welcomed Weir's participation in Pakistan's mineral sector and assured the company of the government's full support in facilitating its engagement and long-term investment in the country.

The minister appreciated Weir's interest in strengthening its presence in Pakistan and contributing its global expertise to the development of the country's mineral resources.

Weir, a global mining technology leader with over 11,000 employees operating across more than 50 countries, expressed its commitment to building long-term relationships with Pakistan and key industry stakeholders.

As per the statement, the company will participate in the Pakistan Minerals Investment Forum 2026 (PMIF'26) as a platinum sponsor.

Its senior leadership delegation, including Andrew Neilson, Group Chief Executive Officer of Weir, is expected to attend the Forum in Islamabad on November 12-13, 2026.

The minister welcomed Weir's engagement with Pakistan and expressed confidence that collaboration with international technology leaders would contribute to efficient, sustainable and modern mineral development, while supporting the country's efforts to attract investment in the sector. **NEWS DESK**

Govt to advance reforms for a stronger construction sector: Cheema

Federal Minister for Economic Affairs and Establishment Division Senator Ahmad Cheema chaired a meeting to discuss reforms aimed at strengthening Pakistan's construction sector, improving project delivery and addressing key issues faced by the industry.

The meeting discussed the proposed Construction Industry Development Authority (CIDA) Bill.

Minister Ahmad Cheema emphasized that the Bill required detailed consideration, including whether to establish a single body for the construction sector or two separate entities: one to regulate the sector and another to promote the construction industry and handle related matters, said a release issued here on Wednesday.

He asked the relevant officials, Minister of State for Finance Bilal Azhar Kayani and representatives of the Constructors Association of Pakistan (CAP) to consult further on the proposed institutional structure.

The retention money deposited by contractors during the defect liability period was also discussed.

The meeting considered a proposal to place these funds in accounts that earn a return, with the principal amount and interest paid back to contractors after the stipulated period. The Minister for Economic Affairs called for further consultation to develop a workable mechanism.

The meeting considered applying the existing Dispute Avoidance/Adjudication Board (DAAAB) mechanism to government projects.

The Board would monitor project implementation and help prevent or resolve disputes as they arise. CAP proposed applying the mechanism to projects valued at Rs20 billion and above. Minister Cheema called for the proposed threshold to be lowered and further consultation among relevant stakeholders to determine an appropriate limit. **NEWS DESK**

Pakistan opens export display center in Doha

Commerce Minister Jam Kamal Khan inaugurated the country's Export Display Center in Doha to promote Pakistani products and enhance their visibility in the Qatari market, the commerce ministry said on Wednesday, as Islamabad eyes increasing bilateral trade and ensuring sustainable economic growth.

The ministry said that the Export Display Center aims to serve as a platform that showcases Pakistani products and facilitates greater engagement between Pakistani exporters and potential buyers in Qatar. It said the initiative is expected to support efforts to strengthen Pakistan's commercial presence in Qatar and explore new avenues for export growth.

The development takes place as Islamabad attempts to ensure sustainable economic growth driven by exports and long-term fiscal reforms. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has tasked his government to increase Pakistan's annual exports to \$60 billion within five years.

"Federal Minister for Commerce Jam Kamal Khan inaugurated the Export Display Center in Doha, marking an initiative aimed at promoting Pakistani products, enhancing their visibility in the Qatari market and creating new opportunities for Pakistani exporters," the commerce ministry said.



ministry said.

Khan stressed the importance of promoting Pakistani products in global markets and strengthening the country's business-to-business linkages to expand its export potential. He also met members of the Pakistani business community in Qatar, discussing opportunities to enhance bilateral trade, facilitate commercial partnerships and increase the market presence of Pakistani goods.

He stressed the importance of the overseas Pakistani business community in promoting the country's products abroad and contributing to stronger economic relations with host countries.

"The inauguration of the Export

Display Center and engagement with the Pakistani business community formed part of Pakistan's broader efforts to expand its export footprint, strengthen private-sector cooperation and further enhance trade and economic ties with Qatar," the statement concluded.

Pakistan has sought greater economic growth and ties with regional countries in recent years, especially after it came to the brink of a sovereign default in 2023. With its reserves almost depleted and inflation surging, Islamabad managed to avert the default after securing a last-gasp deal from the International Monetary Fund. **NEWS DESK**

Access to finance reforms under review

Minister for Finance and Revenue, Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb on Wednesday emphasized that expanding access to finance must translate into tangible benefits for businesses, farmers and underserved segments, supported by effective risk-sharing arrangements and timely implementation of agreed reforms.

The minister chaired the sixth meeting of the Access to Finance (A2F) Steering Committee and reviewed progress on expanding affordable and inclusive financing across priority sectors, including small and medium enterprises (SMEs), agriculture, exports, housing, and the Prime Minister's flagship schemes, including Apna Ghar, Zarkheza and the Pakistan Accelerated Vehicle Electrification (PAVE) Scheme.

The committee underscored the importance of access to finance in supporting economic inclusion, entrepreneurship, job creation and poverty reduction. It reviewed progress on previously agreed actions and received

updates from sectoral and functional sub-committees, focusing on implementation and remaining bottlenecks.

On SME financing, the Committee noted that outstanding financing had reached PKR 1.148 trillion, including PKR 538 billion for small enterprises, as of October 23, 2026. The Committee also reviewed the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority's (SMEDA) capacity-building roadmap, emphasizing financial literacy, improved documentation, accounting support and digital tools to enhance SME readiness for formal financing. SMEDA was encouraged to work closely with lenders and regulators to provide coordinated support to SMEs.

The committee reviewed agriculture financing, with outstanding credit reaching Rs 1.329 trillion and the number of borrowers standing at approximately Rs3.5 million. Under the Prime Minister's Zarkheza: Aasan Zarai Qarza Scheme, 20,176 loan applications amounting to Rs 8.674 billion had been approved, while 6,132 collateral-free loans worth approximately Rs 2.34 billion had been disbursed to smallholder farmers.

Discussions also covered measures to strengthen livestock and dairy financing and expand private-sector participation across agricultural value chains.

On housing finance, the Committee noted that outstanding financing had reached Rs 455 billion, serving 241,500 borrowers. Under the Prime Minister's Apna Ghar Program, 86,896 applications involving Rs 511 billion in financing had been approved, while 15,584 loans worth approximately Rs 91 billion had been disbursed.

The committee discussed measures to accelerate disbursements and address

housing supply constraints, including financing for builders, developers and under-construction projects.

The committee also reviewed implementation of the Pakistan Accelerated Vehicle Electrification (PAVE) Scheme, aimed at promoting affordable electric two- and three-wheeler mobility. Under the scheme, 21,918 applications involving approximately Rs 3.06 billion in financing had been approved. A total of 5,506 loans worth Rs 1.093 billion had been disbursed, while 3,263 electric vehicles had been delivered to customers.

The committee further reviewed digital initiatives to improve credit assessment and lending, including ongoing pilots for SME credit scoring and exporter financing.

The Finance Minister emphasized secure, consent-based data sharing, appropriate confidentiality safeguards and timely resolution of data-linkage issues to facilitate wider adoption of digital and cash-flow-based lending.

Legal and regulatory measures to strengthen the financing framework were also discussed, with emphasis on improving recovery mechanisms, addressing lending risks and facilitating financing for underserved segments.

Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb expressed appreciation for the progress made so far in housing finance in general, and under the Prime Minister's Apna Ghar Scheme in particular. However, he called upon the relevant stakeholders, including financial institutions and implementing agencies, to significantly step up efforts in SME and agriculture financing, stressing the need for greater urgency, stronger execution and faster disbursements.

He emphasized that expanding access to finance must translate into

tangible benefits for



businesses, farmers and underserved segments, supported by effective risk-sharing arrangements and timely implementation of agreed reforms.

The meeting was attended by the federal secretaries including finance, housing and works, national food security and research, Governor State Bank of Pakistan, Chairman Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP), Chief Executive Officer Karandeaz Pakistan, Chief Executive Officer SMEDA, and senior representatives of the Finance Division, SBP and SECP. **NEWS DESK**

WORLD

DTM

US Muscle In Asia: Hegseth Pitches Bold ASEAN Pact

US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth proposed the creation of an "ambitious" new US-ASEAN defence framework on Wednesday, telling the bloc's leaders it could help them navigate "critically important" years ahead.

The United States has been seeking to boost its regional defence partnerships in recent years, citing the need to uphold what it terms a "free and open Indo-Pacific" as China has increasingly flexed its muscles in the region.

Hegseth, speaking before a meeting with defence chiefs from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in Cebu, praised what he called the region's "pragmatism" and "proud nationalism".

"We're not going to agree on everything, nor do we need to," he said, calling for cooperation where shared interests overlap.

"As we look to the



future in this region, I'd like us to be even more ambitious... we propose that we work together to develop a US-ASEAN Framework for Defence Cooperation," Hegseth said, without offering details.

"A practical framework that guides our cooperation over the next several years. I will note a critically important next several years."

He added that the United States was ready to begin the project as Singapore assumes the chairmanship of the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM)-Plus in the coming year. The grouping includes not only the bloc's 11 member states but representatives from the United States, Japan, China, Australia and others.

Hegseth also called for the strengthening of "maritime domain awareness" and advanced cooperation among naval forces. **AP**

IAEA Finds No Evidence Iran Rebuilding Nuclear Sites



The head of the UN nuclear agency said Tuesday there has been no indication Iran has tried to repair or reconstruct its nuclear facilities damaged in US and Israeli military strikes this year or last year.

President Donald Trump has said one of the major reasons the US went to war with Iran on Feb. 28 was to deny Tehran the ability to develop nuclear weapons, even as he has insisted that strikes the US carried out on Iranian nuclear sites in June 2025 "obliterated" the country's atomic program.

During a UN Security Council meeting, International Atomic Energy Agency chief Rafael Grossi urged Iran to give inspectors access to all nuclear sites, including those damaged in the military attacks. The IAEA has not been able to verify the status of Iran's stockpile of near weapons-grade uranium since the US bombed its sites last year.

However, Grossi said that "since June 2025, we have not identified any activity to repair or reconstruct any of the facilities damaged in the military attacks of 2025 and 2026."

Trump has consistently downplayed the economic impact of the Iran war, which has emerged as a liability for Republicans heading into next week's midterm elections, and has argued that higher fuel prices are worth paying to prevent a nuclear-armed Iran. The White House didn't immediately respond Tuesday evening to a request for comment on Grossi's remarks. **AP**

Militants Ambush Somali Forces, Kill 20 Soldiers



Islamic extremist militants killed at least 20 Somali soldiers in an ambush, a military officer who survived the attack said, as the government acknowledged damage to military vehicles but disclosed no troop casualties.

The al-Qaida-linked al-Shabab group, which has fought Somalia's government for nearly two decades, claimed responsibility for Monday's attack near Jameeca village in southern Somalia.

The Defense Ministry said its troops killed about 75 militants and wounded 56 during hours of fighting. Al-Shabab claimed it killed 321 soldiers and captured prisoners and military equipment.

The casualty figures and claims of captured soldiers and equipment could not be independently verified.

Abshir Abdikanim, a military officer traveling with the convoy, told The Associated Press by phone late Tuesday that he saw at least 20 of his fellow soldiers dead after the attack. He said troops had advanced from Leego into Jameeca, in Burhakaba district in the Bay region, where they exchanged heavy gunfire with militants. **AP**

Bolsonaro Jr Lands In US After Poll Loss



Brazilian Senator Flavio Bolsonaro and his family arrived in Miami on Wednesday, where the United States government would grant them entry visas after he refused to comply with a Brazilian Supreme Court order to surrender his passports.

Bolsonaro, who lost last Sunday's presidential election to leftist incumbent Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, left Brazil under a shroud of secrecy after the court order, which relates to a money-laundering investigation in which he denies wrongdoing.

Reuters TV images showed Bolsonaro, his wife and two daughters disembarking from a Gulfstream G400 and heading into Miami's Opa-Locka Executive Airport.

Their journey to the United States captured attention across the region. They entered northern Argentina late on Tuesday evening, according to the country's migration department, and then took a private jet to the Ecuadorian city of Guayaquil. From there, they flew to Miami.

Neither Argentina's presidency, Ecuadorian ministries nor Baires Fly, the operator of the private jet, responded to requests for comment.

Bolsonaro's departure threatens to deepen a rift between the two most populous nations in the Americas.

Lula has accused Washington of colluding with the Bolsonaro family to help return them to power. Ahead of Sunday's election, Reuters reported on a US State Department campaign to restore the Bolsonaros to office.

Trump told reporters on Wednesday that he would approve of Bolsonaro coming to the United States, after his State Department said it would give them entry visas.

Trump has previously alleged that Flavio's father, former president Jair Bolsonaro, was a victim of judicial persecution in Brazil. **Reuters**

ABC Tells Far-Right Party To Stop Using Bluey

Australia's national broadcaster ABC called on the far-right One Nation party on Wednesday to stop using children's TV character "Bluey" in its political cartoons.

"Bluey" is the popular star of an Australian cartoon series featuring canines navigating childhood and parenting in the suburbs.

Pauline Hanson's One Nation party has come under fire for a 2024 political cartoon depicting "Bluey" driving a car over an Australian politician.

That cartoon in particular has come into the spotlight since a man allegedly drove deliberately into Australian independent lawmaker Helen Haines on October 19.

Surgeons had to amputate both of her legs and she remains in hospital.

The ABC said it did not own the intellectual property for "Bluey", which it shows under licence, but was con-



cerned by its unauthorised use for One Nation.

"The ABC is considering available options," a spokesperson for the broadcaster said in a statement provided to **AP**.

"In the meantime, the ABC considers the relevant cartoons should be immediately removed from One Nation's platforms and no further use should occur."

ABC managing director Hugh Marks told a Senate committee on Tuesday that he had only recently become aware of the One Nation cartoon. "It is an infringement of the intellectual property, number one, but it's also a shocking use of Australia's most loved character," he said. One Nation hit back at the ABC director in a social media post, saying it was not the first time he had taken aim at the party: "This time, over Bluey!" **AP**

Dream Cruise Turns Disaster: 200 Stuck At Sea

Around 200 passengers who paid to live on a cruise ship while travelling the world were abruptly left in a Cambodian port after the company ran out of money, an official said on Wednesday.

US-based operator Villa Vie Residences announced on Tuesday it had "suspended operations in Cambodia" as it worked to address "extraordinary increases" in fuel costs following the Iran war.

The 200-metre (656-foot) Odyssey left Northern Ireland in October 2024 for a continuous voyage for which residents could buy or rent rooms for a holiday or for life -- some passengers selling everything they had to pay for it. However, passengers were given just seven hours to pack their bags and leave during a scheduled stop in the Cambodian port of Sihanoukville, according to Long Dimanche, deputy governor of Preah Sihanouk province. He said in a statement 203 guests and 156 crew had arrived aboard the Bahamas-flagged ship from Thailand on October 23,

and had been due to go on to Vietnam. "The sudden order to disembark has left many retirees and remote workers homeless thousands of miles from their home countries," he said. Some passengers took flights out while others remained in the city, he said, adding that the ship itself was due to refuel and leave on October 31. Randy Cassingham, a passenger on board who runs a cruise blog, wrote that the disembarkation order followed a "cascade of problems". **AP**



SPORTS



Rauf Fined For Breaching ICC Code Of Conduct

Fast bowler Haris Rauf was fined 20 per cent of his match fee on Wednesday and handed an official reprimand for breaching the ICC code of conduct during Pakistan's epic one-wicket win over England in the ODI cricket tri-series.

All-rounder Shadab Khan scored a scintillating unbeaten 113 on Sunday and left England stunned by adding 89 runs for the last wicket with Rauf to seal Pakistan's place in Saturday's final.

The ICC said in a statement that Rauf had breached article 2.2 of its code of conduct for players, which relates to displaying conduct contrary to the spirit of the game.

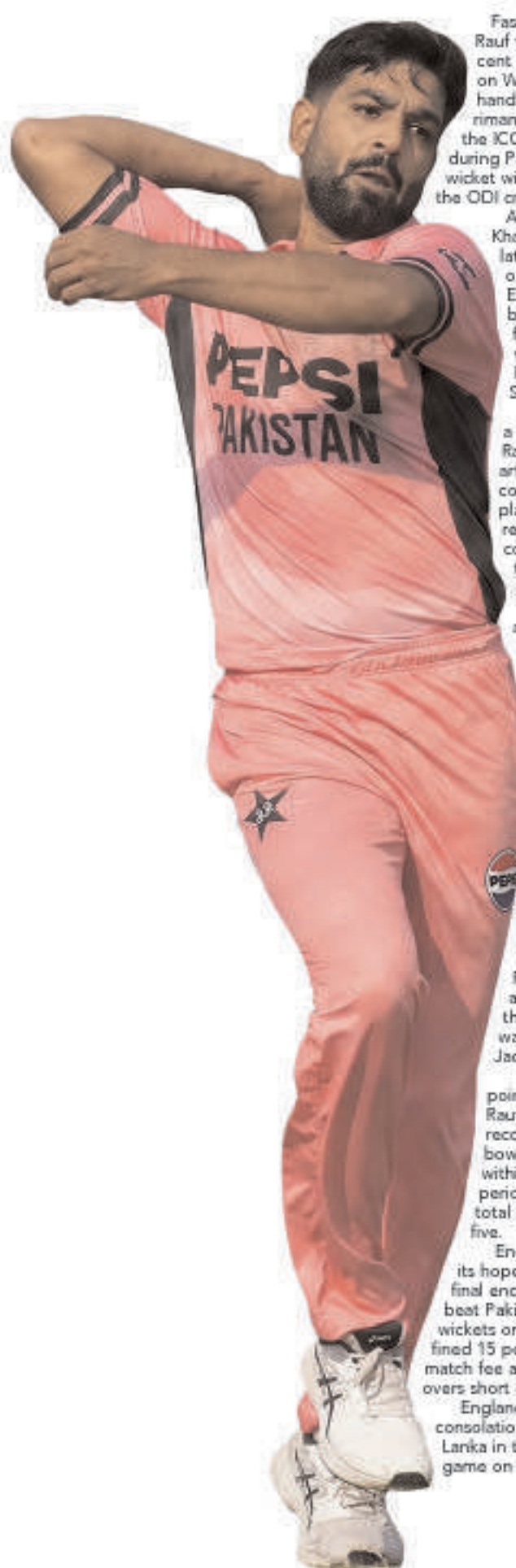
Rauf, standing at the non-striker's end, appealed for a wide before arguing with England all-rounder Will Jacks during the 46th over of Pakistan's run chase.

Rauf also raised his bat and continued the exchange despite warnings from umpire Sharfuddoula Ibne Shahid. The Pakistan player also brushed past the official while walking towards Jacks.

One demerit point was added to Rauf's disciplinary record. It was the fast bowler's third offence within a 24-month period and his points total has increased to five.

England, which had its hopes of reaching the final ended after Sri Lanka beat Pakistan by eight wickets on Tuesday, was fined 15 per cent of its match fee after being three overs short of the target.

England is looking for a consolation win against Sri Lanka in the last league game on Thursday. **AP**



Bad Light Denies Shadman Ton, Bangladesh 213-3

Bangladesh opener Shadman Islam was stranded on 99 as bad light brought an early end to Day 1 in the first cricket test against West Indies on Wednesday. Shadman struck 10 fours to guide his side to 213-3 at stumps. Liton Das, returning from a hip injury, was also unbeaten, on 10.

Bangladesh captain Najmul Hossain Shanto had won the toss and opted to bat first, a decision that was justified by the patient Shadman. New-ball bowlers Jayden Seales and Shamar Joseph put Bangladesh under pressure with probing lines and lengths. Their persistency paid off when Tanzid Hasan edged a delivery from Seales to second slip on 7.

Unlike Tanzid, Shadman resisted the temptation to repeatedly drive outside the off stump and steadied the innings with Mominul Haque. **AP**



Beale Recalled In Shock Move

Kurtley Beale has been recalled for Australia's rugby Nations Championship tour to Europe, where the 37-year-old utility back may be considered for his first test in five years. Beale played the last of his 95 tests for the Wallabies against Wales at Cardiff in 2021. He was selected for Australia's squad in 2024 but had to withdraw with an injured Achilles.

He was selected again Wednesday to cover the absence of regular mid-fielder Hunter Paisami, who is unavailable for the tests against England, Scotland and Wales next month. The Wallabies squad leaves Australia on Saturday, and Beale's inclusion will spark plenty of intrigue about his chances of making a fourth World Cup squad. Australia is hosting the Rugby World Cup next year. **AP**



Wawrinka's Farewell Ends In Basel Loss

Three-time Grand Slam champion Stan Wawrinka played the final match of his career in front of home fans on Tuesday, bidding farewell to the sport following a 7-5 7-6(2) defeat by Czech Jin Lehecka at the Swiss Indoors in Basel.

Wawrinka announced last year that he would retire at the end of the 2026 season, 24 years after he turned professional.

The 41-year-old defeated Rafa Nadal in the 2014 Australian Open final to win his first major, before claiming his other two Grand Slam crowns by beating Novak Djokovic in the finals of the 2015 French Open and 2016 US Open.

"For me, all I wanted in my career was to give everything, to have no regrets, to always fight, to always give 100% in every match — out of respect for myself, for the opponent, for the tournament, for the fans, for everybody," Wawrinka told the ATP website.

"That was always the most important thing for more than 20 years, and that's the only way you can leave the sport: without any regrets."

Wawrinka won 16 ATP titles and reached a career-high world ranking of number three in 2014. He also won Olympic doubles gold with Roger Federer in 2008 and helped deliver Switzerland's first Davis Cup title in 2014. **REUTERS**



Spurs Smash Kings As Wemby Drops 29

Victor Wembanyama had 29 points and 10 rebounds and the San Antonio Spurs beat the Sacramento Kings 130-103 on Tuesday night for their first home victory of the season.

Julian Champagnie added 26 points on 8-for-13 3-point shooting as San Antonio evened its record at 2-2 after opening with disappointing home losses to Oklahoma City and Houston.

Veteran center Domantas Sabonis scored 20 points, 14 rebounds and eight assists for winless Sacramento. De'Andre Hunter added 24 points and Zach LaVine had 22 points.

The Spurs were 17 for 37 on 3-pointers, surpassing

the 15 they made against the Dallas Mavericks on Oct. 24 in their only previous victory.

Dylan Harper had 13 points, six rebounds and six assists for San Antonio. All five Spurs starters were in double figures in their highest offensive output of the season. San Antonio's offense started sluggishly in two previous home games, but rolled to season highs for points in any quarter and half with 39 points in the first period and 80 by halftime. **AP**



Anderson Becomes Napoli Knights Owner

England cricket great James Anderson is the new co-owner of a Naples-based franchise in the inaugural Italia T10 League due to launch next month.

The announcement came just a few days after seam bowler Anderson's 25-year stint at Lancashire came to an end, leaving the playing future of England's all-time record wicket-taker uncertain.

The Italia T10 named the 44-year-old Anderson and former Lancashire wicketkeeper Luke Sutton as co-owners of Napoli Knights, which will be under the ownership of Activate Sport & Leisure — a British talent management and sports consulting agency.

"Cricket has given me so much throughout my career, and the opportunity to be involved in the game in a completely different way is something I'm really excited about," Anderson said.

"Luke and I have a close histo-

ry, so to be taking on this new challenge together is particularly special. The Italia T10 is an exciting concept, and there's a huge opportunity to help raise the profile of cricket in Italy while bringing together some fantastic players and creating an entertaining tournament."

Anderson and Sutton add to the English influence on cricket in Italy. It has long been a minority sport in the country. But interest was piqued when the national team qualified for the T20 World Cup earlier this year for the first time and beat Nepal by 10 wickets in one group game.

The Italia T10, due to run Nov. 18-29 and containing six teams, has been founded by Apex T10 Limited — a company owned by former Essex and Surrey batter Nadeem Shahid. **AP**

