

Opp slams govt over talks, curbs

Opposition leaders Mahmood Khan Achakzai and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan on Thursday criticised the government over stalled political negotiations and restrictions on parliamentarians, calling for meaningful dialogue and the protection of elected representatives' rights.

Speaking at a press conference outside Parliament House alongside opposition leaders, Gohar said the opposition had repeatedly engaged in negotiations with the government in good faith and without preconditions, but the process had failed to produce the desired results. "Our government went away while we kept negotiating with the government," he said, referring to the opposition's attempts to pursue political dialogue.

Gohar also questioned the criteria used to assess political leaders' loyalty to the state, saying that despite nearly three years of the current parliament, he still did not understand the formula used to determine such allegiance. "We have always said that Pakistan comes first and the state comes first," he said.

He also called for parliamentarians to be protected so they could represent their constituents freely and without fear.

Recalling an incident in September 2024, when opposition lawmakers were allegedly picked up, Gohar said the opposition leader had moved a resolution in the National Assembly in response.

Speaking at the same press conference, Opposition Leader in the National Assembly Mahmood Khan Achakzai stressed that parliamentary speeches should be recorded in their entirety, arguing that the official record was essential to preserving the country's political history and allowing the public to assess the statements of elected representatives.

"The complete speech of a member speaking in the National Assembly being recorded is a constitutional requirement," he said. Achakzai said parliamentarians had to struggle even for rights that should ordinarily be guaranteed under parliamentary rules. He maintained that the speaker's authority should be exercised in accordance with the rules and regulations governing the assembly.

Referring to his speech in the National Assembly a day earlier, he said he had made no inappropriate remarks. He alleged that his four-and-a-half-minute speech had been presented as a nine-minute address.

He also rejected suggestions that his remarks had been directed against the country, saying not a single word in his speech had been against Pakistan.

The opposition leader said the time allotted to opposition lawmakers to speak in parliament had been curtailed, describing the restriction as another obstacle to democratic debate.

Continued on Page 7

FINAL PUSH AGAINST TERROR IN KP VOWED

PM unveils Rs 160bn for KP development

Supports KP emergency rule, accuses PTI of criminal negligence on security; vows full authority for tribal council

The Federal Apex Committee and the Area Representative and Development Council (ARDC) on Thursday reiterated the national resolve to eliminate terrorism in all its forms, consolidate the gains of counter-terrorism efforts and ensure lasting peace, effective governance and sustainable development across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, particularly in the merged districts and other underserved areas.

The meetings, separately chaired by Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif here, underscored that defeating terrorism was a collective national responsibility requiring coordinated efforts by all state institutions, sustained support for the security forces and law enforcement agencies, and the active participation of local communities to translate the gains of peace into tangible improvements in public welfare.

The Apex Committee undertook a comprehensive review of the prevailing situation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa following the imposition of Emergency and Governor's Rule in the province.

The forum was briefed on provincial affairs, with particular emphasis on governance

reforms, institutional accountability, transparency and improved service delivery in departments directly affecting public welfare.

The Committee underscored the need for urgent, result-oriented measures to address longstanding governance challenges and improve the lives of the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, particularly those in the merged districts and other terrorism-affected areas.

The body reaffirmed the nation's unwavering resolve to eliminate terrorism in all its forms and manifestations and dismantle terrorist networks, their facilitators and support infrastructure. It emphasized that the fight against terrorism was a collective national responsibility requiring



Security Forces and Law Enforcement Agencies (SFLA).

Continued on Page 7

3 killed, 10 including Pakistani injured in Saudi attacks

Three people were killed while 10, including a Pakistani national, were injured on Wednesday in fresh attacks targeting an airport and oil facility in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province on Wednesday, authorities said.

The King Fahd Airport in Dammam came under attack on Wednesday in which two people were killed while eight others were injured, the Saudi General Authority of Civil Aviation said early Thursday.

The second attack took place on Wednesday morning, when Saudi air defenses intercepted a drone attempting to target a processing facility at Aramco's Shaybah oil field in the Eastern Province, the Saudi energy ministry said. The Shaybah incident resulted in a fire in a vehicle belonging to a contractor operating at the oil field, outside the facility's perimeter, the ministry said. Operations were unaffected, it added.

"The attempted attack resulted in the deaths of two individuals, a Filipino and a Nepali, and injuries to two others, a Pakistani and an Indian, due to falling debris following the

interception," the Saudi energy ministry said.

While the Saudi authorities did not explicitly mention who carried out the attacks, the development takes place amid an increase in missile and drone attacks against the Kingdom by the Iran-backed Houthi rebels.

The Houthis have increased attacks against Saudi aviation and

energy facilities this month, as regional tensions surge due to the US and Iran war. Four drones were separately shot down over Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province, the Coalition to Restore Legitimacy in Yemen said on Thursday. On Wednesday, the coalition said it intercepted seven drones launched toward the Kingdom, including in the Madinah region home to the Prophet's Mosque.

Pakistani nationals have been killed and injured in Houthi attacks against Saudi Arabia this month. Pakistan, which signed a bilateral defense pact with Saudi Arabia in September 2025 and a trilateral defense pact with the Kingdom and Türkiye in August, has vowed to safeguard Saudi Arabia's territorial integrity and security. NEWS DESK



CM Murad, UNIDO eye \$40m for Sindh development

Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah and Deputy Director General/Managing Director of the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO), Ms Fatou Haidara, have agreed to deepen cooperation on inclusive economic growth, climate-resilient infrastructure, rural development, and employment generation, with UNIDO planning to mobilise approximately \$40 million for a dedicated development programme for Sindh under its Programme for Country Partnership (PCP) 2025-2030.

The understanding was reached during a meeting at the CM House, where the two sides reviewed progress under the European Union-funded Poverty Alleviation and Inclusive Development Across Rural Sindh (PAIDAR) programme, discussed the expansion of successful development interventions, and explored new areas of cooperation to improve livelihoods and

create sustainable economic opportunities for vulnerable communities.

The meeting was attended by Provincial Minister for Labour Saeed Ghani, Minister for P&D Jam Khan Shoro, Special Assistant to CM on Investment Syed Qasim Naveed, Chairman P&D Najam Shah, Secretary to CM Asif Jameel, Secretary Social Protection Khadim Channa and Additional Secretary Investment Zahoor Marri.

The UNIDO delegation included Mr Jie Zhao, Chief of the Asia-Pacific Region; Mr Badar-ul-Islam, Officer-in-Charge of UNIDO; and Mr Farooque Ahmed Siddiqui, National Technical Advisor for PAIDAR.

The Chief Minister welcomed the delegation and appreciated UNIDO's continued



partnership with the Government of Sindh, particularly its support for rural communities, enterprise development, and climate-resilient infrastructure following the devastating floods of 2022. NEWS DESK

Govt gives 3 months to civil servants to declare dual nationality

The government has issued fresh instructions with regard to foreign nationality for civil servants.

The Establishment Division has issued an office memorandum to all ministries and divisions with regard to enforcement of the foreign nationality rules 2026.

The government has decided to collect the details of the citizenship status of civil servants and their dependents and directed the public servants to submit their declarations with regard to foreign nationality within 90 days.

The official order has also demanded the details about the foreign nationality and travel documents of the dependents of civil servants.

A proforma has also been issued to submit declaration with regard to the foreign nationality.

All ministries and divisions have been directed to provide details with regard to the foreign nationality of their officials.

"The civil servants have to submit declaration with regard to the foreign nationality and travel documents. They have also to

submit a declaration in case of marriage with a foreign citizen," as per the official memorandum.

The ARY News earlier reported that the government has decided to enforce rules regarding dual citizenship and foreign nationality for civil servants.

All civil servants were directed to submit their declarations within a week and the Establishment Division in an office memorandum to all ministries and divisions, warned that failure to comply with government orders or providing false information will result in departmental action.

According to the memorandum, submitting a false declaration will be treated as misconduct, and non-compliant officers will face proceedings under the Civil Servants (Efficiency and Discipline) Rules, 2020.

The government has also hinted at legal action against non-compliant officials.

Under the directive, civil servants must declare details regarding foreign citizenship, dual nationality, foreign spouses, and dependents. INP

Petrol price cut by Rs 1.60, diesel's up by Rs 1.64 a litre

The government on Thursday decreased the price of petrol by Rs 1.60 per litre, but raised that of high-speed diesel (HSD) by Rs 1.64.

Following the revision, petrol will retail at Rs377.71 per litre while HSD will cost Rs391.75 per litre. The government continues to levy Rs 114 per litre in taxes and duties on petrol and Rs 100 per

litre on diesel.

According to the Petroleum Division's notification, the new prices are applicable for Oct 23 (Friday).

The price of HSD has come down from a peak of Rs 520.35 recorded on April 3. Its price had started rising from Rs 281 per litre after the US-Iran war broke out on February 28. NEWS DESK

National



DSP among four cops martyred, two terrorists killed in Karak

World



ICC awarded EU's top rights prize

Money



World Bank: Pakistan can triple incomes by 2050

Sports



Pakistani lifters dominate at Asian Masters

Glamour



Rebel Wilson lists \$3.8m Sydney home

Back Page



Brook's double ton in vain as Sri Lanka chase 430

NATIONAL

DTM

MQM-P demands action over lawyers' fake degree scandal

Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P) leader Waseem Akhtar on Thursday urged the chief justice of the Sindh High Court (SHC) to take notice of a fake degree scandal involving 1,184 lawyers after Shah Abdul Latif University (SALU), Khairpur, declared their academic records fake and enrolments invalid.

Addressing a press conference, Waseem Akhtar said the university's inquiry committee had declared the academic records of 1,184 LLB candidates fake and illegal.

He demanded that the names of lawyers found to hold fake degrees be published in newspapers and criminal cases registered against them. He also called for action against those who allegedly facilitated the issuance of fraudulent degrees. "If those responsible for dispensing justice hold fake degrees, who will deliver justice?" he asked.

Akhtar said the lawyers concerned had not only practised law in courts but had also participated in bar elections and cast their votes. He further claimed that between 2,500 and 3,000 lawyers were avoiding the verification and scrutiny of their degrees.

He urged Sindh Law Minister Zia-ul-Hassan Lari to take action in the matter, saying those responsible for maintaining the justice system must uphold fairness, transparency and accountability.

Criticising the PPP government, the MQM-P leader alleged that merit had been undermined across Sindh's institutions and that nepotism had become widespread. He also accused the government of damaging educational institutions and called for merit to be ensured in the education and judicial sectors. **INP**

Iqrarul Hassan's bail plea rejected

Judicial magistrate-East on Thursday rejected the bail plea of Awam Raj Tehreek chief Iqrarul Hassan in a case pertaining to the alleged dissemination of anti-state content on social media in Karachi.

The National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency (NCCIA) has registered Case No. 101/2026 against Iqrarul Hassan under the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA).

Speaking to the media outside the court, his lawyer said the defence would approach the Sindh High Court to seek suspension of the order after receiving the detailed judgment. On October 19, the judicial magistrate had sent Iqrar to jail on judicial remand after rejecting the NCCIA's request for further physical remand.

The agency had produced Hassan before the Judicial Magistrate-East and sought his physical remand in connection with allegations that he had posted anti-state material on social media.

The court rejected the request and directed the NCCIA to submit the challan within 14 days. Hassan was arrested in Lahore's Defence Housing Authority (DHA) and subsequently brought to Karachi at around 1 am, according to the details provided. **INP**

Mobile phones worth Rs 2.8mn stolen in five minutes

A fraudster stole mobile phones and other goods worth Rs2.8 million from a shop in Karachi's Saddar mobile market after replacing its locks shortly before closing time, according to reports.

The unusual theft was captured on video, which has stunned Saddar mobile market shopkeepers. According to the details, the suspect arrived at the shop and stood there for some time before changing the locks just moments before the shop closed.

After the shopkeeper unknowingly locked up the shop with the altered locks and left, the suspect opened the shutter and fled with goods worth Rs2.8 million. Trade leader Rizwan Irfan said the incident took place on the night of October 17. He said the suspect looted the shop in just five minutes before escaping.

A case has been registered at the Preeti police station, according to the report. Meanwhile, an Islamabad court sentenced three accused, including a foreign national, to seven years in prison each in an online investment fraud case, the National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency (NCCIA) said on Thursday.

In a statement on X, the NCCIA said the Islamabad Circle secured the convictions following an effective investigation and court proceedings. The court also imposed a cumulative fine of Rs250,000 on the three convicts.

According to the agency, the accused defrauded a citizen of Rs19.391 million by luring them into an investment scheme through a fake application impersonating a foreign private bank. The investigation was conducted by Sub-Inspector Shehroz Riaz, the NCCIA said, adding that it remained committed to taking legal action against cybercrime suspects and protecting citizens. **INP**

Mustafa Kamal calls for sustained investment in Pakistan's youth

Federal Minister for Health Syed Mustafa Kamal on Thursday stressed the need for sustained investment in Pakistan's youth, warning that the country's growing young population could become a national liability if not provided with proper guidance and opportunities.

Addressing Career Connect '26 as chief guest, organized by the Department of Computer Science at the University of Karachi, the Minister described the university as a landmark institution whose standing should be further enhanced through collective efforts, continuity of policies and strategic guidance.

He said the country's population had crossed 260 million, with an annual growth rate of 2.5 per cent and a fertility rate of 3.7 per cent, creating mounting challenges for the country's health, education and economic sectors.

The Minister said around 68 per cent of the country's population comprised young people, making investment in their development essential to harnessing the country's demographic potential.

Expressing concern over the state of child health and education, Mustafa Kamal said approximately 43 per cent of children suffered from stunting caused by malnutrition, affecting their physical and cognitive development and limiting their potential to contribute to the economy. He said millions of school-age children remained out of school, adding that the country could not fully benefit from its young population without addressing these fundamental challenges.

Emphasising the importance of preventive healthcare, the Minister said the health sector should not focus solely on treating patients or constructing hospitals but also ensure access to clean drinking water, timely vaccination, adequate nutrition and proper maternal care. He highlighted the heavy toll of

preventable deaths among children and mothers, saying that many such deaths were linked to unsafe drinking water, infectious diseases, lack of vaccination and malnutrition.

The Federal Minister stressed that addressing these challenges required a comprehensive approach, beginning at the grassroots level and extending to local governments and federal institutions.

He said sustained efforts, effective planning and continuity of policies were essential to strengthening the country's healthcare and education systems and ensuring long-term development. He expressed optimism that active participation by academia, industry and young people, coupled with consistent efforts, could help Pakistan overcome its challenges and put national development on a sustainable path.

NEWS DESK



Sharjeel Memon reviews preparations for Sindh Vision Conference in Sukkur

An important meeting of the Information Department was held under the chairmanship of Sindh Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon, during which a detailed review was conducted of the preparations and administrative arrangements for the Sindh Vision Conference to be held in Sukkur.

He directed that all administrative arrangements for the conference

Sindh government and the measures being taken for public welfare, so that ongoing development activities in the province and the government's priorities can be effectively highlighted.

The meeting held a detailed discussion on resolving the issues faced by journalists and journalistic organisations, improving the journalism sector, matters related to the media, the performance of the Information

Department, and other important issues. On this occasion, the government's measures to address the difficulties faced by journalists and to resolve matters related to journalistic organisations in a better manner were also reviewed.

Sharjeel Inam Memon said that the Sindh government is taking serious measures to promote journalism, protect freedom of expression, and

resolve the issues faced by journalists. He said that journalists play an important role in society, and their services are also significant in highlighting public issues, alongside providing accurate information to the public. Resolving the issues of journalists and journalistic organisations is among the government's priorities.

Sindh Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon directed the relevant off-



be taken forward effectively and that all necessary measures in this regard be completed in a timely manner.

Speaking during the meeting, the minister said that prominent journalists, political, social, and business personalities from across the country are expected to participate in the Sindh Vision Conference. The purpose of the conference is to provide awareness about the development projects of the

Department, and other important issues. On this occasion, the government's measures to address the difficulties faced by journalists and to resolve matters related to journalistic organisations in a better manner were also reviewed.

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resolve the issues faced by journalists. He said that journalists play an important role in society, and their services are also significant in highlighting public issues, alongside providing accurate information to the public. Resolving the issues of journalists and journalistic organisations is among the government's priorities.

The meeting was attended by Secretary Information Kashif Gulzar Shaikh, Director Advertisement Muhammad Yousuf Kaboor, Deputy Director Senang Latif Chaudhry, and other relevant officials of the Information Department. **NEWS DESK**

Sindh govt committed to women's empowerment



Provincial Minister for Women Development Sindh Shaheena Sher Ali met with Muneerah Khan, Resident Director of Aurat Publication and Information Service Foundation at her office to discuss women's development, protection of rights, gender equality and women's empowerment.

During the meeting, Provincial Minister Shaheena Sher Ali said that the social and economic stability of women is very important, keeping in mind, the Sindh government is working on women's development, economic and social empowerment and empowered roles. She said that the cooperation of welfare and non-governmental organizations for the welfare of women has always been valuable, however, there is a need to publish articles and writings in various journals and magazines to raise awareness about women's problems, so there is a need to work on writings related to women's problems, their solutions and suggestions.

The meeting also emphasized joint efforts for the welfare of women. **NEWS DESK**

Female trainees graduate from Charo

A graduation ceremony was held at ZABTech (ITVE), Charo, to recognize female trainees who successfully completed their training under the Skill Development and Vocational Training Programme of the Sindh Integrated Health and Women Empowerment Project (SIHWEP). The project is being implemented by the Health Department, Government of Sindh, with the support of the Islamic Development Bank (IDB).

The ceremony was attended by Mr. Shafaqat Soomro, Programme Director of SIHWEP, and Ms. Waheeda Mahees, Executive Director of ZABTech (ITVE), along with various officials and members of the ZABTech team.

Mr. Pawan Kumar, Head of Chapter at ZABTech Charo, welcomed all the distinguished guests.

During the visit, the guests toured the campus and inspected training sessions in digital literacy, digital skills, and bakery product preparation. They observed the practical work of the trainees, reviewed their learning progress, and appreciated their skills, creativity, and dedication.

Addressing the ceremony, Mr. Shafaqat Soomro and Ms. Waheeda Mahees appreciated the hard work and achievements of the trainees and encouraged them to further enhance their skills and capabilities. They extended their best wishes for the trainees' bright futures and success, emphasizing that technical and vocational training plays a vital role in creating employment opportunities, promoting economic self-reliance, and empowering women.

A success story of one of the trainees was also shared during the ceremony, highlighting the importance of skills development in promoting personal growth and creating better opportunities for the future. Certificates were distributed among the trainees who successfully completed the programme.

The ceremony concluded with a renewed commitment to promoting technical education, empowering women, and equipping individuals with practical skills to build a brighter, more self-reliant, and prosperous future. **NEWS DESK**

UK delegation discusses new provinces, human rights with Sindh Acting Governor

A delegation of the United Kingdom Mission to Pakistan called on Sindh Acting Governor Syed Awasi Qadir Shah at Governor House. The meeting focused on the country's political situation, foreign affairs, the debate surrounding the creation of new provinces, and human rights.

The delegation was led by Ms Charlotte Ojinnaka, Head of Internal Politics, including Ms Maria Haylik, Second Secretary (Political); Mr Saqib Riaz, Principal Political Adviser; Mr Owais Shah, Senior Political Adviser (Punjab); and Ms Huda Ikram, Senior Political Adviser for Sindh and Balochistan.

Irfan Ahmed Memon, Focal Person to the Acting Governor Sindh, was also present. During the discussion on the creation of new provinces, Acting Governor Sindh said that any proposal on the matter should be examined within the constitutional framework, with due respect for the position of the relevant provincial assembly. He stated that the Provincial Assembly of Sindh had consistently rejected proposals for the creation of new provinces or similar administrative units within Sindh.

Syed Awasi Qadir Shah said that Sindh was home to a civilisation, history and culture spanning thousands of years, and its people had deep ties with their historical and cultural heritage. He emphasized that the people's sentiments and democratic decisions must be respected.

The meeting also covered human rights, women's rights, the protection of religious minorities, and legislation aimed at ensuring equal citizenship. Acting Governor Sindh highlighted Sindh's progressive approach to promoting women's rights, protecting minorities, and advancing inclusive legislation.



He also stressed the importance of strengthening democratic institutions, safeguarding fundamental human rights, and ensuring that legislation reflected the aspirations of the people.

The delegation, led by Ms Charlotte Ojinnaka, thanked

Acting Governor Sindh for the meeting and his warm hospitality. At the conclusion of the meeting, Acting Governor Sindh presented the visiting delegation with traditional Sindhi caps and Ajrak as a gesture of hospitality and a reflection of Sindh's rich cultural heritage. **NEWS DESK**

NATIONAL

DTM

Pakistan, EU vow fight against terrorism

Pakistan and the European Union (EU) on Thursday exchanged views on recent regional and global developments impacting the terrorism threat landscape and issued an unequivocal condemnation of terrorism in all its forms, reaffirming commitment to combating this threat.

Pakistan and the EU exchanged their views during the 10th round of annual bilateral Counter Terrorism Dialogue held here.

The Pakistan delegation was led by Dr Fareha Bugti, Director General (CT), while the EU side was headed by Anna Strzaska, the EU External Action Service's Special Envoy for Counter terrorism.

The EU side condemned the recent terrorist attacks in Pakistan, expressed solidarity with the sufferings of innocent civilians affected and recognised the value of Pakistan's efforts to combat terrorism.

Acknowledging each other's role in the ongoing global fight against terrorism, Pakistan and the EU expressed concern at the security implications of the situation in Afghanistan.

Pakistan and the EU agreed to strengthen their cooperation at multilateral forums, including the United Nations, to advance a coherent counter terrorism approach.

They maintained that effective multilateralism remains essential to building lasting



international consensus on terrorism. The discussions also addressed the evolving nature of terrorist threats, including exploitation of cyberspace, information and energy resources for advancing their objectives.

Pakistan and the EU also exchanged best practices on preventing and countering violent extremism, terrorism financing and radicalisation in all forms, particularly the use of cyberspace by terrorists, among other critical areas in addressing the evolving terrorist threat. They identified priority areas for cooperation and reaffirmed their commitment to regular, institutionalised engagement on counter terrorism.

It was agreed that the next round of the counterterrorism dialogue will be held in Brussels at a mutually convenient date next year. **ANP**

Action against employees must be backed by evidence

The Federal Constitutional Court of Pakistan (FCCP) has ruled that departmental action against a government employee requires credible evidence, a fair inquiry, and compliance with legal requirements, holding that a High Court cannot assume the executive's role in matters relating to an officer's posting and disciplinary proceedings.

A bench comprising Justice Rozi Khan and Justice Syed Arshad Hussain Shah issued the judgment on an appeal filed by police officer Munir Samo, examining an order passed by the Sindh High Court's Circuit Court at Larkana on June 30, 2026.

Justice Rozi Khan authored the written judgment.

The FCCP observed that the inquiry report had not established Inspector Munir Ahmed Samo's involvement in the alleged raid.

According to the report, his role was limited to that of a group officer issuing intelligence reports, and no further action against him had been recommended.

The judgment stated that the Sindh High Court had ordered an inquiry into the matter on April 16, 2026. Subsequently, expressing dissatisfaction with the initial inquiry, it directed the Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP), Larkana, to conduct a fair and comprehensive investigation.

On June 19, 2026, the High Court had also directed that the officers concerned should not be assigned field postings for at least one year until the inquiry report was submitted.

The FCCP held that the High Court had failed to adequately consider the significant findings and recommendations contained in the subsequent inquiry report. Any adverse administrative or departmental action against a government employee must be supported by reasons consistent with the inquiry findings and must comply with the prescribed legal procedure, it added.

The written judgment referred to Article 4 of the Constitution, which guarantees the right to be dealt with in accordance with law, and Article 10-A, which ensures the right to a fair trial and due process.

It emphasized that an officer must be given a reasonable opportunity to present his position and respond to the allegations before an adverse decision is taken against him.

The court further observed that the posting of civil servants, allocation of duties and departmental discipline fell within the executive's domain. Courts could examine the legality of administrative actions but could not substitute their own decisions for those of the competent authorities.

Judicial review, the judgment concluded, was intended to bring unlawful actions into conformity with the law, not to transfer administrative powers to the judiciary. **NEWS DESK**

Gilani, Ayaz discuss strengthening of ties with Maldivian President Muizzu



Chairman of the Senate, Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani, and Speaker of National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq met President of the Republic of Maldives Dr Mohamed Muizzu in Islamabad on Thursday to discuss ways to strengthen longstanding bilateral ties, enhance trade and economic cooperation, and promote parliamentary diplomacy.

Senator Talha Mahmood, Chairman Senate Standing Committee on Defence; Senator Faisal Saleem Rehman, Chairman Standing Committee on Interior; Senator Agha Shehzad Durrani, Chairman Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs; Senate Secretary Syed Hasnain Haider; and other senior officials attended the meeting.

Gilani said Pakistan and Maldives enjoy close, friendly relations based on mutual trust, respect and shared interests. He noted that 2026 marks the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two countries, providing an important opportunity to further deepen cooperation.

He emphasized that parliamentary exchanges, friendship groups and closer coordination between standing committees could strengthen institutional ties and mutual understanding.

He also highlighted opportunities to expand Pakistani exports to Maldives, particularly in pharmaceuticals, textiles, rice, cement, meat, fruits and vegetables. ***Improved air and maritime**

connectivity, he added, could further facilitate trade, investment and economic activity. President Muizzu agreed with the proposal and appreciated the suggestion.

Gilani also underscored the potential for cooperation in education, healthcare, youth development and human resource development, stressing that people-to-people and cultural exchanges would further strengthen friendship between the two nations. Discussing regional and global developments, Chairman Senate said Pakistan remained committed to peace and stability.

He highlighted Pakistan's role in efforts to ease tensions between Iran and the United States, stating that the country had demonstrated responsibility in promoting regional and international peace.

President Dr. Mohamed Muizzu reaffirmed Maldives' strong commitment to its friendly relations with Pakistan and expressed interest in further expanding parliamentary, diplomatic and economic cooperation. He highlighted investment opportunities in Pakistan and appreciated the country's efforts to promote peace and reduce international tensions.

Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening bilateral relations through sustained high-level engagement, parliamentary exchanges, increased trade and investment, and stronger people-to-people contacts. President Muizzu also invited Chairman Senate Gilani to visit Maldives.

Ayaz meets president: Meanwhile, National Assembly Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq and President Dr. Mohamed Muizzu focused on bilateral relations between Pakistan and the Maldives, with particular emphasis on further strengthening cooperation and promoting people-to-people contacts.

During the meeting, Ayaz Sadiq said that Pakistan attaches great importance to its longstanding, friendly and brotherly relations with the Maldives.

He emphasized the need to further enhance cooperation between the two countries in areas of mutual interest, including trade, education, health, tourism and capacity building. Ayaz Sadiq underscored the importance of high-level exchanges in promoting mutual understanding and strengthening institutional linkages between the two countries.

He said that continued engagement between the leadership and institutions of Pakistan and the Maldives would help explore new avenues of cooperation and further consolidate bilateral relations.

Ayaz Sadiq highlighted the significance of parliamentary diplomacy in promoting dialogue, mutual understanding and closer ties between the two nations.

He expressed confidence that enhanced interaction between the parliamentary institutions of Pakistan and the Maldives would contribute to strengthening bilateral relations and fostering cooperation on matters of mutual interest.

President of Republic of Maldives Dr. Mohamed Muizzu appreciated the longstanding friendship between the two countries and expressed his desire to further strengthen bilateral cooperation in diverse fields.

He underscored the importance of continued engagement and closer collaboration for the mutual benefit of the peoples of Pakistan and the Maldives. Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to further strengthening bilateral relations through sustained engagement, enhanced cooperation, and closer people-to-people contacts. The meeting was also attended by MNAs Dr. Shazia Sobie, Ms. Shaista Khan, and Mr. Sanjay Perwani. **NEWS DESK**

ECP to hear Punjab, Rawalpindi Cantt LG cases

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) will hear key cases concerning local government elections in Punjab and Rawalpindi Cantonment on October 28, directing senior officials of the Punjab government and the defence establishment to appear before it to present their positions.

According to the revised cause list issued by the ECP on Thursday, the commission has directed the chief secretary Punjab and secretary local government to appear in person in connection with the case regarding local government elections in Punjab.

The commission will also hear a case concerning local government elections in the cantonment boards on the same day, directing the secretary defence and director general of the Military Lands and Cantonments Department, Rawalpindi, to attend the hearing in person or through their authorised representatives to present their positions.

The hearing is scheduled for 12:30 p.m., according to the revised cause list. **NEWS DESK**

Federal workers health insurance scheme sent for approval

Parliamentary Secretary for Health Nelson Azeem on Thursday informed the National Assembly that the proposed health insurance scheme for federal government employees had been forwarded to the relevant authorities for consideration and approval.

Responding to a question during the question hour, he said the Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination (NHSR&C) had forwarded the summary through the Finance Division to the Prime Minister's Office.

He said the Prime Minister's Office subsequently referred the summary to the Committee on the Sehat Sahulat Programme, headed by the Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, for deliberations and recommendations before its onward submission to the prime minister and the federal cabinet. Nelson Azeem said the scheme would be implemented after approval by the competent authority.

Responding to a supplementary question regarding the treatment of cancer patients, he clarified that treatment was already being provided to eligible patients at various government hospitals, with support from Roche under an existing arrangement. He said patients could also avail themselves of treatment through the Sehat Sahulat Card, adding that the proposed insurance scheme was intended to provide an additional financial safeguard for employees and their families. The parliamentary secretary explained that the proposal aimed to redirect medical reimbursement funds to an insurance company so that healthcare expenses could be covered directly under the scheme, reducing the financial burden on employees and their dependents.

He said the initiative reflected the government's commitment to improving public welfare and ensuring access to healthcare facilities. **NEWS DESK**

Afghan repatriation slows down at Torkham

The repatriation of Afghan refugees through Torkham border crossing has witnessed a decline in the daily number of returnees dropping to around 250 to 300 over the past six weeks.

According to available figures at the border on Thursday, a total of 1,571 million Afghan refugees returned to Afghanistan through Torkham between October 2023 and October 2026.

The returnees included approximately 638,000 children, 520,000 men and 412,000 women. Around 255,000 families have returned to Afghanistan during the period.

In 2025, the daily number of Afghan returnees had ranged between 3,500 and 4,000, but the figure has declined sharply in recent weeks.

The government had warned of renewed action against illegally residing Afghan nationals after October 1, with preparations reportedly completed. The holding centre established at Torkham is also operational.

Personnel from various relevant departments remain deployed at the border crossing to manage the movement of Afghan nationals returning to their country.

Around 300 Afghan nationals are reportedly arriving at the holding centre daily, while raids and arrests against illegally residing Afghan nationals continue in different parts of the country.

Authorities have not yet provided further details about the reasons behind the decline in repatriation. **NEWS DESK**

US to cooperate with Punjab for training of security institutions

Punjab Home Secretary Dr Ahmed Javed Qazi and US Consul General Stetson Sanders discussed the law and order situation in Punjab and the professional capacity of security institutions during a meeting here on Thursday.

According to a spokesperson for the Punjab Home Department, the meeting focused on security cooperation, modern technology, professional training and opportunities for further collaboration between the two sides.

Dr Ahmed Javed said the provincial government was making Punjab safer through modern technology and training while strengthening the capacity of law enforcement agencies to maintain law and order. He added that 14 modern check posts were under construction to enhance inter-provincial border security.

He said the protection and welfare of vulnerable segments of society remained a top priority of the Punjab chief minister. A monthly honorarium programme for 25,000 mosque prayer leaders was also being successfully implemented at a cost of Rs20 billion, he added.

The home secretary said the provincial government was taking measures to rehabilitate prisoners under the chief minister's prison reforms agenda. Technical training was being provided to inmates to

help them achieve economic self-reliance and become productive members of society, he added.

He described the Punjab Science Enclave as a flagship project of the provincial government, completed at a cost of billions of rupees. He said the government was also working to protect children and promote their welfare alongside national security.

Dr Ahmad said the Centre of Excellence on Countering Violent Extremism was actively working to prevent extremism. Awareness campaigns were also being conducted to combat smog and promote the safe disposal of crop residue, he added.

He said the provincial government had imposed a ban on the use, purchase and sale of covert recording devices and spying equipment in Punjab.

The home secretary further said a second delegation of parole and prison officers would soon depart for training under cooperation with the US Department of State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs. He said the Civil Defence Resilience Corps had been modernised to meet contemporary requirements, with the registration of around 400,000 volunteers completed so far and their training under way.

US Consul General Stetson Sanders expressed the desire to explore further opportunities for cooperation to strengthen the security of both countries. Special Secretary Home Zainab Khan, Inspector General of Prisons Mian Salik Jalal and Additional Secretary Internal Security Javeria Maqbool also attended the meeting. **NEWS DESK**



EDITORIAL

DTM



Weak growth reflects a deeper crisis

Our economic growth of 3.65 percent in the fiscal year ending June 2026 shows that the country is recovering, but not fast enough to meet its needs. The government's downward revision from 3.70 percent is small, yet it points to a larger problem: Pakistan's economy remains under pressure from war, internal security challenges and political uncertainty. Economic growth is not driven by numbers alone. Businesses need peace, investors need confidence and ordinary people need stable incomes. When conflict threatens regional trade, security concerns disrupt business activity and political uncertainty delays investment, the economy struggles to reach its potential. Pakistan has faced all these challenges. Regional tensions and the risk of war have created uncertainty for trade, energy supplies and investment. Internal security problems have also increased the difficulties faced by businesses and investors. At home, political instability has weakened confidence in the country's economic direction. Investors are less likely to commit money when they cannot predict what lies ahead.

The latest figures offer some encouraging signs. Agriculture performed better than initially estimated, while information and communication recorded strong growth. Construction also benefited from public spending. However, industrial growth slowed, manufacturing fell short of earlier expectations and several important industries reported declines. Services, which account for a large part of economic activity, also grew more slowly than first estimated. The sharp slowdown in the final quarter is particularly worrying. It suggests that the recovery remains fragile and could lose momentum without stronger support for productive economic activity. The rise in the size of the economy to \$450.4 billion may appear encouraging, but a bigger economy does not automatically mean better living standards. Per capita income remains low, while inflation has reduced the purchasing power of households. For many families, economic recovery is meaningful only when jobs become available, wages improve and essential goods become affordable.

More military intervention in Yemen's war

The United Kingdom's decision to deploy fighter jets to Saudi Arabia amid renewed Houthi attacks risks adding another military dimension to an already dangerous regional conflict. While protecting civilians and critical infrastructure is a legitimate concern, the arrival of more military actors is unlikely to bring lasting peace to Yemen. The better option is diplomacy, not another expansion of the war. London says the Royal Air Force Typhoon jets will undertake defensive missions to protect Saudi cities and vital installations. British officials have also announced logistical support and the deployment of military advisers. The distinction between defensive and offensive operations is important, particularly when civilian lives and essential infrastructure are at risk. However, even a deployment described as defensive can carry wider consequences in a region where military calculations can change rapidly. The Houthi attacks on Saudi Arabia, including reported strikes against Riyadh's international airport, raise serious concerns about civilian safety. Attacks on oil tankers and threats to maritime movement also endanger international trade and energy supplies. Such actions must not be treated as an acceptable means of pursuing political objectives. But responding to violence with a growing military presence can create a cycle of retaliation that becomes increasingly difficult to stop.

Yemen has suffered years of conflict, displacement and economic hardship. Saudi Arabia entered the war in 2015 to support Yemen's internationally recognised government. Yet military intervention has failed to deliver a stable political settlement. The renewed hostilities demonstrate how fragile the region's security remains and how easily an existing conflict can return to violence. The entry of more external actors could widen the confrontation, increase the risk of miscalculation and make negotiations harder. Britain and other international partners should therefore use their influence to encourage restraint rather than allow military deployments to become a substitute for political solutions. Saudi Arabia has a right to protect its population, just as civilians in Yemen deserve protection from bombardment and deprivation. These concerns cannot be addressed through competing military campaigns alone. A lasting settlement requires direct engagement, regional cooperation and credible guarantees against attacks. The international community must make a clear choice: help stop the war or risk prolonging it.

Bypassing the Malacca Strait -Part II

As trade routes are rerouted through Thai land routes, Burmese pipelines, and Laos railways, the geographical realities that have shaped Southeast Asian foreign policy for a hundred years are being redefined. The future shape of the region's security architecture will depend less on who has control over the choke points of the seas than on who has control over the land route alternatives.

In contrast, the maritime states of Singapore, Indonesia, and the Philippines are dependent on open maritime passages based on international law. As trade shifts northward onto the land, these states experience a quiet crisis of relevance. They become less relevant diplomatically. If the major external players, particularly China, but also Japan and South Korea, become less reliant on the passage through the Strait of Malacca, then their diplomatic and security engagement in the stability of the littoral states will be reduced. This also applies to the United States, which has historically partnered with Singapore and Indonesia to ensure the freedom of navigation through the strait.

Second, the use of bypass routes means that there is a legal change in Asian trade. Open routes are regulated by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Open oceans are owned by nobody. The land-based bypass routes, however, pass through sovereign territories. The land-based bypass routes are regulated by bilateral landlord and tenant agreements. This means that any transfer of the goods from the Strait of Malacca to Myanmar or Thailand passes under the domestic political will of Naypyidaw or Bangkok.

Security is the major reason Beijing would pay for such projects. This involves the risk that the U.S. Navy may decide to block this route in case of conflict over Taiwan and the South China Sea. However, switching from one maritime choke-point to a number of overland corridors will only generate more complicated vulnerabilities for Beijing.

It is necessary to understand that seeking security in the form of circumvention is a security illusion because pipelines that will be built through Myanmar will go right through the territories contested by EAOs and defense forces against the junta. They will be exposed to instability in these regions, to extortion and sabotage, and will require extensive security deployments to operate at all.

The Landbridge proposed in Thailand is a source of great logistical difficulties as well. The necessity to unload thousands of cargo containers from the ship in the Andaman Sea, load them on trains, then deliver them across the 90-kilometer-long isthmus and load them

on other ships in the Gulf of Thailand is an immense challenge in the case of war.

Additionally, these alternatives do not reduce the nation's strategic exposure to enemy navies; they only shift the strategic risk from one point to another. In case India builds a pipeline facility in Rakhine State or a deep-water port in Ranong Province, they are equally susceptible to enemy blockades or airstrikes as the ships passing through the Malacca Straits. The creation of Chinese port facilities in the Bay of Bengal by India means shifting the frontline to the vicinity of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

With the growth of bypass infrastructure, power dynamics in the region are being recalibrated. The state of Singapore understands the risk it faces to its historic economic system. Understanding that there is no way to stop the development of alternative shipping channels, Singapore has moved to a system where it is now trying to cement itself as the indispensable center for logistics management, green fuels, digital trade architecture, and maritime arbitration in the region. Singapore wants to be the brain of Indo-Pacific shipping even if the brawn moves elsewhere.

In the meantime, the maritime security efforts in the region are expanding. For many years, the focus of Southeast Asian maritime defenses was on protecting the choke

points in the Malacca and Singapore Straits from pirates. Now, the focus of littoral navies, as well as the QUAD nations, has shifted to monitoring the deeper-water approaches in the Andaman Sea and northern reaches of the South China Sea.

Concentration on a single crisis event in the Strait of Malacca fails to recognize the ongoing structural change that is occurring within the Indo-Pacific. The gradual evolution of bypass options has caused economic and political power to shift from maritime Southeast Asia to the Asian mainland.

As trade routes are rerouted through Thai land routes, Burmese pipelines, and Laos railways, the geographical realities that have shaped Southeast Asian foreign policy for a hundred years are being redefined. The future shape of the region's security architecture will depend less on who has control over the choke points of the seas than on who has control over the land route alternatives.



NISAR KAKAR

Nisar Kakar is a writer and poet and a BS English student at Qasbi-i-Azam University, Islamabad.

Second, the use of bypass routes means that there is a legal change in Asian trade. Ocean routes are regulated by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Open oceans are owned by nobody. The land-based bypass routes, however, pass through sovereign territories. The land-based bypass routes are regulated by bilateral landlord and tenant agreements.



How Beijing Sends Subtle Signals Without Saying a Word

China's "panda diplomacy" leverages giant pandas as soft-power tools, strategically aligning animal loans with trade deals and political favors. The arrival of the adorable bamboo-crunching pandas signals goodwill during diplomatic thaws, while the sudden recalls reflect China's subtle dissatisfaction with the host during periods of tension. Beyond projecting a friendly global image, these lucrative panda lease agreements generate vital funding for China's extensive panda habitat restoration and conservation efforts.

Could you imagine a slow, bamboo-chewing panda that mostly does nothing, just sits around all day, somehow becoming one of the most powerful tools in the foreign policy kit of one of the world's biggest powers? It sounds silly at first, but it has been going on for more than 50 years with China's giant pandas. From the outside, it looks completely innocent: just zoos, excited kids, and endless photos of a fluffy animal falling off a log. Look a little closer, though, and you start noticing that this panda diplomacy lines up suspiciously well with the highs and lows of China's relationships with countries like the United States, Australia, and much of Europe.

The tradition goes back further than most people realize. In 1972, President Richard Nixon made his famous trip to Beijing. Right after his trip, China started sending pandas to the USA, which warmed up their years of distant relations. Previously, pandas were considered a

genuine gift, with no intention was hidden behind obvious symbolism. That changed eventually.

China moved away from giving pandas away outright and started loaning them instead, charging foreign zoos hefty annual fees, sometimes over a million dollars, for agreements that usually run around a decade. That's the downside: a lot of visitors don't even realize it while they're getting a shot, because every cub born abroad legally belongs to China, and they get shipped

back once they get three or four years old.

This is where things get genuinely fascinating, at least to anyone who follows international relations. The timing of these panda loans has a habit of falling right in line with major diplomatic efforts. In 2011, Edinburgh Zoo received two pandas. Subsequently, Scotland and China signed trade deals covering salmon exports and renewable energy. In 2017, a panda loan landed in Germany right around the same time Xi Jinping visited Berlin.

Nobody is claiming these are wild coincidences that took years of digging to uncover. Researchers who track this stuff have watched China's whole approach shift over time, moving

from simple goodwill gifts to a straightforward business transaction and now into something closer to a visible thermometer for how healthy or shaky a trade relationship currently is.

The flip side of this pattern might actually be more revealing. Dennis Wilder, a senior fellow at Georgetown University's Initiative for US-China Dialogue on Global Issues, came up with the term "punitive panda diplomacy" after watching what happened during a rough patch in US-China relations. Zoos in Memphis and San Diego lost their pandas during that stretch, and for a while it genuinely seemed like Washington's National Zoo, along with facilities in Scotland and Australia, might be next, with no real indication that anyone

was renewing those contracts. Wilder's read on it was that Beijing might have been sending a message without ever needing to say a word publicly, letting the pandas' quiet exit do the talking instead.

That cold spell didn't stick around forever, which honestly tracks with how these things usually go. As relations between Washington and Beijing started thawing again, China's ambassador to the United States, Xie Feng, showed up at the National Zoo to announce a brand new cooperation deal, calling it a very good sign for the relationship going forward. Two young pandas, Bao Li and Qing Bao, eventually arrived in Washington under an agreement running all the way to 2034, with the zoo paying about a million dollars

each year toward habitat restoration, disease monitoring, and research on how climate change is affecting panda populations.

And then it happened again just a few months later. Right before President Donald Trump's planned trip to China, his first in ten years, Beijing rolled out a fresh panda partnership with Zoo Atlanta, sending over a male named Pingping and a female named Fuzhuang for a decade of joint research. Most observers read that timing as deliberate, a way for China to signal openness right before a major visit, fitting a pattern researchers have documented for years. San Diego Zoo had already gotten its own pair back in 2024, and San Francisco has been expecting a set of pandas too.

It would be unfair to paint this whole thing as pure political theater, because it is really a genuine conservation angle running underneath it. The giant pandas got reclassified from endangered to vulnerable by the IUCN back in 2016, a shift that owes a lot to China's long-term investment in protecting panda habitat. The giant panda was moved from the endangered list to the vulnerable list by the IUCN in 2016. This change is mainly because of China's long-term work to protect panda habitat. China has kept enlarging the Giant Panda National Park, which now covers more than 27,000 square kilometers, in Sichuan, Shaanxi, and Gansu.

China has also carried out projects that connect pieces of habitat that were split apart so that groups of pandas can meet again and keep their gene pool healthy. The fees zoos pay do genuinely fund a chunk of that work. It just also happens that pandas make wonderfully convenient political messengers at the same time.



HOORIA AKBAR

Hooria Akbar is an independent researcher and content writer with a strong interest in contemporary issues across AI, technology, society, and emerging trends.



OPINION

DTM



KARACHI: A potter busy making clay pottery at his workplace on the outskirts of the city. NP

Letters To The EDITOR

The real goal of education

I want to express my views that in our society, becoming a doctor or an engineer is often considered the ultimate achievement for a student. From an early age, many children are told that these two professions are the only paths to a successful and respectable life. As a result, students often face pressure from their families and society to choose medical or engineering, even when their interests and abilities lie elsewhere.

The problem is not that medicine and engineering are bad choices. Both are important professions that contribute greatly to society. The real problem begins when these careers are treated as the only respectable options, while other fields are ignored or considered less valuable.

A student who has a talent for writing may be forced to pursue medicine. Someone interested in computers, business, law, agriculture, architecture, psychology or scientific research may be pushed towards engineering simply because their family believes it offers a better future. In such situations, students are not choosing careers according to their interests; they are choosing according to other people's expectations.

This pressure can affect students' confidence, motivation and academic performance. When young people spend years studying subjects they do not enjoy, they may struggle to discover their true abilities. Some eventually succeed, but others remain dissatisfied because they never had the opportunity to explore what they were genuinely good at.

Another problem is the way society measures success. People often judge a student's intelligence by their examination marks or the profession they enter. A medical student may receive more appreciation than someone studying literature, while an engineering student may be considered more successful than someone pursuing the arts. However, every field requires knowledge, dedication and skill. A society cannot progress through doctors and engineers alone. It also needs teachers, researchers, writers, economists, lawyers, artists, skilled technicians, entrepreneurs and many other professionals.

The situation can be particularly challenging in areas where career counselling and access to information about different professions are limited. Students may not know what opportunities exist beyond a few familiar careers. Families, meanwhile, may encourage medicine or engineering because they believe these professions provide financial security and social respect. Their concerns are understandable, but decisions made without considering a student's abilities, interests and the realities of the job market can create problems later.

NAZIA ALEEM

Lahore

Chakwal's growing water crisis demands urgent action

Chakwal is facing a serious water shortage that requires immediate attention from the government and local communities. The declining availability of water is affecting daily life, agriculture and the livelihoods of people who depend on farming. Without timely action, the problem could become even more difficult to manage in the coming years.

One of the main reasons for the shortage is the continuous decline in groundwater levels. Excessive extraction and insufficient groundwater recharge have reduced the amount of water available for domestic and agricultural use. As a result, many wells have dried up or are providing less water than before. This situation has created difficulties for residents who depend on underground water to meet their daily needs.

Agriculture is among the sectors most affected by the crisis. Many farmers in Chakwal depend heavily on rainfall and small dams to irrigate their fields. However, reduced rainfall in recent years has made these sources less reliable. Farmers are struggling to provide sufficient water to their crops, which can reduce agricultural production and increase financial pressure on rural households.

The growing population has added to the problem. As the demand for drinking water, household consumption and agricultural use increases, the pressure on already limited resources becomes greater. If water continues to be extracted without proper planning, groundwater reserves may decline further, making it harder for communities to meet their basic needs. Pakistan's wider water crisis makes the situation in Chakwal particularly concerning. Agriculture accounts for a large share of the country's water consumption, making efficient water management essential for food production and economic stability. Water scarcity is not simply an environmental issue; it also threatens livelihoods, public welfare and future development.

The government must develop a practical strategy to address the shortage in Chakwal. Rainwater harvesting, groundwater recharge, the construction and maintenance of suitable water-storage facilities, and the promotion of water-saving irrigation methods can help improve the situation. Authorities should also monitor groundwater extraction and encourage farmers to adopt practices that reduce unnecessary water use.

SHUJAAT ALI

Chakwal

Pakistan's Defining Pact

In "The Age of Bronze", Lord Byron weaponized his biting satire against the Congress of Verona, mocking European rulers for masking their domestic failures behind grand global alliances. Condemning a system of "blood, sweat and tear-wrung millions where the country is bankrupt and the courtier fed," his verses exposed the profound hollowness of states that flaunt foreign treaties to obscure abysmal governance at home.

Our own history reads as if Byron's words came true. Since 1947, we have engaged in a relentless quest for salvation abroad to avoid fixes at home. From early dependence on SEATO and CENTO, to RCD and SAARC, and finally to the grand bet on CPEC, each initiative has been merely a tourniquet for a profusely bleeding domestic core.

Today, that outward engagement continues in new forms, including the Makkah Joint Defense Agreement. Its significance lies in the opportunities that deeper strategic cooperation can create, but the ability to convert those opportunities into lasting gains rests on institutions at home. Alliances can reinforce national capacity, but they cannot substitute for statecraft or resolve the governance challenges that ultimately determine their value.

The costs of these governance failures are ultimately borne at home. A telling example: IPPs attracted substantial private and foreign capital, yet flawed contracts saddled consumers with crippling capacity payments. Between July 2023 and May 2024, Rs1.56 trillion was paid to the IPPs for electricity that was never generated. This staggering sum is just one measure of policy failure and of how our failures at home deepen our dependence abroad.

Neelum-Jhelum's tunnel failure turned a major hydropower project into a costly liability; Gwadar's much-heralded port has struggled to turn infrastructure into sustained commercial activity. Partnerships and ambition have never been in short supply; governance has.

CPEC brings the broader lesson into sharp relief. Its investments in energy, infrastructure and connectivity created significant opportunities. However, it is governance that determines if this capacity translates into delivery. As it stands, roads do not build institutions, ports cannot dismantle entrenched rent-seeking, and power plants cannot restore governance.

The pattern extends beyond individual projects or agreements. It reflects a deeper belief that the next patron, package or partnership will usher in a new Pakistan. Successive governments have cast each external opening as a turning point, only for the same weaknesses to survive every change of power.

External support can ease a crisis, relieve a constraint or create an opportunity. It cannot repair failures rooted in governance. The proliferation of agreements and the disappointments that followed underscore the central lesson - external engagement is most valuable when it augments national capacity.

The loss of East Pakistan offers a sobering historical lesson. External alignments and security partnerships may strengthen a state's strategic position, but they cannot redress political exclusion, institutional failure or a breakdown of national cohesion. When those foundations weaken, no amount of external support can hold a country together.

This is no argument for isolation. We do need alliances, markets, investment and credible diplomatic engagement. The question is not

whether we should engage the world but what we bring to the table. Engagement carries weight only when backed by institutional depth; a country that governs itself well can engage others on its own terms.

That strength begins at home with the rule of law, not rule by law. Legal institutions must never become instruments against citizens or political opponents. Contracts must be honored, property must be protected, and disputes must be settled impartially. State decisions must be predictable. Foreign pacts may attract investors; only credible institutions give them reason to stay.

That credibility also demands accountability with consequences, not slogans or acronyms.

Public office must mean responsibility, not immunity. Selective accountability turns justice into an instrument of power. Political stability too is crucial. Governments must govern, oppositions must scrutinize, and elections must ensure credible, orderly transfers of power.

A federation cannot exist on paper while exclusion defines reality. Provinces, districts, minorities, women, youth and other marginalized communities must have a genuine stake in the country's future. Local governments need real authority and resources. Education and healthcare must be judged by outcomes, not promises.

At the heart of effective governance lies competence. We have never lacked talent; we have failed to build a meritocracy that can harness it. The civil service, regulators, public enterprises and local administrations require merit, continuity and performance-based advancement. A capable country does not need a bloated bureaucracy; it needs institutions empowered to deliver.

Our governance has become a Rubik's Cube: endlessly rearranged, rarely solved. Administrations change, institutions are renamed, structures redesigned, and jurisdictions recast, yet the underlying failures persist. We do not need another frantic turn of the cube; we need to solve what we have created.

International agreements may open doors; domestic governance determines whether we have the capacity to walk through them. A sovereign country needs allies, not dependencies. External partnerships should strengthen our position, not become an alibi for domestic failure.

We have signed enough agreements. The next pact must be with ourselves. Its terms are clear: legitimate governance, the rule of law, impartial accountability, merit over connection, and institutions that serve citizens rather than entrenched elites. Political stability alone is not enough. Without changing the structures that sustain the status quo, stability can simply entrench it.

Ultimately, the measure is simple. A country is judged by the life it delivers at home, not by the agreements it signs abroad. Allies can strengthen our position, trade can widen opportunities, and defense partnerships can bolster security. None can substitute for the institutions and national cohesion we must build for ourselves.

A vibrant nation cannot be delivered through diplomatic forays, foreign design, or outsourced governance. It is forged through domestic purpose, institutional integrity, and a shared stake in the national future. Pakistan's defining pact, unrealized so far, shall be with its own people. Its future will be decided at home.



MIR ADNAN AZIZ

Mir Adnan Aziz is a columnist whose writing explores the forces that shape power, belief, and society.

The Significance Quest: Rethinking the Drivers of Extremism

If this assessment is correct, much of today's counterterrorism efforts are actually inappropriate. People who are suppressed through border walls and drone strikes can become even more embittered and will be recruited as the next group of militants to further the humiliation narrative. The more difficult but ultimately effective task is to provide marginalized individuals with avenues to achieve significance without having to pick up arms.

Extremism stems not from low self-esteem, but from "threatened egotism" and a wounded sense of entitlement. As Arie Kruglanski's "significance quest" theory explains, militants use violence to reclaim lost dignity and force recognition. While structural issues like poverty create fertile ground, political violence manifests when perceived humiliation meets narrative promises of justice. Effective counterterrorism requires addressing systemic disenfranchisement rather than relying solely on brute force, which only deepens grievances.

A longstanding misconception about extremism is that it stems from low self-esteem. This concept, however, is a flawed one, as it makes societies see political violence as a psychological problem, not the very forces that make it possible. It allows them to look upon the terrorist as a hurt child who turned into a monster, and a good therapist and some self-help books can cure him. However, a closer look debunks this theory since the issue is much more complicated and difficult to comprehend.

When researchers actually evaluate this "low self-esteem" theory, it continually fails. Roy Baumeister and his colleagues had been looking for a direct link between poor self-image and aggression more than 30 years ago. However, they couldn't locate one. Rather, their results indicated an unexpected finding: people who do not feel good about themselves are more likely to react aggressively when they are insulted. Self-hatred is not the reason that this reaction happens, but actually a feeling of an attack on self-esteem, known as "threatened egotism." Hence, violence usually emanates from those who think they are entitled to better treatment but are treated with disrespect.

This is not merely an academic debate. It is a



BARIRA MUMTAZ

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question of life and death for many. In February 2026, the Afghan and Pakistani security forces fired across the border, killing many people and adding to tensions between the two countries. These tensions had existed for years before, especially since 2021, when the Taliban once again came to power, and they created an environment suitable for the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

They do not say, "I am worthless," but actually the quite the opposite. They claim a Pashtun homeland belonging to their people. It is not the feeling of disaffection that inspires such groups, but a powerful mix of grievance, feeling of entitlement, and wounded pride conveyed through the narratives of justice. Similar dynamics can be observed from the hills of former FATA to the Sahel and among lone-wolf attackers in Western societies.

The issue is far from simple, and any account that suggests otherwise is misleading. Structural theorists have repeatedly cautioned against placing the focus of the cause of terrorism entirely on psychological factors, instead pointing to numerous factors, including prolonged dispossession, continuous drone strikes, occupation of territories, and weak governments. A rejection of oversimplified psychological explanations is warranted because there are political contexts to consider in relation to the causes of terrorism. But it is also not enough to have only struc-

tural explanations, since there are many people who live in poverty and are marginalized without committing acts of violence. Instead, it would be more appropriate to propose that individuals' motivations are triggers to violent action and that structural conditions provide the environment in which violence can take place. That environment is endemic poverty and a state that is too weak, or too violently oppressive, to give people any legitimate ways to be heard.

How, then, does a psychological wound become a deadly weapon? The most convincing explanation comes from Arie Kruglanski's "significance quest" theory. He contends that militants are rarely driven by feelings of insignificance alone. They are driven by the promise that violence will make them matter. A related manifestation of this dynamic is Nietzsche's concept of resentment, the slow-acting poison experienced by those who can-

and transformed into a sense of superiority. After 25 years of interviewing survivors of Rwanda and other genocides, Evelin Lindner came to the same conclusion. As Lindner argues, humiliation is the "nuclear bomb" of human emotions. This is dangerous since it hides itself under the guise of justice.

If this assessment is correct, much of today's counterterrorism efforts are actually inappropriate. People who are suppressed through border walls and drone strikes can become even more embittered and will be recruited as the next group of militants to further the humiliation narrative. The more difficult but ultimately effective task is to provide marginalized individuals with avenues to achieve significance without having to pick up arms.

Rather than ignoring, it is about giving them a voice, a chance for economic opportunity, and a reckoning with the historical grievances experienced by them. The governments routinely opt for the use of brute force rather than the tedious task of dealing with exclusion, humiliation, and political disenfranchisement. One provides short-lived security while the other provides permanent security.

Until the wounded pride continues to be mistaken, violence will keep multiplying in Kabul and elsewhere. Policymakers need to dispel the myth that extremists are weak people due to low self-esteem. The greater threat is posed by people and groups who are firmly convinced of their own righteousness, who are more or less angry, and who are intent on forcing the world to recognize the importance they see for themselves. In the absence of state action to address that reality, states will remain focused on treating the symptoms of extremism and contribute to the creation of the conditions that fuel extremism.



not fight back, transforming their weakness into moral virtue and their opponents' strength into an unforgivable wrong.

A century ago in Vienna, Alfred Adler called it overcompensation, an inferiority complex reinforced

NATIONAL

DTM

Pakistan urges action against networks arming terrorists

Pakistan has voiced serious concern over grave human rights violations by countries conducting extra-territorial assassination campaigns under the pretext of counterterrorism, and called for their condemnation.

Participating in an interactive dialogue with UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights, Ben Saul, in the General Assembly's Third Committee, Pakistani delegate Muhammad Jawad Ajmal reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to ensuring protection of human rights while countering terrorism.

The Third Committee deals with social, humanitarian and cultural matters.

Emphasizing that the definition of terrorism must be consistent with international law, he called for distinguishing between terrorism and exercise of the legitimate right of people to resist foreign occupation and for exercising their right to self-determination.

Highlighting situations of foreign occupation in Indian illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir and Palestine, Ajmal, a counsellor in Pakistan Mission to the UN, said the occupying powers continue to violate human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous populations, with forced relocations, settler violence, demographic changes, arbitrary detentions, torture, inhumane and degrading treatment.

He called for holding to account organized criminal networks involved in illicit trade of arms and weapons, as well as drones to facilitate terrorist groups such as the TTP (Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan) and BLA (Balochistan Liberation Army) in the region.

"The situation in Afghanistan is a glaring example of the growing nexus of terrorist groups targeting neighbouring countries, such as Pakistan that has lost more than 4,700 lives in just the last three years alone.

The Pakistani delegate also expressed concern at violations of sovereignty and territorial integrity in complete breach of international human rights laws, under "false pretexts" of counter-terrorism.

In May 2025, he said, India attacked urban civilian areas in Pakistani territory leading to the loss of 54 innocent Pakistani civilians, including 15 children and 13 women, some of them infants.

"While Pakistan has demonstrated its will and capability to thwart such malicious acts of state terrorism, we must condemn such misadventures," Ajmal stressed.

Listings of terrorist individuals and entities must not directly or indirectly discriminate on prohibited grounds, including religion, he said, but must include violent nationalist, far right and Islamophobic groups that target minorities and vulnerable populations worldwide.

The UNSC sanctions regimes, the Pakistani delegate said, should be made more equitable and transparent. **APP**

Government's sole focus on elimination of terrorism from KP: Talal

Minister of State for Interior, Talal Chaudhry, on Thursday said that the government's sole focus was to restore peace and eliminate terrorism, adding that there were no political motives or targets involved.

Talking to the media outside Parliament House, he said the prime minister had visited and chaired a meeting of the Apex Committee in Peshawar.

He said all resources required by the province from the federal government would be provided.

He said all political forces in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa should stand united behind the security forces with a common stance.

Talal said the security forces were fully capable of defeating terrorists within days. However, he said the problem arose when political leaders showed reluctance, failed to provide leadership to the forces, adopted a soft approach towards terrorists and placed conditions on counterterrorism operations.

He said, regrettably, this attitude had led to the situation involving Articles 232 and 234 of the Constitution. He reiterated that the government would not back down from its focus, adding that peace in Pakistan, economic growth and stability could not be achieved without peace in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. He urged political forces in the province, particularly the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), to call terrorists and their facilitators by their names and treat the facilitators in the same manner as terrorists.

He also called for an end to a lenient approach towards terrorists and urged political leaders to openly identify terrorist groups, including the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and (BLA), and stand firmly with the security forces. He said political issues could be resolved through dialogue.

Islamabad development: Earlier, Talal informed the National Assembly that development work, plot allotments and compensation payments in various sectors of Islamabad were being expedited to resolve issues that had remained pending for decades.

Responding to a Calling Attention Notice regarding the demolition of houses and a graveyard in Sectors E-12 and C-16 without the award of compensation for built-up properties by the Capital Development Authority (CDA), he said several sectors of the federal capital had been launched decades ago, and allotment letters had also been issued, but development work, possession of plots and removal of encroachments could not be completed.

He said a separate member had been appointed in the CDA to oversee sector development and ensure better coordination and progress.

Talal said around 95 per cent of the allottees in Sector E-12 had been given possession. The sector was launched in 1985, and allotment letters were issued in 1990, but possession could not be handed over to the allottees for a long time. He said development work and the removal of encroachments were now progressing at a faster pace.

Referring to Sectors C-14 and C-15, he said Sector C-15 was launched in 2008 and had a total of 2,591 affected persons, including 2,258 residential plot holders.

He said the process of allotments and handing over possession was underway in the sectors, while the remain-

ing issues were also being addressed.

The minister said most cases involving compensation and allotments for built-up properties in Sector E-12 had been settled, with only a limited number of cases remaining. He offered to provide sector-wise details to the concerned members of the National Assembly.

Replying to a supplementary question, Talal Chaudhry said there were two categories of compensation in Sector E-12: people whose land had been acquired and those whose built-up properties were eligible for compensation.

He said 515 landowners had been identified in the first category, of whom 412 had been compensated either through land or cash. Around 80 cases remained pending due to various issues, including disputed claims, family matters and court cases, while 11 people had not applied for compensation.

Regarding built-up properties, he said compensation had been paid in 1,800 cases out of a total of 2,251. He added that 155 people had not submitted applications, while 146 built-up property cases remained pending.

The minister said Islamabad's three MNAs had recently discussed the matter with the interior minister. It was agreed that the minister, along with CDA officials, would personally hear the genuine grievances of affected people in the coming days and make efforts to resolve their issues promptly.

He said delays in compensation payments had complicated the matter, while laws governing built-up properties had been changed three times over the past two decades.

Giving an example, he said around 1,115 houses and other structures existed in Sector C-14 when the land was taken over, but the number had now increased to more than 4,000.

He said some of these structures might be genuine, while others could have been constructed to obtain compensation or plots. If plots were allotted against all such structures, he added, the available plots in the sector might not be sufficient, potentially requiring the CDA to allot plots in other sectors as well.

Talal Chaudhry said he had held a detailed meeting with the concerned members of the National Assembly and discussed shortcomings in the laws governing built-up properties. He said compensation cases should be dealt with under the laws and rules applicable at the time of land acquisition.

Responding to a question, the minister said Islamabad was a planned city but faced a shortage of graveyards and problems involving illegal housing schemes.

He said around 150 illegal housing schemes existed in Islamabad, and some had sold plots reserved for public facilities, including schools, dispensaries, parks and graveyards.

He said graveyards in Islamabad were governed by the Graveyard Regulations, 1961. Eight graveyards existed in Sector E-12, two of which were around 100 years old.

The minister said the relevant regulations governed burials in graveyards after the CDA acquired the land, with new burials subject to the applicable rules and designated areas. He added that several graveyards had emerged in Sector E-12 over the past 35 years, during which possession of plots could not be handed over. However, all existing graves had been preserved.

He said changes had been made to the sector's plan to protect all existing graves and maintain the sanctity of the graveyards. **NEWS DESK**

Ex-KP ministers directed to vacate official residences

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Administration Department has directed several former provincial ministers, a former adviser, and the deputy speaker of the provincial assembly to vacate their official residences.

Those directed to vacate the houses include former local government minister Meena Khan Afridi, former housing minister Arjad Ali Khan, former law minister Altaf Alam, former rehabilitation and resettlement minister Aqibullah, former finance adviser Muzammil Aslam, former labour minister Faisal Tarakai and Deputy Speaker Surayya Bibi, according to an official letter.

The department has also asked the deputy commissioner Peshawar to provide police personnel, including female constables, to assist a magistrate or the relevant officer in retrieving possession of the government residences. Copies of the letter have also been sent to the Capital City Police Officer (CCPO) Peshawar and the SHO of East Police Station for necessary action and police assistance. **NP**

SC seeks record of cases against Jamshed Dasti

The Supreme Court on Thursday directed the Election Commission of Pakistan, the federal government and all provincial governments to submit within 10 days complete records of cases registered against former MNA Jamshed Dasti.

During the hearing of a case concerning criminal proceedings against Dasti over an alleged fake degree, the court extended his bail until November 4 and decided to examine whether the matter should be heard by a three-member bench or proceed before the existing two-member bench.

A two-member bench headed by Justice Malik Shahzad Ahmad Khan heard the case. During the proceedings, counsel for the Punjab government informed the court that 47 cases had been registered against Dasti in the province and that their records had been submitted to the court. The court observed that it would examine whether the case could be heard by the two-member bench or should be referred to a three-member bench.

After extending Dasti's bail until November 4, the court adjourned further proceedings. **NEWS DESK**

Pakistan, US urged to shift focus to IT cooperation

The Embassy of Pakistan in Washington DC hosted the "Pakistan-US Tech Connect 2026" to facilitate direct engagement between leading Pakistani technology firms and their American counterparts, wherein Pakistan's Ambassador Rizwan Saeed Sheikh called for pivoting from traditional security concerns toward technological alignment.

The event was held in collaboration with the Ministry of Information Technology & Telecommunication, OPEN Global, and the Pakistan Software Export Board (PSEB).

Designed as an executive networking forum, the event aimed to unlock potential partnerships across enterprise solutions, digital transformation, product development, and strategic IT collaboration. The delegation showcased senior leadership from 16 premier Pakistani tech companies operating in cutting-edge sectors, including artificial intelligence, cloud computing, data analytics, fintech, and healthcare technology.

The gathering drew prominent attendees, including Sindh Governor Syed Naeel Hashmi, representatives from major US technology and financial firms, multilateral institutions, government agencies, and leaders from the Pakistani American business community.

Through structured executive panel discussions and curated business-to-business (B2B) sessions, the initiative sought to convert Pakistan's expanding IT export capacity into sustainable commercial relationships, elevating technology into a core pillar of Pakistan-US economic engagement.

In his opening remarks, Ambassador Rizwan Saeed Sheikh welcomed participants and outlined the objective of the tech series as a pivotal move to position Pakistan as an impactful contributor and US partner within the fast-evolving global technological landscape.

The current showcase focuses on presenting top-tier Pakistani firms and aims to display the 'best and brightest' from the Pakistani tech industry directly to stakeholders in Washington, D.C., Ambassador Sheikh said. The showcasing aims to display Pakistani tech firms' IT prowess and its ability to meet international standards in evolving fields like AI. Emphasizing the historical depth of bilateral relations between Pakistan and the United States, Ambassador Sheikh described the partnership as inherently consequential and presented IT partnership as the next promising prospect in that context.

Each time Pakistan and the United States have come together, we have produced results, and results not only for ourselves in the bilateral domain, but results for the whole world, he observed. Underscoring a strategic shift in bilateral priorities, Ambassador Sheikh called for pivoting from traditional security concerns toward technological alignment. A key goal is to make a transition in the bilateral relationship from 'GT to IT', moving from counterterrorism to information technology. This is what we have to work on because this is going to yield a mutually rewarding partnership in the future, he added. **NEWS DESK**



KP minerals sector faces Rs 16.94bn losses

A government audit report has identified financial irregularities amounting to over Rs16.94 billion in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's minerals sector in a single year, raising concerns over revenue collection, illegal mining and the recovery of government dues.

According to the report, the losses involved illegal mining, non-recovery of outstanding payments from contractors, unlawful extraction of construction materials and failure to collect various duties and royalties.

The report estimated that illegal mining caused losses exceeding Rs8 billion during 2022 and 2023. It also pointed out that authorities failed to recover Rs4.31 billion in outstanding dues from defaulting contractors.

Despite the presence of check posts, inspectors and officials of the Minerals Department, illegal mining continued across the province, resulting in a further loss of Rs3.08 billion to the provincial exchequer, the report said.

The report also highlighted the illegal extraction of sand and gravel in the name of highway and small dam construction, which caused an estimated loss of Rs3.07 billion.

It noted that the authorities failed to collect Rs547.2 million in excise duty on minerals, while outstanding dues exceeding Rs810 million from coal, bauxite, limestone and soapstone mines were waived.

In Peshawar, government land belonging to the Minerals Department was reportedly leased at Rs200 per acre instead of the prescribed rate of Rs10,000, causing an estimated loss of Rs140 million.

The report further identified losses exceeding Rs530 million due to the non-recovery of dues related to small dams in Kohat, Nowshera, Swabi, Haripur and other districts. It also reported the non-recovery of Rs63.6 million in royalties in Mardan.

The Auditor General recommended an inquiry against those responsible for the irregularities identified in the report. **NEWS DESK**

Jaglot-Skardu Highway closed due to landslide

The movement of traffic has been affected due to landslide on various areas at Jaglot-Skardu Highway and travelers have been advised to be cautious on roads due to recent situation.

According to details, due to landslide in Balistan, important Jaglot-Skardu Highway was closed for traffic as a result of which movement of passengers traveling between Gilgit and Skardu has been affected.

Authorities have been working to open roads with heavy machinery while passengers have been directed to know recent situation of roads prior to traveling.

Local administration has also urged travelers to remain in contact with district administration and traffic police for updated information and follow safety guidelines while travelling in mountainous areas. **NEWS DESK**

Karachi-Rohri track upgrade project to be launched in Jan: NA told

Federal Minister for Railways Hanif Abbasi on Thursday said the government planned to upgrade the 480-kilometre Karachi-Rohri railway track at an estimated cost of \$2.5 billion, with the groundbreaking expected in January or February next year.

Responding to questions during the question hour in the National Assembly, the minister said the project would be undertaken with the cooperation of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) as part of the government's efforts to improve railway infrastructure and enhance passenger safety.

He said the existing railway track had been in use for more than a century, with much of the infrastructure dating back to 1910, making its upgradation essential to address longstanding operational challenges.

Hanif Abbasi said Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif had taken the initiative to prioritise the rehabilitation of the Karachi-Rohri section, describing it as one of the most critical portions of the 1,800-kilometre Main Line-1 (ML-1) network. He expressed confidence that the proposed improvements would help reduce railway accidents and improve the safety and efficiency of train operations.

Responding to another supplementary question, the minister said discussions were also under way to upgrade the Rohri-Multan section, adding that the prime minister had taken the initiative to move forward with the project alongside the Karachi-Rohri section.

Regarding people displaced by railway projects, he said he did not

have the exact information available at the time but could provide details if the matter was raised again.

In response to questions about the revival of railway services in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Hanif Abbasi said Pakistan Railways had signed a framework agreement with the provincial government to work jointly on restoring railway operations.

He said similar cooperation was being pursued with other provincial governments, adding that an agreement had already been reached with Balochistan, while engagement with Punjab and Sindh was also planned.

The minister said Pakistan Railways had initiated action against encroachments on its land across the country, including in Banna, Peshawar, Sukkur, Karachi, Lahore, Faisalabad and Rawalpindi.

He described the recovery and transfer of nearly 200,000 kanals of railway land back into the department's name through mutation as a significant achievement, saying such a large-scale recovery had not occurred in the institution's 78-year history.

He added that the department would continue efforts to retrieve railway land held by public and private entities across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, Sindh and Balochistan.

Aqeel Malik speaks: Minister of State for Law and Justice Barrister Aqeel Malik said that the government was implementing 17 schemes to enhance mango productivity, improve climate resilience and strengthen research, with a focus on increasing mango production and preserving fruit crops.

Responding to a question during the question hour in the National Assembly, he said that the provincial government had allocated Rs 418.432 million for mango sector development during 2025-26 to 2027-28, with initiatives aimed at improving production, addressing climate-related challenges and strengthening research facilities. **NEWS DESK**



NATIONAL

DTM

DSP among four cops martyred, two terrorists killed in Karak



Four policemen, including two officials, were martyred and two terrorists were killed during an exchange of fire in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Karak district on Thursday, police said.

A statement by the KP police said law enforcers had initiated a search and strike operation in the Chappara area at noon, where terrorists had set up a blockade on Wednesday night.

The operation was led by Banda Daud Shah and Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) deputy superintendents of police (DSP), in which bomb disposal unit (BDU) personnel, a drone team, Rescue 15 personnel and Rapid Response Force personnel also participated, the statement said.

"During the operation, the law enforcers raided the hideout of a terrorist commander, Qaiser Iqbal, where an exchange of fire took place," the police said, adding that two terrorists were killed in the encounter.

CTD DSP Imranuddin Khan, Latambar Station House Officer (SHO) Sub-Inspector (SI) Afzal Awan, Constable Kazim and Head Constable Amjab from the BDU were martyred in the exchange of fire. The statement said the operation was ongoing.

It added, "The brave martyred personnel of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Police have set a shining example of dedication to duty, courage, and a commitment to public safety by sacrificing their lives in the fight against terrorism."

The statement said the sacrifices of the martyred policemen reflected the police force's "unwavering resolve" to continue making every possible effort to eradicate terrorism and establish lasting peace in the region.

Separately, security forces killed three terrorists and surrounded seven others during ongoing operations after foiling an attempted attack on a construction company's empty camp in Gwadar, security sources said on Thursday.

According to the security sources, forces responded promptly to the attempted attack by terrorists belonging to Fitna al Hindustan and thwarted their bid to target the vacant camp. Three terrorists were killed during the operation, while security forces surrounded three more terrorists at the location, the sources added.

Meanwhile, security forces were also conducting an operation against terrorists present inside a hotel located near the Gwadar highway following another attempted attack.

Four terrorists at the hotel had been surrounded by the security forces, according to the sources. The security sources said the Gwadar General Officer Commanding (GOC) was personally leading the operation. **NEWS DESK**

SBP-held forex reserves rise by \$19mn to \$21.49bn

Foreign exchange reserves held by the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) rose by \$19 million on a weekly basis to \$21.49 billion as of October 16, 2026, the central bank said on Thursday.

According to data released by the SBP, the country's total liquid foreign reserves stood at \$26.83 billion. Net foreign reserves held by commercial banks stood at \$5.34 billion.

"During the week ended on 16-Oct-2026, SBP's FX reserves increased by US\$19 million to US\$21,488.6 million," the central bank said.

Last week, the country's forex reserves had increased by \$16 million to \$21.47 billion during the week ended October 9, 2026.

Meanwhile, total liquid reserves actually fell by about \$30 million week-on-week, from \$26.86 billion, because commercial banks' holdings dropped by roughly \$49 million. That could be worth a line if you want it. **NEWS DESK**

PM Shehbaz orders direct flights between Pakistan and Maldives

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday announced that he had issued instructions for direct flights between Pakistan and the Maldives.

Addressing the Pakistan-Maldives Business Forum, attended by visiting Maldivian President Dr Mohamed Muizzu, the premier said that once the dignitary returned, a delegation of Pakistani government officials and businessmen would be sent to Malé. He said that the delegation would arrive within the next week or so.

"I want to say that connectivity is very important. We don't have direct flights from Malé to Islamabad or Karachi, so this air link is very important," PM Shehbaz said, addressing Muizzu. "I have already given instructions to our ministry of civil aviation to prepare a quick feasibility [study], be it Pakistan International Airlines, or any other airline in Pakistan, to find the ways and means to take the first flight comprising tourists [and the] business community to Malé," he announced.

The premier said he had been informed by President Muizzu that he gave instructions "to his airline to work out a quick plan to start flights from [the] Maldives to Pakistan".

"I have given instructions to our civil aviation department to immediately invite a delegation from [the] Maldives and work out a plan whereby we can start these air flights between the two countries as early as possible," PM Shehbaz added.

Moreover, the premier highlighted the importance of maritime connectivity, noting that unless there is a reliable direct shipping schedule from Karachi or Gwadar to Malé, "we will not be able to meet our targets efficiently and effectively."

Calling Muizzu a "very sincere friend of Pakistan", the premier

hailed his visit as a "turning point in further strengthening our bilateral, brotherly relations" and a "game-changer in terms of promoting our bilateral trade and investment portfolios".

"I would like to convey this message to our great entrepreneurs, traders, investors and businessmen from both [the] Maldives and Pakistan," he added. "Here is an opportunity we can really convert into ... a concrete action plan."

Citing figures provided by Commerce Minister Jam Kamal Khan, PM Shehbaz said that the trade volume between Islamabad and Malé is approximately \$13 million.

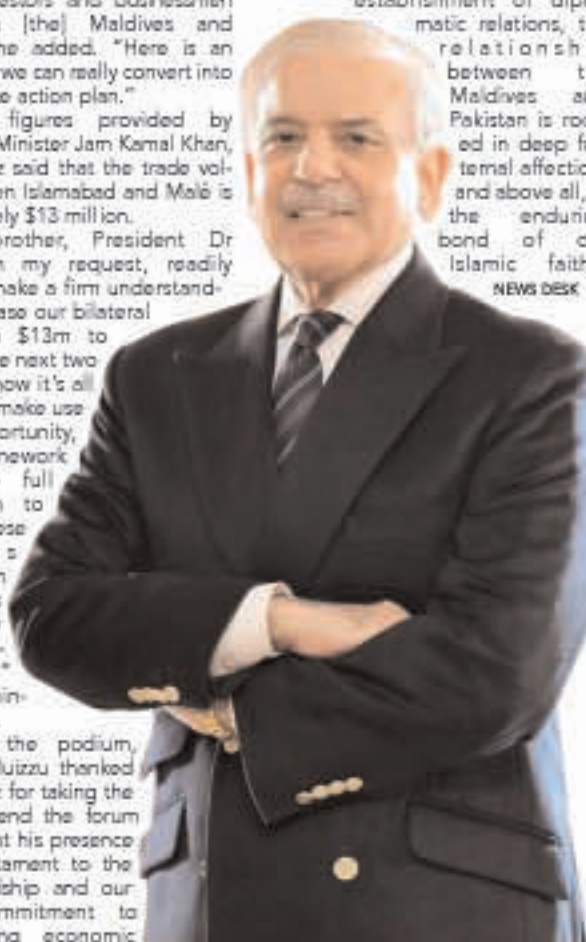
"My brother, President Dr Muizzu, on my request, readily agreed to make a firm understanding to increase our bilateral trade from \$13m to \$200m in the next two years, and now it's all up to us to make use of this opportunity, do our homework and make full preparation to achieve these targets through joint efforts and very close coordination," the prime minister stated.

Taking the podium, President Muizzu thanked PM Shehbaz for taking the time to attend the forum and said that his presence was "a testament to the close friendship and our shared commitment to strengthening economic

cooperation". "It is such a great pleasure for me to be with you today in Islamabad. And particularly to address a gathering of those who drive enterprise, investment, and economic opportunity in our two countries," he added.

"As we mark 60 years since the establishment of diplomatic relations, the relationship between the Maldives and Pakistan is rooted in deep fraternal affection, and above all, in the enduring bond of our Islamic faith."

NEWS DESK



Opp slams govt over talks, curbs

Continued from Page 1

He said political dialogue required a meeting with PTI founder Imran Khan. He also recalled that Jamiat Ulama-e-Islam-Fazl chief Maulana Fazlur Rahman had met the prime minister in connection with the issue.

The opposition had asked the government to ensure that the prime minister personally extended an invitation for negotiations, he said. "Negotiations cannot take place in an atmosphere where the process itself is being mocked," he said.

Achekzai called for a committee to investigate allegations of corruption against the incumbent government, proposing that Defence Minister Khawaja Asif head it.

He maintained that the opposition would resist what it considered an undemocratic system through democratic means. "It is the duty of every citizen who wants to save Pakistan to stand up for democracy," he said, adding that the country needed a strong parliament and state institutions operating within their respective constitutional jurisdictions. "We will not hand Pakistan over to an undemocratic system," he said, warning that such an order could threaten the country's unity.

Also speaking at the press conference, Majid Wehdat-e-Muslimeen chief Allama Raja Nasir Abbas stressed that the rule of law, justice and respect for the Constitution were essential for Pakistan's progress, saying the country's political and economic crises could not be resolved without the supremacy of law. Addressing the country's economic challenges, Abbas said the economic crisis, too, could not be resolved without ensuring the supremacy of law. He added that justice was necessary to restore public confidence in state institutions and the wider system. **NEWS DESK**

PM unveils Rs 160bn for KP development

Continued from Page 1

The Committee also discussed measures strengthening the operational capacity of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Police, Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) and other LEAs through enhanced professional training, modern equipment, infrastructure, improved intelligence capabilities and seamless inter-agency coordination.

The participants stressed that a robust and professional law enforcement apparatus was essential to maintaining law and order, protecting citizens and ensuring the effective writ of the state throughout the province.

Prime Minister Shehbaz reaffirmed the Federal Government's commitment to extending all possible assistance to the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and underscored that restoring lasting peace, safeguarding the lives and property of citizens, strengthening governance and accelerating socio-economic development remained national priorities. He emphasized that the sacrifices made by the people of the province in the fight against terrorism would not go in vain and that the federal government would continue to support initiatives aimed at improving public welfare, creating economic opportunities and addressing the legitimate concerns of the people.

He announced Rs 160 Billion from federal government for Badalta, Bilkharta, Mazboot KP [Transforming, Flourishing, and Strong KP] Program.

The Committee stressed the importance of collective national ownership, community engagement and coordinated actions by all relevant institutions to create an enabling environment for education, healthcare, employment, investment and infrastructure development, in whole of KP but particularly in the merged districts and other underserved areas.

The forum reiterated that the state remained firmly committed to defeating terrorism, restoring durable peace and ensuring stability, effective governance and sustainable development across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

It emphasized that the unity, resilience and collective resolve of the nation would remain central to securing a peaceful, prosperous and secure future for the province and Pakistan. The Area Representative and Development Council (ARDC) highlighted that sustainable peace and security were indispensable prerequisites for development, economic progress and improved quality of life for the people.

Prime Minister Shehbaz emphasized that the sacrifices rendered by the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, particularly those of the merged districts, would not go in vain. He underscored that lasting peace in the merged districts remained a shared national responsibility.

The members of ARDC reaffirmed their resolve to defeat terrorism, eliminate its roots and establish enduring peace remained unwavering. They reiterated their steadfast support for the security forces and law enforcement agencies in their pursuit of lasting peace, stability and prosperity.

The forum underscored that the state remained firmly committed to translating the gains achieved through counter-terrorism efforts into tangible development, improved public services, economic opportunities and a secure future for the region. The prime minister stressed that the strength of the nation lay in its unity and collective resolve to reject violence, extremism and all attempts to undermine peace and stability. He reaffirmed that no amount of intimidation or violence could weaken the determination of the people and the state to secure a peaceful, prosperous and progressive future for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Prime Minister Shehbaz underscored that "whole nation is indebted and proud of the contributions and sacrifices of the people of your areas. Now is the time for a final and decisive effort to finish off the menace of terrorism, once and for all. Failure is not an option." The forum paid rich tribute to the sacrifices of the martyrs in the fight against terrorism.

Both sessions were attended by Muhammad Ishaq Dar, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir, Chief of Army Staff and Chief of Defence Forces, Faizal Karim Kundi, the Governor of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Mohsin Naqvi, Federal Interior Minister, Ahsan Khan Cheema, Federal Minister of Economic Affairs, Muhammad Aurangzeb, Federal Minister for Finance, Attaulah Tarar, Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Engineer Amir Muqam, Federal Minister for Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit Baltistan, Azam Nazir Tarar, Federal Minister for Law, Ali Pervaiz Malik, Federal Minister for Petroleum, Sardar Awwis Ahmed Khan Laghari, Federal Minister for Power, Ahsan Iqbal, Federal Minister for Planning & Development, Rana Sanaulah Khan, Advisor to Prime Minister, members of the Advisory Council as well as the Area Representative and Development Council (ARDC), Commander Peshawar Corps and other senior civil and military officials. **NEWS DESK**

Maldives President, First Lady visit Lok Virsa

President of the Maldives, Dr. Mohamed Muizzu and First Lady, Sajida Mohamed expressed keen interest in Pakistan's rich cultural heritage during their visit to the Lok Virsa Museum on Thursday, exploring the country's diverse regional traditions, indigenous craftsmanship and artistic legacy.

traditional skills and ensuring that the knowledge and craftsmanship of local communities remain accessible to future generations.

Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs, Muhammad Junaid Anwar Chaudhry and Minister of State for Federal Education and Professional Training, Wajaha Qamar were also present during the visit.

They joined the engagement with the visiting dignitaries and highlighted the importance of introducing international guests to Pakistan's cultural wealth and longstanding traditions of hospitality.

The visit offered a glimpse of

showcasing the traditional arts, crafts and cultural practices of communities from across the country.

The visit formed part of President Dr. Mohamed Muizzu's three-day official visit to Pakistan. During the second day of his visit, the Maldivian President and the First Lady also visited the Pakistan Monument and Faisal Mosque in Islamabad, exploring landmarks that reflect the country's national identity, history and architectural heritage.

Maldives first lady visits DRAP: First Lady of the Maldives Sajida Mohamed visited the Drug



Pakistan beyond its political and diplomatic engagements, bringing its living traditions, regional diversity and artistic heritage into focus.

It also underscored the role of cultural interaction in fostering mutual appreciation and strengthening people-to-people ties between Pakistan and the Maldives. Lok Virsa, also known as the National Institute of Folk and Traditional Heritage, serves as a national repository of Pakistan's folk culture, preserving and

Regulatory Authority of Pakistan (DRAP), underscoring the importance of regulatory cooperation in safeguarding public health and ensuring access to safe and quality-assured medicines.

During the visit, she appreciated DRAP's leadership and dedicated professionals for their commitment to protecting public health and maintaining standards for medicines. **NEWS DESK**

Pakistan lauds critical work of UN radiation body

Pakistan has underscored the "vital role" of the United Nations' principal scientific committee studying radiation effects, noting that despite its financial constraints, the panel provides critical data that helps member states develop health and environmental standards.

Over the last seven decades, Pakistani delegate Anzar Shah, said the UN Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (UNSCEAR) has made an important contribution in promoting wider knowledge and understanding of the levels, effects, and risks of atomic emission.

Shah, a first secretary at the Pakistan Mission to the UN, was speaking in a debate on the work of the Committee in

the General Assembly's Fourth Committee (Special Political and Decolonization) on Wednesday.

Commending the dedicated efforts of the Committee, he said it has also provided a solid scientific foundation for member states to formulate international standards for protection against ionizing radiation.

In this regard, the Pakistani delegate urged adequate, predictable and sustainable funding to strengthen the Committee's work, emphasizing its scientific independence, mandate and contribution to global radiation safety.

"At our end," Anzar Shah said, "we have put in place comprehensive regulatory mea-

asures to safeguard against the risks of ionizing radiation, in line with the safety principles and standards developed by the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency)."

The Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission (PAEC), he added, routinely monitors radiation exposure for medical staff and patients in cancer treatment facilities, and also evaluates potential exposure of the public living near nuclear installations, with the data collected systematically archived for analysis.

Pakistan, he said, believes that to reinforce public acceptance of nuclear technology, global efforts must highlight the beneficial aspects of atomic radiation.

Equally important was to underscore

the contributions of atomic radiation to socio-economic progress and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including in health, agriculture, industry, and environmental protection, the Pakistani delegate stressed.

Briefing the Fourth Committee, Sarah Bastout, Chair of the Scientific Committee, updated delegates about its work. Our task is not to prescribe policy or set safety standards," she said, adding that it evaluates evidence objectively, examining the medical, health and environmental consequences of atomic radiation.

The Scientific Committee currently brings together experts nominated by 31 Member States. **NEWS DESK**

BACKPAGE

Brook's double ton in vain as Sri Lanka chase 430



Sri Lanka trumped Harry Brook's fastest ever double century with the second highest successful run chase in ODI history and handed England a second successive defeat in the tri-series on Thursday.

Brook's 116-ball 202 propelled England to its fourth highest ODI score of 429-4 before it ran into Sri Lanka's super counterpunch to lose by two wickets.

Needing six runs off Josh Tongue's final two balls, Janith Liyanage lofted the fast bowler over long-off for a winning six to reach 430-8 and earn Sri Lanka their most memorable ODI victory since winning the 1996 World Cup.

Sri Lanka's astonishing run-chase was only second behind South Africa's 438-9 when it beat Australia by one wicket at Johannesburg in 2006.

"Incredible game of cricket, both teams were exceptional," Brook said. "Sri Lanka just outplayed us. They played exceptional cricket to knock off 400."

Aviska Fernando, recalled for the tri-series since last playing an ODI in January 2025, and Pavan Rathnayake set up the strong chase with a 166-run third-wicket stand after Sri Lanka lost two wickets inside the first five overs of the run chase.

Fernando missed out on a century but his 97-run knock off 83 balls kept Sri Lanka well in the game. Dasun Shanaka, also returning to the ODI fold after more than two years, then added another electrifying 133 runs with Rathnayake off just 79 balls as the England bowlers had no answer to the belligerence of Sri Lanka's batters on a batting wicket.

Rathnayake completed his second ODI century and made 130 off 106 balls with 15 fours and three sixes as he brought down the target to 107 runs off the final 58 balls before holing out to long-on.

But Shanaka, who twice successfully overturned decisions against him through television reviews, continued toying with

England's fast bowlers and smashed eight sixes and six boundaries with Sam Curran returning expensive figures of 2-103.

England sneaked back in the 44th over when Shanaka missed out on a deserved century and was caught at long-on and left Sri Lanka needing 67 off the final six overs.

Dunith Liyanage then smashed three sixes and seven fours and scored a brisk unbeaten 81 off 27 balls as England kept on conceding boundaries.

With eight needed of the final over, Tongue uprooted the middle stumps of Wellalage and Eshan Malinga off successive balls but Asitha Fernando denied the fast bowler a hat trick and gave the strike back to Liyanage to finish off the game with a big hit.

"We chased very well today. I enjoyed it as captain," said Sri Lanka skipper Kusal Mendis, who was run out for duck at the non-striker's end without facing a ball. "Me and coach spoke to the batters and said to play the first couple of overs normally ... everyone believed we can do it."

Brook needed 114 balls for the double ton and holed out two balls later for 202 off the final ball of England's innings after captain Kusal Mendis won his fifth successive toss on the tour of Pakistan and elected to field.

Brook reached his first century off 75 balls with a ramped boundary over fine leg. He then reached 150 with a similar shot, and took 39 balls to hit the second century, reached with a paddle sweep against Janith Liyanage in the final over.

"It was a nice innings but being on the losing side it has no value whatsoever in my eyes," Brook said. "We got to get back to the drawing board a little bit, and we have an opportunity in the next couple of games to nail down a place in the final."

Brook's effort was two balls less than Shubman Gill's record of 116 balls which the Indian made against West Indies at Guwahati last month. **AP**

Zardari highlights Pak-Saudi investment at property expo

Zardari leaves for Germany on 3-day official visit

President Asif Ali Zardari on Thursday visited the Saudi Pakistan Real Estate Expo (SPREX) at Lake City, here, underscoring the importance of strengthening economic cooperation and promoting investment between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

Upon arrival, the President was received by Governor of Punjab Sardar Saleem Haider Khan and Dr Gohar Ejaz, CEO of Lake City and Member of the Saudi-Pakistan Business Council, a Presidency's news release said.

During the visit, the President was briefed on the participating companies and their projects, as well as the investment opportunities being explored in Pakistan's real estate sector.

The Expo features pavilions of prominent Saudi real estate and investment companies, with participation from Prince Mansour bin Mohammed Al Saud, Chairman of the Saudi-Pakistan Business Council, and Abdul Aziz Al-Ashrafi, Vice Chairman of the Council.

The participating Saudi



companies include Safa Investment, Knowledge Economic City, Sumou Investment, Al-Majidiya, Ulo Real Estate, Al-Diyar Al-Arabiya, Bin Daoud Investment and International Gate Investment. The participating companies are exploring potential investment opportunities in Pakistan, while showcasing projects in Makkah and Madinah to attract Saudi investors and promote greater cross-border investment.

Speaking on the occasion, the President emphasised the importance of translating the longstanding and fraternal relations between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia into stronger economic partnerships, increased investment and mutually beneficial business opportunities.

He reiterated that Saudi Arabia has always stood firmly alongside Pakistan through difficult times, reflecting the enduring friendship and strategic partnership between the two countries.

The President appreciated the organisers' efforts to bring Pakistani and Saudi business communities together, observing that such initiatives can help open new avenues for foreign direct investment, encourage private-sector collaboration and foster long-term economic partnerships.

He noted that the participation of prominent Saudi business and investment groups in the Expo reflect growing opportunities for cooperation and can contribute to a new phase of development through investment, enterprise and joint ventures. He also underscored the importance of providing a supportive and investor-friendly environment to facilitate foreign investment in Pakistan.

On the occasion, the new uniforms for Pakistan International Airlines crew were also displayed.

Meanwhile, President Asif Ali Zardari left for Germany from Lahore on Thursday on an official visit to Berlin at the invitation of

German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier.

Punjab Governor Sardar Saleem Haider Khan saw off the president at the airport. The president will be in Germany from October 22 to 24. Leading a high-level delegation, he will meet the German president and senior government officials, as well as business leaders, a Presidency's news release said.

The talks will cover bilateral relations, the regional and global situation, and ways to promote economic and trade cooperation between the two countries.

Meanwhile, President Zardari has paid tribute to Begum Nusrat Bhutto on the 15th anniversary of her death. He remembered her as a courageous and compassionate political leader, a symbol of resistance against authoritarianism and, above all, a mother who endured profound personal tragedy yet remained steadfast in her principles. **NEWS DESK**

Jl, govt to hold talks on petroleum levy today



Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan and government will hold talks on the petroleum levy today (Friday), following a telephone conversation between Federal Minister for Planning Ahsan Iqbal and JI Vice Emir Liaqat Baloch.

The meeting between the two sides' negotiating committees will take place at Punjab House in Islamabad, where they will also work out a schedule for a proposed meeting between Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and JI Emir Hafiz Naeemur Rehman.

According to a JI statement, Ahsan Iqbal, who heads the government's negotiating

committee, informed Liaqat Baloch that the joint meeting had initially been planned for Tuesday or Wednesday but was postponed because of the government's urgent engagements.

Meanwhile, Baloch has called a meeting of the JI negotiating committee in Islamabad ahead of the talks. He said JI would hold peaceful protests at district headquarters across the country on Friday, demanding the abolition of what he called the unjust petroleum levy. He added that the party would continue its protests alongside negotiations with the government.

He said the campaign was not about the party's interests but aimed to secure public relief, reduce unbearable production costs and revive economic activity. He argued that reducing the burden of petroleum levies and payments to independent power producers (IPPs) was essential to easing pressure on households, agriculture, industry, trade and small businesses. Such measures, he said, could help revive economic activity and create employment opportunities.

The JI leader said governments were often reluctant to give up unjust taxes and rarely acknowledged the role of protest movements in securing public relief. He maintained that

previous relief measures announced under pressure from public sit-ins had been implemented through flawed methods that failed to produce a positive impact on the national economy.

Baloch also called on the government and other powerful institutions to acknowledge their mistakes and avoid constitutional measures that could deepen the political crisis. He urged all stakeholders to engage in a national dialogue and agree on priorities to steer the country out of its political and economic difficulties. He said JI's negotiating committee had already identified possible options and available fiscal space within the constraints imposed by the IMF programme and the national budget. The government and the prime minister's team must now demonstrate the political will to provide relief to the public, he added.

Baloch warned that if the government failed to meet the party's demand, JI would proceed with its planned long march from Multan. **SABAH**

Imran's Sisters: LHC summons Home Secy

The Lahore High Court (LHC) on Thursday summoned the Punjab home secretary and the superintendent of Kot Lakhpat jail in connection with a petition seeking the release of former prime minister Imran Khan's three sisters.

All three of Imran's sisters - Aleema Khan, Noreen Niaz and Uzma Khan - were detained by authorities in September, under the Punjab Maintenance of Public Order Ordinance, 1960, as the PTI geared up for a planned protest march towards Islamabad. Their detention was ordered for 30 days.

A day earlier, Aleema's son, Shahrez Khan, filed a fresh plea challenging their detention. It stated that Imran's sisters remained at Lahore's Kot Lakhpat jail despite the lapse of the 30-day period of their detention. Justice Abher Gul Khan took up the petition on Thursday.

Advocate Rana Mudassar Umer appeared on behalf of the petitioner and submitted that the preventive detention could not



replace ordinary criminal law and that the order violated Article 10 as well as the safeguards of Section 3 of the MPO.

The petitioner requested the court to direct the jail superintendent to produce the detainees before the court and "set them at liberty, in the interest of justice, equity and fair play". **INP**

US to get 850 F-35 jets in 10 years

The Pentagon and Lockheed Martin on Thursday announced a 10-year agreement for the production of 850 F-35 warplanes, underscoring Washington's long-term commitment to the high-tech stealth aircraft.

The two sides did not specify a value for the agreement, which comes as Pentagon seeks to strike multi-year deals to expand American weapons production and boost the US defense industrial base.

The announcement "cements (the plane's) role as the free world's key frontline fighter for years ahead," Lockheed Chairman, President and CEO Jim Taiclet said on a call with investors.

F-35s - which Washington's forces have used in combat during the US-Israeli war against Iran - come in three versions that can cost more than \$100 million per plane.

The "framework agreement," which the Pentagon said would "modernize and expand

the F-35 program, still requires congressional approval and funding.

"We have fundamentally changed how we stabilize the American defense industrial base to produce at speed and scale," top acquisition official Michael Duffey said in the Pentagon's announcement.

"By aligning financial incentives with actual performance, we are ensuring our warfighters are equipped with the lethal capabilities they need to fight and win," Duffy said.

The F-35, a joint project between the United States and a number of allies, is one of the world's most advanced military



aircraft. There are more than 1,375 F-35s based around the world, according to Lockheed.

The deal, if approved, would give Washington a "predictable, affordable, and resilient" fighter jet program, Lockheed said, pointing to billions of dollars in expected savings thanks to "long-term pricing and industry volume discounts."

In exchange for the Pentagon's 10-year commitment, Lockheed Martin will fund \$7 billion in projects supporting the F-35s, the Pentagon said.

"With the greater certainty that comes from the US government's transformative approach to F-35 production and sustainment, we can make the upfront investments needed to expand capacity, improve efficiency, and build a more resilient supply chain," Lockheed's Taiclet said in a statement.

"That's good for the taxpayer, good for our suppliers and, most importantly, good for the United States and its allies," he added.

In addition to the F-35s themselves, the agreement also covers "initial spares, 10 years of modification kits and sustainment, and international customer orders," Lockheed said.

There is significant international interest in the aircraft, with the United States recently announcing the approval of a \$24.3 billion sale of 48 of the stealth planes to Saudi Arabia last month.

Turkiye, which was expelled from the F-35 program in 2019 over its purchase of a Russian air defense system, recently expressed confidence that it would regain access to the jets - a move that is strongly opposed by Israel. **AP**

GLAMOURDTMUR

Rebel Wilson Lists \$3.8m Sydney Home

Rebel Wilson is letting go of her Sydney base. The Australian actress has listed her waterfront property in Sydney's Birchgrove for sale with a \$3.8 million price guide. Via her company, Camp Sugar, the *Fat Pizza* star purchased a four-bedroom house for \$3.6 million in 2022. The charming Victorian cottage, which was built in the 1890s, sits on an impressive 274sq m holding. It is located a short 300 metre stroll from the picturesque waterfront of nearby Snails Bay, and is situated directly across from Birchgrove Oval. The cosy home, which Wilson had previously used as her primary Australian residence, features a skylit retreat on the upper-level and an infra-red sauna. It is adorned with high ceilings and features Kauri timber floorboards, as well as modernised interiors. The agent handling the sale is none other than Anna Wilson, the Hollywood star's younger sister, who has previously shifted other Australian properties belonging to her A-list sibling. Wilson, who owns an extensive property portfolio in Australia and abroad, has been shifting multiple Sydney digs in recent months. She recently sealed the deal to offload an investment property in the harbourside suburb of Balmain. Sold for an undisclosed sum only last month, the two-bedroom, two-bathroom Balmain flat had been something of a millstone for the star. Originally scheduled for auction in 2024 for \$3.3 million, it sat on the listings unloved for a month until Rebel pulled it off the market. NEWS DESK



Emma Stone Secretly Made Holmes Doc Twist

That big twist in *You Can See Everything* — well, one of them — came courtesy of Emma Stone. Midway through the new A24 documentary (in theaters now) about disgraced businesswoman Elizabeth Holmes, co-directors Nathan Fielder and Lance Oppenheim brought in another player. As Oppenheim, 30, revealed in a new interview with *Vulture*, Stone, 37, made that invite possible. The actress, who worked with Fielder, 43, on the 2023 Showtime comedy *The Curse*, is among the names listed in the "special thanks" section of the doc's end credits. The two-time Oscar winner also moderated a Q&A with Fielder and Oppenheim at *You Can See Everything*'s surprise world premiere at the 2026 Telluride Film Festival in September. NEWS DESK



Shirley Ballas To Judge Son Mark On DWTS

Shirley Ballas has been confirmed for a guest stint as a judge on *Dancing With The Stars* (DWTS). The *Strictly* head judge, 66, will jet off to California to appear on the US version of the competition for *Horror Movie Night*. Announcing the news during the latest episode of the show, Alfonso Ribeiro said: "She will make her debut on the show next week, where there will be a double elimination." "Next Tuesday on horror movie night, our special guest judge is our dancers' worst nightmare, Shirley Ballas," Julianne Hough added. "She is one of the most respected ballroom dancers in the entire world, but she is very, very strict." NEWS DESK

Romee Strijd Slams VS Over Show Snub

Former *Victoria's Secret* Angel Romee Strijd has responded to the lingerie brand's statement explaining why she wasn't cast in its latest runway show. Earlier this month, the 31-year-old Dutch model fought back tears in a TikTok clip as she revealed she was rejected from the *Victoria's Secret Fashion Show*. The company later issued a response, telling *Vanity Fair*: "Romee holds an important place within *Victoria's Secret* and we deeply value her longstanding relationship with the brand and the dedication she has demonstrated throughout her career with us." "We can confirm that *Victoria's Secret* and [casting director] Piergiorgio Del Muro communicated directly to her representation and formally released her from the casting process on September 6. While we cannot speak to the communications between talent and representation, *Victoria's Secret* values and respects all talent partners — past, present and future." Strijd then responded on an Instagram post about the ordeal shared by the blog *Basically Hollywood*, disputing the rep's timeline of events. "Then how come I went to the casting September 10th?" she wrote with a mind blown emoji. Strijd previously walked in the show from 2014 to 2018. She said in her TikTok, "Either way, it's a closed chapter and it's probably gonna be a good show." NEWS DESK



Lily Allen Axes Concert After Falling Ill

Lily Allen has abruptly canceled her Tuesday, Oct. 20 concert in Auckland, New Zealand. The singer announced the news on Instagram Stories the day of her show, saying that she has "come down with a viral infection" and is "unable to perform." "I was really looking forward to seeing you all and am absolutely gutted to be letting you down," Allen continued in the post. "For those who traveled all the way here, please accept my apology." The performance would have marked Allen's first performance in the country since 2019, *Rolling Stone Australia* reported. Allen is currently on tour in support of her 2025 album *West End Girl*, which alludes to her split from *Stranger Things* star David Harbour with its scathing and vulnerable lyrics. In a recent interview with *The Times*, the English singer-songwriter opened up about how the commercial success of the album has impacted her life. NEWS DESK



Halle Berry Upbeat Amid Custody Battle

Halle Berry appeared in upbeat spirits when she arrived Tuesday at a Los Angeles courthouse amid her custody battle with her ex-husband Olivier Martinez. The Oscar-winning actress has strenuously denied allegations leveled by Martinez that she abused their 13-year-old son Maceo. Berry could at one point be seen smiling outside her latest court appearance in her escalating legal dispute with her former spouse. She was dressed in a sedately formal outfit of a charcoal trouser suit over a checked blouse accessorized with a matching scarf. Her sighting came days after her fiancé Van Hunt testified that Maceo allegedly shoved his mother during a heated argument in their home, according to court documents exclusively obtained by the *Daily Mail*. The *Daily Mail* has contacted Berry's representative and attorney for comment. Hunt, the sole identified eyewitness to a September 26 confrontation between the mom and son, asserted in a public court declaration obtained exclusively by the *Daily Mail* that Berry had shouted: "So, you're going to fight me now?" after Maceo allegedly resisted her demands to remove his Oculus virtual reality headset. NEWS DESK



MONEY

World Bank: Pakistan can triple incomes by 2050

Faster structural reforms could triple Pakistan's incomes by 2050, the World Bank Group said in its latest Pakistan Development Update: Attaining Escape Velocity.

Following progress with macroeconomic stabilisation, Pakistan now has the opportunity for faster and sustained economic growth and job creation, the global lender said on Thursday.

According to the World Bank, sound macroeconomic policies over recent years have helped stabilise the economy and preserve growth, despite the impacts of the Middle East conflict.

"Real GDP growth increased to 3.7% in FY26 from 3.2% in FY25. Revenue growth and expenditure restraint supported record primary fiscal surpluses, reaching 2.9% of GDP in FY26, while strong remittances allowed for the re-accumulation of foreign exchange reserves," said the World Bank.

These improvements were recognised with upgrades from two major international rating agencies (S&P and Moody's), and allowed Pakistan's return to international debt markets, with the issuance of a US\$3 billion Eurobond.

"Pakistan has made real progress in restoring stability, and



markets have taken notice," said Bolormaa Amgaabazar, World Bank Country Director for Pakistan. "But real per capita growth - the rate at which the income of the average Pakistani increases - remains stuck at around 1.6%. Reforms to drive faster growth are now urgently needed."

The report finds that such growth is possible if Pakistan follows the path taken by other successful countries in pursuing ambitious economic reforms.

"Reforms that upgrade policies and institutions to the quality seen in the average middle-income country could drive sustained growth of up to 6.2-6.9% / annum, sufficient for Pakistan to reach Viet Nam's current level of income by 2050," it said.

"With macro stabilisation achieved but fiscal resources and foreign exchange still tightly constrained, structural reform to encourage private investment is the necessary next step towards higher living standards" said Sebastian Essl, lead author of the

report. "Achieving this kind of private-sector led growth requires a plan, coordination, and committed reform implementation."

The report highlighted a set of ambitious reforms that could help Pakistan reach, by 2050, the per capita incomes of countries currently at the upper-middle income threshold.

Many of these build on measures already under way, including timely power sector tariff adjustments that helped cut energy subsidies from 1.1% of GDP in FY25 to 0.8% in FY26, continued implementation of trade liberalisation under the National Tariff Policy, and the recent privatisation of Pakistan International Airlines.

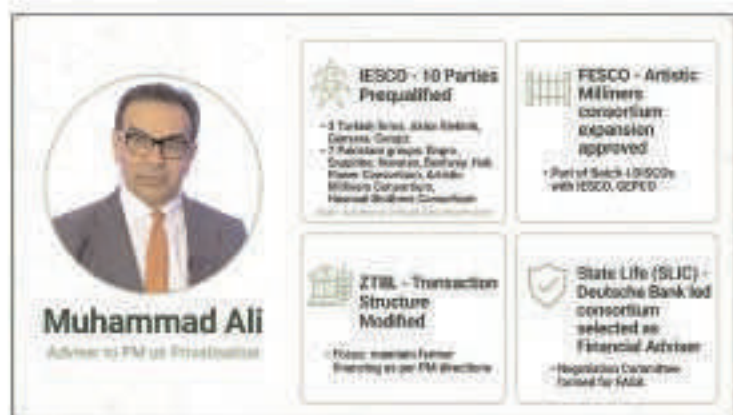
"Building on these foundations, sustained progress will depend on continued reforms to strengthen the business environment, reform the tax system, reduce the state's presence in the economy, and expand access to finance," the World Bank said. **NEWS DESK**

PC prequalifies 10 parties for IESCO sale

The Privatisation Commission (PC) Board, in its 260th meeting held on Thursday under the chairmanship of Muhammad Ali, Adviser to the Prime Minister on Privatisation and Chairman of the Privatisation Commission, approved key measures relating to the privatisation of Islamabad Electric Supply Company Limited (IESCO), Faisalabad Electric Supply Company Limited (FESCO), Zari Taraqati Bank Limited (ZTBL), and State Life Insurance Corporation of Pakistan (SLIC).

The Board approved the prequalification of 10 Interested Parties (IPs) for IESCO's privatisation, reflecting strong participation from domestic and international investors.

The prequalified parties include three Turkish energy companies, alongside prominent Pakistani business groups and investment consortia, reflecting strong domestic and international investor interest in Pakistan's electricity distribution sector and confidence in the Government's ongoing privatisation



programme. The 10 prequalified Interested Parties will now proceed to the next stage of the transaction in accordance with the approved process, including access to the Virtual Data Room (VDR) to undertake detailed buy-side due diligence.

IESCO forms part of the first batch of power distribution companies (DISCOs) identified for privatisation, alongside FESCO and Gujranwala Electric Power Company Limited (GEPSCO).

In a separate agenda item, the Board approved the addition of consortium members to Artistic Milliners (Pvt) Limited, a prequalified Interested Party for FESCO's privatisation. The approved arrangement will facilitate the consortium's participation across the Batch-1 DISCO transactions, subject to applicable transaction requirements.

The Board also approved modifications to the transaction structure and restructuring plan for the privatisation of ZTBL. The revisions are in line with the Prime

Minister's directions to maintain ZTBL's focus on agricultural and farmer financing following privatisation, ensuring continuity of its role in supporting Pakistan's agricultural sector.

In another key decision, the Board approved the selection of the consortium led by Deutsche Bank as the top-ranked Interested Party for appointment as Financial Adviser for the privatisation of State Life Insurance Corporation of Pakistan (SLIC). The Board also constituted a Negotiation Committee to finalise the Financial Advisory Services Agreement (FASA) with the consortium.

The Board reaffirmed its commitment to advancing the Government's privatisation programme through transparent, competitive and professionally managed transactions, aimed at attracting credible domestic and international investment, improving operational efficiency and service delivery, and maximising value for the Government and the people of Pakistan. **NEWS DESK**

PSX loses over 2,006 points



The benchmark KSE-100 Index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) witnessed a steep bearish momentum on Thursday, shedding 2,006.67 points, a negative change of 1.21 percent, to close at 163,924.32 points against 165,930.99 points recorded in the previous trading session.

The ready market witnessed a trading volume of 367.094 million shares, compared to 379.905 million shares traded in the previous session, while the traded value decreased to Rs17.998 billion from Rs21.281 billion.

Market capitalisation dropped to Rs18.173 trillion from Rs18.384 trillion recorded a day earlier.

Out of 494 companies that traded in the ready market, 101 posted gains, 355 suffered losses, while 38 remained unchanged.

Pak Refinery led the volume chart with 25.877 million shares, followed by Energysco PK with 23.190 million shares and WorldCall Telecom with 22.159 million shares.

Among the top gainers, Unilever Pakistan Foods Limited surged by Rs1,216.28 to close at Rs29,103.21, while Khairpur Sugar Mills Limited advanced by Rs157.11 to settle at Rs1,728.17.

On the losing side, PIA Holding Company Limited B declined by Rs638.57 to close at Rs13,626.76, while Attock Refinery Limited fell by Rs47.96 to Rs1,089.60.

In the futures (DFC) market, turnover stood at 98.093 million shares with a traded value of Rs6.542 billion, compared with 120.731 million shares worth Rs9.783 billion in the previous session.

Of 293 companies traded in the DFC market, 31 advanced, 259 declined and 03 remained unchanged. **NEWS DESK**

Companies advised to appoint legal advisors: SECP

The Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) on Thursday advised companies to comply with the requirements of the Lawyers Welfare and Protection Act, 2023, regarding the appointment of a legal advisor.

Under Section 10 of the Act, every incorporated company with a paid-up capital of more than Rs. 20 million must engage at least one practising advocate as legal advisor on a retainer basis, said a news release.

The Act also provides that no advocate may serve as legal advisor to more than three such entities at the same time.

The SECP has advised all such companies to appoint a legal advisor in accordance with Section 10 of the Act and report the particulars of the appointed legal advisor to the Registrar on Form-9 under Section 197 of the Companies Act, 2017.

The SECP shall initiate action against all non-compliant companies under the relevant provisions of the applicable law. **NEWS DESK**

Exporters' concerns push govt to review gas levy

The Ministry of Finance has constituted a committee with government and industry representatives to review the levy policy and calculation formula and recommend possible refinements.

The development came during a follow-up high-level consultative meeting with leading exporters and senior government officials at the Ministry of Commerce to understand the issues hampering Pakistan's exports and identify practical solutions to address these challenges.

The meeting was chaired by Federal Minister for Commerce Jam Kamal Khan and was attended by Minister of State for Finance and Revenue Bilal Azhar Kayani, senior officials of the Ministry of Commerce and representatives of concerned government ministries and departments. Leading exporters participated both in person and virtually.

The consultation followed an earlier high-level meeting convened to identify challenges affecting Pakistan's export competitiveness, including energy costs, taxation, financing constraints, regulatory procedures and international market access.

The meeting extensively reviewed industrial energy costs, particularly the gas levy and its impact on export competitiveness. Participants were informed that the Ministry of Finance had constituted a committee involving relevant government and industry representatives to review the levy policy and calculation formula and recommend possible refinements.

The Punjab infrastructure cost was also discussed, with exporters highlighting concerns regarding its application, collection mechanism and additional costs. The meeting emphasised the need for clarity regarding the legal framework, exemptions and coordination with relevant provincial authorities.

On taxation, participants discussed proposals to rationalise existing export-related eligibility thresholds

and explore proportionate super tax relief linked to export-derived income. The meeting also reviewed concerns regarding additional sales tax and refund arrangements for non-traditional exporters. Relevant proposals would be examined in consultation with the Ministry of Finance and FBR.

The Export Facilitation Scheme was reviewed, particularly procedural requirements, eligibility criteria and possible improvements to facilitate exporters. Participants also proposed enhancing incentives under the export growth scheme to encourage businesses to increase their international sales.

Exporters raised concerns regarding certification charges and repeated documentation amendment fees imposed by the Department of Plant Protection. The meeting emphasised that regulatory charges should be rationalised to ensure institutional sustainability without placing unnecessary financial burdens on exporters.

Business visa restrictions, foreign travel advisories and associated insurance costs were also discussed. Participants were informed that the relevant authorities were pursuing these matters through diplomatic channels, while options for facilitating faster visa processing for verified exporters and business representatives were being explored.

Federal Minister Jam Kamal emphasised that the government was pursuing greater access to international markets through sustained diplomatic and trade engagements. He said Pakistan was actively revisiting existing trade arrangements and seeking improved preferential access with major trading partners, including China, South Korea, Türkiye, Japan and Vietnam.

Referring to China, the minister said Pakistan had been advocating greater tariff concessions in line with preferential treatment extended to other countries. **NEWS DESK**

IMF sees 1.3% contraction in MENA-Pakistan

The IMF on Thursday forecast a sharp drop in economic output in the Middle East, North Africa and Pakistan this year due to the US-Israeli-led war against Iran, followed by a rebound to 6.6 percent growth in 2027, while warning that further energy production disruptions could worsen the outlook. The International Monetary Fund said the region's output was expected to contract by 1.3 percent as a result of the war's impact on energy production, shipping, tourism, trade and confidence. Economic output would increase sharply in 2027, but output in those economies would generally stay below pre-war projections.

The war's impact had been substantial, but uneven, with oil-exporting economies directly affected by disruptions to energy production and shipping hit harder, and oil importers proving to be more resilient, the IMF said in its regional outlook released Thursday in Dubai.

The IMF said its baseline assumed that the conflict would abate in early 2027 and that trade would gradually normalise during the year, but it said the outlook remained clouded by "exceptionally high uncertainty."

"The main risks derive from further disruption to energy production and trade routes that could drive energy prices higher," the IMF said in a statement outlining its key messages, noting external financial conditions could also tighten.

External financial conditions could also tighten if investors reassess AI-driven productivity gains and interest rates rise further amid heightened concerns about inflation and fiscal positions, it said.

Oil importers had proven more resilient, with domestic demand supported by remittances and tourism flows, favorable financial conditions, and prompt policy responses that safeguard consumers from higher commodity prices, the IMF said. Growth in the Caucasus and Central Asia was moderating toward a more sustainable pace, the IMF said, forecasting a 5.2 percent rise in economic output in 2026 and 5 percent in 2027. **REUTERS**

Automakers face action over exports

Pakistan is proposing to cancel automakers' manufacturing certificates if they miss export targets for two consecutive years, according to draft documents reviewed by Arab News, as it targets \$6 billion in auto exports over five years.



Shehbaz Sharif this week. It is a target for the sector as a whole, rather than an annual requirement for each manufacturer.

"Failure to meet export targets for two consecutive years will result in cancellation of manufacturing certificate," the documents said.

Companies missing minimum export targets would also face penalties of 1 percent to 3 percent of their annual production value, according to the documents.

To encourage exports, the

draft proposes reimbursing exporters for some taxes and levies.

"An exporter will get 5 percent compensation of net FOB (Free-On-Board) value of exports as DTL (Drawback of Local Taxes and Levies)," the documents said. Exporters would receive an additional 10 percent on incremental exports if their annual exports grew by more than 5 percent.

The government plans to fund incentives through an Automotive Development Levy on petrol, diesel and hybrid

vehicles with engines above 1,000cc. The levy would also finance upgrades for parts makers, technology transfer, vehicle testing, research and certification.

The policy sets minimum targets for locally produced content in vehicles. Manufacturers missing those targets would lose export incentives and concessions on imported parts that are not made locally.

It proposes sales tax rates of 1 percent for battery electric vehicles, 6 percent for range-extended electric vehicles and 9 percent for plug-in hybrids, covering both locally assembled and imported models.

"NEVs (New Energy Vehicles) are encouraged preferentially vis-à-vis ICE vehicles by giving a reduced rate of sales tax," the documents said.

The draft also proposes lower import tariffs for electric vehicles priced below \$15,000 during the policy's first two years, reduced duties on electric vehicle parts and higher financing limits.

"Exports will not go up just by setting up a target," PAAPAM Chairman Abdul Rahman Aizaz

told Arab News. He confirmed that the \$6 billion goal covered exports of vehicles and parts by assemblers and parts makers.

Aizaz cited security concerns, limited free trade agreements with potential markets, high energy and financing costs, taxation and difficulties attracting foreign buyers for factory inspections and quality audits.

"Pakistan's geopolitical security constraints deter foreign buyers to visit Pakistan for factory evaluation, quality audits and dispute resolution," he said.

Pakistani parts makers say they face a 34 percent structural cost disadvantage because of utility, financing and tax costs. Aizaz said the lack of strategic trade agreements also limited access to markets in Africa, Central Asia and South America.

"The exporters from Pakistan receive no financial rebates or support from the government unlike other countries in the region," he said.

Pakistan Automotive Manufacturers Association Director-General Razi ur Rehman declined to comment until "things have settled down." **NEWS DESK**

WORLD

DTM

Musk, Not White House, Controls Starlink Access: Rubio

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said on Wednesday that decisions regarding Ukraine's access to Starlink were up to its parent company SpaceX and Elon Musk, not the White House, comments that suggested Musk may have restricted Kyiv's access to the service.

The Wall Street Journal reported on Tuesday that Musk had ordered the slowdown of Starshield, a military-grade version of Starlink that Ukraine relies on to defend itself against missile attacks from Russia.

The Journal cited one person saying that SpaceX CEO Musk, President Donald Trump and White House officials discussed the matter beforehand, and two people saying that Musk and the president discussed the matter in the days after the slowdown.

"I'm not aware that we knew about this decision beforehand. But that's irrelevant," Rubio told reporters during a trip to India.

"The bottom line is that that is governed by a private commercial contract as to how they'll be used and what speeds they'll allow it to be used at."

Musk and SpaceX did not respond to requests for comment.

Trump, asked by reporters on



Wednesday whether Musk ordered the slowdown, said: "I don't know who did it, but I was not involved."

Reuters has cited two US officials and a Western official briefed on the matter saying the decision ultimately came from the White House. This version was also asserted by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, but denied by the administration.

Rubio's comments are likely to intensify concerns in Washington regarding Musk's ability to influence US foreign policy. They also represent an apparent shift in position for the administration.

Trump has previously said publicly he believed neither he nor Musk was behind the slowdown. Departing for a trip to Uzbekistan and India on Saturday, Rubio had said no one ordered the slowdown, an assertion that drew criticism from lawmakers in both parties.

"I'm not sure Zelensky knows what he's talking about, but it wasn't deliberate," Rubio said at the time.

"We have nothing to do with that. I don't - the United States, nobody ordered that Starlink speed to be slowed down. It sort of happened, but my understanding is it's been restored," Rubio said. REUTERS

Trump Deportations Up, Still Short Of Goal

President Donald Trump's administration is on track to deport about 660,000 people over the past year, a new report released Thursday shows, as arrests ramp up across the country fueled by billions of dollars meant to supercharge his immigration agenda.

The report by the Migration Policy Institute shows deportations increased from 620,000 during the first year of Trump's second administration. The numbers fall short of previous highs in the early 2000s and fall to meet the Trump administration's promise, made when it received the billions from Congress, that the money would allow for 1 million deportations annually.

The report, based on publicly available data obtained through Freedom of Information Act requests, comes after the Trump administration in January 2025 stopped publicly releasing similar figures compiled by the Department of



Homeland Security. Trump, a Republican, returned to power last year promising to stanch crossings at the southern border and crack down on immigration. His administration has pushed through restrictions on both legal and illegal immigration and launched high-profile arrest operations in its bid to force migrants out. The analysis found that the Department of Homeland Security carried out 980,000 deportations during the first 18 months of the second Trump administration. AP

ICC Awarded EU's Top Rights Prize



Facing US sanctions, the International Criminal Court was on Thursday awarded the European Union's top rights prize, in a show of support that risks upsetting President Donald Trump.

"The European Union is built on respect for multilateralism and international institutions, and this prize recognises the important work of the court in upholding international law and justice," said European Parliament chief Roberta Metsola in announcing the award. The ICC thanked the European Parliament for giving it the Sakharov Prize "at a time when the Court and its officials face unprecedented challenges".

"Against this backdrop, the Sakharov Prize carries particular significance, reaffirming the importance of independent judicial institutions and of those who work to uphold international law," ICC President Tomoko Akane said.

This month, the United States announced sanctions against the ICC aimed at crippling the day-to-day operations of the court, which tries individuals for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide.

Trump's administration has vowed to dismantle the court "brick by brick", furious that judges have issued an arrest warrant for Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for alleged crimes in Gaza.

The win comes after ex-ICC judge Navi Pillay, who also served as UN rights chief, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize this month - a choice Trump slammed as "disgraceful", arguing the award should have gone to him. The EU has already thrown its support behind the ICC in the face of the US sanctions - which will come into force in six months - and has said it is "ready to take any necessary measures" to make sure the court can keep working. AP

Bukele Launches Haiti Rescue

El Salvador's President Nayib Bukele said Wednesday he had launched a military operation to rescue four Salvadoran aviation technicians kidnapped by gangs in Haiti, warning of a more forceful response if they are not released alive and unharmed. Gangs in Haiti had opened fire on an armored vehicle three days earlier the first major attack since an international gang suppression force began operating in the violence-wracked Caribbean country. The four Salvadoran soldiers have been missing since they fled the burning vehicle in the Santo area of Croix-des-Bouquets, Port-au-Prince. Addressing Haitian gang leaders, Bukele demanded that they return the Salvadorans "alive, unharmed" and warned that, if they do so, "everything will go back to the way it was before the kidnapping." If not, the Salvadoran leader - who drew international attention for his contentious war on his own country's gangs - said it would result in a more powerful operation.

"Today's attack is nothing compared to what is coming if they do not release the four hostages alive. And do not take our words as empty threats," he wrote on the social media platform X. AP

Washington Orders Staff Exit From Saudi Arabia



The United States has ordered non-essential US embassy staff and their families to leave Saudi Arabia, the State Department said on Wednesday, as the kingdom comes under sustained deadly attacks by Yemen's Houthis.

"Iranian-supported Houthis have increasingly engaged in hostilities against Saudi Arabia, including attacks on civilian airports and other critical infrastructure resulting in civilian casualties and severe travel disruptions," State Department spokesman Tommy Pigott said in a social media post explaining the measure.

"The safety and security of Department personnel and their families remain our highest priority," he added.

A diplomatic source in the Middle East told AFP that some families of US embassy personnel were also being withdrawn in the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Qatar and Bahrain, but Pigott stressed that Wednesday's order was for the departure of non-emergency embassy staff and their families in Saudi Arabia only.

Saudi Arabia has this month come under near-daily attacks from the Iran-backed Houthis, including a strike on Riyadh's international airport that was the kingdom's deadliest in years, as the war with the group escalates. On Wednesday, the Saudi energy ministry said that falling debris from the successful interception of a drone targeting an oil facility killed two people and injured a further two.

"The attempted attack resulted in the deaths of two individuals, a Filipino and a Nepali, and injuries to two others," the ministry said in a statement.

It did not say who launched the drone aimed at Shaybah oil field near the UAE border. Earlier on Wednesday, the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen reported intercepting six drones. AP

500 Sick In South Africa Water Outbreak

Over 500 people in South Africa have fallen ill from a gastrointestinal illness that causes stomach cramps and diarrhea, which authorities are blaming on poor water quality in two different cities in the country.

Authorities this week issued a warning to communities east of the capital, Pretoria, to stop drinking water from their taps after 408 people including children fell ill and were treated at various health facilities.

Like other cities in the country, the capital and its suburbs have long had issues with the cleanliness of the region's water, and it remains a contentious political issue.

On Wednesday, city officials were distributing water to residents through emergency tankers, while the charity organization Gift of the Givers supplied the community with bottled water. Most of those who fell ill were children under 4. According to health and city officials, the people fell ill after drinking contaminated water from a water treatment plant which supplies water to several communities east of Pretoria. Authorities confirmed that the water at the plant had not been chlorinated for about three weeks, rendering it unsafe for human consumption. Officials said the municipality had trouble obtaining chlorine from its usual supplier. AP



SPORTS

Top Marathoner Aga Hit With Doping Ban

One of the world's leading marathon runners, Ruti Aga, has been banned for six years after track and field's anti-doping investigators found she submitted a fake prescription to explain a failed drug test. The Ethiopian runner won the Tokyo Marathon in 2019 and has reached the podium at the Berlin and New York Marathons. She tested positive for the banned substance methylprednisolone after winning a half marathon in China in March, the Athletics Integrity Unit said on Thursday.

Aga said she'd been given the substance by a doctor in Ethiopia to treat knee pain but the AIU said it found the clinic named on the document didn't exist and the supposed prescription had actually been signed by a family member who wasn't a registered doctor. After that, Aga failed to respond to charges for the use of methylprednisolone and "tampering" with the anti-doping process, the AIU added, meaning the six-year ban was issued without a hearing. The 32-year-old runner's ban includes two years for the use of the substance and four more for tampering. **AP**



Pakistani Lifters Dominate At Asian Masters

Pakistani weightlifters delivered an impressive performance at the 2nd Asian Masters and Grand Prix, securing top positions in several men's age-group and weight categories.

According to the results of the competition, Akbar Ali, vying in the men's 50-70kg category, claimed first position with a combined lift of 190kg, comprising 80kg in the snatch and 110kg in the clean and jerk.

Abdul Razaq secured first place in the men's 55-60kg category with a total lift of 120kg, including 50kg in the snatch and 70kg in the clean and jerk. Vaseer Ahmed But also finished on top in the men's 55-65kg category, registering a combined lift of 142kg, with 67kg in the snatch and 75kg in the clean and jerk. In the men's 55-75kg category,

Ahmed Ilyas secured first position with a total of 105kg, comprising 40kg in the snatch and 65kg in the clean and jerk. Mahmood Heera won the men's 55-110kg category with a combined lift of 130kg, while Riasat Ali topped the men's 55-110kg-plus category with a total of 135kg. In the men's 55-95kg category, Tajikistan's Abdulla Baqarov claimed first place with a combined lift of 205kg, while Pakistan's Nadim Hashemi finished second with a total of 97kg.

Bahrain's Ali Saifallah Qahraman won the men's 50-95kg category with a combined lift of 215kg. **APF**



Phillip Island Set For Emotional MotoGP Send-Off

Seven-time world champion Marc Marquez admits it will be "emotional" this weekend as one of MotoGP's most iconic circuits at Phillip Island hosts its last race after nearly three decades.

The picturesque and often windswept track, some two hours outside of Melbourne, has been a staple on the calendar since 1997 and a favourite among the riders given its waterfront location and demanding layout. But its contract expires this year. Promoter MotoGP Sports Entertainment wanted to broaden its appeal and shift it to Melbourne's Albert Park, which hosts the Australian Formula One.

The Victorian state government was adamant it should remain at



Phillip Island.

points behind April's Jorge Martin in the championship standings. "It is a track with a unique, breathtaking layout. Here I won one of my first races with Ducati and we are motivated to do well, ready to fight right away for the positions that matter." **AFP**

With negotiations breaking down, South Australia stepped in and secured the race for six years from 2027 in Adelaide — the first MotoGP to be held in a city-centre location.

"Phillip Island is an extraordinary circuit. Racing here for the last time will be emotional," said Ducati's Marquez, who heads into the weekend two

Rockets Rout Mavs In Season Opener

Kevin Durant and Jabari Smith Jr. scored 30 points apiece and the Houston Rockets used a big second quarter to build a huge lead and coast to a 128-110 win over the Dallas Mavericks on Wednesday night in the season opener for both teams.

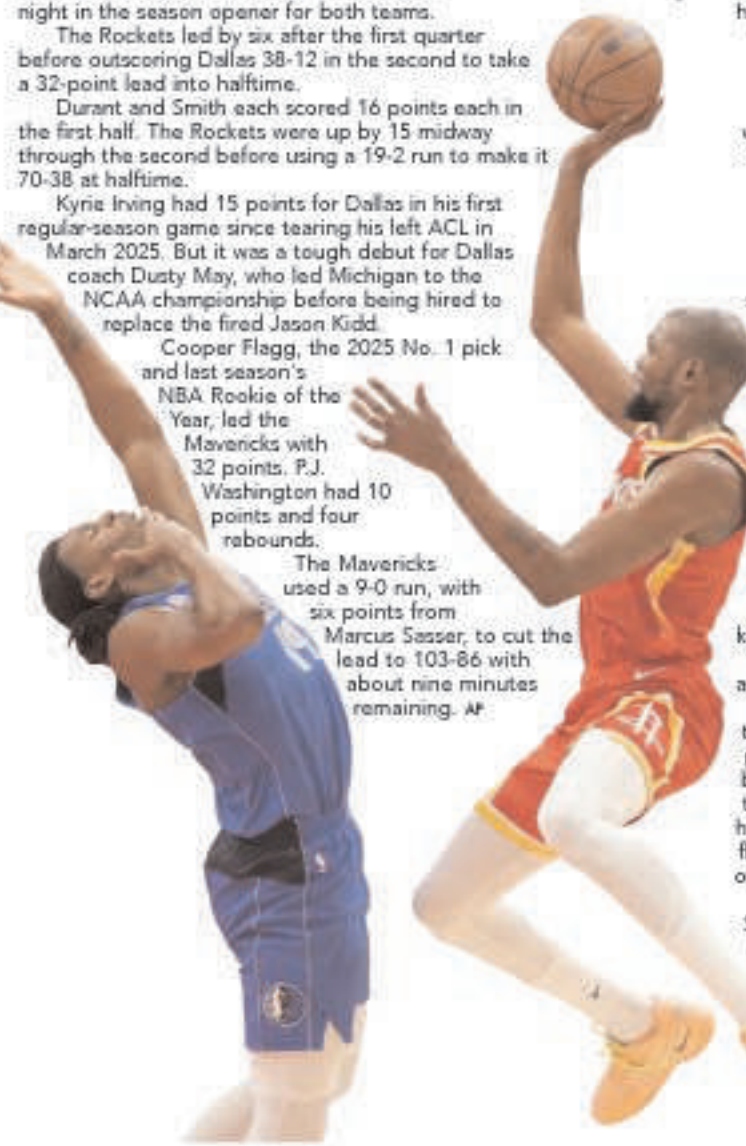
The Rockets led by six after the first quarter before outscoring Dallas 38-12 in the second to take a 32-point lead into halftime.

Durant and Smith each scored 16 points each in the first half. The Rockets were up by 15 midway through the second before using a 19-2 run to make it 70-38 at halftime.

Kyrie Irving had 15 points for Dallas in his first regular-season game since tearing his left ACL in March 2025. But it was a tough debut for Dallas coach Dusty May, who led Michigan to the NCAA championship before being hired to replace the fired Jason Kidd.

Cooper Flagg, the 2025 No. 1 pick and last season's NBA Rookie of the Year, led the Mavericks with 32 points. P.J. Washington had 10 points and four rebounds.

The Mavericks used a 9-0 run, with six points from Marcus Sasser, to cut the lead to 103-86 with about nine minutes remaining. **AP**



Blazers Fans Embrace Lillard In Comeback

Damian Lillard is back, in more ways than one.

The star guard played his first regular-season game with the Trail Blazers since returning to Portland in the summer of 2025, scoring 25 points with six 3-pointers in a 124-83 rout of the Phoenix Suns on Wednesday night.

Lillard spent some 16 months rehabbing a torn Achilles tendon he sustained with the Milwaukee Bucks. "I did feel good, but you know I've felt good for months now, and I've been saying that. But I think there's probably some people that might have been skeptical because they hadn't seen me. I hadn't been out on the floor and been in front of people," Lillard said.

The nine-time All-Star was greeted with an extended standing ovation at Moda Center when he welcomed the crowd in a pregame address. A beloved

figure in Portland, he clearly was missed.

"It was a lot of love. The fans showed a lot of love," Lillard said. "I think it's no secret the relationship between myself and our fans and the city of Portland."

New addition Ja Morant, who finished with 14 points in his Trail Blazers debut, was impressed. "You know, for me

today it was, the guy hasn't played in 18 months, and he comes out and delivered the way he did for us," Morant said. "Special, man."

Lillard signed a three-year, \$42 million deal to rejoin the Blazers in July 2025 after spending two seasons with the Bucks. **AP**



Walker Faces Tattoo Trouble Over City Titles

Kyle Walker admits he may have to lose a tattoo if Manchester City are stripped of league titles they won during his time at the club.

The former England defender won 15 major trophies, including six Premier League titles, at City from 2017 to 2025 and has body art to mark his successful time there. He has 'four in a row' tattooed on his leg to mark their four successive crowns from 2021 to 2024.

City have been found guilty by an independent commission of breaching Premier League financial rules over a nine-season period but have appealed against the judgement. Asked on TalkSPORT whether he would remove the tattoo if City were punished and his league medals taken away, Walker said: "Well, I'm probably going to have to do that bit. I'll try and keep it on, but hopefully we don't get things taken away. It doesn't look great. Let's not hide from the fact that they've been found guilty, but they're going through

PA MEDIA



Anthem Caffe Hits Para Games

Wrong national anthems were played three times at the Asian Para Games in Japan's Nagoya this week, prompting the mayor to apologise just days after the city hosted the mishap-plagued Asian Games.

The Asian Para Games is taking place in the central Japanese hub city through Saturday, featuring around 4,000 athletes and officials in 18 sports. Nagoya Mayor Ichiro Hirose apologised on Wednesday for the latest error, which occurred despite officials' pledges to implement steps to prevent mistakes, including playing the correct national anthems.

"These things happened during the Asian Games, so of course the operations were reviewed and examined based on the

lessons learned. The fact that it happened again is really just unacceptable," the mayor told a press conference. On Monday, a Taiwanese athlete won a men's para taekwondo competition, but the Iranian anthem was played in its entirety, according to Nagoya officials at the mayor's press conference.

Officials realised their mistake after the ceremony, they said. On the same day, the Iranian anthem was played again during a women's para taekwondo ceremony, where a Mongolian competitor was receiving the gold medal, according to the city. **APF**

