



Pakistan's proactive efforts in creating a conducive environment for economic and trade activities, providing friendly countries with significant investment opportunities and benefits

Speaker of the National Assembly
Sardar Ayaz Sadiq

Gillani calls for further promoting parliamentary relations between Pakistan, US



ISLAMABAD: Chairman Senate Syed Yousuf Raza Gillani Wednesday appreciated the US government for its collaboration across various sectors and emphasized the need to enhance trade links for mutual benefit. During the meeting with US Ambassador to Pakistan Donald Blome, the chairman Senate stressed the need for increased cooperation to boost trade volume. Both sides engaged in detailed deliberations on various aspects of the enduring friendship between Pakistan and the United States, said a news release.

Ambassador Blome extended heartiest congratulations to Chairman Senate Syed Yousuf Raza Gillani on being elected as Chairman Senate and conveyed his best wishes for a successful tenure.

Expressing Pakistan's commitment to nurturing its long-standing friendly ties with the US, the Chairman Senate emphasized the importance of further promoting parliamentary relations between the two nations. He underscored the pivotal role that parliamentary contacts can play in enhancing public and legislative engagement. Recognizing the significant economic partnership between the two countries, Chairman Senate Gillani highlighted the US as Pakistan's largest trading partner. Ambassador Blome commended the new economic team of Pakistan and expressed optimism regarding the ongoing discussions between Pakistan and the IMF. He praised the efforts of the Pakistan economic team and emphasized the potential for further economic cooperation between Pakistan and the US.

Acknowledging the positive economic indicators of Pakistan, the ambassador noted the downward trend in inflation and high dollar reserves, stating that the IMF's positive feedback would encourage investors. He also highlighted the flourishing gaming industry in Pakistan and called for enhanced cooperation in the digital sector. Both discussed the importance of parliamentary contacts. Chairman Senate appreciated the fact that a strong Parliamentary Caucus exists in the US Congress for promotion of bilateral ties and we are in the process of reconstitution of the friendship group as a consequence of the recent Senate elections. This would help promote mutually beneficial ties and give Parliamentary diplomacy a chance to build strong people-to-people contacts. Chairman Senate underscored the challenges faced by students and businessmen in obtaining US visas and called for further streamlining the visa process. The US Ambassador acknowledged Pakistan's counter-terrorism efforts and reiterated US support in combating terrorism, recognizing the significant impact of terrorism on the country.



ISLAMABAD: Chairman of China International Development Cooperation Agency, Mr. Luo Zhaohui, along with his delegation called on President Asif Ali Zardari, at Aiwan-e-Sadr.

PML-N respects mandate of all parties & we must now work together for the development & prosperity of the country: PM Shehbaz

Says Saudi Arabian & Iranian delegations will increase foreign investment and strengthen economy of the country



VOM Report

KARACHI: Prime Minister Mian Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif has called for harmony among federal and provincial governments and collective efforts to bring economic stability in the country. Addressing the meeting of Sindh cabinet along with Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah in Karachi on Wednesday, PM Shehbaz Sharif said his visit is aimed to take all the provinces on board for the development projects. He said Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) respects mandate of all parties and we must now work together for the development and prosperity of the country.

The Prime Minister said that recent visits of the foreign delegations are a welcome sign. He said new agreements with neighboring and friendly countries and establishment of border markets will boost trade. PM Shehbaz Sharif said the visits of Saudi Arabian and Iranian delegations will increase foreign investment and strengthen economy of the country. Speaking on the occasion, Sindh Chief Minister informed the Prime Minister about the financial problems of the province. He informed that the School Rehabilitation Project, Barrages Project, Solid Waste Project are pending with the Federal Government for necessary approval.

The Prime Minister directed the Federal Finance Minister to resolve the financial issues. On the request of Transport Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon, the Prime Minister announced to give 150 buses in a pool of 300 buses. He also directed to resolve the issue of K-4 water project. Earlier, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif assured Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah of resolution of all issues with mutual consensus.

Premier Shehbaz Sharif gave the assurance during a one-on-one meeting with Murad Ali Shah at the Chief Minister's House after reaching Sindh capital on a one-day visit in the morning. They also discussed development projects and other issues, including Sindh's share from divisible pool.

Meanwhile Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif has said that the government is devising a policy to boost exports of the country. Addressing the business community in Karachi on Wednesday, the Prime Minister said the government is devising a policy to boost exports of the country. He said promotion of trade and industry in next five years is the foremost priority of the government and all out efforts are being made to overcome the hurdles. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said there is a need to work together for promotion of businesses and trade to generate employment opportunities and control inflation.

Foreign Minister, Envoys vow to further strengthen bilateral relations



ISLAMABAD: Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar was separately called on by Canadian High Commissioner Leslie Scanlon, European Union Ambassador Dr Riina Kionka and ASG UNDP Kanni Wignaraja on Wednesday. During these meetings, the envoys discussed the bilateral ties between Pakistan and their respective countries. Ishaq Dar was paid a courtesy call by Canadian high commissioner.

"They discussed bilateral relations, FM reaffirmed Pakistan's desire to deepen relations with Canada in political, economic and cultural domains; and encouraged Canadian companies to invest in Pakistan," Ministry of Foreign Affairs posted on its official X account. Meanwhile, the foreign minister received the EU ambassador at the Foreign Office. They discussed different aspects of Pakistan-EU relations and expressed satisfaction over the progress being made through several institutional mechanisms, another X post said. They agreed to further strengthen mutually beneficial cooperation including in trade, migration, and climate action.

While Assistant Secretary General of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Kanni Wignaraja also met with the foreign minister. "They discussed UNDP's work post the 2022 floods in Pakistan, Sustainable Development Goals and climate change."

"Foreign Minister Dar expressed Pakistan's support for UNDP's work in climate resilience, SDGs, and socio-economic development," a post on X said.

The foreign minister stressed the need for international solidarity in bridging the financing gap for climate initiatives and supporting vulnerable countries. Assistant Secretary General Wignaraja thanked Pakistan for its support and active engagement at the UN, it was further added. INP



ISLAMABAD: H.E. Mr. Wada Mitsuhiro, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Japan to Pakistan pays a courtesy call on the Honorable Federal Minister for Economic Affairs, Mr. Ahad Khan Cheema.

Pakistan, Portugal discuss bilateral, regional, global issues



In the meeting, the two sides discussed various bilateral, regional, and global issues. They expressed contentment with the current state of bilateral relations and reaffirmed their joint resolve to further expand and diversify mutually beneficial cooperation.

While discussing parliamentary relations, the Speaker underscored the importance of parliamentary diplomacy in strengthening bilateral ties, particularly through expanding cooperation between parliamentary friendship groups and the exchange of parliamentary delegations.

He also mentioned extending the invitation to his Portuguese counterpart to visit Pakistan along with the parliamentary delegation.

Discussing trade and economic cooperation, the Speaker mentioned Pakistan's proactive efforts in creating a conducive environment for economic and trade activities, providing friendly countries with significant investment opportunities and benefits. APP

ISLAMABAD: Speaker of the National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq Wednesday said that Pakistan and Portugal enjoy a multifaceted and friendly relationship marked by shared interests and a common stance on various regional and international matters. It is high time to enhance political, cultural, economic, and people-to-people connections between the two countries the speaker said during a meeting with the Portuguese Envoy to Pakistan, Manuel Frederico Pinheiro Da Silva, who called on him, said a news release.

Law Minister meets IPC delegation

ISLAMABAD: A delegation from the International Parliamentarians Congress (IPC) met with Federal Minister for Law and Justice, Azam Nazeer Tarar here on Wednesday.

The delegation was led by IPC President Abdel Rahim Maaia and included Secretary General Sitara Ayaz, Assistant Secretary General Ijlal Ali Khan and Deputy Speaker Jordan.

The IPC delegation briefed the Law Minister on the organization's work and mission. The IPC is a global platform that unites individual members of national parliaments from around the world to collaboratively address global and regional challenges. The delegation also discussed the formation of IPC's human rights committees.

Minister Tarar commended the IPC's efforts to expand its membership and foster cultural exchange among parliamentarians worldwide.

He expressed his appreciation for the organization's work in addressing critical issues related to Human rights. The IPC President concluded the meeting by presenting a report on road safety. — VOM Report

Atta Tarar presents Rs 1 million cheque to Karachi Press Club



KARACHI: Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaulah Tarar on Friday presented a cheque of Rs 1 million to the Karachi Press Club (KPC). The minister handed over the cheque to KPC President Saeed Sarbazi at the Sindh Governor House. Speaking on the occasion, Atta Tarar said the incumbent government soon after assuming office took steps to clear outstanding dues of the media houses with the aim to provide much-needed relief to journalists and media

workers. A total of Rs 1.6 billion dues of various outlets were paid to ensure payment of salaries and other dues to their employees, he added.

The minister announced that the government was planning to increase newspaper tariffs, which would ultimately benefit the media workers.

KPC President Saeed Sarbazi underscored the Karachi Press Club's significance saying that it was one of the country's largest clubs with a rich history of working for flourishing democracy.

The KPC president and General Secretary Shoaib Khan apprised the minister of the challenges and problems being faced by the workers of both print and electronic media. Responding to their invitation, the minister assured the KPC office-bearers that he would visit the club soon to address their concerns directly. APP

We unite to save Earth and combating global challenges together, Amb Beker

H.E. Ambassador Jemal, Climate Minister H.E. Romina Launch Green Legacy Initiative in Sialkot

VOM Report

SIALKOT: H.E. Jemal Beker Abdula, Special Envoy and Ambassador of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, along with Coordinator to the Prime Minister of Pakistan on Climate Change with status of Federal Minister H.E. Romina Khurshid Alam launched the "Ethio-Pakistan Fraternity Under Green Legacy" initiative of Ethiopia's PM H.E. Dr. Abiy Ahmed at the University of Sialkot in presence of government officials, religious community, businessmen, academia students, civil society and media.

The initiative was launched as part of a collaboration among the Embassy of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, the Ministry of Climate Change and the University of Sialkot.

More than 200 plants of different indigenous species were planted under the "Ethio-Pakistan Fraternity Under Green Legacy" Initiative which was followed by a climate walk in the town which was participated by a large number of people.

H.E. Ambassador Jemal Beker expressed gratitude for the Government of Pakistan for joining hands with the Ethiopian Embassy for fostering brotherhood and fraternity between the two big nations.

"Today we gather here not only to save the planet earth but also connecting the two big and historic nation the heirs of civilizations and protectors of the rule-based world order while fighting together the global challenges such as terrorism and climate change," the Ambassador remarked. H.E. Ambassador Jemal Beker recalled the recent flash flood that brought devastation to Pakistan's shore which, he had personally witnessed during his visit to



tent cities in Sindh. "Climate change is an existential threat that will not spare any place or area on this planet earth if we did not come together to combat this challenge which is not a problem for only Pakistan or Ethiopia but the rest of the world," he

said. To this end, he said the Embassy of FDR Ethiopia launched the Green Legacy Initiative to contribute to the efforts of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan towards greener and cleaner future for the next generations. The Ambassador said the Embassy along

with other stakeholders would do massive plantation throughout the week in other major cities including Lahore, Faisalabad, Gujranwala, Sheikhpura and others. "Our efforts in this regard are completely aligned with the vision of H.E. Dr. Abiy Ahmed who transformed Ethiopia under his Medemer philosophy which strongly advocates for aligning all the resources to provide home grown solutions to the home grown problems," the Ambassador stressed. He said H.E. Dr. Abiy Ahmed, Prime Minister of Ethiopia, mobilized the whole nation under the Green Legacy initiative and so far, more than 32.5 billion seedlings planted across the country in the last five years which included the saplings of fruits like avocado, papaya, banana, oranges, olives and many others. Likewise, coffee, animal feed and floral plants were also planted that taking us closer to our target of 50

billion seedlings until 2025.

In addition to that, more than 150,000 nurseries were set up in the country as well as over a million jobs.

Speaking on the occasion, H.E. Romina Khurshid lauded H.E. Ambassador Jemal Beker Abdula for fostering fraternity between the two nations through Green Legacy Initiative. The Coordinator to the Prime Minister of Pakistan said she was delighted to make a formal announcement regarding the collaboration between the Embassy of Ethiopia in Islamabad and the Ministry of Climate Change of Pakistan regarding the Ethio-Pakistan Fraternity Under Green Legacy Initiative. She said Prime Minister H.E. Shehbaz Sharif had accorded the approval to formalize the collaboration at bilateral level between the two countries and assured of the Government of Pakistan's strong commitment in this regard.

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It's vaccine time

TABINDA ASHRAF SHAHID

Adequate nutritional status and immune function are paramount for health and wellness. Micronutrient deficiencies are a form of malnutrition and a major health problem worldwide, which is also a contributing factor in the aggravation of infectious diseases. Vaccination programmes in low middle-income countries (LMIC) have upgraded their primary healthcare setups which have aided in, to some extent, decreasing the burden of life-threatening infectious diseases like polio.

However, in the presence of micronutrient deficiencies, the efficacy of vaccines has less been recognized as a vital link. It is imperative to note that 50 per cent of deaths of children under five years old worldwide are due to undernutrition. Studies have shown that young children with nutrient deficiencies have weak immune systems, and they are considerably more prone to infections.

Globally, infectious diseases account for 52 million deaths. This includes 14 million deaths in children under five years. At least 70 per cent of these deaths are preventable through vaccination. The National Institute of Health, Islamabad recently declared that Pakistan has not been able to defeat the polio virus completely, since two polio cases have been found in Balochistan so far since the start of 2024.

According to the Global Polio Eradication Initiative 2023, Pakistan and Afghanistan are in the category of endemic countries. The two nations reported a total of 11 cases of wild poliovirus type 1 last year. The morbidity and mortality rate due to the polio virus is likely to prevail, owing to the presence of malnutrition, poor health, water and sanitation plus socioeconomic and political factors.

It is important to note that Pakistan started its polio vaccine campaign in 1974, and is still battling for the eradication of this crippling disease along with the burden of childhood malnutrition. Recently, the Pakistan Health Ministry, Islamabad launched the second nationwide polio vaccination campaign with Unicef and Gavi to administer vaccines to 45.8 million children nationally. It is important to observe that along with vaccines, assessment of nutritional status should also be taken on a priority basis.

The diagnosis of malnutrition is not only a critical component for those who are suffering from growth failure due to micronutrient deficiencies but is also a hurdle in providing full coverage by polio vaccines.

Vaccines improve health; the immune system's response to the vaccine is different depending on environmental, behavioural and nutritional factors. One such factor is gut health. Our gut is the chief site of immune activity while the food that we eat, plays an important role in defining the type of microbes in our intestines.

These organisms or microbiomes protect our gut from disease-causing bacteria, synthesize vitamins and stimulate the immune system. It also breaks down food into small absorbable nutrients like Vitamins B and K and plays an important role in digestion and defence against diseases. In 2013, Jeffrey I Gordon, a biologist at Washington University, found that the presence of certain gut microbiomes is a factor that decisively affects health outcomes ie changing gut microbiome early in life can reduce malnutrition in infants and young children.

Inflammation or absence of certain gut organisms eventually leads to malabsorption of nutrients and vaccines in the gut. The study indicates that when breast milk was supplemented with B infantis (first gut bacteria produced due to the consumption of human milk), malnourished children absorbed nutrients more effectively, preventing malnutrition that led to the increased efficacy of oral polio vaccines.

Recent studies in the Democratic Republic of Congo 2023 have also indicated that non-administration of micronutrient Vitamin A supplements and being underweight are negatively associated with the success of polio vaccines.

According to the National Nutritional Survey 2018 in Pakistan, only 48.4 per cent of children are exclusively breastfed for the first six months of life. Those who are not exclusively breastfed are more susceptible to various infections which leads to undernutrition and weak immunity. It is a known fact that infants who are breastfed six to eight months have a profuse amount of B-infantis that helps in nutrient absorption, prevents deficiencies and improves absorption of oral polio vaccine. It implies that the maternal role in breastfeeding plays an important role in the health and development of children, which is also helpful in successful routine immunization.

Notably, where lifesaving vaccines contribute to immune fitness, optimal nutrition also plays a vital role in strengthening immune function. To win this battle, mothers need to be sensitized about the importance of nutrition in daily life and the purpose of vaccination for its success. Policymakers and stakeholders should also be encouraged to spread the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding, and its connection to healthy nutritional status and immunity.

The importance of routine vaccination, Vitamin A supplementation, the use of clean water and improving sanitation should also be encouraged in families and communities in high-risk areas by increasing awareness and their trust in vaccination campaigns. Socioeconomic issues, political barriers and traditional thinking should also be addressed to achieve a polio-free Pakistan.

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Atta-ur-Rahman

The walk towards development

Pakistan today is sinking into a dark hole, having to borrow money even to pay off the interest on loans taken, rather than the loan itself.

The key areas of focus of a different Pakistan should be the manufacture and export of high-tech, high value-added items, so that we can extricate ourselves from the growing debt snare in which we are trapped. This will require changing tracks and focusing on education, science, technology, and innovation with particular focus on social justice and inclusive socio-economic development.

Pakistan's economic crisis is largely due to the myopic vision of our planners who should have single-mindedly focused on the manufacture and export of high-tech products such as engineering goods, pharmaceuticals, high-value software, automobiles, electronics, etc. Our export in these value-added sectors is a big fat zero. For this, the formulation and dynamic implementation of a far-sighted action plan is necessary.

Pakistan undertook only one foresight-type exercise under my supervision during 2005/2006. The resulting 320-page document covering all important sectors of the national economy laid out 5-, 10- and 15-year strategies and plans for national development. It was approved by the cabinet in August 2007. An inter-ministerial committee was formed for its implementation, but it has since been gathering dust in government archives.

In today's interconnected world, national development depends on the effective utilization of emerging technologies to address societal challenges, drive economic growth, and enhance global competitiveness.

'Technology foresight' exercises can serve as strategic tools that enable stakeholders to envision the potential trajectories of technological evolution and their ramifications on society and the economy. Technology foresight, a systematic approach to anticipating future technological trends and their implications, plays a pivotal role in guiding strategic decision-making and shaping socio-economic policies.

By enabling nations to anticipate disruptions, identify opportunities, and

formulate proactive strategies, technology foresight can serve as a compass for navigating the complexities of the digital age.

Foresight exercises employ various methodologies to anticipate future trends, identify opportunities, and navigate uncertainties. Each method offers distinct advantages and may be tailored to suit specific objectives, contexts, and stakeholders. Perhaps the most important and widely used method is the Delphi method.

This is a structured approach that involves soliciting input from a panel of experts, belonging to subject specialists, private enterprises, and government officials through iterative rounds of surveys or questionnaires. These experts in specific fields provide qualitative and quantitative assessments of future trends, uncertainties, and potential developments. The anonymity of responses encourages open participation and consensus-building, while facilitators synthesize and distil insights to identify emerging themes and patterns. By identifying technological trajectories, nations can strategically invest in research and development (R&D) initiatives, infrastructure, and human capital to capitalize on emerging opportunities and maintain competitiveness in global markets.

Technology foresight guides strategic investments in key sectors and technologies, maximizing the impact of limited resources and fostering economic diversification and resilience. By identifying priority areas for investment, such as digital infrastructure, clean energy, and advanced manufacturing, nations can stimulate innovation ecosystems and create high-quality jobs.

Foresight exercises also facilitate the development of robust innovation ecosystems by fostering collaboration among stakeholders, including government agencies, industry players, academia, and civil society.

Technology foresight exercises need to be combined with a number of other initiatives to yield optimum results. One of these is scenario planning. This involves developing multiple plausible future scenarios based on different assumptions, drivers, and trends.

These scenarios explore a range of possible outcomes and their implica-

tions, allowing decision-makers to prepare for diverse eventualities. Scenario planning encourages strategic thinking, fosters creativity, and helps stakeholders anticipate risks and opportunities in dynamic environments.

Another important part of future planning is technology road-mapping. This is a systematic approach to visualizing and planning the development and adoption of technologies over time. Roadmaps typically delineate technology trajectories, key milestones, dependencies, and resource requirements.

By aligning technological capabilities with strategic objectives, roadmapping helps organizations and industries prioritize investments, coordinate research efforts, and anticipate market trends.

These efforts should also involve trend analysis. This requires examining historical data and current developments to identify patterns, discontinuities, and emerging trends. This method encompasses quantitative analysis, qualitative assessment, and data mining techniques to discern underlying drivers and dynamics shaping future trajectories.

Trend analysis provides valuable insights for anticipating market shifts, technological advancements and societal changes. Environmental scanning can also be important. This entails systematically monitoring and analyzing external factors, such as political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal (PESTEL) trends.

By scanning the external environment, organizations and policymakers can identify potential opportunities, threats, and disruptive forces affecting their operations and strategies. All these efforts can be further greatly facilitated by simulation and modelling. These involve using computational techniques, such as agent-based modelling, system dynamics, and Monte Carlo simulation to simulate complex systems and explore future scenarios.

These methods allow stakeholders to experiment with different parameters, test hypotheses, and assess the potential impacts of policy interventions or technological innovations.

Nations that embrace technology foresight gain a competitive edge in

global markets by positioning themselves as leaders in emerging technologies and industries. By proactively investing in research, talent development and technology commercialization, nations can attract foreign investment, talent and partnerships, enhancing their global relevance and influence.

The Singapore government has implemented technology foresight initiatives, such as the Future Economy Council and Research, Innovation, and Enterprise (RIE) 2025 plan, to drive innovation-led growth and address future challenges in areas such as smart cities, healthcare, and advanced manufacturing. Another good example is that of Finland.

Finland's national foresight programme, Finland 2030, engages stakeholders from government, academia, industry, and civil society to identify long-term challenges and opportunities, guiding strategic investments in areas such as digitalization, sustainability, and education. South Korea's presidential committee on the fourth Industrial Revolution has harnessed technology foresight to inform policy-making and strategic planning in emerging areas such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, and advanced robotics, aiming to maintain its leadership in the global technology landscape.

Germany's socio-economic strategies have also been based on foresight exercises aimed at fostering industrial innovation and competitiveness. Initiatives like the High-Tech Strategy 2025 and the German National Innovation Dialogue have allowed prioritized investments in key technologies such as Industry 4.0, renewable energy, and mobility solutions.

It is high time Pakistan developed short-, medium- and long-term roadmaps with the government interacting closely with the major opposition parties and obtaining their approval for it in order to ensure the continuity of key programmes after a change in government. This is the only way forward.

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Disclaimer: Views expressed by writers in this section are their own and do not necessarily reflect The Asian Telegraph's point-of-view

Today in History

History of Pakistan



Despite her tough policies, the popularity of Benazir Bhutto waned after her husband allegedly became involved in the controversial death of Murtaza

Bhutto. Many public figures and officials suspected Benazir Bhutto's involvement in the murder, although there was no proof. In 1996, seven weeks after this

incident, Benazir Bhutto's government was dismissed by her own hand-picked president on charges of Murtaza Bhutto's death.

The 1997 elections showing right-wing parties, in green, with an exclusive mandate in the country.

To be continued....

Amber Heard privately celebrates 38th Birthday in Madrid two years after Johnny Depp trial

After losing the defamation trial to Depp, Heard has been seen in what appears to be a self-imposed exile in Spain

Heard was said to have felt the need to leave the U.S. after her highly publicized defamation trial with Johnny Depp in Virginia. Amber Heard relocated to Spain for a more peaceful life with her daughter, Oonagh. As she turned 38 on April 22, Heard is enjoying a quiet life. Her daughter, Oonagh Paige, celebrated her third birthday on April 8. Despite maintaining a low profile, Heard has been seen in Madrid for occasional runs.



In a viral video posted by TMZ last summer, Heard expressed her love for Spain in Spanish and indicated she hopes to stay. She left the U.S. after her contentious defamation trial with ex-husband Johnny Depp, finding the aftermath too chaotic. According to a source who spoke to People Magazine, Heard felt the need to leave the U.S. after her highly publicized defamation trial with Johnny Depp in Virginia. The aftermath of the June 2022 verdict, which largely favored Depp, was described as chaotic. Heard viewed this outcome as a setback for other women.

PALO ALTO: Microsoft on Tuesday launched a lightweight artificial intelligence model, as it looks to attract a wider client base with cost-effective options.

The new version called Phi-3-mini is the first of the three small language models (SLM) to be released by the company, as it stakes its future on a technology that is expected to have a wide-ranging impact on the world and the way people work.

"Phi-3 is not slightly cheaper, it's dramatically cheaper, we're talking about a 10x cost difference compared to the other models out there with similar capabilities," said Sébastien Bubeck, Microsoft's vice president of GenAI research.

SLMs are designed to perform simpler tasks, making it easier for use by companies with limited resources, the company said.

Phi-3-mini will be available immediately on Microsoft cloud service platform Azure's AI model catalog, machine learning model plat-



form Hugging Face, and Ollama, a framework for running models on a local machine, the company said.

Last week, Microsoft invested \$1.5 billion in UAE-based AI firm G42. It has also previously partnered with French startup Mistral AI to make their models available through its Azure cloud computing platform.

10 surprising benefits of eating watermelon in summers

Watermelon isn't just a delicious way to cool down on a scorching summer day. This refreshing fruit packs a surprising punch of health benefits that can keep you feeling your best all season long. Here are 10 reasons to reach for a slice (or two!) of watermelon.

As the scorching summer heat approaches, there's nothing quite like biting into a juicy slice of watermelon to cool down. But did you know that besides being delicious, watermelon offers a range of surprising health benefits?

Here are 10 reasons why you should make watermelon your go-to fruit this summer:
 Hydration Hero: Watermelon is over 90% water, making it a fantastic way to stay hydrated naturally, especially important when sweating it out in the summer heat.

Nutrient Powerhouse: Don't let the sweetness fool you! Watermelon is low in calories and contains essential vitamins and minerals like vitamins A and C, potassium, and magnesium.

Sun-Kissed Skin Saviour: The antioxidant lycopene in watermelon may help protect your skin from sun damage, giving you a natural summer glow (but don't skip the sunscreen!).

Workout Wonder: Watermelon contains L-citrulline, which your body converts to nitric oxide. This can improve blood flow and potentially reduce muscle soreness after exercise.

Antioxidant All-Star: Watermelon is loaded with antioxidants that fight free radicals in your body, potentially reducing inflammation and the risk of chronic diseases.

Heart Healthy Helper: The healthy mix of vitamins and minerals in watermelon may contribute to lower blood pressure and better heart health.

Bone Boost: Watermelon contains vitamins and minerals that can contribute to strong bones and may help prevent bone loss.

Digestive Delight: The fibre and water content in watermelon can aid digestion and promote a healthy gut.

Eye-Opening Benefits: Watermelon contains nutrients that may help protect your eyes from age-related macular degeneration.

Mornings Made Easy: Watermelon's high water content and electrolytes can help alleviate nausea and fatigue, making it a great choice for those experiencing morning sickness.



Health

Federal Govt directs provinces to accelerate wheat procurement, increase targets



ISLAMABAD: Minister for National Food Security and Research Rana Tanveer Hussain on Wednesday said that the federal government has sent letters to provincial chief ministers, urging immediate initiation of wheat procurement processes and enhancement of targets.

It was stated by him while responding to the queries of lawmakers in National Assembly mainly related to agriculture sector and procurement of wheat.

The minister assured improvement in the situation of procuring wheat within the next 4-5 days and noted a rise in rates to 3400 per 40 kilograms despite losses incurred initially. He revealed that, under the Prime Minister's directives, letters have been dispatched to chief ministers urging them to initiate wheat procurement and enhance targets accordingly.

The minister for National Food Security and Research expressed gratitude to the House for highlighting critical issues within the agriculture sector, particularly the wheat production in Sindh and Punjab. Emphasizing wheat as Pakistan's staple crop, he underscored the importance of determining support prices to bolster producers and growers, ultimately securing food security for the nation.

However, he acknowledged fluctuations in prices and lamented the inefficiency in subsidy distribution, citing instances where it fails to reach its intended recipients (farmers) despite allocation.

Regarding wheat imports, he disclosed that due to previous imports, a substantial stockpile of 4.1 million tons remains. He clarified that provincial governments bear the responsibility for procurement, revealing a decline in Punjab province procurement targets from 25% to around 15-16% of total production due to various challenges, including adverse weather conditions.

The minister emphasized the superior quality of Pakistani wheat compared to that of Ukraine or any other country. Pakistan Agricultural Storage & Services Corporation Limited (PASSCO) focuses on procuring for strategic reserves and food security, with its own specific targets.

The minister said that an inquiry is underway following the directives of the Prime Minister about import of wheat during the interim government setup. He also agreed upon the formation of a house committee to scrutinize the legitimacy of wheat import in previous interim tenure.

He assured that there would be no hindrance in the supply of fertilizers, and their pricing would not pose an issue. He clarified that the implementation of their plan lies within the purview of the provincial government, which maintains contracts with dealers for such provisions.

Highlighting the Prime Minister's strong commitment to providing relief to farmers and bolstering the agricultural sector, the minister reiterated the government's dedication to this cause. He underscored the Prime Minister's keen interest in providing relief to farmers and fostering growth in the agricultural sector. APP



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Law Azam Nazeer Tarar had a meeting with International Parliamentarians Congress Delegation.

President urges Australian companies to invest in Pakistan

Asif Ali Zardari for stronger economic, cultural ties with China



VOM Report

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari on Wednesday said that Pakistan and Australia enjoyed durable relationship and urged the Australian companies to invest in different sectors of Pakistan including agriculture, agricultural equipment and other tools. The president expressed these views during a meeting with High Commissioner of Australia to Pakistan Neil Hawkins who called on him at the Aiwan-e-Sadr, President Secretariat Press Wing said in a press release. The president also expressed his satisfaction over the bilateral cooperation between the two countries in mining and mineral sectors.

The Australian High Commissioner apprised the President of the existing level of bilateral ties between the two countries, adding both countries were cooperating in education, defence and agriculture sectors. Meanwhile, President Asif Ali Zardari on Wednesday said that Pakistan and China enjoyed long-term strategic relations, which need to be further strengthened in the areas of trade, economy, agriculture, people-to-people contacts, and culture.

The president, in a meeting with the visiting Chairman of China International Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA), Luo Zhaohui, who along with his delegation called on him, underlined the need for both countries to continue to work together to take

bilateral relations to new heights.

The ambassador of China in Pakistan Jiang Zaidong, the Deputy Chairman Planning Commission Dr Jahanzeb Khan, and senior officials of the Chinese and Pakistani governments attended the meeting.

Reiterating Pakistan's firm commitment to China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the president said that Pakistan considered CPEC of immense strategic importance and was fully committed to the timely completion of all CPEC projects.

Highlighting the importance of Gwadar Port, he said that Gwadar Port would not only promote regional connectivity but would also make the transport of goods to China cost-effective. He also suggested to undertake joint training projects to equip human resources with skills keeping in view the Chinese demand for skilled workforce.

Chairman of China International Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA), Mr Luo Zhaohui, briefed the president about CIDCA's role in Pakistan's socio-economic development as well as its contributions in the health and education sectors.

He also underlined the need to promote tourism and agricultural cooperation between the two countries. President Zardari expressed grief over the unfortunate terrorist attack on Chinese workers in Bisham, saying that Pakistan would make all-out efforts to provide a safe environment for the Chinese workers and investors in Pakistan.

Chief Commissioner briefs Federal Minister Engr Amir Muqam about Raha Program

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for States and Frontier Regions and Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit Baltistan Engr Amir Muqam on Wednesday briefed by Chief Commissioner Afghan Refugees Muhammad Abbas Khan regarding Refugees Affected and Hosting Areas (RAHA) program. Chief Commissioner for Afghan Refugees, provided a detailed insight into various aspects of RAHA Program. Chief Commissioner Afghan Refugees shared a detailed report with Federal Minister regarding Raha program. He said that RAHA program main objectives was to create social cohesion between the Afghan refugees and their host communities. He said that it also aimed to support government of Pakistan's efforts to bring the country's poor communities into the mainstream of development, adding that it also aimed to create livelihood opportunities for Afghan refugees and host communities.

The Minister was also informed about the projects executed since 2009 to 2023, funding details and projects recommended by PTF in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The federal minister was also informed about the selection criteria of RAHA projects and approval process. He said that RAHA program aims at rehabilitating Afghan refugees and host communities to support the pluralistic approach of Pakistan.

He said that RAHA program focusing on better living conditions acquired skills, education, health facilities and water and sanitation facilities also empower them with essential vocational and life skills and most importantly creating social harmony.

During briefing, Federal Minister Engr Amir Muqam emphasized the importance of optimal resources utilization in achieving the objectives effectively. He urged the international community, to increase funding and support to meet the growing needs of the Afghan refugees that required substantial resources. "We look forward to continuing our collaboration to ensure the safety and dignity of refugees within our borders," he added.

Iranian President leaves after 3-day Pakistan visit

KARACHI: President of Islamic Republic of Iran Dr Ebrahim Raisi has left for Tehran along with his delegation after completing three-day visit to Pakistan early on Wednesday morning. Sindh Governor Kamran Tessori and Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah saw off the distinguished guest at Karachi Airport early morning. During his three-day visit, the Iranian President held meetings with the President, Prime Minister, Chief of the Army Staff, Chairman Senate, Speaker of the National Assembly, and the chief ministers and governors of Sindh and Punjab. Earlier, Iranian President, along with his spouse Dr Jamileh Alamolhoda and a high level delegation arrived the provincial capital and visited mausoleum of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah. Dr Raisi also held meetings at CM House and addressed a ceremony attended by prominent personalities belonging to all walks of life including Ulema, leading businessmen, provincial ministers and the parliament members. APP

AIOU to host 37th annual conference of AAOU in Oct

VOM Report

ISLAMABAD: Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) will host the 37th Annual Conference of the Asian Association of Open Universities (AAOU) from October 15 to 17. According to AIOU, over 100 international dignitaries, including vice-chancellors, rectors, professors, and researchers from open universities in Asian countries, as well as around 250 national academicians and researchers, are expected to participate. Members of the AAOU's Executive Body and General Body will also attend the conference. Vice-Chancellor of AIOU, Prof Dr Nasir Mahmood, chaired a meeting yesterday to review the preparations for the conference.

VC AIOU has appointed Dr. Zahid Majeed, Director of the Directorate of Academic Planning and Course Production, as the conference coordinator. Dr. Majeed has been directed to contact various organizations to make necessary arrangements for international and national academics participating

in the conference. Additionally, Dr. Nasir has directed the Department of Works to complete the ongoing repair and renovation work of the conference hall as soon as possible. During the briefing, Dr. Zahid Majeed informed the Vice Chancellor that AIOU has previously hosted the AAOU annual conference in 1988 and 2013. In celebration of the Golden Jubilee of AIOU, preparations have been intensified to organize the 37th annual conference of AAOU at AIOU. Dr. Zahid Majeed said that the upcoming conference will host both international and national researchers who will present their research papers. The papers presented at the conference will also be published in AIOU research journals. Additionally, during the conference, the Executive Body and General Body meetings of AAOU will take place.

The meeting was attended by prominent figures such as Prof. Dr. Abdul Aziz Sahir, Dean of Faculty of Social Sciences, Prof. Dr. Fazal ur Rehman, Dean of Faculty of Education, Prof. Dr. Hajra Ahmed, Dean of Faculty of Science, and other principal officers.

Opposition collaboration vital for overcoming national hurdles, says Kundi

ISLAMABAD: Faisal Karim Kundi, a senior leader of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), called upon opposition parties on Wednesday to engage in dialogue to navigate the country through its challenges. Addressing a press conference along with Nadeem Afzal Chan and Syed Sibtal Bukhari, he emphasized that opposition parties must refrain from engaging in the politics of blame and instead focus on improving the lives of the people.

Faisal Kundi remarked that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has divergent views on the by-elections, given that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur has accepted the poll outcomes, while the opposition leader has rejected them.

About the recent visit of Iranian President, he said that Pakistan has always spoken about Palestine and Kashmir and during his visit Pakistan has also always raised his voice for Kashmir and Palestine issues. He said that Pakistan and Iran has signed various Memorandum of Understandings (MOUs) between during the visit of the Iranian President. APP

Addit'l FS receives journalists from UAE, KSA



VOM Report

ISLAMABAD: Additional Foreign Secretary (Middle East) Ambassador Rizwan Saeed Sheikh

on Wednesday received a delegation of journalists from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA).

He briefed the delegation on Pakistan's robust bilateral relations with both countries and discussed key priority areas of Pakistan's policy particularly Kashmir and

Palestine, trade and investment including Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) initiatives, tourism and fostering media cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs posted on its official X account.

SC refers matter to Practice & Procedure Committee after objection on bench hearing case pertaining to civilians' trial in military courts

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court of Pakistan on Wednesday, after reservations raised against the six-member bench hearing the military courts case, referred the matter to the Practice and Procedure Committee former under Practice and Procedure Act 2023 for reconstitution of the bench.

A six-member larger bench on Wednesday, headed by Justice Amin-uddin Khan and comprising Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar, Justice Syed Hassan Azhar Rizvi, Justice Shahid Waheed, Justice Musarrat Hilali and Justice Irfan Saadat Khan, conducted the hearing on the civilians' trials in military courts who were involved in the May 9 incidents last year.

During the hearing, petitioner former chief justice Jawad S Khawaja's lawyer Khawaja Ahmad Hussain Pakistan Barrister Mansoor Usman raised an objection on the bench,

saying that a larger bench should be constituted in light of Justice Syed Mansoor Ali Shah and Justice Yahya Afridi's note.

The lawyer said that a larger bench comprising at least 9 judges should be formed to hear this case, adding that the real question is whether civilians can be tried in military courts or not. On January 29, Justice Sardar Tariq Masood rescued himself from hearing intra-court appeals against civilians' trial in military court, leading to the dissolution of a six-member larger bench. Following the lawyer's objection to the bench, the apex court referred the matter to the Practice and Procedure Committee.

At the outset of the hearing on Wednesday, Attorney General for Pakistan Barrister Mansoor Usman

who have completed their sentences were released before Eid-ul-Fitr. Justice Rizvi inquired whether the verdict of the people who were released part of the court's record. Justice Hilali ordered to bring the military court's verdict on the court record. "The military court's verdict will tell what procedure was adopted in the trial," said Justice Waheed. Later, Justice Mazhar said that they want to see whether the court had allowed the people permission to appoint a lawyer of their choice. One of the petitioners and senior lawyer, Aitzaz Ahsan, said that the court did not issue certificates to those who were in custody for a year. To which, the SC said that there is no such certificate. Lawyer Khawaja Ahmad Hussain said that Justice Yahya Afridi had opined that a six-member bench cannot decide this case.

To this, Justice Mazhar said that Justice Yahya opinion cannot be called a judicial order.

Hussain then questioned how can civilians be tried in military courts, saying that the FB Ali case should be re-examined.

At this point, lawyer Salman Akram Raja said that this case should be heard by at least eight member bench.

Justice Waheed asked what would happen if the judges panel decide the same bench will hear the appeals. At this, Raja said that they will accept the bench. Journalist Hafeezullah Khan Niazi became emotional during the hearing, saying that his son, Hassan Khan Niazi is missing and he is unable to meet him. At this, the top court instructed the AGP to inform SC after finding details about Hassan Niazi. SABAH



ISLAMABAD: Group Photo of Delegation of Information Service Academy (ISA) with Senior officers of Press Information Department (PID).

Emergent measures under way to control effects of climate change: governor

SIALKOT, Apr 24 (APP): Punjab Governor Muhammad Balighur Rehman has said that climate change is a big challenge facing the earth, and the Punjab government is aware of its seriousness, and that is why measures are being taken on an emergency basis to control its dangerous effects.

He expressed these views while addressing the opening session of the "International Climate Change Conference", organized by the Grand Asian University Sialkot (GAUS), here on Wednesday. He said Pakistan was among the top 10 countries most affected by the climate change effects including unexpected increase in temperatures, glaciers melting and deforestation.

The governor said due to environmental problems in India, eastern border areas of Pakistan including Lahore, Bahawalpur and others were being affected badly. He said that to deal with the challenge of environmental changes, there was a need for reforms in every sector, including industry, agriculture, transport, and adoption of modern technology.

The Punjab government, under the leadership of Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz, was aware of its responsibilities in this regard and had been adopting solid policies since day one, he added. He said Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif had effectively raised the issue of climate change at all levels. APP