



Reaffirmed government's commitment for fostering export-led growth and providing a conducive environment for local manufacturers

Finance Minister Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb

Ahsan Iqbal reviews implementation status of CPEC-related decisions



ISLAMABAD: Minister for Planning, Development, and Special Initiatives Professor Ahsan Iqbal presided over a meeting on Thursday to review the implementation status of the decisions regarding CPEC projects, especially those made during Prime Minister (PM) Shehbaz Sharif's recent visit to China.

"There is complete agreement between the leaderships of China and Pakistan on the second phase of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, also known as CPEC 2.0," he said while chairing the meeting. The minister said his visit to China last week was a continuation of the PM's discussions with the Chinese President and Prime Minister, which focused on the strategic implementation of these decisions to ensure the success of CPEC 2.0. Mentioning the global interest in China's economic development model, he said world leaders were keen to benefit from China's innovative approach. "As of 2018, Pakistan was the biggest beneficiary of China's economic model and open market due to CPEC," he remarked.

However, he said, progress slowed down after 2018, leaving Pakistan behind while other regional corridors completed their projects.

Despite these setbacks, Ahsan Iqbal stressed the continued importance of CPEC due to Pakistan's strategic geographical position. He urged the Ministry of Railways to expedite the documentation and preparatory steps for the ML1 project.

"During my recent visit to China, we agreed to convene an early meeting of the Joint Financing Committee for the ML1 project, which will take place within a month," he announced.

He stressed the need for full preparation by the Ministry of Railways and other concerned departments for this critical meeting. "Given CPEC's unique status, there are ample growth opportunities. To capitalize on these opportunities, we must be serious about completing the projects included in Phase 2.0," he added. The minister also called for a collaborative effort from all relevant ministries and institutions to ensure the timely completion of CPEC projects. "The governments of China and Pakistan have agreed to start work on the ML1 project soon. The duration and stages of completion will be determined in the upcoming meeting of the Joint Financing Committee."

Additionally, he urged the Railway and National Highway Authority (NHA) to prepare a comprehensive master plan for road construction across the region. "The master plan should outline how CPEC and Pakistan can play a pivotal role in connecting the entire region and serve as an engine of global economic growth," he stressed. APP



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif chairs a review meeting on the reforms and digitisation of the Federal Board of Revenue.

PM Shehbaz directs increase of Appellate Tribunals to 100 for accelerated tax case handling

VOM Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday instructed that the number of Appellate Tribunals be increased to 100 to expedite the resolution of tax cases. Chairing a review meeting on reforms and digitization in the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR), the prime minister also directed an increase in the number of Appellate Tribunals for Customs cases and the creation of a dashboard to evaluate the performance of Tax Appellate Tribunals. The prime minister stated that tax refund fraud amounting to Rs 800 billion was uncovered in the past four months, and emphasized further improvements to the tax refund system.

The prime minister expressed that increasing revenue was achievable through reforms in the FBR. He lamented the unfortunate and unnecessary delays in many of the FBR's reform projects. The prime minister emphasized zero tolerance for delays in sales tax refund payments and instructed the immediate formulation of a strategy to recover unlawfully issued refunds. The prime minister directed the complete digitization of the Fraud Detection and Investigation Department of the FBR and the development of a strategy to centralize all ongoing reform projects within the FBR.

The prime minister instructed the relevant authorities to employ the latest technology and the best personnel for the digitization of the FBR.

Shehbaz Sharif instructed the implementation of a unified sales tax system for all taxpayers by October 2024.

The prime minister was briefed that a unified sales tax return system, successfully implemented by the telecom sector, was being introduced for taxpayer convenience. FBR aimed to integrate with revenue authorities across the country through a unified sales tax platform.

The prime minister assured timely funding for upgrading the customs system and directed the FBR to devise a strategy for designing and implementing the new software system.

The prime minister was informed about the reforms in Inland Revenue and Customs, along with the progress achieved in digitizing the FBR in the last eight weeks.

The prime minister was informed that McKinsey, a globally recognized consultant, was overseeing the digitization process of the FBR, and positive outcomes from this initiative have begun to surface.

The PM was informed that there were 83,579 tax-related cases amounting to Rs 3.2 trillion pending in various courts and tribunals.

It was conveyed in the forum that during the current government's tenure, several initiatives have been undertaken to handle tax

cases. In the past four months alone, courts have settled 63 cases amounting to approximately Rs 44 billion.

The prime minister was briefed that modern technology has identified 4.9 million individuals capable of paying taxes.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif instructed to prioritize bringing wealthy individuals and capitalists into the tax net, ensuring no additional burden on the poor. During the briefing, the PM was informed that since April 1, 2024, 150,000 retailers have been registered using the FBR Trader Friendly mobile phone application.

The PM instructed to maintain consultations with retailers to enhance the effectiveness of this system. The prime minister also instructed to prepare proposals for reforming the Pakistan Revenue Automation Authority (PRAL).

The PM was informed that the implementation of the Integrated Transit Trade Management System (ITTMS) project was scheduled to commence from October 2024. Under the ITTMS initiative, International Standard One-Window Facilitation Centers were being set up at the Pak-Afghan borders of Torkham and Chaman. The development of the Customs Automated Entry-Exit System (AEES) has commenced. AEES will utilize cutting-edge scanning technology and integrate with the web-based One Customs and Pakistan Single Window platforms.

There will be no compromise in the fight against drugs: Mohsin Naqvi

Accords approval in principle for the conduct of National Drug Survey



ISLAMABAD: Interior Minister Senator Syed Mohsin Naqvi has accorded approval in principle for the conduct of National Drug Survey.

Chairing a meeting of the committee for the National Drug Survey, in Islamabad, Mohsin Naqvi directed to finalize matters related to survey within fifteen days. Under this exercise, data of persons using drugs will be collected.

Mohsin Naqvi said the ANF and Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) should jointly formulate the methodology, nature of data required, sample format and timeline for conducting the survey. He said the international development partners should also be contacted for cooperation in the conduct of the survey. Mohsin Naqvi said the drug survey should be authentic and comprehensive, emphasizing it will ensure effective decision making against narcotics.

He directed that apart from homes, data should also be collected from educational institutions, slums and other places.

Mohsin Naqvi said there will be no compromise in the fight against drugs, saying it is the issue of the nation's future. The last national drug survey was conducted back in 2013.

The meeting was attended by Federal Secretary Interior, Federal Secretary for Planning, Additional Secretary Finance, Special Secretary Health, DG ANF, and Chief Statistician. SABAH



ISLAMABAD: Minister of State for IT and Telecommunication Ms. Shaza Fatima Khawaja chairing 60th Board of Directors meeting of Pakistan Software Export Board (PSEB).

Finance Minister emphasizes the importance of increasing focus on policy framework for exports



ISLAMABAD: Finance Minister Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb has reaffirmed government's commitment for fostering export-led growth and providing a conducive environment for local manufacturers. Muhammad Aurangzeb was talking to a delegation of the Pakistan Mobile Phone Manufacturers Association in Islamabad on Thursday. The Minister emphasized the importance of

increasing the focus on the policy framework for exports. He also acknowledged the valuable feedback and underscored the government's commitment for expanding the entire digital ecosystem in the country.

The delegation highlighted the necessity for a stable and supportive policy environment that encourages local manufacturers.

The meeting agreed on the need for a strategic and supportive policy framework aimed at fostering local manufacturing and enhancing export potential.

The meeting concluded with a mutual agreement on the need for a strategic and supportive policy framework aimed at fostering local manufacturing and enhancing export potential, thereby contributing to the broader goals of national economic growth and digital transformation. — VOM Report

Atta Tarar grieved over demise of 'autistic Palestinian'



ISLAMABAD: Minister for Information, Broadcasting, Culture and National Heritage Attaullah Tarar on Thursday joined the global condemnation call made to disapprove demise of Mohammed Bhar, a 24-year-old Palestinian with Down syndrome and autism,

by the injuries reportedly inflicted by "a combat dog of the Israel Defence Force (IDF)".

According to the story, also shared by the minister on social media to grieve the demise of Bhar, said "Mohammed Bhar was left for dead after being mauled by a combat dog of the Israel Defence Force (IDF) on July 3, during a raid on his family's home in Shejaiya." The minister, in his post that has Bhar's picture, said, "He had Down syndrome and Autism. Their dogs attacked him and left him to die. At a loss of words, can't explain the pain." He also prayed for the mercy of the Allah Almighty. APP

Pakistan serves strong demarche to Afghanistan over the terror attack on Bannu Cantonment

Interim Afghan Govt urged to fully investigate & take immediate, robust & effective action against perpetrators of Bannu attack

ISLAMABAD: The Deputy Head of Mission of the Embassy of Afghanistan in Islamabad was summoned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to deliver Pakistan's strong demarche over the deadly terrorist attack on Bannu Cantonment on 15 July 2024, which resulted in the martyrdom of eight security personnel and injured several others.

According to a statement issued by Foreign Office Spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch, the terrorist attack was carried out by the Hafiz Gul Bahadur Group based in Afghanistan. Hafiz Gul Bahadur Group, along with Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), is responsible for the deaths of hundreds of civilians and law enforcement officials in multiple terrorist attacks inside Pakistan.

Mumtaz Zahra Baloch said that the Interim Afghan Government was urged to fully investigate and take immediate, robust and effective action against the perpetrators of the Bannu attack and to prevent the recurrence of such attacks against Pakistan using the territory of Afghanistan. Pakistan reiterated its serious concerns over the presence of terror outfits inside Afghanistan that continue to threaten Pakistan's security. Such incidents also go against the spirit of bilateral relations between the two brotherly countries.

FO spokesperson said that the Bannu Cantonment attack is yet another reminder of the serious threat posed by terrorism to regional peace and security. SABAH

Army Chief praises Pak-China strong military cooperation

RAWALPINDI: 97th Anniversary of the founding of People's Liberation Army (PLA) of China was hosted at GHQ. His Excellency Mr. Jiang Zaidong Ambassador of the People's Republic of China to Pakistan was the Chief Guest on the occasion. Major General Wang Zhong, Defence Attaché, Chinese Embassy officials & Officers from tri-services of Pakistan attended the event. General Syed Asim Munir, NI (M), Chief of Army Staff (COAS) while welcoming the Chinese guests, congratulated the PLA and praised PLA's contribution to Chinese defence, security and nation development.

He further added that "Pakistan-China relations are exceptional and have always weathered the vicissitudes of strategic environment with mutual trust and unwavering belief in each other's support". "Relations between Pakistan Army and



Peoples Liberation Army are strong and both militaries continue to engage in bilateral military cooperation, demonstrating the iron clad brotherhood between the two countries", COAS concluded.

Speaking on the occasion, the Chinese Ambassador thanked COAS for hosting the event for the 97th anniversary of the founding of the PLA.

"Pakistani military has always been at the forefront of countering terrorism and has made great sacrifices for the peace and stability of Pakistan and the region", Chinese ambassador remarked.

"We stand ready to work with our brethren to combat terrorism and firmly believe that no force can destroy the iron-clad friendship between China and Pakistan and the brotherhood between the two militaries", Chinese ambassador said. PR

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Europe seeks elusive unity as its adversities pile up

MOHAMED CHEBARO

It would not be an exaggeration to suggest that last week's NATO Summit in Washington showed that the 75-year-old alliance is at a perilous junction. Despite the pomp surrounding its meetings, the summit failed to ring fence support for Ukraine or show any indication that its leaders would be capable of facing up to Russia's threat, which takes many shapes and forms and is not just a mere challenge at the alliance's eastern border. The European Political Community Summit, which is convening in the UK on Thursday, will have more to contend with, despite it being a relatively young grouping that was only formed in 2022 after Russia invaded Ukraine. In a fragile and dangerous era, the leaders from mainly EU nations, along with other European nations aspiring to join the bloc, in addition to many outside it like the UK, will hope to strengthen their ties and visions to deal with the most urgent challenges. The venue of Blenheim Palace, near Oxford, was the birthplace of Winston Churchill and was maybe chosen to inspire. But it will also remind everyone of the need for common resolve to deal with the adversities that the leaders of the liberal democratic world are today having to grapple with. Criticism has often been leveled at the European Political Community for being merely a fig leaf to appease EU candidate nations as they go through the painfully slow accession process. But it also serves a unique function, allowing non-EU countries such as Ukraine, some of the Balkan states and Türkiye to engage in neutral, equal discussions with their EU counterparts in the hope that this level playing field is conducive to a more unified, cohesive continent. Ukraine will no doubt dominate the discussions of the 40-plus heads of government, as the trajectory of the war has now changed and the initiative is increasingly in the hands of Vladimir Putin and his generals. Ukraine's backers' hesitance, due to domestic and geostrategic calculations, is emboldening Moscow, which believes its strategy of wearing down Ukraine and its Western allies is working. Another pressing issue facing the gathering is the Gaza conflict, which has imposed itself for the past nine months. With no end in sight and fears piling up that it might still be raging come 2025 or even expanded, the leaders will need to discuss its ramifications. Peace plans kept being shot down by an intransigent Hamas and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who though traditionally friendly with the West, is now increasingly at the mercy of his anti-ceasefire, anti-peace plan, far-right Israeli political partners. The list of foreign policy challenges for those gathering in the UK is very long and contains a host of complex and intractable issues, such as the continued civil strife and wars in the Horn of Africa, Myanmar and Sudan. There is also the weaponized, state-induced migration toward Europe and the West and the deteriorating relationship between the Global South — or, as the Chinese and Russians like to call it, the "global majority" — and the West. The outgoing NATO secretary-general recently warned Western leaders of an "alliance of authoritarian powers" working more closely together and against Western democracies. However, these conflicts and discords are likely to be dominated by further uncertainty come Nov. 5, should Donald Trump get a second chance to sit in the White House. Parallel to the geostrategic adversities, the leaders convening in the UK are increasingly under pressure at home, as sluggish economic growth for many, coupled with rising demands on the welfare state, are putting pressure on public purses throughout the continent. There is only a limited range of options and maneuvers available for states to meet the daunting challenges. All that is throwing democratic processes into jeopardy, as electorates are driven further into the lap of the extreme and populist voices, as seen in France recently and in the European Parliament elections before that. Playing the role of host of the summit, new UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer and his government will be in the spotlight too, as leaders new and old will be seeking to see if Britain can be relied upon again after years of political chaos that damaged its reputation. The European Political Community aims to fill a void felt on the European level, as the tools of diplomacy and multilateralism have waned in an increasingly splintered world. The test for the fourth summit is whether it will offer tangible support for Ukraine and those Europeans feeling threatened by Russia. Though the community remains a nonexecutive assembly to rally those who believe in freedom and democracy, one fears that it might just be a talking shop, unable to overcome the deficits in cooperation and policy coordination across Europe beyond the EU. This dangerous era for Europe might need a Churchill-like leadership figure. Despite the war within its borders, growing and divisive migration challenges, a continent-wide cost-of-living crisis, higher-than-usual leadership turnover, electoral shocks and the rise of right-wing nationalist parties, the existing joint and individual state efforts in Europe are not measuring up. They need to induce the stability needed amid a failure of leadership and an increasingly impatient electorate, whose trust in the state and its institutions is dwindling. This summit and those that are to follow are unlikely to dispel the questions that have and will continue to linger over the efficacy and usefulness of the European Political Community. Will the summit's ambitions to protect democracy, deal with migration and restore energy security come to fruition or will the group be mired in bureaucracy, political grandstanding and division, especially at a time when domestic politics across Europe is defining and overshadowing states' international commitments?

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DR. ABDEL AZIZ ALUWAI SHEG

US election campaign heats up, alarming partners

The Republican Convention gave Donald Trump's campaign a boost on Monday as it endorsed him as expected. The pomp and circumstance of party solidarity was especially enthusiastic coming just days after the attack on the former president. Saturday's attempted assassination was the latest sign of the extreme polarization of American politics during this election campaign, bringing the country dangerously close to a serious political crisis. I witnessed these divisions up close in Washington recently. I was witness to history, not in the most glorious way, on June 27, when the two main contenders, Joe Biden and Trump, debated each other. I had spent days in the US capital prior to the debate and noticed the deep fissures in the way people anticipated the event. The debate was a letdown, to say the least. Having lived in the US for some 24 years and followed its presidential debates for much longer, I had seen many that were below par, but this one was much more so. Some historians have already dubbed it the worst presidential debate ever. Conservative media outlets relished Biden's poor showing. The New York Post, for one, led the next day by blaring, "Time to Go, Joe!" on its front page. Other reactions included "it made me weep," "a total and unmitigated disaster," and so on. The pressure piled on as usually pro-Biden media and opinion writers excoriated the president. "Joe Biden, a good man and a good president, has no business running for reelection," New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman wrote the next day. "Biden has been a friend" for decades, Friedman added, but "he should preserve his dignity and

leave the stage at the end of this term." Wall Street Journal columnist Peggy Noonan wrote: "This can't continue. I am sorry to say this harsh thing, but allowing him to go forward at this point looks like elder abuse." She called on Democrats to choose a different candidate before it is too late. This idea was supported by others. The Financial Times' Edward Luce said: "The best that can be said of Joe Biden's stumbling debate performance was that it took place in June." This idea was echoed by Mark Leibovich in The Atlantic. Other former Biden supporters chipped in. Actor George Clooney, who had earlier hosted a fundraiser for the president, wrote an Op-Ed in The New York Times that was titled, "I love Joe Biden. But we need a new nominee." He called on Biden to step aside and allow another candidate to lead the party in the November election. Filmmakers Stephen King and Rob Reiner echoed Clooney's call, as did a slew of Hollywood celebrities who have been ardent supporters of the Democratic Party. Senior party leaders kept their distance from these public calls, preferring to discuss the matter privately with the president. But there were dozens of members of Congress, fundraisers and activists who supported calls for the president to step aside and for the Democrats to quickly regroup under a different leader. Going into the debate, polls showed that about 70 percent of Americans thought Biden was too old to serve a second term, but Democrats had largely lined up behind him as the most likely nominee to win, dismissing concerns about his frequent gaffes and inarticulate answers. But last month's 90-minute debate confirmed their worst fears. His performance failed to reassure Democrats that he can retain the White House and avoid a defeat in the congressional elections.

Nevertheless, key Democratic leaders maintained a united front, at least publicly, supporting the president's wish to run for a second term. Some supporters recalled previous times in American history when a nominee was able to recover, citing Ronald Reagan's comeback to win a second term in 1984 after a disastrous first debate. However, their hopes of winning the November polls under Biden's leadership appear to have been dampened after the upsurge in Trump's support following the attempt on his life on Saturday and the following celebratory Republican Convention, where Trump, bandaged but defiant, accepted his party's nomination and picked a running mate. While such surges can be transitory, the Trump campaign appears to be seizing the momentum and he now appears to be the most likely winner in November, if the Democrats are unable to reverse Trump's winning streak. Trump appears to be on a roll. Besides the debate, in which his opponent stumbled, and the convention, where Trump shone, he garnered genuine sympathy after he was nearly killed by a would-be assassin's bullet. His courage and defiance in the face of danger were not lost on observers. In addition, the courts have also helped him stay at the top of his game. There was a low point in May, when a New York court convicted him of 34 felonies for falsifying business records related to a hush money payment ahead of the 2016 presidential election. However, more recently, the courts have been kinder to the former president. On July 1, the US Supreme Court ruled that he cannot be prosecuted for actions that were within his constitutional powers as president, throwing out a lower court's decision to the contrary. And this week, a federal judge in Florida dismissed the classified documents case against Trump, siding with his defense lawyers, who said the special coun-

sel who filed the charges was illegally appointed by the Justice Department. While Biden's adversaries are naturally exaggerating his frequent faux pas, such as introducing President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine as "President Putin" at the NATO Summit in Washington last week, the question should not be whether the president is lucid or if he has some cognitive challenges, but whether he is the best candidate to lead the US in the next four years. In other words, an incumbent need not get a second term if the voters find someone better to lead the country. In American history, there have been about a dozen one-term presidents. American elections are largely a domestic affair and the rest of the world will deal with whoever is chosen by US voters. However, the geopolitical repercussions of these elections should not be underestimated. US decisions on global issues are extremely important. Take the war in Gaza, which the US has failed to stop despite the fact that it is Israel's main supporter and provider of the arms it uses in conducting the war and, as such, is the only country with the ability to end the war and start the region on the path toward peace. Whether it is fighting terrorism, piracy or maintaining maritime security, the US is a key player. The EU and NATO will be equally concerned if the next president does not share their priorities. With the unparalleled powers of American presidents, it matters to the world who occupies the White House. It would be wise to start planning for the different scenarios come Jan. 20, 2025, when a new presidential term commences.

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Today in History

History of Pakistan

Agriculture, now no longer the largest sector, contributes roughly one-fifth of GDP, while manufacturing provides about one-sixth. Economic performance compares favourably with that of many other developing countries; Pakistan has maintained a sustained and fairly steady annual growth rate since independence. At the same time, there has been a relentless increase in population, so, despite real growth in the economy, output per capita has risen only slowly. This slow growth in per capita income has not coincided with a high inci-

dence of absolute poverty, however, which has been considerably smaller in Pakistan than in other South Asian countries. Nonetheless, a significant proportion of the population lives below the poverty line, and the relative prosperity of the industrialized regions around Karachi and Lahore contrasts sharply with the poverty of the Punjab's barani areas, semi-arid Balochistan, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Overall, approximately one-fourth of Pakistan is arable land, although only small fractions of that are in permanent crops (about 1 percent) or per-

manent pastures (6 percent). Roughly 5 percent of the country is forested. Nonetheless, agriculture, forestry, and fishing still provide employment for the single largest proportion of the labour force and a livelihood for an even larger segment of the population. Land-reform programs implemented in 1959, 1972, and 1977 began to deal with the problems of large-scale, often absentee ownership of land and the excessive fragmentation of small holdings by introducing maximum and minimum area limits. The commercialization of agriculture has also resulted

in fairly large-scale transfers of land, concentrating its ownership among middle-class farmers. The attention given to the agricultural sector in development plans has brought about some radical changes in centuries-old farming techniques. The construction of tube wells for irrigation and salinity control, the use of chemical fertilizers and scientifically selected seeds, and the gradual introduction of farm machinery have all contributed to the notable increase in productivity.

To be continued....

Scarlett Johansson speaks up about Avengers' cast group chat

Scarlett Johansson reveals Avengers' cast maintain a chat group thread



Scarlett Johansson has recently spilled the tea about original Avengers group chat. In a new interview with The New York Times, Scarlett, who wants to promote her new movie Fly Me to the Moon, talked about her bond with her MCU co-stars Chris Evans, Robert Downey Jr., Jeremy Renner, Chris Hemsworth and Mark Ruffalo. When asked whether her Avengers co-stars maintained a group thread, the Black Widow actress said, "Yes, that's true. But hopefully, nobody will ever read it." "Everything goes on in there. I mean, really. If somebody's gotten terrible reviews, that could be something that

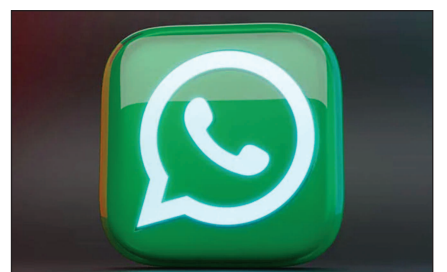
comes up," stated Scarlett. Scarlett shared that the chat group is "like a family" for her, as she remarked, "We've been through an incredible experience over a decade plus of time. It was life-changing for all of us." "If you text the chain, you can guarantee that within a few minutes, most people will respond, which is great," pointed out the actress. Meanwhile, Fly Me to the Moon is in theatres now. On the personal front, Scarlett shares two-year-old son with husband Colin Jost. She is also a mother to nine-year-old daughter, whom she shares with her former husband Romain Dauriac.

Showbiz

Tech

Mark Zuckerberg announces speed dial-like feature for WhatsApp

Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg recently unveiled a new feature for WhatsApp that works just like a speed dial and is designed to help users better manage their communications. The new feature is a "favourite" filter which will enable users to prioritise important chats, groups and calls within the instant messaging app, WABetaInfo reported. The announcement was made by the 40-year-old tech billionaire via his official WhatsApp channel, after he recently revealed new AI-powered business features and Meta Verified for WhatsApp. Users may use the new feature to conveniently locate their most important chats and groups directly from the chats tab. Moreover, the new filter will also be introduced within the calls tab that will allow users to swiftly access their favourite contacts, making the process of placing calls just a tap away. How does WhatsApp's new filter work? There are multiple methods that allow users to mark chats and groups as favourites,



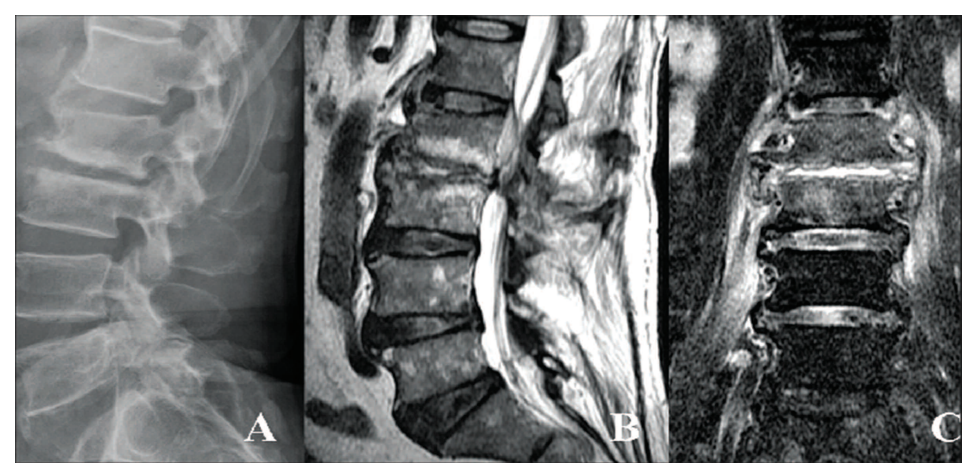
WABetaInfo reported. Users may add chats and groups to their favourites by accessing the "Favorites" tab within the chats list. They can designate specific contacts and groups as favourites directly from the chat info or the calls tab. Users can also manage favourites within the app settings, where they can easily add, organise, and remove them. The feature is available for both Android and iOS users.

Pyogenic Spondylitis Four Years After an Injection Into the Paraspinal Muscles

In the context of local injection techniques, there are infectious complications such as epidural abscesses and pyogenic spondylitis. An 83-year-old female who received an injection into the paraspinal muscles for lower back pain four years ago developed a paraspinal muscle abscess accompanied by methicillin-susceptible Staphylococcus aureus bacteremia and multiple sites of pyogenic spondylitis. Non-surgical treatment was followed with 73 days of antibiotic therapy by cefazoline. We noted an improvement in inflammatory response in blood tests and findings of inflammation on imaging tests. Instances of delayed-onset infectious complications several years after simple local injection techniques are rare. Pyogenic spondylitis is a relatively rare condition with an incidence rate of approximately 5.3 to 7.4

patients per 100,000 person-years, as indicated by a retrospective cohort study using the Diagnosis Procedure Combination data in Japan [1]. Treatment generally requires rest and adequate doses of sensitive antibiotics. Its etiology includes hematogenous spread from distant infectious foci, direct dissemination to the spine through trauma, medical procedures, or surgery, as well as secondary propagation from adjacent soft tissue infections. Risk factors encompass a history of spinal surgery (including degenerative spinal disorders) and underlying conditions that compromise the immune system, such as diabetes and corticosteroid usage. Additionally, the use of injectable medications has been identified as a potential factor [2,3]. While local injection techniques such as trigger point injections or nerve

muscular abscesses or epidural abscesses, infectious complications from such procedures usually occur within days to up to six months [4,5]. In this case, a patient with no underlying condition developed spondylitis. Moreover, the onset of spondylitis was considered to be attributed to a lumbar injection performed four years prior. The patient was an 83-year-old female with spinal canal stenosis. She had no history of atopic dermatitis, no recent history of tooth extraction, and no significant family or social history. She was not on any medication or supplemental agents. Four years ago, she had visited a local doctor for treatment of lower back pain and had received an injection in the lumbar region. Thereafter, there was no history of trauma. She arrived at our hospital via ambulance due to loss of appetite and weakness in the lower limbs.



President Zardari, PM Shehbaz express good wishes for early recovery of US President Joseph R. Biden, who has tested positive for COVID-19



ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Mian Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif have expressed good wishes for the early recovery of the US President Joseph R. Biden, who has tested positive for COVID-19. In a statement, President Asif Ali Zardari conveyed his sincere hopes for President Biden's good health and well-being. Meanwhile PM Shehbaz Sharif has expressed good wishes for the early recovery of US President from COVID-19. The Prime Minister conveyed these sentiments in a post on his X handle. Earlier, in a statement, the White House confirmed that President Biden has tested positive for COVID-19. SABAH

Azerbaijan, Pakistan join hands to beautify Islamabad

ISLAMABAD: In a landmark initiative to enhance the beauty of the Federal Capital, Chairman Horticulture Experts Team of Azerbaijan recently met with CDA Chairman, Mohammad Ali Randhawa, to kickstart the implementation of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Baku and Islamabad. Under this collaboration, horticulture experts from Azerbaijan will initially focus on renovating and landscaping four key locations including Srinagar Highway, Shakar Parian, Saidpur Village, and Melody Food Park. This effort is part of a larger plan by the CDAs environment teams, which are already carrying out landscaping work in various other areas of the city. Randhawa, emphasized the urgency of the project, directing that work on the Islamabad beautification plan should commence immediately. He stressed that horticulture work should be conducted simultaneously at all sites across the city to ensure a cohesive and swift transformation. In addition to the landscaping efforts, the Engineering Wing of Baku will provide expert technical advice and support, enhancing the project's overall efficiency and effectiveness. Azerbaijan will also gift various horticulture tools and machinery to Pakistan, significantly boosting the local capability for such endeavours. APP

Number of martyrs affected by their wounds due to Israeli occupation's closure of Rafah Crossing for 72 days rises to 292: Govt Media Office Gaza Strip

GAZA: Government Media Office in Gaza Strip has said that the number of martyrs affected by their wounds due to the Israeli occupation's closure of the Rafah Crossing for 72 days rises to 292. The number of martyrs who succumbed to their wounds, having been denied travel by the Israeli occupation for medical treatment abroad due to the closure of the Rafah border crossing for 72 days, has risen to 292. These individuals were among the injured who needed treatment in hospitals outside the Gaza Strip but died while waiting for the Rafah crossing to open. Since the closure of the Rafah crossing by the

Israeli occupation, more than 3,500 patients and injured individuals have been denied travel for medical treatment outside the Gaza Strip. There are 25,000 registered medical transfer requests with the Ministry of Health under the category of travel for medical treatment abroad. However, the closure of the Rafah crossing by the Israeli occupation deprives these individuals of travel for treatment, posing a life-threatening risk to their survival. The health system is experiencing its worst phase amid the Israeli occupation's plan and premeditated intention to completely dismantle the health system and disable all hospitals in the Gaza Strip. SABAH



RAWALPINDI: A sabeel provided by Chief Minister Punjab distributing water among mourners in the city. ONLINE

FIA Interpol arrests nine wanted criminals from UAE

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) National Central Bureau (NCB) Interpol has arrested nine wanted criminals from the United Arab Emirates (UAE). According to the FIA spokesperson, the arrested individuals were wanted by the Punjab Police in various cases. The arrested suspects include Irfan Asghar, Farhan Nazakat, Samar Abbas, Najibullah, Saddam Hussain, Muhammad Rafeeq, Muhammad Saqib, Muhammad Usman, and Tariq Mehmood. The FIA spokesperson revealed that the accused were involved in murder and attempted murder cases, with some of them evading arrest for up to 14 years. The arrested individuals will be brought back to Pakistan, with a team already dispatched to

UAE for their extradition. Earlier, the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) Interpol arrested a wanted criminal, Rafeeq Ahmed, from Saudi Arabia. The suspect identified as Rafeeq Ahmed, was wanted in several cases, including murder, and had been on the run since 2016. The FIA Interpol had issued a Red Notice for Ahmed's arrest, and he was finally apprehended in Saudi Arabia after eight years and brought back to Karachi. In May, it was reported that over the last six months, the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) National Central Bureau (NCB) Interpol of Pakistan successfully apprehended 66 accused individuals wanted for serious crimes across various countries. INP



RAWALPINDI: The main procession of Ashura day coming from Imam Bargah Ashiq Hussain Teli Mohalla passing through Raja Bazaar in the city. ONLINE

Coordination as cornerstone in global health emergencies: Pakistani economist

BELJING: The Boao Forum for Asia (BFA) council member and former Under Secretary-General of the UN, Shamsah Akhtar said that coordination is cornerstone in global health emergencies. "In the 75 years since its establishment, the WHO has worked hard to do a lot of work. However, from an overall perspective, we are still far from achieving true global coordination." "The functions of many departments and platforms are highly overlapping. Such an inefficient situation may have been ignored by the world for so long, which has ruthlessly exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic," Shamsah Akhtar expressed at the 3rd Conference of Global Health Forum (GHP) of Boao Forum for Asia, China Economic Net (CEN) reported. The Pakistani economist and diplomat's view was endorsed by renowned Chinese virologist and immunologist Gao Fu. Gao pointed out that countries are paying more attention to competition, not collaboration. He made a remark that the coronavirus is human's enemy, but learning from the enemy is the key to defeating it. All parties need and must to learn the virus's spirit of collaboration. Currently, multitudinous vaccines, namely



precise small molecule inhibitors are being used, but the novel coronavirus could successfully escape repeatedly because of the synergy of its variants around the world. The interaction between them makes their mutation rate faster and faster, and even produces sub-variants, for they are extremely good at learning from each other and sharing data. "Once they know that the original strain is useless, they will mutate immediately. Scientists couldn't name all the variants even if we use up all 26 Greek letters. Thus, know yourself as well as the enemy, and

let's collaborate now." Akhtar endorsed Gao's view, added that global medical institutions are in urgent need of reform, during which multilateralism should be the crux. Not only governments and national institutions, but also small and medium-sized enterprises should actively participate in the process, in which data sharing is critical. In addition, she mentioned global financing as a foundation. "I worked at the World Bank for a long time, so I feel deeply about this point. In layman's terms, what could be done without money?" Akhtar talked about Pakistan's experience, noting that relevant departments of Pakistan tried their best to provide a large amount of funding to fight against COVID-19 epidemic, as well as received financial support from partner countries and international organizations, all of which are extremely vital. "Collaboration means that the question we have to think about is: whether globalization can really be achieved?" Under the threat of global epidemics might happen in the future, each country can't do anything on its own." Just as Ms. Akhtar mentioned, "establish a mechanism to solve problems, such as the fundraising and allocation of funds, more efficiently, is what we have to do now," Gao emphasized. APP

Rana holds PTI govt responsible for inflation

ISLAMABAD: Adviser to the Prime Minister on Political Affairs and Inter-Provincial Coordination Rana Sanaullah Thursday said the previous government of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) was responsible for the current economic crisis. Talking to a private news channel, he said that the economic measures taken by the incumbent government are yielding positive results, adding, that the situation will further improve in the coming months and inflation will be reduced. Talking about banning PTI, he said the federal cabinet will finally approve the declaration on whether to move a reference to the Supreme Court seeking a ban on PTI or not, adding, that the government will take any decision under the law and constitutional rules. He said we respect the judiciary wholeheartedly and we have the legal right to appeal against the decision and the government is going to file the review petition. The government would not confuse this constitutional issue with politics, he added. To another question, he criticized that initially government had offered peaceful dialogue with PTI but they repeatedly refused, adding, that Khan neither believes in the democratic process nor his political agenda only stood for ruining Pakistani society. DNA

Security forces thwart terrorist attack attempt in Gwadar

GWADAR: The security forces successfully thwarted a terrorist attack attempt in Gwadar with timely action. The terrorists had planted an improvised explosive device (IED) in the Mandi area during the night. The security forces, along with the bomb disposal squad, conducted a swift and efficient operation to neutralise the threat and foil the terrorist plans. The bomb disposal squad managed to dismantle the IED and foiled the terrorists and their facilitators' plans to hit Gwadar areas. The security forces' clearance operation has been completed, securing the area from any potential danger.

Punjab CM commends admin over arrangements, security on Ashura

LAHORE: Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif on Thursday expressed her satisfaction on Ashura Day arrangements and security for making the occasion peaceful. Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif appreciated the provincial ministers and Cabinet Committee on Law & Order. The Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz commended Chief Secretary and his entire team for the excellent arrangements in this regard. Moreover, the CM also appreciated IG police Punjab and the entire police team for the excellent security arrangements on Ashura Day. She appreciated Commissioners, Deputy Commissioners for organizing Niaz and Sabils for the mourners for the first time in Punjab. INP

Three-day training for excellence of Anti-Terrorism Courts commences

PESHAWAR: A three-day specialized training for excellence of Anti-Terrorism Courts commenced at Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Judicial Academy on Thursday. 26 participants including Judges of Anti-Terrorism Courts, District and Sessions Judges, Prosecutors, Police Officers, Investigators and other stakeholders connected with the performance of Anti-Terrorism Courts are participating in the training program. Justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim, Chief Justice Peshawar High Court/Chairman BoG, graced the inaugural ceremony as the chief guest. Registrar, PHC, Jehanzeb Shinwari, Barrister Ikhtiar Khan; Director General Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Judicial Academy, Zia ur Rehman; Dean Faculty, and all the Directors of the Academy attended the event. The Director General of the Academy, in his welcome note, highlighted the concept, objectives and significance of the specialized training program. He expressed that Anti-Terrorism Courts and the Counter Terrorism Department, with the assistance of Prosecution, play a crucial role in combating terrorism. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of the system seems hindered by the low rate of convictions and delayed trials. INP

Romanian embassy, PRBC sign MoU to boost trade between Romania and Pakistan

ISLAMABAD: The Embassy of Romania to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan on Thursday signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Pakistan Romania Business Council (PRBC) to strengthen bilateral trade and economic cooperation between Romania and Pakistan. The MoU signed by Eduard-Robert PREDA, Charge D'Affaires, Embassy of Romania to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, and Chairman of PRBC, Sohail Shamim FIRPO, and recognized the outstanding services rendered by PRBC since 2011 in promoting bilateral trade between the two countries. The agreement establishes a framework for cooperation between the Embassy of Romania and PRBC, with the Embassy extending full support to PRBC's endeavours to promote and strengthen bilateral trade. Additionally, the protocol acknowledges the recent expansion of PRBC through the formation of its North Chapter.

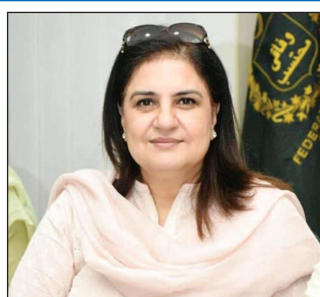


The embassy and PRBC have agreed to collaborate in enhancing economic cooperation and bilateral trade between Romania and Pakistan. This partnership aims to foster greater economic ties and mutual benefits for both nations. The signing of this protocol marks a significant milestone in the bilateral relations between Romania and Pakistan. APP

Rubina Khalid underscores importance of introducing a quality, int'l-standard skill training programme for BISP beneficiaries

ADB's mission visits BISP to discuss modalities of Integrated Social Protection Development Programme

ISLAMABAD: Senator Rubina Khalid, Chairperson Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), has underscored the importance of introducing a quality, international-standard skill training programme for Benazir Income Support Programme beneficiaries and their family members. During a meeting with a delegation from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) led by Ms. Sofia Shakil, Director of Human and Social Development, Senator Rubina Khalid emphasized that this initiative aims to facilitate the poverty graduation of beneficiary families, enabling them to contribute meaningfully to the national economy. The meeting, held at the Benazir Income Support Programme Headquarters on Thursday, included notable participants such as Ms. Xin Long, Co-Mission Leader/Principal Social Protection



Specialist and Mr. Omer Bin Zia, Senior Social Protection Officer. Senator Rubina Khalid also highlighted the critical need for human resource development, emphasizing to focus on skills and certifications that are in high demand internationally, such as healthcare and hospitality management. "By equipping our beneficiaries with these skills, we aim to open up employment opportunities abroad, thereby enhancing their socio-economic prospects," she stated.

Ms. Sofia Shakil acknowledged the significance of skill development, praising Benazir Income Support Programme's dynamic and institutionalized mechanisms. She expressed ADB's commitment for expanding its support on the supply side and looked forward to enhance collaboration with BISP on education, health and nutrition particularly at the provincial level. Earlier, the ADB's fact-finding mission also met with Secretary BISP, Amer Ali Ahmad, to discuss the modalities for additional financing of the Integrated Social Protection Development Programme. Mr. Laisiasa Tora, Principal Public Sector Specialist, gave a detailed briefing on the programme. Secretary BISP emphasized the importance of utilizing the Benazir Income Support Programme's NSER database and expansion of the Adolescent Girls' Programme. SABAH

Pakistan registers \$2.56 bln in exports to China for FY 2023-24

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's exports to China surged to \$150.3 million in June, concluding the fiscal year 2023-24 with a total of \$2.56 billion. Gwadar Pro stated quoting the latest report from the Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP). In June alone, Pakistan's global exports reached \$2.529 billion, marking a 7.34% increase from the \$2.356 billion recorded in the same month of the previous fiscal year. Overall, Pakistan's exports for FY 2023-24 totaled \$30.65 billion, representing a 10.54% increase from \$27.72 billion in the previous year. Despite this growth, Pakistan faces a significant trade deficit. The country's imports for FY 2023-24 amounted to \$54.73 billion, resulting in a trade deficit of \$24.09 billion. Pakistan is strategically targeting the Chinese market to expand its export footprint. The Minister of Planning and Development, Professor Ahsan Iqbal, recently emphasized the importance of leveraging China's vast import market. He directed ministries to focus on areas where China has significant expertise, aiming to enhance Pakistan's innovation, technology transfer, and capacity building. As Pakistan seeks to expand its share in the Chinese import market, collaboration with Chinese experts is expected to play a pivotal role in fostering innovation and sustainable economic growth. The strategic focus on the Chinese market is seen as a critical step towards addressing trade deficit and achieving long-term economic stability. DNA