



IMF Executive Board is expected to approve the IMF loan program in September and expressed optimism that negotiations are progressing positively

Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue
Muhammad Aurangzeb

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Youth is Pakistan's biggest & most valuable asset & we will not let it go waste: COAS Syed Asim Munir

Says strong bond among people, the govt & the armed forces of Pakistan guarantees its security & development

ISLAMABAD: Addressing the National Youth Convention, Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Syed Asim Munir said strong bond among people, the government and the armed forces of Pakistan guarantees its security and development.

COAS Syed Asim Munir said sparkle in the eyes of our youth strengthens our belief that Pakistan's future is in safe hands. Quoting a verse from the Holy Quran, Army Chief said as Muslims we are forbidden to lose hope. He said it is responsibility of state to keep public away from negative implications of social media. COAS General Syed Asim Munir vowed that youth is Pakistan's biggest and most valuable asset and we will not let it go waste. Highlighting the importance of an independent homeland, he said if you want to know the importance of a free state, ask the people of Occupied Kashmir and Gaza.

Later, Army Chief also had a question answer session with youth during which he responded to their queries. He expressed unwavering belief that Allah will grant us victory against terrorism.

Formal launching ceremony of the 'Apostille Convention', held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Islamabad

Ishaq Dar urges the officers of the Ministry to be more proactive in provision of efficient public service delivery

ISLAMABAD: The formal launching ceremony of the "Apostille Convention", was held on Wednesday at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Islamabad. With this launch, public document authentication for international use has been streamlined.

Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar presided over Wednesday's launching ceremony which was attended by senior officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Information Technology and National Information Technology Board (NITB).

The Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister outlined the government's priority of public facilitation. Ishaq Dar highlighted the efforts of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in provision of efficient public service delivery.

Ishaq Dar urged the officers of the Ministry to be more proactive in provision of efficient public service delivery. SABAH



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif and Chief of Army Staff General Syed Asim Munir distributing laptops among the high achievers during National Youth Convention held.

PM directs institutions to accelerate efforts to do away with smuggling

United efforts, youth empowerment keys to country's progress: PM

VOM Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday expressing satisfaction over the reduction in the smuggling, instructed the relevant institutions to accelerate their efforts to purge the country of this menace in toto. The prime minister, chairing a meeting to review the measures for the elimination of smuggling, reiterated that the government would never allow the smugglers to damage the national economy. He said the government utilized modern technology to curb smuggling and instructed to apprehend the people involved in smuggling, their facilitators and confiscate the transport vehicles used for the purpose. He also asked the federal Board of Revenue, interior ministry and other relevant departments to improve their coordination and sought a comprehensive strategy to create employment opportunities in the frontier regions. During the briefing, the prime minister was told that the interior ministry was running a countrywide campaign and effective measures were being taken to curb the smuggling of petroleum products, cigarettes, mobile phones, gold, tea, clothes, commodities, vehicle tires and spare parts. It was told that web portal to curb the smuggling of urea and sugar had been launched and 54 joint checkpoints had been established as per the prime minister's directives. A mechanism for identification and mapping of non-custom paid vehicles, and the draft leg-

islation to establish the Pakistan Land Port Authority were in the final stage.

A report on the outcomes of the anti-smuggling drive was also presented in the meeting which said that 212 Afghan transit trade goods at risk of smuggling had been banned and a bank guarantee had been made mandatory for the trade, instead of an insurance guarantee. It was told that besides essential commodities, the smuggling of petroleum products had also reduced by half and sugar by 80%, besides other eatables. During the year 2023-24, the smuggling goods worth Rs106 billion were confiscated and the anti-smuggling drive also led to the reduction in hoarding practices.

The participants were also apprised of the action taken against the officers involved in smuggling. It was told that the process to identify the smugglers, their facilitators and transporters was on a fast pace, with the collaboration of NADRA, Excise and other relevant departments. Federal ministers Jam Kamal Khan, Ahmad Khan Cheema, Muhammad Aurangzeb, Attaullah Tarar, Syed Mohsin Raza Naqvi, Rana Tanveer Hussain, Dr Musaddiq Malik, Deputy Chairman of Planning Commission Jahanzeb Khan, PM's Coordinator Rana Ehsan Afzal and provincial chief secretaries attended the meeting.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday said that youth empowerment and the united efforts by the politicians and the national institutions were inevitable to put the country on the course to progress.

"If we resolve to change Pakistan, it will not be too far when the country will emerge as a great nation. Today's Pakistan and its prevailing circumstances necessitate politicians and national institutions to serve the country unitedly while observing their constitutional limits. If we do so, history will remember us forever otherwise the future generations will never forgive us," he said addressing the National Youth Convention held here. The Convention was attended by federal ministers, Chief of the Army Staff General Syed Asim Munir, Chairman of the Higher Education Commission, teachers, vice-chancellors and students from across the country. He said it was the government's responsibility to equip the youth with modern education, technology and skills to enable them to change the country's fate and bring about a "revolution" of progress and prosperity. He said the country's youth had immense potential as for the last three years, Pakistani students were among the top achievers of the foreign scholarships. Calling the 1973 Constitution a binding force for the nation, he said Pakistani nation also showed unity when the country carried out the nuclear tests in 1998 to make its defence impregnable, setting aside the serious challenges.

He told the gathering that Pakistan had sacrificed thousands of lives in its fight against terrorism besides suffering an economic loss of \$150 billion. Not just Pakistan, the whole world has benefited from the elimination of terrorism by Pakistan, he added.

Senate Body on Finance updated on IMF loan program

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Muhammad Aurangzeb on Wednesday updated the Senate Standing Committee on Finance and Revenue about the International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan program. He indicated that the IMF Executive Board is expected to approve the program in September and expressed optimism that negotiations are progressing positively.

The meeting of Senate Body on Finance and Revenue was held at the Parliament House with Senator Saleem Mandviwalla in chair. Governor of the State Bank and the Chairman of the FBR also attended the meeting.

The Chairman of the FBR gave an in-camera briefing on the officers appointed as OSD over the past two years. Additionally, an in-camera session addressed measures by State Bank officials to prevent money laundering disguised as solar panel imports.

The Committee intended to review the Deposit Protection Corporation Amendment Bill 2024, which is part of the benchmarks set by the IMF. Finance Minister Aurangzeb stated that the IMF has set a deadline of October 2024 for the legislation. However, Committee member Farooq Naek criticized the bill as unconstitutional, asserting that it was introduced during the caretaker period and accusing the Ministry of Law and Justice of misleading the Committee. Chairman Mandviwalla clarified that the bill was introduced by the previous caretaker government in January and has not yet been passed. The Committee debated whether the newly elected government should reintroduce the bill. Senator Farooq Hamid Naek condemned the caretaker setup as unconstitutional, noting its rare use outside of Bangladesh. After consensus of all the committee members the Committee directed that the bill be reintroduced again in the National Assembly on Monday.

Senate Standing Committee on Finance and Revenue also reviewed issues regarding digital and plastic currency. Governor State Bank Jameel Ahmed reported that new currency notes are being developed and that the life span of plastic notes is under evaluation. It was briefed that state bank will internally finalise the prerequisites of introducing new currency notes by December. Senator Shahzad Durrani supported the introduction of plastic currency, while Governor Ahmed stated that plastic currency will be tested and issued based on public acceptance.

Senator Mohsin Aziz criticized the 5,000-rupee note as a source of corruption, claiming it is hoarded in unaccounted spaces. The discussion highlighted that although the note was initially valuable, its worth has diminished over time. Governor state Bank assured that new currency notes will include enhanced security features. The meeting also addressed the issue of 800 plus consignments of light aliphatic hydrocarbon solvent (HS CODE 2710.1250) and the problems faced by the FPCCI at MCC Appraisalment Quetta. It was reported that, after extensive deliberation, the Department of Explosives has ordered the release of the tankers upon payment of a penalty of 300,000 per tanker. The issue therefore stood resolved. Regarding the inclusion of provincial representatives on the EXIM Bank Board, it was noted that the State-Owned Enterprise Governance and Operation Act 2023 requires the majority of directors to be independent. The federal government may appoint qualified individuals as independent directors, meeting the State Bank of Pakistan's fit and proper criteria. INP

Election of a Pakistani youth belonging to Balochistan as the President of Oxford Union Society is a great honor: President Zardari



ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari says youth of the country are blessed with immense potential and there is dire need to provide them opportunities to highlight name of the country. President Asif Ali Zardari was talking to newly elected President of Oxford Union Society Israr

Khan Kakar, who called on him in Islamabad on Wednesday. The President said Israr Khan Kakar's election as President of the Oxford Union will encourage other young people. He expressed the hope that Israr Khan will brighten the name of the country with his achievements in the future too. The President said Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto Shaheed was the first Asian woman President of the Oxford Union. He congratulated Israr Khan Kakar for his election as the President of Oxford Union Society. The President said election of a Pakistani youth belonging to Balochistan as the President of Oxford Union Society is a great honor. SABAH

PTI founder meddles in military affairs with demand for Faiz Hameed's open trial: Tarar

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Information, Broadcasting, Culture and National Heritage Attaullah Tarar on Wednesday said PTI founder had meddled in the affairs of Pakistan Army by demanding an open trial for ex-Spy Chief. The minister, in a news statement, regretted that the PTI founder had made multiple attempts to make the matter related to Faiz Hameed controversial. Instead of giving statements in defense of Faiz Hameed, the PTI founder should better made his position clear in the 190 million pounds case, Tarar said, adding his controversial statements showed that he was suffering from "serious anxiety and uncertainty". The minister said the PTI founder was reluctant to accept that the issue of Faiz Hameed was internal matter of the Army, which proved that the ex-spy chief was his "asset". He said it seemed that the PTI chief was in mental disarray as sometime he called Faiz Hameed an "asset or a hero", while on some occasion took completely an otherwise stance. In the Faiz Hameed case, he said it appeared that the PTI founder had no qualms about using people for his own personal interests. The minister said the PTI founder was expert in ditching his own well wishers. APP

Meta's role in advancing child protection, privacy initiatives commendable: Minister



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Law, Justice and Human Rights, Senator Azam Nazeer Tarar has commended Meta (Facebook) for its proactive role in ensuring safe digital spaces and effectively utilizing its platform to support the Ministry's initiatives on child protection, privacy and related human rights concerns. Speaking during meeting with a delegation headed by Vice President Public Policy APAC, Meta, Simon Milner which called on him here on Wednesday, the minister also recognized the Public Service Video (PSM) developed by Meta as a significant contribution to advancing the ministry's mission. The PSM highlights the collaborative efforts between the Ministry of Human Rights and Meta to promote the right to privacy and child protection in digital spaces. The content is designed to educate the public about their digital rights and

responsibilities, reflecting the Ministry's broader human rights agenda.

A central aspect of this initiative is the promotion of the TakeItDown platform, developed by the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC). The platform allows individuals to anonymously report explicit images or videos of minors shared online. Through this tool, families and young people can take proactive measures to remove harmful content from the internet, addressing online harassment, exploitation, and cyberbullying.

Senator Azam Nazeer Tarar emphasized the importance of sustained collaboration with Meta to tackle pressing issues such as online child protection and the preservation of individual privacy rights. He reiterated the ministry's dedication to partnering with Meta and other key stakeholders to ensure that Pakistan leads in human rights advocacy and protection. The Ministry of Human Rights remains committed to expanding its partnership with Meta and other collaborators to enhance the awareness, protection and promotion of human rights across the nation. INP

Govt fully committed to Empowering a Digital Pakistan, Ahsan Iqbal

IRS and COPAIR jointly organized the Empowering a Digital Pakistan conference

VOM Report

Islamabad - Speaking at the Empowering a Digital Pakistan conference organized by the Institute of Regional Studies (IRS) and Center of Pakistan and International Relations (COPAIR), Ahsan Iqbal Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, said that the government was committed to bringing a digital transformation in Pakistan while working with all the stakeholders, underlining that there was no path to prosperity except collaboration and working together. He also noted that there was a huge potential in the country, especially the youth has the power to take Pakistan forward through digitalization; however, that would only be possible through connecting the young gener-

ation to the fastest-growing transformative technologies. Minister for Planning said peace, political stability, continuity of policies and commitment to reforms are crucial to take the country forward on the path of economic development. Ahsan Iqbal said Pakistan is standing at a defining moment and cannot afford to lag behind in embracing the latest technology. He said we have to introduce technology in every sector to compete with the world. He called for collaboration and collective efforts to take the country in the right direction. Speaking at the event, Ambassador Jauhar Saleem, President of IRS, underscored the importance of aligning policies and institutions with modern technologies so to speed up the digital transformation process in the country.

He pointed out that there was a digital divide, with some sectors of the economy and society benefiting from digital transformation adequately while others lagged behind. He stressed the need for expanding upon e-governance and digitalization of all public services on the one hand and promoting digital awareness and adoption of best practices on the other. Pakistan could now only catch up with other high-growth economies through digital transformation at a fast pace. Ms. Anna Munawwar Awan, President of COPAIR, articulated that emerging technologies possess the potential to revolutionize industries, enhance decision-making processes, and engender new economic opportunities.

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The constitution is important

HASSAN BAIG

The tragedy of our time is that the social contract between citizens and the state (in the form of the constitution) in Pakistan is corrupted with malaise and malpractices. Throughout our chequered constitutional history, there have been quite a few incidents and accidents regarding constitutional violations. The worst era was one where the social contract was completely set aside, and martial law regimes were imposed. Even today, we keep hearing that martial law is a possibility – a step destined to further weaken the already weak social contract. One of the main expressions of confidence and trust of citizens in the state is their vote, which strengthens a democratic system. Unfortunately, this trust is eroding in Pakistan. The February elections seemed to have been a futile exercise, where the aspirations of many people were crushed. This is one of the reasons for discontent and distrust among people, which ultimately leads to political instability that triggers economic instability. Recently, a minister talked about the constitutional meltdown. What could happen if the constitution fails once again and some other setup is formed on any pretext, as we see the new unprecedented development of non-compliance with court decisions? All three pillars of the state – let me include the fourth pillar as well that is the press and media including social media – have distinct roles to play. Unfortunately, all are failing to meet their constitutional obligations owing to multiple reasons, resulting in chaos in society.

The structure of the state stands on the constitution. The state today is severely under pressure as it is unable to provide the citizens with the facilities they are entitled to under the constitution. The truth is that the security of the state can only be ensured by adhering to the provisions of the constitution. That is missing in Pakistan.

The government's performance in protecting human rights is not that ideal. People are badly suffering from maladministration and malpractices that are common here. On top of it, people are unable to exercise their right to expression and free speech owing to various issues. The right to assembly is again an issue and a great concern for all of us. The country's popular party (PTI) that performed well in the February elections is being partially denied their right to public gatherings. This is one of the reasons for political instability in the country, which is followed by economic instability. This needs to improve.

The state is constitutionally obliged to ensure equitable and just economic development in all areas and provinces of Pakistan. One of the reasons for discontentment and chaos in the country is backwardness and uneven development, especially in Balochistan where people are rightly demanding their fundamental rights be provided by the government of Pakistan. People's confidence in the system is waning due to a range of issues, including enforced disappearances where the government has been completely ineffective.

Economic security has gained such high importance in today's world that it has become almost synonymous with the security of the state. Whenever the constitution is deviated from or not followed in letter and spirit, discontentment among people gives way to political instability, which becomes a cause of economic instability. We are in search of economic stability while not taking care of political stability that could only be ensured through an inclusive political system.

Inclusivity is important in all fields of life – social, political or economic – and strengthens the country. It needs to be followed. The Council of Common Interest (CCI) is one of the strongest institutions that could give strength to the federation if followed in letter and spirit. The NFC awards must be revisited to cope with the floods of loans and tsunami of debts. The CCI is the right forum to be used for just and equitable economic development.

It is beyond imagination as to why the government is not holding frequent meetings of the forum to gain political and economic stability by following the constitution. The provinces would be happy to share the burden of the federation if constitutional obligations are met in the case of the CCI. The social contract would also be honoured by holding the meetings of this very vital forum, as the federating units fetch people's confidence in their respective provinces. The local government system is key to progress and prosperity, cementing the relations between citizens and the state. The constitution is being violated again and again by delays in local government elections. This is another area where the social contract is under siege in Pakistan. What is wrong with the federal and provincial governments, and why do they not hold local bodies' elections? Development issues could be properly addressed through local governments. Economic strength and economic prosperity could be achieved through this system of governance by meeting constitutional obligations in this regard. The question is why Article 6 cannot be invoked in this case, as the constitution is frequently being violated by not holding elections of the local government.

It would be in the best interest of the nation to follow the constitution; this is the only way to strengthen the social contract that is under siege. The way forward for peace, progress, prosperity and economic growth is to meet constitutional obligations. The dream of a strong Pakistan can only be realized by following the constitution.

Issues like terrorism, security challenges and economic instability are a result of non-compliance with the constitution. There is an urgent need to give importance to our social contract to make this nation stronger and prosperous. For that, we have to follow the constitution. All challenges are the ultimate result of our wrong policies and the violations of constitutional provisions. Partial compliance with the constitution does not guarantee any stability, whether political, economic or otherwise.

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Dr Ayesha Razzaque

The great tuition debate

It is that time of the year again when summer ends and schools reopen, many and often with revised fees. Every year, this reignites the annual debate around private school fees and where to draw the line between fair and excessive increases. Public schools are inexpensive in relative, and arguably absolute, terms. That is why the tuition fee debate always centres on private schools.

Article 25-A of the constitution of Pakistan guarantees citizens the right to free and quality education up to age 16, approximately grade 10. According to the Pakistan Education Statistics 2021-22 report, 29 million children go to public schools, while an almost equal number, 26 million, go to private schools, and - according to different sources - between two and five million attend madrassahs. That leaves another 26 million children, nearly equal to the number of private school-going children, out of school.

There are two very key takeaways in these numbers: one, while the state is responsible for providing an education to every child in the country, the private school sector serves almost as many students as public schools. And, two, if private schools were to close tomorrow, the public school sector would be helplessly out of its depth accommodating all the children that would be looking for schools. But you do not even have to go that far because an almost equal number of children who should be in schools are not. The bottom line is that the public school sector is failing to provide all eligible children an education, not to speak of a quality education.

A 2019 judgment by the Supreme Court of Pakistan considered a string of judgments and appeal cases filed in high courts in Sindh, Punjab, Quetta, and Peshawar as well as the Supreme Court since 2005. In Punjab, private schools are regulated by the Punjab Private Educational Institutions Ordinance 1984 and subsequent amendments with the last one in 2017. Similarly, in Sindh private schools are regulated by the Sindh Private Educational Institutions (Regulation and Control) Rules, 2005. These regulations have put maximum caps on the increase in private school fees from one year to the

next. In Sindh, that cap is placed at 5.0 per cent of the previous year's fee, in Punjab and ICT at 5 per cent but can be stretched to 8.0 per cent after a school jumps through more hoops, and in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa the cap is set at 10 per cent. It is usually on the grounds of these regulations that parents demand that courts order their children's private schools to reduce tuition fees.

Instead of wading through years of judgments by courts on this issue, let us see if we can apply some common sense and fairness to this issue. If we look at the World Bank inflation data of Pakistan from 1960 to 2022, in only 17 of those 62 years was the annual rate of inflation in Pakistan less than 5.0 per cent. Over the same period, in 18 years the rate of inflation exceeded 10 per cent. For 2023, not included in the World Bank's data set, other sources report the inflation rate at greater than 20 per cent.

Like many poorly drafted laws, Punjab treats private schools differently based on whether they charge more or less than Rs4,000 per month in tuition fees. In 2021, the Private Educational Institutions Regulatory Authority (PEIRA) that regulates schools in the ICT took it a step further and defined three categories of low- (less than Rs5000 pm), medium- (Rs5,000 to 10,000 pm), and high-fee (more than Rs10,000 pm) private institutions.

At that time, low-, medium-, and high-fee schools made up 83, 6.5, and 10.5 per cent of all schools in the ICT. It is only 2024, and many schools must have already slipped from low and medium to medium and high categories. Setting such thresholds in absolute terms in a currency that loses purchasing power every year is nonsensical.

Schools pay rents or leases, utility bills, consumables, and salaries – their costs are as much at the mercy of inflation as individuals. Moreover, notwithstanding all the politically correct talk about not treating education as a business, except for non-profit schools, that is precisely what private schools are: for-profit businesses. And no for-profit business can keep its doors open for long if it cannot recover its costs and make a profit. Then, does it make sense to cap the annual increase in school tuition fees at a rate lower than inflation?

Politicians and bureaucrats have never seen a price control mechanism they don't like. In the context of private schools, politicians get to earn the applause of voters on the backs of private school owners and

bureaucracy gets another say in the operations of private schools, making for a potential avenue for corruption. Among other laws relevant to private schools is the Punjab Free and Compulsory Education Act of 2014. Article 13 compels private schools to admit 10 per cent of their students free of cost. This adds to the schools' costs and will ultimately be borne by the parents of other children – it amounts to a poorly disguised tax on private school education. The government of Pakistan has perfected the art of populist wins on the backs of others.

On occasion, petitioners have even invoked Article 25-A to force private schools to lower tuition fees to their liking. It has never made sense to me how parents decline to send their children to public schools but then feel privileged to force private schools to unrealistically lower their fees to their liking by employing archaic and nonsensical price control rules. Stifle an industry, and businesses will start exiting it or discourage new entrants. That would amount to a lose-lose-lose situation for parents, the state, and private school owners.

Government is not competent to decide what price private schools (or any business) ought to charge for their services. It has never covered itself in glory any time it has exerted price controls. In a competitive market – and the domestic school education market is, if nothing else, competitive – setting the price for services at which supply balances demand is best left to the free market. If governments (politicians and bureaucrats) are truly concerned about the cost of private school education, they ought to address it by increasing the supply of quality schooling by the public sector. But then, that is harder than pulling the price control lever and reducing prices by decree.

Parents elect to send their children to private schools because they are better, and offer services, facilities, and activities that public schools do not. And when you force a vendor, seller, or service provider to sell their wares or services at a forcibly depressed price, you are asking to be taken advantage of. A few years ago, when a court ruled in favour of keeping tuition fees at an artificially low level, schools started to lay off music, art, and physical education teachers and scaled back or discontinued enrichment activities – all the things people send their children to private schools for in the first place.

However, there are other opportuni-

The writer (she/her) has a PhD in Education.

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

History of Pakistan

Each region (and, often, each household) has its own preferred mixture of spices—the term masala is used to describe such a mixture. In addition to the many spices that are also

associated with other countries of South Asia, yogurt is a common ingredient. Favourite meats include chicken, mutton, and lamb. Lentils are a standard dish, and various

types of wheat bread are the national staple. The most common breads are chapatti (unleavened flat bread) and naan (slightly leavened). Pakistanis drink a great deal of hot

tea (chai), and lassi (a type of yogurt drink), sherbet, and lemonade are popular.

To be continued....

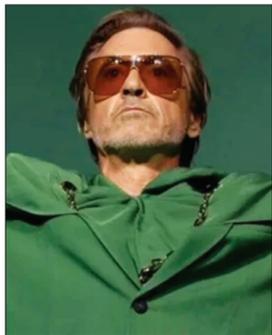
Today in History



Showbiz

Kevin Feige hints at Robert Downey Jr.'s potential MCU comeback

Doctor Doom emerges as potential MCU role for Robert Downey Jr.



In a surprising turn of events, Marvel Studios' Kevin Feige proposed a potential return for Robert Downey Jr. to the Marvel Cinematic Universe, despite his character Tony Stark's death in Avengers: Endgame. Downey and his wife, Susan, were discussing future projects with Feige when the idea was floated, leaving the door open for a possible comeback. "He said, 'It just keeps occurring to me if you were to come back ...'" Downey said in the latest episode of The Hollywood Reporter's Awards Chatter podcast. "Susan was like, 'Wait, wait. Come back as what?'" Downey and Feige explored the creative hurdles that would need to be

overcome to bring Tony Stark back into the MCU fold. "How can we not go backwards? How can we not disappoint expectations? How can we continue to beat expectations?" Downey recalled. Added the actor: "And he brought up Victor Von Doom. I looked into this character. Later on, he goes, 'Let's get Victor Von Doom right.'" Downey Jr. had a meeting with Bob Iger at his house to explore opportunities for working together on Disney's theme parks and live experiences. Iger was on board with the Doctor Doom idea and promptly set up a visit to Disney's Imagineering Campus for Downey and Feige, where

they could discover the innovative work being done. "You want to talk about two guys that are not easy to have their minds blown, let alone at the same time," said Downey. "What is going on there, right now, is so beyond my expectations of what was possible." Since departing the MCU, Downey Jr. has maintained friendships with directors Joe and Anthony Russo (Avengers) and Jon Favreau (Iron Man). Recently, at San Diego Comic-Con, Kevin Feige announced the Russo brothers' return to direct two upcoming Avengers films: Avengers: Dookusday (2026) and Avengers: Secret Wars (2027).

Tech

What's new in WhatsApp?

Latest WhatsApp update confirms an exciting feature is finally being rolled out

WhatsApp users may finally rejoice as the app's highly-anticipated favourite chats and groups feature is set to be rolled out to everyone. The Meta-owned instant messaging app is following through on its previous announcement to introduce a feature allowing users to mark certain contacts and groups as favourites, WABetaInfo reported. The latest WhatsApp for iOS 24.16.79 update, recently released on the App Store, confirms this exciting development. According to WABetaInfo, the update's changelog reveals that the new feature will allow users to add favourites, which will be prominently displayed at the top of the calls tab and serve as a filter for the chats list. To get started, WhatsApp users can open the app settings and open the favourites section, where they can easily add contacts and groups to their favourites list. Once added, these favourites will be promi-



nently displayed for quicker access. In this section, users can also manage their favourites by rearranging, adding, or removing them as needed. In addition, the changelog provided by WhatsApp notes that users can experience the new calling user interface (UI), which features updated controls that are more intuitive and easier to access, improving the overall reliability of the calling feature. If you don't have these features, note that some accounts may receive them over the coming weeks, according to the official changelog.

Health

Mpox claims life in Ivory Coast: authorities

"The situation is no cause for alarm," says an INHP doctor

ABIDJAN: Ivory Coast health authorities on Tuesday reported 28 cases of mpox, with one person dying from the virus that has killed hundreds in Democratic Republic of Congo. The total has risen from six declared cases on August 1. The National Public Hygiene Institute (INHP) recorded "28 confirmed cases including one death" across the country as of Tuesday, said an INHP doctor Daouda Coulibaly. The fatal case and some others were recorded in the country's economic capital

Abidjan, the INHP said. Coulibaly said tests were being carried out to identify the strain of the latest mpox cases. "The situation is no cause for alarm," Coulibaly said. "We are seeing just the start of a nascent epidemic - there is no upsurge" in cases. He said monitoring for mpox had been strengthened. "We have to break the chains of transmission, identify the contacts of cases, isolate them and monitor them."

Cases identified in the west African country this year were of the subtype that spread during a previous epidemic in 2022, known as clade 2. A more contagious and deadly subtype known as clade 1b has emerged in DR Congo, Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda and Sweden. More than 500 people have died in DR Congo this year from some form of mpox. The WHO last week declared it a global public health emergency.



Ayaz Sadiq terms gross HRs violations in IIOJK, Palestine a trial of conscience of modern world



ISLAMABAD: Speaker National Assembly, Sardar Ayaz Sadiq has termed the large scale human rights violations in Indian illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) and Palestine as a trial of the conscience of the modern world.

Speaking during his meeting with the President of the Republic of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko in Minsk, Belarus on Wednesday, he said that the severe Human Rights violations in IIOJK and Palestine warrant immediate attention of the civilized world, said a news release received here.

Sardar Ayaz Sadiq said that resolving the Kashmir issue as per resolutions of the United Nations Security Council was pivotal for regional peace and stability, and an immediate ceasefire in Gaza was also essential for ending the Palestinian Genocide.

He said that Pakistan was the least contributor to climate change but the most severely affected Nation due to the devastating impact of climate change.

The Speaker NA further stated, "The issue of global climate change requires global efforts." While highlighting the friendly ties between both nations, he said that Pakistan and Belarus enjoy cordial ties based on shared interests.

He expressed his resolve to strengthen relations between both nations further. The Speaker added, "Pakistan is blessed with vast potential in energy and trade."

Ayaz Sadiq also said that Pakistan-Belarus Bilateral Relations are characterized by mutual respect. He further underscored that Pakistan-Belarus ties would expand through collaboration in economic, industrial, and agriculture sectors. During the meeting, matters related to enhancing bilateral relations, including trade and parliamentary relations, were deliberated in detail.

Both sides also expressed determination to further strengthen bilateral relations. The President of Belarus, Aleksandr Lukashenko remarked that Belarus attached great importance to its close ties with Pakistan. While expressing the desire to further expand bilateral cooperation with Pakistan, he added, "Pakistan has great potential in Energy, Trade and Agriculture Sectors." INP



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Privatisation, Board of Investment & Communications, Abdul Aleem Khan presided 222nd meeting of Privatisation Commission Board.

At least 35 people killed, 15 others injured after a bus carrying Pakistani pilgrims meets with an accident in Yazd, Iran

President Zardari, PM Shehbaz, Maryam, Omar Ayub express deep grief & sorrow over loss of precious lives in the tragic bus accident

TEHRAN/ISLAMABAD: At least 35 people were killed and 15 others sustained serious injuries after a bus carrying Pakistani pilgrims met with an accident in Yazd, Iran. According to initial reports, the accident occurred due to failure of brakes. Injured have been shifted to nearby hospital. Most of the passengers belong to Larkana, Ghotki and other cities of Sindh. However, taking to social media platform X, formerly Twitter, Pakistan's Ambassador to Iran Mudassar Tipu confirmed the death of 28 pilgrims and said that the remaining 23 were wounded in the accident which occurred around 700 kilometres from the embassy. The ambassador's statement comes after a bus carrying Pakistani pilgrims overturned and caught fire near Taftan-Dehshir checkpoint, reported Iranian media.

"Embassy officials have already left for Yazd this morning. An officer in Zahedan is overseeing emergency arrangements," the ambassador further said. Speaking with a private TV channel, the envoy said overspeeding and brake failure caused the ill-fated bus to crash into a school wall. According to Maulana Qamar Abbas Naqvi — a member of a peace committee based in Larkana — said at least 30 people died on the spot, while five succumbed to their injuries at the hospital.

On the other hand, Iran's Mehr News Agency said that the number of killed people in the

accident was 28 with emergency imposed in hospitals across the city to treat the injured. The bus, which had 53 passengers on board, met with the accident last night. The police and rescue officials rushed to the scene and shifted the bodies and the injured to the hospital. As per details received from sources earlier on Wednesday, the bus was carrying more than 50 passengers, including 14 women. They added that 10 people hailed from Khairpur, whereas six were from Kashmir. Syed Athar Shamsi, the leaders of the convoy which left from Larkana to participate in Arbaeen, said that the group of pilgrims were commuting in two buses. The bus moving ahead met with the accident, while the other one was left behind due to documentation related issues. Crisis management director general of Yazd province, while talking to Iranian state TV, confirmed that 11 women and 17 men lost their lives in the accident, reported Reuters.

"Seven of the injured people are in critical condition and six injured people have now left the hospital," he said adding that Pakistan's consular services in Iran have been invited to Yazd province to follow up on the accident. Iranian traffic police have said that preliminary investigations reveal that the accident was caused by a technical defect in the bus braking system.

Reacting to the incident, President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Mian Muhammad

Shehbaz Sharif have expressed deep grief and sorrow over loss of precious lives in the tragic bus accident of Pakistani Zaireen in Iran. The President and the Prime Minister commiserated with the bereaved families and prayed for the departed souls.

The President directed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to bring the bodies to Pakistan and provide timely aid to the injured. The Prime Minister said directions have been issued to Pakistan's mission in Tehran to extend all possible assistance to the affected families.

Meanwhile Federal Minister for Interior Mohsin Naqvi has expressed deep grief over the death of 35 Pakistani pilgrims in a bus accident in Yazd, Iran. He extended heartfelt condolences to the families of the deceased. He also prayed for the swift recovery of the injured. Interior Minister said that he was deeply saddened over the loss of precious human lives in the bus accident. He said that our sympathies are with the families of the deceased and the injured, and we equally share their grief. Federal Minister for Interior Mohsin Naqvi prayed that May Allah Almighty grant patience and fortitude to the bereaved families. Meanwhile, Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PT) leader and National Assembly Opposition Leader Omar Ayub Khan have also separately expressed condolences and prayed for the speedy recovery of the wounded pilgrims. SABAH

Minister expresses gratitude for € 91.1 million German support for Pakistan

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Economic Affairs, Ahsan Khan Cheema on Wednesday, expressed his gratitude for the € 91.1 million German support for Pakistan's post-flood, climate-resilient reconstruction. He also appreciated the long-standing partnership between the two countries since 1961 encompassing total development assistance of € 4 billion from the Federal Republic of Germany, said a press release issued here.

The meeting between Minister for Economic Affairs, Ahsan Khan Cheema and German Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development Mrs. Svenja Schulze.

Ms. Svenja Schulze, Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), Government of Federal Republic of Germany called on the Minister for Economic Affairs, Ahsan Khan Cheema along with the delegation comprising of German Parliamentarians, German Ambassador to Pakistan, and other senior officials.

Ahsan Khan Cheema welcomed the Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development and members of her delegation on their visit to Pakistan. He appreciated the Government of Federal Republic of Germany for being a valuable development partner and specifically highlighted its bilateral economic assistance and support extended to Pakistan for attaining the GSP+ status.

The Minister highlighted revenue generation, export-led growth, increased agriculture modality, information technology, and human resource development as key priority areas for driving the economic agenda of the Government. He further emphasized that the reforms are being undertaken within the framework agreed with the IMF.

In addition, the Minister appreciated German support for Hydropower Projects in Pakistan and the Pakistan-German Climate and Energy Partnership.

He expressed hope that the Government of Germany would continue its support in areas of clean energy and climate change, and the pipeline assistance would not be subject to any budgetary cuts.

The German Minister highlighted that the Pakistan-German partnership has withstood the test of time and has produced significant outcomes in the jointly identified areas of cooperation.

Svenja Schulze on this occasion announced that the German government will provide € 24 Million to Pakistan for projects in the field of sustainable energy and emissions trading.

Furthermore, she acknowledged the potential of the textile industry of Pakistan and emphasized the need for its further development and future Pak-German cooperation in this sector.

Both sides agreed on the importance of climate-friendly projects and the development of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) as the critical factors for the economy of Pakistan. APP

Sugar Advisory Board recommends exporting 100,000 MT of surplus sugar



ISLAMABAD: Minister for Industries and Production Rana Tanveer Hussain on Wednesday chaired a meeting of the Sugar Advisory Board (SAB) which recommended exporting 100,000 metric tons of surplus sugar.

The meeting was attended by Federal Minister for Commerce, Mir Jam Kamal Khan, the Secretary, Industries and Production, other high ranking federal Officials, representatives from

provinces, representatives from Pakistan Sugar Mills Association, Provincial Cane Commissioners, FBR officials and growers. A summary was sent to the Economic Coordination Committee of the Federal Cabinet for consideration. The final approval for sugar export will be given by the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC).

During the meeting, the availability of sugar stocks and prices in the country was reviewed in details. The minister highlighted that there is surplus sugar in the country adding that no hike in the ex-mill price of sugar will be accepted because of export. Pakistan Sugar Association will ensure maintenance of ex-mills price of sugar as agreed earlier. Rana Tanveer Hussain said that sugar exports will be carried out following the terms and conditions set by the cabinet. SABAH

Bilawal seeks reports about damage to canal embankments

ISLAMABAD: Chairman, Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has sought detailed reports from the Irrigation Ministers of Sindh and Balochistan regarding the damage to canal embankments due to the recent rains in the provinces. Presiding over a meeting through video-link, he inquired about the floods and damages caused in Sindh and Balochistan following the recent rains.

The ministers gave briefing over the damages caused by the floods in their respective provinces, said a statement issued by the Media Cell Bilawal House on Wednesday. Sadiq Umrani and Jam Khan Shoro, the Irrigation Ministers for Balochistan and Sindh respectively, briefed the party chief on the performance of their respective departments.

During the meeting, both Sindh and Balochistan Ministers agreed to adopt a unified stance on the formula for water distribution in the country at the platform of the Indus River System Authority (IRSA). In a response, both the ministers informed about the extent of the damage and the steps being taken to address and repair the affected embankments.

Pakistani female peacekeeper wins award for gender advocacy

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Army's Major Sania Safdar has become first UN peacekeeper in Cyprus to receive the 2023 'Certificate of Recognition' for advocating gender equality.

According to the mission, she is serving with the United Nations Force in Cyprus as a Mission's Force Signal Officer. The award, issued by the New York-based U.N. Department for Peace Operations, was presented to her by the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General in Cyprus, Colin Stewart.

In a statement, Major Sania Safdar said receiving this certificate as the first peacekeeper from UNFICYP is deeply meaningful to her and significant for Pakistan Army Mission in Cyprus. Major Safdar is currently serving as the Mission's Force Signal Officer and one of the UNFICYP's military gender focal points. Her primary tasks involve overseeing communication systems and promoting gender equality within military component. Since her deployment to the



Mission last year, she proactively took charge of several initiatives to contribute to achieve this recognition by focusing on integrating the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda into military components of the Mission's work. APP

SC's stay order was a barrier to the trial of the May 9 perpetrators under the Army Act: Senator Irfan Siddiqui

Says British courts are open 24 hours, whereas our courts are on holiday

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) senior leader Senator Irfan Siddiqui said on Wednesday that the Supreme Court's stay order was a barrier to the trial of the May 9 perpetrators under the Army Act. "It (stay order) has been eight months since the Supreme Court directed that no one should be punished without its permission," Senator Irfan Siddiqui said who also heads Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs.

Talking to a private TV, the Senator referred to recent riots in the UK and said that the incident took place on July 29, and within a month, trials were completed and hundreds of people have been sentenced. "British courts are open 24 hours, whereas our courts are on holiday," the Senator said.

Irfan Siddiqui said that Faiz Hameed was being tried under the same Army Act that was applied to try more than two dozen people and three of them were also awarded death sentences during Imran Khan's tenure.

"Talking about open trials were never discussed at that time, but today the talk of open trials by Imran Khan was

merely for distraction," he said. In response to a question, Senator Irfan Siddiqui said that whoever Faiz Hameed names will be brought to justice. He referred to the ISPR press release, and said that one case against Faiz Hameed is related to Top City, but the other logically seems to be connected to May 9 as well.

During the trial, when evidence is presented and inquiries are made, actions against others will also expand based on their responses, he added.

Irfan Siddiqui said that May 9 was an attack on the state, is a very serious matter, and the responsibility for maintaining the state's authority falls on the shoulders of all institutions, including the judiciary. Pakistan's history includes many conspiracies, such as those involving Akbar Khan, Bhutto, and Zia, but May 9 was the first conspiracy that was half successful, he added.

"This conspiracy had three phases: Faiz Hameed's personal enmity was obvious against the appointment of General Asim Munir as Army Chief, he said.

In order to block the appointment, ini-

tially the records of his family was leaked, and then May 9 was executed to create turmoil within the army and incite a rebellion to overturn the leadership, he said. Irfan Siddiqui stated that Imran Khan has already admitted to May 9; now he should stop being cowardly and act to be brave, and openly admit his actions. Regarding former Chief Justice Saqib Nisar, Siddiqui said that he was involved in facilitating the conviction of Nawaz Sharif among other matters.

The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) has dealt with many such figures including Saqib Nisar and Ata Bandial, he added.

On the question of his arrest under tenancy laws, Irfan Siddiqui revealed that General Faiz Hameed had him arrested because he refused to meet him at his office and safe house due to eye surgery.

Talking about rumors of a technocrat government, Irfan Siddiqui mentioned that it is rare to find a Prime Minister like Shehbaz Sharif, who works with genuine concern for the country and strong determination. "If anyone has a solution, they should present it," he

said. The PML-N sacrificed politics and saved Pakistan from default, brought the inflation to its lowest level in three years, cut interest rates. The hard work is bearing fruits and there is visible improvements in foreign exchange, IT exports, and remittances, Pakistan's economic indicators are continually improving.

Regarding the verbal exchanges between the Chief Ministers of Sindh and Punjab, he said that minor issues in politics don't matter much. He said if Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif has provided relief of 45 billion rupees by cutting developmental budget, other provinces should also provide relief to their people by creating fiscal space. He said that there was no such issue that poses a threat to the government. The government will continue and complete its term.

In response to another question, Irfan Siddiqui described Maulana Fazlur Rehman as a very astute politician who always keeps a vent open even if doors and windows are closed. SABAH

Govt fully committed to Empowering...

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To address these challenges and fully leverage emerging technologies, we must focus on Artificial Intelligence (AI), Blockchain Technology, Open Source Intelligence (OSINT), Quantum Computing, Cyber security, Digital Media Literacy, Infrastructure Development and Education and Training. Let us unite in our efforts to digitally empower every individual and transform Pakistan into a beacon of innovation and progress.

Ms. Aisha Humera Chaudhry, Additional Secretary of IT and Telecom Ministry, briefed the participants about the Ministry of IT and Telecom's efforts in advancing information technology infrastructure in the country. She also touched upon endeavors for promoting digital transformation through collaborations with domestic and foreign companies.

Dr. Baber Majid Bhatti, CEO of NITB, emphasized the importance of adopting digital technologies to achieve holistic socio-economic development. He also stressed upon the need to address the overlapping phenomena of digital initiatives and projects in the country as they were not contributing effectively to the development of digitalization.

Dr. Haider Abbas, Director General of the National CERT shared that as per global and national cybersecurity indexes, Pakistan ranked as one of the most vulnerable countries in terms of cybersecurity. He mentioned that the Pakistan Cyber Emergency Response Team had implemented various initiatives to protect Pakistan's digital borders and was working

closely with all major stakeholders to enhance digital security resilience.

Khuram Rahat, Vice Chairman of P@SHA, recommended the establishment of a strong framework for digital transformation and cybersecurity. He also emphasized the need for strict enforcement of legal frameworks and an open data policy to promote data monetization and enhanced public access.

Mr. Amer Shahzad, Director General, Wireless, PTA, highlighted the strategic framework adopted by PTA to drive digitalization forward. He emphasized upon the authority's commitment to infrastructure development, fostering cross-sectional collaboration, ensuring timely adoption of 5G technologies, extending rural connectivity, implementing subsidy programs, and fostering robust public and private partnerships.

At the concluding session, Ms. Gulmina Bilal Ahmed, Chairperson of the National Vocational and Technical Training Commission (NAVTTTC), in her remarks emphasized the organization's collaborations with industry, global organizations, and government agencies to customize its programs to meet market needs. She added that NAVTTTC was offering state-of-the-art Information Technology courses to hundreds of thousands of IT students through its extensive network of training centers across the country, utilizing digital tools and platforms.

The seminar held at Serena attracted a wide variety of audiences including foreign envoys and diplomats, CEOs of IT companies, heads of think tanks, former ambassadors, academia, intelligentsia, and opinion makers.