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Pakistan, Turkiye, Saudi Arabia set for first defence pact meeting

ISLAMABAD, (Monitoring Desk): Talks under the "Makkah Joint Defence Agreement" between Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Turkiye will be held in Istanbul on Monday to review the contours of the agreement and progress made so far, the Prime Minister's Office said on Sunday.

According to a statement, the three countries, which signed the pact earlier this month, would discuss the agreement in detail at their first meeting since its signing. The Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said in a statement that Chief of Defence Forces and Chief of Army Staff, Field Marshal Asim Munir, arrived in Turkiye on an official visit.

Sources reported, citing a Turkish foreign ministry source, that top officials from Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan will gather in Istanbul on Monday for the first committee meeting under the joint defence accord they signed this month.

Foreign and defence ministers, as well as the chiefs of staff of the three countries, will attend the meeting in Istanbul, the ministry source said.

"International security issues will be on the agenda," the source said, with discussions expected to cover enhancing defence capabilities, greater interoperability among their armed forces and deepening cooperation in the defence industry, including joint production and development.

Six months after the US and Israel launched the war against Iran, negotiations are at an impasse and President Donald Trump's administration has stepped up efforts to punish Iran financially with what it has billed as an "economic D-Day".

Turkey, which has NATO's second-largest military, has said the pact with nuclear-armed Pakistan ' and top oil exporter Saudi Arabia was open to expansion — with Egypt as a potential candidate — and did not seek to replace existing alliances.

Earlier, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar arrived in Istanbul for the talks and other official engagements after concluding his visit to the UK.

Upon his arrival, FM Dar was received by Turkiye's Deputy Chief of Staff for Administrative Affairs Brig Gen ªenol Varol, Pakistan's Ambassador to Turkiye Dr Yousuf Junaid, Turkish Foreign Ministry Ambassador Cihad Erginay and other senior Turkish officials.

After arriving in Istanbul, FM Dar visited the shrine of Hazrat Abu Ayyub Al-Ansari and offered Fateha.

He prayed for the security, peace and prosperity of Pakistan and its people, and also offered special prayers for the unity of the Muslim Ummah.



ISTANBUL: Turkiye's Deputy Chief of Staff for Administration Brig. Gen. Senol Varol, Pakistan's Ambassador to Turkiye Dr. Yousaf Junaid, Ambassador Cihad Erginay of the Turkish MFA, and other senior officials of the Turkish Government receives Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar upon arrival in ISTANBUL.



QUETTA: Leader of the Opposition in the National Assembly and Chairman of Pashtoonkhwa Milli Awami Party, Mahmood Khan Achakzai addressing the opening session of the Pashtoon National Jirga

Gun not solution to any problem:

All issues must be resolved through dialogue, political struggle: Mahmood Khan Achakzai

Says under current difficult circumstances, lives, property, honor and dignity of Pashtoons face various threats

QUETTA (ANN): Leader of the Opposition in the National Assembly and Chairman of Pashtoonkhwa Milli Awami Party, Mahmood Khan Achakzai, has said that the Pashtoon National Jirga organized by the Pashtoonkhwa Milli Awami Party is a continuation of the decisions of the Bannu National Jirga and the national struggle. The time has come for all political parties, Nawabs, tribal elders and national leadership to sit together and formulate a consensus national strategy to resolve the problems facing the Pashtoon nation.

He was addressing the opening session of the Pashtoon National Jirga in Quetta. Mahmood Khan Achakzai said that this Jirga does not belong to any one political party or a specific group; rather, it is a Jirga for the survival, rights and future of the entire Pashtoon nation, and its decisions will be made while keeping national interests in view.

He made it clear that the Pashtoon National Jirga is in no way against the Baloch nation. The Baloch are also settled on their historic land, and Pashtoons and Baloch have been neighbors for centuries. There is no enmity or war between the two nations; rather, they want to resolve issues through brotherly dialogue, mutual respect and peaceful coexistence.

Mahmood Khan Achakzai said that Pakistan is a common country of all nationalities, including Punjabis, Sindhis, Baloch, Saraikis and Pashtoons, and that no nation here is a master or a slave. According to the Constitution and law, all nationalities should receive equality, justice and their legitimate rights.

He said that British Balochistan and the historic Pashtoon districts of Quetta, Pishin, Loralai, Zhob, Chaman, Harnai and Ziarat have their own historical and geographical identity. Issues of illegal occupation of land and demarcation in Quetta and the Pashtoon belt should be resolved immediately. The alleged forcible occupation of thousands of acres of land belonging to the Bazai tribe and other Pashtoon communities is in no way acceptable. The Chairman of the Pashtoonkhwa Milli Awami Party said that our mountains are rich in immense natural resources such as lithium, gold, silver, copper and other rare minerals, but despite the abundance of these resources, the people here suffer from poverty and deprivation. Talented young people are forced to work as laborers in Dubai and other Gulf countries in search of employment.

He said that we are not begging anyone; rather, we are only demanding our legitimate and constitutional right over the resources of our own land.

President, PM extend warm greetings to Turkish leadership, people on Victory Day

ISLAMABAD, (APP): President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, Sunday, extended warm greetings to President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the brotherly people of Turkiye on the occasion of Victory Day.

In a post on X handle, the president said Pakistan and Turkiye enjoy a unique and enduring relationship, rooted in deep bonds of history, faith and mutual support.

He recalled that the Great Victory of 30 August 1922 remains an important chapter in Turkiye's history and expressed confidence that the close ties between the two countries would continue to grow.

The president wished President Erdogan and the people of Turkiye continued peace, prosperity and success.

Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, on his X handle, extended warmest felicitations to the dear brother, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the Government, and the brotherly people of the Republic of Turkiye on the joyous occasion of Victory Day. He said the 30th of August commemorated the historic victory secured under the leadership of Gazi Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, which laid the foundations of the modern Turkish Republic.

Pakistan joined its Turkish brothers and sisters in honouring this proud legacy of courage and national resolve, he added. "The bonds between Pakistan and Turkiye are bonds of the heart, forged over centuries of shared faith, history and struggle. Today our two nations have reaffirmed this strategic expression of enduring brotherhood through the Makkah Joint Defence Agreement, which binds our two nations, alongside the brotherly Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, in our shared pursuit of common security and collective deterrence," he added.

Pakistan, KSA target US$3 bn in agricultural, food exports

ISLAMABAD, (APP): Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have agreed to work towards increasing Pakistan's agricultural and food exports to the Kingdom to US$3 billion within the next two years, as the two countries seek to deepen cooperation in food security and agriculture.

Significant progress in agricultural cooperation between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia was achieved due to Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif's patronage and personal interest.

At the invitation of the Government of Pakistan, a Saudi delegation led by Eng. Abdulrahman A. Alfadley, Minister of Environment, Water and Agriculture, and comprising senior officials of the Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture, the General Food Security Authority and related entities, visited Islamabad from 26 to 28 August 2026.

The Pakistan side was led by Rana Tanveer Hussain, Federal Minister for National Food Security & Research, and included senior government officials and private-sector representatives including Secretary Commerce Jawad Paul, Secretary MNFSR Amer Ali Ahmed, PM's Coordinator on Agriculture & Food Security Ahmad Umair, and private-sector representatives of Pakistan's rice, red meat processed-food/fruit-concentrate, and green fodder sectors.



LAHORE: PML-N President Nawaz Sharif, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz meet AJK Prime Minister Iftikhar Gilani and Speaker Tariq Farooq.

Youth empowerment vital for Balochistan's progress: Governor

QUETTA, (VoM Report): Governor Balochistan Jaffar Khan Mandokhail has emphasized the need to provide young people with quality education, modern skills, and employment opportunities, noting that the province's youth possess immense potential to move forward if guided in the right direction.

Speaking to a youth delegation at the Governor House Quetta, Jaffar Mandokhail said that a comprehensive strategy is essential to address the specific psychology of young people and the demands of the 21st century. He underscored that without ensuring merit, it is impossible to gain the trust of the public, particularly the younger generation.

Highlighting efforts to amplify the voices of Pakistan's youth on the global stage, the Governor recalled his participation in the Youth and Artificial Intelligence Summit organized by the Youth International Organization at the United Nations Headquarters in New York.

He stressed that it is vital to showcase the hidden talents, aspirations, and dreams of Balochistan's youth to the world.

Jaffar Mandokhail described young people as equal partners in all spheres of life, not just the architects of the future. He said practical steps are being taken to eliminate despair, provide dignified employment, and ensure access to modern opportunities. Addressing unemployment, he explained that new programs are being designed to make youth skilled, self-reliant, and capable of generating employment, rather than merely job seekers.

He noted that investment is being made in public sector universities to deliver quality education and modern training programs, including professional courses, online IT training, and medical diploma programs, preparing youth for emerging opportunities both locally and globally.

The Governor urged young people to discover their hidden abilities, prioritize the pursuit of knowledge and skills, transform patriotism into practical service, and play an active role in the development of the nation.



KHAN YUNIS, GAZA, PALESTINE: Funeral ceremony held in front of Nasser Hospital for Palestinians, who were killed in attacks by the Israeli army

Parents must safeguard minors from terrorist propaganda: Home Minister

Mir Zia Langau reveals foiled BLA plot to use minor girls in suicide attacks

QUETTA, (APP): Home Minister Mir Zia Langau held a high-profile press conference in Quetta, disclosing that security forces, acting on intelligence reports, thwarted a BLA plan to use two minor girls in suicide attacks.

The minister presented the two girls, identified as Zainab (16) and Fatima (12), who had been prepared by the group for suicide missions. Zia Langau in a press conference said that their interrogation revealed the BLA's malicious and inhumane designs, exposing how the organization exploited vulnerable minors for terrorism.

According to the minister, Zainab's husband and several family members were killed by militants, after which a local BLA commander manipulated her grief and resentment, falsely blaming state institutions and urging her to seek revenge. Fatima, Zainab's cousin, was similarly coerced after her father was targeted by the group. Both girls disclosed that they were kept at an undisclosed location for forty days, subjected to mistreatment, and pressured to carry out suicide attacks.

Zia Langau emphasized that the plot was foiled when security forces intercepted the girls during a transfer operation, saving their lives. The girls expressed gratitude to the forces for rescuing them and appealed to the government and the nation for forgiveness.

The minister condemned the BLA's actions, describing them as a violation of cultural and social values, and accused external hostile elements of orchestrating such plots to destabilize Balochistan. He stressed that while isolated incidents of terrorism occur, security agencies successfully prevent numerous attacks, underscoring their vigilance and sacrifices.

Zia Langau reiterated that the government is committed to providing children with opportunities in education, health, and welfare, ensuring they are protected from extremist exploitation. He urged parents and communities to remain vigilant and safeguard minors from falling prey to terrorist propaganda.

CJP to inaugurate newly established Facilitation Center at BHC

QUETTA, (VoM Report): The inauguration ceremony of the newly established Facilitation Center at the High Court of Balochistan, Quetta, will be held tomorrow, Monday, August 31, 2026. The center will be inaugurated by the Chief Justice of Pakistan, Justice Yahya Afridi. The inauguration ceremony will be attended by honorable judges of the Supreme Court of Pakistan and the High Court of Balochistan, as well as honorable Chief Justices. The ceremony will be held at 10:30 a.m. on the premises of the High Court of Balochistan, Quetta.

The purpose of establishing the newly established Facilitation Center is to provide litigants and lawyers with easy, timely, and improved services, as well as essential facilities related to judicial matters at a single location.

With the establishment of the Facilitation Center, it is expected that the difficulties faced by litigants will be reduced.

All promises made to people to be fulfilled: Bakht Kakar

QUETTA, (APP): Balochistan's Provincial Health Minister, Bakhth Muhammad Kakar, has vowed to transform Nawankilli into a modern and developed city, reaffirming his commitment to fulfill all promises made to the people during the elections.

The minister addressed a large public gathering in Nawankilli, attended by elders, political and social figures, party workers, and women from various parts of constituency PB-39. During the event, residents highlighted issues facing their localities. Kakar listened to the concerns individually and directed relevant authorities to take immediate and priority-based measures for their resolution. In his speech, Kakar emphasized that his office and residence remain open 24 hours for the people of PB-39, assuring them that every possible effort will be made to address their problems.



QUETTA: group photo of women parliamentarians after a meeting with Noreen Bano Lehri, Chairperson of the National Commission on the Status of Women.

THE VOICE OF MILLIONS

Monday August 31, 2026

Alarming poverty level

A new World Bank report on poverty, equity and resilience in Pakistan delivers a sobering verdict — Pakistan's hard-won gains in reducing poverty are rapidly unraveling. The alarming reversal demands immediate and decisive action. Unfortunately, the government appears to lack the funding or foresight to implement a suitable plan of action.

After two decades of significant progress that saw the national poverty rate fall dramatically, the trend has sharply reversed since 2020, when the Covid-19 pandemic upended the global economy. Though Pakistan's economy famously appeared to have done relatively well during the pandemic, underlying issues actually became more pronounced, especially for millions of people who were unable to find regular work and earn money.

The rate is now projected to cross 25% this year, while calculations using constant values and more countries put it at almost 45%. While Covid played a big role, the setback was also driven by economic shocks, including high inflation and the 2022 floods, but the root cause is a deeper structural flaw. The consumption-driven growth model that powered earlier gains has reached its limits.

The report highlights that over 85% of jobs are in informal sectors, where employees lack job security or the prospects of a raise or other improvement in income.

It is also worth noting that rural poverty is more than double the urban rate, and geographic disparities are severe, with poverty in some districts exceeding 70%. Crippling human capital deficits, such as widespread child stunting and a learning crisis where 75% of children cannot read a simple story, lock families into poverty.

The World Bank has outlined a critical pathway for recovery, but it would require investing in people — improving health, education and basic services — while building household resilience through stronger social safety nets and adopting progressive fiscal measures to target support towards the most vulnerable.

Unacknowledged heroes

ALI TAUQEER SHEIKH

A recent encounter with the UK's All Party Parliamentary Group for Bees, Pollinators and Invertebrates has revealed something remarkable: British parliamentarians have formed a cross-party group specifically acknowledging invertebrates' profound connection with climate change, biodiversity, trade and human health.

This initiative raises crucial questions about Pakistan's own invertebrate populations. As our country experiences frequent floods, droughts and heatwaves, how are these climatic extremes affecting the unsung architects of our ecosystems? What implications do these impacts hold for Pakistan's food security and public health?

In Pakistan, the global and national significa--n--ce of insects and invertebrates is profound yet ov--erlooked and critically threatened. Their collective work underpins the very foundations of life: from pollinating the crops that feed us to decomposing organic matter that enriches our soils.

These unrecognised heroes of ecosystems are indispensable to biodiversity and food security. Pakistan's diverse ecology, from the Himalayas to the Indus delta, is home to a wide range of invertebrates crucial to environmental and economic health. As the backbone of the country's agriculture, insect pollinators are vital for such crops as fruit, vegetables and cotton.

Beyond farming, insects play crucial roles in nutrient cycling in arid zones and maintaining the delicate balance of alpine flora. Aquatic invertebrates serve as indicators of water quality and support aquatic food chains in our water bodies. While credible data is hard to come by, some species like the Kashmir Kaiser-i-Hind butterfly are considered globally threatened. Threats to these species are multifaceted.

In Pakistan, the significance of insects and invertebrates is profound yet overlooked.

Bees are the most critical pollinators, enabling the reproduction of major food crops and wild flowering plants. Without them, farm yield would plummet. Beyond pollination, insects like ladybugs are natural pest controllers, reducing the need for chemical pesticides. Beetles and earthworms, known as detritivores, decompose organic matter, enriching soil and preventing erosion.

They also form the base of food chains, supporting birds, amphibians and mammals. The decline of insect populations is a crisis.

Impact of floods: Floods, like the recent ones in Pakistan, cause mass invertebrate mortality, as widespread floods and prolonged inundation drown or wash away vast numbers of terrestrial insects and their nests. These events also lead to habitat destruction, as floodwaters destroy the plants and soil that invertebrates rely on for food and shelter. The water itself, often polluted, can be toxic in Pakistan.

Phenological mismatch and species migration: Perhaps most concerning is the slow climatic on--set of phenological mismatches: the decoupling of synchronised relationships between insects and their food sources. As temperatures shift, bees may emerge from hibernation before their preferred flowers bloom, while butterfly lifecycles become misaligned with host plant availability. Across Pakistan's seven elevation zones, from the Thar desert to the Karakorams, these mismatches create unpredictable ecosystem dynamics.

Climate change has also triggered a northward movement of species. Rising temperatures and al--tered precipitation patterns have enabled disease vectors like mosquitoes to establish their ha--bitat in previously cooler, higher-altitude regi-ons. Stu-dies in Islamabad and Peshawar show increasing dengue transmission risk as these vectors colonise northern Pakistan, while native invertebrate populations struggle with changing conditions.

Invertebrate wealth: Pakistan's diverse ecosystems host a range of invertebrates crucial for environmental and economic resilience.

Native bee species serve as the backbone of agriculture, pollinating key export crops like cotton, fruit and oilseeds. The economic value of these pollination services is invisible in the national account.

Beyond agriculture, many unique species represent significant biodiversity assets and potential flagships for ecotourism in northern Pakistan. Aquatic invertebrates serve as vital indicators of water quality throughout our river systems, while beneficial insects like ladybugs provide natural pest control.

Growing international trade in invertebrates presents both opportunities and risks. Pakistan could develop indigenous biocontrol solutions for export while expanding its managed pollination services sector. The commercial production and harvesting of insects have emerged as a major trade commodity.

However, unregulated trade poses biosecurity threats, as seen with the global spread of Varroa mites that have devastated honeybee populations worldwide. While Pakistan also grapples with illegal wildlife trafficking of mammals and reptiles, invertebrate commerce requires distinct regulatory frameworks due to its unique biosecurity and ecological implications.

Governance gaps: Pakistan addresses invertebrate protection through multiple agencies, primarily the ministries of climate change and food security. Key legislation includes the Pakistan Plant Quarantine Act (1976) and the Pakistan Trade Control of Wild Fauna and Flora Act (2012) aligned with CITES. However, significant gaps re--main.

Despite research conducted by the Ento-mo-logical Research Institute and various universit-ies, the Pakistan Zoological Survey lacks a centr-a--lised national dataset for monitoring invertebr-ate populations — a critical oversight given their importance to agricultural and food security.

Conservation priorities: Protecting Pakistan's invertebrates requires immediate action across four fronts: conducting nationwide population su--r-veys and enhanced entomological research to un--derstand climate vulnerabilities; strengthening protected areas and converting lands along railway tracks and road networks into ecological corridors linking fragmented habitats.

Hostage by law

USAMA KHILJI

A barrage of cases filed under various laws against lawyers working on issues the state wants silence on — where the law and Constitution are being undermined — shows how defending rights by those under oath to uphold it has seemingly become criminal. Worse, a bar divided — much like the bench — is also involved in registering trumped-up charges against their own members to make the disposal of these cases difficult.

The right to representation, due process and fair trial are enshrined in the Constitution and lawyers' oaths, but there seems to be an unannounced policy of punishing those who work on issues that the state wants silence on: enforced disappearances, defending the political opposition, media censorship, arbitrary inclusion of names on no-fly lists, false blasphemy charges and criticising the controversial 26th Amendment that gave expanded powers to the executive in the appointment and transfer of judges.

Most lawyers and several judges contend that the 26th Amendment has undermined judicial independence by giving the executive more control over the judiciary as well as the allocation of court cases. Resultantly, the exclusion of the more independent judges from constitutional cases has led to more decisions in favour of the executive.

Two recent issues have highlighted the rifts between the judges of the Islamabad High Court as well as overall issues in the dispensation of justice. First, Justice Tariq Mehmood Jahangiri was barred from carrying out his judicial duties until the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) decided on the case of his allegedly fake degree. Second, Justice Saman Rafat Imtiaz was stripped of her powers to entertain harassment complaints after she took cognisance of a complaint filed by lawyer Imaan Hazir-Mazari alleging harassment by IHC Chief Justice Sarfraz Dogar.

Lawyers must unite for judicial freedom.

In the aftermath of these and other controversies, five IHC judges took the extraordinary step of filing petitions in the Supreme Court, asking it to declare that administrative powers could not be "deployed to undermine or trump judicial powers", and to rule that a chief justice of a high court "cannot exclude available judges from the roster at will and use the power to issue a roster to oust judges from performing judicial functions". The apex court has returned the petitions by the justices without admitting them, and has also not listed the cases challenging the 26th Amendment for undermining judicial independence. The irony.

It must be noted that the same judges had written a letter to the SJC in 2024 asking for guidance in the face of "brazen meddling" by the executive in judicial matters at the IHC. This included a case of surveillance cameras being found in Justice Jahangiri's residence, and the brother-in-law of a lower court judge being disappeared for a few days to influence a court decision. The 26th Amendment was passed a few months after these grievances were made public by the judges, with the elevation of one of the judges — Justice Kayani — to the chief justice's position blocked by Justice Dogar's transfer from the Lahore High Court to Islamabad.

Lawyers at the IHC decided to protest last week against the bar on Justice Jahangiri's judicial duties as a violation of constitutional principles. However, a scuffle broke out between some lawyers and the president of the Islamabad High Court Bar Association, who was accused of letting his voters down. This led the IHCBA president to register an FIR against all the protesting lawyers under the Anti-Terrorism Act and the Pakistan Penal Code on charges of attempted murder. Such a disproporti-o-nate response aga-i-nst members of one's own bar on a minor brawl and implicating all lawyers, including women lawyers and others who were nowhere close to the scene of the scuffle, speaks volumes for the cracks within Pakistan's bar associations. And, it exposes the state's willingness to take any opportunity to persecute anyone — including lawyers — who doesn't toe the line.

In light of these divisions, it is of utmost importance that lawyers across the country unite in favour of judicial independence — for the sake of preserving their profession if nothing else. Short-term personal gains must not blur the larger crisis of justice in the country, where public trust in the courts is eroding by the day.

At the same time, if judges are serious about maintaining independence and want to disprove allegations of being controlled by the executive, they must demonstrate it through actions that do not include dismissing petitions, disempowering fellow judges and writing three-word verdicts. Last, the state must take its newfound external validation to start internal political processes to rectify matters rather than stoking more divisions.

Lighting the way

KHURRAM HUSAIN

The World Bank has issued a stark warning to Pakistan in a report released on Tuesday.

The country's growth model has run its course, and over the past five years, the number of people living below the poverty line has begun to swell after two decades of shrinkage.

Not only that. Nearly 40 per cent of children are stunted, and this percentage has not changed much over a long period of time. One quarter of children of primary school age remain out of school. Of the ones that do go to school, 75pc of those who finish primary schooling cannot read, or follow a simple story.

One after another, the dismal state of the population as seen in the social indicators testifies to the fact that the economy is not delivering, whether or not it grows. The middle of the decade of the 2010s saw a high-growth spurt, yet between the years 2011 and 2021, "real wage growth in sectors employing the poor remained minimal at just 2-3pc" the report notes, "making the poor ill-equipped to convert economic growth into income-generating opportunities".

The report is a strong reminder that Pakistan's economic urgency is actually not about growth. It is about reform. This economy cannot lift people out of poverty even when it grows. It cannot reduce income disparities between urban and rural, or between geographical regions. It cannot create enough jobs for the youth, or furnish income-generating opportunities for women at a rate sufficiently fast to make any meaningful impact in the lives of the multitude.

One reason for this, the report points out, is that 95pc of all job growth for the poor in the early years of the 2000s, when poverty levels fell sharply, was due to opportunities in the informal sector, and the movement of labour from agriculture to low-quality jobs in services and construction. That drop in poverty was not brought about due to expanding opportunities in the formal sector.

The World Bank report is a strong reminder that Pakistan's economic urgency is actually not about growth.

Meanwhile, the state as presently constituted cannot educate its children, reduce the incidence of stunting among them, build resilience to shocks (such as floods) at the local level — and on and on and on.

The report proposes a number of pathways forward. These include strengthened public service delivery, devolution to local governments and their empowerment via a fiscal model that provides them with the resources they need to discharge their responsibilities.

Other ways forward include what they call "building resilience" via social safety nets and improved targeting through the National Socio-Economic Registry, and finally developing better data systems "through a robust statistical infrastructure that produces accessible, high-frequency, and granular data" to drive evidence-based research, which can serve both as a feedback loop and an input in policy design.

Of all these, the last deserves particular mention. I have long argued for more legally mandated data release templates across government departments. This has many benefits that appear slowly, but reliably, and help focus attention on metrics against which to measure progress.

For now, the single most robust data dissemination template that operates in the country is the one that focuses on the health of the external sector. We get high-quality data on the balance of payments and trade, and multiple data points against which to measure the foreign exchange reserves, as well as the forward positions taken by the State Bank. The debt statistics are more thorough than any other, and a clear picture of Pakistan's debt profile can be easily built very quickly.

Try finding out a few basic facts about education or health, however, and you'll notice how woefully inadequate our data is. Try looking for more regular data on the power sector, and you will have to wade through unspeakably complex Nepra documents to piece the picture together yourself. Forget about employment. That data gets released once a year in a good year. Maybe the World Bank can play a proactive role here in helping develop a data release template for the power sector, for starters. Maybe it would be a good idea for data on the accumulation of circular debt to be released officially, as per pre-defined protocols, on a fortnightly basis.

Maybe there should be a simple data page on the Nepra website, where we can see fuel consumption data broken down by power plant every month. Maybe units sent out can be shown on a map by coverage area, and next to it we can see recoveries made in the same area during the same period.

There is a lot of room for expansion here. The provincial governments should also be mandated to release key data relating to health and education on a regular basis. The template for this release should be standardised to enable comparisons across provinces, and ideally with other countries as well.

This sort of data release requirement helps bring some discipline in government departments. It enables outsiders to track performance. It helps identify those areas where policy needs to be strengthened. And it reduces the scope for discretionary decision-making. In short, an expansive and standardised data collection and disclosure requirement on government departments can help bring about the kinds of reforms the World Bank is saying Pakistan needs to undertake.

One big reason why change is so hard to bring about in this country is precisely because large swathes of it operate in the dark, in the sense that there is no transparency. Without transparency, it is hard to build accountability. And without accountability, there is no incentive to change, because continuing with business as usual is easier and risk-free.

Hidden watermark

F.S. AIJAZUDDIN

The atomic mushroom cloud has cha-n-ged shape: it is now a nuclear umbrella. Historically, an umbrella has symbolised 'protection, power, and prestige'. (The Thai king has nine above his head.) It is now a warning: Noli me tángere/ Do not touch me. Or if you do, it is at your peril and cost.

During wartime, self-interest drives countries to become allies. In 1939, Stalin's Soviet Union entered into a non-aggression pact with Hitler's Germany. Hitler's invasion of Russia in 1941 put paid to that.

In August 1945, the Soviet Union and the US-backed government of Chiang Kai-shek signed a treaty against Mao Zedong's Communist PLA. After Chiang Kai-shek's flight to Taiwan, Stalin switched sides and signed a fresh agreement with Mao.

In August 1971, Mrs Indira Gandhi threw her father's non-alignment to the winds and sought Soviet support as pre-emptive protection against Nixon's tilt to--wards Yahya Khan. To counter it, she si-g-ned the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Fri----endship and Co--operation. The Soviets agr-eed to "provide arms and guarantee a mu--tual defence". This 20-year treaty outlived her. It died when the USSR did, in 1991.

SMDA mimics Nato's umbrella obligations.

The most durable and sinister mutual defence pact of modern times has been Nato's treaty of 1949. Under its Article 5, if any Nato member country is attacked, "each and every other member of the Alliance will consider this act of violence as an armed attack against all members [emphasis added]". They are bound to assist the ally attacked. Caveat aggressor.

The ongoing conflict in Ukraine between Putin's Russia and the US-led Coalition of the Willing binding 31 countries, plus US's unequivocal support for Israel, has demolished the centuries-old Westphalian concepts of territorial integrity and national sovereignty. Gone is the gossamer 'equilibrium of power'. Instead, there is unbridled 'supranational authority' in each hemisphere.

Peripheral countries are left to scramble for 'friends, not masters'. That explains Saudi Arabia's hurry to sign a Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement (SMDA) with Pakistan on Sept 17, 2025. The agreement mimics Nato's umbrella obligations. It provides that any aggression against either country shall be considered aggression against both. Vulnerable others can join this alliance in the future. Its doors are 'not closed'.

Both parties to the SMDA have emphasised that it is not a knee-jerk reaction to Israel's recent violation of Qatari airspace. Our defence minister explains that the SMDA is simply the consummation of years of Pakistan's "military cooperation and brotherly relationship with Saudi Arabia'. If so, why not earlier? If not, why now? Arab nations speak the same language but not all with the same meaning. Unity of action eludes them. The SMDA is touted as a strategic union. It is premised on fulfilling the parties' needs reciprocally. Concerned parties have asked whether personnel and nuclear material can be part of a strategic exchange. Saudi Arabia (and any other rich Arab country who joins) has the money to pay. It is seen as a conjunction of interests.

Who will give what or take how much is not disclosed in the SMDA. Pakistan will be expected to do more than simply provide a contingent to protect the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, equivalent to the Papal Swiss Guard in Rome. The latter, though armed with ceremonial halberds and swords, could not prevent a Turk from shooting Pope John Paul II in St Peter's Square in 1981.

PM Shehbaz Sharif and Field Marshal Asim Munir have every reason to feel satisfied. Pakistan is no longer being regarded as a poor supplicant, begging for Saudi dole. It is now the muscled giver, not a flaccid taker. Reg-ar-dless of the potency inherent in the SMDA which dots the I's in Israel and India, its efficacy will lie in its application — if Saudi Arabia or Pakistan are attacked.

Trump says Putin will not attack NATO territory

WASHINGTON, (Monitoring Desk): US President Donald Trump said that Russian President Vladimir Putin "is not going to be attacking a NATO territory."
Asked in the Oval Office whether Putin had agreed or committed not to attack NATO territory, Trump replied: "I had good talks with him. He's not going to be attacking a NATO territory."
About whether he wanted to deliver a warning to Russia not to attack NATO territory, Trump said: "I don't want to comment on that, but they're not going to attack."
CIA Director John Ratcliffe recently met Russian officials in Moscow, with some reports claiming he warned Moscow not to escalate conflict with America's NATO allies over their support for Ukraine.
Trump was also pressed on whether Washington would "punish" Putin or Russia if Moscow continued doing business with Iran despite US warnings.
"It depends. It depends," Trump said. "So far, I think Russia's behaved quite well having to do with the Strait of Hormuz."
In a Thursday interview with Axios, Trump said he was "not concerned ... at all" that Russia would attack a NATO country, saying: "There is no problem."
Trump also disputed reports that Ratcliffe traveled to Moscow to warn Russia against attacking NATO territory.
According to Axios, Trump characterized Ratcliffe's meeting with Russian Foreign Intelligence Service chief Sergey Naryshkin as "standard business."
"Ratcliffe sees his Russian counterpart once every six months or once every year. They have a very good relationship. There was no message and there was nothing unusual," Trump said.



Relatives of Palestinians, who lost their lives following the Israeli attack on Al-Karara town, mourn during funeral process in Khan Yunis, Gaza, Palestine.



Syria's President Ahmed al-Sharaa meets with SDF ringleader Mazloum Abdi, at the People's Palace in Damascus.

No regional oil sales unless Iran sells too: Ghalibaf

TEHRAN, (Monitoring Desk): Iran's parliament speaker has firmly responded to recent remarks by US CENTCOM Commander Brad Cooper, reiterating Tehran's earlier stance that no one would sell oil in the region if Iran doesn't.
Reposting his Persian language post on his X account, Mohammad Baqer Ghalibaf warned that in a region where Iran doesn't sell oil, no one else will.
The equation of this war is quite clear: either everyone is secure, or no one is, he stated.
He asserted that if Iran's national security is compromised, no regional infrastructure will remain safe, emphasizing that stability in the Strait of Hormuz is contingent upon the absence of US forces from the region.
He concluded by reiterating a point made on several previous occasions: the Strait will not return to its pre-war status.

Muslim states shouldn't be launchpads for attacks on Iran: Tehran

Pezeshkian says no Islamic country should seek its own security through the insecurity of its neighbors

TEHRAN, (Monitoring Desk): Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian urged Muslim countries to not allow their territory to be used for attacks against other Muslim nations.
"Defending Iran does not mean hostility toward Muslim nations or neighboring countries," Pezeshkian said in an address broadcast on Iranian state television during the 40th International Islamic Unity Conference in Tehran.
"No Islamic country should allow its territory to be used as a launchpad for aggression against another Islamic country. No Islamic country should seek its own security through the insecurity of its neighbors," he said.
Referring to the conflict with the U.S., Pezeshkian said large-scale U.S. and Israeli military attacks against Iran began while diplomatic efforts between Tehran and Washington to resolve their differences were still underway.
He said Iran-U.S. negotiations had resumed that same month in an effort to find a diplomatic solution when the attacks began, killing Iranian commanders, officials, scientists, students, schoolchildren and civilians, as well as targeting cities and infrastructure. According to Iran's state-run IRNA news agency, around 600 domestic and international guests from 40 countries, including Iraq, Pakistan, Türkiye, Lebanon and Afghanistan, are attending the conference. The conference will continue through Sunday.

Iran's unseen supreme leader fuels questions over who is in charge

TEHRAN, (Monitoring Desk): Six months after the airstrikes that triggered the war and thrust a badly wounded Mojtaba Khamenei into the role of Iran's supreme leader, he remains almost completely absent from public view, creating an unusual vacuum at the center of the country's leadership.
Questions about Khamenei's health and ability to govern are becoming increasingly sensitive as Iran faces critical decisions over a war that has destabilized the Middle East and further battered its already fragile economy.
Iranian officials and senior sources familiar with the leadership say Khamenei remains firmly in control, governing largely from the shadows because of security concerns while recovering from injuries that have reportedly left him disfigured.
They say he has delegated much of the day-to-day running of the country to a small group of senior officials.
But Khamenei has not appeared in a photograph or video, nor has he delivered a recorded audio message, since he was appointed supreme leader about a week into the war. His prolonged absence has fueled growing skepticism among Iranians in a political system where the supreme leader is expected to project authority and remain the ultimate voice on matters of state.
"The question is no longer whether Mojtaba is alive, but whether Iran still has a functioning supreme leader," said Alex Vatanka of the Middle East Institute in Washington.
Khamenei has communicated with the Iranian public only through a small number of written statements read by state broadcasters. He was also notably absent from the elaborate weeklong funeral rites held for his father last month, further intensifying speculation about his health and whereabouts.
Iranian officials and insiders attribute his continued absence to fears of assassination. They insist, however, that he remains actively involved in governing, holding frequent meetings with senior officials, receiving reports on major developments and making the final decisions on key national issues.
President Masoud Pezeshkian said Aug. 10 that he had held a seven-hour meeting with Khamenei.
But even among the Islamic Republic's most hard-line supporters, doubts are creeping in.
"We need to hear our leader's voice, or see any sign that he is there on top and leading the country to give us more confidence," said a member of the Basij volunteer militia in Qom, the seminary city at the heart of Iran's theocratic state.
The Basij member, who requested anonymity to discuss such a sensitive subject, said he believed Khamenei was still making key decisions. But he said the lack of even a photograph was damaging morale and not in Iran's interest. Among Iranians who oppose the ruling hierarchy or want broad reforms, the message is blunter. "How do we know that Mojtaba has not been killed?" said Shahrokh, a pro-reform businessman in Tehran who also requested anonymity.



Hundreds of traders and businesspeople stage a demonstration in Nairobi, Kenya, to protest rising tax rates and the increasing cost of living.



The European premiere of 'Practical Magic 2' was held at the Odeon Luxe Leicester Square in London. Sandra Bullock also attended the premiere.

UN rights office slams Trump's Palestine Action terrorism designation

WASHINGTON, (Monitoring Desk): The U.N. human rights office said that the Trump administration's designation of Palestine Action as a terrorist organization was a "disproportionate and unnecessary restriction" on freedom of speech, warning that it represented an expansive use of the term terrorism and could have a chilling effect on civil liberties.
Washington designated Palestine Action as a terrorist organization, saying the move was part of President Donald Trump's broader effort to crack down on left-wing groups as part of his counterterrorism agenda.
Israel's Foreign Ministry welcomed the designation.
The U.N. human rights office, led by U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk, said the designation appeared to restrict fundamental rights, including freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association, as well as participation in public affairs.
"Expansive use of the term 'terrorism' has been documented to have a chilling effect on civic space," the office said.
Britain previously banned Palestine Action as a terrorist organization, a move that was also condemned by Türk's office. The U.K. Supreme Court has said it will hear an appeal of a lower court ruling that Britain's decision to ban the campaign group as a terrorist organization was lawful. Palestine Action has targeted Israel-linked defense companies in Britain, particularly Israel's largest defense firm, Elbit Systems, often blocking entrances or spraying buildings with red paint. The group was banned by Britain shortly after a June 2025 break-in at Royal Air Force Brize Norton.

Syria's al-Sharaa names SDF's Abdi presidential adviser after dissolution

DAMASCUS, (Monitoring Desk): Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa appointed former SDF ringleader Ferhat Abdi ªahin, also known as Mazloum Abdi, as a presidential adviser, cementing a dramatic political shift just days after the group announced its dissolution and integration into state institutions. The appointment was announced in a decree signed by al-Sharaa and carried by state news agency SANA. "Mustafa Khalil Abdi is appointed as adviser to the presidency of the republic," the decree said, using one of the names by which Abdi has been known. His appointment comes after he announced Tuesday that the SDF would dissolve under an agreement reached with Damascus in January to integrate its armed units and civilian administration into Syrian state institutions.
Abdi said the move followed "the completion of the process of integrating our forces into the brigades of the Syrian army." Syria's new authorities, which took power after the ouster of longtime dictator Bashar Assad in 2024, have sought to restore central government control across the country after years of fragmentation during the civil war.
U.S. special envoy for Syria Tom Barrack welcomed the agreement Tuesday, describing it as an example of former rivals reaching a diplomatic settlement aimed at strengthening Syrian sovereignty. Barrack also said securing meaningful government roles for Kurdish figures, including Abdi, would recognize their leadership and contributions to regional stability. Abdi agreed to integration with Damascus after government forces captured significant territory from terrorist PKK/YPG-led forces during clashes.

EU, 14 countries condemn Israel's seizure of UNRWA facility in occupied East Jerusalem

BRUSSELS, (Monitoring Desk): The European Union and 14 countries condemned Israel's seizure of a UNRWA-run facility in occupied East Jerusalem, reaffirming support for the UN agency tasked with providing assistance to Palestinian refugees.
In a joint statement published by the Belgian Consulate-General in Jerusalem, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, the EU, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Switzerland and the UK all strongly condemned the "unlawful entry" by Israeli forces into UNRWA's Qalandia Training Center on Tuesday and the seizure of UNRWA facilities in East Jerusalem.
The countries, all members of the UNRWA Advisory Commission, noted that UN premises are protected under international law through the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations, and therefore must be respected.
They called for Israel's "immediate and full compliance" with UN directives allowing UNRWA to carry out its mandated activities without interference.
Signatories further called on Israel "to honor its obligations and to halt all disruptions to UNRWA's activities and operations without delay."
On Tuesday, Israeli forces expelled UNRWA staff from the center, seized the facility, and raised the Israeli flag in its courtyard.
Israeli military personnel deployed in the streets of the Qalandia refugee camp and the nearby Kafr Aqab neighborhood, where they conducted raids and searches and interrogated Palestinians.
The moves have drawn widespread international criticism.

German Left Party opposes Volkswagen's planned defense deal with Israeli firm

BERLIN, (Monitoring Desk): German auto giant Volkswagen's revived plans to convert production at its Osnabruck plant to military equipment in partnership with Israel's state-owned Rafael drew sharp condemnation from the opposition Left Party.
Thomas Gross, the party's mayoral candidate in Osnabruck for next month's election, strongly criticized Volkswagen's management over the controversial proposal and for leaving thousands of workers in the dark about their future. Cooperating with an Israeli state-owned enterprise is incompatible with Osnabruck's tradition as a "City of Peace," Gross said in a statement to media, citing the city's legacy as the birthplace of the 1648 Peace of Westphalia, which helped lay the foundations of modern international law.
He added that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government is responsible for numerous war crimes in Gaza, and that international human rights organizations believe they amount to genocide.
Gross emphasized that viable options exist to preserve civilian manufacturing in Osnabruck without converting the site into a defense facility. "The Left Party supports the proposal to produce minibuses at the plant, which are urgently needed for public transportation in rural areas," Gross said. "In our view, it is far more urgent to improve climate protection and climate adaptation than to pour billions into military buildup."



Search and rescue operations are underway in Bidur, a city in Nepal's Nuwakot region near the Nepal-China border, following landslides and flash floods. The death toll has risen to 469, while hundreds of people, including citizens from 32 countries are reported missing.



Members of the Nepalese community gathered and lit candles in Jackson Heights, New York, U.S. to mourn the victims of the devastating Bhote Koshi flash floods and landslides in Nepal

Nepal scrambles to find 1,300 missing as floods death toll hits 353

BIDUR, (Monitoring Desk): Nepalese rescue teams searched devastated areas for more than 1,300 people still missing after flash floods and landslides along the Nepal-Tibet border killed at least 353 and swept away entire villages. Homes were engulfed and vehicles tossed around by the tsunami-like rumble of water and mud that struck villages and towns Wednesday morning on the path of two rivers, Bhote Koshi and Trishuli.
Many of the missing are foreign tourists, including scores of Hindu pilgrims to Tibet's sacred snow-capped Mount Kailash.
According to the U.S. Geological Survey, the disaster was caused by a glacial collapse that sent forth an overwhelming flow of icy debris.
Emergency teams were racing to evacuate survivors from affected zones, fearing new flash floods. Nepali soldiers used sniffer dogs to search for bodies buried under thick grey sludge.
"Everything is finished," Omkar Joshi, 35, a Nepali customs agent rescued from a hilltop in the border town of Timure, told media. "It is a giant graveyard. All that is left are sand and pebbles, soaked red by human blood." Nepali police said they had recovered 353 bodies.
Another 823 people, including 517 foreign tourists, were out of contact in the country.

Pakistan possesses significant foundations for long-term economic progress: Ahsan

ISLAMABAD, (APP): Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Professor Ahsan Iqbal said Pakistan's central economic challenge was to convert macroeconomic stability into sustained growth, higher productivity, exports, investment and employment.

He expressed these views while addressing a visiting delegation of Harvard Business School (HBS) MBA students, a news release said.

Welcoming the delegation to the Ministry of Planning and Development, the minister said Pakistan should not be viewed merely through the prism of its challenges, but through the scale of its underlying potential.

With a population of nearly 260 million, a large youth cohort, a strategic geographic location, considerable agricultural and mineral resources, an expanding digital economy and a strong global diaspora, he said the country possessed significant foundations for long-term economic progress.

He said Pakistan must break the recurring cycle of "boom, external account pressure, stabilization and slowdown" by restructuring the economy around productivity and exports. "Stabilization is necessary, but stabilization alone is not development. Pakistan cannot austerity its way to prosperity. We have to earn our prosperity through productivity, innovation, investment and exports," Ahsan Iqbal said.

The minister briefed the delegation on URAAN Pakistan, the government's national transformation framework built around the 5Es: Exports, Enterprise and Employment; E-Pakistan and the digital economy; Environment, Climate Change, Food and Water Security; Energy and Infrastructure; and Equity, Ethics and Empowerment.

He said Pakistan had set the ambition of becoming a $1 trillion economy by 2035, but stressed that the objective was not simply to achieve a numerical GDP target. "The real question is what Pakistan will be capable of producing and selling competitively to the world in 2035 that it cannot produce today. Development is ultimately about building national capabilities," he said.

Ahsan Iqbal identified productivity, quality and innovation as critical determinants of Pakistan's future competitiveness. He said the government was seeking to build a national culture around Productivity, Quality and Innovation (PQI) so that "Made in Pakistan" increasingly became associated globally with reliability, quality and value.

Highlighting the importance of human capital, he said Pakistan's greatest resource was its people and warned that a young population could become a demographic liability unless supported by education, nutrition, healthcare, skills and employment.

"Human capital is our most important infrastructure. The enduring strength of advanced economies lies not only in physical assets but in the intellectual software generated by their universities, research institutions and innovation ecosystems," he said.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Professor Ahsan Iqbal in a group photo with the visiting delegation of Harvard Business School (HBS) MBA students



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif chairs a review meeting regarding FBR reforms

Acting President felicitates Iftikhar Gilani on his successful election as AJK PM

ISLAMABAD, (APP): Acting President of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan Sardar Ayaz Sadiq, felicitated Barrister Iftikhar Gilani on his successful election as Prime Minister of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK). He expressed his best wishes and prayers for the newly elected Prime Minister. Ayaz Sadiq said Barrister Iftikhar Gilani's election reflected the confidence of the members of the AJK Legislative Assembly in his leadership abilities.

He expressed hope that the newly elected Prime Minister would use his political insight and leadership skills to steer AJK towards development, prosperity and public welfare.

Acting President also said that the federal government would continue to extend its full support and cooperation for the development and prosperity of AJK.

He said the welfare of the people of Azad Jammu and Kashmir remained a priority.

Law Minister urges lawmakers to rise above political narratives

ISLAMABAD, (APP): Federal Minister for Law and Justice, Azam Nazeer Tarar described the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS) incident as a deeply painful tragedy, saying the entire nation was saddened by the loss of lives.

Speaking in the National Assembly, he said Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif had constituted two committees soon after the tragic fire incident to ascertain its causes and recommend measures to prevent such incidents in future.

The government was committed to determining the factors and causes that led to the tragic incident, he added. The minister said a former interior secretary, a highly reputed officer, had been entrusted with the inquiry and given two days to submit an interim report. He said the interim report was expected soon and its contents would be shared. The committee had also been directed to submit a detailed report to the prime minister within seven days. Based on the committee's recommendations, necessary action would be taken, he added.

Tarar said another four-member committee, headed by Dr Azhar Kiyani, had also been constituted to review the overall condition and requirements of PIMS and submit recommendations for its improvement.

The committee included a retired professor of medicine, a retired civil servant and another expert, he added. The Law Minister said the body had been notified as an administrative management oversight committee and would submit its report within seven days.

Implementation of reforms should be ensured to increase revenue collection, completely eradicate smuggling: PM Shehbaz

ISLAMABAD, (APP): Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif directed the authorities concerned to ensure the implementation of reformative measures in the tax system within the stipulated timeframe and accelerate effective action against tax evasion, smuggling, and illegal businesses.

The prime minister, chairing the weekly review meeting on FBR reforms here, directed a third-party audit of reforms to bring transparency, effectiveness, and sustainability to the process, saying that digitalisation, production monitoring, and automated systems were key pillars of the FBR reforms.

During the meeting, the prime minister, who was briefed on the restructuring of PRAL, said that the government's efforts to introduce tax reforms were aimed at the development of the country.

He said that the deployment of reputed goods evaluators in the FBR was a welcome step and appreciated the efforts of the Board's chairman and his team in this regard.

He also instructed that the implementation of reforms should be ensured to modernise and strengthen the tax system, increase revenue collection, and completely eradicate smuggling.

The participants of the meeting were given a detailed briefing on the ongoing reforms in the FBR, particularly the restructuring of PRAL, the digitalisation of the tax system, and the measures taken to curb smuggling.

It was informed that step-by-step work was underway on IRIS 3.0, a new tax operating model, and a central data hub to make the tax system modern, integrated, and data-driven, as international consultants have also been hired to design IRIS 3.0. Swift work was underway on a project under IRIS 3.0 to make the tax system more effective, pilot auto-taxation, and utilise artificial intelligence and machine learning in the future to improve tax collection. The participants were told that new senior-level appointments have been made in PRAL across various sectors, including technology, data security, operations, and the tax domain. Regarding the positive impacts of faceless assessment in the customs sector, the meeting was informed that from January to June 2026, there was a 12% increase in average revenue per Goods Declaration (GD), and that the system has also helped improve the identification and monitoring of import irregularities. The meeting was also briefed that the recruitment process of 280 goods evaluators was in its final stages and a Central Assessment Unit was being established in Islamabad that would be made operational by December 31, 2026.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Communications Abdul Aleem Khan presiding over a meeting regarding Axle Load Control Regime at the Ministry of Communications

Religious groups vows to promote peace, national unity, tolerance, social harmony

ISLAMABAD, (APP): Religious educational boards, seminaries and religious organizations across the country appreciated the government's efforts to resolve longstanding issues concerning madrassas.

The Pakistan Ulema Council, Mutahida Madaris Council, Mutahida Jamiat Ahl-e-Hadith and other religious organizations welcomed progress on madrassa registration, access to banking facilities and greater transparency in financial and administrative matters.

The religious leadership expressed gratitude to Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif and Chief of Army Staff and Chief of Defence Forces Syed Asim Munir for supporting efforts to address madrassa-related issues through consultation and institutional mechanisms, said a press released. They said the recent progress would help strengthen cooperation between religious seminaries and state institutions.

National Paigham-e-Aman Committee Coordinator and Pakistan Ulema Council Chairman Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mehmood Ashrafi, Mufti Abdul Rahim, Syed Ziaullah Shah Bukhari, Allama Arif Wahidi, Dr Asif Mir, Mufti Muhammad Karim Khan, Allama Tauqeer Abbas, Allama Muhammad Hussain Akbar and other religious scholars participated in the Youm-e-Tashakur activities. The participants said madrassas were an important part of Pakistan's educational and social system and could play an effective role in promoting peace and preventing extremism, terrorism and radicalization.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Climate Change and Environmental Coordination Dr. Musadik Malik delivers the keynote address at an event titled "Living with Floods in a Climate Change Present," organized by the AGHS Legal Aid Cell

IMF mission to visit Pakistan next month for fourth EFF review

ISLAMABAD, (Monitoring Desk): The International Monetary Fund (IMF) review mission is scheduled to visit Pakistan next month to conduct the fourth review of the country's $7 billion Extended Fund Facility (EFF). The review mission will inquire about the proposed legislation on the Sovereign Wealth Fund (SWF). The government has introduced the Pakistan Sovereign Wealth Fund (Amendment) Bill, 2026 in the Senate to revise governance and increase fiscal safeguards in order to fulfil IMF conditions. A top official in the Finance Division told media that the IMF review was expected to visit Pakistan in September 2026, but exact dates have not yet been confirmed. Pakistani high-ups have proposed six amendments to SOE-dedicated laws to parliament. They now need to progress with the remaining three State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) with dedicated laws by the end of August 2026.

The authorities have submitted a draft SWF Law amendment to parliament. These amendments clarify the legal mandate of the SWF as a holding company.



GUJRANWALA: Federal Minister for Interior, Mohsin Naqvi visiting NADRA mega center

Evidence-based probe underway into deaths of 14 newborns at PIMS: Mustafa Kamal

ISLAMABAD, (APP): Federal Minister for Health, Syed Mustafa Kamal assured the National Assembly that no person found responsible for the deaths of 14 newborn babies in the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS) fire incident would be spared, stressing that the government would ensure accountability based on evidence.

Speaking in the National Assembly, the minister said there could be no substitute for the lives of the innocent children and acknowledged that the tragedy had no justification. He said Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif had constituted a high-powered inquiry committee without including officials from any government department to ensure an impartial investigation. He said clear terms of reference had been set for the committee and all departments and institutions concerned had been directed to provide complete cooperation and information whenever required. Mustafa Kamal said the committee had been working for the past 24 hours and was examining the statements and positions of the Capital Development Authority (CDA), PIMS administration and other relevant quarters. He said the preliminary report of the committee was expected upon completion of 48 hours, adding that the investigation would be based on evidence, including digital evidence, video footage, eyewitness accounts and statements of relatives of the victims.

"I assure you on behalf of the government that whoever is found responsible, starting from my own office, no one will be spared," he said.

Mustafa Kamal also urged lawmakers not to impose an arbitrary deadline on the parliamentary committee, saying recommendations should be implemented as and when they emerged rather than waiting for a fixed period.

He said the tragedy should also prompt a broader discussion on child mortality in Pakistan, pointing out that infant deaths occurred annually in the country and many of these lives could potentially be saved through timely and effective healthcare interventions.

Special anti-polio campaign to target 204,000 children in Quetta schools, seminaries

QUETTA, (VoM Report): A special anti-polio campaign targeting approximately 204,000 children enrolled in schools and religious seminaries across Quetta will begin on Aug 31, with authorities finalizing security and coordination measures to ensure uninterrupted vaccination activities.

Deputy Commissioner Quetta Mehrullah Badini announced the target while chairing a meeting convened to review preparations for the campaign, including the operational strategy, security arrangements and coordination among departments concerned.

Officials informed the meeting that the drive would be specifically conducted in educational institutions and religious seminaries, where vaccination teams will administer anti-polio drops and vaccines to eligible children. Badini directed the relevant authorities to implement the security plan effectively and ensure comprehensive protection for vaccination personnel throughout the campaign.

No compromise could be made on safety, lives of children: Danyal

ISLAMABAD, (APP): Parliamentary Secretary for Information and Broadcasting Barrister Danyal Chaudhary called for a transparent investigation into the PIMS nursery fire that claimed the lives of 14 newborns, stressing that those found responsible for negligence must face action under the law. He made the remarks while chairing a meeting of the Advisory Council of the Parliamentary Caucus on Child Rights at the SDGs Secretariat in Islamabad, where lawmakers also called for stricter fire safety and emergency measures in hospitals, particularly neonatal nurseries.



The Advisory Council expressed deep grief over the deaths of the newborns in the PIMS nursery fire and stressed the need for a transparent investigation to establish the facts and determine responsibility for any negligence or lapse.

Mr Chaudhary said no compromise could be made on the safety and lives of children.



Twelve-year-old autistic anti-Islamophobia campaigner Joshua Harris distributes cakes to people at Al Muslimin Mosque Molenbeek and BIF Hijret Mosque in Brussels, Belgium, as part of his 'Cake Not Hate' campaign against anti-Muslim hate.

25 unauthorized mini petrol pumps sealed in Quetta

QUETTA, (VoM Report): The district administration has sealed 25 unauthorized mini petrol pumps and arrested 16 individuals in Sariab as part of an intensified campaign against illegal fuel outlets operating in densely populated parts of the city. The enforcement action was launched on the directives of Deputy Commissioner Quetta Mehrullah Badini and conducted under the supervision of the Special Magistrate Sariab.

During the operation, authorities shut down 25 mini petrol pumps found operating without the required authorization, while 16 people were taken into custody and subsequently sent to jail. Badini said unregulated fuel outlets in residential and heavily populated areas posed a significant danger to residents and property, particularly because of the potential hazards associated with the storage and handling of petroleum products.

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