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Saudi Arabia says Houthi drone intercepted near Makkah, group denies involvement

OIC condemns 'heinous attacks' on Makkah, Madinah region

JEDDAH, (Agencies): Saudi air defences intercepted and destroyed a drone launched by Yemen's Houthi group near Makkah, the Saudi-led coalition said early on Wednesday, while the Houthis denied responsibility for the launch.

Coalition spokesman Turki al-Malki said the drone was intercepted around 6:50pm local time on Tuesday before entering restricted airspace, with its wreckage falling south of the city.

Al-Malki described the incident as the Houthis' second attempt to target Makkah, citing a ballistic missile launched toward the city on July 27, 2017.

He said the security of the Two Holy Mosques and pilgrims was a "red line," vowing that the coalition would take measures to deter further attacks.

Meanwhile, the Houthis denied responsibility for the attack, rejecting the Saudi accusation that they had launched the drone.

"Claims of targeting Makkah are a nauseating lie that has been consumed before and no longer fools anyone," Hezam al-Asad, a senior member of the Houthi Supreme Political Council, said in a statement. The incident came a day after the coalition said 13 civilians were injured in missile and drone attacks by the Houthis on Khamis Mushait, Abha and Taif, with seven homes and two vehicles damaged.

Confrontations between Yemen's internationally recognised government's forces and the Houthis have escalated since early July following years of relative calm. The country has been engulfed in war since the Houthis seized the capital Sanaa and several provinces in 2014 before a Saudi-led Arab coalition intervened in 2015 in support of the internationally recognised government. The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation condemned what it called Houthi attacks on Makkah and the Madinah region, calling them "heinous attacks" intended to "terrorise civilians" and violate the sanctity of holy sites and mosques.Confrontations between Yemen's internationally recognised government forces and the Houthis have escalated since early July following years of relative calm.
The country has been engulfed in war since the Houthis seized the capital Sanaa and several provinces in 2014 before a Saudi-led Arab coalition intervened in 2015 in support of the government. Brigadier General Yahya Saree, spokesman for the Yemeni Armed Forces, said in a statement on Wednesday that Yemeni forces downed a Saudi F-15.



RAWALPINDI: Chief of Defence Forces and Chief of Army Staff Field Marshal Asim Munir in a group photo with the American defence company delegation.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif chairs a review meeting regarding the PM Special Relief Scheme (fuel subsidy) for motorcycles, rickshaws and 800 cc cars

PM orders public awareness drive for special fuel relief scheme

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, Wednesday, chaired a meeting to review progress on the PM Special Relief Scheme aimed at providing relief to low-income and middle-class citizens in view of recent increase in petroleum product prices amid the situation in the Gulf region.

The prime minister directed the establishment of facilitation desks comprising administration officials, volunteers and petrol pump staff to assist citizens in easily obtaining the subsidy.

He directed that personnel deployed at the facilitation desks should guide eligible citizens and provide them with all possible assistance in registration and other necessary procedures.

The prime minister also asked the relevant authorities to remain proactive in creating public awareness about the scheme. Under the scheme, fuel subsidies are being provided to owners of motorcycles, rickshaws and vehicles with engine capacities of up to 800cc, PM Office Media Wing said in a press release.

Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar, Ministers Ahad Khan Cheema, Attaullah Tarar, Shaza Fatima Khawaja and Ali Pervez Malik, Minister of State for Finance Bilal Azhar Kayani, Special Assistant Tariq Bajwa and senior officers of relevant institutions attended the meeting. The meeting was briefed on progress regarding the fuel subsidy scheme.

Following the launch of its pilot phase in Islamabad, the scheme has now been launched across the country, including Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan. The meeting was informed that the scheme had been designed in a simple and easy manner for the public to understand. Only four pieces of information were required for registration: the applicant's CNIC number, vehicle number plate, province of registration and vehicle registration date.

Complete details of the fuel subsidy scheme are available on its Urdu website, www.pmfuelrelief.pk.

The meeting was further informed that the number of successful registrations was gradually increasing.



ISLAMABAD: Chairman Senate, Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani delivering his keynote address at Somalia-Pakistan Partnership and Technical Cooperation Roundtable "Somalia-Pakistan Peer Learning Program On Foundational ID and Digital Public Infrastructure" organized by UNDP

Confident, talented younger generation essential for Balochistan's future: Dr Rubaba Buledi

QUETTA, (VoM Report): Provincial Adviser for Women Development Dr Rubaba Khan Buledi has stressed the need for greater opportunities, professional training and adequate sporting facilities for young women in Balochistan, saying the province's daughters have the talent and determination to achieve distinction at national and international competitions. She was speaking as chief guest at the closing ceremony of the 7th Women's Balochistan Wushu Championship 2026, where she witnessed demonstrations by female athletes and distributed gold medals among players who delivered notable performances. Dr Rubaba Buledi said sports provide young people



thinking and leadership abilities. She noted that Balochistan's youth had already demonstrated considerable potential in different sporting disciplines and could represent Pakistan with distinction when provided appropriate support. She said the achievements of female athletes were also contributing to a positive image of Balochistan, adding that encouraging girls to participate in sports was a shared responsibility of the government, educational and sporting institutions, families and society. The Provincial Adviser said the Women Development Department was pursuing initiatives aimed at improving the welfare of women and girls, safeguarding their rights, promoting education and health, building confidence and enabling their dignified and active participation in society.

CM Bugti remembers Sardar Sarfraz Domki with affection on death anniversary

QUETTA, (VoM Report): Balochistan Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti has paid tribute to his longtime friend Sardar Sarfraz Khan Domki on his death anniversary, recalling his kindness, humility and sincerity and saying the memories of their association continue to hold a special place in his heart.

In a message shared on Facebook, the Chief Minister reflected on the passage of time following the loss of a loved one, saying that while years may pass, the affection, sincerity and memories associated with certain people keep their presence alive in the hearts of those who knew them.

Mir Sarfraz Bugti described Sardar Sarfraz Domki as one of the most humble, compassionate and genuine individuals he had known. He recalled his simple and down-to-earth personality, along with the warmth and care he extended to people around him.

Time has come to implement Makkah pact amid Houthi attacks: Defence Minister

ISLAMABAD, (Monitoring Desk): Defence Minister Khawaja Asif on Wednesday said he believed the situation had reached a point where the Makkah agreement had to be implemented, following an attempted drone attack near the holy city.

"Makkah Agreement applies to us, and we will fulfil our duty," Asif said while speaking private news channel, adding that Pakistan was bound by the agreement but he could not go into its details.

He said Pakistan did not need an agreement to protect the holy sites, stressing that safeguarding them was a duty even in the absence of the Makkah Agreement. "If Makkah is attacked, there is no need for an agreement to protect it," Asif said.

His remarks came after Saudi Arabia said its air defences intercepted and destroyed a Houthi drone south of Makkah before it entered prohibited airspace over the holy city.

The drone was intercepted on Tuesday evening and was reportedly the second Houthi attempt to target Makkah, according to a spokesperson for the Saudi-led military coalition in Yemen.

Gilani for stronger Pak-Somalia cooperation in digital governance

ISLAMABAD, (APP): Chairman Senate Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani called for enhanced Pakistan-Somalia cooperation in digital governance, foundational identity, artificial intelligence and Digital Public Infrastructure, emphasizing the importance of South-South cooperation in developing practical solutions to shared challenges.

Addressing the concluding ceremony of the Somalia-Pakistan Peer Learning Programme on Foundational ID and Digital Public Infrastructure, Gilani said the programme demonstrated that meaningful international cooperation was not limited to formal agreements, but also involved sharing knowledge, experiences and practical solutions to strengthen institutions and improve citizens' lives.

He appreciated the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for facilitating the peer learning process and commended the partnership between Pakistan's NADRA and Somalia's National Identification and Registration Authority (NIRA) as a valuable example of South-South cooperation.

Friday to be observed as 'Day of Condemnation' against attempts to target Makkah

ISLAMABAD, (APP):Chairman Pakistan Ulema Council and Secretary-General International Tazeem-e-Haramain Sharifain Council, Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mehmood Ashrafi announced that the upcoming Friday would be observed across the country as a 'Day of Condemnation' against attempts to target Makkah al Mukarramah and attacks against the holy sites in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Addressing a press conference here, Ashrafi appealed to religious scholars, leaders, preachers and Imams from all schools of thought to condemn the attacks in their Friday sermons and highlight the unanimous position of the Muslim Ummah regarding the sanctity, security and protection of Haramain Sharifain.

He said Makkah al Mukarramah and Madinah al Munawwarah are at the heart of the faith and belief of Muslims, while the land of Haramain Sharifain represents a red line for the entire Muslim Ummah. "Muslims stand with the leadership and people of Saudi Arabia," he said, stressing that there could be no compromise on the sanctity, security and protection of Haramain Sharifain.

The press conference was also attended by Maulana Zulfiqar Ahmed, Maulana Zahid Mansoor and other religious scholars and leaders.

CDF calls for advanced solutions to enhance national security

RAWALPINDI, (Monitoring Desk): Chief of Defence Forces and Chief of Army Staff Field Marshal Asim Munir on Wednesday highlighted the importance of technological innovation and advanced solutions in strengthening national security and resilience in a meeting with an American defence company delegation.

A statement from the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said that representatives from POWERUS, specialising in defence and critical infrastructure solutions, called on CDF Munir at General Headquarters (GHQ) in Rawalpindi to discuss matters of mutual interest.

It further said the delegation, led by Robert Bret Velicovich, discussed evolving trends in defence technology and avenues for cooperation in defence procurement, production and capacity building.

"CDF highlighted the importance of technological innovation and advanced solutions in strengthening national security and resilience. Both sides expressed interest in further developing engagement in areas of mutual interest," the ISPR said. Pakistan has sought to expand engagement with the United States in defence and economic domains. In July, US lawmakers held talks with CDF Munir at GHQ on bilateral defence cooperation, private-sector partnerships and broader economic engagement.

In mid-January, American and Pakistani troops concluded a joint training at Pakistan's National Counter-Terrorism Centre in Pabbi.

In the same month, CDF Munir vowed to facilitate "a major transformation in Pakistan Armed Forces across multiple domains, with technology reshaping the future character of warfare" during his visit to Bahawalpur Garrison, as per ISPR. He had said the character of war had evolved massively, with technological advancements driving the evolution, dictating huge mental transformation at all tiers. In December, the US authorised the sale of advanced technology and support for Pakistan's F-16 fighter jets, worth $686 million. The package included Link-16 systems, cryptographic equipment, avionics updates, training, and comprehensive logistical support.



QUETTA: Federal Minister for National Heritage and Culture Aurangzeb Khan Khichi addressing the "Naqoosh-e-Watan" Mega Seminar as chief guest at Sardar Bahadur Khan Women's University

Balochistan holds central place in Pakistan's historical, cultural identity: Khichi

QUETTA, (VoM Report): Federal Minister for National Heritage and Culture Aurangzeb Khan Khichi has said Balochistan occupies a central place in Pakistan's historical and cultural identity, emphasizing that the country's national narrative cannot be viewed in its entirety without acknowledging the province's heritage and contributions.

Addressing the "Naqoosh-e-Watan" Mega Seminar as chief guest at Sardar Bahadur Khan Women's University, he said Pakistan should evolve into a society where every citizen feels that their language, culture and regional identity are respected and represented.

The seminar was organized in collaboration with the Balochistan Centre of Excellence, Government of Balochistan and Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF) to promote discussion on the country's cultural narrative, harmony and social cohesion.

Provincial Education Minister Raheela Hameed Durrani, PPAF Chief Executive Officer Nadir Gul Barech, Federal Secretary Asad Rehman Gilani, Balochistan Centre of Excellence Chief Coordination Officer Dr Dost Muhammad, Deputy Coordination Officer Dr Ismat Khan, Vice Chancellor Sardar Bahadur Khan Women's University Prof Dr Rubina Mushtaq, Lok Virsa Executive Director Dr Muhammad Waqas Saleem and Rehabilitation Centre In-charge Fahmida Kakar attended the event.

The seminar focused on strengthening cultural understanding and encouraging young people, particularly female students, to contribute constructively to society while recognizing the role of cultural diversity in building social harmony.

Raheela Hameed Durrani said cultural diversity should serve as a bridge among communities rather than become a cause of division.

She emphasized the importance of mutual respect and cultural understanding in strengthening national cohesion.

She also highlighted the economic potential of Balochistan's traditional skills, handicrafts, cultural diversity and tourism, saying these sectors could generate new livelihoods and income opportunities for local communities.



KALAT: Deputy Commissioner Ayesha Zehri issuing directives on the applications of people during the open court.

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A costly cut

Pakistan is confronting a growing climate threat at precisely the moment it has reduced spending on the institutions tasked with managing it. The decision to cut the climate ministry's PSDP allocation from Rs3.5bn to Rs2.48bn is difficult to justify given the challenges ahead. Climate risks are increasing and public investment should reflect that reality. Suparco has identified 130 potentially dangerous glacial lakes in Pakistan's northern regions, with downstream communities exposed to the risk of glacial lake outburst floods. While only 24 of these lakes are currently unfrozen and under observation, the findings show that our glaciers are under increasing stress. Rising temperatures are accelerating glacial melt in a country that contains one of the largest concentrations of ice outside the polar regions. The concern extends beyond the immediate flood danger. As glaciers retreat, the long-term reliability of river flows that sustain agriculture, hydropower generation and drinking water supplies comes into question. Then there is the climate outlook. Suparco has warned that El Niño conditions may bring weaker monsoon rainfall, more frequent heatwaves, drought conditions and warmer winters. Such shifts threaten crop yields, livestock production and water availability. Extreme heat already imposes economic costs through lost labour productivity, increased energy demand and mounting public health burdens. Droughts can damage food security and raise inflationary pressures, while erratic rainfall continues to expose vulnerable communities to both flooding and water shortages.

Climate change is increasingly a fiscal challenge. Governments are forced to divert scarce resources towards emergency relief, reconstruction and compensation instead of development priorities. Repeated climate shocks discourage investment, disrupt supply chains and place additional strain on an economy already grappling with tight public finances. Our experience in recent years demonstrates how quickly climate shocks can overwhelm public resources. The devastating floods of 2022 caused losses estimated at over $30bn and left a recovery bill that continues to burden public finances. The lesson is that preparedness costs less than reconstruction. Investments in climate monitoring, early warning systems, resilient infrastructure and disaster management are not discretionary expenditures. They are economic safeguards. The budget debate also raises questions about priorities. Senator Sherry Rehman was right to question why climate spending is being cut while hundreds of billions of rupees continue to flow towards loss-making SOEs. At a time when climate-related hazards are multiplying, reducing support for adaptation and resilience amounts to a costly policy error. Pakistan cannot control global emissions trends, but it can strengthen its capacity to cope with their consequences. That requires sustained funding, stronger institutions and long-term planning. The country's climate vulnerabilities are becoming more visible with each passing year. Ignoring them today will prove more expensive tomorrow.

From legislation to institution building

A Year of Reform and Transformation in the Home Department, Government of Balochistan

For decades, Balochistan has faced a unique combination of challenges, including terrorism, violent extremism, organized crime, narcotics trafficking, illegal migration, weak institutional capacity, and the complexities arising from its vast geography and strategic location.

Addressing these challenges requires more than routine administration. It requires strong institutions, modern legal frameworks, technological innovation, and a long-term commitment to strengthening the writ of the State.

Over the past year, under the leadership of Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti, the Home Department, Government of Balochistan, embarked upon an ambitious programme of legal, institutional, and administrative reforms aimed at transforming the province's security and governance architecture.

The reforms undertaken during this period were not limited to managing day-to-day law and order. They focused on building permanent institutions, modernizing governance structures, strengthening criminal justice mechanisms, and enhancing public safety across the province.

Strengthening the Legal Framework

One of the foremost priorities of the Home Department was the modernization of Balochistan's legal and criminal justice framework.

A series of important legislative reforms were initiated and implemented, including amendments to the Witness Protection framework, reforms in the Balochistan Forensic Science Agency legislation, legal provisions enabling Faceless Courts for high-risk terrorism cases, reforms relating to detention centres, enactment of the Safe City Authority framework, the Balochistan Prison and Correctional Service Act 2026, and the Probation and Parole Act.

These reforms represent a significant step towards building a modern, efficient and secure criminal justice system capable of responding to contemporary security challenges.

Turning Laws into Functioning Institutions

Legislation alone does not create change unless it is accompanied by implementation.

One of the defining achievements of the past year has been the operationalization of institutions and legal frameworks that had remained dormant or underutilized for many years.

The Centre of Excellence on Countering Violent Extremism was made fully functional and is now serving as a policy, research and analytical platform supporting evidence-based decision making and counter-extremism initiatives.

Similarly, detention centres were operationalized for the first time under the relevant legal framework. The Quetta facility is functional while a modern facility in Turbat is under development. These initiatives have strengthened the State's ability to manage high-risk detainees within a lawful and structured framework.

Building Institutions for the Future

Perhaps the most significant achievement of the Home Department during the past year has been institution building.

The Provincial Intelligence Fusion and Threat Assessment Centre (PIFTAC) was operationalized to enhance intelligence sharing, threat analysis and inter-agency coordination.

The Balochistan Integrated Security Architecture (BISA) was established to create a unified security coordination framework involving multiple departments and agencies.

The Balochistan Charities Registration Authority (BCRA) was activated and a province-wide process was initiated to regulate and register charities, NGOs, and religious seminaries in accordance with applicable laws.

Several specialized units were also established, including the Red Notice Cell, Anti-Illegal Spectrum Cell, Anti-Subversion Cell, Anti-Extortion Coordination Mechanism, and Human Trafficking Cell.

Together, these initiatives represent a shift towards proactive, intelligence-driven and institution-based governance.

Safe City and Technology-Based Security

Modern policing increasingly depends on technology.

During the past year, Safe City systems were reorganized under a unified provincial framework and institutional oversight was strengthened through the appointment of dedicated leadership.

Advanced surveillance systems, digital monitoring tools and technology-based enforcement mechanisms were introduced to improve crime prevention and law enforcement.

Within a short period of operation, these systems facilitated the recovery of more than one hundred stolen vehicles and contributed to the arrest of numerous criminal suspects.

Plans are also underway to expand Safe City initiatives to additional urban centres across the province.

Protecting Vulnerable Establishments

For the first time, the Security of Vulnerable Establishments framework was implemented in a comprehensive manner across the province.

Security audits were conducted for government offices, educational institutions, hospitals and other critical facilities.

More than 1,500 locations were equipped with modern CCTV surveillance systems, significantly strengthening protective security arrangements and improving emergency response capabilities.

Modernizing Counter-Terrorism Capacity

The Home Department continued to invest in modern counter-terrorism capabilities.

A dedicated drone unit was established to support surveillance, intelligence gathering, counter-terrorism operations and anti-narcotics campaigns.

Bomb disposal capabilities were further strengthened, while work also progressed on the implementation of video-link and faceless trial mechanisms for high-risk terrorism cases.

These measures aim to improve both operational effectiveness and the protection of judges, prosecutors and witnesses.

Repatriation of Illegal Foreign Nationals

One of the largest administrative and logistical exercises undertaken during the year was the implementation of the Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan.

Working in close coordination with district administrations, police, Levies, Special Branch, Frontier Corps and other stakeholders, the Home Department oversaw the organized and lawful repatriation of approximately 1.1 million illegal foreign nationals from the province.

Temporary holding and transit facilities established for this purpose were gradually phased out following completion of their mandate.

The initiative strengthened the rule of law, improved regulatory oversight and reduced pressure on public resources and service delivery systems.

Historic Anti-Poppy Campaign

The Home Department also led an unprecedented campaign against illegal poppy cultivation.

Using modern technology, drone surveillance, field verification and coordinated enforcement actions, thousands of acres of illegal cultivation were identified and eradicated.

The campaign represents one of the most significant anti-narcotics efforts undertaken in the province and has contributed substantially towards disrupting the illicit drug economy.

Action Against Illegal Tobacco Trade

A large-scale enforcement campaign was also launched against illegal tobacco cultivation, transportation and trade. Record quantities of illegal tobacco were seized, helping curb tax evasion, disrupt illicit markets and strengthen the formal economy.

Administrative Reforms

The year also witnessed important structural reforms within the province's security architecture. The Levies Force was successfully merged into the Police Department, while Civil Defence was integrated into the Special Branch.

Brutes & brutalised

Shahzad Sharjeel

Nothing seems to be working, especially when it comes to character building and instilling humane traits, particularly among men. In-person congregations of millions at tableeghiijtima, hundreds, if not thousands, of urs ceremonies around the country at shrines and mausoleums, televangelists, and social media platforms with a combined following of hundreds of millions gush morality and piety 24/7, and yet men go about brutalising women, other men, and animals. Something's got to give.

We have become a 250-million-strong, growing-by-the-minute, cursing, lashing-out mass — bent upon auto-cannibalisation. It is impossible to determine whether the brutality on display, ever-disgusting in its daily manifestations, is innate or a reaction of a systematically brutalised society. I, for one, am unable to stop imagining ways to inflict the worst possible pain on the criminal who attacked Dr Mahnoor with acid in a Quetta hospital.

The rage that is stirred within by the many instances of brutality even brushes aside criticism of 'encounter' killings as one finds oneself unsatisfied with the ultimate punishment dispensed by courts of law.

I may not be alone in this; many others must be racking their brains to devise severe deterrents to stop men from gouging out a camel's eyes or amputating the limbs of a cow that strayed into their field of crops. While I am at it, let me acknowledge the lack of imagination, as my mind keeps returning to the collective punishment practised by another set of brutes, such as the white colonialists, their brown successors and the Zionist Israeli regime.

Would confiscating movable and immovable assets and razing houses deter the would-be criminal? What if they have nothing to lose? OK, how about denying them their last rites? Notwithstanding the extremity of the idea, it assumes the culprit has died, legally or not. What if he is never apprehended? What form of collective punishment would compel him to surrender and/or serve as a deterrent to prevent the crime in the first place?

All these schemes may appear satisfying at first; however, we are also burdened with a conscience; else, why would we be discussing any of it? No amount of rage can stop one from asking, 'but how could you punish his family for his crimes?' An equally angry response could be 'but whose responsibility is it to raise him properly and ensure he stays on the straight and narrow?' The logic of 'it takes a village to raise a child' doesn't hold, for the villages — and the cities — are run by men dispensing jirga justice.

So then, how does one cultivate law-abiding, engaged citizens? This question may hold at least one key to the multiple cells we have locked ourselves in. To be engaged, people need to have a stake in the system and to know that breaking the law has consequences. Otherwise, no number of religious congregations, fulmination of the morality brigade on social media, or, for that matter, letting off steam at raves and jamming at private parties would temper the brute within us.

Those who don't have anything to look forward to in life could become a danger to themselves and society, but Zahir Jaffer had everything going for him, yet he brutally murdered Noor Mukadam. The logical conclusion of his trial would be a step towards establishing accountability and put a tiny dimple in our collective belief that the powerful go scot-free in Pakistan. As for those brutalising women and children, one really hopes for the worst of both worlds: first, jaza-saza sab yaheen pay hogi; yaheen azab-o-sawab hoga (all reckoning in this life) type rep-ay-m-ent; plus the lowest rungs of eternal hell in the hereafter. Now that we have the condemnations out of the way, let us turn to tangible measures and the state's responsibility. The euphemisms of 'waste band bullet' and the 'half' and 'full-fry' do not change the nature of extrajudicial measures. They have had no deterrent effect on would-be criminals.

A state that does not itself raise and harbour criminals for any policy gains will not allow any segment of society to do so. A state that does not manipulate the courts to secure favourable decisions can insist that the judiciary set its house in order. Only a state that does not use the police for political expediency could improve its investigative and prosecutorial capabilities, leading to convictions and, hopefully, some measure of deterrence.

Salute to Abdul Razzaq, a hospital staff member who came to Dr Mahnoor's aid, and to his family, who raised him right. Salute to the polio vaccinators who continue to risk their lives for Pakistan's children, knowing another band of brutes lies in wait.

Parliamentary budget office

Ahmed Bilal Mehboob

While the budget session in the federal and provincial assemblies is in progress, some members of the two Houses of parliament have again raised the need for an independent office within parliament to provide an unbiased analysis of the annual budget to the legislators.

The argument is that if members of parliament have to debate various aspects of the budget as informed legislators and exercise oversight on the executive's produced budget, they need support from an entity which is outside the control of the executive so that the numbers produced by the Ministry of Finance for the budget and by the Ministry of Planning and Development for the Public Sector Development Programme can be scrutinised and independently verified before the parliamentarians provide their feedback and input during the budget debate.

In fact, a member of the National Assembly had introduced a private member's bill titled the 'Parliamentary Budget Office Bill, 2025', in the Assembly last year. The bill was referred to the National Assembly Standing Committee on Finance which asked its sub-committee chaired by Dr Nafisa Shah to examine the proposal in depth.

As one can gather from media reports, the bill was strongly opposed by the representatives of the finance ministry who complained to the sub-committee that the bill granted excessive powers to the proposed budget office. The ministry also objected to the suggested direct reporting relationship of the proposed office to parliament without taking the ministry into confidence.

While the bill was not passed in its original form, it was agreed that the ministry's finance and revenue divisions would come up with an amended draft for consideration of the sub-committee and the full committee.

As the debate on the 2026-27 budget commences, there is no sign that such a draft has been placed before the committee or that the committee has taken that into consideration.

A parliamentary budget office is not a novel idea; a number of countries around the world have established such offices to support the independent character of their respective parliaments but most of them are mature democracies in the developed world. Australia, Canada, the Netherlands, South Korea and US are among those with independent budget offices within their respective parliaments. Some developing or mid-level countries like Kenya also have a parliamentary budget office.

The only exception seems to be Afghanistan during the pre-Taliban period when USAID and development agencies from many developed democracies were working hard to transform Afghanistan into a democracy. USAID supported the establishment of a parliamentary budget office in Afghanistan in 2007, which continued to function right up to the Taliban takeover in 2021. In keeping with the overall democracy project in Afghanistan, there is no evidence that the Afghan parliamentary budget office reported any meaningful success.

A typical office of this kind requires highly skilled and professional staff ranging from 15 to 45 members — depending on the scope of work. The cost of establishing a typical parliamentary budget office ranges from $3 million to $10m with an annual operational cost ranging from $5m to $10m for a country like Pakistan. In comparison, America's Congressional Budget Office employs hundreds of professional staff and its operational cost is in the vicinity of $65m. The Netherlands spends around $8m to $10m per year.

It is normal to expect that there will be some level of tension or even confrontation between the parliamentary budget office and government.

For example, Canada's parliamentary budget officer recently released the highly scrutinised Economic and Fiscal Outlook — June 2026 that revealed that the federal deficit had essentially doubled to 72 billion Canadian dollars in the last fiscal year, putting the government's fiscal targets in jeopardy. The office's reports have frequently challenged the government's financial management as the nation approached an election, embarrassing the ruling party and putting at risk its electoral prospects. It is, therefore, understandable that the government in Pakistan has resisted the idea of such an independent institution.

Confrontations are not limited to those with governments.

The Canadian parliamentary budget office, in the past, has also crossed swords with the Speaker of the Canadian House of Commons and defied his explicit instructions to submit its reports to the Speaker's office or the finance committee before making it public. There was a long-standing confrontation between the first parliamentary budget officer Kevin Page and the Speaker at the time.

This writer witnessed the state of relations between the two while conducting three study visits of Pakistani parliamentarians to the Canadian parliament from 2009 to 2011. This example could serve as a reminder to all concerned that when an 'independent' entity is created, it may not accept dictation even from its creator. All those advocating for an independent parliamentary budget office may read the book Unaccountable: Truth and Lies on Parliament Hill authored by Kevin Page.

While Pakistani legislators may continue to seek the creation of an independent parliamentary budget office, a practical compromise solution may be to strengthen the staffing of the Standing Committee on Finance and Revenue, both quantitatively and qualitatively. By inducting qualified professionals on the basis of merit, the committee can significantly enhance its research and analytical capacity, while avoiding endless argument with the government.

Sadly, our standing committees relating to various divisions of the federal government lack the capacity to undertake any meaningful oversight of the concerned ministries and divisions. In fact, the entire committee system may need to be strengthened by providing it with dedicated researchers and analysts in addition to physical infrastructure such as offices and dedicated meeting rooms.

Compared to the creation of a parliamentary budget office, it may be more practical and attainable to strengthen parliamentary committees.

Progress made in Strait of Hormuz talks: Rubio

Monitoring Desk

WASHINGTON: Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Tuesday that progress has been made in talks Iran and Oman ' on the Strait of Hormuz, "but not finality yet," adding, "We're hoping that happen very ."He made the comments after President Trump again backed down on attacks against Iran to allow for negotiations, saying, "I want to give them every last chance before decapitation. … We'll see what happens."Yemen's Iran-backed Houthis claimed Tuesday they carried out a drone strike on "a sensitive target" at an airport in southern Saudi Arabia. The Saudis have not commented on the claim.

Yemen's Iran-backed Houthis said on Wednesday that they attacked a Saudi oil tanker off Yanbu, in the Red Sea, as the rebels pressed on with their declared maritime blockade of the kingdom.

This was the eighth Saudi oil tanker targeted since the start of the blockade on July 22, a Houthi military spokesman said.

The group "successfully targeted the Saudi oil tanker 'Wafa' in the northern Red Sea, off the coast of Yanbu, with a number of ballistic missiles," Yahya Saree said in a video statement.

The Houthis declared they will escalate attacks in the northern Red Sea because Saudi Arabia is diverting its oil tankers there from the south in response to their blockade.

In an interview with Fox News Tuesday night from Southern California, President Trump said that the Strait of Hormuz would open "very soon," or the U.S. would strike Iran.

"The Strait is going to be open very soon, or they're going to hit very hard, and then the Strait is going to be open," Mr. Trump said.

The president was in the Los Angeles area for a Republican National Committee fundraising dinner hosted at his Rancho Palos Verdes golf course.

The state of commercial traffic through the strait remains murky. Iran and Oman have continued to allege that they have control of the vital waterway, through which about 20% of the world's global oil supply traverses.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio told reporters earlier Tuesday that "there's been progress made" in talks Iran and Oman ` regarding the strait, but that no final agreement had been reached.

The U.S. has used nearly all of its global stockpile of long-range precision missiles during the war with Iran.



People walk across a mud-covered road following heavy rain in Nawalapitiya, Sri Lanka.



Ukrainian firefighters tackle a blaze early Wednesday at the site of Russian missile strike on a postal logistics center in Kyiv.

Lebanon and Israel still split over disarming Hezbollah at Rome talks

Monitoring Desk

Lebanon: Lebanon and Israel are holding a second day of United States-brokered talks in Rome over Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon, but the session is unlikely to yield further pullbacks as the two sides remain split over disarming Hezbollah, according to a senior Lebanese official.

The negotiations on Wednesday are the second day of the second round of talks in Rome and the seventh overall, following five sessions in Washington. They aim to shore up a fragile ceasefire and build on a framework agreement signed in June.

Tuesday's session was split into political and military tracks, a senior Lebanese official told the Anadolu news agency. Lebanon set out its position on the border during the political meeting, while the military track addressed the mechanism for verifying implementation of security arrangements, including the Israeli withdrawal and Hezbollah's weapons. Lebanon has received no answer from the Israeli political side on its commitment to the ceasefire, the official said.

For the first time, the official told Anadolu, the Israeli delegation stepped back from demanding that Hezbollah's disarmament be discussed before the border file.

A key focus is Ali Taher Hill, strategic high ground near Nabatieh that Israel says conceals a Hezbollah command centre and underground weapons facilities. Israel wants the Lebanese army to secure the site and dismantle the group's infrastructure as one of several "pilot zones", but Beirut says there are no Israeli units there to replace.

The talks also addressed naming a third party to verify the Israeli withdrawal and oversee the Lebanese army's takeover of the areas in question, the official said. Some reports point to Italy.

Russian strike kills at least 17 as Zelensky says

Monitoring Desk

KYIV: Russia has attacked Ukraine with ballistic missiles and drones, killing at least 17 people, as Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky said interceptors "could have saved lives".

In one of the deadliest strikes on Kyiv and the capital region this year - which started after midnight on Wednesday - at least 45 people were injured after residential buildings, a railway station and warehouses were hit.

Ukraine, who has consistently urged allies for more US-made Patriot missile interceptors to defend against Russian ballistics, has not reported intercepting any of the missiles in the overnight attack.

Zelensky added delays in receiving anti-ballistic systems from partners leads to "horrific casualties and destruction".

The president later said the supply of interceptors from allies had been "significantly reduced" this year.

The Russia defence ministry said it had struck logistics hubs and supply centres in Kyiv and the surrounding region.

"These centres were involved in the storage, delivery of various weapons and military supplies, as well as in the production and distribution of unmanned aerial vehicles," it said.

It also said it had hit three cargo vessels "which were transporting weapons and military equipment" near the Black Sea port of Odesa.

Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko said there were fears people could be trapped under rubble.

Ukraine's emergency services said one person had died in the city of Kyiv and at least 16 injured, with a further 16 dead and 29 injured in the wider region.

Fires were still being extinguished in five locations across the region on Wednesday, covering an area of approximately 230,000 sq m, it added.

The country's air force said in a post on Telegram that Russia had launched 24 ballistic missiles and four anti-ship missiles during the attack on the capital.

Kim Yo Jong warns Japan over expanding military capabilities

Monitoring Desk

SEOUL: Kim Yo Jong, the powerful sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, warned Wednesday that Pyongyang could adopt "additional military options" against Japan, accusing Tokyo of becoming a "war state" through its expanding military capabilities.

Kim made the remarks in a statement carried by the state-run Korean Central News Agency.

"Japan, a war criminal state, is accelerating its transformation into a war state," she wrote, claiming that Tokyo was exploiting growing geopolitical tensions to boost its offensive military capacity.

She cited Japan's recent test-firing of U.S.-made Tomahawk cruise missiles from a destroyer in the Pacific Ocean and its March deployment of long-range surface-to-ship missiles and high-speed gliding projectiles at bases in Kumamoto and Shizuoka prefectures as examples of Tokyo's changing military posture.

Kim also pointed to Japan's participation in U.S.-led military exercises in the Philippines in May, where it launched offensive missiles outside its territory for the first time since World War II.

Kim claimed that Japan's growing arsenal of long-range weapons was transforming its Self-Defense Forces into an offensive military.

"The mass possession of different kinds of long-range strike means with an unexpectedness of preemptive attack and a drastic increase in the radius of their operation ... make Japan reorganize its overall armed forces.

Arrests in Egypt after people allegedly impersonate judges

Monitoring Desk

EGYPT: Several people have been arrested in Egypt over an alleged plot by fake judges to defraud people of their money.

Egypt's Ministry of Interior said the alleged scam involved fabricated scenes in court and impersonating a judge on social media.

The main suspects, an unemployed man and a student residing in Cairo and Giza, have been detained, the ministry said.

Upon questioning, they confessed to forming a criminal gang taking money from citizens by falsely claiming they could allocate housing from government agencies, it added.

They also are said to have admitted staging fake court scenes with the help of others.

Suspect in Greek suitcase murder of Scottish aid worker appears in court

Monitoring Desk

GREECE: Police escorted a man accused of killing Scottish aid worker Elisabeth Jane Ross and hiding her body in a suitcase to court on Wednesday after he was charged with murder and robbery.

The body of Ross, 38, was discovered inside the suitcase at an abandoned building on July 18 a few days after she had arrived in Athens to visit friends.

The suspect was identified from street camera footage recorded near the site, showing a man wheeling a large, dark-colored suitcase. He was granted 24 hours to prepare his defense and is expected back in court Thursday, court officials said.

The suspect — a migrant who has not been named in accordance with Greek law — was arrested Sunday. The United Kingdom National Crime Agency and Police Scotland assisted with the investigation, along with law enforcement from the United States. Greek public broadcaster ERT reported that the suspect was born in Afghanistan and was pursuing a boxing career in Athens.

Brazil-Argentina diplomatic relations downgrade

Monitoring Desk

BRAZIL: Brazil has asked Argentina to recall its ambassador, the Foreign Ministry in Buenos Aires said Tuesday, after a diplomatic spat last week in which President Javier Milei called his Brazilian counterpart Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva a "thief." "He's a thief, he's corrupt, he's been convicted of theft and corruption, he's been in prison, so it's true that we can call him a convict," Milei said of Lula during an interview on TV channel LN+.

Houthis claim attack on Saudi tanker in Red Sea

Monitoring Desk

YEMEN: The Iranian-allied Houthi militia in Yemen has attacked another Saudi tanker, the group said on Wednesday, firing rockets at the oil tanker NCC Wafa on the Red Sea.

Military spokesman Yahya Saree said the attack targeted the vessel near Yanbu, a Saudi port being used to reroute a large share of its oil exports to world markets, bypassing the blockaded Strait of Hormuz.

There was no immediate confirmation or reaction from Saudi Arabia.

The Shiite militia has been waging war in Yemen for more than 10 years against the Saudi-backed government. The conflict escalated again several weeks ago with airstrikes on Sana'a, the Houthi power base in northern Yemen. The Houthis then began attacking Saudi ships in the Red Sea or forcing them to change course.

Saree said the Houthis had so far attacked eight Saudi tankers. In addition, 29 Saudi tankers in the region had been forced to change course because of their threats and attacks, he said.

The attacks have raised fears that the strategically important Bab al-Mandab (Gate of Tears) strait could effectively be closed. Traffic through the strait, which the militia can target from Yemeni territory, is continuing for now, according to independent data providers.

The strait lies on the shortest sea route between Asia and Europe, running via the Indian Ocean.

N-Korean missile unit deploys in Russia for Ukraine war, Kyiv says

Monitoring Desk

LONDON: A North Korean missile unit has begun deploying to western Russia and could be equipped with 120 ballistic missiles and six launchers for strikes against Ukraine, an official at Ukraine's military intelligence agency said.

Ukraine is very short of high-end air and Russia has tried to exploit this by using more ballistic missiles, which are particularly hard to shoot down.

Russia has fired scores of North ballistic missiles at Ukraine since late 2023, but the deployment of North Korean missile forces would be an expansion of the already extensive military cooperation between Moscow and Pyongyang. Andrii Cherniak of Ukraine's Main Directorate of Intelligence said Russia planned to base the missile unit of around 90 North Korean personnel in the western Russian region of Voronezh, within its 112th Missile Brigade. Pyongyang has already sent a new batch of 40 KN-23 and KN-24 missiles and personnel to Russia, but the configuration of the deployment and total number of missiles will be finalised at top-level talks next month, he said.



Taiwan military personnel conduct a live-fire exercise on Zhongfu Beach as part of annual Han Kuang military exercise.

At Least 14 Dead, 7 Injured in Landslide at Monastery

Monitoring Desk

ETHIOPIA: A landslide occurred at Tsadkane Debre Mitmaq St. Mary Monastery in Ethiopia on Monday, Aug. 3

The natural disaster struck the Monastery patrons who were attending a prayer service At least 14 people died, and seven were injured. It remains unclear if there are more victims beneath the debris Over a dozen people have been killed in a deadly landslide in the Amhara Region of Ethiopia on Monday, Aug. 3.

The landslide was triggered by heavy rainfall around 7 a.m. local time, resulting in the devastating event at Tsadkane Debre Mitmaq St. Mary Monastery, according to the Associated Press. A group of rocks slid down the mountain and crashed onto the Monastery patrons; several of the deceased victims were "gathered to receive the holy water," the diocese's general manager Megabe Hadis Neka Tibeb Ababu said, the outlet reported.

The group of patrons had gathered for the special prayer service. The Orthodox Christian service included a holy water cleansing ritual for chronic illnesses, per the BBC.

Eleven of the deceased victims were buried at the monastery; the remaining three were transported to their hometowns.

Search teams recover famed climber Purja's body and 3 others from Pakistan peak

Monitoring Desk

ISLAMABAD: Search teams backed by military helicopters recovered the bodies of renowned British-Nepali mountaineer Nirmal Purja and three other missing climbers on Wednesday, bringing the number of bodies recovered from Broad Peak to seven nearly a week after an avalanche swept away a 10-member international expedition, officials said Wednesday.

The Alpine Club of Pakistan said the operation was one of the most technically demanding recovery missions ever carried out on the mountain. It said the bodies of Purja.



Journalists wait for the arrival of participants for a new round of talks between the Lebanese and Israeli delegations, at the US Embassy in Rome.

Ceuta warns of 'unsustainable' situation for child migrants after influx

Monitoring Desk

CEUTA: The leader of Spain's north African territory of Ceuta on Wednesday said the number of children left there after last week's irregular migrant rush was "unsustainable", pleading for government aid.

Spain says it has returned to neighbouring Morocco 70,000 of the 72,000 migrants who entered Ceuta from July 30 in scenes that infuriated EU partners seeking a harder line on irregular immigration.

But the roughly 2,500 who remain include hundreds of unaccompanied minors who are enduring dire conditions with limited access to food, water, shelter and sanitation. Ceuta's leader Juan Jesus Vivas told public broadcaster RTVE that authorities were taking care of 1,100 migrant minors against a theoretical capacity of 90. "This is an absolutely unsustainable situation," said Vivas, adding that there was "a high risk for order and public security" as reception centres were overwhelmed.



Most of the migrants returned to Morocco but hundreds of children have stayed.

Malaysia says: Myanmar refugee return will not go ahead if lives are at risk

Monitoring Desk

KUALA LUMPUR: Malaysia will not proceed with repatriating 5,000 Myanmar refugees if their lives are found to be at risk upon return, a government spokesman said on Wednesday, as authorities continued to screen the refugees ahead of the planned handover.

Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim has said that the 5,000 to be repatriated were ethnic Rohingya refugees, and that the move was being carried out following rising tensions with local communities in Malaysia.

In the unrest, Rohingya refugee schools across the country were shut down, with many Rohingya children reportedly facing harassment and threats.

Some were also evicted from ' their homes in the state of Penang and briefly detained by authorities after gathering outside the UNHCR building in Kuala Lumpur to ' seek assistance.

The foreign and home ministries are currently reviewing the plan to identify the 5,000 refugees to be returned to Myanmar, Communications Minister Fahmi Fadzil told a regular press briefing.

"Malaysia, as a responsible country.

Taiwan begins military drills as China pressure grows

Monitoring Desk

TAIWAN: Taiwan's largest military drills of the year began Wednesday as the island democracy attempts to prepare its population for a potential Chinese invasion.

The annual "Han Kuang" exercise, which runs from August 5-14, stages combat scenarios for troops and reservists to practise responding to an attack on the island, defence officials say.

Civilians will also be put through their paces during exercises that include a temporary slowdown of mobile internet speeds as well as air raid drills.

China claims Taiwan is part of its territory and has threatened to use force to seize the island of 23 million people.

Beijing has ramped up military pressure on Taiwan in recent years, deploying fighter jets and warships around the island on an almost daily basis and carrying out large-scale drills.

The Chinese coast guard has also stepped up its grey zone activities—actions that fall short of war—around Taiwan and its outer islands.

On Wednesday, dozens of reservists spread out along a beach facing the Taiwan Strait and fired Taiwanese-made assault rifles at targets on a shore where Chinese forces could land during an invasion.

Sri Lanka shuts schools as floods and mudslides kill 7

Monitoring Desk

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka has shut down schools across its central highlands after torrential rains triggered deadly mudslides and flash floods, killing at least seven people and injuring several others.

The heavy downpours struck the country's mountainous tea-growing region, which is still struggling to recover from the devastation of Cyclone Ditwah. The storm killed nearly 640 people and caused an estimated $4.1bn in damage when it struck last November. Pradeep Kodippili, the spokesperson for the government's Disaster Management Centre, said that five people died after being buried in mudslides that overran two houses in the central region, and two others were killed.

Houthi attacks on KSA have brought Mideast conflict to 'dangerous juncture': Pakistan

UNITED NATIONS: Pakistan said that Houthi attacks on Saudi Arabia had brought the conflict in the Middle East to a "dangerous juncture", while the United States and China called for restraint and de-escalation in Yemen as renewed fighting and attacks on the kingdom threatened to further destabilise the strategic Bab al-Mandab Strait.

Speaking at an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council, Pakistan's Permanent Representative Asim Iftikhar Ahmad condemned Houthi attacks on Saudi Arabia.

"The Houthi military escalation inside Yemen, the continued Houthi attacks against the kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the latest military developments along Yemen's Red Sea coast have brought the conflict to an extremely dangerous juncture," he said.

He added that the expansion of attacks in and around the Bab al-Mandab Strait represented a "serious escalation".

"Pakistan condemns, in the strongest terms, all Houthi attacks against the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia," he said, reaffirming Pakistan's "unwavering support for the sovereignty, territorial integrity, security and prosperity" of the kingdom. He said that Pakistan "fully supports Saudi Arabia's legitimate right", consistent with the UN Charter and international law, "to take necessary measures to defend its territory, protect its citizens and safeguard its national assets against threats". Ahmad warned that continued violations of international law against commercial shipping posed a growing threat to freedom of navigation and international maritime commerce. "Any attempt to threaten, obstruct, or weaponise the vital waterways will have consequences for international trade and commercial shipping, global supply chains, and energy security," he said.

He said the relative calm painstakingly maintained in Yemen since 2022 had collapsed, warning that continued escalation risked reigniting a full-scale conflict and drawing Yemen deeper into the wider regional confrontation.

"This must be prevented," he said, calling for diplomacy to match the gravity of the crisis.

"Diplomacy must assume urgency in proportion to the gravity of this situation," Ahmad said, expressing Pakistan's strong support for "the resumption of an inclusive, Yemeni-led and Yemeni-owned political process under United Nations auspices".



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Ahsan Iqbal addressing the Launch Ceremony of Quantum Valley Pakistan, titled "Shaping Pakistan's Innovation & Technology Future," at the Pak-China Friendship Centre


ISLAMABAD: The outgoing ambassador of the French Republic to Pakistan Mr. Nicolas Galey calls on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif

Pakistan committed to further expand ties with France: PM

ISLAMABAD, (APP): Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to further expand and deepen its longstanding relations with France through enhanced political dialogue, economic engagement, development cooperation, and people-to-people exchanges.

Talking to the outgoing Ambassador of the French Republic to Pakistan Nicolas Galey, who paid a farewell call on him, the prime minister appreciated Ambassador Galey's contribution towards strengthening Pakistan-France relations during his tenure.

Both sides underscored the importance of regular high-level exchanges, and continued cooperation on regional and global issues of mutual interest.

The prime minister conveyed warm regards for President Emmanuel Macron, and wished Ambassador Nicolas Galey every success in his future endeavours.

Parliamentary dialogue on global challenges should remain purposeful, constructive: Ayaz

ISLAMABAD, (APP):Speaker of National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq called for stronger parliamentary leadership, democratic accountability and international cooperation to effectively address the growing challenges posed by climate change.

Addressing the 69th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference in Cape Town, Ayaz Sadiq also referred, without naming any country or delegation, to issues relating to sudden flows of water in rivers and the withholding of water, highlighting the broader implications of water-related challenges in the context of climate change.

While Ayaz Sadiq was addressing, members of the Indian delegation started to create disorderliness during the speech.

The chair intervened and called for decorum and order so that the speech could continue. Even after some time, The Jamican Speaker and host of the meeting has also grabbed a mic from a member of Indian delegation while he was talking. This made Indian delegation a laughing stock in the hall.

Despite the brief interruption, the Speaker continued his address, reiterating that climate adaptation could only be made effective through fair financial support, democratic accountability, international cooperation, and sustained parliamentary engagement.

Ayaz Sadiq's address was well listened attentively by participants, with international delegates appreciating his emphasis on climate justice, parliamentary oversight, democratic accountability, and collective action to address the global challenge of climate change.

Fuerthermore, Ayaz Sadiq said that climate adaptation policies should be formulated with effective public participation.

Pakistan's defence, diplomatic successes must be supported by strong economy: Ahsan

ISLAMABAD, (APP): Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Ahsan Iqbal expressed confidence that Quantum Valley Pakistan would open new pathways for the country's youth, startups and high-tech businesses while strengthening Pakistan's transition towards a knowledge and technology-driven economy.

Addressing the launching ceremony of Quantum Valley Pakistan: "Shaping Pakistan's Innovation & Technology Future," the minister said the initiative marked the beginning of a new direction for Pakistan and would connect Pakistani youth with global centres of innovation and technology.

"Today is not merely the inauguration of a project; it marks the beginning of a new direction for Pakistan's future," he said, describing the launch as a proud moment for the country.

The ceremony was attended by Tim Rowe, CEO of Cambridge Innovation Center (CIC); Dougan Sherwood, Partner at CIC; and Seena Amidi, Managing Partner at Plug and Play.

Ahsan Iqbal said the centre of power in the 21st century was no longer physical strength but intellectual and creative capability, adding that countries with the best ideas and the ability to transform those ideas into products would advance in the global economy.

He said nearly 60 percent of Pakistan's population comprised young people, describing the country's youth as second to none in talent and potential.

"We have to bring together the capabilities of our youth and move forward with the spirit of Team Pakistan," he said.

The minister said Quantum Valley Pakistan would provide a platform to connect Pakistani youth with global technology and innovation hubs and bring different stakeholders together within a modern technology ecosystem. He added that the initiative would create new opportunities for startups and promote high-tech businesses in Pakistan.

During the ceremony, two agreements were signed to strengthen technological collaboration and support the country's innovation ecosystem.

The first agreement was signed between Cambridge Innovation Center and Quantum Valley Pakistan, while the second was signed between Plug and Play and Quantum Valley Pakistan. Ahsan Iqbal termed the agreements an important step towards equipping Pakistani youth with modern technologies and creating pathways for innovation,entrepreneurship and high-tech business development. The minister said Pakistan's defence and diplomatic successes needed to be supported by a strong and sustainable economy.

He said the government had set a target of transforming Pakistan into a $1 trillion economy by 2035 and a $3 trillion economy by 2047.

"Achieving a $1 trillion economy by 2035 is certainly difficult, but it is not impossible," he said, adding that Pakistan's achievement of becoming a nuclear power despite enormous challenges demonstrated that the country could also pursue ambitious economic targets through determination, innovation and collective national effort.


KARACHI: First Lady Bibi Asifa Bhutto Zardari, MNA, in a group photograph with the delegation of the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), led by Representative and Country Director WFP Pakistan Ms. Anita Hirsch following their meeting

Pakistan's approach focuses on preparing workers before migration: Ch Salik

ISLAMABAD, (APP): Minister for Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development Chaudhry Salik Hussain has stressed the need to develop safe, orderly, regular and dignified migration pathways based on genuine labour-market demand. He was addressing the Budapest Process Thematic Working Group Meeting on Legal Pathways for Migration here on Wednesday, said a press release.

The Minister said Pakistan deployed more than 750,000 workers overseas in 2025, reflecting the growing importance of labour mobility.

He said Pakistan's approach focuses on preparing workers before migration, protecting them during employment, maintaining links with them abroad and supporting their reintegration upon return.

He highlighted the National Emigration and Welfare Policy 2026, which focuses on safe and regular emigration, skills development, welfare of overseas Pakistanis, diaspora engagement and reintegration of returning migrants.

Chaudhry Salik Hussain also highlighted the EU-Pakistan Talent Partnership, aimed at providing pre-departure training, language courses, skills recognition and job matching for Pakistani workers in Europe.


ISLAMABAD: Dr Musadik Malik meets Nepalese Ambassador Rita Dhital to convey Pakistan's condolences and discuss support for Nepal's ongoing relief and recovery efforts

Hajj fundamental pillar of Islam; profound act of worship: Gilani

ISLAMABAD, (APP): Chairman Senate Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani inaugurated the balloting process for a Hajj facility for two Senate Secretariat employees in BPS-01 to BPS-07, generously sponsored by Senator Amir Waliuddin Chishti.

The balloting ceremony was held at the Senator Service Centre, Parliament House, Islamabad, and was attended by Senator Syed Masroor Ahsan, Senator Rahat Jamali, Senator Amir Waliuddin Chishti, Secretary Senate Syed Hasnain Haider, senior officials of the Senate Secretariat, and a large number of employees.

Speaking on the occasion, Chairman Senate Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani said that Hajj is one of the fundamental pillars of Islam and a profound act of worship.

He said that every Muslim cherishes the desire to visit the sacred House of Allah and have the honour of performing Hajj.

Pakistan offers assistance to Nepal amid devastating floods

ISLAMABAD, (APP): Pakistan has offered technical and other assistance to Nepal as the Himalayan country grapples with the devastating impact of floods and other climate-induced disasters.

Federal Minister for Climate Change and Environmental Coordination Musadik Malik conveyed the offer during a meeting with Nepal's Ambassador to Pakistan Rita Dhital on Wednesday.

"Pakistan stands with Nepal. Nepal is not alone," the minister said, expressing condolences over the loss of life and destruction caused by the disaster.

Musadik Malik said Pakistan was ready to assist Nepal in ongoing search, rescue and recovery efforts, adding that the scale and complexity of the crisis called for the use of all available resources, including satellite imagery, drones and artificial intelligence.

"Whatever we are trying to do for our people is at your disposal," he told the ambassador.

The minister stressed the need for greater regional cooperation to deal with climate-related disasters, particularly glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs).

"We cannot fight nature, but we can reduce its impact," he said, calling for cooperation between upstream and downstream countries to develop early-warning systems, risk assessments and other mechanisms to protect vulnerable communities.

He said Pakistan was willing to share its experience and data, including its GLOF-risk inventory, with Nepal and work with it on disaster preparedness and climate resilience.

Investment decisions requires predictability, confidence in govt policies: Shaza

ISLAMABAD, (APP): Federal Minister for Information Technology and Telecommunication Shaza Fatima Khawaja invited Japanese companies to explore investment and partnership opportunities in Pakistan's technology sector and other areas where technology can support economic activity.

Addressing a virtual keynote at the Pakistan Business Seminar in Tokyo titled "Pakistan's Digital Transformation and Opportunities for Partnership with Japan", she said Pakistan was ready to work directly with Japanese companies interested in the country's technology sector and other areas where technology could support economic activity.

The minister invited Japanese companies to visit Pakistan, interact with young engineers, technology companies, universities, academicians, startups and innovators, and assess the capabilities already available in the country.

She said Pakistan was a young, innovative and entrepreneurial country, with 68 per cent of its population of around 240 million people under the age of 30.



Students take part in a protest over housing costs, in Athens, Greece


ISLAMABAD: Pakistani officials presenting gifts to the members of Uzbek media delegation

Pakistan to soon be free of polio virus circulation through early detection, rapid response: Ayesha

PESHAWAR, (APP): Prime Minister's Focal Person for Polio Eradication, Ms. Ayesha Raza Farooq has said Pakistan will soon be free of polio virus circulation through early detection, rapid response and high campaign coverage. She said almost the entire country would be cleared of polio virus in 2026, while a small pocket in southern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where three cases have been reported, would be targeted under a comprehensive plan to eliminate polio transmission by mid-2027. She was briefing health journalists from across the country on ongoing polio eradication initiatives and the planned Sub-National Immunization Drive (SNID), scheduled for September 21-27 to vaccinate 31 million children under five in 115 high-risk districts.

New provinces vital to ensure greater public access to centres of power: Sardar Yousaf

ISLAMABAD, (APP): Federal Minister for Religious Affairs and Chairman Hazara Province Movement, Sardar Muhammad Yousaf called for the creation of new provinces, including Hazara, to bring governance closer to the people, improve service delivery and ensure greater public access to centres of power. Addressing a national dialogue organised by the Islamabad Bar Association, he said Pakistan had four provinces at the time of its creation and the number had remained unchanged despite a substantial increase in population, districts, tehsils and administrative requirements.

"The time has come to create new provinces, including Hazara," he said, adding that the demand for Hazara province was constitutional, democratic and based purely on administrative considerations rather than linguistic or ethnic identity. Sardar Yousaf said the people of Hazara had rendered sacrifices for the cause, with seven people losing their lives during the movement for a separate province. He said resolutions in favour of Hazara province had been passed three times by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly, while bills relating to its creation had also been introduced in the National Assembly and Senate.

The minister said population growth had increased public needs and administrative challenges. Drawing an analogy with expanding families, he said that as families grew, new houses were built; similarly, the increase in districts and tehsils provided a basis for considering additional provinces.

He said the 18th Constitutional Amendment had devolved powers from the federation to the provinces, but adequate authority had not subsequently been transferred from provinces to districts and divisions. "Our struggle is aimed at empowering the people and ensuring their access to centres of power," he said, adding that new provinces should have adequate administrative and financial powers to generate revenue, formulate policies and implement them.

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