

THE DESTINATION

NEWS THAT TRAVELS

Editor: Zahid Husain

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Gohar Ejaz warns govt of faltering exports, record high trade deficit

STAFF REPORTER

ISLAMABAD

Former Caretaker Federal Minister Dr Gohar Ejaz has expressed concerns over the decline in national exports as Pakistan's trade deficit was continuously widening. Taking to his social media account at X, business icon Gohar Ejaz said that Pakistan set a target of 10% annual growth in goods exports starting June 2023. "We achieved that target during FY2023-24, recording US\$30.9 billion in goods exports", Gohar Ejaz added. He expressed concerns that over the last two years since June 2024, the government has lost focus and failed to sustain the targeted 10% export growth. "As of June 2026, goods exports stand at only US\$30.1 billion, i.e. US\$800 million LESS than the US\$30.9 billion achieved in June 2024". Former Federal Minister said as a result, Pakistan has lost an estimated US\$8 billion in potential goods exports over the past two years while recording its highest-ever trade deficit of US\$39.4 billion this year. Gohar Ejaz urged the government to focus on exports as the current trend is not Sustainable economic model.



Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves surge to highest level since 2021

WEB DESK

ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves witnessed a significant increase during the latest reporting week after the government received inflows of \$1.944 billion, pushing the country's total reserves to their highest level since 2021. According to data released by the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), the central bank's foreign exchange reserves rose by \$1.944 billion to \$18.471 billion, marking the highest level recorded since 2021. The reserves held by commercial banks also increased by \$3 million, reaching \$5.518 billion during the same period. As a result, Pakistan's total liquid foreign exchange reserves increased by \$1.947 billion to \$23.9887 billion, also the highest level since 2021. The sharp rise in reserves is expected to strengthen the country's external position, improve import cover and enhance investor confidence as Pakistan continues efforts to



Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan: 9 July 2026 — President Asif Ali Zardari departed from Manas International Airport for Pakistan after concluding his official visit to the Kyrgyz Republic. Marlen Mamataliyev, Speaker of the Kyrgyz Parliament,

Iranian FM Araghchi discusses regional tensions with Oman and Turkiye

● US launches new airstrikes on Iran, with Tehran firing back at 3 Gulf Arab states

WEB DESK

TEHRAN

The United States launched new airstrikes hitting Iran early Thursday, sparking retaliatory Iranian fire targeting Bahrain, Kuwait and Qatar in crossfire that again threatened an interim deal aimed at finding a way to end the war gripping the Persian Gulf. The strikes came hours after U.S. President Donald Trump said recent Iranian attacks on ships in the Strait of Hormuz signaled the end of the fragile ceasefire. The U.S. military hit a variety of military sites and

port facilities early Wednesday following Iran's targeting of several merchant vessels off the coast of Oman, sparking Iranian fire then as well. But Thursday's attacks appeared bigger all around. There was no immediate word of damage in the three Gulf Arab countries. Kuwait's military said it was actively intercepting incoming drones and missiles. Military officials said in a social media post that the latest strikes were intended to "further degrade" Iran's ability "to threaten freedom of navigation" in the strait, through which a fifth of the world's traded oil and natural



gas passed before the war began with U.S. and Israeli attacks on Feb. 28. Iranian state media reported explosions in several locations, including Bushehr, home to Iran's nuclear power plant complex, and the southern port cities of Chabahar, Konarak, Bandar Abbas and Sirik. After leaving a NATO summit in Turkey, Trump posted

several videos on his social media site of what he said were explosions in Iran and issued another warning to the Islamic Republic. "This is in retribution for yesterday's bombing of ships by Iran. If it happens again, it will get much worse!" Trump wrote. (Continued on Page-4) Trump had said earlier in the day that the latest back-and-forth fighting would not result in "long-term" military action. "Anything that happens is going to happen very fast," Trump said, though he also suggested the U.S. military might "just finish the job." (Continued on Page-4)

PM Shehbaz reaffirms resolve to eradicate terrorism in high-level Quetta huddle

■ The meeting was attended by Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir, Governor Balochistan Jaffar Khan Mandokhail, Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti, and heads of various law enforcement agencies

STAFF REPORTER

QUETTA

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday reaffirmed Pakistan's resolve to eradicate terrorism, declaring that the fight against militants groups would continue until the "last terrorist" is eliminated. Addressing the Provincial Apex Committee meeting on the National Action Plan (NAP) in

Quetta, the prime minister said Pakistan had witnessed several major terrorist incidents over the past four days. However, he praised the security forces for their swift response, stating that 54 militants had been killed in operations carried out across Balochistan. Shehbaz Sharif paid tribute to police personnel, Pakistan Army soldiers, and civilians who lost their lives in recent attacks, saying the country's



political and military leadership remained fully united in the fight against terrorism. The prime minister maintained that militants were operating from Afghan territory to launch attacks inside Pakistan and claimed that the country's eastern neighbour was providing terrorists with weapons and financial support. He also said that external elements were involved in terrorist activities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Pakistan seeks emergency LNG supply after Qatari shipment 'aborted'

■ Pakistan has issued an emergency LNG tender after a Qatari shipment was cancelled amid Strait of Hormuz tensions, as authorities move to secure uninterrupted gas supplies.

STAFF REPORTER

ISLAMABAD

The federal government has issued an emergency tender to procure a liquefied natural gas (LNG) cargo for delivery on July 15-16 after a scheduled shipment from Qatar was cancelled due to renewed tensions in the Strait of Hormuz, according to a Bloomberg report. The emergency tender was floated by state-owned Pakistan LNG Limited (PLL) after receiving government approval on Wednesday. The move followed the cancellation of a Qatari LNG cargo that was expected to arrive in Pakistan later this month, traders familiar with the matter told Bloomberg. The disruption comes as shipping activity through the Strait of Hormuz has been severely affected by escalating regional tensions, including recent military exchanges involving the United States and Iran. Reports said a vessel carrying an LNG cargo from Qatar to Pakistan turned back before completing its passage through the strategic waterway. Earlier, Pakistan secured an LNG cargo from TotalEnergies SE for delivery on July 10-11 at a price of \$17.37 per million



British thermal units (MMBtu). It marked the country's second spot-market LNG purchase within two weeks as authorities sought to replace delayed Qatari supplies. Pakistan imports the vast majority of its LNG under long-term agreements with Qatar, making the country highly dependent on uninterrupted shipments. Supply disruptions linked to the regional conflict have forced Islamabad to rely on more expensive spot-market purchases to avoid potential gas shortages. Officials have maintained that ensuring adequate fuel supplies remains a key government priority. The National Crisis

Management Cell (NCMC) has continued to monitor developments in regional energy markets and coordinate timely procurement decisions to minimise the risk of supply disruptions. Pakistan's LNG procurement strategy has remained under close scrutiny since concerns emerged over operations at Qatar's Ras Laffan LNG facilities, which heightened uncertainty across global energy markets. The reported declaration of force majeure by QatarEnergy also prompted several LNG-importing countries to explore alternative sources of supply.

India wages proxy war in Pakistan through Afghanistan: Rama Sanaullah

STAFF REPORTER

ISLAMABAD

Adviser to the prime minister, Rana Sanaullah said on Thursday that India is involved in a proxy war in Pakistan through Afghanistan. the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) stalwart said the security situation in Balochistan is extremely serious and should be treated as a war rather than only a law and order issue. 'Enemies impose war on Pakistan' He said Pakistan's enemies have imposed this war on the country and claimed there is no doubt that India and Afghanistan are involved. He also alleged that those responsible for the Jaffar Express attack had links with India. Sanaullah said Pakistan would respond to the threat with all available means and that decisions taken on Thursday would be put into effect to meet public expectations regarding security and law enforcement. He said terrorism has placed the lives of ordinary people in great difficulty and stressed that the entire nation should stand together to confront the threat. The adviser said banned outfits,

including the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) and Fitna al-Khawarij, are working against Pakistan. He said their objective is not development or better governance and alleged that they target roads and bridges. PML-N leader calls for addressing Balochistan's governance issues Sanaullah said governance issues in Balochistan should be addressed separately and that local people should be heard. However, he said terrorist attacks should not be attributed solely to governance issues. He also said an Apex Committee meeting should take place in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and added that security operations require coordination because militants may move from one area to another. Sanaullah claimed Pakistan's enemies have intensified their campaign because of the country's recent achievements and said the whole nation should unite in response.





BISP, UN agencies extend partnership to protect 3.3 million women, children from malnutrition, The Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), in collaboration with United Nations agencies, has extended the Benazir Nashonuma Programme for another three years to protect an additional 3.3 million children and women from malnutrition across Pakistan.

Fire at G-9 Markaz brought under control, cooling process continues

- A fire that broke out at G-9 Markaz in Islamabad was brought under control after a response by firefighting teams, while district authorities continued post-fire operations at the site.

News Desk

ISLAMABAD

A fire that broke out at G-9 Markaz in Islamabad was brought under control after a response by firefighting teams, while district authorities continued post-fire operations at the site.

According to the district administration, the Assistant Commissioner and Magistrate remained present at the location to monitor the situation and coordinate response efforts. Fire brigade



ICT
ISLAMABAD
CAPITAL TERRITORY
ADMINISTRATION

vehicles worked to contain the blaze and successfully prevented its further spread. Following the extinguishing of the fire, a cooling process is still underway to eliminate any remaining

hotspots and reduce the risk of reignition. Officials said teams are continuing to monitor the affected area as part of standard safety procedures. The district administration

confirmed that the immediate emergency has been handled, and authorities are now focusing on assessing the impact of the incident. Relevant departments are collecting information from the site and reviewing available evidence. Officials said an investigation has been launched to determine the cause of the fire. The inquiry will examine all possible factors that may have contributed to the incident. Authorities have urged the public to rely on official sources for information while the investigation and assessment process continues.

CASS Lahore Highlights Hindutva's Growing Influence on India's Strategic Culture

- CASS Lahore hosts discussion on saffronisation of India's strategic culture

News Desk

ISLAMABAD

The Centre for Aerospace and Security Studies (CASS) Lahore organised an event titled "Saffronisation of India's Strategic Culture: Contemporary Transition and Future Outlook" on July 8, 2026, bringing together academics, intellectuals and security experts to examine ideological shifts in India's strategic thinking. Ms Ezba Walayat Khan, Research Assistant at CASS Lahore, delivered the opening address and welcomed participants. She said CASS Lahore, as an independent think tank, regularly holds academic engagements for scholars and practitioners interested in national security and related issues. Dr Asma Khawaja, Executive Director of the Centre for International Strategic Studies (CISS), AJK, discussed the mythological roots and civilisational foundations of Hindutva's influence



on Indian strategic thought. She described strategic culture as dynamic and identified revisionism, Hindu supremacy, deception and grand strategic thinking as key features shaping India's contemporary approach. Dr Khawaja said that despite India's claims of preparedness for a two-front war, its civilisational

aversion to overextension makes such a conflict unlikely. Referring to Marka-e-Haq, she said India's conduct appeared to be shaped by historical narratives and civilisational assumptions. She added that India's pursuit of prestige suffered due to what she termed a misapplication of Kautilya's principle that perception without preparation can lead to defeat. She concluded that Indian strategy appeared aimed at achieving dominance rather than maintaining a balance of power.

Dr Bilal Ghazanfar, Assistant Professor and Head of the Department of International Relations at the University of Rawalpindi, said that under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India had deliberately reshaped its strategic culture through ideological, institutional, military, informational and diplomatic changes.

ACT-AI initiative aims to equip young people with state-of-the-art AI skills: Rana Mashhood

- Chairman of the Prime Minister's Youth Programme (PMYP) Rana Mashhood Ahmad Khan noted that ACT-AI initiative, launched under the vision of Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, is being implemented through collaboration between the PYMP, HEC, NAVTTC, and ACT-AI to equip young people with state-of-the-art AI skills.

News Desk

ISLAMABAD

Chairman of the Prime Minister's Youth Programme (PMYP) Rana Mashhood Ahmad Khan noted that ACT-AI initiative, launched under the vision of Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, is being implemented through collaboration between the PYMP, HEC, NAVTTC, and ACT-AI to equip young people with state-of-the-art AI skills. He made these remarks during visit the Higher Education Commission (HEC) Smart Classroom, where he was virtually interacting with students enrolled in the ACT-AI Online Short Course on Artificial Intelligence (AI) Skills. The visit was followed by a meeting with HEC officials to review the programme's progress and



discuss strategies for expanding AI education and strengthening industry linkages for Pakistani youth. Representing HEC were Dr Nasir Khan, Member Quality Assurance; Dr Shafique Rehman; Member Strategic Planning, and IT and Curriculum Division officials involved in implementing the ACT-AI

initiative. During the virtual interaction, students from Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) across Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Gilgit-Baltistan shared their experiences, appreciating the programme's quality instruction, practical curriculum, and relevance to emerging industry demands. They also highlighted areas for improvement, to which Chairman PMYP assured them that their feedback would be incorporated into future phases of the initiative. Addressing the participants, Rana Mashhood said the ACT-AI initiative reflects the Government's continued commitment to preparing Pakistani youth for opportunities in the rapidly evolving digital economy. He further shared that work is underway to develop Pakistan's first uniform AI curriculum and emphasized that future cohorts would continue to incorporate the latest advancements in Artificial Intelligence.



Rawalpindi CPO Action: Dhamial Police Corruption Three Officials Suspended

News Desk

ISLAMABAD

Rawalpindi CPO action against Dhamial police corruption has taken the city by storm this week. Three police officials from Dhamial police station were arrested right after a citizen filed a complaint against them.

The trouble started when a video went viral showing police staff taking a bribe of Rs150,000 from two young men. The men were on their way to Chakri Road when the officials allegedly stopped them and demanded money.

City Police Officer Hassan Mushtaq Sukhera took quick notice of the matter. He ordered an immediate inquiry into the citizen's complaint. Once the claims were found true, he did not waste any time.

The CPO ordered the registration of an FIR against the police officials involved. He also directed police teams to arrest all three men without delay. Along with this, the Station House Officer, Sub-Inspector Anwarul Haq, was suspended too.

Haq was charge-sheeted for failing to keep an eye on his staff's conduct. His negligence of duty played a big role in letting the corruption happen under his watch.



Rehan Tariq sent on 6-Day Physical Remand in PECA Case

News Desk

LAHORE

A Lahore court has handed podcast host Rehan Tariq over to the National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency (NCCIA) on a six-day physical remand in a case related to allegations of promoting religious hatred through online content. Rehan Tariq was arrested by the NCCIA after arriving in Pakistan from London on Wednesday. Authorities registered a case against him under Sections 11-C, 295-A, and 298 of the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA), accusing him of sharing content that allegedly hurt religious sentiments and could contribute to sectarian tensions.

The case relates to a podcast interview featuring religious scholar Syed Jawad Naqvi, which attracted significant attention and controversy on social media. According to the First Information Report (FIR), investigators allege that Tariq raised questions during the discussion on sensitive sectarian matters, and that the content, its presentation, and the context in which it was shared had the potential to create conflict among different religious groups.



Court hands Atif Zaman double death sentence in Mureed Abbas Murder case

Our Correspondent

KARACHI

An Additional District and Sessions Court has delivered its verdict in the murder case of television anchor Mureed Abbas and Khizar Hayat, nearly seven years after the case was filed. The court awarded Atif Zaman double death sentences after convicting him of the murders of Mureed Abbas and Khizar Hayat. It also issued permanent arrest warrants for absconding co-accused Adil Zaman.

According to the prosecution, Mureed Abbas and Khizar Hayat were killed on July 9, 2019. A case was registered against Atif Zaman and Adil Zaman at Darakhshan Police Station. The prosecution said the two victims were killed over a business dispute involving Atif Zaman and his brother, Adil Zaman.

Nepra Raises Electricity Tariff by 34 Paisas Per Unit

■ Nepra Approves 34 Paisas Electricity Tariff Increase for Pakistan Consumers



STAFF REPORTER

ISLAMABAD

The National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (Nepra) has approved an increase of 34 paisas per unit in electricity tariffs for consumers across Pakistan, including customers of K-Electric in Karachi.

According to an official notification issued by the regulator, the adjustment has been approved

under the monthly Fuel Cost Adjustment (FCA) mechanism for May 2026. The revised rates will be reflected in electricity bills issued in July 2026.

The increase will apply to consumers nationwide, including those receiving electricity from K-Electric, as part of the regular monthly adjustment process

based on changes in fuel costs.

The Central Power Purchasing Agency (CPPA) had requested a tariff hike of 82 paisas per unit for the May 2026 FCA. However, after reviewing the request, Nepra approved a lower increase of 34 paisas per unit.

The adjustment is expected to affect upcoming electricity bills, with consumers seeing the additional charges included separately under the fuel cost adjustment heading.



The Institute of Regional Studies (IRS), Islamabad, hosted a special seminar to commemorate the 105th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China (CPC), titled "China's Remarkable Socioeconomic Transformation under the Leadership of the CPC and Its Growing Contributions to Global Public Good".

ADB cuts Pakistan's growth forecast, raises inflation outlook

■ The bank also raised its forecast for average annual inflation from 6.5 per cent to 8.3 per cent.

Staff Reporter

ISLAMABAD



The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has revised down Pakistan's economic growth forecast for fiscal year 2026-27 while raising its inflation projection, citing regional uncertainty, energy-market risks and the potential impact of continuing tensions in the Middle East.

In its latest Asian Development Outlook report, the ADB reduced Pakistan's projected gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate from 4.5 per cent to 3.7 per cent for the current fiscal year. The bank also raised its forecast for average annual inflation from 6.5 per cent to 8.3 per cent.

The federal government has set a GDP growth target of 4 per cent for 2026-27 and aims to keep average inflation at 8.2 per cent. However, the ADB warned that instability in the Middle East could add further pressure on prices, particularly through uncertainty in regional energy markets.

According to the report, disruptions in energy supplies and supply chains have increased

production costs and weakened economic activity across the region.

The ADB has also decided to provide Pakistan financing worth \$4 billion.

For developing Asia and the Pacific, the ADB lowered its 2026 growth forecast to 4.9 per cent, compared with 5.1 per cent projected in April. The revised forecast is also 0.6 percentage points below the 5.5 per cent growth recorded in 2025. The report maintained the region's 2027 growth forecast at 5.1 per cent, expecting economic activity to recover as pressures from energy and supply-chain disruptions ease.

South Asia's growth outlook was reduced to 6 per cent in 2026 and

6.7 per cent in 2027 due to higher oil prices, increased freight costs and uncertainty surrounding remittances.

Inflation across developing Asia and the Pacific is projected to rise to 4.3 per cent in 2026 from 3 per cent in 2025, driven mainly by higher oil and gas prices and their spillover effects on other commodities. Inflation is expected to ease to 3.4 per cent in 2027.

The ADB identified major downside risks, including a renewed escalation in the Middle East conflict, prolonged uncertainty in energy markets, tighter global financial conditions, rising trade-policy uncertainty, food-price pressures and a deeper property-sector downturn in China.

Oil Prices Surge After Trump Orders Iran Strikes

■ Oil Markets Rally as Trump Ends Iran Ceasefire and Escalation Grows

Web Desk

NEW YORK

Global oil markets extended their gains on Thursday after US President Donald Trump announced the end of the ceasefire arrangement with Iran and ordered new strikes following attacks on vessels in the Strait of Hormuz.

Crude prices surged as investors reacted to rising tensions between Washington and Tehran, although equity markets showed signs of resilience, with technology stocks attracting some bargain buying. Asian markets, including Tokyo and Seoul, opened higher despite concerns over the latest geopolitical developments.

Oil prices jumped sharply on Wednesday after Trump said the fragile truce between the United States and Iran had collapsed.

Washington also withdrew a temporary sanctions waiver that had allowed Iranian oil exports to continue.

Both major crude benchmarks climbed nearly eight percent, with Brent crude briefly crossing \$80 per barrel for the first time in two weeks. The rise renewed concerns over inflationary pressures and the possible impact on global economic growth.

Trump said the US strikes were carried out in response to attacks on ships in the Strait of Hormuz, a key global energy route through which around one-fifth of the world's oil supply typically passes. He warned that Iran would face more severe consequences if further attacks occurred.

"This is in response to yesterday's bombing of ships by Iran," Trump



said in a statement shared on social media.

Despite the aggressive warnings, Trump later indicated that he expected the latest escalation to be resolved quickly and suggested that diplomatic discussions could continue. He also claimed that Iranian officials had contacted him seeking a new agreement, though he did not provide details about the alleged communication. Market analysts said Trump's statements increased fears that tensions could escalate further and that previous efforts toward

negotiations could collapse.

Neil Wilson of Saxo Markets said the remarks highlighted concerns about a possible return to a more hostile environment, although he noted that a complete breakdown in talks was not considered the most likely outcome because both sides had incentives to avoid a prolonged confrontation.

Stock markets remained mixed as investors weighed geopolitical risks against recent weakness in technology shares. Asian markets mostly moved higher, with Seoul's benchmark index gaining nearly two percent and Tokyo's Nikkei rising around two percent. Hong Kong continued its recent recovery, supported by gains in Chinese technology companies, while Shanghai, Singapore, Wellington, and Taipei also recorded increases.

Gas Supply Continues Nationwide Despite Qatar Energy Force Majeure Extension: SNGPL

■ SNGPL said the force majeure declared by Qatar Energy in March 2026

NEWS DESK

ISLAMABAD

Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Limited (SNGPL) on Thursday said gas supply to consumers across the country remains uninterrupted, rejecting media reports suggesting that a new wave of supply disruptions or force majeure had led to curtailment.

In a press release, the company said certain news reports published a day earlier had created an impression that gas consumers were facing fresh supply constraints. However, it clarified that no change had been made to gas supplies for consumers and that the reports did not reflect the ground situation.

SNGPL said the force majeure declared by Qatar Energy in March 2026 had been extended from time to time, including through its latest extension communicated to the company. It added that the matter was an ongoing situation and did not represent any new adverse development or reduction in gas



supply. The company said the gas supply situation was being closely managed under the guidance of the National Coordination and Management Council and the Ministry of Energy's Petroleum Division.

According to SNGPL, indigenous gas supplies have been optimised while LNG cargoes are being arranged regularly to meet demand across all sectors.

It said household demand during cooking hours was being met, while continuous gas supply to industry and the fertiliser sector had also been ensured to support economic activity. The company added that special focus was being placed on maximising gas supply to the power sector to help reduce electricity load-shedding.



Pakistan resumes potato exports to Russia after import restrictions eased

■ Pakistan eyes major boost in tyre exports as Chinese-Backed JV Announces \$120 million expansion

WEB DESK

ISLAMABAD

Russia has lifted restrictions on potato imports from Punjab, allowing 101 Pakistani exporters to resume shipments from July 7 after reviewing Pakistan's phytosanitary control system, according to Pakistan's trade mission in Moscow.

The decision was formally conveyed to the Ministry of National Food Security and Research, marking the resumption of potato exports to the Russian market following months of trade restrictions.

Russian authorities, however, excluded two Pakistani exporters from the approved list, citing their failure to meet the phytosanitary requirements of the Eurasian Economic Union during previous exports to Russia. According to official communication, potato imports from Punjab will be permitted subject to guarantees provided by Pakistan's Department of Plant Protection, which will oversee compliance with Russia's phytosanitary standards.

The Russian Federal Service for Veterinary and Phytosanitary

Surveillance said the decision followed its review of Pakistan's list of potato exporters and planned export volumes from Punjab.

The authority also noted that it had already permitted three Pakistani exporters—Chase International, Zahid Kinnow Grading and Waxing Plant, and National Fruit—to resume exports in April.

Pakistan's trade mission has asked the Ministry of National Food Security to ensure the implementation of the Russian decision and facilitate exporters.

Pakistan had engaged Russian authorities after import restrictions were imposed in May 2025, submitting pest status records and laboratory reports confirming the absence of the pests and diseases cited by Russia.

Meanwhile, the Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP) and the Pakistan Horticulture Development and Export Company (PHDEC) have organised virtual business-to-business meetings to help exporters take advantage of renewed access to the Russian market.



Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb, holding a meeting with Pakistan's newly appointed High Commissioner to the United Kingdom, Tipu Usman, to discuss Pakistan-UK economic and financial cooperation.

Global Outcry After Caracas Operation



(By Dr. Muhammad Tayyab Khan Singhani, Ph.D.)

There are moments in history that descend upon its pages like a storm events that are not merely military operations, but intense portraits of power, global politics, diplomatic aggression, and ethical questions which future generations study either as a warning or as a lesson. The situation that emerged after Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and his wife were taken into the custody of a U.S. special unit is also not just a military operation, but a broader political experiment a story of fearless power projection and a shaken global balance of authority, whose effects extend beyond regions and continents, reaching minds and consciences alike. This action is being seen as a severe blow to Venezuela's sovereignty and has once again revived the question: do powerful states still consider it their right to decide the political fate of weaker nations from predetermined negotiation tables?

The proud and triumphant tone adopted by U.S. President Donald Trump in describing the operation reflects a mindset in which military superiority is placed above moral legitimacy. The power blackout in the dead of night, aerial siege, advance of special units, and the dramatic removal of the president from his "fortress" were hailed as a technical marvel turning the display of power into something closer to a spectacle, a "television show," as Trump himself described it. Yet while this scene was framed as a symbol of military brilliance, it simultaneously left behind a serious question mark over international law, state dignity, and the very principle of sovereignty. The Venezuelan Defense Minister's declaration that this was the worst act of aggression in the country's history was not merely an emotional response it was the cry of a nation whose land was struck by missiles, whose civilian population trembled, whose civil and military installations were targeted, and whose capital Caracas was engulfed in towering columns of fire and smoke. The global response that followed was equally extraordinary. China condemned it as a blatant use of force, Russia demanded the release of the elected president, Iran and several Latin American countries termed it a grave violation of regional integrity, while the European Union and other Western states emphasized adherence to legal and humanitarian principles. Thus, the incident no longer remained a matter between two states rather, it appeared to redraw global diplomatic alignments along tense and polarized

axes. According to the U.S. position, Maduro faces serious criminal charges, narcotics allegations, and cases concerning human rights violations. His wife, Cilia Flores, was also targeted due to her perceived behind-the-scenes political influence and alleged connections. But the real question is not what the accusations are the question is whether any allegation in the modern global system now supersedes the sanctity of territorial sovereignty. Can a single powerful nation claim moral or legal authority to overthrow a government or abduct a sitting head of state? Or is this the return of that old era where the law of the jungle overpowers the language of diplomacy? Another disturbing dimension emerges when this operation is linked with transitional administration, restoration of oil infrastructure, and the intervention of American corporations revealing a broader framework of political restructuring and resource control. This recalls the echoes of old colonial doctrines where "reconstruction" precedes control, "security" cloaks dominance, and economic recovery becomes a prelude to political redesign. If this is the shape of the future, then the world appears to be walking back toward the shadows of past imperialism. Maduro's own political persona is not without contradictions on one side, centralized authority, rigid governance, and tightening space around political dissent; on the other, an image of a people's leader dancing at rallies, speaking in a soft tone, projecting simplicity and accessibility. This style may have earned him domestic sympathy, yet simultaneously created

intense global criticism. Even so, the manner, timing, and method of his arrest could trigger a crisis whose effects may not remain confined within Venezuela's borders. American analytical circles also note that regime change achieved through force rarely produces stability instead, history repeatedly shows that it results in greater chaos, mass migration, economic collapse, and regional friction. Should political confrontation intensify in the Caribbean following this operation whether through armed resistance or institutional conflict its consequences may spread far beyond Venezuela. It is for this reason that a large number of Americans themselves express hesitation toward such military action because history proves that a chapter opened through force seldom closes peacefully. On another level, Venezuela's decision to approach the UN Security Council indicates that international legal platforms remain the final refuge for weaker states. But when powerful nations begin to challenge the supremacy of these very institutions the foundations of the global order begin to tremble. Today's question is not whose stance is correct the real question is whether the world now stands at the brink of a new conflict between power and law.



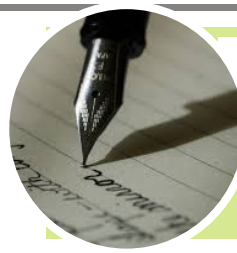
By: Salman Ahmed Qureshi

2025: The Year Pakistan Reclaimed Its Diplomatic Influence

The year 2025 will be remembered as one of the most important and blessed years in Pakistan's diplomatic history. This year can be described as the year of renewed momentum for Pakistan at the economic and diplomatic fronts. After navigating the complex and uncertain global environment for so many years, Pakistan not only strengthened its international relations but achieved strategic partnerships also, emerged as a reliable partner for the international community and became a respected voice on key global issues. From major security pacts and proactive international and regional engagement through foreign visits to global eminence and recognition, Pakistan has shown that it is pursuing a visionary foreign policy. This year we have seen decisive turnaround for the country. The revival of diplomatic relevance and the strategic partnerships along with economic stabilization and reform led recovery could be seen. If we talk about the diplomatic wins and strategic alignments, there is a list of success that Pakistan has achieved at the diplomatic front. The credit goes to Pakistan's diplomats, military leaders and the political leaders who were extremely active in 2025. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, President Asif Ali Zardari, Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, and the Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir, travelled extensively around the world to strengthen ties with key partners within and beyond the region. In total, they made 71 foreign trips collectively to promote Pakistan's foreign relations and strategic interests. These trips were not for show and pomp, but were meant to revive Pakistan's relations with major powers and the newly emerging powers. The frequency and range of these visits signaled a confident Pakistan that is eager to expand its influence and always ready to cooperate with the world. The year 2025 began with a visit by the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to Pakistan, where the historic bonds between

Pakistan and Türkiye were reinforced. This visit of the President Erdogan proved to be a historic moment in Türkiye-Pakistan bilateral relations because it resulted in 24 agreements and memoranda across military, trade, economy, health, technology, agriculture, and other areas. Furthermore, the commitment of both countries' heads to achieve the target of \$5 billion volume of bilateral trade proved their strong political will to deepen economic cooperation between the two brotherly nations. The visit by Iranian President His Excellency Dr. Masoud Pezeshkian carried greater significance since it was his first official visit to Pakistan since assuming office in July 2024. The Iranian Foreign Ministry described the visit as the start of a "new chapter" in ural, and political domains, and third, Islamabad's hosting of the Iranian President reinforced Pakistan's commitment to proactive diplomacy and a balanced approach to international engagement. The visit culminated in the signing of 12 Memoranda of Understanding (MoU)/agreements, covering diverse sectors such as trade, energy, border management, cultural exchange, and scientific cooperation and also set the target of \$10 billion volume of t was President Pezeshkian's first visit to Pakistan after assuming office, second, it laid a solid foundation for advancing bilateral cooperation across economic, security, cultural, and political domains, and third, Islamabad's hosting of the Iranian President reinforced Pakistan's commitment to proactive diplomacy and a balanced approach to international engagement. trade between both sides. This visit was a diplomatic achievement for Pakistan, one since it was President Pezeshkian's first visit to Pakistan after assuming

office, second, it laid a solid foundation for advancing bilateral cooperation across economic, security, cultural, and political domains, and third, Islamabad's hosting of the Iranian President reinforced Pakistan's commitment to proactive diplomacy and a balanced approach to international engagement. The recent visit of President of Kyrgyzstan Sadyr Zhaparov was a diplomatic milestone because it was the first visit by a Kyrgyz head of state to Pakistan in 20 years. Both sides agreed to significantly boost their trade from \$15 million to \$200 million within two years. Along with this 15 MoUs were signed as well. This visit marked a significant step in revitalizing bilateral relations after a long diplomatic gap. It also reflected that both sides are determined to expand cooperation beyond symbolic ties. A few days ago on Dec 26, 2025, the President of the United Arab Emirates and Ruler of Abu Dhabi Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, undertook first official visit to Pakistan. Although Pakistan and UAE enjoy the fraternal bonds but this visit is an effort to further strengthen those bonds through a "quantum jump" in economic cooperation. The UAE President showed interest in investment, energy, trade, and infrastructure. During the visit, a landmark agreement was signed under which the UAE committed to purchasing shares worth \$1 billion in Pakistan's Fauji Foundation. Overall, it signaled a shift toward a more robust, investment-driven relationship aimed at mutual economic growth and regional stability. Earlier, Jordan's King Abdullah II, Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim, Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto, and Kazakhstan's Deputy Prime Minister Murat Nurtleu, also paid official visits to Pakistan.



By: Salman Ahmed Qureshi

Afghanistan, India and Peace in the Region

Reports of intelligence-based airstrikes carried out by Pakistan in Afghanistan's Nangarhar, Paktika and Khost provinces have once again jolted the political landscape of South Asia. According to security sources, multiple hideouts of the outlawed Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan and other militant factions were targeted. President Asif Ali Zardari stated in clear terms that Pakistan's tolerance for cross border terrorism has reached its limit and that the country is acting under its inherent right of self defense. His remarks signal a broader policy shift. Pakistan appears to be moving from a reactive posture to a more assertive security strategy. To understand the present, one must revisit the past. Pakistan-Afghanistan relations have historically been marked by mistrust and volatility. Kabul's delay in recognizing Pakistan after its independence, disputes over the Durand Line, and recurring border tensions laid the foundation for a fragile relationship. During the Cold War, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan transformed the region into a theater of proxy conflict. Under General Zia-ul-Haq, Pakistan became a frontline state in the anti-Soviet jihad. While Soviet forces eventually withdrew, the long-term consequences included the proliferation of militancy, weapons, and ideological extremism forces that continue to haunt the region. During the Soviet backed era, Afghanistan was governed by the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). Its leader,

Babrak Karmal, served as president from 1979 to 1986 and was associated with the Parcham faction of the party. He was succeeded by Mohammad

that despite heavy reliance on Soviet support, the Afghan state apparatus during the Karmal and Najibullah years maintained a degree of institutional cohesion and centralized authority. However, following the Soviet withdrawal, Najibullah's government collapsed, and Afghanistan descended into protracted civil war. The subsequent infighting among Mujahideen factions, followed by the rise of the Taliban in the 1990s, reshaped Afghanistan's political landscape. Yet international isolation and internal rigidity prevented durable stability. After 9/11, the U.S.-led intervention removed the Taliban from power,

but the eventual American withdrawal under President Joe Biden once again created a vacuum. Militant groups exploited this uncertainty, raising concerns across the region. Pakistan maintains that outlawed TTP factions and ISIS-Khorasan elements continue to use Afghan territory to plan and launch attacks inside Pakistan. This assertion forms the basis of Islamabad's argument that recent military actions were unavoidable. Under international law, a state has the right to self-defense if armed attacks are orchestrated from across its borders and the host state fails to act decisively against the perpetrators. India's role in Afghanistan also features prominently in Pakistan's strategic calculus. India has invested billions of dollars in Afghan infrastructure projects, including roads, dams, and the Afghan parliament building. While these initiatives are publicly framed as development

assistance, sections of Pakistan's security establishment perceive a parallel strategic dimension to New Delhi's engagement. Afghan governments' perceived proximity to India has contributed to Islamabad's concerns about n host communities. A dignified, phased, and internationally supported

encirclement and regional imbalance. Similarly, growing economic cooperation between Iran and India particularly regarding the Chabahar Port project has influenced regional alignments. Some observers argue that unbalanced foreign partnerships can expose smaller states to geopolitical pressures and sanctions related complications. For Afghanistan's leadership, this underscores the importance of maintaining strategic equilibrium rather than overreliance on any single external actor. Another enduring dimension of Pakistan-Afghanistan relations is the refugee question. Millions of Afghan refugees have resided in Pakistan for decades, placing economic and social strain on host communities. A dignified, phased, and internationally supported

repatriation framework could serve the interests of both nations while easing bilateral tensions. South Asia today stands at a delicate crossroads. If Afghanistan takes credible steps to prevent its soil from being used by transnational militant groups and pursues a balanced foreign policy, new avenues for regional peace could emerge. Pakistan, for its part, has signaled that it will not compromise on its security.

US launches new airstrikes on Iran, with Tehran firing back at 3 Gulf Arab states

Trump also renewed his past threats to hit Iran's civilian infrastructure, including electric plants and desalinization plants, and to seize the oil-production hub of Kharg Island. After three tankers were hit Tuesday, the U.S. launched strikes on Iran, and Iranian forces retaliated by targeting American military sites in the Persian Gulf. Iran has asserted that the interim ceasefire deal gives it the right to manage traffic through the strait. Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf, a key negotiator in talks seeking a permanent end to the war, was defiant in a post on X: "The era of bullying and extortion is over. It leads nowhere. We don't fold." STRIKES RAISE FEARS THAT WAR COULD RESUME

Trump fueled concerns that the war could restart by saying the interim agreement to pause fighting was "over," although he added that he would allow negotiations to continue. Attacks have repeatedly threatened the shaky ceasefire, but Trump's comments added new uncertainty, and oil prices shot up after he spoke. A renewed conflict could engulf the wider Middle East and would likely again halt energy shipments through the strait. "For me, I think it's over," Trump said when asked about the status of the ceasefire. He added that U.S. representatives can continue negotiations, but he cast doubt on the outcome. "They can talk, but I think they're wasting their time," he said.

THE DESTINATION

Editor's Mail

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Chief Editor

Tahir Chudhary
Resident Editor Lahore

Opinion polls see France's Le Pen winning 2027 election despite guilty verdict

- The polls were carried out after the 57-year-old veteran far-right leader announced she would run in the election, following the appeal court's ruling that found her guilty of having misused EU money



WEB DESK

PARIS

Far-right leader Marine Le Pen could well win France's presidential election next year despite an appeal court this week upholding a guilty verdict for embezzlement of EU funds, two opinion polls suggest.

Much can happen until the ballot's first round on April 18 next year, and the pollsters stress this is not a forecast, but rather a snapshot of current voting intentions.

But both surveys, by Ifop pollsters for LCI and Le Figaro, and Toluna Harris Interactive for M6 and RTL show Le Pen leading the first round and being elected in the run-off on May 2, as did most opinion polls before the verdict.

The polls were carried out after the 57-year-old veteran far-right leader announced she would run in the election, following the appeal court's ruling that found her guilty of having misused EU money to pay party staff but reduced an election ban, allowing her to be candidate.

For the first round, Ifop sees the leader of the anti-immigration, eurosceptic National Rally ahead with 36%,

improving on ratings of 32-34% in previous surveys by the same pollster over the past months. None of her opponents would have more than 19% at best. The other poll shows similar results.

In the run-off, which sees the top two candidates from the first round face off, both pollsters see Le Pen winning. It's a narrower win against Former Prime Minister Edouard Philippe, a center-right candidate, with 49% in the Harris Interactive poll, which is within the margin of error.

Both pollsters see Gabriel Attal, also a former prime minister to President Emmanuel Macron, at 45%, while if it was the hard-left's Jean-Luc Melenchon against Le Pen, he would lose by a huge margin, with just about a third of the votes.

Reacting to the surveys, Socialist Party leader Olivier Faure said Le Pen was a "formidable candidate." The Socialists, and many other parties, say it was shameful for Le Pen to run despite her conviction. She has appealed the conviction and the highest court, the Cour de Cassation, has said it aimed to give a final verdict before the election.

Le Pen was greeted by cheers and boos as she launched her presidential campaign on Wednesday. As she shook hands in the street market of La Fleche in the Loire Valley, in western France, some jeered "Give the money back!" and "Go to jail!" while others chanted "Marine, President!" — a sign of the tensions that may lie ahead.



Pakistan Russia Joint Strategy vs Afghan Terror Networks

- Pakistan Russia Bilateral Cooperation Grows at UN Police Summit

WEB DESK

NEWYORK

Pakistan and Russia have agreed to build a joint strategy against terrorist networks in the region, with a strong focus on Afghanistan. This step forward in Pakistan Russia counterterrorism efforts came as Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi met his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Kolokoltsev, on the sidelines of the fifth UNCOPS 2026 summit.

The two leaders sat down for detailed talks on the region's security situation. They also looked at ways to work more closely on counterterrorism, drug trafficking, cybercrime, and training for law enforcement officers.

Both sides discussed running joint police exercises together. They also spoke about building shared plans to tackle terrorist groups active in the region. This shows growing Pakistan Russia bilateral cooperation on security matters.

To make this partnership stronger, both countries agreed to sign a memorandum of understanding between their interior ministries. This move will help turn spoken promises into lasting, official cooperation.

The meeting also looked back at earlier talks between the two nations to check progress. Naqvi invited Kolokoltsev to visit Pakistan soon, a sign of warming ties between the two countries.



Croatian Foreign Minister Dr Gordan Grlic Radman on Thursday said Croatia enjoys excellent relations with Pakistan and sees significant potential to further expand cooperation, particularly in economic and business sectors.

Trump Says Iran War Unlikely Despite Rising Regional Tensions

- President Trump Says Iran Conflict Unlikely Despite Fresh Military Escalation and Tensions

WEB DESK

Washington

US President Donald Trump has said he does not expect the conflict with Iran to develop into another full-scale war, despite renewed military tensions following recent attacks in the Strait of Hormuz.

Speaking during a news conference in Ankara, Trump stated that he believes the situation will calm down quickly. He explained that the latest US military action came after Iran allegedly targeted two ships, prompting Washington to launch what he described as a strong retaliatory strike. Trump warned that if Iran carries out further attacks, the United States would respond with force "ten times stronger."

His remarks came after earlier statements in which he announced the termination of the understanding reached with Iran and warned of additional military action following strikes on Iranian facilities. Those operations were presented as a



prolonged conflict, Trump emphasized that the United States is not seeking a lengthy military campaign. He said any future action would be swift and focused on ensuring security and maintaining stability in global energy supplies. He also expressed confidence that oil markets would return to normal conditions quickly.

During the same appearance, Trump also remarked that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan does not want Iran to become a nuclear power, highlighting the broader regional concern over Tehran's nuclear ambitions.

The latest tensions began after Iran allegedly attacked two commercial ships in the Strait of Hormuz. According to reports, Iran claimed the vessels had ignored the maritime route it wanted ships to follow through the strategic waterway, where Tehran has sought to impose transit charges.

response to attacks blamed on Iran's Revolutionary Guard in the Strait of Hormuz.

Trump's earlier warning fueled fears of another major confrontation between Washington and Tehran. Following those comments, crude oil prices in New York and London climbed more than five percent, while stock markets in the United States and several other countries recorded losses as investors reacted to growing geopolitical uncertainty. Addressing concerns about another

Venezuela Earthquake Death Toll Rises to 3,811

- Venezuela Earthquake Death Toll Climbs as Thousands Remain Homeless

WEB DESK

VENEZUELA

Venezuela earthquake death toll has now reached 3,811, according to new figures shared by National Assembly President Jorge Rodriguez this week.

The updated numbers also show 16,740 people injured and nearly 18,000 left without homes since the twin quakes struck on June 24. These figures continue to grow as rescue teams keep searching through damaged buildings across the country.

Interim President Delcy Rodriguez is now asking world leaders to lift sanctions on Venezuela. She says the country has money and gold held overseas that could help pay for rebuilding homes, schools, and hospitals.

For many years, the US, the European Union, and other nations placed strict sanctions on Venezuela. These actions were linked to claims about unfair



elections and drug crime. Many of these rules are still active today.

Still, after US forces captured former leader Nicolas Maduro earlier this year, Washington gave some relief to Venezuela's oil industry. Following the earthquakes, US officials also allowed

some earthquake-related money transfers for four months.

Rodriguez shared that she wrote a letter to King Charles, asking for Venezuelan gold kept at the Bank of England to be released. She also spoke with leaders at the International Monetary Fund about freeing up more funds for the country.



: Sheikh Dr. Mohammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa, Secretary General of the Muslim World League (MWL), called on the Chief Justice of Pakistan at the Supreme Court of Pakistan on Thursday.

600 Dead in DR Congo Ebola Outbreak

- A clinical trial of two potential treatments began in the DRC on July 2.

WEB DESK

KINSHASA

The Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has claimed 600 lives, according to the latest figures released by the World Health Organization (WHO) on Thursday.

The UN health agency said that 1,759 confirmed cases have been reported in the DRC since the outbreak was declared in mid-May. The death toll crossed 500 only three days earlier, highlighting the rapid spread of the disease.

In neighbouring Uganda, two people have died, while 17 patients have recovered out of 20 confirmed cases.

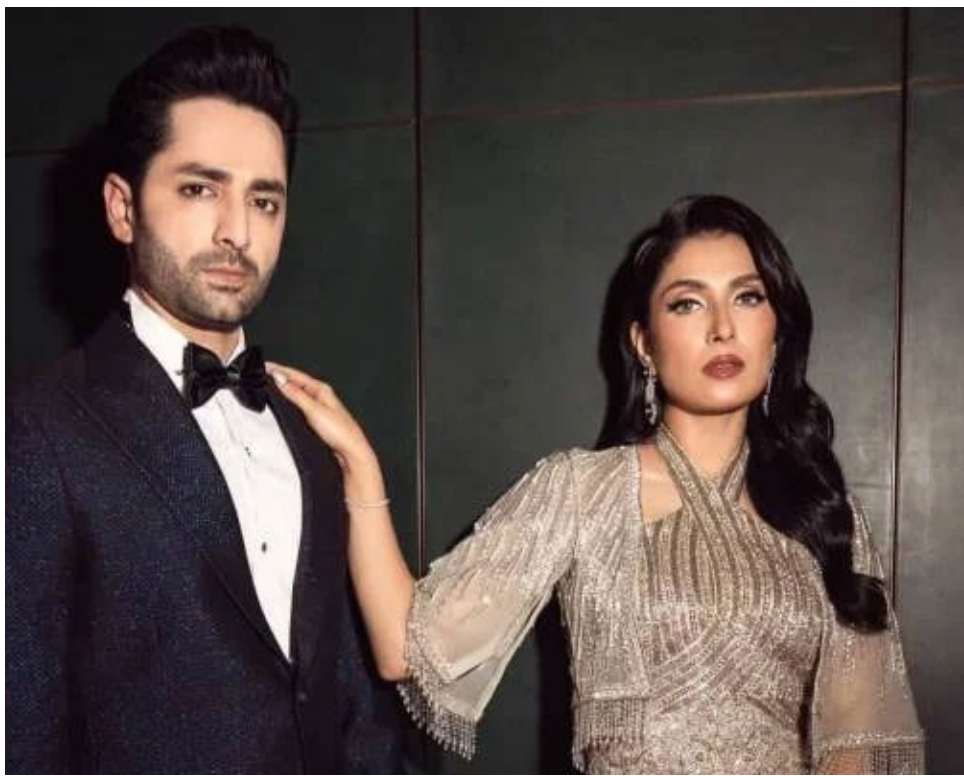
WHO data, based on figures provided by Congolese health authorities, showed that the outbreak has a case fatality rate of 34 percent in the DRC. So far, 285 patients have recovered, while 304 suspected cases remain under investigation.



The outbreak has affected four provinces in northeastern DRC, with Ituri province emerging as the main hotspot.

Health officials said the outbreak is being driven by the rare Bundibugyo strain of Ebola, for which no approved vaccine or treatment is currently available.

A clinical trial of two potential treatments began in the DRC on July 2. The study is assessing the effectiveness of the monoclonal antibody MBP134 and the antiviral drug remdesivir, both separately and in combination.



Danish Taimoor Responds Wittyly to Ronaldo Tribute Criticism

■ Actor Danish Taimoor has frequently expressed his admiration for Cristiano Ronaldo

News Desk

ISLAMABAD

Pakistani actor Danish Taimoor has responded with humor to the social media criticism over his recent tribute to football legend Cristiano Ronaldo. The actor addressed users who questioned his use of the phrase “grew up watching Ronaldo,” offering a lighthearted clarification through a new Instagram post. Sharing a fresh photo, Danish explained that he meant he had followed Ronaldo’s career throughout his own adulthood. In his caption, he wrote, “I grew up (from

my 20s to my 40s, #43 right now Alhamdulillah) watching Ronaldo’s career. Didn’t know I had to explain what ‘grew up’ means. Hahahahahah. Some of you are fighting grammar harder than your team fights in knockout games. And yes, he’s still the GOAT. Period.” His playful response quickly gained traction online, with many fans defending the actor and praising his sense of humor. Supporters described the debate as unnecessary, saying his admiration for Ronaldo had always been obvious and that critics had overanalyzed a simple expression. The clarification follows Danish’s emotional tribute after Portugal’s

FIFA Club World Cup exit, where he praised Ronaldo’s remarkable legacy. His statement about having “grown up watching” the football star sparked debate, as some social media users compared the ages of the actor and the Portuguese icon. A longtime football enthusiast, Danish Taimoor has frequently expressed his admiration for Cristiano Ronaldo and has openly supported both the Portuguese superstar and Real Madrid. His latest post reaffirmed that his respect for Ronaldo remains as strong as ever, despite the online criticism.

Justin Bieber Joins FIFA World Cup Final Halftime Show

■ Canadian pop superstar Justin Bieber Added to Star-Studded FIFA World Cup Final Halftime Performance

Web desk

NEW YORK

Canadian pop superstar Justin Bieber has been added to the lineup for the first-ever FIFA World Cup final halftime show, with organizers confirming that the entire musical performance will run for 11 minutes. Bieber will join an all-star cast featuring Madonna, Shakira, and BTS for the Super Bowl-style spectacle scheduled for July 19 at MetLife Stadium.

The performance is being curated by Chris Martin and marks the first time a halftime show of this scale will be staged during a FIFA World Cup final. The announcement comes after concerns that the production could significantly extend the traditional halftime break.

Football regulations allow a halftime interval of no more than 15 minutes. However, organizers



may need additional time for stage setup and removal, raising questions about whether the break could affect the flow of the match. Earlier reports had suggested the show might extend the halftime period to around 25 minutes, but the confirmed 11-minute performance has eased some of those concerns.

FIFA President Gianni Infantino described the event as the biggest

stage ever for a halftime show, with billions of viewers expected worldwide. The show will also include appearances by characters from Sesame Street and The Muppets. It will support the FIFA Global Citizen Education Fund, which aims to raise \$100 million to improve education opportunities for children around the world during the tournament.

Bieber said he was grateful for the opportunity to participate and highlighted the educational initiative behind the event. The singer, known for hits including Stay and Love Yourself, said the cause made the performance even more meaningful.

The latest additions to the lineup include Nigerian singer Burna Boy and Venezuelan conductor Gustavo Dudamel. Coldplay will also perform in collaboration with the PS22 Chorus.

Global Citizen CEO Hugh Evans said the event could become one of the most-watched 11 minutes in music broadcast history, comparing its global reach to major charity performances such as Live Aid.

The World Cup final halftime performance will be slightly shorter than recent Super Bowl halftime shows, which have generally lasted around 13 to 14 minutes.



Wasim Abbas Confirms Divorce from Saba Hameed After 29-Year Marriage

Showbiz Desk

ISLAMABAD

Veteran Pakistani actor Wasim Abbas has confirmed that he and fellow actor Saba Hameed ended their 29-year marriage, revealing that the two had been living separately for the past 14 years before their divorce was formally finalised. In a recent interview, Abbas said the separation was amicable and that there was never any bitterness between the former couple. Despite living apart, he said they continued to work together on different projects and occasionally met as friends. Wasim Abbas and Saba Hameed were long regarded as one of Pakistan’s most respected celebrity couples, admired for

their successful careers and strong public image. Abbas said he would have no hesitation in working with Saba Hameed again if offered a suitable role.

Speaking about the decision to divorce, Abbas said he felt neither sadness nor regret, explaining that the emotional connection needed to sustain a marriage had faded over time. He also clarified that the couple had no children together.

The actor said he has always maintained a warm relationship with Saba Hameed’s family and believes that mutual respect is more important than love in any relationship. According to him, the couple chose to end their marriage with dignity and never spoke negatively about one another in the media.

Mehermaan Alieen Shares Candid Behind-the-Scenes Moments From Zanjeerain Set

■ The actress has been receiving appreciation from viewers for her role in the serial.

WEB DESK

Lahore

Rising Pakistani actress Mehermaan Alieen Khan has shared a series of candid behind-the-scenes videos from the set of drama serial Zanjeerain, giving fans a glimpse into the emotions, teamwork and lighter moments behind the project.

Taking to Instagram, the actress posted a carousel of videos accompanied by captions reflecting the mood of the scenes and her experiences during filming.

In one clip, Mehermaan is seen resting her chin on her hand with her eyes closed. She captioned the video with a reflective line about betrayal and emotional confinement: “Some betrayals don’t shatter you, rather



leave you staring out of windows you once called home. Not every prison has bars!” Another video showed the actress filming in Lahore’s historic Walled City. Dressed in a traditional shalwar kameez and dupatta, she jokingly referred to veteran actor Adnan Siddiqui’s cheerful energy on set.

Her next post showed Siddiqui sitting on a rooftop and playing the famous tune of Mere Paas Tum Ho on a flute. Mehermaan called it her favourite part of the set and described it as a treat to watch.

The actress also highlighted the work of the production team. In one video, crew members were seen preparing for the next take as she adjusted her costume near a window. “It takes a village. Truly. Behind each perfect shot!” she wrote.

In another clip, a crew member was seen carefully painting a wall before filming. Praising the attention to detail, Mehermaan said that even a tiny mark on the wall could delay a shot when a team was committed to perfection.

Fans quickly responded with admiration in the comments section.



Vice chancellor Govt college woman University Sialkot Professor Dr, Shazia Bashir & President SCCI Syed Ehtesham Mazhar Gilani are viewing on display items during the exhibition of Art and Design at SCCI

Nimra Khan drops cryptic ‘Bitter Reality’ post about fake friends

Web Desk

KARACHI

Pakistani actress Nimra Khan has once again captured social media's attention after sharing a thought provoking Instagram reel that explored the darker side of jealousy, competition, and fake friendships.

Taking to Instagram, the actress posted a visually captivating reel featuring a series of elegant looks against different scenic backdrops. While the stylish visuals impressed fans, it was the reflective message accompanying the video that truly resonated with viewers. She simply captioned the post, “Bitter Reality.” The reel featured a trending voiceover discussing how jealousy



can often hide behind smiles and friendship. The narration suggested that some people outwardly celebrate your achievements while secretly wishing for your downfall, emphasizing that envy often stems from another person's success rather than any wrongdoing.

The audio further encouraged listeners to remain focused on their own journey.

Ducky Bhai shuts down viral Shoaib Akhtar rumours with strong clarification

Staff Reporter

ISLAMABAD

Pakistani YouTuber Ducky Bhai, Saad Ur Rehman has responded to the online criticism surrounding his interaction with former Pakistani fast bowler Shoaib Akhtar after a video from a latest event sparked widespread discussion on social media.

The controversy began when a clip from the event went viral, with many social media users claiming that Ducky Bhai deliberately ignored Shoaib Akhtar. The video quickly fueled speculation, leading many to believe there was tension between the two personalities.

Addressing the claims through his Instagram Story, Ducky Bhai dismissed the speculation and clarified that the viral narrative was completely misleading.



He explained that he had already met Shoaib Akhtar privately before the event began. According to him, they greeted each other warmly and had a proper conversation in a private room before Shoaib Akhtar was called to the stage.

Ducky Bhai expressed surprise that such a minor incident had become a topic of discussion online. He said he had seen many unnecessary stories on social media, but described this as one of the most pointless claims he had come across.



West Indies-bound Pakistan team starts training National Test squad has begun practice session for West Indies tour at Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium

Fifa refereeing chief rejects claims of bias in Argentina's win over Egypt

■ Collina defends World Cup officials, warns against integrity allegations

Web Desk

WASHINGTON

Fifa refereeing chief Pierluigi Collina defended the officiating in Argentina's 3-2 victory over Egypt in the World Cup round of 16, dismissing allegations of bias and saying match officials operated with complete independence.

In an interview published on Fifa website on Thursday, Collina said criticism of referees was part of football but he condemned the questioning of the officials' integrity after Egypt complained about the officiating following the defeat.

Constructive discussion about decisions will always be part of football, but unfounded allegations have no place in our sport," Collina said.



"Nobody can question the integrity of the Fifa World Cup match officials ... Nobody can claim that Fifa refereeing can be influenced by anyone, not even by the Fifa president [Gianni Infantino]."

Collina said that such allegations could provoke threats against referees and their families.

Egypt exited the tournament but claimed they had been treated unfairly after Argentina overturned a 2-0

deficit to snatch victory with a stoppage-time winner from Enzo Fernandez.

Coach Hossam Hassan alleged after the match there may have been pressure on the referee to keep Argentina in the tournament.

And the Egyptian Football Association said "several key incidents raised serious concerns and left profound questions about the consistency and fairness of decisions that directly influenced the course of the game."

Egypt argued that Mostafa Zico's second-half strike was incorrectly ruled out for what it described as a non-existent foul in the build-up. Egypt were also incensed that a challenge on Mohamed Salah was not penalised moments before Argentina launched the move that produced the winning goal.

Messi Leads Argentina's Dramatic Comeback Against Egypt, Switzerland Also Advance

● Argentina will now face Switzerland in the quarter-finals in Kansas City on Saturday.

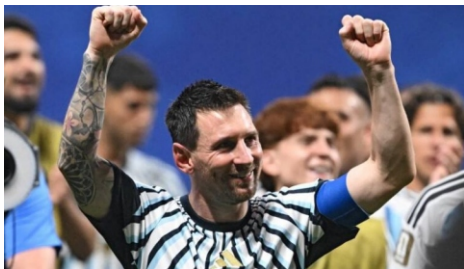
WEB DESK

Atlanta

Lionel Messi inspired Argentina to a thrilling 3-2 comeback victory over Egypt in the FIFA World Cup last-16 clash, helping the defending champions book their place in the quarter-finals.

Egypt appeared on course for one of the biggest upsets of the tournament after Yasser Ibrahim and Mostafa Zico scored to give their side a 2-0 lead with only 11 minutes remaining at Atlanta's Mercedes-Benz Stadium.

Argentina, however, produced a remarkable late revival. Cristian Romero pulled one



back in the 79th minute with a header from Messi's accurate cross. Four minutes later, Messi volleyed home the equaliser, scoring his eighth goal of the tournament and bringing Argentina level at 2-2. With the match heading towards

extra time, Enzo Fernandez scored the winning goal in the second minute of stoppage time to complete Argentina's stunning fightback.

Messi became emotional after the final whistle and said the team was determined to remain in the competition.

"Coming back from 2-0 down was not easy, especially in a World Cup where no team gives up easily," Messi said. "It was a moment of happiness and relief. We wanted to stay in the tournament and did not want this to be the end for us."

The match also saw Messi miss a first-half penalty, while Egypt had a second-half goal ruled out following a controversial VAR decision. Egypt coach Hossam Hassan strongly criticised the officiating, claiming his side had been treated unfairly.

Argentina will now face Switzerland in the quarter-finals in Kansas City on Saturday. Switzerland secured their place in the last eight after defeating Colombia 4-3 in a penalty shoot-out following a goalless draw after extra time in Vancouver. The victory marked Switzerland's first World Cup quarter-final appearance since 1954.

Zohran Mamdani comments on controversial Argentina-Egypt match



WEB DESK

ISLAMABAD

New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani has commented on the controversial refereeing decisions in the Argentina-Egypt match.

Speaking to the media about his new "Next Stop: Better Buses, Faster Service" initiative, Mamdani said improved public transport helps save commuters valuable time and that the project is intended to reduce travel times.

He said shorter journeys would allow people to spend more time with their families, including having breakfast together before work and returning home earlier in the evening to be with their children.

During the media interaction, Mamdani also addressed the controversial decisions in the Argentina-Egypt match.

Concluding his remarks, he said, "It means agreeing with your friends that Egypt were robbed yesterday."

His comments have added to the ongoing debate on social media over the refereeing decisions during the match.

Following Argentina's dramatic victory over Egypt, Egypt's head coach, players and many social media users have criticised the match referees over a series of controversial decisions.



Litton Das ruled out of Zimbabwe ODI series due to hamstring injury

SPORTS DESK

DHAKA

Bangladesh wicketkeeper-batter Litton Das has been ruled out of the remainder of the ongoing ODI series against Zimbabwe after failing to recover from a hamstring injury.

Litton was initially sidelined for the opening ODI on July 6, but continued fitness concerns have now ruled him out of the entire three-match series. He will remain in Dhaka to continue his rehabilitation.

Bangladesh team physiotherapist Baizid Islam Khan said Litton was not fit enough to return despite undergoing a fitness test.

"Litton Das missed the first ODI and is still not match fit. He underwent a fitness assessment today, but the results were not satisfactory," Khan said. He added that with the remaining ODIs scheduled in quick succession, Litton is not expected to regain full fitness during the series, prompting the decision to rule him out of the final two matches.

FIFA confirms first ever halftime show for 2026 World Cup final

■ FIFA says the 2026 World Cup final will host the tournament's first-ever halftime show featuring Justin Bieber, Madonna, Shakira and BTS.



SPORTS DESK

ISLAMABAD

FIFA has announced that the 2026 FIFA World Cup final, to be held at New York New Jersey Stadium on July 19, 2026, will feature the tournament's first-ever halftime show.

The show will feature performances by Justin Bieber, Madonna, Shakira and BTS.

Nigerian singer Burna Boy,

conductor Gustavo Dudamel, the PS22 Chorus and Coldplay will also be part of the special event.

Gianni Infantino, president of FIFA, said the halftime show would not only celebrate football and music but would also support efforts to expand access to quality education and sporting opportunities for children around the world through the FIFA Global Citizen Education Fund.

Justin Bieber said the FIFA World Cup brings the world together on one platform and that he was pleased to be part of the historic halftime show, particularly because the initiative will help expand educational opportunities for children around the world.

Afghanistan fast bowler Shapoor Zadran laid to rest, cricketers pay tribute

SPORTS DESK

ISLAMABAD

Afghanistan fast bowler Shapoor Zadran, who died in New Delhi on Tuesday after a prolonged illness, was laid to rest in Kabul on Thursday following funeral prayers at the Eidgah Mosque attended by family, friends, fellow cricketers and thousands of mourners.

The cricket world has united in paying tribute to former Afghanistan fast bowler Shapoor Zadran following his death at the age of 38, with the International Cricket Council (ICC), national cricket boards, current and former players and officials remembering him as one of the pioneers of Afghan cricket.

The International Cricket Council (ICC) said it was saddened by the passing of the former Afghanistan paceman, describing him as a Cricket World Cup hero whose



contribution to the game would be remembered.

The Afghanistan Cricket Board (ACB) described Zadran as one of the foundation-laying figures of Afghanistan cricket, saying his dedication, passion and unwavering commitment played a vital role in the development of the game. "He was among the proud cricketers who stood at the heart of Afghanistan's early cricket journey and helped build the path that brought Afghan cricket to the international stage," the board said. Former India all-rounder Yuvraj Singh called Zadran "a

true pioneer of Afghanistan cricket", saying his passion and commitment to the game would always be remembered.

"It's always heartbreaking to lose someone who gave so much to the game," Singh wrote, extending condolences to Zadran's family and the Afghanistan cricket community.

Former India captain and commentator Ravi Shastri also paid tribute, saying Zadran's contribution to Afghanistan's journey in world cricket would never be forgotten.

Former Pakistan fast bowler Shoaib Akhtar described him as

a fearless cricketer who played a key role in putting Afghanistan on the global cricket map, while former Sri Lanka all-rounder Angelo Mathews remembered him as "a champion both on and off the field."

The Bangladesh Cricket Board expressed deep sadness over Zadran's passing, saying his contribution to Afghanistan cricket would always be remembered. Australian fast bowler Josh Hazlewood also conveyed his condolences to Zadran's family.

Messages of sympathy also poured in from current and former players, cricket boards and officials around the world, highlighting the respect Zadran earned throughout his career.

A key figure in Afghanistan's rise on the international stage, Zadran represented his country in 44 One-Day Internationals, 36 Twenty20 Internationals and one Test match, claiming 43 ODI wickets and 37 T20I wickets during an international career spanning more than a decade.

PM Shehbaz, Croatian FM agree to strengthen bilateral cooperation

- Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said Pakistan and Croatia enjoy friendly relations founded on mutual respect



STAFF REPORTER
ISLAMABAD

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Croatian Minister of Foreign Affairs Gordan Grlic Radman agreed to enhance bilateral cooperation during a meeting held at the Prime Minister's House on Thursday. Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar and Foreign Secretary Amna Baloch also attended the meeting.

Welcoming the Croatian delegation, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said Pakistan and Croatia enjoy friendly relations founded on mutual respect, goodwill, and shared interests. He reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to further strengthening ties between the two countries. The prime minister expressed Pakistan's desire to expand bilateral cooperation in key sectors, including trade and investment, information technology, connectivity, agriculture, tourism, and skilled workforce development.

Shehbaz Sharif also conveyed his best wishes to Croatian President Zoran Milanovic and Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic, extending a cordial invitation for them to undertake

official visits to Pakistan.

Speaking on the occasion, Radman expressed gratitude for the invitation and said he was pleased to be making his first official visit to Pakistan. He said the talks offered an opportunity to review bilateral relations and explore new avenues of cooperation, particularly in trade, the economy, and business. Describing Pakistan-Croatia relations as "excellent," the Croatian minister said there remains significant potential to further strengthen collaboration between the two countries.

Commenting on ongoing conflicts in the Middle East and Ukraine, Radman underscored the importance of international solidarity, respect for international law, and humanitarian principles in addressing global and regional crises.

He also welcomed Pakistan's diplomatic efforts to promote dialogue and de-escalation in the Middle East, praising initiatives aimed at advancing peace and regional stability. Radman congratulated Pakistan on its role in supporting diplomatic engagement and reaffirmed Croatia's support for peaceful solutions to international conflicts.

Six killed in Dera Ismail Khan tribal clash

- Six people were killed in a violent clash in Dera Ismail Khan, while a separate grenade attack injured a woman and two children, prompting police investigations.



Staff Reporter

DERA ISMAIL KHAN

At least six people were killed and two others injured in a violent clash between two rival groups in the Hanyala Shah Hassan Khel area of Dera Ismail Khan, police said on Wednesday. According to police, five of the deceased belonged to the Ataullah group, while one victim was from the rival faction. A heavy police contingent was deployed to the area to restore order and prevent further violence.

In a separate incident, a woman and two children were injured after unidentified

attackers hurled a hand grenade and opened fire at a house in the Wanda Ali area of Kadi Khaisor. Police said the attack targeted the residence of a man identified as Iqbal. The injured were shifted to a nearby hospital for medical

treatment.

Following the incident, family members and local residents staged a protest outside the office of the SP Paharpur, demanding the immediate arrest of those responsible and stronger security measures.

Police said an investigation into the grenade attack and firing incident is underway, while efforts are being made to identify and apprehend the attackers. Authorities have also increased security in the affected areas to prevent further unrest.



Students participate in drawing, painting and calligraphy activities during the Summer Camp at Alhamra Arts Council.

Pakistan Calls for Global Action Against Conflict Sexual Violence



WEB DESK

NEW YORK

Pakistan has urged the international community to take stronger and more coordinated measures to eliminate conflict-related sexual violence. The appeal was made by Pakistan's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Asim Iftikhar Ahmad, during the UN Security Council's Open Debate on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence.

Addressing the Council, Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad said sexual violence in conflict is not an unavoidable outcome of war. Instead, he described it as a deliberate weapon used to spread fear, inflict suffering, suppress communities and impose collective punishment.

CM Maryam orders state of readiness over heatwave and urban flooding threat

- Punjab CM Maryam Nawaz directed authorities to prepare for heatwaves, urban flooding and monsoon emergencies, citing rising climate risks.

ASIF IQBAL

LAHORE



Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz has warned that temperatures could rise significantly during July, August and September, while urban flooding also remains a major concern, directing all relevant departments to maintain complete preparedness.

Chairing a meeting on monsoon preparedness, the chief minister said climate change is a reality and some cities could experience temperatures as high as 52 degrees Celsius. She added that above-normal rainfall has also been forecast for certain areas.

Maryam Nawaz said proactive measures are being taken to deal with monsoon rains and

that the early warning system is being fully activated to ensure timely weather forecasts and emergency response.

She directed all departments to remain on high alert for possible flooding and instructed rescue and emergency services to continue conducting mock exercises to strengthen disaster preparedness.

The chief minister said lessons learned from last year's devastating floods had been incorporated into current planning, adding that arrangements had also been made to ensure adequate fodder

supplies for livestock.

She further instructed authorities to issue timely public advisories regarding heatwaves and weather conditions, urging citizens to avoid unnecessary outdoor exposure for elderly people, women and children during extreme heat.

Maryam Nawaz said Punjab had completed all necessary arrangements to tackle heatwave conditions, claiming that rainwater is drained promptly in the province, while, without naming any province, she remarked that floodwater remains stagnant elsewhere.

Referring to the recent Kahna tragedy, the chief minister announced that the "Apna Ghar, Mehfooz Ghar" programme had been launched to help prevent similar incidents.

Pakistan rises 30pc in global maritime rankings: Iftikhar Ahmad Rao

- Pakistan's maritime ranking has improved by 30%, reaching 69th globally, says Maritime Task Force chairman.

STAFF REPORTER

ISLAMABAD

Chairman of the Prime Minister's Maritime Task Force Iftikhar Ahmad Rao said on Thursday that Pakistan's improved performance has lifted its position in the global maritime sector.

Speaking at a press conference alongside the Secretary of the Ministry of Maritime Affairs and a member of the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR), Rao said around 80% of global trade is conducted by sea and Pakistan is located at a



strategically important point in the Gulf region.

He said Pakistan serves as an important gateway to Central

Asia. The Maritime Task Force was established in August 2024 and held meetings with officials of relevant institutions to

identify issues facing the sector before presenting its recommendations to the prime minister in December 2024.

Rao said an implementation committee had also been formed to oversee the task force's recommendations and that it was holding meetings on a regular basis.

He said customs authorities had deployed additional personnel to speed up maritime operations, contributing to improved sectoral performance. As a result, Pakistan's maritime ranking improved by 30%, placing the country 69th in the global rankings.



Punjab government and the U.S. Consulate General in Lahore have agreed to strengthen cooperation in the cultural sector following a meeting between Punjab Information and Culture Minister Uzma Bukhari and U.S. Consul General Stetson Sanders.

Sea breeze eases Karachi heat; rain expected over next three days

STAFF REPORTER

KARACHI

Sea breeze and cloud cover have brought relief from intense heat in Karachi, with the Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD) forecasting light drizzle and partly cloudy conditions over the next three days. According to the PMD's Early Warning Centre, the city is expected to remain partly cloudy and humid, with a chance of drizzle during the night. Strong winds may also blow intermittently during the forecast period. The department said daytime temperatures are likely to remain between 34°C and 36°C over the coming days.

The weather system is being influenced by moisture-laden winds



from the Arabian Sea moving into the upper and central parts of the country, while a western weather system is also affecting northern regions. Meanwhile, hot and humid weather is expected to persist across most parts of Sindh.

The PMD further forecast isolated dust storms, gusty winds and light rain accompanied by thunder in the districts of Jacobabad, Qambar Shahdadkot, Larkana, Sukkur, Dadu and Jamshoro later on Thursday.