A Leading National Daily
ABC Certified

Daily The Spokesman

Simultaneously published from Islamabad, Lahore and Multan

Rabi-ul-Awwal 8, Saturday, August 22, 2026 | www.dailyspokesman.net | @daily_spokesman | Daily Spokesman Vol: 20, Issue: 123 | Price Rs. 25.00 Pages 8

Nawaz Sharif visits different areas of Lahore

Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) President Mohammad Nawaz Sharif on Friday visited different areas of Lahore and reviewed development projects. PML-N President Nawaz Sharif visited the Railway Station Underpass and Circular Road and inspected the decoration of bazaars, shops and signboards.

Khan has no serious health issue, says Khawaja Asif

Defence Minister Khawaja Asif has assured the nation that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan has no serious health problem and said he had recovered from an eye condition. Speaking in the National Assembly on Friday, Khawaja Asif said he could state on oath that there was no serious issue with Imran Khan's health.

Meeting

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari in a meeting with Ms Hao Yuejiao, President of the China Africa & Asia Trade & Cooperation Promotion Association, at Aiwan-e-Sadr on Friday.

Photo: PID

President Zardari for further strengthening Pakistan-China Economic and Trade Cooperation

City Desk

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari has called for further strengthening economic and trade cooperation between Pakistan and China, particularly by promoting greater business-to-business engagement and exploring new avenues of collaboration.

The President expressed these views during a meeting with Ms Hao Yuejiao, President of the China Africa & Asia Trade & Cooperation Promotion Association. He welcomed efforts to enhance trade and investment ties between the two countries and emphasised the importance of expanding mutually beneficial cooperation.

Senator Saleem Mandviwalla was also present during the meeting.

High-Level Malaysian Delegation Discusses Regional Security with COAS Asim Munir

City Desk

RAWALPINDI: Minister of Home Affairs of Malaysia, Mr. Saifuddin Nasution Bin Ismail, along with the Malaysian Ambassador to Pakistan and a high-level delegation called on Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir, NI (M), HJ, Chief of Army Staff & Chief of Defence Forces (COAS & CDF), at General Headquarters (GHQ), Rawalpindi.

During the meeting, the regional security dynamics and matters of mutual interest were deliberated upon. Both sides reaffirmed the strong and enduring bonds between Pakistan and Malaysia and expressed their resolve to further broaden cooperation and engagement in areas of shared interest.

The COAS & CDF reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to further deepening defence collaboration and strategic engagement with Malaysia.

PM pledges equitable development for Balochistan, urges dialogue over violence

City Desk

ISLAMABAD: PM Shehbaz Sharif, addressing a Q&A session with participants of the Balochistan National Workshop, reaffirmed the federal government's commitment to Balochistan's equitable development, stressing that the province's grievances must be resolved through dialogue and mutual consultation rather than violence.

He noted that Balochistan's vast mineral and natural resources require investment and collaboration to develop, and that any benefits should go first to the province's people. He acknowledged that the province's large geography and dispersed population create real challenges in delivering roads, education and healthcare. Recalling Balochistan's voluntary accession to Pakistan, he called for a "grand, frank and meaningful dialogue" while firmly rejecting violence against workers and civilians involved in development projects.

On the Karachi-Chaman N-25 highway, he said Rs415 billion had been allocated to convert the route from a "khooni sarak" into one of peace and development, a decision made in consultation with Field Marshal Asim Munir. He warned that terrorism remains a major obstacle to infrastructure progress, saying no amount of funding can build roads if killings continue.

He highlighted Gwadar Port's strategic capacity, directing that 60 percent of federal imports of essential goods be routed through it, and noted Balochistan's share in federal schemes and education programmes has been kept 10 percent above its population ratio. He cited the 2010 NFC Award and Punjab's contribution as examples of interprovincial solidarity.

The PM also detailed the tubewell solarisation programme, with around 20,000 tubewells already converted under a Rs70 billion initiative. He urged Balochistan's leadership and civil society to help safeguard development projects, and paid tribute to security personnel who sacrificed their lives fighting terrorism, concluding with hopes for peace and prosperity in the province.

Security Forces Kill 49 Terrorists in Intelligence-Based Operations: ISPR

City Desk

RAWALPINDI: Security Forces, in coordination with police, conducted a series of intelligence-based operations in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan as part of the ongoing counter-terrorism campaign, according to ISPR.

The operations resulted in the killing of 49 terrorists, while significant quantities of weapons, explosives, ammunition and other equipment were recovered and destroyed.

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 12 terrorists were killed during operations in Bannu, North Waziristan, Orakzai and Khyber districts. Security forces also recovered explosives, IED detonating devices, weapons, ammunition and motorcycles.

In Balochistan, 37 terrorists were killed in 10 intelligence-based operations conducted in Mastung, Mach, Khuzdar and Panjgur districts. Weapons, explosive drums and remote detonation equipment were also seized and destroyed. ISPR said sanitization operations were continuing to eliminate any remaining terrorist elements in the affected areas. It reaffirmed that Security Forces and Law Enforcement Agencies remain committed to protecting Pakistan's security and territorial integrity.

The statement said the counter-terrorism campaign under the Azm-e-Istehkam framework would continue with full determination to eliminate foreign-sponsored terrorism and restore lasting peace and stability across the country.

President, PM laud security forces for eliminating 49 terrorists in KP, Balochistan

City Desk

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Friday praised security forces and police for eliminating 49 terrorists belonging to Fitna al-Hindustan and Fitna al-Khawarij in joint intelligence-based operations in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan.

President Zardari commended the forces for the successful operations, stating that terrorist elements backed by external support would never succeed in undermining Pakistan's peace and stability. He reiterated that anti-terrorism operations would continue with full force until the menace is completely eradicated, expressing confidence that Balochistan and KP would soon be free of terrorism and move toward development and prosperity.

PM Shehbaz Sharif also paid tribute to the security forces, calling the operations a reflection of their professional expertise. He reaffirmed the government's resolve to completely eliminate terrorism and ensure lasting peace and security for citizens. Both leaders reaffirmed the national resolve to defeat terrorism and commended the courage, professionalism and sacrifices of security forces and police personnel in the ongoing fight against extremism.

Finance Minister meets Silk Road Fund delegation, discusses investment cooperation with Pakistan

Commerce Desk

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb met a high-level Silk Road Fund (SRF) delegation, led by Chairperson Ms. Zhu Jun, to discuss investment opportunities and economic cooperation with Pakistan.

Aurangzeb briefed the delegation on Pakistan's economic progress, including improved fiscal discipline, external account stability and foreign exchange reserves. He outlined government efforts on domestic resource mobilization, broadening the tax base, digitalizing tax administration, and addressing energy sector challenges, alongside a focus on export-led growth and private sector investment.

The SRF delegation expressed strong interest in further engagement, with Ms. Zhu Jun praising the quality of private-sector projects reviewed and Pakistan's private sector strength. She highlighted SRF's interest in infrastructure, energy and private sector development. The delegation also discussed opportunities in power sector reforms, including transmission and distribution.

Aurangzeb welcomed the positive assessment and called for stronger linkages between international capital and viable Pakistani projects. The SRF delegation included senior officials from its Legal, Investment and Executive departments, alongside officials from Finance Division, Economic Affairs Division and Special Investment Facilitation Council

PM reaffirms commitment to strengthen ties with Malaysia

City Desk

ISLAMABAD: Minister of Home Affairs of Malaysia Dato' Seri Saifuddin Nasution Ismail called on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif at the Prime Minister House, on Friday.

Welcoming the Malaysian Home Minister, the Prime Minister conveyed his warm wishes for Dato' Seri Anwar bin Ibrahim, Prime Minister of Malaysia, and inquired about his health, while wishing him an early recovery.

The Prime Minister reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to further strengthening the close and fraternal ties between Pakistan and Malaysia across all spheres, including security, law enforcement, as well as trade and investment.

The regional situation was also discussed during the meeting. In this context, the Prime Minister appreciated Malaysia's support for Pakistan's regional peace efforts.

The Malaysian Home Minister conveyed the greetings of his prime minister to Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif and expressed Malaysia's keen desire to further strengthen its robust ties with Pakistan.

The Prime Minister also witnessed the signing of the Agreement on the Transfer of Sentenced Persons between the two countries, signed between the Home Minister of Malaysia and Interior Minister Syed Mohsin Raza Naqvi.

Deputy Prime Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar, Minister of State for Interior Talal Chaudhry, SAPM Tariq Fatemi and other senior officials were also present during the meeting.

CM Maryam Nawaz Inaugurates Jinnah Institute of Cardiology

Bureau Report

LAHORE: Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif inaugurated the Jinnah Institute of Cardiology and Maryam Nawaz Heart Transplant Centre, calling it a long-held dream. She announced the introduction of home dialysis machines across Punjab and said serving the public was the greatest reward, urging officials and doctors to fulfill their duties diligently.

She noted the Pakistan Institute of Cardiology (PIC), established by Muhammad Nawaz Sharif, had become overwhelmed given Lahore's population and patients arriving from across the country, necessitating the new facility. She praised Dr. Hasnat, who returned from England to serve, and highlighted that around 100 million people used public hospitals last year, receiving free medicines, surgeries, and home delivery of medication, while acknowledging persistent issues like theft of supplies and staff corruption.

CM Maryam announced Pakistan's first heart transplant centre, saying transplant costs would be reduced from $50,000 to around $10,000 using Chinese technology, with procedures provided entirely free. She detailed the institute's facilities: six cath labs, five operation theatres, a heart-lung machine, AI-integrated hybrid cath labs, zero-infection technology, Tesla MRI, a 640-slice CT scanner, and an electrophysiology department, noting a New Zealand nursing director and Colonel Sabrina were part of the team.

She recalled that of 15,000 children awaiting heart surgery two-and-a-half years ago, 14,600 had since been treated. She cited 2,460 organ transplants in Punjab, expansion of stroke.

Drinking Water

ISLAMABAD: People take water from filtration plant during their visit to iconic Faisal Mosque in the Federal Capital.

Photo: Online by Sultan Bashir

Mera Karachi Group Organizes Mangrove Plantation Drive

Bureau Report

KARACHI: Mera Karachi Group (MKG) organized a mangrove plantation drive at Toor Creek in the Indus Delta to help protect Karachi's coastline and promote environmental awareness. More than 60 volunteers, including environmental advocates and students from Rehri Goth, participated in the initiative with support from the Sindh Forest Department, Caritas Pakistan and Ecolife.

The campaign aimed to increase mangrove cover while educating local communities, particularly young people, about the importance of protecting Karachi's fragile coastal ecosystem. Mangroves help stabilize coastal soil, reduce erosion, protect against storm surges and flooding, and provide breeding grounds for fish and other marine life that support fishing communities.

MKG founder Syed Imran Ahmad stressed that environmental protection requires active participation from government institutions, civil society, local communities, educational institutions and the corporate sector. He urged businesses to move beyond one-time CSR activities and support long-term mangrove restoration, maintenance, monitoring and community-based environmental programmes.

The group said the involvement of Rehri Goth students demonstrated the importance of engaging coastal communities directly in conservation efforts and developing environmental responsibility among youth.

MKG announced plans for a second mangrove plantation drive in October and invited citizens, companies, schools and organizations to participate in future initiatives aimed at building a greener, healthier and more climate-resilient Karachi.

AJK Election Results Face Legal Challenge in Supreme Court

Abdul Majeed Tahir

MUZAFFARABAD: Candidates who were declared successful from six constituencies of Azad Jammu and Kashmir have had their election victories challenged before the Supreme Court by their respective opponents.

The petitions challenge the election results and allege irregularities in the electoral process. According to sources, notices have been issued to the concerned parties on the petitions filed before the Supreme Court, while hearings have been scheduled for September 1 and September 3, 2026. According to the details, Chaudhry Latif Akbar, contesting from LA-31 Khawara-5, has challenged the election result declaring Raja Saqib Majeed successful.

Similarly, Chaudhry Muhammad Yasin from LA-12 Kotli-5 has challenged the election result in favour of Raja Riyasat.

From LA-11 Kotli-4, Chaudhry Akhlaq Ahmed, a rival candidate, has filed a petition challenging the victory of Raja Asif.

At LA-9 Kotli-3, Chaudhry Javed Iqbal Budhanvi has approached the Supreme Court against the victory of Sardar Umair Naeem.

From LA-5 Bhimber-1, Chaudhry Pervez Ashraf has challenged the victory of Colonel (Retd.) Waqar Noor.

Meanwhile, Mushtaq Ahmed Minhas has filed a petition before the Supreme Court challenging the victory of Sardar Zia-ul-Qamar from LA-15 Central Bagh.

The Supreme Court has issued notices to the parties concerned, and the matter has now entered the stage of judicial scrutiny.

Bhimber finalizes arrangements for Eid Milad-un-Nabi central procession

Bureau Report

BHIMBER: Deputy Commissioner Chaudhry Muhammad Tariq chaired a key meeting to review arrangements for the central procession, gatherings, and religious programmes marking Eid Milad-un-Nabi ﷺ in Bhimber district. The session was attended by religious scholars, district officials, police, municipal administration, Rescue 1122, health, electricity, and civil defence department representatives.

The meeting finalized details on procession routes, security, traffic management, sanitation, uninterrupted electricity, drinking water, and medical facilities. DC Tariq directed officials to ensure foolproof security and timely completion of all arrangements, calling peace and citizen facilitation the administration's top priority. He instructed authorities to maintain cleanliness along procession routes, remove encroachments, ensure smooth traffic flow, and keep ambulances and emergency medical services ready.

Police briefed the meeting on the security plan, with the DC stressing full implementation of traffic arrangements. He emphasized that Eid Milad-un-Nabi ﷺ teaches love, brotherhood, tolerance and peace, urging all communities to cooperate with authorities. A control room will coordinate with departments to handle emergencies during the observance.

403rd Urs of Hazrat Mian Mir (RA) celebrations begin in Lahore

Bureau Report

LAHORE: Secretary/Chief Administrator Auqaf Punjab Dr. Ehsan Bhutta inaugurated the 403rd Annual Urs celebrations of Hazrat Mian Mir (RA), highlighting his enduring spiritual and humanitarian teachings. He performed traditional chadar poshi at the shrine, followed by dastar-bandi of distinguished guests. Special prayers were offered for Pakistan, its Armed Forces and the nation's martyrs.

Dr. Bhutta also inaugurated the Mian Mir Gallery, featuring 20 rare photographs documenting the historical and spiritual relationship between Baba Guru Nanak and Hazrat Mian Mir (RA), as well as the history of the shrine and mosque. He appreciated researcher Mobeen-ur-Rehman and the Auqaf Department for preserving the material.

He said Hazrat Mian Mir's teachings promote love, fraternity, tolerance, compassion, peace and harmony, urging people to apply these values in practical life to overcome hatred and intolerance. The Tourism Department deployed 10 male and three female Punjab Tourism Force officials to assist visitors and devotees.

International Day of Remembrance and Tribute to the Victims of Terrorism

Jawaz

August 21 marks the UN-designated International Day of Remembrance and Tribute to the Victims of Terrorism, an occasion to honor those whose lives were shattered by violence and to reflect on losses too profound for statistics to capture. The piece begins with an evocative reflection on grief, describing how terrorism is often reduced to numbers and incidents, yet its true toll is borne by families and communities left permanently altered — mothers who lose children, spouses who lose partners, and communities whose social fabric is torn apart in ways that time cannot fully repair.

The narrative emphasizes that behind every victim lies a family transformed forever: homes waiting for those who will never return, loved ones clinging to photographs and belongings, and survivors carrying visible or invisible wounds — physical disabilities alongside psychological trauma, fear, and grief. It poses the enduring question of why such violence occurs and for whose benefit, while also noting that suffering does not always end in defeat. Those who endure loss often find deeper resilience, becoming inheritors of courage passed down by earlier generations, with their strength rooted in faith, patience, and a commitment to preserving human dignity and building a future free from terror.

The piece turns specifically to Pakistan's experience, noting that the country has suffered extensively from terrorism, with perpetrators exploiting religion, ethnicity, language, sectarian divisions, and other pretexts to justify violence. The consequences have extended beyond loss of life to include psychological trauma, social disruption, economic hardship, and an erosion of trust and security necessary for national development. It stresses that virtually no village, street, or household in Pakistan has been untouched by terrorism, and that those who defend the country have repeatedly prioritized others' safety over their own. Despite sustained attempts to destabilize the nation, Pakistan's resolve has strengthened through adversity, with its counterterrorism efforts gaining international recognition.

The reflection stresses that honoring victims requires more than sympathy — survivors and bereaved families need dignity, support, and opportunities to rebuild their lives. While no compensation can undo what was lost or return the years taken away, compassion and meaningful support can help survivors reconstruct what violence sought to destroy. Governments, institutions, and communities are called upon to jointly address the social, economic, and psychological needs of those affected.

The piece concludes by framing August 21 not merely as a day of remembrance but as a renewed commitment to defeating ideologies of hatred and violence, protecting innocent lives, and strengthening social cohesion. It calls for honoring victims through concrete action — building societies that reject hatred, respect human life, and work to ensure that no family has to endure such loss again. The sacrifices made in pursuit of peace, it argues, represent a debt that can only be honored by preserving that peace, standing with survivors, and ensuring victims of terrorism are never forgotten.

The overall message underscores that while terrorism attempts to instill fear and division, the resilience of affected communities — particularly in Pakistan — demonstrates a collective refusal to let violence define the future, with remembrance serving as both an act of tribute and a call to sustained global action against terrorism.

Islamabad
30º – 38º Clear

SERVICES

Namaz Timings
Fajr .... 4:05 am
Zohr .... 12:11 pm
Asr .... 4:53 pm
Maghrib .... 6:46 pm
Isha .... 8:16 pm

EMERGENCY
Rescue (Police) 15
Bomb Disposal 15
Fire Services Rawalpindi/
Islamabad .... 1122 & 16
Emergency Ambulance .... 1122 &
& Rescue Services 4451122
Motorway Police 9266044
Motorway Police 9270601-20

Women Police Stations
Islamabad 9222596
Rawalpindi 9270601-20

ENQUIRY
Edhi Ambulance 115
PIA Flight Info 114
PIA Cargo 9280979
Railway Inquiry 117
Railway Exchange 9270831-5
WASA Rawalpindi 5555489
CAA 9281092

HOSPITALS
CMH 5611111
MH 561116
MH 561116
Cantt Hospital 9270907-11
DHQ 5556311-4
RGH 9290301-7
Holy Family 9290322-7
PIMS 9261170-79
Polyclinic 9218300-09
Shifa International 4603666

DEPARTMENTS
CDA 9221334-43
CDA 9208301-04
Met Office 9250360-6
RDA 5555864
TMA 5770886
Cantonment Board 9270151-3
Islamabad Metropolitan
Corporation 9209224
Potohar Town 9209224
Rawal Town 5773343

COMPLAINTS
Water Tanker Service
E-7, F-10 & F-11 9204654
G-5, G-6, G-7, G-8, ... 9203883
G-9, G-10, G-11, G-12, H-8 9266316
Wapda Islamabad 9217579-80
Sui Gas Complaint 119, 9272249

ICCD Secretary-General meets Finance Minister, discusses cooperation opportunities

Commerce Desk

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb met H. E Shaikh Yousef Hassan Khalawi, Secretary-General of the Islamic Chamber of Commerce and Development (ICCD), to discuss economic cooperation, halal markets, Islamic finance and private-sector collaboration. He was accompanied by Al Baraka Bank Pakistan CEO Muhammad Atif Hanif and ICCD's Aalia Jaffar.

Aurangzeb stressed strengthening ties between Pakistan's business community and global networks through the Chamber's platforms. Khalawi briefed him on ICCD's international outreach connecting Muslim business communities worldwide, including in non-OIC countries.

Discussions covered the global halal economy and opportunities for Pakistan in halal food, fashion, tourism and other sectors, with Aurangzeb emphasizing identification of specific products and markets rather than a broad approach. The meeting also explored strengthening Pakistan's Islamic finance ecosystem and improving market linkages.

Khalawi shared international experience in halal business development and economic cooperation. Both sides discussed leveraging conferences and forums to connect Pakistani businesses globally, with Aurangzeb welcoming continued engagement with the Chamber.

Visit

ISLAMABAD: People visiting iconic Faisal Mosque in the Federal Capital.

Photo: Online by Sultan Bashir

Limited Access to Healthy Food Alarming, Raises Questions Over Government Policies

City Desk

RAWALPINDI: Sheikh Abdul Waheed, President of Anjuman Tajran Liaquat Road Rawalpindi, said that despite healthy food being relatively affordable in South Asia, Pakistan has one of the lowest proportions of people able to afford a healthy diet in the region, raising serious questions about the government's economic and food policies.

He called on the government to immediately stabilize food prices, provide meaningful relief to low-income groups, and take effective measures to increase people's purchasing power. He said that according to the United Nations' 2026 report on food and food security, 63 percent of Pakistan's population last year—approximately 161 million people—could not afford a nutritious and healthy meal, reflecting a deeply concerning situation of rising inflation, low incomes and food insecurity.

Fuel price hike to burden public, business community, says Sain Ijaz Malik

City Desk

RAWALPINDI: Sain Muhammad Ijaz Malik, President of the All Rawalpindi Restaurants Association and Member of the District Peace Committee, expressed concern over rising petrol and diesel prices, warning that even a minor increase would add to the difficulties already faced by the public and business community amid inflation.

He said fuel price hikes directly affect transportation, food items, and daily-use goods, and with people already grappling with rising costs, further increases would worsen financial strain, as higher business costs get passed on to consumers. He noted that fluctuating fuel prices also raise operating costs for restaurants and other businesses, urging the government to assess the inflationary impact of fuel hikes rather than simply announcing them.

Malik pointed out that businesses were already burdened by rising electricity, gas, and raw material costs, and warned that another fuel price increase would further raise the cost of doing business. He called on the government to adopt effective, sustainable economic policies to provide genuine relief to both the public and the business community.

Philanthropists Donate Rs 50 Lakh Medicines to LGH

Bureau Report

LAHORE: Philanthropists donated medicines worth Rs 50 lakh to Lahore General Hospital (LGH), to be distributed free among OPD patients. Prof. Dr. Farooq Afzal, Principal PGMI, praised such support as vital in easing hospital burdens and restoring public trust, noting LGH serves thousands daily.

MS LGH Prof. Dr. Faryad Hussain assured transparent distribution to deserving patients, with the pharmacy operating 8am-8pm for over 5,000 daily OPD visitors. Doctors including Samina Taufiq, Amara Akhtar, Kausar Shaheen, Abdul Aziz, and others attended.

Prof. Afzal emphasized cooperation among government, medical professionals, and philanthropists as essential for improving public hospitals. Donors praised LGH's discipline and pledged continued future support.

Al-Shifa Trust treats 1.26 million patients in FY2025-26

City Desk

RAWALPINDI: Al-Shifa Trust's network of seven eye hospitals provided healthcare services to more than 1.26 million people during FY2025-26 as it announced plans to expand outpatient services at its Rawalpindi hospital to meet rising demand.

According to the Trust's latest performance report, 1,267,657 patients benefited from its services. Community outreach remained a key component of operations, with 664,668 people examined through eye screening and medical camps. In addition 37,739 individuals were screened for diabetes and hypertension to support the early detection of conditions that can lead to vision loss.

Services provided to patients also included outpatient consultations, refraction, dispensing of spectacles, follow-up visits, diagnostic investigations, laser procedures, general surgeries and other specialized ophthalmic care.

Talking to media, Trust President Major General (Retired) Rehmat Khan said the growing patient load had prompted Al-Shifa Trust to expand its outpatient department. A tower originally built for income-generating purposes will be converted into a state-of-the-art OPD-3.

He said the Trust's hospitals performed 55,314 cataract surgeries during the year, while 784 corneal transplants were carried out. Specialists also managed 1,548 cases of Retinopathy of Prematurity (ROP), helping prevent avoidable blindness among premature infants.

The Trust spent nearly Rs5 billion during FY2025-26 and expects to require around Rs6 billion in the next financial year to maintain services, strengthen facilities, expand outreach programmes and meet rising demand.

Rehmat Khan said the completion of Al-Shifa Lahore Eye Hospital would help share the patient burden, while the Trust was also planning to establish a major eye hospital in Quetta to meet future needs.

Attock Administration Reviews Eid Milad-un-Nabi Arrangements

Raza Naqvi

ATTOCK: Deputy Commissioner Attock Dr. Mudassir Ahmed Shah has directed all relevant departments to finalize comprehensive arrangements for Eid Milad-un-Nabi (PBUH), with particular attention to security, law and order, cleanliness, traffic management and essential public facilities.

Chairing a meeting at the DC Office, he instructed departments to work through coordinated efforts and ensure that processions and religious gatherings follow designated routes and timings. The meeting reviewed arrangements for security, sanitation, lighting, removal of encroachments, traffic control and medical facilities.

DPO Attock Ali Bin Tariq assured the meeting that foolproof security would be provided for all processions and gatherings. Security personnel would be deployed at sensitive locations and along procession routes under an approved security plan. He also urged organizers to cooperate with the administration and police and adhere strictly to prescribed routes and timings.

The Deputy Commissioner ordered special cleanliness measures across the district and directed municipal authorities to complete sanitation and other preparations well before the celebrations. He stressed close coordination among departments and warned against negligence.

The administration pledged to utilize all available resources to ensure peaceful, orderly and well-organized Eid Milad-un-Nabi celebrations across Attock.

Punjab urged to simplify revenue court management system

News Desk

TAXILA: Land laws expert Malik Muhammad Shakeel Kareemi has urged the Punjab Government to make the Revenue Court Management System simpler, more transparent and accessible to the public.

Talking to the media, he said digitalization was essential, but poor connectivity and frequent system outages were disrupting case filing and court proceedings. He noted that many citizens, lawyers and relevant officials lacked adequate training and awareness about the digital system, causing delays in the disposal of revenue cases and delivery of justice.

Kareemi urged the Punjab Government to direct PULRA to simplify the app's profile section and allow manual filing while authorities digitize records themselves. He also proposed that lawyers be informed about case fixation through official staff, and that litigants' compliance be ensured.

He called for abolition of the Rs5,000 court fee and simplification of digital challan procedures. He further suggested that authorities collect complete hard copies at filing and digitize them.

National CERT Concludes Second Cohort of Cyber Champs Internship

City Desk

ISLAMABAD: National CERT has successfully concluded the second cohort of its six-week Cyber Champs Internship Program, aimed at strengthening digital safety awareness and developing foundational cybersecurity skills among young students.

The program covered essential digital hygiene, password security, protection of personal information, secure Wi-Fi and mobile applications, phishing and online fraud prevention, and cyber harassment. Participants also received introductory training in Python programming, web development, network security, cloud architecture, Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) and Governance, Risk and Compliance (GRC), along with public speaking and presentation skills.

Learning was supported through practical exercises, case studies, presentations and interactive sessions conducted by National CERT experts. Participants also visited the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA), toured its Security Operations Centre and interacted with cybersecurity professionals.

At the closing ceremony, National CERT Director General Dr. Haider Abbas encouraged participants to continue developing their technical skills and become responsible digital defenders and cyber ambassadors. Director Capacity Building Khurram Javed highlighted the importance of preparing young people to navigate the digital environment safely.

The ceremony concluded with certificate distribution and student reflections, marking another step toward developing a skilled and cyber-resilient generation for a secure digital Pakistan.

Refineries' Upgradation May Further Reduce Diesel Price, Malik Khuda Baksh

Commerce Desk

KARACHI: Pakistan Petroleum Dealers Association (PPDA) Chairman Malik Khuda Baksh has said that upgrading Pakistan's refineries could lead to further reductions in diesel prices and provide additional relief to consumers.

He said Petroleum Minister Ali Pervaiz Malik briefed him during his recent Karachi visit about the refinery upgradation programme. According to the minister, upgraded refineries would be able to process both heavier and lighter crude oil grades, increasing domestic refining capacity.

Malik Khuda Baksh appreciated the government's efforts to pass the benefit of lower diesel prices to consumers. He said petroleum dealers had discussed a five-point agenda with the Petroleum Ministry, including measures to reduce petroleum product prices through improved refinery operations.

He said the ministry responded promptly to the dealers' concerns, resulting in a reduction in diesel prices. Further refinery upgrades, he added, could create greater opportunities for lowering diesel and other petroleum product prices.

He urged the government to accelerate the modernization of local refineries to increase production, reduce reliance on imported petroleum products and ensure greater benefits for consumers.

Group Chairman/Chief Editor: **Almass Ayoub Sabir**
Vice Chairman: **Asim Nazir Ahmad**
Editor: **Naveed Ahmad Khan**
Head Editorial Advisory Board: **Amjad Mehmood**
Bureau Chief Karachi: **Khurram Jaffrani** (jaffrani@adpluse.pk)
Bureau Chief Lahore: **Syed Afraz Ali Nazish** (afrazalishah@gmail.com)
Head Office: AIMS Building, Street No. 4, H-8/1, Islamabad. spokesmanislamabad@gmail.com **Phone:**+92 51 2227123, **WhatsApp** +92 346 5008408
Karachi office: A111, Block C, Gulsha-e-Jamal, PRECHS, Karachi Phone:021-33399390 Email: spokesmankarachi@gmail.com
Lahore Office: 7-E,Samanberg, Johar Town. spokesmanlahore@gmail.com
Daily The Spokesman available only on annual subscription

After Military Failure, Trump's Economic War on Iran

Analysis

Qamar Bashir

The geopolitical landscape has witnessed few spectacles as paradoxical as the recent confrontation between the coalition of the United States and Israel against the Islamic Republic of Iran. What was predicted by Western military analysts and policymakers to be a swift, decisive campaign—a "shock and awe" reminiscent of the opening salvos of the 2003 Iraq War—has instead morphed into a historical anomaly.

It is a conflict defined not by the victor's triumph, but by the hubris of the aggressor being dashed upon the rocks of asymmetric resilience. The United States, the sole superpower possessing a military budget exceeding 1.5 Trillion annually—larger than the next 20 countries combined—has been forced into a humiliating strategic retreat.

After failing to achieve a single operational objective, the rhetoric has shifted from "military obliteration" to "economic annihilation." This pivot from Tomahawks to Treasury sanctions is not a sign of strength; it is the death rattle of a failing hegemonic strategy, a threat as hollow as the bombs that failed to subdue Tehran.

In the lead-up to the conflict, the rhetoric emanating from Washington and Tel Aviv was characterized by a certainty that bordered on the biblical. Officials promised the "degradation of Iran's military infrastructure to the Stone Age," invoking imagery of an assault more severe and more comprehensive than the fire-bombing of Dresden or the atomic strikes on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

After having failed to achieve even a single declared objective of waging war against Iran, the United States found itself in a position unique in its modern history: it had not lost a war tactically, but it had failed to win strategically. Iranian uranium enrichment, far from being halted, reportedly accelerated in response to the strikes, with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) confirming that stockpiles of 60% enriched uranium had risen by over 15% during the conflict window. The "daunting military machine" was halted not by Iranian nuclear parity, but by the cost of persistence.

This military failure has profound implications. For three decades, the United States has relied on the specter of its military supremacy to police the global order. The failure to bend Iran—a nation whose military budget is approximately $24.6 billion, a mere fraction of America's—breaks the spell of invincibility.

It demonstrates that a nation-state can withstand the full kinetic might of the U. S. military if it possesses dispersed infrastructure, a decentralized command structure, and a popular willingness to absorb punishment.

Iran's successful enforcement of maritime control over the Strait of Hormuz serves as a case study in asymmetric deterrence. Despite the presence of the U. S. Navy's Fifth Fleet, which includes aircraft carriers and nuclear submarines, Iran's swarm tactics of fast-attack craft and shore-based anti-ship ballistic missiles effectively checked U. S. freedom of navigation. The sight of Chinese oil tankers transiting the Strait under Iranian escort, unchallenged by the U. S. blockade, was a symbolic dagger in the heart of American naval supremacy.

Having failed on the kinetic battlefield, the United States has pivoted to the economic battlefield. The new executive order announced by the President promises "excruciating economic pain never seen before in the history of humankind." This is a bold claim.

It is, however, a rhetorical escalation of a campaign that has been running since 1979. Iran has lived under some form of U. S. sanction for over four decades. The "Maximum Pressure" campaign initiated by the first Trump administration in 2018 aimed to drive Iranian oil exports to zero. While it succeeded in plunging exports to around 400,000 barrels per day (bpd) at its peak, it did not collapse the government.

Today, Iran has not only recovered but has adapted. Current estimates place Iranian oil exports at over 1.6 million bpd, with the vast majority flowing to China. The threat now is to extend "secondary sanctions" to any nation buying Iranian oil. However, the efficacy of this threat is undermined by the very structure of the global economy that the United States helped create: the petrodollar system.

The U. S. Treasury's ability to sanction hinges on the centrality of the Dollar and the SWIFT messaging system. Yet, the infrastructure of evasion is now mature. Iran has spent 30 years perfecting the "black market" of oil. The system described by intelligence analysts—where proceeds never touch a direct Iranian account but are routed through third-party shell companies in Asia, often utilizing Chinese Yuan—has rendered the U. S. financial radar partially blind.

Furthermore, Iran's strategic integration into the BRICS bloc (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, and new members like the UAE and Egypt) provides a lifeline. The BRICS New Development Bank and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement are actively working on a unified payment system—the "BRICS Pay"—designed to bypass SWIFT.

China's Cross-Border Interbank Payment System (CIPS) has seen a 30% year-on-year increase in daily processing volume. When Iran sells oil to China and receives payment in Yuan via CIPS, the transaction bypasses the New York banking system entirely. The "weaponi zation"

Continued on Page 7

Cartoon by Amjad Rasmi. (Courtesy of Asharq Al-Awsat)

Remembering the Victims, Renewing the Resolve

Today, as the international community marks the day set aside to remember the victims of terrorism, Pakistan stands in solidarity with all who have borne the weight of this global scourge. It is a moment not only for reflection but for reaffirming a collective, unwavering commitment to a world free from violence directed at the innocent.

Terrorism is among the gravest challenges facing humanity. Those who plan and carry out such acts operate outside any framework of conscience, using the suffering of ordinary people as a means to an end. Behind every statistic lies a family shattered, a future stolen, a community left to rebuild. The families of the dead and the countless individuals living with lifelong injuries deserve not fleeting sympathy but sustained compassion and support.

Few nations understand this cost as intimately as Pakistan. Its soldiers, police officers and ordinary citizens have paid the ultimate price in a struggle that has spanned decades. Beyond the human toll, the economic and social costs have been staggering, slowing development and disrupting the everyday lives of millions. Yet Pakistan's resolve has not wavered, and its commitment to eliminating this menace remains firm.

It bears repeating that terrorism has no sanction in any religion, culture or civilization. It is, at its core, a product of extremist ideology and moral corrosion, not faith. This is precisely why unified international condemnation, paired with genuine cooperation among states, is essential. No single country can defeat terrorism alone; it requires shared intelligence, shared resources and shared will.

Equally important is the long, often overlooked work of rehabilitation. Victims need more than tributes — they need healthcare, psychological support and a functioning path back to normal life. Governments, including Pakistan's, must continue investing in these systems even amid constrained resources, because the moral obligation to those who have suffered does not end when headlines fade.

This day should serve as more than a ceremonial observance. It is a call to institutions — global and national, governmental and civic — to speak out against terrorism and the ideologies that sustain it, while defending the human values and rule of law that terrorism seeks to destroy. Remembering the victims is not simply an act of mourning; it is a pledge that their suffering will not be forgotten, and that the fight to prevent further tragedy will continue with undiminished determination.

The Diplomatic Tightrope: Decoding the US Ambassador's Visit to Kashmir

Analysis

Altaf Hussain Wani

The recent visit of the US Ambassador to Kashmir, and his subsequent interactions with Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, has ignited a firestorm of debate. In the high-stakes theater of South Asian diplomacy, words are never accidental. While some view the Ambassador's rhetoric as a nod to New Delhi, a broader analysis of the current geopolitical shift suggests a far more complex reality—one where the United States is recalibrating its regional architecture, moving away from an exclusive reliance on India and rediscovering the pivotal role of Pakistan.

To understand the weight of this visit, one must look beyond the immediate optics and examine the seismic shifts that occurred after the May 2025 India-Pakistan standoff. That crisis, which brought two nuclear-armed powers to the brink of catastrophe, served as a catalyst for a fundamental change in US policy. The subsequent US-mediated ceasefire proved that Washington no longer views the Kashmir dispute as a bilateral matter to be ignored, but as a global security flashpoint requiring active American mediation.

This shift was codified in the landmark "Macca Accord" and the "Islamabad Peace Deal," which signaled a return to a balanced strategic approach. The US President's recent praise for Pakistan's maturity and its emergence as a primary peace broker in the region marks a visible drift from the "Modi-centric" policy of the previous decade. Washington has realized that India's ambition to be the "net security provider" in the region has largely failed; New Delhi's internal frictions and its inability to maintain regional stability have left a vacuum that Pakistan has stepped in to fill.

Today, Pakistan has emerged as the indispensable player in regional defense and security. From counter-terrorism to border management, Islamabad has demonstrated a capacity for stability that the US now prioritizes. This realignment is further evidenced by the escalating tariff wars between Washington and New Delhi, as the US seeks to challenge India's protectionist economic policies, signaling that the "strategic partnership" is no longer a blank check.

Against this backdrop, the US Ambassador's visit to Indian-occupied Kashmir must be read carefully. While he may have used language that suggests Kashmir is part of India to maintain diplomatic protocol during his meeting with Omar Abdullah, this should not be mistaken for a policy pivot. In fact, previous remarks by the US Envoy in Pakistan specifically referencing "Azad Jammu and Kashmir" demonstrate that Washington maintains a nuanced, dual-track recognition of the region's complex administrative realities. The Ambassador was not "unbriefed"; rather, he was performing a delicate balancing act.

The intrigue lies in Chief Minister Omar Abdullah's remark: "Ambassador will talk to Washington and I will talk to New Delhi." This is a masterclass in political navigation. Abdullah is signaling to New Delhi that he is engaging with the US, but he is simultaneously signaling to Washington that the local leadership is ready for a dialogue that transcends India's rigid internal narrative. By positioning himself as a conduit, Abdullah is essentially inviting the US to apply the same mediating pressure in Srinagar that it successfully applied during the 2025 ceasefire.

However, the situation in Azad Kashmir remains a critical piece of this puzzle. Soon after the formation of new government in Azad Kashmir, we might see a similar kind of visit by US envoy to Muzaffarabad. The US is acutely aware that any lasting peace requires a holistic approach that considers the aspirations of people on both sides of the Line of Control. The US's renewed engagement with Islamabad is a recognition that peace in the valley cannot be achieved without the cooperation of a secure and stable Pakistan.

The legal history of the Kashmir dispute—rooted in UN resolutions and the promise of self-determination—has not been erased; it has been reactivated. For years, the US practiced "strategic ambiguity," but the failures of the last few years have forced a move toward "strategic clarity." The US now recognizes that a stable South Asia is impossible if one power is allowed to unilaterally alter the status quo without regional consensus.

In conclusion, the US Ambassador's visit is not a validation of India's claims, but a reconnaissance mission in a changing landscape. The US is no longer blindly backing New Delhi; it is diversifying its bets. By elevating Pakistan as a security provider and a peace broker, Washington is creating a system of checks and balances.

The "drift" from Modi toward a more balanced relationship with Islamabad suggests that the US now views Pakistan as the more reliable partner for long-term regional equilibrium. While the rhetoric in Srinagar may seem conciliatory, the underlying policy is clear: the US is returning to the role of the ultimate arbiter. For the people of Kashmir, the hope is that this shift from "bilateralism" back to "international mediation" will finally move the region from a state of managed conflict to a sustainable peace.

Write is chairman Kashmir institute of international Relations (KIIR) can be reached at: saleeemwani@hotmail.com and on X @ sultan1913

The Inner Reflection: The Loss of Political Tolerance

Unzila Siddiqui

The foundation of any human society rests upon a single essential cornerstone: tolerance. The natural order operates through balance and mutual harmony—trees remain rooted to the earth, rivers flow along designated paths, and night gracefully yields to day. Within this universe exists a silent covenant acknowledging the presence of the other. Yet, when we examine human society, particularly our political landscape, the sight is unsettling. It appears as though we have turned disagreement into a cardinal sin, reducing politics—once a struggle of ideals and public service—into an arena of personal animosity and ego. This erosion of political tolerance acts like termite damage, slowly eating away at our social fabric.

Looking back through history, politics once wore a dignified face. There was an era when political leaders criticized each other sharply on the floor of parliament, only to share a warm cup of tea and lighthearted conversation once outside the chamber. They opposed each other's ideas, not each other's existence. Their words may have been biting, yet their tone retained grace, civility, and literary refinement. Language was chosen carefully to convey a point without diminishing the dignity of the opponent. Today's political landscape presents a stark contrast, where reasoned argument has given way to noise and hostility.

The maturity of a society is measured not by uniform agreement, but by the dignity and respect accorded to differing viewpoints. Tolerance does not require endorsing another's views; its true essence lies in recognizing their right to hold a different perspective. The beauty of democracy rests in granting a voice to every individual, regardless of background or ideology. When we strip politics of this grace, democracy transforms into a form of authoritarianism where only a single narrative is deemed acceptable. A dangerous sentiment has taken root in our discourse: the belief that anyone who disagrees cannot be a well-wisher of the nation. This mindset fractures society, erecting walls of division where understanding ought to exist.

In this shifting landscape, social media has added fuel to the fire. Technology, intended to bring people closer, has instead amplified distances and hostility. Armed with virtual platforms, individuals often launch verbal attacks the moment an opinion strays from their preferred standard.

A measured, soft-spoken tone carries far greater weight than a shouting voice. When you speak quietly with reason, your words resonate with the listener; when you attempt to prevail through clamor, the other party simply raises their defenses. Our political leadership must realize that their words, actions, and gestures shape the attitudes of millions. If leaders display anger and intolerance on national screens, civility cannot be expected from the everyday citizen.

This deficit of tolerance has impacted the younger generation most deeply. The youth, who represent the nation's future, increasingly view politics as a destructive sport rather than a constructive pursuit. An impression is taking root that success requires aggression, disrespect, and the belittling of others—an intellectual decline whose consequences will echo for decades. Should we fail to reassess our conduct, we risk becoming a society where peace remains confined to textbooks.

Dissent is a sign of life. If everyone thought alike, the world would lose its color and vitality. Diversity of thought drives human progress. What we need is to revive the tradition of genuine dialogue in politics—a process where

Continued on Page 7

Chairman Senate welcomes Malaysian Interior Minister, calls for stronger Pakistan-Malaysia ties

Malaysia's Minister of Home Affairs, H. E. Datuk Seri Saifuddin Nasution bin Ismail, called on Chairman Senate Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani at Parliament House, Islamabad. Gilani welcomed the delegation, highlighting the historical, brotherly relations between the two countries rooted in shared religious and cultural bonds.

He recalled his longstanding engagement with Malaysia, including his recent visit for the Global Muslim Business Forum, and noted around 5,000 Pakistani students are studying in Malaysian universities, calling the diaspora an asset to Malaysia's development. Referencing reciprocal PM visits in 2024 and 2025, he termed the minister's visit another milestone in bilateral engagement.

Gilani expressed hope for a visit by Malaysia's King and Queen, the Foreign Minister, and the next Joint Ministerial Commission session. He welcomed the signing of the Treaty on International Transfer of Prisoners and hoped for progress on the Mutual Legal Assistance Agreement.

On economic cooperation, he urged translating political ties into trade and investment, citing SIFC as a facilitation platform and Pakistan's potential as a gateway to Afghanistan, Central Asia and Western China. He also flagged opportunities in semiconductors, defence production, and manpower export, particularly security personnel, given Pakistan's youthful population.

The Malaysian minister appreciated Pakistan's hospitality and reaffirmed Malaysia's commitment to deepening cooperation. The meeting, also attended by the Leader of the Opposition and parliamentary leaders, concluded with a shared resolve to strengthen parliamentary, economic, defence and people-to-people ties.

London seminar on 'Future of Pakistan' highlights role of youth, technology in national development

Chaudhry Tabraiz Aurah

LONDON: A seminar on the "Future of Pakistan," organized by the Pakistan Overseas Diaspora in London, brought together political representatives, legal experts, journalists and community members to discuss the country's future, emerging technologies and youth empowerment.

Additional Advocate General Sindh Qazi Muhammad Bashir delivered the keynote address, joined by PPP UK President Mohsin Bari, organisation Chairman Afzal Chaudhry, and Pakistan Press Club London President Chaudhry Tabraiz Ashraf Aurah.

Bashir said Pakistan's youth represent the country's future and must be given leadership opportunities, citing Karachi Mayor Murtaza Wahab as representative of younger aspirations. He called for embracing modern technology and expressed support for Bilawal Bhutto becoming prime minister.

Afzal Chaudhry noted the world is undergoing the Fourth Industrial Revolution driven by AI, digital economy and cybersecurity, urging Pakistan to establish dedicated institutions for these sectors. Mohsin Bari said limited opportunities at home push youth toward migration, but developing new sectors could reverse this trend.

Aurah called the seminar's theme timely, praising British-based journalists for supporting the Pakistani community. Press Club Chairman Asad Malik conducted proceedings, with other office-bearers in attendance.

The event concluded with a Q&A session, with participants urging more such forums and greater contribution from Pakistanis at home and abroad toward national progress.

Construction sector reforms can unlock investment, jobs and industrial growth, says Mian Zahid Hussain

Commerce Desk

KARACHI: Mian Zahid Hussain, President of the Pakistan Businessmen and Intellectuals Forum and All Karachi Industrial Alliance, and Chairman of the National Business Group Pakistan and FPCCI's Policy Advisory Board, welcomed the launch of the Asaan Tajir App, calling it a necessary step to broaden the tax base, simplify compliance and reduce interaction between small traders and FBR officials.

He noted the app was launched by Finance Minister Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb, Minister of State for Finance Bilal Azhar Kayani and FBR Chairman Rashid Mahmood Langrial, and could help formalize millions of undocumented retailers. Under the scheme, single-shop owners get a one-page return, simple registration and a one-percent turnover tax with a minimum annual payment of Rs25,000. He praised the Urdu interface and proposed Green Plate for compliant traders, urging that the assurance against FBR shop visits be made legally binding, along with an independent complaint-resolution mechanism.

Hussain said the scheme targets around 4.2 million small traders; even one million joining could generate Rs25 billion annually. He stressed success should be measured by new taxpayers and revenue, not app downloads, noting salaried taxpayers paid Rs633 billion in FY2025-26 versus just Rs70 billion from wholesale/retail withholding, showing the tax system's heavy reliance on salaried and existing taxpayers.

He called for a one-page, pre-filled return for salaried taxpayers using data FBR already has, and demanded the app be made available in Urdu, Sindhi, Pashto and Balochi, along with a free Apple version, web portal, assisted filing, and help desks at FPCCI and district offices for those lacking digital skills.

Hussain also cautioned that the one-percent turnover tax could hurt high-turnover, low-margin businesses, potentially consuming 20 percent of profit for firms with five-percent margins. He urged FBR to review sector-wise margins and the Rs200 million turnover ceiling for defining small shopkeepers, and called for regular public data on filers, collections, Green Plates and complaints, with non-coercive, technology-based enforcement for those remaining outside the tax net after a facilitation period.

Aladdin Impact Ventures Launches "Founders Exchange" Initiative

Tahir Amin Malik

LAHORE: Aladdin Impact Ventures Pvt. Ltd. has launched Founders Exchange, a monthly gathering designed to give founders, CEOs, and entrepreneurs a relaxed space to connect as people rather than professionals. Moving away from conventional networking built around pitches and formal introductions, the series focuses on natural bonding through conversations, group games, trivia, and informal interactions.

CEO Ayesha Zaman said the first edition, scheduled for August 28, 2026 in Lahore, has already drawn strong interest, with 76 registrations and roughly 95% of participants being CEOs and business leaders.

Zaman said founders typically carry constant responsibility, and she wanted the initiative to feel like personal time — a space free from pitching or performing. She emphasized that deliberately built experiences around games and casual conversation allow genuine relationships to form naturally, noting strong business connections often begin as authentic human ones.

Aladdin Impact Ventures views the initiative as part of its broader commitment to strengthening founder communities and fostering collaboration. Zaman said success would mean founders leaving feeling lighter, happier, and more connected than when they arrived.

AI Startups to Expand Access to Advanced Intelligence for Pakistani Students and Freelancers

City Desk

ISLAMABAD: Pajic AI Lab, the research and innovation subsidiary of PAJIC Holding Ltd, has announced pre-seed funding for two locally developed AI startups designed specifically for Pakistan's growing student and freelance communities.

The upcoming platforms aim to provide access to advanced Large Language Models (LLMs) and vibe-coding capabilities at an estimated 60 to 70 percent lower cost than international platforms. The startups will also address payment barriers by allowing users to subscribe and transact in Pakistani rupees through local banking applications and digital wallets, reducing reliance on international credit cards and foreign exchange payments.

PAJIC Holding Ltd President and Chairman Fysal Gill said the initiatives were designed to support Pakistan's emerging AI ecosystem and expand affordable access to advanced digital tools. He noted that investments in GPU-based data centers, government support for AI and growing international technology activity were creating a stronger foundation for the country's digital economy.

The startups are currently completing localized model fine-tuning and API integration, with commercial deployment planned for 2026.

The company said the platforms are expected to empower students, freelancers and digital creators, while contributing to technology-driven economic growth over the next three to five years.

Commissioner Multan Congratulates Board Position Holders

Quratulain Asim

MULTAN: Commissioner Multan Division Aamir Karim Khan met with students who secured top positions in the matriculation examinations, congratulating them on their achievement. He attributed their success to hard work, parental prayers, teachers' efforts, and Allah's blessings, urging them to remain humble and grateful while continuing to work hard.

Khan stressed that alongside education, developing skills for responsible citizenship is essential, urging youth to maintain cleanliness, follow traffic rules, wear helmets, respect others, and contribute to societal betterment. He advised students to set clear goals and pursue future careers as doctors, engineers, civil servants, military officers, IT experts, and pilots with determination.

He emphasized that government positions are responsibilities rather than privileges, urging future officers to use their roles to serve the public and improve society.

Additional Commissioner Coordination Shahid Joyia, Education Board Chairman Dr. Ijaz Ahmed, Secretary Khurram Qureshi, Controller Muhammad Imran, along with teachers and parents, attended the ceremony. The Commissioner concluded by distributing certificates of appreciation to all the students.

Bull & Bears PSX 100-Share Index Fluctuation

Pakistan: PSX 100-Share Index	
Current	Prev. Close
177,166.52	176,591.76
Day's High	Day's Low
177,583.36	176,110.75
Index Value	Change
23,470,059,076	+574.76
Percentage	Time
+0.33%	21 Aug, 2026 4:30 pm

Europe: FTSE 100 Index	
Index Value	Change
10,816.56	+68.40
Percentage	Time
+0.64%	21 Aug, 4:35 pm GMT+1

USA: Dow Jones Industrial Average	
Index Value	Change
53,311.63	+552.42
Percentage	Time
+1.05%	21 Aug, 3:10 pm GMT-4

Asia Pacific: Nikkei Stocks Average	
Index Value	Change
66,016.36	−200.43
Percentage	Time
−0.30%	21 Aug, 3:45 pm GMT+9

Open Market Forex Rates

Currency	Buying	Selling
Australian Dollar	194.65	198.35
Bahrain Dinar	734.35	745.38
Canadian Dollar	200.50	204.95
China Yuan	38.20	38.95
Danish Krone	42.80	43.40
Euro	323.27	327.71
Hong Kong Dollar	34.95	35.95
Indian Rupee	2.60	3.20
Japanese Yen	1.7339	1.8337
Kuwaiti Dinar	883.90	894.45
Malaysian Ringgit	68.10	68.95
NewZealand $	162.60	165.78
Norwegians Krone	28.15	28.50
Omani Riyal	719.24	729.35
Qatari Riyal	74.98	75.85
Saudi Riyal	73.90	74.60
Singapore Dollar	216.01	224.04
Swedish Korona	28.40	28.90
Swiss Franc	343.16	347.93
Thai Bhat	8.75	9.40
U.A.E Dirham	75.60	76.50
UK Pound Sterling	376.97	380.25
US Dollar	278.00	278.65

Pakistan, Google sign MoU to boost AI, digital skills for $30bn digital economy by 2030

Spokesman Report

ISLAMABAD: The Government of Pakistan and Google signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Friday to accelerate the country's digital transformation, expand digital skills and promote AI-driven innovation, targeting $30 billion in IT exports and digital economy by 2030.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif witnessed the signing and hosted a reception for the visiting Google delegation, calling the agreement a milestone in Pakistan's partnership with Google that would empower youth with modern technology and tools, emphasizing the country's potential to leverage its youth bulge.

Senior officials present included IT Minister Shaza Fatima Khawaja, Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb, Google VP Wilson White and US Chargé d'Affaires Natalie A. Baker.

Under the MoU, Google will provide 150,000 Career Certificates to Pakistani youth in 2026, along with one-year free access to Google AI Plus and Gemini Notebook for students. A dedicated Google AI Centre of Excellence will be established in Islamabad to train human resources to international standards.

The agreement also covers collaboration in mobile apps and gaming, digital payments, digital trade, and AI use in government and key sectors. Google will support the FBR's transformation plan and AI applications in agriculture for crop monitoring and yield forecasting. Digital platforms will help SMEs and local app/gaming developers reach international markets.

The MoU was signed by IT Secretary Zarrar Hasham Khan and Google's David Weller. Minister Khawaja called it a testament to two years of digital modernisation efforts, while Google's Farhan Qureshi said it would unlock Pakistan's digital potential.

A joint task force involving government, Google and industry stakeholders will be formed to address IT export growth barriers, investment frameworks and workforce upskilling.

Meeting

ISLAMABAD: Speaker National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq in a meeting with Malaysian Parliamentary Delegation led by Minister for Interior Mr. Saifuddin Nasution bin Ismail at Parliament House

Photo: PID

Pakistan Well Placed to Tap Global Islamic Finance Opportunities: Khalawi

Commerce Desk

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has significant potential to expand its share in the global Islamic economy by developing innovative Shariah-compliant financial products, strengthening regulations and building professional expertise, said Yousef Hassan Khalawi, Secretary General of the Islamic Chamber of Commerce and Development (ICCD).

Speaking at the SECP Talk Series on "Shaping the Future of Islamic Finance: Pakistan and the Global Perspective," Khalawi said Pakistan's large Muslim population, growing Islamic finance market, sizeable diaspora and strong pool of financial professionals provide a solid foundation for expanding into global Islamic finance.

He stressed the need for innovation in emerging areas such as fintech and highlighted opportunities in listed Waqf structures, agricultural finance and Qard Hassan, or interest-free lending. He also emphasized the importance of Shariah standardization and developing professionals skilled in both Islamic principles and modern finance.

SECP Commissioner Imtiaz Haider said Islamic finance is expanding rapidly in Pakistan's capital markets and non-bank financial sector. He noted that 309 Pakistan Stock Exchange-listed securities are Shariah-compliant, representing 65 percent of total market capitalization, worth Rs13.2 trillion.

He added that Islamic mutual fund assets rose from Rs722 billion in June 2023 to Rs2.2 trillion in June 2026, with 197 of 389 mutual funds being Shariah-compliant. The session also highlighted new Islamic microfinance, housing finance and investment products.

PCJCCI Signs MOU with EU-China Commission

Commerce Desk

LAHORE: The Pakistan China Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PCJCCI) signed a strategic MOU with the EU-China Commission to promote trade, investment, business collaboration, and knowledge exchange, strengthening international economic cooperation. The agreement was signed by PCJCCI Vice President Amir Ali, who said it would create a platform for expanding B2B linkages and helping Pakistani and Chinese enterprises explore new markets, attract investment, and build commercial partnerships.

A Chinese representative from the EU-China Commission called the agreement a reflection of shared commitment to economic cooperation, expressing confidence it would open new avenues for trade and knowledge sharing.

PCJCCI Secretary General Salahuddin Hanif said the MOU would help convert institutional cooperation into practical business opportunities, with PCJCCI facilitating joint trade exhibitions, B2B conferences, business delegations, and exchange programmes.

The agreement covers cooperation in trade, investment, agriculture, culture, education, industrial exhibitions, and B2B engagement, alongside delegation visits and exchange programmes to boost mutual understanding. It also identifies opportunities in emergency and resilience industries, encouraging Chinese enterprises to explore the Pakistani market.

Hanif reaffirmed PCJCCI's role as a bridge connecting Pakistani, Chinese, and international business communities. The agreement is expected to expand market access and strengthen economic partnerships linking Pakistan, China, and Europe.

PIBF Lahore Backs JI Sit-in Against Petroleum Levy

Commerce Desk

LAHORE: The Pak International Business Forum (PIBF) Lahore announced its participation in the Jamaat-e-Islami sit-in against the petroleum levy, calling it a major burden on businesses, industry, and the public. PIBF Lahore President Abdul Wadood Alvi, Secretary General Malik Mehmood Ahmed, and Vice President Hafiz Ejaz said the business community had serious reservations over petroleum-related taxes, which raise transportation and production costs and fuel inflation.

They said reducing energy costs was essential to improving business competitiveness and attracting investment, expressing support for peaceful, democratic efforts to provide relief to consumers and businesses. They stressed that sustainable growth requires lowering input costs, promoting local industry, and enhancing the competitiveness of Pakistani products in domestic and international markets.

PIBF Lahore reiterated its commitment to advocating for economic stability, affordable energy, and a business-friendly environment, noting it had previously called for the removal of the petroleum levy, arguing lower fuel costs would support investment and sustainable economic growth.

GEPCO Privatisation Draws Strong Investor Interest

Commerce Desk

ISLAMABAD: The Privatisation Commission (PC) received strong interest for the privatisation of Gujranwala Electric Power Company (GEPCO), with 11 prospective investors submitting Expressions of Interest (EOIs) by the closing date, seeking 51% to 100% shareholding and management control.

Interested parties include three Turkish firms (Aktor Elektrik, Genvera Enerji, Cengiz Enerji), Saudi Arabia's Al Sharif Contracting, and several major Pakistani groups: Engro Energy, Sapphire Fibers, Hub Power Holdings with Lucky Cement, Shirazi Investments, Artistic Milliners with Fatima Group, K-Electric, and a consortium of AKD Securities, Fast Cable, and Mughal Steel Group.

The Commission credited extensive domestic and international roadshows over the past six months for the strong response. Muhammad Ali, Adviser to the PM on Privatisation and PC Chairman, called it another milestone in DISCOs privatisation, reflecting investor confidence in Pakistan's power-sector reform agenda and commitment to a transparent, competitive process.

Submitted EOIs and Statements of Qualification will undergo evaluation against prequalification criteria, with qualifying applicants granted Virtual Data Room access for detailed due diligence.

Gold price rises Rs5,200 per tola to Rs477,136

ISLAMABAD: The price of gold in the country witnessed a sharp increase on Friday, with the price of 24-karat gold rising by Rs5,200 to Rs477,136 per tola, according to the All Pakistan Sarafa Gems and Jewellers Association.

The price of 24-karat gold for 10 grams increased by Rs4,458 to Rs409,067, while the price of 22-karat gold for 10 grams rose by Rs4,086 to Rs374,991.

In the international market, gold was quoted at $4,547 per ounce, up by $52 from the previous session.

Standard Chartered Pakistan H1 2026 Results

Commerce Desk

KARACHI: Standard Chartered Bank (Pakistan) reported a profit before tax of PKR 24.4 billion for H1 2026, down from PKR 32.9 billion in H1'25, with revenue of PKR 34.8 billion, lower by PKR 9.6 billion due to reduced interest rates, though quarterly revenue rose 10% versus Q1. Total expenses fell 5%, maintaining a strong 33% cost-to-income ratio. A prudent risk approach and debt recoveries led to a net release of PKR 1.1 billion, marking five consecutive years of net reversals.

Total deposits reached PKR 671 billion, up 3%, with current accounts comprising 57% of the deposit book. Net advances grew 15% (PKR 31 billion), driven by corporate advances and mortgages. The bank facilitated Pakistan's return to international capital markets through USD 750 million Eurobond and USD 250 million Panda Bond issuances.

With ROE at 21.3% and CAR at 21.2%, the Board announced an interim cash dividend of 30% (PKR 3/share). CEO Adil Salahuddin cited improving economic conditions and investor confidence as growth opportunities, emphasizing the bank's role connecting clients to global markets.

The bank highlighted community initiatives including women-in-tech programmes, girls' sports empowerment, and disability inclusion, maintaining 30% women diversity. The Board thanked outgoing CEO Rehan M. Shaikh and welcomed Adil Salahuddin as his successor.

NUST Hosts Largest-Ever Cohort of International Interns; Rector Interacts with Participants

City Desk

ISLAMABAD: Rector, Dr. Muhammad Zahid Latif, interacted with participants of the NUST Internship Programme for International Students (NIPIS-2026) during an interactive session. The interaction was also attended by Pro-Rector (RIC), Dr. Rizwan Riaz.

Speaking to the interns, Rector highlighted the value of international student engagement in building people-to-people connections, promoting cross-cultural understanding and encouraging academic collaboration. He shared that initiatives such as NIPIS contribute to NUST's growing international footprint by bringing together talented students from around the world and creating opportunities for academic and cultural exchange. Dr. Zahid also spoke about NUST's knowledge ecosystem, its academic and research landscape and the University's vision for the future.

The session concluded with a candid interaction, during which the interns shared their experiences at NUST, reflected on their academic journeys and engaged with Rector on a range of topics related to higher education, research and their future academic pursuits.

A flagship international internship initiative of NUST, NIPIS has been hosting students from friendly countries since 2018, providing them with opportunities to gain academic and research exposure while experiencing Pakistan and its rich cultural heritage. This year, the programme is hosting its largest cohort since inception, bringing together 51 international interns from 15 countries for a unique academic, research and cultural experience at NUST.

CASS organised 'Redefining Power: Geoeconomics, Technology & Security'

LAHORE: The Centre for Aerospace and Security Studies (CASS) Lahore organised an event titled, "Redefining Power: Geoeconomics, Technology and Security in an era of Strategic Competition" on 19 August 2026.

As an independent think tank, CASS Lahore organises academic events for scholars and practitioners interested in national security in its wider context. The event was attended by academics, intellectuals, and domain experts. Ms Sibra Waseem, a Research Assistant at CASS Lahore, delivered the opening address.

Mr Haroon Sharif, Chairman, PREF, Islamabad, highlighted that Pakistan needs to build on its geopolitical relevance by translating strategic partnerships and CPEC into investment, technology transfer, and industrial ecosystems.

He highlighted opportunities arising from Pakistan's strategic location. He underscored the need to diversify the country's energy mix and reduce vulnerability to imported oil, accounting for 85 per cent of requirements.

He stressed the need to create opportunities for 4 million annual labour-market entrants. Additionally, he suggested focusing on sectors

with potential for value addition, productivity and exports, alongside knowledge and technology partnerships, R&D and greater private-sector participation.

Dr Safdar Sohail, Executive Director, SPRC, Islamabad, emphasised the need to link Pakistan's geopolitical relationships with economic transformation by converting strategic opportunities, particularly through the US and CPEC, into manufacturing capacity, technology partnerships and export competitiveness.

Given Pakistan's narrow export base, he stressed the importance of development finance and industrial policy. He highlighted the provinces' role following the 18th Amendment, alongside better data, standards and integration of finance, manufacturing and SMEs to build a self-sustaining economy. Taking discussion further, he also commended the PAF for its decisive victory in the May 2025 war, even in the face of severe financial constraints.

In his concluding remarks, Air Marshal Asim Suleiman (Retd), President, CASS, Lahore, emphasised that military power remains essential, but economy, technology, and national security are becoming interconnected, with disruption in one affecting others. For Pakistan, this transformation is significant given its geostrategic location, connectivity and growing digital economy, which must be converted into sustainable economic gains. Furthermore, he underscored a growth strategy that stands behind the strong while ensuring a level playing field for development. Highlighting the significance of human capital development, he cited Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmed Baber Sidhu's vision of strengthening PAF by harnessing best available human resources and wisely spending the PAF resources, which contributed to Pakistan's success during Marka-e-Haq.

The event concluded with a lively interactive session. It highlighted economic geography, GDP growth model, and supporting policies as powerful tool. The participants appreciated CASS Lahore's initiative in hosting an engaging and thought-provoking discussion.

FrieslandCampina Engro Pakistan Limited reports successful half-year run despite political and economic volatility

Commerce Desk

KARACHI: The Company has achieved a revenue growth of 12.1% during the first half of 2026 over the same period last year. Revenue reached PKR 58.9 billion compared to PKR 52.5 billion last year. This performance was driven by favorable portfolio mix, emphasis on in-market execution, selective brand investment and route-to-market fundamentals. Alongside topline delivery, ongoing efficiency initiatives across sourcing, manufacturing and distribution translated into gross margin expansion of 350 bps and operating profit growth of 53.9% versus the same period last year.

The packaged milk market continues to operate below its pre-tax levels, driven by the 18% sales tax imposed on UHT milk in July 2024. The uneven playing field versus loose milk, which remains outside the tax net, continues to suppress volumes in the formal dairy sector. Company continued to actively engage with relevant government stakeholders to advocate for equitable taxation, underscoring the adverse impact of the current tax regime on public health, farmer livelihoods, and the documented dairy economy.

The regional conflict continued to create challenges for the operating environment during the first half of 2026. Shipment delays and elevated freight costs weighed on the value chain, while multiple revisions in fuel prices during the period added further volatility to input costs.

On the domestic front, inflation trended higher during the period, prompting increase in policy rate as well. Collectively, these dynamics continue to have a bearing on category affordability and demand.

Leveraging its global expertise and 150 years of heritage, FCEPL remains committed to the highest standards of hygiene, food safety and sustainability and providing safe, affordable and nourishing dairy products to millions of Pakistanis, every day.

When Books Lose Their Place in Young Lives

Unaiza Rashid

A young person sitting with a book for an hour has become less common than a young person spending an hour scrolling through a phone. Today, books are competing with social media, short videos, online games and endless notifications for the attention of the younger generation. While technology has made information easier to access, it has also changed the way young people spend their free time and, in many cases, reduced their interest in reading. Reading has traditionally been considered an important habit for developing knowledge and understanding. However, many young people today find it difficult to sit down and read a book simply for pleasure. This does not mean that they have lost their curiosity. Rather, their attention is being directed towards faster and more convenient forms of content. It is common to see students waiting for a class or travelling somewhere with their phones in their hands, scrolling through social media instead of reading a few pages of a book. One of the main reasons for this change is the growing use of social media. Platforms such as TikTok, Instagram and YouTube provide a constant stream of short and attractive content. A person can watch dozens of videos within a few minutes, while reading a book requires patience and concentration. As young people become accustomed to receiving information quickly, spending hours reading a book can start to feel boring or difficult. Another important factor is the pressure of modern student life. Young people have academic responsibilities, assignments, examinations and, for many, part-time jobs or other commitments. After a tiring day, scrolling through social media often seems easier than picking up a book. Unfortunately, what begins as a way to relax can turn into hours of screen time. A student may plan to watch a few videos during a short break and then realise that an hour or more has passed without doing anything meaningful.

The environment at home and in educational institutions also matters. In many families, academic performance is given more importance than reading for enjoyment. Students are often encouraged to read textbooks because they are necessary for examinations, but they are not always encouraged to explore novels, biographies, history or other forms of literature. As a result, reading can become something associated only with exams rather than something enjoyable. Parents have an important role in changing this attitude. Children are more likely to develop a reading habit when they see books being valued at home. A parent who spends some time reading instead of constantly using a phone can set a simple but powerful example. Parents can also encourage their children to choose books according to their interests rather than forcing them to read something they do not enjoy. Even keeping a small collection of books at home can help create an environment where reading feels natural. Teachers also have a responsibility to make reading more engaging. Instead of limiting reading to textbooks and examination material, teachers can introduce students to interesting novels, short stories, biographies and articles. Class discussions about books, reading activities and small book clubs can make students realise that reading is not only about passing exams. Schools and colleges can also make better use of their libraries and create spaces where students can read comfortably. The decline in reading may appear harmless, but its long-term effects should not be ignored. Reading regularly improves vocabulary, writing skills, concentration and the ability to understand complex ideas. Books also encourage readers to think beyond their immediate surroundings. Through literature, a young person can experience different cultures, personalities and ways of looking at life. There is also a difference between simply receiving information and actually engaging with it. Social media can tell us what happened in a matter of seconds, but books often encourage us to ask why it happened and what it means. When young people depend too heavily on short and simplified content, they may gradually lose the patience required for deeper thinking. Another quality that can be affected is imagination. When reading a novel, the reader creates the characters, places and situations in their own mind. A screen provides most of these details for us. This is one reason why reading remains valuable even in an age when entertainment is available at the touch of a button.

However, technology should not be treated as the enemy. It can actually become part of the solution. E-books, audiobooks and digital libraries have made reading more accessible. Young people who do not have easy access to physical books can now find thousands of titles online. The problem is not technology itself; it is the way we use it. The first step towards bringing back the habit of reading is to make it enjoyable rather than compulsory. Parents and teachers should allow young people to choose books according to their interests. A student who enjoys mystery stories may not immediately enjoy a history book, and that is perfectly fine. The purpose is to develop the habit first. Schools and colleges can also encourage reading through book clubs, reading competitions and library activities. Libraries should be welcoming spaces rather than places students visit only when an assignment requires it. Even setting aside fifteen or twenty minutes each day for reading can gradually make a difference. Parents can support this habit by setting aside some family reading time at home, even if it is only for a short period each day. Young people, too, have a role to play. It is not necessary to stop using social media completely. Instead, they can try replacing a small part of their daily screen time with reading. Ten pages a day may seem insignificant, but over time those pages can become several books a year. The decline in book reading is not simply about books disappearing from young people's lives. It is about what happens to our ability to concentrate, imagine and think deeply when we become dependent on constant and instant entertainment. Technology will continue to develop, and young people will continue to use it. The challenge is to make sure that books do not disappear in the process. Perhaps we do not need to convince young people that they should read because reading is "good for them." We simply need to help them discover a book that makes them want to turn to the next page. Once that happens, reading may no longer feel like a responsibility. It may become a habit they choose for themselves. " No doubt book's reading is a Food for thought.

After Military Failure, Trump's Economic War on Iran

Continued from Page 4

of the dollar has simply accelerated the global de-dollarization trend; central banks worldwide currently hold 58% of their reserves in USD, down from 71% two decades ago.

The domestic economic situation in the United States further undermines the credibility of this new sanctions regime. The President's assertion of a "flourishing economy" rings hollow against the data. The U. S. national debt has surpassed $40 trillion—a staggering figure that is five times the federal government's annual receipts of approximately $8 trillion.

The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) projects that interest payments on this debt will soon consume 20% of all federal spending, rivaling the defense budget. This fiscal fragility manifests in tangible economic pain: recent data revealed a loss of 27,000 jobs in a single month, and inflation, while moderating, remains above the Federal Reserve's 2% target, exacerbated by supply chain disruptions caused by the war.

The collapse of Walmart's stock—an 8% single-day drop that erased nearly $45 billion in market capitalization—is a bellwether. Walmart represents the American consumer base; its decline signals a shift from spending to saving, a precursor to recession. A nation drowning in debt and teetering on a consumer downturn lacks the economic oxygen to sustain a protracted global trade war against nations trading with Iran.

Finally, the geopolitical map renders this new sanction regime diplomatically unsustainable. The nations refusing to align with U. S. economic dictates represent over half of the world's population.

China and India continue to buy Russian and Iranian energy because it is economically rational. Brazil, led by a leftist government, has no interest in enforcing American secondary sanctions against its own agricultural or industrial sectors.

The global South, observing the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza and the reckless military gambit in Iran, views the U. S. not as a moral leader but as a destabilizing force. The threat to sanction any nation trading with Iran is an ultimatum the world is no longer willing to accept.

The era of the "American Century" ended not with a bang in the deserts of Iran, but with the realization that economic coercive power, like military power, is finite. The United States has failed to win the war; it is equally likely to fail in winning the peace. The pivot to "economic excruciation" is not a strategy for victory, but a coping mechanism for a superpower struggling to accept the limits of its own waning influence.

The writer is Press Secretary to the President (Rtd), Former Press Minister, Embassy of Pakistan to France, Former Press Attaché to Malaysia and Former MD, SRBC. He is living in Michigan, USA

The Inner Reflection: The Loss of Political Tolerance

Continued from Page 4

individuals holding different views sit opposite one another, express their perspectives, and listen calmly. Dialogue is not meant to declare a victor or defeat an opponent, but to find a middle ground for the collective good.

Let us pause and consider the direction in which we are moving. Politics is not merely the pursuit of power; it is a sacred trust aimed at public welfare. Until tolerance, empathy, and mutual respect are restored to our political culture, we cannot build a civilized society. The hour demands that all political factions rise above personal interests, gather at the table, and commit to bringing gentleness back to their speech, openness to their hearts, and tolerance to their politics.

Governments come and go, and the sun of power rises and sets, but what endures is character and conduct. If we lose our ethics and civility in political battles, any victory achieved will ultimately amount to a profound defeat. It is time to close the market of hostility and light the lamps of tolerance and empathy, allowing coming generations to breathe in a peaceful and dignified environment.

The writer is columnist and dentist and Registered member of PFUC. SHe can be reached at unzilakhalidsiddiqui8@gmail.com

Daily The Spokesman

Saturday, August 22, 2026

Calls on

RAWALPINDI: Lieutenant General Banza Mwilambwe Jules, Chief of Defence of the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo, calls on Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir, Chief of Army Staff & CDF, at GHQ.

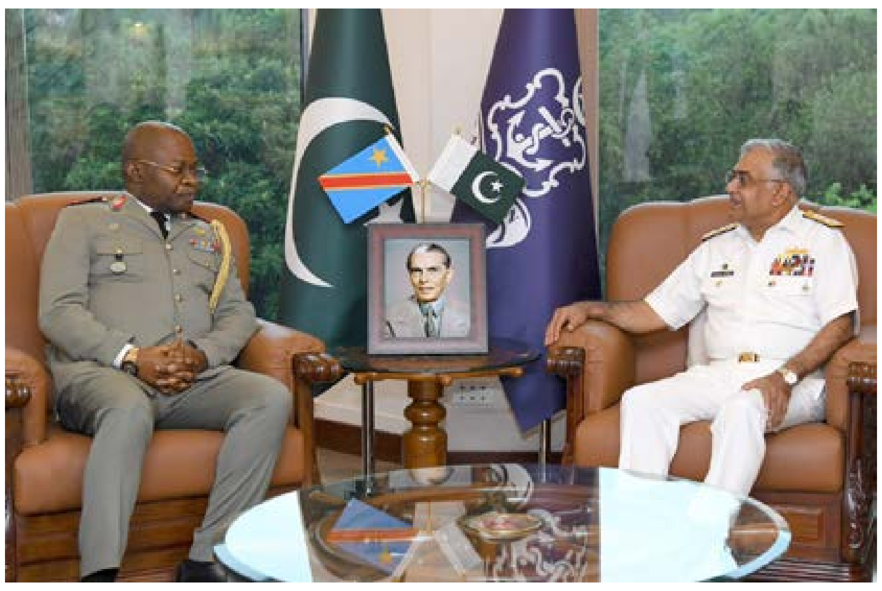
Photo: ISPR

Pakistan and DRC Sign Defense MoU as Congo's Top General Visits GHQ

Spokesman Report

RAWALPINDI: A high-level defence delegation of the Democratic Republic of Congo, headed by Lieutenant General Banza Mwilambwe Jules, Chief of Defence of the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo, called on Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir, NI (M), HJ, Chief of Army Staff & Chief of Defence Forces (CDF), at General Headquarters (GHQ), Rawalpindi.

Upon arrival at GHQ, the visiting dignitary was presented a Guard of Honour by a smartly turned-out tri-services contingent.



During the meeting, matters of mutual interest, regional security environment and avenues for enhanced bilateral defence and security cooperation were discussed. Both dignitaries expressed satisfaction over the longstanding cordial relations between Pakistan and Democratic Republic of Congo. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed which aims at broadening and strengthening defence and security cooperation between the two countries.

Earlier, Lieutenant General Banza Mwilambwe Jules, also called on Admiral Naveed Ashraf, NI, NI (M), T Bt, Chief of the Naval Staff. The visiting dignitary lauded the professionalism, operational capabilities and unwavering commitment of the Armed Forces of Pakistan towards maintaining peace and stability in the region and acknowledged the significant progress achieved through indigenization and self-reliance.

Saudi Business Community Expresses Interest in Investing in Pakistan

Commerce Desk

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Investment Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh met a Saudi Investment Forum delegation led by Kunwar Qutbuddin, alongside PIBF President Engr. Ghulam Safdar and Mokamela International LLC Chairman Raja Riaz, to discuss strengthening Pakistan-Saudi economic ties. The delegation described the newly consolidated Riyadh-Jeddah forum, representing over 400 businesses, as a credible platform for commercial linkages.

Sheikh assured full facilitation for bona fide Saudi investors through the Board of Investment (BOI), highlighting BOI's role in identifying opportunities, coordinating with government institutions, and its Honorary Investment Counsellors and Business Facilitation Center's single-window approach. He cited regulatory reforms underway to simplify processes and noted

PM Shehbaz Sharif's personal focus on improving ease of doing business.

Sheikh highlighted investment potential across agriculture, IT, mining, manufacturing, energy, and tourism, drawing on his own business background and philanthropic work, including founding FAST University Chiniot. The delegation invited him to a future investment conference, expressing confidence the engagement would translate interest into concrete projects and partnerships.

Russian Ambassador Attends SCO Meeting Ahead of Pakistan's Chairmanship

Spokesman Report

ISLAMABAD: On August 19, Russian Ambassador Albert P. Khorev attended a meeting of SCO Member States' Ambassadors hosted by Dr. Muhammad Faisal, Pakistan's National Coordinator for the SCO, focused on organizational preparations for Pakistan's upcoming SCO Chairmanship.

Ambassador Khorev emphasized that the SCO remains among Russia's key foreign policy priorities and highlighted the importance of advancing initiatives in finance, investment, technology, industrial cooperation, the digital economy, transportation, and energy. He concluded by wishing Pakistan success in its upcoming Chairmanship and reaffirming Russia's commitment to constructive cooperation within the organization.

CM Punjab condemns blast in Mastung

Bureau Report

LAHORE: Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif has strongly condemned the blast in Mastung, Balochistan, and expressed deep grief and sorrow over the loss of precious lives.

The chief minister prayed for the early recovery of those injured in the blast.

Shafay Hussain Invites Ontario Minister to Lahore Amid Push for Deeper Economic Links

Spokesman Report

TORONTO: Meeting of Minister Shafay Hussain with Minister Victor Fedeli, Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade of Ontario

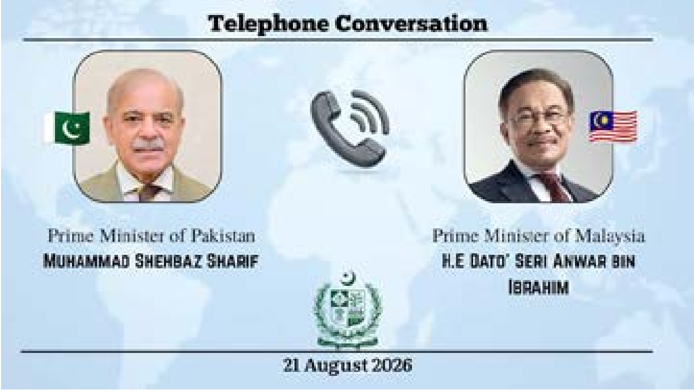
Mr. Shafay Hussain, Minister of Industries, Commerce and Investment, Government of Punjab, along with an official delegation, held a meeting with Mr. Victor Fedeli, Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade, Government of Ontario, in Toronto today.

Appreciating the growing economic engagement between Pakistan and

Canada in recent years, the two Ministers exchanged views on the potential for enhancing trade, investment and commercial exchanges between Punjab and Ontario provinces. Minister Hussain highlighted agro-food, agri-tech, value addition and supply chain management in dairy, livestock, poultry, energy, and Himalayan pink salt sectors as low lying fruits for deepening Punjab-Ontario economic engagement. The two sides also discussed technology transfer and promoting business to business linkages between the two provinces.

Minister Hussain extended the invitation to Minister Fedeli to visit Lahore. Minister Fedeli accepted the invitation.

PM Shehbaz, Malaysian Counterpart Express Satisfaction Over Bilateral Ties



City Desk

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif held a telephone conversation with Malaysian Prime Minister Dato Seri Anwar Ibrahim and discussed bilateral relations and regional developments.

During the cordial conversation, Prime Minister Shehbaz inquired about Dr. Anwar Ibrahim's health and wished him a speedy recovery. The two leaders expressed satisfaction over the positive trajectory of Pakistan-Malaysia relations and agreed to maintain the momentum, particularly by strengthening trade and investment cooperation.

The situation in the Gulf and broader regional developments also came under discussion. Prime Minister Anwar appreciated Pakistan's efforts for regional peace and thanked Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir for their leadership in promoting these efforts.

Both leaders agreed to meet at a mutually convenient time in the near future. Prime Minister Shehbaz also reiterated his invitation to Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim to undertake an official visit to Pakistan.

DR Congo Defence Delegation Calls on Air Chief

City Desk

ISLAMABAD: A high-level defence delegation from the Democratic Republic of Congo, led by Lt. Gen. Banza Mwilambwe Jules, Chief of Defence Forces, called on Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmed Baber Sidhu at Air Headquarters, discussing matters of mutual interest, regional security, and avenues for enhanced defence cooperation.

The Air Chief highlighted the longstanding cordial relations between Pakistan and DR Congo, reiterating PAF's resolve to strengthen defence ties through greater interaction, training, and expertise exchange between the two countries' armed forces. He also briefed the visiting delegation on PAF's indigenous capabilities and ongoing efforts toward self-reliance.

The visiting dignitary praised PAF's professionalism, operational preparedness, and training standards, expressing keen interest in its indigenization achievements. He underscored his resolve to rebuild and modernize DR Congo's Air Force and voiced his desire to benefit from PAF's professional expertise.

The visit reflected both countries' shared commitment to strengthening bilateral defence cooperation and building lasting institutional ties, contributing to regional peace and stability.

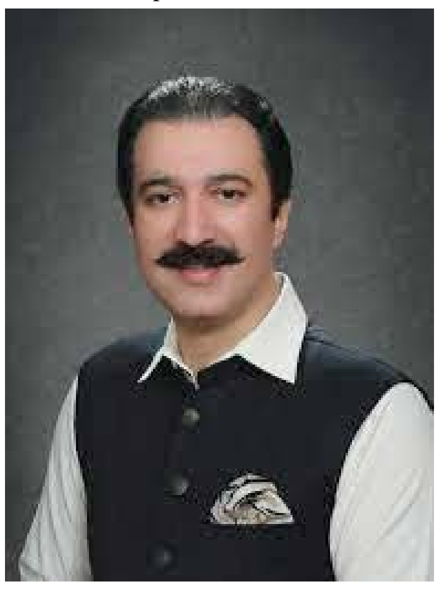
AJK PM Condemns US Ambassador's Remarks on Kashmir

Bureau Report

MUZAFFARABAD: Prime Minister of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) Faisal Mumtaz Rathore has strongly condemned remarks attributed to the US Ambassador to India, reportedly describing Kashmir as an "integral part" of India during a visit to Srinagar, the capital of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK).

Rathore said the statement was contrary to historical facts, the aspirations of the Kashmiri people and relevant United Nations resolutions. He emphasized that Jammu and Kashmir remains a disputed territory whose final status should be determined through a free and impartial plebiscite reflecting the will of its people. He described any unilateral declaration of the territory as part of India as a denial of the Kashmiri people's right to self-determination.

The AJK premier urged the international community, particularly major powers, to support the Kashmiri people's fundamental rights and address longstanding human rights concerns in the region. He said the Kashmir dispute could only be resolved in accordance with relevant UN Security Council resolutions and the aspirations of Kashmiris.



Rathore reaffirmed that the AJK government would intensify diplomatic and political efforts to highlight the dispute internationally and present the aspirations of the people of occupied Jammu and Kashmir before the global community.

Published by: Almass Ayoub Sabir from Zero Point Printers Rawalpindi