



DPM/FM Dar for competitive, innovative automotive ecosystem



Tariq Fazal congratulates successful candidates in Gilgit-Baltistan elections



BISP to launch digital wallet-based payments nationwide: Rubina Khalid

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(Late) Rehmat Khan

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In meeting with PM, president stresses 'provincial rights, economic stability' in upcoming budget

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari on Monday stressed that the upcoming 2026-2027 federal budget should prioritise "public welfare, provincial rights and economic stability" during a meeting with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, the Presidency said.

The meeting, part of wider pre-budget consultations between major allied parties in the Centre, came a couple of days ahead of the government's announcement to present the federal budget for FY2026-27 on June 10. A hand-out released after the meeting said Zardari and Shehbaz discussed the upcoming budget at the President's House.

"While discussing budget proposals and public relief, the president stressed prioritising

public welfare, provincial rights and economic stability in the federal budget," the handout said.

It added that the president directed that every effort should be made to harmonise the growth rate with public welfare schemes in the upcoming budget. National security, as well as the internal and regional situation, were also discussed. The Presidency said Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi briefed the president on his recent visit to Iran and regional diplomatic engagements. Apart from the federal budget and national security, the meeting also discussed the economy, the recent Gilgit-Baltistan elections, the situation in Azad Jammu and Kashmir, law and order, and other matters of national importance, the handout said. Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister.



ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari talking to Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif at Aiwan-e-Sadr.

'Shaky Zionist regime has few days left,' says Iranian supreme leader

PEAK POINT



IRAN: Iran's Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei said Monday that "the shaky Zionist regime has few days left," amid escalating tensions between Iran and Israel.

Iran launched several missile barrages toward northern Israel late Sunday following an Israeli airstrike on Beirut's southern suburbs.

Israel later launched strikes on western and central Iran, with explosions reported in several Iranian cities including Tehran, Isfahan, and Tabriz. Iran blames US for latest exchanges of fire with Israel.

Overnight exchanges of fire between Iran and Israel will only worsen an already "chaotic diplomatic process" with the United States, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmail Baghaei said on Monday, adding that Tehran was exchanging messages with Washington in an atmosphere of "extreme suspicion".

Baghaei said Israel's actions in Lebanon, whether carried out with U.S. knowledge and consent or not, were aimed at sabotaging diplomacy. He said Washington, as a party to the April 8 ceasefire.

Trump tells Israel and Iran to stop 'shooting immediately'

MAHPARA ZAMAN



NEW YORK: US President Donald Trump said Monday that Israel and Iran must stop "shooting," as the two countries attacked each other for the first time since a ceasefire two months ago.

"Israel and Iran must immediately stop 'shooting,'" Trump said in a brief post on Truth Social.

Earlier speaking to Axios, President Trump said he will tell Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu "not to retaliate" against Iranian missiles. "I am going to call Bibi right now and tell him not to retaliate," Trump told the outlet. "Each of them had their fun. Israel had its strike, and Iran had its strike. We don't need another one."

"We are very close to a final deal with Iran. It is going to be a good deal. I don't want it to blow up because of what is happening now," Axios cites the president as saying.

Trump says that if Israel strikes back, the conflict will just continue for "47 years — or the last 3,000 years," according to Axios.

Trump also urged Iran to return to the negotiating table, after it launched missiles at northern Israel. A Fox News correspondent quotes Trump as saying: "You've shot your missiles. That's enough. Get back to the table and make a deal."

Iran blames US for resumption of hostilities with Israel Iran said Monday that the United States held responsibility for the resumption.

Israel, Iran trade fire for first time since truce

PEAK POINT



ISRAEL: Israel and Iran exchanged attacks on Monday for the first time since a ceasefire in the Middle East war took effect two months ago, despite

US President Donald Trump calling for restraint.

The flare-up, which also drew in other countries in the region, saw Israel striking Iran after the Islamic republic targeted it in vengeance for an airstrike on Beirut's southern suburbs, where its proxy Hezbollah holds sway.

It followed weeks of negotiations seeking to bring about a definitive end to the regional war sparked by US and Israeli strikes on Iran on February 28.

No casualties have been reported so far in either Israel or Iran. The attacks included a strike on an Iranian petrochemical complex and a missile attack on Israel by Yemen's Houthi rebels.

The Israeli military said it struck and dismantled Iranian defence systems deployed across several areas in the country. AFP journalists in Jerusalem and the West Bank city of Ramallah heard a series of explosions and the Israeli army said it worked to intercept.

Rocket attack on transporter's vehicle sparks protests in Swat

PEAK POINT

SWAT: Protests broke out in Swat's Matta tehsil on Monday following a deadly attack in the Shakardara area that left three people dead and injured well-known transporter Afzal Khan Gujjar, according to protesters and police.

Members of the Gujjar community staged a protest against the attack, with demonstrators placing the bodies of the victims on the road and blocking the Matta-Mingora Road for all kinds of traffic. Protesters said they were demonstrating against the attack.

China's Xi lands in North Korea for rare visit, hails 'invincible friendship' with Pyongyang

PEAK POINT

NORTH KOREA: China's President Xi Jinping hailed an "invincible friendship" with Pyongyang as he arrived in North Korea on Monday, his first trip abroad this year after hosting back-to-back summits in Beijing.

China, Washington's chief geopolitical rival, has been North Korea's main trading partner by far for decades and a key source of diplomatic and economic support for the country hit by multiple international sanctions. Military officers lined a red carpet as an Air China plane carrying Xi arrived for his first visit since 2019, video from Xinhua showed.

A banner that read "We warmly welcome Comrade Xi Jinping" and hailing the two countries' "unbreak-

able friendship" hung below Chinese and North Korean flags at the summit in Beijing.



China flags at the airport. Xi made the trip after hosting US President Donald Trump and Russia's Vladimir Putin separately in Beijing, and as North Korea's nuclear talks with Washington remain deadlocked.

The White House said last month that Xi and Trump "confirmed their shared goal to denuclearise North Korea" during their

summit in Beijing. However, leader Kim Jong Un's powerful sister said on the eve of Xi's arrival that North Korea's nuclear weapons programme was "the line of no retreat".

Minseon Ku, a diplomacy professor at DePaul University, told AFP that "Beijing probably has accepted North Korea as a nuclear state" but Xi "will probably tell Kim that China wants stability more

than anything".

China has "always prioritised stability and is currently having to manage its relations and differences with the US", Ku said.

Seong-Hyon Lee, a visiting scholar at the Harvard University Asia Centre, also said Beijing is shifting towards "underwriting regime durability" rather than seeking to coerce North Korea into denuclearisation.

"China's broader regional strategy benefits from a stable, heavily armed, and aligned buffer state that absorbs US and allied military bandwidth," he told AFP.

North Korea has repeatedly declared itself an "irreversible" nuclear state since Kim and Trump's 2019 summit collapsed over the scope.

Earthquake of magnitude 7.8 strikes off southern Philippines, 15 feared killed

PEAK POINT



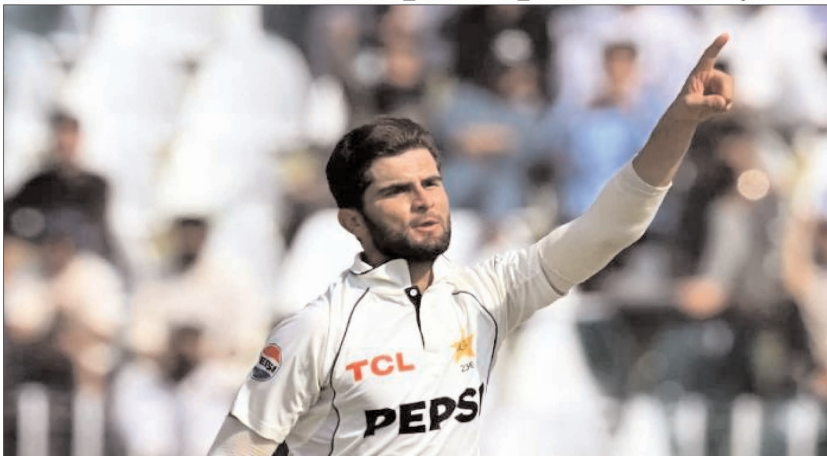
PHILIPPINES: At least 15 people were feared dead in the southern Philippines on Monday after a powerful magnitude 7.8 earthquake struck off the island of Mindanao, triggering tsunami warnings across several countries. The quake came early in the morning as schools were reopening in the Philippines after a long break, with the tremors felt strongly in a dozen provinces and 420 km (261 miles) away in the city of Manado on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi. Tsunami alerts were issued in the southern Philippines, northern Indonesia and the Malaysian state of Sabah on Borneo island after the quake with an epicentre located about 20 km off Mindanao's Sarangani province. Philippine authorities were assessing the damage from the quake.



SPORTS



PCB likely to drop ODI Captain Shaheen Afridi from Test plans permanently



PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's white-ball captain, Shaheen Shah Afridi, has been left out of the national Test team camp, with selectors opting to include him only in preparations for limited-overs cricket.

According to sources, the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has shortlisted 22 players for the red-ball camp, and 27 players for the white-ball camp as preparations begin for upcoming international

assignments, including the tour of the West Indies.

According to the reports, the white-ball camp is scheduled to continue until Sept. 18, while the red-ball training camp will run until July 10.

A separate camp for the West Indies tour is expected to begin on July 15.

Despite serving as Pakistan's ODI captain, Shaheen was not included among the players selected for the Test camp.

Instead, he has been named

only in the white-ball squad, a move that signals the selectors' preference to limit his role to shorter formats for the foreseeable future.

Shaheen last played a Test match against Bangladesh.

In that match, he claimed three wickets while conceding 113 runs in the first innings and took two wickets for 54 runs in the second innings.

He was subsequently replaced by Khurram Shahzad for the following Test.

Reports said members of the PCB think tank have concerns over Shaheen's absence from first-class cricket, believing that regular participation in four-day matches is essential for maintaining and improving performance in the longer format.

The report added that, based on those concerns, the board has decided not to consider the left-arm fast bowler for Test selection in the near future unless there is a significant change in his red-ball cricket involvement.

PCB names 49 players for NCA red-ball, white-ball camps



PEAK POINT

LAHORE: The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) on Sunday announced separate red-ball and white-ball camps at the National Cricket Academy (NCA), with 49 players set to participate in preparations for upcoming international and domestic assignments.

The red-ball camp, featuring 22 players, will run from June 8 to July 10, while the white-ball camp involving 27 players will be held from June 15 to Sept 18.

According to the PCB, players who were part of Pakistan's recently concluded One-day International series against Australia and have been selected for the red-ball camp will join the training programme from June 15.

The camps have been designed to help players prepare for future international commitments as well as domestic competitions. Participants will work on their technical skills and fitness under the supervision of national and NCA coaching staff, assisted by PCB medical personnel.

The board said players would also take part in one-on-one sessions with coaches aimed at improving their understanding of the technical and physical demands of international cricket.

PFF announces District Football Championship 2026



PEAK POINT

LAHORE: The Pakistan Football Federation (PFF) on Monday announced launch of the nationwide District Football Championship 2026 with a view to revitalising grassroots football, identifying emerging talent, and strengthening domestic football structures.

Addressing a press conference, PFF Chief

onship.

All provincial football attended the meeting virtually.

COO Khokhar said it is for the first time in country's football history that the federation will provide comprehensive professional and administrative support to all the districts to ensure the successful organisation of the championship.

Khokhar credited provincial and regional FAs presidents for their productive contribution in the consultation process and PFF President Syed Mohsen Gilani for spearheading the initiative, describing it as a transformative step towards rebuilding Pakistan's football ecosystem from the grassroots level.

"Under the leadership of Mohsen Gilani, Pakistan football has already made significant progress internationally and has earned appreciation from FIFA and AFC officials. Now, the focus is on bringing the same vision and commitment to grassroots and domestic football," he said.

The PFF COO emphasised that the District Football Championship 2026 represents a major investment in the future of Pakistani football, with the objective of creating opportunities for local players and establishing a sustainable talent development pathway. "The PFF is fully committed to making this championship a historic success.

India thrash Afghanistan by an innings and 300 runs in one-off Test



WINNERS

Pakistan hockey team management finalised ahead of Pro League

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Hockey Federation (PHF) has finalised the national team management for the upcoming Pro Hockey League, confirming the coaching and support staff ahead of the team's departure for Europe.

According to sources, goalkeeping coach Mazhar Abbas will not be part of the touring contingent and has been excluded from the final management setup for the tournament.

The sources further stated that discussions are ongoing with former national captain Wasim Ahmed regarding a potential coaching role.

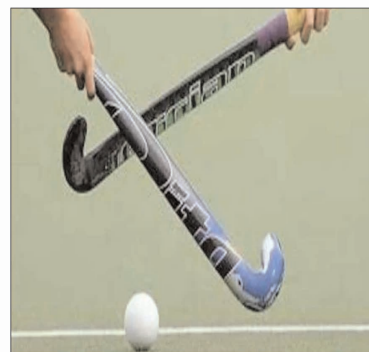
The former skipper, who is currently based in Australia, is expected to join the team in Belgium, subject to final arrangements.

Sources confirmed that the visa process for the 20-member squad and five-member coaching staff has

been completed.

The management team will include head coach Manzoor-ul-Hassan, with Khawaja Junaid serving as

pist. The national squad is scheduled to hold its final training session in Lahore today before departing for Karachi on the evening of



team manager-cum-coach. June 9.

Other members of the support staff include Sultan Ashraf as video analyst and Fahad Javed as physiotherapist. The team will then leave for Belgium on the morning of June 10 to begin its Pro League preparations.

Siniakova, Townsend continue dominance with French Open doubles crown





Senate returns Rs. 1.436 billion returned to national exchequer, surpassing fiscal target by 500%

NADEEM TANOLI

ISLAMABAD: In a remarkable display of fiscal discipline, the Senate of Pakistan surrendered Rs. 1.436 billion to the national exchequer through a comprehensive austerity and expenditure rationalisation programme, exceeding the target prescribed by the Finance Division by 500 percent. The savings, accounting for 15.9 percent of the Senate's total budget for FY 2025-26, set a new benchmark for institutional accountability and prudent stewardship of public resources.

The initiative was spearheaded by Chairman Senate Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani, who began implementing austerity measures from his own office before extending the framework across the entire Senate Secretariat. Lawmakers and officials were briefed that the program included strict expenditure controls, efficiency measures, and systematic rationalisation of operational costs to ensure that financial discipline became an institutional practice rather than a symbolic gesture. Among the most significant measures

was the suspension of 17 out of 18 procurement projects approved by the Senate. Finance Committee, resulting in immediate and substantial savings. Recruitment and other non-essential expenditures were streamlined, administrative overheads reduced, and operational costs brought under enhanced scrutiny. The official transport fleet was largely grounded, fuel allocations strictly capped, and usage subjected to rigorous monitoring. Refreshments for official meetings were discontinued, and committee pro-

ceedings increasingly shifted to digital and virtual platforms to reduce hospitality and logistical costs. Remarkably, despite a budget allocation of Rs. 60 million for the purchase of official vehicles during the current financial year, not a single vehicle was procured, demonstrating the Senate leadership's commitment to prioritising the national interest over institutional convenience. Furthermore, the Senate Finance Committee, on the recommendation of Chairman Gilani, decided unanimously to forgo the

proposed allocation for the replacement of condemned vehicles in the next financial year, a measure projected to generate additional savings of approximately Rs. 140 million. The Senate Secretariat emphasized that the Rs. 1.436 billion represents actual, realized savings not projected reductions or deferred liabilities—at a time when economic prudence and efficient utilisation of public funds are national imperatives. The program reflects sustained reforms, disciplined financial management, and a commit-

ment to transparency and accountability, with every rupee saved being returned to the people of Pakistan, whose trust governs the use of public resources. Chairman Gilani stressed that these austerity measures are not a one-time initiative but part of an ongoing commitment to responsible governance and the highest standards of public service. The Secretariat hopes that public disclosure of these figures will enhance confidence in state institutions and inspire similar practices across other government departments.

Allocate 4% of GDP for Education: Dr. Abdus Salam

Budget must prioritize funding to tackle the educational emergency

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: Dr. Abdus Salam, Chairman of the Standing Committee on Education at the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI), has called for education to be the top priority for national economic development. He stated that the fact that 26.2 million children are out of school, coupled with the meager 0.8% of GDP cur-



Dr. Abdus Salam, Chairman of the Standing Committee on Education at the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI), has called for education to be the top priority for national economic development.

my, Dr. Abdus Salam issued a categorical demand to the Government of Pakistan to allocate at least 4% of GDP to the education sector in the upcoming federal budget to overcome the ongoing crisis. He emphasized that education is not merely a social responsibility but the foundation of national economic stability, adding that only a skilled and educated youth population can lead Pakistan

toward economic self-reliance. Citing the Pakistan Economic Survey 2024-25 and international reports, he pointed out that the reduction in educational expenditure and the imbalanced utilization of the budget require immediate reforms. Advocating for the strict implementation of Article 25-A of the Constitution, Dr. Abdus Salam proposed a shift in federal budgetary

priorities. He urged that along with higher education, special focus must be placed on primary, secondary, and technical and vocational education. Furthermore, he demanded the establishment of a dedicated fund to promote girls' education. He remarked that a budget reflects a nation's priorities, and investing in education in line with modern demands is the only path to achieving

the 2030 Global Education Goals (SDG-4). Dr. Abdus Salam reaffirmed his commitment that the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry would continue to strive at every level to align Pakistan's educational policies with the needs of industry and trade, ensuring the building of a better and stable economic future for the country.

Opinion & Editorial

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Death for demonic crimes

In a nation where the scales of justice often tilt against the most vulnerable, our courts have delivered powerful, unequivocal verdicts that deserve full endorsement from the public. By refusing to show leniency in two of the most horrifying cases in recent memory, the judiciary has reaffirmed that depravity deserves no concession. This week, a Lahore High Court division bench dismissed the appeals of Abid Malhi and Shafiq Baga, upholding the death sentences handed down by an anti-terrorism court in 2021 for the two men behind the 2020 gang rape of a woman of Pakistani origin on the Sialkot-Lahore motorway, a brutal attack carried out at gunpoint in front of her three young children. The court ruled the death sentences to be "lawful", leaving no room for ambiguity. We applaud this decision. The depravity of raping a mother in front of her children is beyond any comprehension, and the state's ultimate sanction is the only proportionate response. Meanwhile, the Supreme Court closed the chapter on the Noor Mukadam murder case, dismissing Zahir Jaffer's final review plea and sealing his death sentence for the grisly crime. After the Islamabad High Court and Supreme Court had already upheld the conviction, this closure is a testament to the relentless pursuit of justice by the victim's family.

Respite needed

Umair Javed
THE federal budget is rightly bemoaned as a futile exercise. The space available for anything particularly creative — meaningfully redistributive or growth-enabling — is extremely limited. Instead, nearly every budget of the last decade and a half has been an exercise in managing the fiscal deficit under an IMF programme. Once that's accounted for, the remaining scraps are distributed as largesse mostly between different arms of the state (and those close to those arms). Every sitting government can, with some merit, claim to be the inheritor of a particularly bad situation. That this extractive revenue appetite is dictated by long-standing issues not of its own creation. That ballooning debt has to be serviced and for that more revenue is an inescapable necessity. That the luxury of pursuing growth does not exist, especially when the IMF looms large. That the straitjacket imposed by entrenched economic dysfunction cannot be thrown off so easily.

This would be an evadable charge if it's a party's first time in government. But if time spent as the face of the federal government lies in the double digits, perhaps some reflection and accountability are merited.

Stretching back to the previous assembly, this will be the current dispensation's fifth straight budget (under three different finance minis-

ters). Surely that's enough time to muster some creativity and some resolve to escape the so-called straitjacket. Yet all one can fear is a familiar accounting exercise that aims to extract a few more rupees from a narrow, weary economic base. All one can fear is a familiar accounting exercise that aims to extract a few more rupees from a narrow, weary economic base. Within this base, it's worth remembering that the vast majority of people are already reeling from a fresh cost-of-living crisis triggered by the imperialist war on Iran. With pump prices still at least 40 per cent higher than their pre-war base, and with second-order effects of pricier oil impacting at least 25pc of household spending, any further increase in the tax burden will be nothing short of disastrous.

On the income tax front, the salaried segment has already been recast as a pliant, low-effort source of nearly half a trillion rupees annually. Those below the threshold who can't be milked through this mechanism are still paying through the sales tax and petroleum levy net. The latter two in particular remain regressive in their incidence and impact.

At a time when inflationary pressures have rendered real income growth stagnant for almost a decade, the increased direct and indirect tax burden represents an additional constraint on consumption. One hears plenty

of stories of households actively downgrading their lifestyles under mounting financial pressure. Small car owners switching down to motorbikes; children being pulled out of category A or B schools and being sent to smaller, lower-cost ones. Spending on leisure making way for just the basic essentials.

To counter these anecdotes, some officials and government partisans often respond by pointing out pockets of high consumption in major urban centres. Look at all the jam-packed restaurants. Look at all the footfall in shopping malls. Look at all the new specialty coffee shops opening not just in Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad, but also apparently in Faisalabad and Gujranwala.

All of this is meant to do two things — the first is to undercut the story of economic hardship that depressing anecdotes (and the actual consumption surveys) tell us. The second thing is to provide a comforting story of economic progress that somehow exists beyond the data. For this reason, the notion of the informal economy is often trotted out — Pakistan may be 'officially' poor, but unofficially it's doing much better. There are two things wrong with this approach. The first is that it assumes that the informal economy somehow shows distributional patterns different from the formal economy.

Courtesy Dawn

Democratic refuge?

Ali Hassan Bangwar

Electioneering in Gilgit-Baltistan centers on these slogans and promises: should you (s)elect us to power, we would make G-B like Karachi; if (s)elect, we would make Lahore of G-B; should you afford us yet another opportunity, we would change your fate the same way we did for the rest of the country; we would freely guard free and fair elections against any potential rigging for we are the only tried and tested saviours of the country and its people.

Of all the instruments employed to gauge politics, truth, power and democracy in Pakistan, electioneering offers a relatively accurate account of what power wielders are actually up to. Gilgit-Baltistan is no exception. Now that G-B goes to polls today, one must make sense of the stated and inferred axis of power - from all the trumpets, clichés and campaign theaters that preceded and will succeed it. And yes, from their governance record in the rest of the country. The promises of replicating Lahore or Karachi in G-B - regardless of its distinct topography, demography and political status - betray not merely a lack of pragmatic vision but a familiar contempt for it. The parties in power are not, however, without a plan. They have every plan to capture and perpetuate their hold on power - all through a democratic contract that, in this country, is largely forged not between the rulers and the ruled, but between the rulers themselves. This way, the people addressed during the campaign are not the people. And G-B's potential promises of prosperity are not for G-B. All their addresses and beseeching are directed not towards the people. One might wonder whether democracy and the people still hold any genuine relevance in the calculus of the axis of power. The answer is largely affirmative - for unfortunate reasons, though. Notwithstanding their status as largely non-entities, the people of Pakistan are still held dear by the rulers - instrumentally dear.

Courtesy Tribune

Eidgah Sharif historic institution serving Islam, humanity: Gilani



PEAK POINT

RAWALPINDI: Chairman Senate of Pakistan, Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani, on Monday said that Eidgah Sharif is not merely a spiritual center but a historic institution dedicated to the service of Islam, societal reform, and the moral and spiritual guidance of humanity.

Addressing a distinguished gathering

of devotees, religious scholars, spiritual leaders, and esteemed guests at the annual Urs ceremony held at Eidgah Sharif, Rawalpindi, he said that for nearly one and a half centuries, the institution has continued to play a significant role in promoting the teachings and values of Islam.

The Chairman of the Senate paid rich tribute to the spiritual and religious contributions of the founder of

Eidgah Sharif, Sheikh-ul-Mashaikh Khawaja Khawajgan Hazrat Khawaja Hafiz Abdul Karim (RA), his successors Hazrat Hafiz Abdul Rahman (RA), Hazrat Khawaja Hafiz Habib-ur-Rehman (RA), the current Sajjada Nasheen Hazrat Pir Muhammad Naqeeb ur Rehman Damat Barakatuhum, and his successor Hazrat Pir Muhammad Hassan Haseeb ur Rehman Damat Barakatuhum.

He observed that millions of followers across the world remain associated with the Silsilah-e-Aliya Siddiqia Naqshbandia and acknowledged that, beyond Pakistan, spiritual leaders affiliated with Eidgah Sharif continue to promote Islamic teachings across the United Kingdom, the United States, Europe, and Gulf countries.

He remarked that these outreach and preaching efforts have guided many individuals toward Islam and stand as a reflection.

CM Afridi, Ahsan Iqbal meets on NEC, KP financial issues, meeting IK

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: A federal delegation led by Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Ahsan Iqbal called on Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Muhammad Sohail Afridi at Khyber Pakhtunkhwa House Islamabad to discuss a range of intergovernmental matters, including meeting with former Prime Minister Imran Khan, the forthcoming meeting of the National Economic Council (NEC), provincial fiscal and constitutional rights, development financing for the merged districts, energy-related issues, wheat supply, hydropower projects, and other matters of mutual concern. During the meeting, Chief Minister Sohail Afridi conveyed the provincial government's concerns regarding the continued unequal treatment of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in matters relating to fiscal allocations and development financing. He stated that sustained denial of the province's constitutional and financial entitlements could adversely affect the environment necessary

for constructive intergovernmental engagement, including participation in national forums such as the NEC. The Chief Minister emphasized that consultations with Imran Khan were essential in the context of major policy and budgetary decisions, noting that political parties routinely seek guidance from their leadership on matters of national importance. He stressed that the provincial government considered such consultations necessary before taking key decisions relating to the budget and broader economic policy. Highlighting fiscal concerns, the Chief Minister pointed to reductions in development allocations earmarked for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the merged districts. He noted that funding under the Accelerated Implementation Programme (AIP) had been reduced from Rs. 37 billion to Rs. 27 billion, while development allocations for the merged districts had been reduced from Rs. 66 billion to Rs. 56 billion by the federal government. He stated that the NFC.



ISLAMABAD: A federal delegation led by Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Ahsan Iqbal called on Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Muhammad Sohail Afridi at Khyber Pakhtunkhwa House Islamabad.

Digital skills key to economic future: Shaza

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for IT and Telecommunication Shaza Fatima Khawaja on Monday said the AI Seekho 2026 initiative is an important step to equip young professionals with advanced artificial intelligence skills and to strengthen Pakistan's digital workforce, in collaboration with global partners, including Google.

Addressing the Award Distribution Ceremony of AI Seekho 2026, organized by Telenor Pakistan, in collaboration with Google, the Ministry of IT & Telecommunications

(MoITT), and Innovista, she thanked partner organisations, and participants, saying the programme received an overwhelming response soon after its launch.

The initiative brought together thousands of aspiring developers, innovators, and technology enthusiasts from across the country.

She called it a key milestone in Pakistan's move toward an AI-driven digital economy.

According to official figures, AI Seekho 2026 received more than 10,000 registrations for its online challenge. Around 40 percent of participants were professional developers, showing

growing interest in artificial intelligence in Pakistan.

More than 7,000 participants later took part in the programme. They formed over 2,600 teams and submitted more than 600 projects in regional and national competitions.

Using Google's latest AI tools, participants developed applications and interactive solutions in different sectors. They showed technical skills, creativity, and problem-solving abilities. After regional rounds, six finalist teams reached the national final to compete for prizes worth Rs2.5 million.

Struggler Karachi won first place, Nurture

Minister calls for ocean literacy to boost climate resilience

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs Muhammad Junaid Anwar Chaudhry on Monday urged a fundamental rethink of humanity's relationship with the oceans, calling for urgent collective action to protect marine resources amid rising environmental pressures. On World Oceans Day, which this year is observed under the global theme "REIMAGINE: Beyond the world we know, a new relationship with our ocean," Junaid Chaudhry said oceans are not distant ecosystems but life-support systems that shape air, food and climate. "Oceans flow through our air, food and climate," he said in a statement.

"Advocating ocean literacy to boost climate resilience, Junaid Chaudhry said that we must move from awareness to action to protect, restore and reimagine the oceans as a shared global responsibility." The minister highlighted expanding coastal conservation efforts, including a weekly cleanup campaign by the Karachi Port Trust (KPT) aimed at removing marine waste and improving harbour sustainability. He said work is also under way to restore degraded.

Islamabad secured second position, and Vibronix Lahore came third. The minister praised their innovation, creativity, and technical performance.

Shaza Fatima Khawaja said the strong participation reflects a shift among young people who earlier considered AI and coding difficult, but now see digital skills as important and achievable for future careers.

She also appreciated participants for choosing structured learning over digital distractions, saying their effort in skill development was a major personal achievement.

Shaza Fatima Khawaja

BISP to launch digital wallet-based payments nationwide: Rubina Khalid

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: Chairperson Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) Senator Rubina Khalid on Monday announced that all BISP payments would be made through digital wallets from July 2026, saying the initiative would enhance transparency, eliminate unauthorized deductions and strengthen the economic empowerment of beneficiary women.

She also regretted the spread of misinformation about the programme, describing BISP as a globally recognized model of financial inclusion and social protection that continues to support more than 10 million deserving families across Pakistan.

Addressing a press conference at BISP Headquarters regarding the introduction of digital wallets and distribution of Benazir SIMS,



she said the programme reflected the vision of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto and enjoyed the full confidence of the President and Prime Minister of Pakistan.

She added that several countries and international organizations were studying and learning from the BISP model.

The Chairperson stated that both the President of Pakistan and the Prime Minister of Pakistan have full confidence in the programme.

BISP to launch digital wallet-based payments nationwide from July 2026; over 8 million Benazir SIMS distributed.

DPM/FM Dar for competitive, innovative automotive ecosystem

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: Deputy Prime Minister/Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar, Monday, underscored the importance of developing a competitive, innovative and sustainable automotive ecosystem. He stressed that such a system could support economic growth, enhance industrial capacity, generate skilled jobs and advance environmental sustainability through a future-ready automotive sector. The DPM/FM chaired a high-level meeting to review the auto and auto parts policy, with a particular focus on accelerating Pakistan's transition towards Electric Vehicles (EVs). Office of the Deputy Prime Minister said in a press release. The meeting was attended by the



ministers for power, petroleum and climate change; adviser to the PM on industries and production; ministers of state for finance and railways, SAPM Tariq Bajwa; secretaries of commerce, industries and production, and petroleum, national coordinator NCMC, senior officials from concerned ministries and leading policy experts and economists. The committee was briefed on measures to promote EV adoption, strengthen domestic manufacturing.

Tariq Fazal congratulates successful candidates in Gilgit-Baltistan elections

PEAK POINT

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Parliamentary Affairs Dr. Tariq Fazal Chaudhry on Monday congratulated the successful candidates in the Gilgit-Baltistan elections and praised the people of the region for their active participation in the democratic process.

In a post on his X account, Dr. Tariq Fazal Chaudhry extended congratulations to candidates from the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), independent candidates, and other political parties on winning seats in the elections.

He paid special tribute to the



politically aware and responsible people of Gilgit-Baltistan, stating that they had decided their future through the power of the vote in a peaceful electoral environment. The minister said that the victorious candidates were now custodians of the public trust and carried the responsibility of representing the aspirations of the people. He also appreciated all candidates who participated.