Pakistan seeks $10 billion US lifeline to shore up fragile economy: Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb has asked US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent to provide Islamabad with a USD 10 billion Exchange Stabilisation Support Facility to help strengthen its economy, according to a media report. Exchange Stabilisation Support Facility, often routed through the US Treasury's Exchange Stabilisation Fund, is a financial backstop mechanism that includes currency swaps, financial guarantees and loans, among other measures. Wednesday that it received confirmation on the information about Pakistan's request from its embassy in Washington. The mission, however, did not share further details with the newspaper. Dawn also sought a response from the US Treasury, but did not get any. An official readout issued by the embassy noted that Aurangzeb had sought US support for Pakistan's road-to-market strategy, based on improved access to international capital markets, higher foreign exchange reserves, and enhanced sovereign credit ratings.

EAM Jaishankar raises safety of Indian seafarers with Russia's Lavrov after Black Sea attack

NEW DELHI: External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Wednesday held separate meetings with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and US Secretary of State Marco Rubio on the sidelines of the ASEAN summit and the East Asia Summit Foreign Ministers' meeting in Manila, discussing bilateral ties, regional security and key global developments. In his meeting with Lavrov, Jaishankar reiterated India's "strong concern" over the safety of Indian seafarers in the Black Sea region, a day after New Delhi summoned the Russian Charge d'Affaires to protest the deaths of four Indian crew members in a Russian missile strike on the Guinea Bissau-flagged merchant vessel MV Golden Leo off the coast of Ukraine. The talks came against the backdrop of India's strongest diplomatic protest over the incident, with the Ministry of External Affairs on Tuesday describing the attack on commercial shipping as "unacceptable" and urging Russia to ensure such incidents are not repeated. Following the meeting, Jaishankar said the two ministers carried out "an in-depth review" of bilateral ties. "Reiterated our strong concern regarding the safety of Indian seafarers in the region. Discussed various aspects of our partnership, including trade & investment, energy & connectivity, science & technology, and mobility. Also exchanged views on the Ukraine conflict and the Gulf situation," he said. The discussions also covered trade, investment, energy security and connectivity, reflecting the broad agenda of the India-Russia strategic partnership even as New Delhi pressed Moscow on the safety of civilian maritime traffic. India has consistently maintained that the conflict in Ukraine should be resolved through dialogue and diplomacy. The meeting with Lavrov followed India's decision to summon Russian Charge d'Affaires Vladimir Ladanov on Tuesday to convey its "grave concerns" and "unequivocal condemnation" of the attack. Jaishankar also met US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, with both sides reviewing progress in the India-US Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership and discussing regional and global issues.

What to know about Iran's Pickaxe Mountain, home to an underground nuclear site threatened by Trump

DUBAI: U.S. President Donald Trump has repeatedly issued threats to bomb an under-construction Iranian nuclear site buried deep under a mountain as the two nations exchange blows over the Strait of Hormuz. The site, known as Kuh-e Kolang Gaz La, or "Pickaxe Mountain," lies on the south side of Iran's Natanz nuclear enrichment site, which was bombed by the United States during Operation Midnight Hammer in 2025's 12-day war between Iran and Israel. But Pickaxe Mountain has remained untouched as Iran continues to dig at the site.

It remains unclear just what has been placed at Pickaxe Mountain, as the United Nations' nuclear watchdog has never gained access to the site. But Trump on Tuesday talking with journalists in the Oval Office acknowledged the possibility Iran may have moved centrifuges there, potentially at a depth that would challenge even the most-powerful bombs in America's arsenal. "We'll be hitting that area ... probably pretty soon. And there's not a thing they can do about it," Trump said. Here's what to know about Pickaxe Mountain and the status of Iran's nuclear program. The new project at Pickaxe Mountain is being constructed next to Natanz, about 225 kilometers (140 miles) south of Tehran, Iran's capital. Natanz, a mix of above- and underground facilities, has been a point of international concern since its existence became known

two decades ago. Repeated sabotage attacks on Natanz, including one likely carried out by Israel that destroyed a manufacturing site for centrifuges, led Iranian officials to start work on the Pickaxe Mountain site.

Protected by anti-aircraft batteries, fencing and Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, the facility sprawls across 2.7 square kilometers (1 square mile) in the country's arid Central Plateau. It has multiple entrances visible from satellite images. In 2023, an Associated Press story on Pickaxe Mountain included analysis from experts at the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies that suggested Iran is likely building a facility at a depth of between 80 meters (260 feet) and 100 meters (328 feet). Digging has continued at the site in the time since, with some experts suggesting it could be even deeper underground.

Experts say the size of the construction project indicates Iran will likely be able to use the underground facility to enrich uranium as well as to build centrifuges. Centrifuges, tube-shaped devices arranged in large cascades of dozens of machines, rapidly spin uranium gas to enrich it. Additional cascades spinning would allow Iran to quickly enrich uranium under the mountain's protection. Such underground facilities led the U.S. to create the GBU-57 bomb, which can plow through at least 60 meters (200 feet) of earth before detonating, according to the American military. U.S. officials reportedly have discussed using two such bombs in succession to ensure a site is destroyed. It is not clear that such a one-two punch would damage a facility as deep as the one at Pickaxe Mountain.

Speaking alongside Lebanese President Joseph Aoun on Tuesday, Trump initially sought to downplay Pickaxe Mountain by bringing up Iran's stockpile of highly enriched uranium. Iran had enriched uranium up to nearly weapons-grade levels of 60% before the 2025 strikes. In the time since, Iran is not known to have restarted enrichment and its stockpile is believed to be at still at the bombed enrichment sites. "We follow the material, that's where the action is," Trump told journalists.

Trump, however, said Pickaxe Mountain was a potential target for American bombers as back-and-forth attacks between Iran and the U.S. rage on. "Normally I wouldn't say that," the president added. "If I thought they could do something about it, I would never say that, but we'll be hitting that area pretty soon. And very heavily." Iran says that areas around its only nuclear power plant at Bushehr have already come under attack during the war, though no damage was done to its Russian-run reactor. Tehran also said the U.S. attacked the cleared area where it plans to build the Darkhovin nuclear plant, though the U.N.'s International Atomic Energy Agency says there was no atomic material there the last time they inspected the site. The only nuclear power plant in the United Arab Emirates, its four-reactor facility at Barakah, also has been targeted during the war. Iran has since warned that it would take unspecified "required actions" to respond to the Darkhovin attack. In 2025, the U.S. bombed Iran's nuclear sites at Fordo, Isfahan and Natanz. All three had conducted uranium enrichment.

Amid Iran conflict, US to back Saudi Arabia's nuclear ambitions with landmark deal

WASHINGTON: The United States plans to announce a landmark deal with Saudi Arabia on Wednesday that would help establish a civilian nuclear programme in the kingdom, according to media reports. The move comes as Washington continues to fight a war with Iran that began in part over US concerns with Tehran's own nuclear programme -- an issue that remains a key point of contention during now-stalled talks between the two foes. Citing two unnamed US officials, the New York Times reported on Tuesday that the Trump administration planned to formally sign and announce the deal with the Saudis on Wednesday. President Donald Trump's administration said the agreement would provide billions of dollars for the US nuclear industry. A provision in the 30-year deal would potentially see American companies build a uranium enrichment facility in Saudi Arabia, the Wall Street Journal reported. But some US lawmakers from both parties and Israeli officials have voiced opposition to a civilian nuclear project for Saudi Arabia, over fears it could be converted to eventually develop nuclear weapons.

The deal is expected to be submitted to Congress in the coming days, but its approval is not required for it to go through. Saudi Arabia has long been adamant about its right to pursue a civilian nuclear programme. In recent years, Washington has sought to include any deal concerning a nuclear agreement as part of wider strategic play that would include seeing Saudi Arabia normalise ties with Israel, along with the signing of a US defence pact. The US signed a nuclear agreement with the kingdom's neighbour the United Arab Emirates in 2009, though the country does not enrich its own uranium.

Iran launches missiles at Jordan, plumes of smoke fill Aqaba

DUBAI: Missile alert sirens sounded Wednesday in Jordan's port city of Aqaba as attacks across the Middle East overshadowed diplomatic efforts in Pakistan to salvage an interim ceasefire deal that has collapsed. Jordan's military said it intercepted four missiles in the Iranian attack, while two others fell in "uninhabited areas." Plumes of smoke could be seen overhead in Aqaba in videos filmed by people in the nearby Israeli city of Eilat.

The U.S. military said earlier Wednesday that it had completed an 11th night of strikes on Iran. Iranian air defenses activated near the capital, Tehran, and Iran's state-run IRNA news agency reported that explosions rocked Bushehr, East Azerbaijan, Hamadan, Hormozgan, Khuzestan and Sistan and Baluchistan provinces. The U.S. said its targets included aircraft hangars and drone storage sites. That came after Iran attacked a tanker in the strait Tuesday, forcing the crew to abandon the ship. Iran also kept up attacks against U.S. allies in the region. Iran also launched attacks against Bahrain, Jordan and Kuwait. Before the latest strikes, Iranian Interior Minister Eskandar Momeni visited Pakistan, a key mediator in the conflict, seeking to revive diplomacy. But it was unclear what new arrangement might be reached to end the war, which lately has become a battle for control over the Strait of Hormuz, a waterway vital to world energy supplies.