

ISLAMABAD (APP): President Asif Ali Zardari has summoned the joint session of the Parliament on Thursday, April 18, 2024 at 4:00 pm. The President summoned the joint session of Parliament in exercise of the powers conferred by article 54(1) and 56(3) of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. The earlier notification to call the joint session of the Parliament on April 16 stands canceled.



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# Iran says ‘concluded’ retaliation against Israel, summons Western envoys

TEHRAN (AFP/APP): Iran on Sunday urged Israel not to retaliate militarily to an unprecedented attack overnight, which Tehran presented as a justified response to a deadly strike on its consulate building in Damascus.

"The matter can be deemed concluded," Iran's mission to the United Nations said in a post on social media platform X just a few hours after the start of the operation late Saturday.

"However, should the Israeli regime make another mistake, Iran's response will be considerably more severe," the Iranian mission warned.

Iranian president Ebrahim Raisi on Sunday warned Israel and its allies against any "reckless" actions after Tehran's drone and missile attack, which marked the first time Iran has launched a direct military assault on Israeli territory. "If the Zionist regime (Israel) or its supporters demonstrate reckless behaviour, they will receive a decisive and much stronger response," Raisi said in a statement.

After numerous countries condemned the attack, Tehran's foreign ministry summoned the French, British, and German ambassadors "following the irresponsible positions of certain officials of these countries regarding Iran's response", a statement said.

Late Saturday, Iran's Revolutionary Guards Corps announced that they had launched "dozens of

## US does not want to see Middle East crisis ‘escalate’

WASHINGTON (AFP/APP): The United States does not want to see an escalation of the crisis in the Middle East, a top White House official said Sunday after Israel repelled a massive missile and drone attack from Iran.

"We don't want to see this escalate," White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said on NBC's "Meet the Press".

"We're not looking for a wider war with Iran."

Israel was on high alert Sunday after Iran's unprecedented attack

sparked fears of a broader conflict. Iran launched its first-ever direct assault on Israeli territory late Saturday in retaliation for a deadly strike by Israeli on Tehran's consulate in Damascus on April 1.

Iran's retaliation marked a major escalation of the long-running covert war between the regional foes.

US President Joe Biden has reaffirmed Washington's "ironclad" support for Israel, while appearing to guide its staunch ally away from a military response.

continue this operation".

Bagheri said Iran's retaliation targeted an "intelligence centre" and the air base from which Tehran says the Israeli F-35 jets took off to strike the Damascus consulate on April 1. "Both these centres were significantly destroyed," he said, though Israel maintains that the attack only resulted in minor damage.

Since Iran's 1979 revolution, Israel has been the sworn enemy of the Islamic republic. Iran has often called for the destruction of Israel, with support of the Palestinian cause one of the pillars of the Islamic revolution. However, until

Saturday Tehran had also refrained from a direct attack on Israel.

Instead, it has backed members of the so-called "Axis of Resistance" against Israel, including Lebanon's Hezbollah and Yemen's Huthi rebels, since the outbreak of war in Gaza between Israel and Palestinian militant group Hamas on October 7.

Hours before the strikes on Saturday, Iran seized an Israeli-linked container ship in the Gulf which Washington called "an act of piracy". During the night, Tehran warned the United States, urging it to "stay away" from its conflict with Israel.

"If necessary", Tehran "will not hesitate to take defensive measures to protect its interests against any aggressive military action," Iran's foreign ministry said.

Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian later said Tehran had notified neighbouring countries ahead of the military operation, stressing its objective was "to punish the Israeli regime". "We are not seeking to target the American people or American bases in the region," he said, but warned that Iran could target US military positions involved in "defending and supporting" Israel.

"The next slap will be fiercer," warned a mural unveiled overnight in Tehran's Palestine Square, where several thousands gathered, shouting "Death to Israel" and "Death to America".

# PPP will continue to support govt to achieve economic stability: President

GARHI KHUDA BAKHSH BHUTTO (PPI): President Asif Ali Zardari says Pakistan People's Party will continue to support the government for economic stability and prosperity in the country.

He was addressing the public gathering on 45th death anniversary of Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto at Garhi Khuda Bakhsh Bhutto in Larkana on Sunday.

The President said Pakistan is blessed with vast potential of minerals and natural resources and we will emerge from current economic crisis through exploitation of these resources.

Paying tribute to Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, he said Bhutto family always sacrificed their lives for the country and people.

President Zardari thanked the people for posing their confidence on Pakistan People's Party in general elections.

**Bilawal urges nation to continue Bhutto's mission for progress:** People's Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari on Sunday urged the nation to continue

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's mission for progress and prosperity of the country.

In his message on the occasion of 45th death anniversary of the founder of the PPP and former prime minister, Bilawal said "let us strive to build a Pakistan where justice prevails, where democracy flourishes and every citizen is empowered to utilize his full potential."

"Let us all move forward with a new determination by following the legacy of ZAB. Today, we should pay homage to Shaheed Bhutto and also pledge to uphold the ideals for which he sacrificed his life."

It may be noted that the PPP had put off a rally to observe the death anniversary, which falls on April 4, due to Ramadan.

The PPP has made all the arrangement to hold the rally at Garhi Khuda Baksh at 3 pm today. Party workers from all over the country have reached Bhutto's mausoleum where more than 8,000 police and security personnel have been deployed.

As per party sources, PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari and other party leaders will address the participants.

Pakistan's Supreme Court last month ruled that Bhutto, who was hanged 44 year ago after being convicted of murder, didn't get a fair trial. Bhutto was hanged in 1979 after a trial under the military regime of late General Zia-ul-Haq.

The party, the PPP, he founded is now run by his grandson and former foreign minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari.

"We didn't find that the fair trial and due process requirements were met," said Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa in remarks telecast live of the ruling that he said was a unanimous decision by a nine-member bench headed by him.

The ruling came in response to a judicial reference filed by Bilawal's father, Asif Ali Zardari, during his tenure as president in 2011. It sought an opinion by the top court on revisiting the death sentence awarded to the PPP founder.

# Bodies of nine passengers, killed in Noshki terror attack, sent to Punjab

NOSHKI (INP): Bodies of nine passengers, who were gunned down in Noshki, Balochistan yesterday as they were on their way from Quetta to Iran for their onward journey to Europe, have been sent to their towns and cities in Punjab on Sunday.

Earlier, Deputy Commissioner Dera Ghazi Khan Shahid Zaman and Commandant Border Military Force Muhammad Asad Khan received the bodies at Punjab, Balochistan border.

Before sending the bodies, funeral prayers for the deceased were offered in Quetta. Balochistan Chief Minister Sarfaraz Bugti, inspector general of police, Balochistan and other senior officials of the provincial government offered the prayers. Two passengers give eyewitnesses' account

Zahid Imran and Tahir, two passengers from Punjab, who fortunately remained safe, have reported that the assassins stopped the coach, entered it and then asked "who

were the passengers who belonged to Punjab and who were the ones who were locals?"

Then they separated the Punjabis from the rest of the passengers, whisked them away, and shot them dead. Imran and Tahir informed that the gunmen did not ask them about their ethnic backgrounds because the women sitting on the seats next to them told the gunmen that they were accompanying them.

On the other hand, the people of Balochistan have strongly condemned the killings of unarmed and innocent passengers from Punjab at the hands of Baloch militants.

Terrorists have no religion, no ethnicity, they have said, adding that a group of terrorists is bent upon bringing a bad name to the Baloch people and creating obstacles in the way of progress and prosperity of the province.

Balochistan CM rules out talks with militants

Balochistan Chief Minister Sarfaraz Bugti has said categorically that there could be no talks with the people who indulge in acts of violence. "We will hunt them down and punish them," the CM said, adding that the provincial government was reviewing the security plan. As many as 11 people, including nine passengers, were killed in two separate attacks in Noshki district of Balochistan late Friday night. Sources in the police informed that over a dozen armed assailants first made nine passengers travelling from Quetta to Taftan on the National Highway disembark from the coach, then kidnapped them before shooting all of them dead.

Later their bodies were found dumped under a fly-over. They disclosed that the deceased belonged to Mandi Bahauddin, Gujranwala and Wazirabad areas of Punjab.

Of total nine passengers who lost their lives in the Noshki incident, six belonged to Chak Fateh Shah village of Mandi

Bahauddin district of Punjab.

A man and his nephew are also among the dead.

The deceased had left their village for Iran only three days before Eidul Fitr.

Family members of the slain passengers have demanded the authorities to send their bodies to the native village as early as possible.

They have demanded strict action against the assassins and their backers. Similarly one of the passengers, who was shot dead, belonged to Chorra area of Wazirabad.

Wasiq had left his native town three days before Eid.

All these passengers had to travel to Europe via Iran.

Sources have said that in yet another incident in Noshki, two persons were killed while five were injured when unidentified men opened fire at a car on the National Highway when the driver failed to apply brakes. According to the SP Noshki, MNA's brother was among those injured in the attack.



LARKANA: President Asif Ali Zardari and PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto responding to the workers by waving hands on the occasion of 45th Death Anniversary of Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto at Garhi Khuda Bakhsh.

# Death toll from lightning in country reaches 26

Four die, 15 houses damaged in rain-related incidents in KP

QUETTA (INP): The death toll from lightning reached 26 in the country on Sunday when one more person lost his life after he was struck by lightning in Garhi Yasin area of Shikarpur. The body was shifted to a local hospital where the person was identified as Zulfikar Ali Jakro. On Saturday, at least 25 people were killed in Punjab and Balochistan when they were struck by lightning. In Punjab alone, 17 people fell prey to the deadly strikes as confirmed by a spokesperson for the Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA). Lightning struck people in several areas of the province namely Muzaffargarh, Rahim Yar Khan, Rajanpur, Lodhran, Bahawalpur, and Bahawalnagar.

Heart-wrenching accounts emerged from the Faqeer Wali area near Haroonabad, where a father and his two sons lost their lives, while the mother and another son sustained injuries. Rescue 1122 confirmed nine fatalities in Faqeer Wali. In another incident, a family of four, a man his wife, and their two

children perished in Rahim Yar Khan. The unfortunate couple was identified as Muhammad Hafeez and Kalsoom Bibi, who lost their lives when they were struck by lightning while they were busy cutting the wheat crop to save them from rain in Rahim Yar Khan district, two children died in Basti Kalwar, one person in Thul Hassan, a farmer in Khan Bela and a shepherd in Mari Allah due to lightning.

Another person died in Khairpur Daha and an eight-year-old child in Chak-113 area of Bahawalpur district by lightning. A woman was killed in a similar incident in Lodhran. In Balochistan, eight individuals fell victim to the strikes following torrential rainfall. Reports indicate two fatalities each from Surab and Chaman districts, with additional casualties reported from Qilla Abdullah, Dera Bugti, Muslim Bagh, and Pishin.

Meanwhile, As many as four people have lost their lives, seven have been injured while 15 houses have been damaged in rain-

related incidents in different areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) during the last 24 hours.

In its report issued on Sunday, the Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) said that the dead included three children, while three women, three men, and a child were injured in these incidents. It further said that out of a total 15 houses damaged due to heavy rains, 13 were partially damaged while two were completely destroyed. An report informed that the incidents of walls and roofs collapse were reported from upper areas of KP namely Upper Dir, Lower Chitral, Swat and Buner. PDMA has said that it is in contact with all district administrations and other concerned departments in order to ensure the provision of aid to the affected areas. Informing the people that its emergency operation center is functional round the clock, the PDMA has asked the people to contact on its helpline number 1700 in case of an emergency.

Meanwhile, PDMA on

Sunday predicted thunderstorms for different parts of Punjab during the next 24 hours. The PDMA said that Rawalpindi, Lahore, Gujranwala, Faisalabad, Sargodha, Dera Ghazi Khan, Multan, Sahiwal and Bahawalpur divisions were expected to receive rains.

It further said that heavy rains could result in the flooding of streams of Kohe Suleman mountainous range and other parts of Dera Ghazi Khan, while in landslides in Murree and Galyat. The Authority said there were chances of hailstorms lashing upper parts of Punjab.

PDMA DG Irfan Ali Kathia advised people to protect themselves from incidents of lightning by taking shelter in safe places. The DG further said that the people returning home after spending Eid with their loved ones in their native areas may face difficulties due to bad weather. "People returning from Liaquatpur and Bahawalpur to Lahore should especially take precautionary measures," he said, adding, "In case of an emergency, please contact us on our helpline number 1129."

# Pakistan condemns Israeli aggression, calls for de-escalation

## E.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistani while strongly condemning Israeli aggression has called for de-escalation in the region. The recent escalation, sparked by Israeli actions on April 1st and 2nd, has drawn Pakistan's ire and concern for the volatile situation in the Middle East, a statement issued on Sunday stated.

The statement vehemently condemned the Israeli attack on the Iranian Consular Section in Damascus, Syria, labeling it as "unacceptable and irresponsible."

The Pakistani government squarely placed blame on Israel for the escalation

and urged the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to intervene to prevent further adventurism in the region.

Highlighting the grave implications of the UNSC's inability to fulfill its responsibilities, Pakistan stressed the importance of maintaining peace in its neighborhood. With a vested interest in containing hostilities that could engulf the entire region, Pakistan called for immediate de-escalation and urged Israel to respond to Iranian strikes with restraint.

Pakistan's stance on the ongoing conflict in Gaza remained steadfast, with the country advocating for international efforts to pre-

vent the expansion of hostilities and calling for a ceasefire. The government emphasized the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza and condemned Israeli aggression against Syria and Lebanon.

Furthermore, Pakistan highlighted the critical importance of a strong defense and security apparatus in the face of external threats, particularly from India and externally sponsored terrorism. The alleged nexus between Israel and India was portrayed as a destabilizing factor in the region, prompting Pakistan to emphasize the need for vigilance against such alliances. As tensions continue to simmer, Pakistan

urged for a cessation of hostilities and reiterated its commitment to ensuring the focus remains on addressing the genocide in Gaza and the humanitarian crisis it has caused. The country's proactive stance in recalling the Israeli attack against the Iranian Consulate underscores its dedication to maintaining regional stability and security. Amidst social media propaganda and vested political interests, Pakistan called for unity and vigilance against attempts to sow discord and play into the hands of adversaries. With the region on edge, Pakistan's calls for de-escalation and peace resonate as a beacon of hope in turbulent times.

# CM expresses grief; announces financial assistance for affectees

PESHAWAR (APP): Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Sardar Ali Amin Gandapur on Sunday expressed grief and lamented the loss of precious human lives due to rains in the province and announced financial assistance for the affected families. In a statement issued here, the Chief Minister, expressed sorrow that several districts including Chitral, Dir, Swat, and Abbottabad have suffered significant human and material losses due to heavy rainfall.

Expressing his grief, Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Sardar Ali Amin Gandapur, lamented the loss of precious human lives resulting from various incidents

triggered by the rainfall.

The Chief Minister extended heartfelt condolences and sympathy to the affected families, while also expressing hope for the speedy recovery of the injured. He directed the Relief Department to provide a detailed report on the human and material losses incurred in the province due to the incidents.

The Chief Minister announced financial assistance for the affected families and instructed relevant authorities to take necessary actions in this regard.

"We stand in solidarity with the grieving families," said Sardar Ali Amin Gandapur.

He assured that the provincial

government will not leave the affected individuals alone and will provide them with all possible assistance.

"It is imperative to take immediate steps to restore closed roads and other infrastructure damaged by landslides caused by the rainfall," added Ali Amin Gandapur.

He urged the district administration officials to oversee relief and rescue operations themselves.

Efforts will be made on an urgent basis to provide immediate relief to the affected families and ensure the provision of the best medical aid to the injured, as per the directives of the Chief Minister to the concerned district administration.





KARACHI: Palestine Foundation stages a protest demonstration against Israeli genocide in Gaza at Karachi Press Club. —APP Photo

## Baisakhi encompasses cultural equality, universal unity sans borders

LAHORE (APP): Baisakhi, also known as Vaisakhi, is an important Punjabi festival celebrated in the Pakistani and Indian Punjab and other parts of the both countries. It falls on April 13th or 14th every year and marks the beginning of the new solar year and the harvest season.

It is a day to celebrate 1699 - the year when Sikhism was born as a collective faith. As a whole the message of Baisakhi is peace and love.

Noted educationist and Sikh activist in Pakistan Professor Kalyan Singh told APP that to celebrate Vaisakhi, Sikhs visit important religious places of worship called Gurudwaras. These holy places are also especially decorated for the occasion, Kalyan said, adding many people enjoy parades and special processions through the streets called Nagar Kirtans.

To a query, he said that 'Nagar' means town and 'Kirtan' means the singing of hymns from the Guru Granth Sahib, which is the Sikh holy book. It is worth mentioning here that

the government of Punjab (Pakistan) has declared that the Baisakhi celebration would be observed officially.

It is worth mentioning here that Punjabi New Year is celebrated on Baisakhi. As the Punjabi people also gather around the first crop of the Rabi season. The farmers offer their prayers for an abundant harvest and prosperity.

In addition, the tenth Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh Ji, founded the Khalsa Panth on this day, giving it prominence in Sikh tradition. According to various traditions, Baba Guru Nanak was inspired by a unique and powerful spiritual experience that awarded him with a vision of the true nature of God.

To Sikh rituals, Wesakhi's cultural festivities adopt various spiritual meditations that Baba Guru Nanak experienced while concluding the idea, that the way to find spiritual growth was only through thinking power, and through living in a virtuous way that reflects the feelings of presence of the divine within each human being on earth.

Meanwhile Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday

in a statement has felicitated the Sikhs on the occasion of the Baisakhi festival. He said "Pakistan is a beautiful blend of different faiths and cultures" and the colour of Baisakhi further added to this beauty.

The PM said that the government of Pakistan and its provincial governments will provide all-out facilities to Sikh pilgrims, coming from all over the world to perform Baisakhi rituals.

The main event of the Sikh religious festival, Baisakhi Mela, was held at Gurudwara Panja Sahib in Hasanabdal on Sunday. Thousands of Sikh pilgrims from all over the world, including India participated.

It is worth mentioning here that this year Pakistan has extended visas to 2,843 Indian Sikh pilgrims, granting them the opportunity to engage in the festivities of Baisakhi Mela and Khalsa Janam Din. Subsequently, on April 15, the pilgrims will travel to Nankana Sahib from Hasanabdal, where they will pay homage to Sacha Sauda (Farooqabad) during their stay.

## PPP leader joins PTI

LAHORE (APP): Pakistan People's Party leader Sharif Khan Khilji on Sunday resigned from the party and announced joining Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI).

In a statement on Sunday, he said that he was resigning from the party even though there is a PPP government in Sindh and Balochistan. "I have a sincere desire to help the poor," he added.

It may be mentioned here that earlier Sharif Khilji had left the PTI and joined the PPP.

"I never did politics for privileges and funds, so I announce joining the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf again," he added.

## People return to Lahore after Eid

LAHORE (APP): After celebrating Eid-ul-Fitr with their loved-ones in their hometowns, people have started returning to the city.

As Monday will be the first working day after Eid holidays, a large number of people returned to Lahore on Sunday.

Rush of people was seen at city General Bus Stand and other terminals as well as railway station. On this Eid, like in the past years, special trains were also run by Pakistan Railway to facilitate people.

## Lahorites turn to recreational areas to enjoy weather

LAHORE (APP): To enjoy a pleasant weather, Lahorites thronged gardens, parks, theatres, cinemas and restaurants on Sunday. Most of the cinemas screened new movies which attracted large crowds. Even the cinemas showing old movies did a good business.

Citizens enjoyed weather with their families and friends in different parks and at recreational areas while children seemed engrossed in swings. Children and parents also enjoyed boating in some parks where the facility was available.

Muhammad Sharif, a family head, told APP that it is the last day of Eid holiday, so they have come to enjoy the weather with children. After rains, weather in the city became pleasant on Sunday, and fresh winds continued to blow with light showers.

## DC visits Ravi zone, reviews proposed development sites

LAHORE (APP): The district administration has sprung into action as the Chief Minister Punjab launched the Lahore Rehabilitation Package, a project worth Rs 22 billion, to address the civic amenities and environmental issues.

Deputy Commissioner and Metropolitan Corporation Lahore (MCL) Administrator Rafia Haider on Sunday conducted a field visit to assess the proposed development sites in Ravi Zone, UC 04, and UC 13.

Metropolitan Officer (Infrastructure) and Zonal Officer briefed the administrator on the construction

and restoration of roads, sewerage systems, street lighting, and patchwork.

DC Rafia Haider directed the MCL officers to identify sites in various locations based on population density. She emphasized focusing on the drainage system alongside road construction in the rehabilitation plan. A advance sewerage system plan, connecting streets and alleys to disposal points, is to be developed in consultation with Water and Sanitation Agency (WASA), she added. It is essential to link the drains and sewers with the sewage system, she stressed. She highlighted

the importance of an integrated infrastructure.

She said the environmental protection projects, restoration and beautification of parks will also include in the rehabilitation plan, adding that the rehabilitation plan aims to encompass all areas of the city, with special attention to densely populated areas.

Rafia Haider said, on the special instructions of the CM, alternative routes will be provided during the development works to minimize inconvenience to the citizens, adding that the development work will be completed as soon as possible to reduce the discomfort to residents.

## ‘Green Emergency’ vital to combat environmental degradation

LAHORE (APP): In a world grappling with environmental challenges and global warming, reforestation stands out as a powerful solution that offers numerous benefits to combat climate related hazards.

By planting trees in areas that have been deforested or are devoid of forests, reforestation can unlock a range of positive effects: from combating climate change to fostering biodiversity, as it holds a key to a healthier planet and thriving communities.

Climate change is one of the most pressing global issues, and reforestation plays a crucial role in mitigating it. Trees are champions in absorbing carbon dioxide (CO2) from the atmosphere through the process of photosynthesis — that's why forests are called carbon sinks. By planting trees and restoring forests, it is possible to effectively sequester carbon to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Forests had a remarkable ability to regulate local and regional climates. The shade provides by tree canopies helps reduce temperatures, creating a cooling effect in urban areas. Through evaporation, trees release water vapor into the air, further cooling the surrounding environment.

Reforested areas act as natural air-conditioners, mitigating the urban heat

island effect, which is a phenomenon where urban areas experience higher temperatures than surrounding rural areas.

Trees can reduce heat-related stress and premature deaths during high temperatures and heat-waves. The World Health Organization recorded that from 1998 to 2017, more than 166,000 people died due to heat-waves, with this risk increasing due to climate change. By planting trees strategically in urban settings, microclimates could be created that provide respite from the heat and improve overall climate resilience. In an era of increasing air pollution, trees emerge as nature's air purifiers. They absorb harmful pollutants such as nitrogen dioxide, sulphur dioxide, ozone, and particulate matter, thereby improving air quality. Through photosynthesis, trees also release oxygen, which is vital for our wellbeing.

Reforestation efforts hold the potential to combat respiratory health problems, such as asthma and other respiratory illnesses. According to the WHO, nine out of ten people worldwide breathe polluted air. This produces millions of preventable illnesses and deaths. By increasing tree cover in urban areas and near industrial zones, we can create

cleaner and healthier environments for communities. Biodiversity is vital for all life on Earth, and forests are vibrant ecosystems that support a wide array of plant and animal species. Humans use at least 40,000 different species of plants and animals daily for food, shelter, clothing, and medicinal needs.

Reforestation plays a pivotal role in preserving and restoring biodiversity. By planting a diverse range of tree species, we create habitats for various plants, insects, birds, and mammals, fostering a balanced and resilient ecosystem. Researchers have discovered that up to 2.3 million living species can depend on a single tree!

Healthy soil is the foundation for sustainable agriculture and thriving ecosystems. Reforestation helps protect and restore soil health by preventing erosion and improving its structure. The extensive root systems of trees bind the soil, reducing the risk of landslides and soil degradation. The Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz-led Punjab government has initiated "Plant for Pakistan" campaign, considering the trees plantation vital to combat environmental degradation, smog destructions and other climate-related issues in Pakistan.

## Maryam felicitates PM over improving economic indicators

LAHORE (APP): Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz, while paying tributes to Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on improving Pakistan's economic indicators, said on Sunday that under the vibrant leadership of PML-N Quaid Nawaz Sharif, Pakistan's economy had once again started treading on the path of progress.

The fruits of economic progress during the tenure of PML-N government are prominently coming to surface, Maryam said adding that "the common man

would be provided relief with reduction in electricity rates and price- hike. Big international financial institutions including IMF, ADB had acknowledge Pakistan's economic policies."

She said, "Owing to PM Shehbaz Sharif's economic policies, the investors' confidence is enhancing. For the first time in the history, 100 index Stock Exchange has crossed its 70 thousand psychological barrier."

The chief minister said, "Good news are awaiting Pakistanis and their is a strong likelihood of reduction

in inflation rate up to 12.2 per cent next year. For the first time, Rs 500 reduction occurred in the price of 20-kg flour bag and there is further possibility of Rs 300 reduction in the flour price according to market indicators.

"The Economic & Social Survey of Asia & Pacific Region termed Pakistan's economic indicators excellent. In the UN Report, Pakistan's economic progress has been predicted in the next fiscal year. The growth rate would increase from 2 per cent to 2.3 per cent during the current and next financial

year in Pakistan."

The CM recalled that Pakistan had successfully completed its current economic programme with the IMF and its economy was showing satisfactory performance along with increase in its foreign reserves. She said that Pakistan's economy would further improve with the launch of new economic programme with the IMF. The Pakistani nation reposes its complete trust in the leadership of PM Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, she concluded.

## 39,000 Punjab schools to be upgraded with Rs 50bln

LAHORE (APP): The Punjab government has decided to upgrade more than 39,000 schools with Rs 50 billion. Among these schools, 7,000 would be upgraded from elementary to high level, while 32,000 schools would be upgraded from primary to elementary level.

According to an official document, the elementary schools would be upgraded in next two years, and primary schools in next three years. Updated IT and science labs would also be set up in these schools.

Earlier, Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif had announced that delay in delivery of textbooks was not acceptable.

The Punjab School Inspectorate submitted a proposal to form Standardised Matriculation Examination Board and run all matters of school education through a central body, which was discussed in a meeting, chaired by CM Maryam Nawaz.

## PHC seals 556 quackery centres in province

LAHORE (APP): The Punjab Healthcare Commission (PHC) has sealed 556 outlets of quacks in Punjab province. According to the PHC spokesperson on Sunday, during the month of March, the PHC enforcement teams raided 2,747 treatment centres. At 75 points, earlier declared quackery centres, qualified physicians had started treating patients.

Also, the PHC started surveillance of 1,745 centres. Among all districts, the highest number 49 centres were sealed in Lahore. The rest included 44 each in Faisalabad and Rawalpindi, 32 each in Gujranwala and Sargodha, Layyah 27, and 25 each in Okara and Sahiwal. The spokesperson for the commission said the PHC had so far visited over 187,000 centres, and sealed more than 50,000 illegal outlets, whereas at 39,684 points, other businesses had been started.

## Foolproof security at churches, parks

LAHORE (APP): Lahore police deployed full-scale security arrangements on Sunday at the city's churches, parks, and recreational places. Teams of Lahore police executed high alert operations to ensure security duties across the city. This was stated by Lahore Capital City Police Officer Bilal Siddique Kamyana in a statement issued here today.

He said that Lahore police ensured foolproof security of religious gatherings at Christian places of worship, parks, and recreational places on Sunday. Search and sweep operations continued around churches, parks, and sensitive locations.

Supervisory officers monitored security arrangements at churches and recreational places. Bilal Siddique Kamyana said that additional personnel and snipers were deployed at sensitive churches, while Dolphin Squads, Police Response Unit, and Elite Forces patrolled effectively around churches and parks. Traffic police ensured smooth traffic flow around churches and recreational areas. Bilal Siddique Kamyana also highlighted the stringent checking of individuals and vehicles at entry.

## Sindh govt declares high alert in view of heavy rains

KARACHI (APP): The Government of Sindh has issued a high alert for all municipalities, administrative bodies, and hospitals across the province.

The Chief Secretary of Sindh, Syed Asif Haider Shah has instructed all relevant authorities to remain high alert during the

expected rainfall.

Addressing all commissioners and deputy commissioners, Mr Shah emphasized ensuring the effective drainage of rainwater from major thoroughfares and low-lying areas.

He directed the Water Board, Karachi Electric, Water and Sanitation

Agency (WASA), and Cantonments to stay prepared to handle any emergency situations. The Chief Secretary urged the installation of de-watering pumps on key city roads and emphasized the completion of all necessary arrangements in districts to tackle any emergent situation.



KARACHI: Vehicles passing through rain water at Korangi Road. —APP Photo

## Celebrations of Khalsa Janumdin & Vasakhi Mela

LAHORE (APP): The celebrations of the 325th Khalsa Janumdin and Vasakhi Mela concluded at Gurudwara Panja Sahib, Hasanabdal.

According to a press release issued here on Sunday, Sikh pilgrims from all over the world including India, ambassadors from Australia, Nepal and other 10 countries attended the event. They thanked the government of Pakistan and the Evacuee Property Trust Board administration for decorating the Gurudwara Panja Sahib in a beautiful manner and providing accommodation to the pilgrims. Addressing the main ceremony, Federal Minister for Defense Khawaja

Muhammad Asif welcomed the guests. While congratulating them, he said that minorities in Pakistan have complete religious freedom and their places of worship and property are safe. "Measures are being taken for the welfare of non-Muslims," he added.

Senator Sardar Guldeep Singh, Secretary Board Farid Iqbal, Additional Secretary Shrines Rana Shahid Saleem, Administrator Karachi Muhammad Asif Khan, Deputy Administrator Hasan Abdul Yasir Asghar Monga, Asher Younis MPA, Baba Girpal Singh, Sardar Sawant Singh Dr. Mampal Singh and other political and religious minority leaders

participated in the ceremony. Sardar Ramesh Singh Arora, Pradhan of Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee and Provincial Minister for Minority Affairs, said that Pakistan is the only country in the world where the Sikh Marriage Act is going to be implemented. "Historical heritage of Sikhs is safe in Pakistan and false propaganda is spread in the neighboring country," he added.

The foreign ambassadors praised the high level arrangements. Earlier, Secretary Board Farid Iqbal reviewed all the arrangements made for the Sikh pilgrims in the light of the chairman's orders.

## PhD admission test held at ICCBS

KARACHI (APP): The International Center for Chemical and Biological Sciences (ICCBS), University of Karachi (UoK) organized an entrance test for admissions to its PhD Degree Programme for 2024 on Sunday.

A spokesman for the ICCBS – University of Karachi said this was the first intake of students in the PhD Degree Programme for 2024. He said that dozens of candidates appeared in the test that started at 10:00 am and

concluded at noon at the L.E.J. National Science Information Center (ICCBS).

On the special instructions of Prof. Dr Farzana Shaheen, the Director of the ICCBS, University of Karachi, strict security arrangements were made and unauthorized individuals were not allowed near the test centre, the spokesman said, adding that the test results will be announced on the centre's and the University's website on April 22.

As per the policy of the

international centre, all admissions will be given to students purely on a merit basis under the announced higher learning program of the University of Karachi.

The successful students will have to appear in the interviews scheduled to be held on April 25, he said and maintained that the successful students would be given admission to the Dr Panjwani Center for Molecular Medicine and Drug Research (PCMD) and H.E.J. Research Institute of Chemistry, University of Karachi.

## Rescue 1122 responded to 27,254 emergencies

LAHORE (APP): Emergency Services Department, Punjab, Secretary Dr Rizwan Naseer has expressed his concern over an increasing number of road accidents and the loss of 43 lives in these crashes in Punjab during Eid holidays.

He expressed these views while a chairing virtual meeting with all Divisional & District Emergency Officers, held at Emergency Services

Headquarters, Thoker Niaz Baig, Lahore. Dr Rizwan Naseer urged all stakeholders, including parents, teachers, and civil society to sensitize their loved ones to reduce motorbike speed and adopt an extreme left lane to prevent crashes and loss of lives. He also appreciated rescuers who sacrificed their Eid leave to provide timely emergency services to the citizens of Punjab.

He said that the res-

cuers showed great commitment and dedication to their duty during Eid holidays and played a crucial role in saving lives and providing timely assistance to emergency victims. He stated that Rescue 1122 Emergency Ambulance, Rescue and Fire Services and Motorbike Rescue Service responded to 27,254 emergencies in all districts of Punjab during four Eid holidays.



# Govt to focus on solution of public issues on priority

PESHAWAR (APP): The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Public Health Engineering Malik Pakhtunyar Khan Sunday said that the current government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is paying special attention to solving the public problems of the province.

The present provincial government has closed the door of corruption, looting and nepotism by establishing the supremacy of merit in the province, while building a strong barrier against corruption and looting in the future.

On the occasion of participating in the happy Eid celebrations, the political and social figure Haji Malik Muhammad Allah Dawar was also with him. Pakhtunyar Khan said that unlike the previous governments, the PTI government has focused on the welfare of the people and is taking positive steps to provide relief to the people.

It has introduced excellent testing service institutions and modern reform system for providing employment, which is expected to improve significantly in education, health and other social sectors. A large number of people are benefiting due to which Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has become a role model province for other provinces of the country.

He said that all the legitimate problems of the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are being solved gradually and this continuity of government initiatives and policies will continue and the people of all the backward and remote areas can also lead a peaceful life.

## Business community commends Governor KP

PESHAWAR (APP): The business community of Peshawar has paid tributes to Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Haji Ghulam Ali for keeping the official residence open for general public during Eid holidays.

“Governor Haji Ghulam Ali not only ended the feeling of deprivation of the people but also won their hearts by keeping the Governor’s House open for the public and family,” they observed.

“The sincerity and love with which the governor received Eid from people will be remembered in history with golden words,” comments Salman Elahi and Lal Jan Khan, office bearers of Peshawar Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

In a press statement issued here on Sunday, Malik Salman Elahi, President Peshawar Chamber of Commerce, Senior Vice President Lal Jan, Vice President Saeed Khan and President of Flour Association Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Waheed Khan in their joint statement, praised Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Haji Ghulam Ali for opening the Governor House for the public and family during three days of Eid-ul-Fitr.

Paying tribute, they said Haji Ghulam Ali has proved on every occasion that he is a governor with a passion for serving the people and always feels happy to be among common men.

Governor’s house where ordinary people could not even think of going, Haji Ghulam Ali broke this tradition after becoming the governor and ended the feeling of deprivation felt by people and practically proved that Governor’s house is not only for special people but also for common man.

Like last year, this year too, on the three days of Eid, the governor’s house was kept open for the public for three days to share happiness, they added.

The representatives of the business community said Governor Haji Ghulam Ali has won the hearts of the people not only of Peshawar but of the entire province, be they are special children, school and college students or from other walks of life.

He not only invited all of them to the Governor’s House and honored them, but also entertained them personally, they said.

They further said that history will always remember their services and efforts for opening the Governor House to the common people in the 76-year history.

Ever since Haji Ghulam Ali assumed the gubernatorial post, people from every school of thought including workers of political parties, members of the business community across the province, chambers, youth and those belonging to minority communities have called on him by considering as their representative, they added.

## Opening of highway: Advisor laud quick response

PESHAWAR (APP): The Tourism Advisor congratulates the relevant departments for opening the Bahrain Kalam highway by showing quick response to the problem being faced by the local and foreign tourists who were stranded due to landslides near Bahrain.

It is hoped that the highway hit by landslides near Bahrain will be widened, Zahid Chanzeb, Adviser to Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Tourism and Culture said. He said for the opening of the Bahrain-Kalam highway for traffic and evacuating tourists and local people, who were stuck for several hours through an alternative route, the relief and tourism department, district administration and rescue and security agencies worked day and night.

The efforts are appreciated and it is hoped that beyond Bahrain, the highway will be widened for traffic at other points as well hit by landslides. He said more landslides have occurred, so that the flow of tourists can continue.

Zahid Chanzeb expressed his satisfaction with the restoration work of the highway and clarified that heavy machinery is being used to remove the landslide debris from the highway on different point and widen it.

He said great efforts are being taken to protect the roads from Swat River and all the relevant department officials were there all the time.

The work is being done diligently under the supervision of the authorities and it is expected that the highway will be completely restored by Monday morning and the road will be made wide enough to allow the vehicles of tourists to pass easily.

## More rain, hailstorm predicted

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD) has predicted more rain-wind/thunderstorms with isolated heavy falls and hailstorms in Peshawar and parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Sunday night and Monday.

As per the synoptic situation, a strong westerly wave prevails over most parts of Pakistan. Moisture from the Arabian Sea is also penetrating southern parts of the country.

Under these conditions, more rain-wind/thunderstorms are likely in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa districts Chitral, Dir, Swat, Abbottabad, Mansehra, Haripur, Kohistan, Shangla, Buner, Malakand, Khyber, Peshawar, Charsadda, Nowshera, Swabi, Mardan, Karak, Kohat, Lakki Marwat, Bajaur, Mohmand, Kurram, Waziristan, Bannu and Dera Ismail Khan on Sunday night and Monday. Isolated heavy falls and hailstorms are also expected during the period.

Heavy rainfall may generate flash flooding in local nullahs/streams of Dir, Swat, Chitral, Kohistan, Mansehra and tributaries of the Kabul River till 15 April. Landslides are likely in Upper Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

## Rescue 1122 saves stranded puppies

PESHAWAR (APP): Around six puppies trapped over a dry bed of river Panjkora in Lower Dir District were brought to safety by dutiful staffers of Rescue 1122 on Sunday.

According to details, the rescue operation was initiated in response to a call seeking help for the safety of newly born dog puppies.

Responding promptly to the call, Rescue 1122 staffers reached the site and prepared a plan for reaching up to the trapped puppies which were lying over a dry bed in the middle of the flowing river.

One of the officials of Rescue 1122 after wading through the shallow water, dived into the river and swam up to the dry bed. The whining puppies were put in a sack and swam towards safety.

People witnessing the rescue operation clapped in jubilation over saving the lives of minor creatures by brave officials of Rescue 1122. They appreciated the dedication and dutifulness exhibited by staff members of Rescue 1122 in saving the lives of needy puppies.

## Police raided Shisha House in Town area

PESHAWAR (APP): The youths who were present in Zero Point Shisha House on Old Bara Road, a posh area of the town, were arrested by Town Police.

Youths were busy smoking tobacco through hookah in Shisha House, Police officials said.

The Police disclosed that Hookahs, flavors and many smoking tools were also recovered from Shisha House.

The youth and the cafe manager were arrested in Shisha Café with further investigation having been started by registering a case against all the arrested persons, the Police Official said.



PESHAWAR: Provincial Food Minister Zahir Shah Toru addressing a public gathering.

# PAJCCI commend Railways over increasing revenue

PESHAWAR (APP): Pakistan Afghan Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PAJCCI) has commended Pakistan Railways over increasing its annual revenue to highest peak of Rs. 66 billion in nine months of current year and has suggested for launching of cargo trains to further piling up of earnings.

In a press statement issued here on Sunday, Coordinator PAJCCI KP, Zia-ul-Haq Sarhadi said it is appreciating development that Pakistan Railways has increased its annual revenue to record height.

The phenomenal jump in earnings reflect revival of people’s confidence on Railways in the wake of better management decisions taken by Chairman Mazhar Ali Shah and GM, Amir Baloch for provision of improved travelling facilities, opined Zia who is also Member Advisory Committee of Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) on Pakistan Railways.

He said Railways is safest and cheapest travelling facility in the country but due to some management loopholes, travelers had diverted to buses and other mode of travelling.

If such decisions were kept on taking, more people will prefer travelling in trains and revenue will increase with passage of time, he opined.

Coordinator PAJCCI also suggested Pakistan Railways to focus on launching of cargo trains from Karachi to Peshawar for facilitation of business community especially those dealing in Pak-Afghan trade.

He said Railways should also cater to transportation of loose cargo being sent by exporters and importers within the country.

By focusing on plying of cargo trains, Railways can triple its annual earnings from existing one besides providing relief to people especially business community who have to pay exorbitant rates to truck owners for transportation of goods.

Zia said in the wake of increase in prices of petroleum products, fare for transportation of goods from port city (Karachi) to Peshawar through heavy vehicles has increased manifold, inflicting huge burden on business community of the country.

Cargo trains by Railway will not only provide relief to business community but also contribute in increasing volume of bilateral trade between Pakistan and Afghanistan by reducing transportation charges, he observed.

# Call for preservation of historical buildings in Peshawar

PESHAWAR (APP): Beig a gateway to subcontinent, Peshawar has always remained a strategic city where kings and invaders of various dynasties constructed historic buildings for their families’ residences to prolong their rule.

Besides Balahisar Fort, historic buildings including Sethi House and Khan Klubs were constructed at the heart of Peshawar City where kings, commanders and monarchs stayed before marching to subcontinent.

Constructed by Mughal rulers in 1800 on Ashraf Road at Peshawar City, Khan Klub was also main centre of attraction for domestic and foreign tourists due to its boutique style and sooth environment.

However, Khan Klub has started losing its eye-catching ancient architecture and woodwork after it was converted into floor godowns and general stores for monetary gains in recent past.

Located at Hastnagri bazaar near Balahisar fort and Chowk Yadgar, Khan Klub’s four storey building built on five marla land was presently in shamble condition with no facilities for tourist and art lovers for which it was once famous far and required immediate reconstruction and conservation work before it falls.

While passing on Ashraf road near Rampura gate, a visitor would be extremely disappointed after seeing the deteriorating boutique style primitive building with dust of floor, fodder and materials of daily use commodities.

“Khan Klub is neither a hotel nor a guesthouse or Havalli, but it is a home of centuries old civilization reflecting Mughal era architecture and traditional craftsmanship and its conservation was need of the hour being an identity of Peshawar,” said Bakhtzada Khan, senior research officer KP archeology and museum department while talking to APP.

“Khan Klub was the most preferred choice of foreign tourists and dignitaries for stay at Peshawar due to its peaceful environment, architectural significance and close proximity with historical buildings including Balahisar fort, Mohabat Khan mosque and Qissa Khwani bazaar,” he said.

“Before 2,001, booking of a room was a herculean task for foreign tourists, ambassadors and missions, who stayed here due to its pleasant atmosphere, mouthwatering cuisines, cultural music and closed location with other historical buildings including Qisa Khwani bazaar, Ghanta Ghar, Mohabat Khan Mosque, Chowk Yadgar, Ghanta Ghar and Sethi House,” he said, adding in its main halls were flooded with tourists where they enjoyed the traditional Peshawari music including ‘Rubab with Tabla.

Tourists explored the historical Chowk Yadgar monument constructed in 1892 after it was dedicated to General Hastings and were highly impressed by the historical Mahabat Khan mosque’s architecture built in 17th century by the Mughal Governor Mohabat Khan.

Peshawar Museum, which is the lone museum of Ghandhara Art with complete life story of Lord Buddha housing around 30,000 artifacts and statues had drawn Ghandara art lovers and enjoyed the traditional Peshawari Qehwa at historical Qissa Khwani bazaar in the company of the international storey tellers.

Besides cultural programs, he said the tourists enjoyed local traditional music and taste of varieties of foods including the mouthwatering Peshawari Palao, Qahwah (Green Tea), lemon grass tea with an aroma of jasmine, Bengal tea, Kerala coffee and darjeeling spring bud at Qissa Khwani and returned back to Khan Klub for night stay.

Bakht Zada said Khan Klub had been formally converted into a fully fledged hotel by a local influential Inayatullah Khan with support of an Irish American Martin Jay Davis in 1995 and has soon become the most ideal choice of foreign and domestic tourists.

The owners said they were ready to reserve its two upper storey for tourists if the provincial government provides financial support for its repair and renovation. The architecture and artwork of the historical building were badly affected by earthquakes, torrential rains and changing weather patterns and at least five million would be required for its complete renovation and conservation works.

Its sophisticated artwork on exterior and interior designs besides its beautifully designed balconies required immediate renovations before it collapsed.

Its eight rooms with different colorful names were totally different from one another.

By visiting its “Garnet Room” a visitor enjoyed the panoramic view of the old city of Peshawar and mountain ranges of Koh-e-Shalman. The room is decorated with garnet inlaid floor and saffron colored silk.

“Peridot” is another room with a 12-feet ceiling, a balcony and shuttered windows from where a fine view of the walled city could still be seen.

There was a Mughal era restaurant, where the guests sat on takiyas (pillows) and enjoyed KP’s traditional live musical shows in the form of Rubab and Tabla besides popular cultural dances, also needing the attention of concerned authorities for conservation and repair works.

Bakhtzada said that 1868 ancient houses, monuments and religious places in KP including Khan Klub have been included in the protected list and its architecture would be kept preserved.

KP government has completed a cultural heritage trail project under which 500 meters long trail from ancient Ghanta Ghar to Gor Gathri has been renovated including centuries-old buildings, houses and shops besides establishment of a food street at Namak Mandai Peshawar.

“The trail started at the historical Ghanta Ghar and passed through ancient Bazaar-e-Kalaan and primordial Mohallah Sethian with a number of beautifully architectural houses constructed by wealthy Sethi family way back in 1880s.”

Sethi house with a unique woodwork has been purchased by the government keeping in view of its historical significance and was opened for tourists after establishment of a museum in it. The renovation of Ali Mardan Khan Valley built during the British era at cantonment was also completed besides ancient inns of Mughal period at Gor Kathri at Peshawar.

Under the heritage project, the facade or outer appearances of 85 heritage buildings of Mughal, British and Sikh period with a cultural and historical touch was renovated.

The experts requested the KP cultural and tourism authority and Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation to come forward and financially support owners of such buildings to conserve Khan Klub like architectural wonders of Pakistan.

# Rainy weather brings boom to grilled fish, chappli kabab business

PESHAWAR (APP): The torrential rains coupled with cold breeze have brought boom to grilled fish and Chappli Kabab business in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Following cold weather conditions due to heavy rain continued with intermittent intervals in Peshawar for the last two days, Peshawarties thronged to the outlets of the mouthwatering Chappli Kabab and grilled fried fish at historic Qissa Khwani and Namak Mandi where the delectable varieties are being served with spicy sauces and green tea.

Many consumers were seen taking parcels for their loved ones at home to keep themselves warm in rainy weather.

Peshawar is a unique ancient city for being frequently visited by the tourists and food lovers to relish its delectable traditional food varieties including the mouth-watering chapli kabab, Peshawari rice-pulao and fish varieties mostly brought from Malakand, Hazara divisions, Punjab and Karachi as special offer.

The visitors, while travelling on historic Qissa Khawani and Namak Mandi bazaars in the bustling city of Peshawar, can’t resist the aroma of grilled fish and chapli kabab being served with traditional qehwa and spicy sauces till late night.

“The tantalising aroma of trout and carp fish, chapli kabab and BBQ have always attracted me to enjoy at Qissa Khawani bazaar having about 3,000 years old history where plenty of shops available for food lovers,” said Professor Dr Muhammad Naeem, former Chairman Economics Department, University of Peshawar while talking to APP.

“It is my fifth visit to Qisa Khawani during the ongoing spring season with my family. My visit to Peshawar remained incomplete without enjoying the mouthwatering chapli kabab and grilled fish with green qehwa at Qissa Khwani which was internationally known for storytellers.”

Tourists while travelling to subcontinent or Central Asia for trade had often stayed here at night and swapped tales of each other’s culture, civilizations and traditions besides day to day happening while enjoying Chapli Kabab with traditional qehwa.

The visitors also went around to the historic Balahisar fort, Ghanta Ghar, Mohalla Sethian with rare architecture and wood work of its buildings in a day long trip and returned to Qissa Khwani for a night stay before starting their journey to their destination for trade.

Ghanta Ghar, a famous fish trade hub in Peshawar also drew a substantial number of seafood lovers on Sunday where the trade of fish including mushka, rahu, simon, pomfret, mahsher, and lobsters have significantly increased after the heavy torrential rain that turned weather cold.

At Ghanta Ghar, fish seller Ahmad Jan said trout stock has been brought from Swat and Mansehra districts to fulfill Peshawarties’ pressing demands for Eid parties.

“The recipe for trout fish is very simple and time-efficient. We prepare trout in oil after its proper water wash and cutting. Later, varieties of spicy sauces, pomegranate seed powder, salt and other spicy ingredients are properly mixed.”

Before making it on medium flame, he said the fish is properly marinated for about two hours to ensure that all sauces are intact and the colour is unchanged and later served to customers with chips, sauces (Chatnis), salad and naans.

While eating fish at Ring Road Peshawar along with friends, Qaiser Khan, a resident of Wapda Town Peshawar said trout was his favourite seafood as its meat was full of proteins and vitamins besides easily digestible.

“When I was young, I visited Swat with my father to enjoy the freshwater brown trout due to its aromatic taste and spiciness amid snowfall. This year, I did not go to Swat due to the availability of the grilled and baked trout fish at Peshawar.”

Dr Ziaullah Chamkani, senior medical specialist at Government Lady Reading Hospital Peshawar said there was an additional burden on the heart, brains, joints and lungs of weak people and children due to persistent cough, nausea and frosts in rainy weather, adding consumption of fish was the best available choice to help reduce risks of these diseases.

Besides the best source of proteins, vitamins, omega-3 fatty acids, phosphorus, iron and iodine, he said that consumption of seafood helps improve digestion, protects skin from dryness and relieves joints’ pains.

Usman Ali, General Secretary of Swat Trout Fish Farming Association said that business of trout farmers have shined in rainy weather following increase in demands of consumers and hotel industry from across the country. He said about 150 trout farms existed in Swat that engaged extra laborers to meet the placed orders.

He said about 2,500 people were directly associated with trout farming in Swat where one kilogram trout was being sold at Rs 2000 to Rs 2500 per kilogram in the open market.

“Trout farming is a highly profitable business and any farmer having 35 marla land minimum and proper water inflow and outflow system can produce 2,250 kg trout by earning about two million rupees profit after 15 months raring.”

Fisheries Department officials told APP that under the Trout Village Project (TVP), around 93 small and large trout fish farms were established in Malakand and Hazara divisions under a 50:50% cost sharing formula basis.

A model trout hatchery under KP government was set up at Salathnar valley in Upper Swat on 15 kanal with capacity to produce six million fish seeds per year.

“Development of cold water fisheries resources”, a joint venture of Federal and Provincial Governments having 40:60% cost sharing basis, is in progress in Malakand and Hazara divisions under which 297 trout lakes were being established to bolster fish production.

KP government has approved ‘development of reservoirs for uplift of fisheries resources’ project under which 67 carp fish farms and model hatchery on 179 kanal at Swabi were being established from where fish seedlings to be provided to private hatcheries and Turbella dam.

Following completion of these projects, he said KP’s fish production would likely increase to 740 metric tons from the existing 400 metric tons by 2025.

A model coldwater research centre is being established at Madyn Swat with a facility of a fish hatchery where academia and young researchers would be facilitated to conduct researches on different issues of aquatic resources in the province.





## In brief

### Leader of armed gang held

KOHAT (APP): Kohat Police have arrested the leader of a dangerous armed gang with automatic weapons here on Sunday. SHO Jangal Khel Police Station Irfan Afridi along with the police team detained the alleged accused in a raid. The action against the leader of the local gang was carried out on the complaint of disturbance of peace. The alleged suspect is involved in incidents of firing on opponents and spreading fear among people. A Kalashnikov and dozens of cartridges were recovered from the possession of the arrested accused Qayyum Shinwari. A case has been registered against the accused in Jangal Khel Police Station.

### Boy shot dead in Swabi

SWABI (APP): Some unknown persons killed a young man in Bhai Kot Manari, Police control in Swabi confirmed the shoot-out here on Sunday. Police said that one Wajid Ali, while filing an FIR in Swabi Police Station, said that his 26-year-old brother Umar Ghani was cutting grass at 10.00 am in the morning and some unknown gunmen opened indiscriminate firing on him, killing his brother on the spot. Wali told the Police that after a long time had gone to Siraj, when he did not return home, I started searching with my nephew Samad, during which I saw his murdered body lying in the fields, which was killed by an unknown miscreant. Swabi Police has registered an FIR against unknown persons on the report of the deceased's brother and started investigation.

### Domestic dispute takes one life

F.P. Report

KARAK: Shanwah Gudi area of Tehsil Takht Nusrati is in the grip of insecurity, firing on domestic dispute, as a result of firing, one youth died and one injured, the dead Hatibullah was shifted to Tehsil Headquarters Hospital for post-mortem. The injured youth Naseemullah was shifted to the district headquarters hospital Kirk in critical condition. The police started a search operation to find the accused. Meanwhile, in front of Tablighi Center, more than 100 bags of rice, ghee and other goods were stolen from Asif General Store. Despite the passage of fifteen days, neither the thief nor the stolen goods were caught. According to the details, the police failed to arrest the thieves. Between four and thirty in the morning, unknown thieves broke the shutters and stole 117 sacks of rice, ghee and other goods, but despite the passage of 15 days, the police failed to arrest the thieves.

### Minister vows education for all

F.P. Report

MARDAN: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Food Zahir Shah Toru has said that to achieve peace the education is a must and no dreams can be fulfilled without achieving excellence in education. He was addressing in a ceremony organized by Gujjar Social Foundation on Sunday. Toru said that history of the developed nations have one thing in common and that is they have provided best education facilities to their youth. He further said that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf government will not leave any stone unturned in providing education to the youth of the province.

### Flood in Chamarkhan village

## Link road, pedestrian bridge, washed away by

CHITRAL (APP): Due to continued torrential rains from last Friday, while snowfall on the peaks of mountain and Kalash village badly affected the communication system in the entire valley has been damaged.

Talking to APP, Deputy Commissioner Chitral Muhammad Imran Khan said that all appropriate measures have been taken to ensure safety to the general public. He said, due to the heavy rain since last Friday, flood hit in different streams and the routes of several valleys were closed due to landsliding and falling heavy boulders

from mountains.

The only land route connecting Chitral to other parts of the country is also closed for all kinds of traffic at Lowari tunnel, while Upper Chitral, Lutkoh and Kalash Valley's road were also closed in light of the safety to the general public.

He said the district administration and officials of the relevant department including TMAs, NHAs are working day and night for the opening of roads and ensuring communication systems. Floods devastated different areas in upper and lower Chitral districts.

Chamarkun village badly affected by chocho goal nullah as a link road, pedestrian bridge, irrigation stream and water supply pipelines were also destroyed due to floods.

He said road connection would be restored soon to different areas and a guideline has already been issued to the general public to avoid unnecessary travelling. Deputy Commissioner Muhammad Imran Khan said the officials of the PDMA, TMA and NHAs are working hard with heavy machinery in opening of the main and link roads.

## Noshki tragedy: CM orders compensation

QUETTA (PPI): Chief Minister Balochistan, Mir Sarfraz Bughti on Sunday said that war against terrorism was not the war of security forces against terrorists rather it was the war of state against the enemies of peace.

These views were expressed by him while chairing a high level meeting at Chief Minister's Secretariat Quetta regarding law and order situation in the province.

He said that all, including bureaucracy, politi-

cians, civil and armed forces, judiciary and media, would have to fight the war against terrorism, adding that war against terrorism would be fought with shared responsibility and common way forward.

Bughti directed the authorities to ensure compensating the heirs of martyrs within a period of seven days. Commissioner Quetta Division and Deputy Inspector General of Police, Rakhshan Division gave briefing about the Noshki incident.

Condemning the incident of Noshki, it was decided in the high level meeting to plan the security plan afresh in order to curb the occurrence of such incidents in future.

The meeting was attended by Chief Secretary Balochistan, Shakeel Qadir Khan, Additional Chief Secretary (Home), Home and Tribal Affairs Department, Zahid Saleem, Inspector General of Police, Balochistan, Abdul Khaliq Sheikh and others.

## Three die in Dir rain-related incident

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: Two minor girls and a woman were killed in rain related incidents here on Saturday night, residents and Rescue 1122 officials said.

They said that two minor girls were killed and two other children were injured when the roof of their room collapsed due to a landslide in heavy rains at Badalai area of Nehag Dara in the jurisdiction of Wari police station in Upper Dir district here on Sunday.

They said that locals and Rescue 1122 emergency team rushed to the spot and retrieved the bodies and the injured from the debris of the stone and mud-made

house.

The injured were shifted to a nearby hospital. Similarly a married woman identified as daughter of Anwar Khan was killed when a wall of a house owned by one Samiullah collapsed at Shafankay village in Gumbat Banda village in the jurisdiction of Lal Qila police station here on Saturday night. According to local police, the deceased woman was staying in the house as a guest and the wall fell upon her. She died on the spot.

The house of one Liaquat Khan s/o Muhammad Siasat Khan also collapsed because of heavy rains at Darmal Bala village of Balambat here the other day. The inmates, according to official sources, remained

unhurt.

It continued to rain for the third consecutive day in parts of the Lower and Upper Dir districts here on Sunday. Several link roads remained blocked due to landslides. The Munda tehsil municipal administration staff cleared a road leading to the Mian Kalay with the help of tractors. The flooded stream at Talash and other parts of the district also disrupted flow of vehicular traffic. The hilltops in Upper Dir and Binshahi in Lower Dir, according to locals, also received snowfall. The district administration has asked motorists to avoid unnecessary travel to upper parts and use snow chains while travelling to the hilly areas of Lowari Top and Shahi Top.



QUETTA: A motorcyclist is on his way during heavy rain which lashed city on Sunday. — INP photo

## PPP Senator condoles over murder of eight people

MUZAFFARGARH (APP): PPP Senator Rana Mahmood ul Hassan here on Sunday expressed condolences with the bereaved families of eight persons who were brutally murdered in Mud Wala area of Alipur.

On this occasion, he said that the incident was extreme level of brutality in which the killer didn't even spare the innocent children.

He assured the bereaved family that the killer would be punished severely and said that he would raise the matter in the Senate and the National Assembly as

well.

Rana Mahmood told the relatives that he had come there on behalf of President Asif Ali Zardari and Chairman People's Party Bilawal Bhutto Zardari as they had directed to extend every type of cooperation with the heirs of the victims. It is worth mentioning here that a tailor named Sajjad Hussain brutally killed his wife and seven minor children with a sharp edge weapon in Mud Wala area of Alipur Tehsil, few days back. Sadar Alipur police have arrested the killer and registered a case against him.

### Dera police arrest four drugs dealers

The district police have arrested four accused and recovered a huge quantity of drugs during an ongoing crackdown against drug dealers in the area. According to the police spokesman, as part of operations which were underway against anti-social elements under the supervision of District Police Officer (DPO) Nasir Mehmood, the cantt police arrested those drug dealers including Mansoor, Shahzad, Abdul Sattar and Abdul Manan.



CHINIOT: A man fixing a solar panel at his makeshift hut. — APP photo

## Rescue 1122 rescues 662 people on Eid

MUZAFFARGARH (APP): District Emergency Officer (DEO) Rescue 1122 Dr Hussain Mian said that they had rescued 662 people during Eid-ul-Fitr across the district.

While giving details to the media about the accidents that occurred on the occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr, DEO said that Rescue 1122 responded to 665 emergencies including 148 road traffic, 471 medical emergencies, 09 fire emergencies, 14 crime emergencies and 22 miscellaneous emergencies and one fall from height.

Rescue 1122 responded to these emergencies in time and rescued a total of 662 people, out of which 245 people were given first aid on the spot and 399 patients were shifted to the hospitals while 18 people died on the spot.

Likewise, observation posts were established at recreational places including Head Muhammad Wala, Chenab Bank Multan road, Head Panjand and Head Taunsa in order to prevent drowning incidents during Eid-ul-Fitr.

Dr. Hussain Mian also informed that heartbreaking incident that happened on the second day of Eid at Mud Wala a suburb of Alipur, in which an outlaw brutally killed his five innocent daughters, two sons and his wife. Four ambulances of Rescue 1122 immediately responded to the spot and covered the dead bodies and shifted to DHQ hospital.

## Two bikes stolen

Hafiz Aziz-ur-Rehman

HAFIZABAD: Unidentified thieves stole two motorcycles in two separate incidents in Hafizabad. The incidents of motorcycle thefts have reached a peak in the entire district. The police have failed to stop the incidents.

According to the details, Muhammad Jahanzeb son of Rahmatnabad parked his motorcycle in front of the house from where unknown thieves stole his motorcycle.

The second incident took place in Madhri-anwala where Mohsin Afzal came to his in-law's house and parked his motorcycle at Mohammad Zaman's house. Meanwhile, unknown thieves stole his motorcycle from there.

Meanwhile, Deputy Commissioner Madam Sundas Irshad visited DHQ Hospital, where he inspected the new Children's Ward, General Emergency, Medical Children's Ward, Dialysis Center, Ultrasound Room, OPD and other departments constructed in the hospital. While visiting, reviewed the treatment facilities available to the patients, supply of medicines, cleanliness and other arrangements. CEO Health Dr. Umar Sharif Rathoor, MS Dr. Shakeel Ahmad Shahid were also with her.

The Medical Superintendent of DHQ Hospital said that separate arrangements will be made for children suffering from thalassemia in the new children's ward where they will be provided with blood supply and other medical facilities. The Deputy Commissioner also checked different washrooms to review the sanitation system of the hospital.

## Efforts made to increase literacy in KP: Adviser

Abid Buner

BUNER: Adviser to the Chief Minister Syed Fakhar Jahan has said that education is being given importance throughout the province, including Buner, and efforts are being made to increase the literacy rate.

He was talking to media after administering oath to the newly elected cabinet of Buner on Sunday. He congratulated the new cabinet and assured all possible support to the journalists of the Buner Press Club.

He also informed about the measures to prevent corruption in the health card and expressed his government determination to implement the oath of the Chief Minister on end to corruption in every possible way.

He claimed that government to complete the

Karkakar Tunnel the Slarzi Marble Zone and other pending development schemes.

However, in case of non-receipt of funds and arrears from the center, he boldly expressed the options of Dumma Dum Mast Qalandar would be utilized.

The Chief Minister Aide further said that PTI was put against the wall and its governments were dismissed first, then delayed holding general elections for the year long.

He complained that PTI opponents were given the chance like the unelected PDM government established in the center and cooperatives governments in provinces and then stole the PTI mandate in the general elections and now obstacles are making in the way of the KP provincial government, but the KP government the

PTI leadership and activists have their clear stand that they want peace and going with the federal government and institutions for the sake of national interests and peace.

He repeated all of them want to play a full role for the development, prosperity and peace in the country. He continued to add even if the attitude of walling up KP government and PTI is continued, then they will use every option and stand on every front and raise their voice for having their rights and not accept to deprived them of their due rights.

He said the government employees and the people suffering from inflation, unemployment and unrest will stand up with KP government against the federal government and to continue struggle to take their rights, he concluded.

## Pak Army starts tree plantation drive

F.P. Report

MIRAMSHAH: Pakistan Army has started tree plantation drive on the arrival of spring season at Bang Dar area of Tehsil Ghulam Khan in North Waziristan.

According to a report on

Sunday, Pakistan Army leveled the land to make it cultivable and then fruit plants were cultivated.

Pakistan Army also distributed saplings to the locals and guidelines were also given to them regarding plant protection for

optimal growth.

People expressed gratitude to the Pakistan Army for this historic initiative as there will be lasting and positive results on the climate and the lives of the people of North Waziristan.

## Govt to providing complete religious freedom to people

ATTOCK (APP): Federal Minister for Defense, Khawaja Muhammad Asif, has said the present government is committed to providing complete religious freedom to people of all faiths living in the country.

He was talking to newsmen after participating in the Bhog ceremony in connection with the Besakhi festival at Gurdwara Panja Sahib Hassanabdal on Sunday.

In his address, he expressed that the Sikh Marriage Act had been passed in 2018, and now it would be implemented soon after the approval of the provincial cabinet.

He said that around six gurdwaras across the country would be open and handed over to the local Sikh community for the observance of rituals.

Earlier, speaking at the Bhog ceremony, Khawaja Asif said that the Pakistani people and gov-

ernment were proud to host the Sikh pilgrims on their holy land.

"The present government believes in the freedom of the minority and would extend all its resources for the better preservation of their sacred places" he added.

The Sikh religion famous Baisakhi celebrations, to mark the advent of the order of the \*Khalsa by 10th Sikh Guru Gobind Singh Ji, were observed at Gurdwara Panja Sahib here.

Around ten thousand Sikh yatrees—among them over 2400 Indians and others from other parts of the world, including Pakistan, India, Canada, and the United Kingdom participated in the festivities.

Baisakhi processions called Nagar Keertan were taken out on the premises of Gurdwara Panja Sahib with traditional performances and religious rites.

The leader of the Indian Sikh contingent, Sardar Kulwant Singh, expressed their satisfaction over the arrangements made for Sikh pilgrims in his address.

In their speeches, representatives of various Sikh community organizations in different countries also lauded the Pakistani government's decision to open the Kartarpur corridor and thanked the Pakistani government for fulfilling their longstanding demand. Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) Amritsar party leader Sardar Rawinder Singh told the media that special love for Pakistanis compelled them to visit the country again and again.

"We are grateful to the Pakistani government, particularly the ETPB, for making arrangements for the protection of Gurdwaras in Pakistan," he added.



HASSANABDAL: Federal Defence Minister, Khawaja Asif addressing the Sikh pilgrims at Gurdwara Panja Sahib on the occasion of Baisakhi Mela.





# Ukraine mily chief warns of worsening situation

KYIV, Ukraine (AP): Ukraine's military chief on Saturday warned that the battlefield situation in the industrial east has "significantly worsened in recent days," as warming weather allowed Russian forces to launch a fresh push along several stretches of the more 1,000 km-long (620-mile) front line.

In an update on the Telegram messaging app, Gen. Oleksandr Syrskyy said that Moscow had "significantly" ramped up its assaults since President Vladimir Putin extended his nearly quarter-century rule in a preordained election last month that saw anti-war candidates barred from the ballot and independent voices silenced in a Kremlin-backed media blockade.

According to Syrskyy, Russian forces have been "actively attacking" Ukrainian positions in three

areas of the eastern Donetsk region, near the cities of Lyman, Bakhmut and Pokrovsk, and beginning to launch tank assaults as drier, warmer spring weather has made it easier for heavy vehicles to move across previously muddy terrain.

"Despite significant losses, the enemy is intensifying its efforts by using new units (equipped with) armored vehicles, thanks to which it periodically achieves tactical success," Syrskyy said.

A Russian Defense Ministry spokesman on Saturday confirmed the capture of a village that had been the site of fierce fighting for close to eighteen months. Analysts from Ukraine's non-governmental Deep State group, which tracks frontline developments, had reported on Russia's takeover of Pervomaiske, some 45 kilometers (28 miles) southeast of

Pokrovsk, in the early hours of Thursday.

On Saturday, the group said in a Telegram update that Moscow's forces had also taken Bohdaniivka, another eastern village close to the city of Bakhmut, where the war's bloodiest battle raged for nine months until it fell to Russia last May. Ukraine's Defense Ministry shortly afterwards denied that Bohdaniivka had been captured, and said "intense fighting" continued there.

With the war in Ukraine entering its third year and a vital U.S. aid package for Kyiv stuck in Congress, Russian troops are ramping up pressure on exhausted Ukrainian forces on the front line to prepare to grab more land this spring and summer.

Russia has relied on its edge in firepower and personnel to step up attacks across eastern Ukraine. It has

increasingly used satellite-guided gliding bombs — which allow planes to drop them from a safe distance — to pummel Ukrainian forces beset by a shortage of troops and ammunition.

Also on Saturday, Germany announced that it will deliver an additional Patriot air defense system to Ukraine, days after Russian missiles and drones on Thursday struck infrastructure and power facilities across several regions, leaving hundreds of thousands of homes without power, in what private energy operator DTEK described as one of the most powerful attacks this year. The German Defense Ministry said it would "begin the handover" of the Patriot system immediately, without providing a precise timeline.

In an update on X, formerly known as Twitter, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said

he had discussed the "massive" Russian air attacks on civilian energy infrastructure with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Saturday, and declared that Berlin will "stand unbreakably by Ukraine's side."

Putin described the strikes as retribution for Ukrainian attacks on Russia's energy infrastructure, after a slew of Ukrainian drone strikes over the past few months hit oil refineries deep inside Russia.

Starting last month, Moscow renewed its assault on Ukrainian energy facilities. On Thursday it completely knocked out a plant that was the biggest energy supplier for the region around Kyiv, as well as the nearby Cherkasy and Zhytomyr provinces.

At least 10 of the strikes damaged energy infrastructure in Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city. Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said more

than 200,000 people in the region were without power and Russia "is trying to destroy Kharkiv's infrastructure and leave the city in darkness."

Energy facilities were also hit in the Zaporizhzhia and Lviv regions.

The volume and accuracy of recent attacks have alarmed the country's defenders, who say Kremlin forces now have better intelligence and fresh tactics in their campaign to annihilate Ukraine's electrical grid and bring its economy to a halt.

In the winter of 2022-2023, Russia took aim at Ukraine's power grid in an effort to deny civilians light and heating and chip away at the country's appetite for war.

In Ukraine's Russian-occupied south, a local Kremlin-installed official blamed Kyiv for a shelling attack that killed 10 people, including children,

in a town in the southern Zaporizhzhia region the previous day.

The Tokmak municipal administration reported on Telegram that the shelling struck three apartment blocks Friday evening. Five people were pulled alive from the rubble and 13 people were hospitalized, according to the Kremlin-installed regional head Yevhen Balitsky. It was not immediately possible to verify his claims.

Ukrainian officials did not immediately acknowledge or comment on the attack.

Meanwhile, in Ukraine, a Russian drone on Saturday dropped explosives on an ambulance that had been called out to a village near the frontline city of Kupiansk, wounding its 58-year-old driver, local Gov. Oleh Syniehubov reported. His claim could not be independently verified.



SYDNEY: A couple comfort each other after laying a floral tribute at Oxford Street Mall alongside Westfield Bondi Junction on Sunday in Bondi Junction, Australia.

## Saudi Arabia warns against misuse of Umrah visas for employment

Dubai (Gulf News): The Ministry of Hajj and Umrah warned against the misuse of Umrah visas for purposes other than pilgrimage.

Emphasizing the importance of adhering to the regulations, the ministry clarified that Umrah visas should not be utilised for work-related activities.

In a statement shared via its official account on the "X" platform, the ministry underscored the significance of fulfilling the purpose of the facilitated Umrah trip.

Pilgrims were advised to depart from the Kingdom before the expiration of their visa tenure and cautioned against any attempt to use the visa for employment purposes.

This advisory comes in the wake of an increasing number of instances where Umrah visas have been exploited for unauthorised purposes, raising concerns regarding compliance with visa regulations.

**Saudi Arabia arrests over 20,000 violators of residency, labour and border security laws in a week**

The Saudi Ministry of Interior said that 20,667 individuals were arrested for residency, labour, and border

security violations in a nationwide sweep from April 4 to 10.

Of them, 14,805 have been arrested for residency violations, 3,860 for border breaches and 2,002 for labour violations.

During the operations, 959 were caught attempting illegal entry into Saudi Arabia, predominantly Yemenis (44 per cent) and Ethiopians (53 per cent), with 58 others trying to exit illegally. Nine were arrested for aiding violators.

Furthermore, 63,087 expatriates were referred to regulatory compliance, with 54,732 being referred for travel documentation, 2,828 for travel arrangements, and 6,271 facing deportation.

The ministry emphasized severe penalties for aiding illegal activities, including imprisonment for up to 15 years and fines of up to SR1 million. Reports of violations can be made to authorities via 911 in major regions or 999 and 996 elsewhere.



## 1968 killing of a milkman who was a WWII veteran solved 56 years later

WASHINGTON (CNN): Fifty-six years after a Florida milkman failed to return home after his rounds, his homicide has been solved, closing the oldest cold case in Indian River County Sheriff's Office history.

The emergence of two people who say the suspect confessed to them helped investigators determine who killed Hiram "Ross" Grayam, a decorated World War II veteran who was fatally shot execution style while working on April 11, 1968, according to the sheriff's office.

The victim's son Larry Grayam, who was 16 at the time of his father's death, said the resolution of the case has brought mixed emotions.

"It devastated my family as a young kid, and caused me to actually lead a life of public safety and work as a photojournalist as well," Larry Grayam said.

Hiram Grayam, 47, a married father of three from Vero Beach who was a recipient of the Purple Heart, was last seen by a witness talking to two males who then got into his truck, Sheriff Eric Flowers said Thursday at a news conference.

The witness "said Mr. Grayam engaged them in conversation and announced that he would be back shortly," Flowers added. The next day, Grayam's body and truck were located in a wooded area in what was described as a "chilling scene," the sheriff's office said in a statement.

Over the subsequent years, 16 separate investigations occurred through April 1974 in an effort to solve the case, Flowers said.

In 2006, the case was reopened at the request of a family member.

After the victim's family was interviewed by the media, the suspected killer, Thomas J. Williams, wrote a letter to the editor of a local newspaper saying he had been accused of the killing but denied being involved in it, Flowers said.

"At that point, he wasn't on anybody's radar," Larry Grayam said at the news conference. "He kind of interjected himself into the crime and became a suspect." Williams died in 2016, but two people said prior to his death he confessed to them that he had killed Grayam, the sheriff said. The sheriff's office told CNN investigators were tipped off in February 2022 by an inmate in their jail, who told them Williams had confessed to him. The inmate was a member of Williams' family, the sheriff said.

After receiving that information, detectives tracked down the suspect's ex-wife, who also said

Williams confessed to her, Flowers said. The sheriff's office noted the two individuals who knew of the confession were independent witnesses who did not know each other and had not come forward earlier out of fear for their safety as Williams had threatened them. The witnesses said the suspect had been arrested and convicted several times on other charges, the sheriff's office added.

"Thomas Williams, we believe is our shooter in this case... but we know there's another person out there that knows what happened on that day. We know who he is, and we want someone to come forward from the community to give us more information about that," Flowers said. The sheriff's office said the developments in "the milkman homicide" case "stand as beacons of hope for families like the Grayams, ensuring that no victim is forgotten, and no crime is unpunished."



## Search continues as officer is charged with lying

WASHBURN (AP): A Maine police officer accused of lying about a missing-person case was charged with several crimes, including falsifying a report in which he claimed he had taken the missing man to a hospital, police said.

Washburn Police Sgt. Chandler Cole resigned after being charged with aggravated forgery, tampering with public records or information, falsifying physical evidence, and unsworn falsification, according to court records. He was arrested on March 29.

Cole said he had no comment when reached by The Associated Press.

The charges, first reported by WAGM-TV, stem from the case of a missing person who appeared to be distressed when seen walking along a road on Jan. 30.

Cole reported that he had picked up Erik Foote and dropped him off at a convenience store, but he told Foote's parents he took him to the hospital.

An investigation concluded Cole altered his report to reflect a hospital drop-off. But there is no hospital record to support the claim.

Foote has yet to be located in a case that has riveted the community of 1,500 people, which has organized another search party to look for him this weekend.

The Aroostook County Sheriff's Office is now handling the investigation.

The town is in the process of deciding whether to keep a police department. Washburn's police chief retired Jan. 31, Cole resigned in February and a young officer is working elsewhere, Town Manager Donna Turner said.

## Modi promises jobs if BJP wins

NEW DELHI (Reuters): Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) promised on Sunday to create jobs, boost infrastructure and expand welfare programs if it wins a third term, seeking to address key voter concerns ahead of next week's elections.

The general election, which begins on April 19, will be held in seven stages until June 1. Votes are due to be counted on June 4 and results are expected the same day.

Modi, 73, is widely tipped to win a record-equalling third term on the back of his 10-year record, which includes strong economic growth, infrastructure projects, welfare handouts and aggressive Hindu nationalism.

Surveys, however, suggest unemployment, inflation and rural distress remain issues of concern in the world's most populous country despite its strong economy, and addressing these will be Modi's biggest challenge.

"Our focus is on dignity of life ... on quality of life, our focus is also on creating jobs through investment," Modi said after releasing the manifesto, titled Modi's Guarantee, at the party headquarters in the capital.

## Germany's Chancellor arrives in China

BEIJING (AFP): German Chancellor Olaf Scholz arrived in China on Sunday, kicking off a trip in which he faces a tough balancing act as he aims to shore up economic ties with Berlin's biggest trading partner.

Scholz touched down in the southwestern megacity of Chongqing on Sunday morning, Chinese state broadcaster CCTV said, accompanied by a large delegation of ministers and business executives.

As Western allies are cranking up pressure on Beijing, Scholz is expected to underline that Germany remains committed to doing business with the world's second-largest economy and rejects US-led calls for "decoupling."

His friendly overtures toward China risk sparking ire among Washington and EU partners, which have been pushing back against Beijing's heavy subsidies for industries.

"China remains a really important economic partner," Scholz told journalists on Friday, adding that he

would try to level the playing field for German companies in China.

On the geopolitical front, Scholz will also use his visit to persuade Chinese President Xi Jinping to exert his influence to rein in his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin and help bring an end to the war in Ukraine.

"Given the close relations between China and Russia, Beijing has the possibility to exert its influence on Russia," said a German government source in Berlin. The three-day tour through Chongqing, Shanghai and Beijing is Scholz's second trip to China since he took office.

His first in November 2022 took place under intense scrutiny, as it came swiftly after Xi strengthened his grip on power, and marked the first post-pandemic visit by a G7 leader to China.

Stung then by painful supply chain disruptions during the health crisis as well as by China's refusal to distance itself from

Russia despite Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, Western allies had been scrambling to reduce their reliance on Beijing.

Scholz's visit comes as many of Germany's Western allies confront China on a range of trade issues. A slew of probes into state aid for Chinese solar panels, electric cars and wind turbines are ongoing in Brussels.

The United States is meanwhile investigating national security risks posed by Chinese technology in cars.

With tensions rumbling over Taiwan, US President Joe Biden this week made defense pledges to Japan and the Philippines, while describing behavior by Beijing in the South China Sea as "dangerous and aggressive." Two days before his visit, Scholz held talks with France's President Emmanuel Macron, whose office said the leaders "coordinated to defend a rebalancing of European-Chinese trade relations."

## Sydney knife attacker had mental health issues

SYDNEY (Reuters): The man who fatally stabbed six people in Sydney had mental health issues in the past and there was no indication ideology was a motive in the attack in one of the city's busiest shopping centres, police said on Sunday.

The attacker, identified by police as 40-year-old Joel Cauchi, was known to police in the neighbouring state of Queensland, and police have spoken to his family after Saturday's attack, according to police from both New South Wales and Queensland.

Cauchi's family recognised him and contacted police on Saturday after seeing news reports of the killings.

"The family when they viewed footage of the event on TV thought that may well have been their son and they reached out to authorities," said Queensland Police Assistant Commissioner Roger Lowe.

Witnesses described how Cauchi, wearing shorts and an Australian

national rugby league jersey, ran through the Westfield Bondi Junction mall with a knife. He fatally stabbed six people and injured at least 12 before he was shot dead by Inspector Amy Scott, who confronted him solo while he was on the rampage.

Some shoppers and staff at the mall in Sydney's east tried to stop him and crowds sheltered in shuttered shops.

"This was a terrible scene," New South Wales Police Assistant Commissioner Anthony Cooke told reporters.

"There is still to this point, nothing that we have, no information we received, no evidence we have recovered or intelligence that we have gathered that would suggest that this was driven by any particular motivation, ideology or otherwise."

Cauchi had been diagnosed with mental health issues when he was 17 and had been in contact with police frequently in the past four to five years,

said Queensland police officer Lowe.

Cauchi had not been arrested or charged with any crimes in Queensland, he added. Cauchi led an itinerant lifestyle, had recently been sleeping in his car and had only infrequently stayed in touch with his mother via text messages, Lowe said.

Attacks such as Saturday's stabbing are rare in Australia, a country of about 26 million people with some of the world's toughest gun and knife laws. Cauchi had recently moved to Sydney.

Police said they had searched a small storage facility he had been renting but found no major evidence to indicate an attack was coming. Five of the six people killed were women, and the male victim was a shopping centre security guard, police said.

Those taken to hospital with stab wounds included a nine-month-old baby, who was in a serious but stable condition, police said on Sunday.

## Sudan's uprooted millions pay price for year-long war

CAIRO/PORT SUDAN (Reuters): After fleeing from the war in Sudan to Egypt, Mohamed Ismail says his ambitions are limited to putting food in the mouths of his five children from a meagre monthly salary of about \$100 earned at a paper factory in Giza.

One seven-year-old son sleeps in his arms because of the trauma of hearing explosions before they fled from the outskirts of the Sudanese capital, Khartoum, in January.

A year of war between Sudan's army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has driven more than 8.5 million people from their homes, creating the world's largest displacement crisis and uprooting families multiple times as people struggle to escape to neighbouring

countries with economic and security problems of their own.

Financial challenges have led some to return to the war-stricken capital.

"Being safe somewhere is the most important thing," said Ismail, 42. "We're not even thinking about education because the economic situation doesn't allow that. As a parent that really impacts you, but we are helpless."

Sudan's war erupted on April 15, 2023, over a planned political transition under which the army, led by Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and the RSF, led by Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, known as Hemedti, were competing to protect their interests.

Fighting tore through the capital and unleashed waves of ethnically-driven

violence in the western region of Darfur, before spreading to other areas including Gezira state, an important farming region that became an aid hub where many had sought refuge.

When the RSF entered the state's main city Wad Madani in December, looting and occupying neighbourhoods as they had done in the capital, many were uprooted for a second time.

Ahmed, 50, who had fled with his wife and four children from the capital when the war began, said RSF troops pulled them from a car as they tried to escape Wad Madani in order to seize the vehicle.

They headed east to al-Gedaref, where his 75-year-old mother-in-law died after the arduous, three-day journey.



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Iran Israel Conflict

The effects of a potential war between Iran and Israel would likely have significant repercussions on the broader world stage. Here are some potential impacts:

1. Regional Destabilization: An Iran-Israel conflict could escalate tensions across the Middle East, leading to increased instability in the region. This could potentially draw in other countries and non-state actors, further exacerbating conflicts in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and beyond.

2. Oil Prices and Global Economy: The Middle East is a major hub for oil production. Any conflict in this region could disrupt oil supplies and lead to a spike in global oil prices. This would impact economies worldwide, potentially causing economic downturns and affecting various industries reliant on stable energy prices.

3. International Alliances and Diplomacy: A conflict involving Iran and Israel would likely prompt international responses and alliances. Countries may be forced to choose sides or get involved diplomatically, leading to complex political maneuvering and potentially strained relations between different nations.

4. Humanitarian Crisis: Wars in the Middle East often result in humanitarian crises with large numbers of refugees fleeing conflict zones. This could place additional strain on neighboring countries and international aid efforts.

5. Global Security and Terrorism: A heightened conflict could increase the risk of terrorist activities globally, as extremist groups may exploit the chaos and violence to further their agendas.

6. Nuclear Concerns: Iran's nuclear program is a significant international issue. A war could impact efforts to manage or control this program, potentially leading to broader proliferation concerns.

7. Impact on Global Stability and Trade: Geopolitical tensions can impact global stability and trade flows. Uncertainty and conflict can undermine investor confidence and disrupt supply chains, affecting global markets.

Overall, the effects of an Iran-Israel war would likely be far-reaching and complex, impacting political, economic, and security dynamics around the world. Efforts to prevent such a conflict and to find diplomatic solutions remain crucial for maintaining global stability and security.

The effects of an Iran-Israel war on Pakistan could be significant, given Pakistan's geopolitical position and regional relationships.

Pakistan shares a border with Iran and has historical ties with both Iran and Israel. A conflict between these two countries could lead to heightened security concerns for Pakistan. There could be implications for border security, refugee flows, and potential spillover effects of violence into Pakistan's territory.

Pakistan may face diplomatic pressures to align with either Iran or Israel or to take a neutral stance. This could strain Pakistan's foreign relations and impact its strategic partnerships in the region and beyond.

Pakistan's economy could be affected by disruptions in trade routes and energy supplies resulting from a regional conflict. Pakistan heavily relies on imports of oil and gas, and any disruption in the region could lead to increased prices and economic challenges.

A conflict in the neighboring region could have implications for Pakistan's internal stability. It could exacerbate existing tensions or fuel sectarian or extremist sentiments within the country.

In the event of a conflict, Pakistan could see an influx of refugees from Iran or other neighboring countries affected by the war. This could strain resources and create humanitarian challenges.

Pakistan's foreign policy decisions in response to an Iran-Israel conflict could impact its relations with other global powers, particularly the United States, China, and Gulf countries, which have their own interests and alliances in the region.

Overall, while the specific impacts would depend on the nature and scale of the conflict, Pakistan would likely be influenced by regional dynamics and would need to carefully navigate its response to ensure its own security and stability amidst heightened tensions in the broader Middle East.

Visit opportunity to reinforce common ground

Strengthening Sino-German economic cooperation, rebalancing the trade relations between the European Union and China, and seeking solutions to hotspot issues are reportedly the three goals of German Chancellor Olaf Scholz's ongoing visit to China from Sunday to Tuesday.

Although Berlin last year unveiled its first ever Strategy on China aimed at reducing Germany's dependence on the Chinese market in critical areas and aligning Germany with the EU's push for "de-risking", Scholz, during his reception of visiting Chinese Premier Li Qiang in June last year, reiterated that the German side welcomes China's development and prosperity, noting that Germany rejects all forms of decoupling and that "de-risking" should not be "de-sinicization".

That Germany is not looking to sever its links with China is also proved by the fast increase of German investment in the country, which is its largest trading partner. German direct investment in China reached nearly 12 billion (\$12.77 billion) in 2023, a record high. As a matter of fact, Germany invested more in China between 2021 and 2023 than in the five-year period between 2015 and 2020, according to the Cologne Institute for Economic Research, a leading economics institute of Germany.

The German economy shrank by 0.3 percent last year, battered by inflation, high interest rates and cooling exports, and this year, the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action of Germany expects anaemic growth of 0.2 percent.

The large-scale high-level business delegation that is accompanying Scholz on his second trip to China since November 2022 — when he also led a big team of representatives of leading German companies — as well as the presence of three major Cabinet ministers in his entourage speak volumes of the Scholz government looking to deepen economic and trade relations with the world's second-largest economy. Given their common belief in free trade, economic globalization and multilateral global governance, China and Germany are natural partners in many sectors.

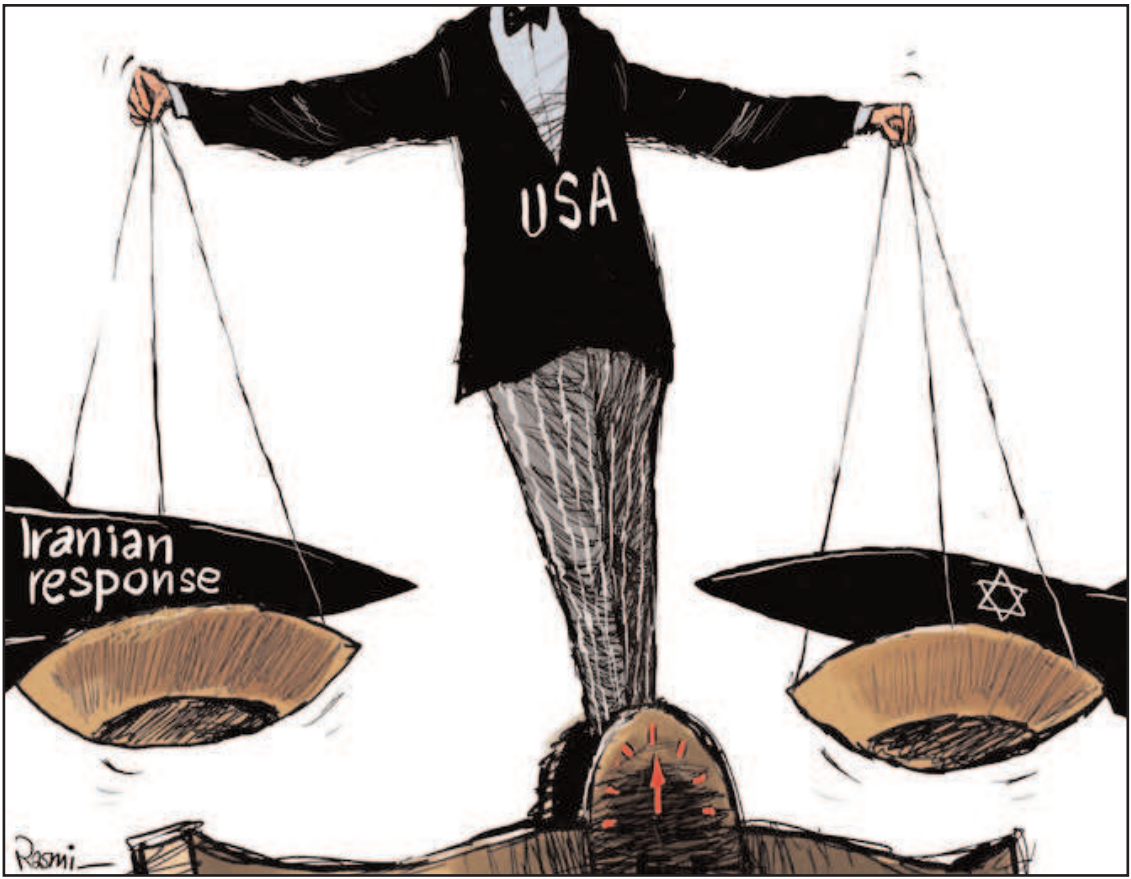
That Scholz talked with French President Emmanuel Macron via video link two days before departing for China shows that the German and French leaders want to coordinate their stance and take advantage of such face-to-face exchanges with Beijing to effectively lubricate ties that may be in danger of faltering due to the EU's anti-subsidy probes into China-made electric vehicles and solar panels.

That the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the Middle East crisis were also covered in the virtual meeting between Scholz and Macron on Friday reflects the great significance Germany and France attach to the important role China is playing in seeking solutions to these hotspot issues, as well as the tremendous potential of the three countries' closer coordination and cooperation in this regard.

Scholz's visit therefore will not only help China and Germany enhance their mutual understanding and trust and deepen their practical cooperation, it also provides an opportunity to help steer China-EU relations on a more steady and stable course.

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After 6 months of tragedy in Gaza, is there any hope of an end in sight?

Yossi Mekelberg

Eid Al-Fitr was a very sad occasion in Gaza this year, during which people mainly celebrated the fact that they had managed to survive the bloodiest war this tiny enclave has ever experienced — and it is no stranger to conflict and the deaths and devastation that come with it.

It is six months since the latest war began. Six months ago, I did not think we would reach this tragic landmark. Although the intensity of the fighting has lessened recently, still there is no end to it in sight, and the fear of regional escalation continues to loom.

At best, the indirect negotiations between Israel and Hamas that are taking place in Cairo might yield a temporary ceasefire and the release of 40 hostages in exchange for Palestinian detainees held in Israeli prisons. But following the assassination this week of three of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh's children and several of his grandchildren, the possibility of such a deal is an even more remote possibility.

To say "at best" is not to belittle the importance of securing any cessation of hostilities during this devastating war, or the release of even some of the hostages; after all, it is the Gazan people and those from Israel taken captive by Hamas who are paying the price for the iniquitous decisions taken by their respective leaderships.

This has always been the case throughout history: Those who are least to blame are those who suffer the most.

Whatever the leadership of Hamas hoped to achieve through the brutal and inexcusable manner of their Oct. 7 attacks remains a mystery.

Yet for all the understandable shock and trauma that Israel suffered on that fateful day, and the anger that followed and continues to linger, the response by the Israeli government was nothing short of a deadly lapse of judgment that cannot be justified, morally or ethically, and has been politically disastrous for the country.

No one expected that Israel would not respond to the attacks by Hamas and go after the organization with great force, as the "casus belli," or the provocation for war, was clear.

However, instead of thinking strategically about an aftermath in which peace negotiations with the Palestinians were still possible, relationships with friends and allies were undamaged, regional stability was not jeopardized, and they had ensured that by the end of this extremely difficult episode the country would be more secure, politically ascendant and hold the moral high ground, but instead of all this a red mist descended on the entire country.

The anger and outrage among the people was understandable. But for those at the helm of government, and especially Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, it was not only anger and a thirst for vengeance that took over,

there were also personal considerations about attempting to redeem themselves after a colossal failure to defend their people from being murdered or taken hostage, and recognition that only by continuing the war would they stand a chance of remaining in power.

For some in the government, the primordial response of revenge co-

tives of "destroying Hamas" and bringing the hostages home, let alone bringing them home alive. Netanyahu continues to maintain that victory is within reach but given his credibility deficit there is hardly anyone, at home or abroad, who believes a word he utters.

From the very beginning there was a complete misunderstanding of the

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hostage, and recognition that only by continuing the war would they stand a chance of remaining in power. For some in the government, the primordial response of revenge coalesced

with the political-ideological motivation of imposing a "new order" in Gaza, including building Jewish settlements there. The devastating consequences to Gaza and its people are clear for all to see. Tens of thousands of people of all ages, most of them innocent civilians with no ties to militancy, have been killed. Many more are either already suffering from starvation or on the verge of it.

Meanwhile, Israel is nowhere close to achieving its stated war objectives of "destroying Hamas" and bringing the

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consequences of a war between a state, especially one that defines itself as a liberal democracy, and a movement that is defined by armed resistance and an extremist ideology, with little consideration of, or sense of obligation to, international conventions, the rules of war or international humanitarian law.

Moreover, Israeli authorities fell into the trap set by Hamas. They overreacted, handing other forces in the region an opportunity to join the

war against them and to radicalize the population in Gaza, particularly the young. They lost the initial sympathy and worldwide support they had enjoyed. They walked into this trap with their eyes wide open.

Israel has lost support even among its closest friends and allies. It stands accused in the International Court of Justice of genocide. Some countries have already imposed on it arms-supply bans. Relations with the US, its main ally and backer, are at an all-time low. And Israeli society is deeply polarized.

Not only is there no victory in sight but Israelis in the northern and southern parts of the country have had to evacuate their homes for security reasons during the past six months. Hamas does not seem ready to lay down its arms, and the hostages continue to languish in captivity.

And yet still there is hardly any reflection on the damage caused by Israel in conflating the culprits of Oct. 7 with the entire population of Gaza, either by treating them as collateral damage in the war against Hamas or, even worse, by judging them deserving of collective punishment.

A limited military operation, in terms of time and scope, with the required patience to target those behind the Oct. 7 attacks, one that avoided hurting the rest of the population in Gaza, would have enabled a more successful response, built trust with the local population for the day after the war, prevented the deterioration of regional security, and kept allies on side instead of alienating them.

Among the less rational members of Israel's war Cabinet, there is a rejection of the notion that international support is crucial and that it depends upon adhering to standards of behavior in line with international humanitarian law.

As a result, that support has evaporated, which has played right into the hands of Hamas but also provoked Iran and its proxies.

As a result, Hamas is emboldened as it attempts to drive a harder bargain during the indirect negotiations with Israel, while Tehran, sensing Israel's weakening position among its traditional allies, might yet retaliate with excessive force to the killing of Iranian military commander Mohammed Reza Zahedi in Damascus this month.

After six months of war, with no end in sight, it is apparent that the damaging consequences of the conflict, the psychological as much as the material, will take many years to repair. Relations between the Israelis and the Palestinians have reached rock bottom and will not, cannot, return to their prewar, so-called status-quo.

There is only one way out of these dire straits and it is for alternative leaders to emerge who recognize that without peace and reconciliation, death and misery will continue to reign supreme.

GCC-EU ties are improving, but obstacles remain

Christian Koch

Relations between the Gulf Cooperation Council and the EU are on a positive trajectory, in general. The points of contact between the two have intensified markedly in recent years on both the governmental and institutional levels, guided by a Strategic Partnership Document proposed by the EU in May 2022.

Europe has underlined its determination to play a stronger role in regional security by contributing to the deescalation of tensions in the wider Middle East, among other things. An example of this was the participation of 19 EU member states in the recent Aspides naval operation to help safeguard shipping in the Red Sea.

The partnership agreement represents the key policy guidelines from the European side for enhancing its relationship with the GCC, with a focus on six main areas: trade and investment; the green transition and energy security; regional security and stability; humanitarian and developmental issues; governance, reform, and human rights; and institutional cooperation.

There has been particular improvement in the field of institutional relations over the past two years. In addition to the 27th GCC-EU Joint Council and Ministerial Meeting that took place in Muscat on Oct. 9-10 last year, the two sides reached an agreement on a number of other institutional mechanisms, including a work plan covering the years 2022 until 2027 that is continuously updated; a mechanism for regular, structured GCC-EU regional security dialogue, involving four working groups; and a high-level forum on regional security and cooperation to complement the work that is done during official GCC-EU meetings.

The first of the structured regional security talks took place in Riyadh in January, and a high-level forum will convene on April 22 in Luxembourg.

Other recent gatherings include the 31st meeting of the GCC-EU Joint Cooperation Committee, in February 2023; the 24th meeting of the Political Committee (January 2023); the 12th GCC-EU Macroeconomic Dialogue (November 2022); the fifth Trade and Investment Dialogue (March 2023); and the inaugural meeting of the GCC Aid and EU Services Committee (September 2023). In addition, the seventh GCC-EU Business Forum took place in November 2023 in Bahrain.

During the past two years there has also been an increase in the number of official visits by high-level European officials to the Gulf, including European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen; European Council President Charles Michel; and the EU's foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell, who has, in fact, visited GCC member countries several times. Such high-level visits have become the norm rather than the exception, as was the case in the past.

In addition, numerous EU commissioners have visited GCC countries to hold talks, highlighting a determination to build closer relations across a variety of policy issues. In return, GCC Secretary-General Jassem Albudaiwi has traveled to Brussels several times, most recently last month.

In terms of fostering closer ties between the EU and GCC, the appointment of Luigi Di Maio, an Italian former foreign minister, as the new EU special representative for the Gulf region has been particularly important. Since taking up the position in June 2023, he has engaged with all sectors in the GCC, making it clear from day one that his first task was to listen to regional stakeholders, and gain their insights and perspectives, before deciding on a clear plan of action for the EU.

Writing in a regional

newspaper in November, Di Maio wrote: "We can write the perfect strategy in Brussels, but we need to work together (on) how we can converge and execute our shared ambitions and priorities. The real point is now to prioritize with the countries of the GCC ... a common map to go ahead."

His approach has, on the whole, been well received within GCC states and, as a result, it can be argued that he has been able to overcome any initial skepticism about his appointment and gain a high degree of acceptance among Gulf policy leadership.

Closer institutional relations between the EU and GCC provide an important foundation for more substantive and broader ties. Equally relevant has been the EU's acknowledgment of the active role the GCC states are playing in their neighborhood, characterizing them as "emerging players on the international stage," and underlining their growing influence, regionally and globally.

As the Gulf experiences unparalleled levels of economic and societal change, combined with a volatile regional security climate, Europe must continue to acknowledge the new dynamics in play in the region or risk seeing its interests fail to receive proper consideration.

Regarding the war in Gaza, the initial position taken by European nations of unconditional support for Israel met with deep disappointment inside the GCC, leading to charges of hypocrisy, double standards, and moral failure, in particular when compared with the contrasting EU position on Ukraine.

Only as the Israeli onslaught in Gaza intensified and public protests across the continent increased did the European position begin to shift. Calls for an immediate ceasefire began to gain momentum by the end of last year, but some would argue this was too little, too late in terms of preventing the greater calamity of dragging the entire Middle East, once again, into a period of prolonged instability and uncertainty.

There is, therefore, a lot of work to be done. In terms of the current crisis in the Middle East, it is to be hoped that the upcoming EU-GCC high-level forum in Luxembourg will serve as a further step in developing a common plan of action for the two sides to follow.

Of equal importance, however, is progress on the many other issues contained in the Strategic Partnership Document, including the revitalization of EU-GCC Free Trade Area negotiations; the establishment of a dedicated EU-GCC expert group on energy and the climate; and an EU-GCC ministerial meeting on humanitarian assistance. Particular emphasis must be placed on increased mobility of Gulf residents at the youth, cultural and educational levels. This includes the provision by European nations of visa services for all GCC countries as soon as possible.

What all this suggests is that GCC-EU relations remain a work in progress, in which ties must continually be reassessed and adjusted according to the demands of changing circumstances.

There has, indeed, been a greater degree of convergence of late on key policy issues and the two sides have reiterated their shared interests in a wide variety of areas.

Yet, while a degree of momentum in cooperation between the GCC and EU has been apparent, there is at the same time a sense of deja vu, given the fact that numerous pronouncements in the past either failed to materialize in practice or did not live up to expectations.

Europe remains the partner of choice for GCC states in many domains. The more effective the ties between them, and the ways in which they can be structured, the more sustainable the relationship will prove to be.



# Germany’s quandary shows that China ‘de-risking’ is hard to do

De-risking has perhaps become the key buzzword in European policy on China in recent years. Yet, attempts to deliver on this ambition have been very uneven.

Take the example of German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, who will pay his latest visit to China on Sunday, accompanied by a big business delegation that includes representatives of leading brands such as Siemens, Mercedes, Volkswagen, and Bayer.

Last year, his government drew up a strategy on Beijing that called for reduced dependence on China. Yet a recently published report by the German Economic Institute revealed there is still a mountain to climb in achieving this.

German direct investment in China has risen to a record &euro;11.9 billion (\$12.7 billion), and the report highlights the ways in which the nations’ economies remain deeply intertwined in relation to a wide range of products and raw materials. It found Europe’s largest economy still relies heavily on the Asian giant for about 200 commodities, only a small decrease from an initial 213 during the period covered by the study.

While total German imports of Chinese goods fell by almost 20 percent between 2022 and 2023, the overall percentage of product groups for which Germany relies on China for more than 50 percent of its imports, including chemicals, computers, and solar cells, has not changed significantly. Moreover, in some categories, such as pharmaceuticals and rare earth elements such as scandium and yttrium, Germany’s dependence on China has increased.

Unsurprisingly, the conclusion of the study is that “a clear structural de-risking — in the sense of a continuing trend toward further significant declines in

imports — is therefore not yet apparent.”

The key challenge is perhaps that the German policy on “de-risking” is vague on specific measures or binding targets. Scholz might contemplate this core point during his trip.

He will visit Chongqing, which is located on the Yangtze River in central China and widely considered to be the largest city in the world, with about 32 million people living in its greater administrative area; Shanghai in southeastern

Andrew Hammond

a longstanding and deep economic dependence on the Asian giant.

The context in which to consider this is the attempts by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and other top EU officials, including foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, to try to enforce a stronger, bloc-wide stance on China. Given the differing views among the 27 member states, Brussels is struggling to find much common

foreign policy focal point for Beijing, including its role as an economic market. China, a rising superpower, had, until recently at least, generally enjoyed growing influence across much of the continent.

In the aftermath of the pandemic and Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, Brussels has therefore sought to unite the bloc around a stronger policy on China. Even on issues in which breakthroughs have been made with Beijing in recent years, such as the

Nonetheless, there are clear differences in outlook between the more hawkish Eastern European nations, such as the Czech Republic, Poland, and Lithuania, and Western counterparts, such as France, Spain, and Germany that do much more bilateral business with China.

Perceptions of a divided EU have been publicly highlighted by several Chinese officials, including EU ambassador Fu Cong, who has questioned whether all 27 member states back the agenda set by Borrell and von der Leyen. He said: “Europe has not formulated a coherent policy toward China” and that it felt like “people quarreling with each other.”

The positions of Western European nations such as Germany and France are particularly problematic for Brussels given that both of them want to continue to engage extensively, economically, with China.

Berlin’s deep and longstanding business ties with Beijing are widely documented so it is no surprise that Scholz is more equivocal than von der Leyen and Borrell on the issue of China.

However, what has surprised many people is the relatively soft stance adopted by French President Emmanuel Macron. During a joint visit to Beijing last year with von der Leyen, the French president, remarkably, took a business delegation that was estimated to number about 50, and deployed the language of economic reciprocity rather than de-risking.

Taking all of these things together, this challenging background explains why so many European eyes will be on Scholz’s latest visit to China. While Germany is walking a political and economic tightrope in terms of bilateral relations, overall EU relations with Beijing remain frozen and could yet go from bad to worse this year.

# Israeli intelligence failed, but not for the reasons you think

Daoud Kuttab

There is no doubt that the once-powerful, seemingly omnipotent Israeli intelligence services failed the country on Oct. 7. But the failures are not limited simply to the fact that they were unable to predict and prevent the attacks by Hamas; the biggest failure has been what has happened since then.

The first failure following the attacks was their inability to correctly survey and assess the likely results of a war on Gaza, in particular the ability to ensure the conflict would be a short one and would secure a decisive win.

Having seen the results of the attacks on Oct. 7, all that the Israeli intelligence services needed to do was listen to and analyze what the leaders of Hamas were saying at the time. Those leaders made it clear that they knew Israel would react harshly, and stated publicly that they were ready for all possible retaliatory action.

It has not been publicly revealed whether the Israeli intelligence services were aware, or believed, that the Hamas leadership would be able to survive nearly six months of devastating war in Gaza. But if they did, and made any effort to warn the political leadership, it is clear that the Netanyahu administration paid little or no attention to it.

Most likely, though, Israeli arrogance and exaggerated self-confidence blinded them to the benefits of adopting a cool, level-headed approach instead of diving into the heavily populated Gaza Strip and taking on what we now know to be a ready Palestinian resistance to the Israeli invaders.

The failures of Israeli intelligence were also evident in the mistaken belief that if Gaza and its people were hit very hard militarily, Hamas would simply lay down its arms, release the hostages and surrender.

It is true that Palestinians did indeed leave their land and homes once before, in 1948, falsely believing that they could later return home. It is also true that Israel was able to defeat a coalition of Arab countries in six days in 1967. But the Israeli intelligence services clearly failed to see a major change among the Palestinian people in more modern times; they learned their lessons about the futility of ever leaving their homes, preferring to die there than become refugees for, in some cases, a second or third time.

Simple historical research into the modus operandi and ideological beliefs and practices of fundamentalists in general, and Islamists in particular, would have revealed many examples of how extremists might react when under attack.

All Israeli Jews needed to do, for example, was look to the historical examples of the Jewish zealots who became trapped in the desert enclave of Masada in the 1st century. Unable to repel their attackers and under siege, these fundamentalists choose mass suicide rather than surrender.

Similar examples of religious fundamentalists refusing to capitulate abound throughout history.

Therefore the idea, repeatedly stated by Israeli authorities and their supporters, that Hamas should

simply surrender reflects a lack of understanding of the lessons of history and the ideological thinking of people who not only do not fear death but even welcome it in accordance with their ideological beliefs.

Another major failure of Israeli intelligence was the belief that the international narrative about the war could be controlled simply by preventing journalists from entering Gaza. The impact of social media, and the work of the Palestinian journalists inside Gaza, clearly did not factor into the Israeli calculus, and not even the systematic killing of journalists and the bombing of media offices, or attempts to cut internet connections to Gaza, could prevent damning reports and photographs getting out.

The inability to predict or control worldwide reactions to the war represents another major failing by Israeli authorities. As US

now ready to do so. Even the US, which repeatedly used its power of veto within the UN Security Council to block resolutions that Israel did not want in the aftermath of Oct. 7, eventually ran out of patience after continually going to bat for the country while its leaders continued to ignore, or even defy, advice from their allies in Washington.

Of course, one should not lay all of the blame at the feet of the Israeli intelligence services. The failures that led to Oct. 7, coupled with the concerns of Netanyahu and his allies about loss of their political power — and in the case of the prime minister, possible jail time in the fraud and corruption cases he faces — appear to have resulted in Israel’s political leaders ignoring the advice of friends, allies and, most likely, their own intelligence services.

Netanyahu and his ultra-right-wing, racist Cabinet have dug themselves into a big hole they are unable to

***All Israeli Jews needed to do, for example, was look to the historical example of the Jewish zealots who became trapped in the desert enclave of Masada in the 1st century.***

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Sen. Tim Kaine pointed out, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu might have succeeded initially in pulling the wool over the eyes of the Biden administration and many other world leaders. Eventually, however, they began to realize they were being taken for a ride by the smooth-talking Netanyahu and started to change course.

The initial carte blanche Israel was granted by its allies for its response to Oct. 7 remained in place for a while but eventually was withdrawn.

Expecting that this wave of worldwide support from the media and politicians would continue indefinitely was a major error in judgment.

In fact, countries that once opposed recognition of Palestinian statehood are

get out of. The tragedy is that while they continue to attempt to do so, the military operations that they ordered continue to kill innocent Palestinians and others.

This so-called “defensive” war is in reality a war of revenge and it quickly became an absolutely chaotic military operation with no goals that could realistically be achieved and no political horizon for what happens next, as Israeli authorities continue to go from one mistake to another without any coherent plan or proper, intelligent thinking.

The most sane and smart advice from the intelligence services now should simply be a call for authorities to cut their political losses, and the human cost, by ending this ill-advised campaign in Gaza.

# Arab Americans should not settle for the lesser of two evils

Wouldn’t it be nice to hear Palestinian and Israeli activists and leaders call out the extremists on both sides, instead of acting like the defenders of one side only.

I was on a radio show in Chicago recently and, while I condemned Hamas for the horrific violence of Oct. 7, I also condemned the Israeli government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Instead of joining me, the two pro-Israel guests immediately went into “defend Israel mode,” insisting that the problem is that Hamas uses “human shields” and Israel has no choice but to kill Palestinians.

I tried to get them to criticize Israel’s government, but they refused. In fact, read many of the op-eds in Western newspapers and you will see activists on both sides closing their eyes to the atrocities committed by their side, while aggressively and often exaggerating the atrocities committed by the other.

One of the questions I was asked related to the #AbandonBiden movement, which has successfully convinced many Arab and Muslim Americans to vote against President Joe Biden’s reelection in the

Democratic primaries. They asked if Arabs “see” that, by rejecting Biden, they will “get” former President Donald Trump, “who moved the US Embassy to Jerusalem?”

I was asked: “Biden is the lesser of two evils to you, right?” But why do Arab Americans have to pick the lesser of two evils when we vote? In doing that, we end up with “evil” either way.

Why do we not have leaders who are in the center, who see the hate, the extremism and the violence of both sides — Israel’s government and Hamas extremists?

Wouldn’t that be a novel idea: picking someone who speaks the truth, not one-sided political propaganda. Someone who believes that both Hamas and the Netanyahu government are equally guilty of atrocities, war crimes and the killing of women, children and the elderly?

Because that is the truth that neither side wants to admit: their side is just as wrong as those they are criticizing.

I was asked what Biden could do to regain the support of the Arabs and Muslims who voted against him in the Democratic pri-

Ray Hanania

maries, including in six swing states. I said that I had been reading the opinion columns being pushed by the mainstream American news media, which is partisan and today leans to the far left. They were defending Israel, defending Biden and blaming everything on one side. I tried to say that, maybe, these columnists should speak out about their own activists and leaders, who condemn one side, the Palestinians and Hamas, and say nothing about the crimes of the side they support.

In other words, the president cannot regain the backing of those who support the #AbandonBiden movement simply by pandering to them politically.

Biden empowered Hamas to attack Israel by refusing to condemn the Israeli assaults that took place in the two years prior to Oct. 7, during which time he was the so-called leader of the free world. He also needs to roll back his support of the Israeli government’s actions in more than a rhetorical manner: by cutting American funding and arms supplies to Tel Aviv. Biden must stop

allowing one side to continue its carnage.

Do both and maybe that will suggest to Arab and Muslim Americans that Biden cares about peace, not politics. That he opposes violence of all kinds, not just violence against political allies who support him or that he favors. That he applies principles and morality to the actions of both sides and judges them harshly, condemning them both at the same press conference without worrying about the political repercussions.

Arabs and Muslims in America are no different to the rest of the American public. They want reason. They want moderation in policies and a leadership that is smart and driven by the principles that make America the true democracy it can be.

All someone needs to do is step away from the extremist sidelines and into the center. And speak the truth. Speak the truth about the Israeli government’s violence and its rejection of peace over the past two decades under Netanyahu and his late mentor Ariel Sharon.

Horrific leaders. Netanyahu set the tone for the environment of hates

in Israel who oppose the creation of a Palestinian state, with that hate-driven rejection of peace spurring the expansion of extremism among Palestinians.

Speak the truth about Hamas and other Palestinian extremists who have opposed the peace process since Day 1, when Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin signed the Oslo I Accord in Washington in 1993 — a moving moment that I witnessed personally. All these people who loudly scream, both in their rhetoric and their writings, that the other side is evil and that their side is the victim are only encouraging the growing carnage and conflict between Palestinians and Israelis. They are not offering reason or common sense and they are not embracing the principles of morality or peace.

The lesser of two evils is not a real option. Those who embrace it and advocate it over acknowledging the truth, no matter whether they are Palestinian or Israeli, Arab or Jew, are only being evil themselves.

For a future of peace for Palestinians and Israelis, the war is against the lesser of two evils, not each other.

# Gaza war is redefining Türkiye’s sociopolitical narratives

Sinem Cengiz

Türkiye on Tuesday announced restrictions on trade with Israel, while Turkish Airlines has suspended flights to the country, marking Ankara’s first significant measures against Israel after six months of war in Gaza. Although the decision came after Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan condemned Israel for preventing aid from reaching the people of Gaza, the move seems to have been motivated by a confluence of factors spanning the political, societal and international realms.

At the political level, there is an understanding that the ruling Justice and Development Party, known as the AKP, and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan have undergone a period of foreign policy

reflection since the nationwide local elections of March 31 resulted in a victory for the opposition. This was the first time since Erdogan came to power 22 years ago that his party had been defeated across the country at the ballot box. It prompted a reassessment of strategies after more than two decades of dominance. Erdogan acknowledged that the election had not gone as hoped and that it would mark “a turning point” for him and his party.

Although Türkiye’s economic crisis is seen as the leading reason for the decline in the AKP’s votes, the government’s stance toward the ongoing Gaza war is believed to have been another influential factor. While it is not clear to what extent the Gaza war affected the

election results, it certainly did affect the political and societal narratives in the country, as the Palestinian issue occupies a significant place in the hearts and minds of the Turkish people and the country’s political parties.

Since Oct. 7, Erdogan has escalated his criticism of Israel, engaging in a rhetorical confrontation and implementing various diplomatic measures, such as recalling ambassadors, suspending talks and backing Palestine on the international stage.

Ankara also became the largest humanitarian donor to Gaza, along with the UAE, and advocated the idea of a guarantor system to work toward a two-state solution. Despite these efforts, Türkiye’s actions were deemed inadequate not only by Arab streets but

also by its domestic critics, particularly the opposition parties, which made suspending trade with Israel a central campaign theme.

The conservative New Welfare Party, known as the YRP, emerged as a vocal critic despite once being an AKP ally. Heavily criticizing the government for not halting its ongoing trade ties with Israel, the YRP even went as far as saying that every vote for the AKP was like sending a bullet to the Israeli military for it to use in its ongoing “genocide” in Gaza. The YRP based its argument on various reports that have shown that trade with Israel was not only being conducted by private companies, but also by companies run by indi-

viduals close to Erdogan. The YRP, which last year entered the Turkish parliament thanks to its alliance with the AKP, decided to run independently this time and it turned out to be the third most successful party in the local polls.

The YRP’s criticism of the government’s policy toward Israel seems to have triggered a wave of disapproval among traditional AKP voters, who started to see the YRP as an alternative. Although it is uncertain how this was reflected in the votes, Erdogan was quoted by local media as saying: “Unfortunately, even on an issue like the Gaza crisis, for which we did everything we could and paid the price, we failed to fend off political attacks and convince

some people.”

On the societal level, reactions to the government’s stance have manifested in protests and expressions of dissent. For example, dozens of citizens gathered in Taksim Square in central Istanbul last Saturday, calling on the Turkish government to sever trade ties with Israel. The detention of demonstrators prompted angry reactions from opposition parties and society. During election rallies, people showed their reaction to the government’s policy with banners demanding “End the trade with Israel.” Some people even wrote “Gaza” on their ballot papers on election day. So, this sort of societal reaction was not surprising.

Although Israel claimed that the election

outcome reflected a backlash against Erdogan’s anti-Tel Aviv stance, the reality suggests otherwise.

There have even been expectations of Türkiye going further with its actions against Israel, such as a trade embargo and the closure of the Kurecik Radar Station in eastern Türkiye, which the YRP argues is used to protect Israel.

On the issue of trade, Ankara has long believed that collectively punishing Israeli society by cutting ties altogether would also negatively affect the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. Even after the 2010 Mavi Marmara massacre, Türkiye did not end its bilateral trade relations with Israel.

However, despite all diplomatic and humani-

tarian calls, Israel continues its atrocities in Gaza. Therefore, Türkiye’s latest measure to restrict some of its exports to Israel is important, underscoring the significance of the Gaza war in reshaping domestic and foreign policy narratives.

The Gaza war is no longer a mere foreign policy issue, it has become a game-changer in Turkish politics. This is due to both the magnitude of the unfolding humanitarian crisis in Gaza and the fact that, in Türkiye, domestic and foreign policy issues are intricately intertwined.

Looking ahead, while Türkiye will not have any more major elections for several years, it remains to be seen how the Gaza war will continue to shape its domestic and foreign agenda.





# Economic growth forecast to rise 2.8%

ISLAMABAD (INP): In Pakistan, growth is forecast to rise at 1.9% in FY2024 (ending on 30 June 2024) and 2.8% in FY2025, up from the 0.2% contraction last fiscal year.

Gwadar Pro stated on Sunday quoting Asian Development Bank (ADB) economic forecasts report for Asia April 2024.

According to the report, the shift back to positive growth will come from a recovery in both agriculture and industry.

However, domestic

demand will remain constrained by the surge in living costs and tight macro-economic policies.

Growth is projected to remain subdued in FY2024 and pick up in FY2025, provided economic reforms take effect.

Real GDP is projected to grow by 1.9% in FY2024 driven by a rebound in private sector investment linked to progress on reform measures and transition to a new and more stable government.

An expansion in private

consumption and a rise in workers' remittances from a move toward a market-determined exchange rate should buttress growth.

However, low confidence, to support recovery in industrial output in the latter half of the year.

Construction will remain weak due to elevated construction costs, higher tax rates on property transfers implemented in the FY2024 budget, and rationalization of public investment to consolidate the fiscal position.

Growth in services is projected to strengthen in FY2024 as recovery in agriculture and industry benefit services.

If reforms are implemented, growth is forecast to restart gradually this fiscal year and improve slightly next year.

Inflation is projected to moderate somewhat this year, and more next year, under stabilization policies.

Improving women's financial inclusion is critical to strengthen growth.

## PIAF stresses need for large scale structural changes in power sector

### F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Industrial & Traders Associations Front (PIAF) Chairman Faheemur Rehman Saigol has stressed the need for large scale structural changes in power sector, controlling line losses of DISCOs by using modern technology, and customer-oriented business approach, as the public exchequer has incurred a loss of over Rs400 billion in the fiscal year 2022-23 by the power distribution companies.

The PIAF Chairman, quoting the media report, observed that that the performance of distribution companies (DISCOs) throughout 2022-23 remained very poor, and the expected power sector reforms were not achieved. Given the ongoing poor performance, it is apparent that, under the existing circumstances, the current DISCO setup is unlikely to be able to deliver the desired results.

No significant improvement has been witnessed on part of some DISCOs in this regard. During

FY2022-23, the overall actual losses of DISCOs were 16.38% against the actual loss of 16.69% in FY 2021-22. The actual T&D losses are much higher than the allowed T&D losses for FY 2022-23, which is 12.21%. Unfortunately, the majority of DISCOs have not adhered to the NEPRA given targets, except FESCO, GEPCO, and K-Electric which have managed to keep their losses below the levels or equal to targets set by NEPRA. However, other DISCOs have exceeded these limits, which contributed to a substantial loss of over Rs. 166 billion to the national exchequer.

Faheem Saigol said that it is an undeniable fact that DISCOs are deliberately drawing less power than their demand, despite being provided with an adequate quota on account of loadshedding based on Aggregate Technical & Commercial losses policy. The AT&C based loadshedding is still being carried out and DISCOs particularly PESCO, QESCO, SEPCO and HESCO have

considered it an easy path for them to manage the recovery rather than to put the efforts and ensure maximum collection.

On recoveries, the report said it is observed that only one DISCO i.e., IESCO has significantly achieved the target of 100% recovery in fiscal year 2022-23. Moreover, GEPCO, FESCO, and MEPCO are nearest to the target and achieved the recoveries of 98 to 99%. Similarly, PESCO, LESCO and K-Electric have crossed the figure of 90%. Moreover, HESCO and SEPCO remained the same as in previous year, somewhere in middle with reported values of 75.9 and 68.2%. However, QESCO has been witnessed as worst performing DISCO among all with the reported position of 36.9%.

On System Average Interruption Frequency Index (SAIFI), the report said that none of the distribution companies have been able to meet the SAIFI standard of 13. Regarding System Average Interruption Duration Index (SAIDI), the report said

that almost all DSICOs are far away from the set Standard of 14 minutes. On the issue of pending connections, the performance report said that a total of 278,815 connections were not given to the eligible consumers despite the fact that they made payments due to which more than 1100MW demand/load could not be served, which is a serious matter of concern as the ample generation capacity is available.

Loadshedding for an average of 2 to 3 hours daily is being carried out in IESCO, FESCO, GEPCO, LESCO, MEPCO and SEPCO. In contrast, PESCO, QESCO, HESCO and K-Electric have reported loadshedding duration hours 4.5 to 10.25 hours, said the report. It is further observed that distribution companies especially PESCO, QESCO, SEPCO, HESCO and K-Electric are carrying out loadshedding as per AT&C losses criteria which is not in line with the requirements Performance Standards (Distribution) Rules 2005 and has never been recognized by the NEPRA.

## CAA tightens monitoring of airspace due to ME tensions

KARACHI (INP): In response to heightened tensions in the Middle East, Pakistan's Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has implemented stricter monitoring procedures for incoming flights.

Media reports citing aviation sources reveal new instructions issued to Pakistan Air Traffic Control (ATC). These directives mandate close scrutiny of all flights entering Pakistani airspace from Afghanistan and Iran. Additionally, the CAA is

keeping a watchful eye on any suspicious activity within Pakistan's western airspace.

This move comes as the Foreign Office spokesperson voiced Pakistan's deep concern over the escalating situation in the Middle East. The spokesperson emphasized Pakistan's ongoing assessment of the situation with worry and its months-long calls for international intervention.

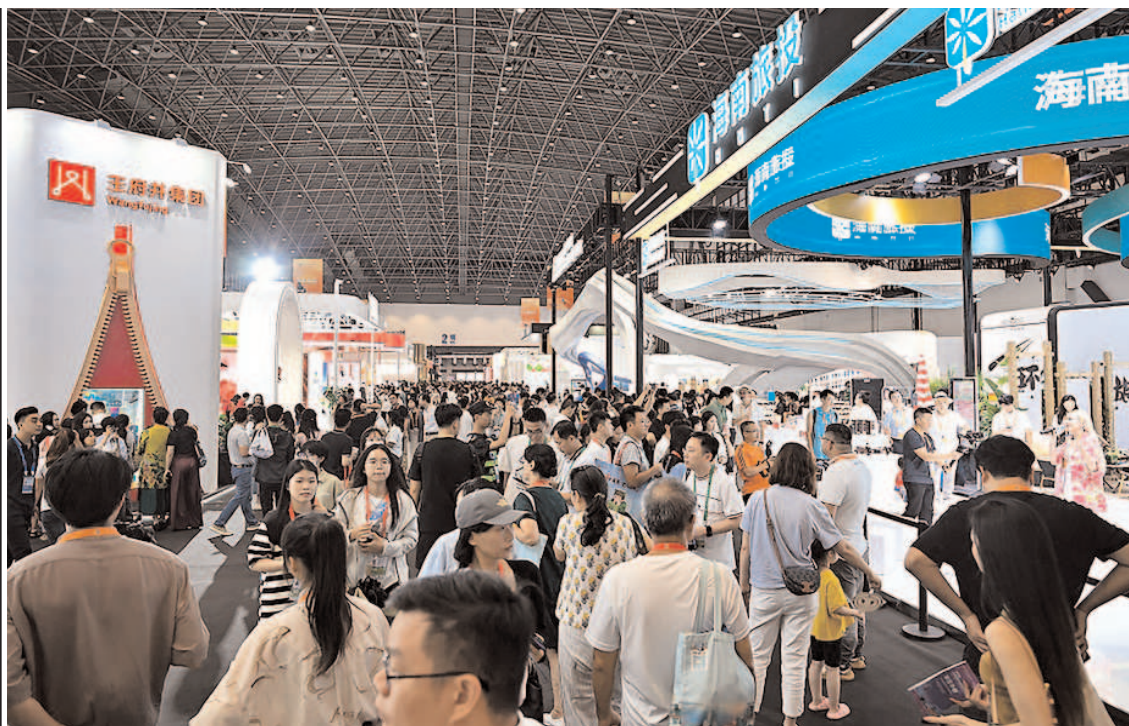
"Stalling diplomacy has demonstrably led to today's developments," the

spokesperson remarked. Pakistan, reiterating its previous stance, has urged for an immediate cessation of hostilities and a ceasefire in Gaza. The recent events, according to the spokesperson, expose the shortcomings of diplomacy and its potential for severe repercussions.

"With the failure to maintain a ceasefire, the urgent need now is to stabilize the situation and restore peace. All parties must exercise restraint and work towards de-escalation," the spokesperson concluded.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia has also echoed these concerns, expressing deep unease over the escalating regional tensions and their potential ramifications.

It underscored the importance of fulfilling international security responsibilities, highlighting the sensitivity of the issue for regional and global peace. The kingdom warned of serious consequences should the crisis escalate further.



HAINAN: People taking keen interest at stalls in China's 4th International Expo.

## EV charging infrastructure sees robust growth in Q1

BEIJING (APP): China's electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure experienced steady growth in the first quarter of 2024, according to industry data.

The China Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Promotion Alliance reported the addition of 716,000 charging piles during the January-March period, marking a 13.2 percent increase compared to the same period in 2023.

By the end of March, the nation's charging pile count had exceeded 9.31 million, reflecting a significant year-on-year increase of 59.4%. This expansion comes alongside a robust performance in the NEV sector, where both production and sales figures continue to exhibit rapid growth.

In the first quarter, NEV output saw a substantial year-on-year increase of 28.2 percent, reaching nearly 2.12 million units, while NEV sales climbed 31.8 percent to 2.09 million units.

NEVs comprise a broad category that includes Hybrid Electric Vehicles, Plug-in Hybrid Electric Vehicles, Battery Electric Vehicles, and Fuel Cell Electric Vehicles, while the term EV typically refers specifically to BEVs that are powered solely by electricity.

## Saudi master developer KEC inks two deals

RIYADH (Arab News): Saudi master developer Knowledge Economic City Co. is set to deliver 396 residential apartments within the first phase of its mixed-use project Al-Alya, having signed two contracts.

In Tadawul filings, the Saudi Stock Exchange-listed firm announced signing two deals with Elkhoreiji Commerce and Contracting Co., totaling SR288.6 million.

The first agreement entails fully implementing contracting works for additional residential buildings in the first phase of the Al-Alya mixed-use project. This comprises a group of four houses, offering 132 apartments of various sizes valued at SR117.5 million, excluding value-added tax.

The second contract involves the implementation of electromechanical, finishing, gardening, and site coordination works for a group of eight residential buildings valued at SR171.13 million, providing 264 apartments.

## SNGPL's gas theft crackdown: 62 connections disconnected in raids

### F.P. Report

LAHORE: During the ongoing crackdown against gas pilferers, SNGPL continued raids in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Islamabad, disconnecting another 62 connections; Rs 1.5 million fine imposed.

In Lahore, the regional team disconnected 1 connection on illegal use of gas.

In Multan, 11 connections were disconnected on illegal use.

In Peshawar and Karak, the company disconnected 21 connections on account of direct use of gas and illegal use of gas and amount

of Rs. 0.56 million against gas theft cases.

In Sahiwal, 3 connections were disconnected on illegal use of gas.

In Faisalabad, the team disconnected 2 connections on illegal use of gas while imposing fine of Rs 0.102 have been booked against gas pilfers.

The regional team of Bahawalpur disconnected 2 connections on illegal use of gas while another one on use of compressor.

In Gujranwala, four connections were disconnected on illegal use of gas while one on use of compressor. The team also imposed a

fine of Rs 0.42 against gas theft cases.

The regional team of Gujrat disconnected 4 connections on illegal use of gas and also imposed a fine of Rs 0.00031 against gas theft cases.

In Islamabad, one connection was disconnected by the team on illegal use of gas.

The team of Rawalpindi disconnected 6 connections on illegal use of gas while imposing fine of Rs 0.12m against gas theft cases.

In Mardan, 5 connections were disconnected by the team and also booked an amount of Rs 0.3 million.

## Asia consequential position in world: Meher

LAHORE (APP): Kyrgyzstan's Honorary Consul Meher Kashif Yousif has said that Asia holds a consequential position in the world due to its large population, strategic locations, rich mineral resources and diversity.

Presiding over a workshop on "Importance of BRICS for Pakistan" organized by Gold Ring Economic Forum here Sunday, he added that Pakistan, as an important partner in the region has sought membership in order to align with this trend. With its abundant natural resources, strategic location and fifth-largest world population, Pakistan's absence from

BRICS could have repercussions in the future if not addressed.

He said Pakistani leadership should consider BRICS while assessing ground realities.

He said BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) can pave the way for sustainable development and growth in the region.

New doors for trade and investment will be opened under the supervision of developed countries like China and Russia.

He said the individual who coined BRICS has predicted that these nations' economies will dominate the world by 2050.

He said a golden oppor-

tunity has been presented to these advancing countries under the leadership of this group.

Meher Kashif said that multilateralism, trade and investment, loan provision, and a burgeoning economy are the future progressing in the right direction.

He mentioned that one of the main components of this forum is the NDB, New Development Bank. The emergence of a BRICS currency is also expected to tackle and mitigate the dominance of the dollar. Six other countries have been invited to join this union: Argentina, Ethiopia, Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab from January 1st, 2024.

## Economic growth linked to durable regional peace

LAHORE (APP): SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry's former president Ifthikhar Ali Malik has advocated the cause of achieving durable peace in the region, a prerequisite to economic growth, prosperity and development for all countries of South Asia.

Talking to a delegation of traders led by Muslim Khan Buner from KP here Sunday, he said South Asia has long been plagued by instability and conflicts that have hindered the region's progress and potential.

One of the major concerns contributing to this instability has been the presence of terrorist sanctu-

aries on Afghan soil, which have posed a severe threat not only to Afghanistan but to neighboring countries including Pakistan, he added.

He said counterterrorism cooperation and collaboration closely with regional and international stakeholders, especially Pakistan, to eliminate terrorist sanctuaries can help eradicate the breeding grounds for extremist elements and bring about much-needed stability.

About economic integration, he said, "We must embrace economic integration initiatives within the South Asian region and enhanced economic coop-

eration can create an environment conducive to peace, prosperity, and development for all."

He believed that by taking these steps, the Afghan government can play a pivotal role in shaping a more secure and prosperous South Asia, as this in turn, will foster economic growth, improve living standards, and create a brighter future for all nations in the region.

SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry's former president Ifthikhar Ali Malik said, "We are committed to supporting any positive efforts towards peace and development in South Asia."

## BMP proposes central bank to review credit policies in SMEs favor

### F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce & Industry's Businessmen Panel has proposed the central bank to review its credit policies by fixing a special quota to finance the small and medium enterprises, as only the large industries have been availing government's all major concessional export loaning facilities, with very limited financing is left for the SMEs which are the backbone of the economy, contributing around 40 percent to the national gross domestic product (GDP).

The FPCCI former president and Businessmen Panel Chairman Mian Anjum Nisar said that the

government with a view to help grow the businesses will have to take solid measures to strengthen the industry, especially the SMEs, saving the livelihood of millions of workers associated with the small industries.

The government will have to make a visible reduction in markup rate to help grow the businesses, particularly the SME sector, as Pakistan needs millions of jobs annually.

We need to highlight the critical role of Small & Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in driving sustainable economic development in Pakistan. With an estimated 5.2 million businesses, the SME sector is a cornerstone of our economy, fostering employment,

growth, and export diversification.

The FPCCI former President observed that despite their significance, more than 5 million SMEs face a significant credit gap, receiving limited credit, far below the neighboring countries.

The State Bank of Pakistan is committed to increasing SME credit share to 17% by 2023. To achieve this, we must advocate for targeted and fixed SME allocations in concessional financing schemes, particularly those aimed at the export-oriented sector.

Mian Anjum Nisar said that the State Bank of Pakistan has launched various policies for the promotion of SME finance, but the required results were

still awaited. It was unfortunate that banks were always reluctant to provide financing to SMEs as their financing continued to show negative growth.

In its endeavor to provide concessional financing to the export-oriented sector, the SBP has introduced the Export Finance Scheme, offering financing as low as 3%, in stark contrast to the earlier Export Refinance Schemes (ERF) markup rates that reached 21%.

However, it is a matter of great concern that a substantial portion of this financing has been availed by large corporate industries, leaving no room for SMEs. The current economic challenges demand a targeted approach to sup-

port the SMEs, as they are among the hardest-hit and in desperate need of assistance.

The FPCCI former president said that a small section of public sector and Islamic banks and few DFIs were active in financing SMEs sector. Despite significantly contributing to the GDP, exports and employment generation, the financing percentage of SMEs remained pathetic in general.

He urged the government that SME policy should focus on addressing specific issues faced by the SME sector and help check reluctance of financial institutions to provide financing to SMEs.

He said that the FPCCI and the BMP fully support

the proposed measures for promotion of SME finance including the establishment of credit guarantee company for offering risk sharing facility for SMEs. He urged all the stakeholders to collaborate to meet the objectives of the SME policy and support the priority sectors.

Mian Anjum Nisar emphasized the importance of SMEs for the growth and development of the economy.

He called for early and speedy access to finance for SMEs, including creation of enabling regulatory framework, market development, awareness creation and capacity building programs for banks and SMEs and introduction of SME financing targets for banks

and DFIs.

He stressed that a separate and comprehensive policy for the SME sector was the need of the day to promote contribution of SME sector for inclusive growth.

There are over five million SMEs across the country. These represent about 90 percent of Pakistan's businesses, and contribute 35 percent to GDP with over 30 percent to export earnings.

In fact, it is a key pillar of national economy, employing about 40 percent of the workforce for different abilities---skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled.

These diversified enterprises are engaged in a variety of industrial, commercial and services activities.

The long list of businesses include textiles, leather, plastic, sports goods, handicraft, IT, construction, materials, consumer goods, horticulture, fisheries, gems, healthcare, agricultural produce, and energy.

The SMEs are vulnerable to financial strains, increased cost of production, supply chain disruption, and drastic decrease in demand, due to limited financial resources and weaker access to financing and management.

Resultantly, there has been gross decline in their sales and profitability in recent months, which has caused deterioration in business conditions; some SMEs going out of business and others facing numerous problems.





## In brief

## National hockey training camp

KARACHI (Monitoring Desk): The players will report to Karachi today for the national training hockey camp under the auspices of the Pakistan Hockey Federation (PHF). In this regard all arrangements have been completed by PHF. Meanwhile, Secretary General PHF Haider Hussain met with Shehla Raza, President of National Hockey Camp Management. Olympian Ayaz Mehmood, Olympian Waseem Feroze, Olympian Rehan Butt, Olympian Muhammad Saqlain, Member Selection Committee Olympian Nasir Ali and Secretary General Haider Hussain were included in the meeting. In the meeting, PHF president Shehla Raza instructed to equip the players with the best training. "I am hopeful that the players will perform well in the Sultan Azlan Shah Cup", said Shehla Raza. President PHF Shehla Raza instructed to discover new talent in national sports. Olympian Nasir Ali told the meeting that talented players have been included in the national camp. Coach Olympian Rehan Butt will do special work on penalty corner and attacking skills. The players will also be equipped with defensive strategy and pressure game technique, said coach Olympian Muhammad Saqlain. Special attention will be paid to the physical fitness of the players, coach Olympian Wasim Feroze said. Coach Olympian Ayaz Mehmood briefed that the training will be conducted in two sessions, morning and evening and the training manual has been prepared.

## Hasan Ali reaches England

KARACHI (Monitoring Desk): Pakistan pace bowler Hasan Ali has reached England to represent Warwickshire County Cricket Club in the upcoming season of the County Championship. Hasan Ali's contract was renewed ahead of the 2024 season after playing for Warwickshire and Birmingham Bears last year. On his arrival at the Edgbaston Cricket Stadium, the right-arm pacer was warmly welcomed by the players and coaching staff of the Warwickshire team. "I have reached my second home," said Hasan Ali. "I was excited to be here and finally I am here." The 29-year-old pacer shared his excitement to rejoin his teammates at Warwickshire before departing from Pakistan. "Looking forward to joining my team Warwickshire for the county season. Here's to a brilliant season together boys! Remember me in your prayers, everyone," he posted on his official X (formerly Twitter) account. Hasan Ali took 33 wickets across formats in his first season at Warwickshire last year. Prior to that, he represented Lancashire in the previous edition of the County Championship and took 25 wickets at 20.60 in his debut season. He has played 24 Tests, 66 ODIs and 50 T20Is for Pakistan, picking a total of 240 wickets across three formats.

## Alcaraz withdraws from Barcelona Open

BARCELONA (Agencies): Carlos Alcaraz has withdrawn from the Barcelona Open with an injury. The Wimbledon champion and world number three has won the title in the past two years, but has been suffering from a right forearm problem. Alcaraz, 20, had also withdrawn from this week's Monte Carlo Masters, where he was drawn to play Canada's Felix Auger-Aliassime.

# Liverpool's title hopes hit by loss to Palace

LIVERPOOL (AFP): Liverpool's Premier League title challenge suffered a potentially fatal blow as Crystal Palace won 1-0 at Anfield on Sunday.

A first home league defeat in 29 games for the Reds leaves Jurgen Klopp's men two points behind Manchester City and level with Arsenal, who can go top with victory over Aston Villa later on Sunday. Eberechi Eze's early goal handed the Eagles a vital win in their battle for survival as they move eight points clear of the drop zone.

However, Liverpool's final season under Klopp is unravelling. The League Cup winners were on course for a quadruple just a few weeks ago. But after crashing out of the FA Cup to Manchester United, Liverpool succumbed to a first home defeat in any competition for 14 months when Atalanta stormed Anfield on Thursday to take a 3-0 first leg lead in their Europa League quarter-final tie.

Klopp's men have now won just three of their last eight games in all competi-

tions and are showing clear signs of fatigue after already having played 51 games this season. Slow starts have been a recurring theme of Liverpool's struggles of late and they were again forced to come from behind.

Alisson Becker made his long-awaited return in goal for the home side but he had no chance when Eze was left with a simple finish from Tyrick Mitchell's cross. Palace were millimetres away from a second moments later when Andy Robertson produced a remarkable goalline clearance to deny Jean-Philippe Mateta after Virgil van Dijk's slip let the French striker through.

Liverpool had to resort to set-pieces to put the Palace defence under pressure in the first half. Wataru Endo's scuffed effort came back off the crossbar. Dean Henderson then produced a stunning save to prevent Luis Diaz levelling at the back post with an acrobatic effort.

Klopp reacted at half-time with the introduction of Dominik Szoboszlai and Trent Alexander-Arnold's return after two months out

quickly followed when Conor Bradley went down injured. Diogo Jota and Cody Gakpo were also sent on for the rescue mission from the bench.

Jota looked certain to equalise when picked out by Szoboszlai but the Portuguese forward's finish hit Nathaniel Clyne on the line with the goal gaping.

At the other end, Alisson showed why he is one of the world's best goalkeepers with a remarkable stop to turn Mateta's strike over from point-blank range. Liverpool galloped immediately up the other end and Curtis Jones slotted wide with just Henderson to beat.

Mohamed Salah had one final chance to at least snatch a point, but his goal-bound effort was brilliantly blocked by Mitchell in stoppage time. Unless Liverpool produce a stunning fight-back against Atalanta in midweek, Klopp will have just two more games at Anfield before his momentous reign comes to an end. But what looked like it could be a glorious goodbye is now at danger of turning into a damp squib.



LIVERPOOL : Mohamed Salah of Liverpool FC and Tyrick Mitchell of Crystal Palace, battle for a ball, during the Premier League match.

## Fakhar Zaman impressed by Azam Khan

KARACHI (Monitoring Desk): Pakistan's top-order batter Fakhar Zaman has appreciated young wicketkeeper batter Azam Khan for his courage and hard work during the recently concluded physical fitness camp in Kakul.

Twenty-nine cricketers attended the pre-season camp at the historic and iconic Pakistan Military Academy in Kakul from March 26 to April 6, with the training and drills designed by Pakistan Army experts and strategists.

During the camp, there was a focus on team building aimed to enhance the physical and mental strength of the players, ensuring they were in the best condition to face the challenges ahead.

Under the guidance of experienced trainers and coaches, the players underwent a comprehensive training regime tailored to elevate their fitness levels, agility, leader-

ship, strategic thinking and overall performance on the field.

Azam Khan's consistent hard work during the fitness camp brought him to the forefront, despite being criticized for his fitness issues in the past.

Fakhar Zaman praised the explosive wicketkeeper highly in an interview on the Pakistan Cricket Board's (PCB) official YouTube channel.

"What impressed me the most is what Azam Khan has done. We were not expecting him to undergo such tough training, and naturally, his physique is such that we didn't anticipate him to take up such challenges," Zaman said.

"Despite that, the way he has pushed himself, even climbing mountains when we were hiking, I mean, we couldn't believe he would make it to the top. If we all show such courage, it could be very beneficial."

Zaman also reflected on the experience of undergoing a rigorous fitness regime at Kakul during the holy month of Ramadan while fasting.

"It was quite tough when I was here back in 2018, but this time, it wasn't so tough, due to the holy month of Ramadan," Zaman said.

"The training they conduct here is tough, but since it was Ramadan, they took great care and lightened the workload a bit."

"When your fitness is good, you also get good results, and our aim here was to build team bonding, which worked well. The training sessions, both on and off, have been excellent, and of course, there will be benefits from that," he added.

Notably, both Fakhar Zaman and Azam Khan are part of Pakistan's squad for the upcoming five-match home T20I series against New Zealand, starting from 18 April.



MONTE-CARLO: Stefanos Tsitsipas of Greece poses for a photograph with the trophy after his victory over Casper Ruud of Norway in the singles final match.

## PCB provides update on Ihsanullah's elbow injury

LAHORE (Monitoring Desk): Pakistan fast bowler Ihsanullah has departed for Manchester, England to see a renowned orthopedic surgeon about his elbow injury, the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) confirmed on Sunday.

Ihsanullah, who has featured for Pakistan in one ODI and four T20Is, suffered an elbow injury last year.

The 21-year-old has been out of action since playing for Pakistan in the ODI series against New Zealand at home last year in April.

"Fast bowler Ihsanullah left for Manchester, England, on Sunday morning for his crucial appointment on Monday with esteemed orthopedic surgeon, Professor Adam Watts, regarding his elbow injury," PCB stated in a press release.

"Professor Watts specialises in hand and wrist surgery, shoulder and elbow procedures, sports injuries, and trauma surgery."

"Ihsanullah's franchise, Multan Sultans, has collaborated with the PCB to secure this appointment."

"The PCB, as Ihsanullah's parent body, will cover all expenses for his treatment and rehabilitation."



"Further updates will be provided by the PCB following Professor Watts' assessment and diagnosis."

Notably, the right-arm pacer was bowling in the nets ahead of the Pakistan Super League (PSL) season nine but could not receive the green signal from the medical team and was consequently ruled out of the entirety of the tournament.

Ihsanullah played a pivotal role in Sultans' run to the final of last year's edition as he ended up as the second-highest wicket-taker of the tournament, picking up 22 wickets in 13 matches.

## Monte Carlo Masters Stefanos Tsitsipas beats Casper Ruud to win third title

MONTE CARLO (Agencies): Stefanos Tsitsipas beat Casper Ruud 6-1 6-4 to win his third Monte Carlo Masters title in four years.

Greece's Tsitsipas, 25, dominated the opening stages and sealed the first set inside 36 minutes.

Norwegian Ruud fought valiantly in a tense second set, which was level at 4-4 before Tsitsipas pulled away in the final two games.

"It's been a very difficult time for me, so to be back on the podium and winning, it's amazing," he said.

The victory took Tsitsipas to seventh in the world rankings and he fell to the floor in emotion after his win.

"I am extremely grateful

to my friends, family and everyone behind this journey," he added. "To win three [titles] is just unbelievable - it was a nerve-racking game but I am extremely happy."

The success concluded a significant tournament for Tsitsipas as he also beat top-10 players Alexander Zverev and Jannik Sinner to reach the final.

He joined Rafael Nadal, Bjorn Borg, Thomas Muster and Ilie Nastase in the list of players to win three or more titles at Monte Carlo.

Tsitsipas committed to a fearless style of play, dominating on the forehand and challenging Ruud's tactics of playing deep from the court.

He broke Ruud's serve in the third game of the first set and the Norwegian, who struggled for fluency, could not recover.

The 25-year-old Ruud improved significantly in the second set and a tense seventh game lasted 13 minutes, but Tsitsipas survived three break points.

In an impressive all-round performance, he saved all eight break points he faced and converted four of his own eight break opportunities.

Both players are set to play in the Barcelona Open next week, where defending champion Carlos Alcaraz has been forced to withdraw with a forearm injury, but Rafael Nadal is set to make his comeback.

## West Indies women team arrives in Karachi

ISLAMABAD (APP): The West Indies women's cricket team arrived in Karachi on Sunday to take on Pakistan in eight limited-overs matches at the National Bank Stadium.

The three ODIs, which were part of the ICC Women's Championship 2022-25, would be played from April 18 to 23 followed by five T20Is from April 26 to May 3, said a press release.

As per schedule, Pakistan and West Indies would hold training sessions at the National Bank Stadium from 2.30pm on Monday.

Pakistan and West Indies would train at the National Bank Stadium on Tuesday.

On April 17, Pakistan and West Indies will train at the National Bank Stadium. Afterwards,

opposite captains Hayley Matthews of the West Indies and Pakistan's Nida Dar would hold pre-series press conferences and will also participate in the pre-series photo-shoot with the trophy. On April 18 and 21, the ODIs would start at 9:30am with the toss taking place at 9am.

Meanwhile, both sides are scheduled to hold training sessions April 20 and 22. The third ODI would commence on April 23 at 3:30pm with the toss taking place at 3pm.

**Kiwis reach Islamabad for T20 series:** The New Zealand team landed in capital on Sunday to play the five-match T20 series against Pakistan. PCB officials welcomed the New Zealand team at the airport.

Later, the team was driven

to hotel in tight security.

Meanwhile, Pakistan cricketers will reach Rawalpindi after Eidul Fitr holidays today. As per schedule, the team will practice at the Pindi Cricket Stadium on Monday, while New Zealand have opted for rest.

However, both the team will hold training sessions at the Pindi Cricket Stadium on Tuesday and Wednesday. Captains Babar Azam of Pakistan and New Zealand's Michael Bracewell will take part in pre-series photoshoot followed by pre-series media conferences on Wednesday.

The T20I series will begin on April 18. The Kiwis will play three matches at Rawalpindi and two matches on April 25 and 27 at Lahore's Gaddafi Stadium.

## Pakistani squash players win big at Australian Jr Open

LAHORE (Monitoring Desk): The young Pakistani squash players, Mahnoor Ali and Mahwish Ali, sponsored by the Bilquis and Abdul Razak Dawood (BARD) Foundation, achieved remarkable success by winning gold medals at the Australian Junior Open 2024.

The championship took place at the prestigious Melbourne Sports and Aquatic Centre in Albert Park, Victoria. The tournament highlighted young Pakistani female players' exceptional performance across diverse categories, bringing pride to the nation and reaffirming its longstanding position in the sport.

Mahwish Ali, a 15-year-old rising star in the world of squash, is the newest BARD fellow of the Bilquis and Abdul Razak Dawood Foundation. With several victories and titles to her name, including 21 gold medals and multiple championships, she embodies determination and perseverance.

Similarly, Mahnoor Ali, also a recent recipient of support from the BARD



Foundation, has established herself as a significant figure in the squash world at the age of 11. She has won 11 gold medals to date. Her dedication and extraordinary skill have propelled her to numerous victories, such as the Asian Junior Gold Medal, Scottish Junior Open Gold Medal, and much more, serving as an inspiration to us all.

In this impressive series of matches, these two young Pakistani female players fully showed their dominance and diligence at the Australian Junior Open 2024 with notable victories. Mahnoor and Mahwish displayed outstanding skills in the Girls U-13 and Girls U-17 divisions respectively.

"It's incredibly gratifying to witness Pakistani girls embracing their poten-

tial. The achievements of these two talented girls exemplify the limitless capabilities of Pakistani women and girls. We're honoured to have them as BARD fellows and are committed to providing constant support throughout their journey. Their success serves as an inspiration for other young girls to move forward and pursue their dreams," Abdul Razak Dawood, President of the BARD Foundation, said.

The BARD Foundation has always played a vital role in promoting talent and paving the way for successful careers for many. The initiative undertaken by the foundation believes in changing fortunes by helping competent individuals realise their potential as champions in their chosen fields.

The purpose of the foundation is to develop strong and confident individuals, with a special emphasis on skill construction and improvement. The foundation extends assistance to anyone who has the spirit of adventure by becoming a part of their transformative journey.

## O'Sullivan says World C'ship should leave Crucible

LONDON (AFP): Snooker great Ronnie O'Sullivan has called for the World Championship to be moved from the Crucible Theatre in Sheffield, northern England, suggesting China and Saudi Arabia as alternative locations.

The Crucible has hosted every edition of snooker's showpiece tournament since 1977 but the seven-time world champion believes the time has come to leave the venue, where the maximum capacity is under 1,000 seats.

O'Sullivan will attempt to win a modern-day record eighth world title when the Championship starts on April 20, having recently taken part in events in Riyadh, the



Saudi capital, and the Chinese city of Yushan.

"I don't like the Crucible," the 48-year-old Englishman told The Sun newspaper. "I don't think you can get in and out of it. I think definite-

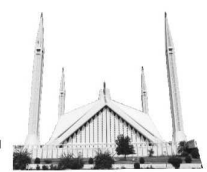
ly it's a wise decision to take it away from Sheffield.

"Still have a tournament there. Why not? But just not the world championship over 17 days. It's a massive circus and you need a massive space to accommodate it."

O'Sullivan added: "I think Saudi Arabia would be great. They've got the resources and would do it great. If you're going to take it to China, you'd have to take it to Shanghai. Or another major city like Shenzhen or Guangzhou."

"It'd be done properly. Courtesy cars will be laid on. Food will be there. Hotels will be great. Everything would be paid for. Prize money would be astronomical."





## In brief

### AIOU announces exam schedule

ISLAMABAD (APP): Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) is conducting online (in camera) Matric and FA programs for international students offered in autumn 2023 semester from April 22. According to the examination of Associate degree (BA, B.Com), BBA, B.Ed and BS programs for local students will commence from April 23 throughout the country. Date sheet is uploaded on the university website (www.aiou.edu.pk) and roll number slips are uploaded to students' CMS portals. Vice Chancellor, AIOU, Prof Dr. Nasir Mahmood has instructed the examinations department to ensure transparency and provide all facilities to the students during the examinations. Special teams will make surprise visits to the exam centers.

### IRSA releases 132,800 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Sunday released 132,800 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 140,800 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1414.82 feet and was 16.82 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 29,200 cusecs and 25,000 cusecs respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1107.05 feet, which was 57.05 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 28,800 cusecs and 25,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 15,200, 38,100, 33,700 and 7,600 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 69,100 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 8,800 cusecs were released from River Chenab at Marala.

### Police arrests accused

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Capital Police (ICP) has successfully apprehended an accused who was allegedly involved in child molestation case and obtained his physical remand from the relevant court to carry out further investigations. A public relations officer said on Sunday that, on April 10, 2024, the Kirpa police team received information from a plaintiff who stated that my 10 years old son was sexually assaulted by an accused namely Imdad Hussain. Upon receiving the information, the Kirpa police team registered case no. 161 under section 376-PPC. DIG Operations Syed Shahzad Nadeem Bukhari took immediate notice of a molestation case registered at Kirpa police station. He directed the officials to apprehend the culprit on a priority basis. A specialized police team was formed under the supervision of SSP Investigation. The SSOIU and Kirpa police teams utilized all scientific and technical resources and successfully apprehended the accused involved in this case. The police also took a physical remand of the accused and further investigation is underway. DIG Operations appreciated the performance of the team and emphasized that crimes of this nature against women and children are utterly unacceptable and that those responsible will be held accountable to the fullest extent of the law.



ISLAMABAD: Families arriving back from their home town after Eid-ul-Fitar celebrations at Fiazabad Bus Stand.

## Bilawal highlights climate crisis amidst rain-related losses in country

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chairman Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has conveyed heartfelt condolences for the tragic loss of lives resulting from multiple accidents amidst heavy rains across various regions of the nation, notably Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. He also voiced his concern regarding the incidents of lightning strikes exacerbated by the changing climate conditions during the inclement weather.

According to the press release issued by the Media Cell Bilawal House here Sunday, the PPP Chairman lamented the loss of lives caused by lightning strikes as well as other rain-related incidents in South Punjab, including its districts Bahawalpur, Bahawalnagar, Rahim Yar

Khan, Muzaffargarh, Rajanpur and Lodhran.

He urged the provincial government to deploy all available resources to fulfill its duty in aiding the rain-affected victims throughout Punjab. Bilawal Bhutto expressed regret over the loss of lives in accidents during the rains in various areas of the province, including the lower and upper Chitral areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

He urged the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government and related disaster management agencies to provide immediate assistance to the rain victims, aiding citizens trapped in various problems including landslides. He further conveyed his heartfelt grief and sorrow for the tragic loss of lives and property resulting from lightning strikes and other accidents

in various areas of Balochistan, including Chaman, Dera Bugti, and Kohlu. He expressed confidence that the People's government in Balochistan will stand by the rain victims, ensuring they are not left alone during this challenging time.

Bilawal Bhutto highlighted the surge in lightning incidents nationwide as indicative of climate change, emphasizing the imperative role of universities and research institutions in addressing this issue. He underscored the necessity for exceptional spirit and leadership at the government level to shield citizens from climate change impacts. Bilawal Bhutto stressed that confronting the threats posed by climate change demands substantive action rather than superficial discourse or avoidance.

## Price controller revises bread loaf (Naan/Tandoori Roti) rates

RAWALPINDI (APP): The controller of prices and supplies/ Deputy Commissioner has revised the rates of open market loafs (Naan-Roti) in the city. Following the Punjab Price Control of Essential Commodities Ordinance 2023 (V of 2024), the price controller issued a notification regarding the rates.

According to the noti-

cation issued on Sunday, the unit price for 100g Roti Tandoori (per Loaf) will be Rs. 16.0 and that of 120g Naan (per loaf) will be Rs. 20.0.

The notification intimates that new prices for mentioned essential commodities for the open market will come into force with immediate effect in revenue limits of the district.

No person or shopkeeper shall charge or cause to be charged the prices of the aforementioned items offered for sale, in excess of the rates fixed, says the notification.

The controller directed the shopkeepers and sellers are required to display rate lists at conspicuous places for the information of the general public.

## RWMC ensures sanitation of Rawalpindi on Eid despite rains

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi Waste Management Company (RWMC) on Sunday continued its cleanliness drive despite rains and deputed additional sanitary workers to clean and dredge major drains to avoid urban flooding. According to the RWMC spokesman, the RWMC carried out the cleanliness of nullahs and choked drains during continued rainfall over the last two days to ensure sanitation in several city areas.

He said that additional staff had been assigned duties in three shifts to ensure cleanliness round the clock so that some sanitation-related problems could not become hurdles

in the smooth flow of water. He informed that RWMC workers removed hundreds of tons of waste in the Rawalpindi city areas while drains blocked during the rain had been opened immediately to have no problem with drainage in the city.

He said that complaints received on social media platforms were also being addressed promptly. Meanwhile, the RWMC completed its special cleanliness operation devised for Eid days in the entire district and was also making all-out efforts to keep the hill station, Murree clear for tourists.

He added that all graveyards, parks and recreation-

al places of Rawalpindi and its tehsils had been cleared while waste had been lifted from all the surrounding areas of Masjids, adding lime powder had also been sprinkled around all masjids, Eidgahs and public places during Eid days.

In case of any complaint, citizens were asked to register their complaints on helpline number 1139, which would be rectified immediately, he added. RWMC has appealed to the citizens not to throw garbage and plastic bags in nullahs and drains, which cause blockades, adding that RWMC would utilize all resources to keep the city environment friendly.

## Islamabad Police commences house workers, tenants registration drive

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad police on Sunday launched a door-to-door campaign "Knock the Door" to register house workers and tenants in order to improve safety and prevent crime.

The officers from the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) of Islamabad collected data on 242 house servants across 520 houses within Khanna and Bani Gala police station areas, a police public relations officer said on Sunday.

The registration drive is part of an effort to maintain law and order in the capital and keep a check on potentially dangerous individuals by gathering information on tenants and domestic workers, the police

aimed to reduce the risk of theft and other crimes committed by people posing as ordinary citizens.

The police teams visited various neighborhoods to gather data and talk to residents about any challenges they face. The officers also advised citizens to verify the identity of anyone collecting data while in plain clothes.

The unregistered tenants and employees may pose a risk to public safety, as they can be involved in theft and robbery.

Following the campaign, Islamabad police hoped to create a safer environment for residents by using their resources effectively.

## Police conducts search operation in Noor Colony

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi Police, on the special directive of City Police Officer (CPO) Khalid Mehmood Hamdani on Sunday, launched special search operation in Noor Colony and adjoining areas in the jurisdiction of Sadiqabad Police Station.

According to police spokesman, heavy police contingents, Elite Force, Special Branch personnel and ladies police under the supervision of senior police officers of Sadiqabad Police Station conducted search operation.

During operation, police have searched 33 houses, 11 shops while 52 persons were interrogated.

However, no arrest was made on the occasion. The spokesman informed that the search operations to net criminals and proclaimed offenders are being conducted in different areas regularly.

## DIG Operations pays surprise visit to PS Margalla

ISLAMABAD (APP): Deputy Inspector General (DIG Operations), Islamabad Capital Police Syed Shehzad Nadeem Bukhari on Sunday paid a surprise visit to Margalla police station.

A public relations officer said that during the visit, DIG Operations commended two police officers for good performance and checked the records, roznamcha, front desk, record room, lockup, investigation officers' rooms and residential barracks. He said that inappropriate behaviour toward citizens will not be tolerated under any circumstances. He directed the police officials to utilize all available resources for the convenience of citizens. Deputy Inspector General (DIG Operations), Islamabad Capital Police Syed Shehzad Nadeem Bukhari also stressed to take effective steps immediately for the prevention of serious crimes, apprehension of the accused and recovery of stolen goods. He further said that no effort will be spared in providing relief to the citizens, the protection of life and property of the citizens is among the top priorities of the Islamabad Capital, he maintained.

## Over 230 candidates vie for 23 vacant seats of NA, PAs: ECP

ISLAMABAD (APP): A total of 239 candidates were vying for 23 vacant seats in both national and provincial assemblies during the upcoming by-elections slated for April 21, an official of Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) said.

A total of 239 candidates will contest in the by elections, with 50 of them competing for vacant National Assembly seats. Notably, the first lady Aseefa Bhutto Zardari has already been elected unopposed for NA 207, he said.

He said that a total of 23 candidates were vying for the vacant seats in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly, while 154 candidates were seeking their fortunes in Punjab. In Sindh, Zubair Ahmed Junejo secured his seat unopposed on PS-80.

Twelve contenders are in the running for the empty seats in the Balochistan Assembly. The Commission has schedule to commence printing the ballot papers for the by-elections upon the finalization of candidate lists by the relevant returning officers on March 30, he added. He stated that necessary election materials had been provided to provincial election commissioners. Additionally, district Returning Officers and Returning Officers are fulfilling their duties according to the established election schedule.

He said close coordination has been maintained by the commission with the Ministries of Interior and Defense as well as provincial law enforcement agencies.

On March 13, the Commission announced the schedule for by-elections across 23 National and Provincial Assembly seats. These elections encompass six National Assembly seats, twelve Punjab Assembly seats, two seats in the

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly, one seat in the Sindh Assembly and two seats in the Balochistan Assembly, all slated for April 21, he told.

ECP empowers ROs, POs with first-class magistrate authority for by-elections: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has granted Returning Officers (ROs) and Presiding Officers (POs) powers equivalent to those of first-class magistrates to ensure the seamless execution of the forthcoming by-elections on five national and 16 provincial Assembly constituencies scheduled for April 21.

District Returning Officers (DROs) and Returning Officers (ROs) were vested with magisterial powers as per the notification issued by the ECP, in adherence to Section 193 of the Election Act 2017.

The Presiding officers have the authority to employ these powers during the by-elections across five national and 16 provincial assemblies in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Balochistan, spanning from April 20 to 22, until the official declaration of final results for the candidates.

Returning Officers (ROs) and District Returning Officers (DROs) are empowered to take action against candidates who violate the code of conduct set forth by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP). These officers have the authority equivalent to that of a Magistrate first class concerning offenses outlined in Sections 169 and 171. They can also initiate legal proceedings under Section 190 of the Code of Criminal Procedure and conduct summary trials as per Chapter XX of the code. It is important to note that by-elections will be conducted on April 21 for 21 constituencies of National and Provincial Assemblies.

## Ahsan Iqbal to receive APO Meritorious & Distinguished Award-2024 next month

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Professor Ahsan Iqbal would formally receive the Asian Productivity Organization (APO) Meritorious and Distinguished Award-2024 during its Governing Body's 66th session to be held in Kuala Lumpur next month for his inspiring, exemplary achievements and contributions leading to centrality of productivity. "The APO has revealed the winners of the APO, Regional Meritorious and Distinguished Awards, 2024 and Planning Minister Professor Ahsan Iqbal is one of the recipients in Asia Pacific who is the winner among the others," a news release by the Planning Ministry said on Sunday.

These prestigious awards honor individuals who have made significant

contributions to productivity improvement across the Asia Pacific.

This was the fourth time that Professor Ahsan Iqbal has assumed the charge of the Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives. First time he became the planning minister in 1997 and continued this responsibility till 1999 then served from (2013-2017), and again from (2022-2023). Besides, he served as a Deputy Chairman Planning Commission of Pakistan.

Previously, Ahsan Iqbal was also appointed as the United Nations Development Programme's for the Asia Pacific region, for his tireless efforts in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In Addition, Ahsan Iqbal was hailed as the testament to his pivotal role in fostering bilateral relations

and economic prosperity. Under his dynamic leadership, several initiatives were taken which includes vision 2010, vision 2025, Outlook 2035, 5Es framework, 4RF framework for flood, China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), five New Economic Corridor and their alignment with 5Es framework, National Centers for Excellence, Main Line-1 (ML-1) railway project, Karachi Circular Railway (KCR) KCR and others. Furthermore, other remarkable achievements includes, initiating the PQI (Productivity, Quality, and Innovation) initiative, driving excellence in Pakistan's industries, increasing the development budget for higher education by an impressive 68 percent, demonstrating his unwavering commitment to the future of our youth.

## Six outlaws netted, narcotics, weapons recovered

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Capital Police (ICP) apprehended six outlaws from different areas of the city during the last 24 hours and recovered drugs and weapons from their possession.

A public relations officer said on Sunday that, responding to the directions of DIG Operations Syed Shahzad Nadeem Bukhari, the Islamabad Capital Police has intensified its crackdown against the criminal elements in order to eliminate the crime from the city.

Meanwhile, the Aabpara police team arrested an accused namely Adnan

Khan and recovered one 30-bore pistol from his possession. Likewise, the Karachi Company police team arrested two accused namely Abdul Samad and Bilal and recovered two 30-bore pistols from their possession.

The Tarnol police team arrested an accused namely Fazal Subhan and recovered one 9mm pistol from his possession. Moreover, the Noon police team arrested an accused namely Baqir Hussain and recovered one 9mm pistol from his possession. The Lohi Bher police team arrested an accused namely Nisar ul Haq Minhas and recovered 610 grams

heroin from his possession.

The police have registered separate cases against the nabbed accused and further investigation is underway. The DIG Operations directed the police officials to further intensify the crackdown against the criminal elements, as the Safety and security of the citizens is our foremost priority and no laxity will be tolerated in this regard.

The citizens are urged to cooperate with police and to report any suspicious activity or information on the emergency helpline "Pucar-15" or via the "ICT-15" app for immediate assistance.

## Sweet Fest on Sweet Eid" delights Pakistan's expats in Sharjah

ISLAMABAD (APP): In a delightful celebration of Eid, the Pakistan Social Center in Sharjah hosted the "Sweet Fest on Sweet Eid" event, captivating the local community with a showcase of culinary talent and cultural festivities.

The highlight of the event was the sweet dish competition, which saw participants from diverse backgrounds vying for top honors. After careful evaluation by esteemed judges Dr. Noor and Pakistan Social Center President Khalid Hussain Chaudhry, three exceptional women emerged victorious in three distinct categories.

Tania Fakhr's rendition of Sheer Khurma, Asma Fatima's traditional halwa, and Huda Yameen's international favorite, Trifle, earned them well-deserved recognition and admiration.

The competition, featuring over 15 participants, offered a rich tapes-

try of flavors and culinary techniques. Judges meticulously scrutinized each dish, evaluating taste, presentation, and creativity. Shabnam Qamar's halwa also garnered special commendation for its traditional appeal. The winners were awarded a cash prize of five hundred dirhams each, adding to the jubilant atmosphere of the occasion.

Expressing their joy and gratitude, the winners shared their experiences, highlighting the efforts and dedication invested in crafting their winning dishes. Tania Fakhr expressed delight at the opportunity to participate in the Eid festivities, while Asma Fatima and Huda Yameen expressed pride in their culinary achievements.

President Khalid Hussain Chaudhry, accompanied by special guest Salahuddin Tareen, distributed certificates to the winners, underscoring the importance of commu-

ty engagement and celebration during Eid.

Reflecting on the success of the event, Khalid Hussain Chaudhry emphasized the role of the Pakistan Social Center in fostering a sense of unity and belonging among overseas Pakistanis. Dr. Noor Al Saba, a distinguished Pakistani entrepreneur and judge of the competition, commended the event for its cultural significance and congratulated the winners. The "Sweet Fest on Sweet Eid" event not only celebrated the rich culinary heritage of Pakistan but also served as a vibrant cultural showcase, bringing together residents of Sharjah in a spirit of joy and camaraderie.

Attendees departed with hearts full of joy and memories of a truly sweet Eid celebration, affirming the Pakistan Social Center's commitment to community engagement and cultural enrichment.



**Health services demanded**

KHOST CITY (Pajhwok): Some residents of remote areas in southeastern Khost province say they lack access to basic health services, including well-equipped maternity clinics. They say there are no health clinics in many remote areas and if any they have no maternity wards. The residents are asking the government to solve the problem. Among these remote areas one is Babrak Tana area in Alisher district near the Durand Line.

**80% construction completed**

KABUL (TOLONews): Hashmatullah Shahidi, captain of Afghan cricket team, said that the project to build 25 homes for Afghan refugees has progressed 80% in Torkham. He said that in addition to the 25 homes, facilities such as a mosque, a health center, and a library are also planned for these repatriated refugees and will soon be available to them. Last year, Shahidi launched an international campaign aimed at raising funds for the refugees expelled.

Asia is comparable to a living body composed of soil and water. The heart that beats inside the body is Afghanistan. The destruction of Afghanistan would be the destruction of Asia. And in its progress and prosperity lies the well-being of Asia. - Allama Iqbal

# Kabul’s stance may be cause of delay in UN Envoy appointment

KABUL (TOLONews): The Islamic Emirate said that their stance to oppose the appointment of another UN special representative for Afghanistan might be a reason for delay in the process.

Zabihullah Mujahid, spokesman for the Islamic Emirate, emphasized that there is no need for such a representative for Afghanistan, and said that it is likely that some countries in the United Nations have realized this issue.

“Afghanistan is neither at war nor in crisis to need a UN representative. This was the demand of the Islamic Emirate, some countries in the UN might have realized the issue and this may have led to the delay in appointing an envoy,” Mujahid told TOLONews.

Meanwhile, Thomas West, the United States special representative for Afghanistan, discussed the full implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 2721 with the deputy permanent repre-



sentative of the United Arab Emirates to the United Nations.

Nasir Ahmad Faiq, Chargé d’Affaires of Afghanistan’s Permanent Mission to the UN, said that consultations regarding the special representative will resume in the coming days.

“The new envoy will have the responsibility of bringing new changes in Afghanistan to cause change in the country’s political status and to increase engagement between the world and Afghans,” said Wais Nasiri,

## Iran’s attack legitimate defense: IEA

KABUL (Ariana News): Following Iran’s retaliatory attack on Israel, the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) on Sunday called the act as “legitimate defense.”

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in a statement said that Israel’s attack on the Iranian consulate in Damascus on April 1 had been against all diplomatic norms and international laws.

The ministry added that since October, Israel has continued to commit genocide and has killed more than 33,000 civilians in Gaza, and by violating the space of other countries and spreading insecurity, it has sought to divert the world’s attention from its crimes.

“The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan calls on all influential countries in the world and the region to accelerate their efforts to stop the crimes of the Zionist regime (Israel) in order to prevent the crisis from spreading further,” the statement said.

Late on Saturday, Iran launched hundreds of missiles and drones towards Israel in retaliation for the attack on its consulate in Syria.

# Recent floods in Uruzgan claim 3 lives

KABUL (TOLONews): Enayatullah Shuja, the governor of Uruzgan province, told TOLONews that recent rainfall and ensuing floods in Tirinkot, the center of Uruzgan, have resulted in the death of at least three people.

According to Shuja, dozens of homes and hundreds of acres of agricultural land have also been destroyed in the recent floods, and several construction projects are at risk.

“The floods have destroyed roads, pathways, and the gardens and orchards of the people. According to the information we have received from the residents, the roads are still closed,” The governor added.

Residents and flood victims in Tirinkot are calling on the interim government and aid agencies for immediate assistance. Some of them stated that they have not witnessed such severe flooding in decades.

Atiqullah, a resident of Uruzgan, told a TOLONews



reporter, “It has caused us great damage. We only managed to save the children; there was a father and a daughter here, the daughter drawn in the flood.”

Mohammad Aslam, another resident of Uruzgan, added, “The flood has taken homes, crop fields, and almond trees. It has destroyed several areas including the qanats.”

Meanwhile, the Meteorological Department of the Ministry of Transport and Aviation has announced that the provinces of Badakhshan, Takhar, Kunduz, Baghlan, Kunar, Balkh, Panjshir, Parwan, Kapisa, Kabul, Logar, Paktia, Nuristan, Nangarhar, Laghman,

Khost, Paktika, Zabul, Kandahar, Helmand, Uruzgan, Daykundi, Ghor, Herat, Farah, Nimroz, Badghis, Sar-e Pol, Bamyan, Maidan Wardak, Ghazni, Samangan, Jowzjan, and Faryab will experience rainfall and flooding on Saturday and Sunday (25th and 26th of Hamal).

# Nearly 7,000 complaints filed with ministry in past year

KABUL (TOLONews): The Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice of the Islamic Emirate said that the ministry has received 6,800 complaints in the past year.

Mawlawi Sediqullah, the deputy minister for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, told TOLONews that more than 1,700 of those complaints were from Kabul alone.

According to him, most complaints were related to issues of land, homes, the improper conduct of some members of the Islamic Emirate toward citizens, and women’s rights.

“6,800 complaints have been recorded across Afghanistan which have been addressed. The complainants have been convinced and their complaints have been addressed. Just from Kabul we had 1,722 complaints,” said Mawlawi Sediqullah, the deputy minister for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice.

He added that compared to the past one and a half years, the number of complaints registered by citizens has been decreasing.

“The distance and differences between the Taliban and people have been removed. Both sides understood each other. The Taliban stopped making all the mistakes they used to make,” he added.

Some political experts said that the Complaints Hearing Commission addressing citizens’ complaints strengthens trust between the nation and the caretaker government.

“The Ministry of Vice and Virtue should do things which benefit the Afghan society. The should not use force but advise people so that people get ready to accept and implement what Allah says,” Moin Gul Samkanai, a political affairs expert said.

Mawlawi Sediqullah also emphasized that the leader of the Islamic Emirate in the newly ratified law pertaining to this commission, has emphasized in several articles that the complaints of the citizens of the country must be addressed promptly and without neglect.

## Owners complain about lack of electricity

KABUL (TOLONews): Several factory owners in Kabul’s industrial parks are complaining about the lack of electrical energy in their facilities.

They state that electricity is only provided during the day, and they are unable to produce at night.

Khal Mohammad Tajik, a factory owner, said: “If there is 24-hour electricity, it would greatly enhance work, production, and employment opportunities. We ask the Islamic Emirate to provide us with continuous electricity.”

The executive director of Kabul Industrialists, Basir Taraki, said: “Taxes and fees are based on electricity consumption. Each sector should evaluate itself and establish guidelines so that taxes or fees can be aligned with their consumption.”

Da Afghanistan Breshna Sherkat (DABS) stated that this agency is striving to supply electricity to factory owners in the capital.

The spokesman for Da Afghanistan Breshna Sherkat, Hekmatullah Maiwand, said: “Our focus is also to ensure regular electricity supply to our fellow citizens working in the industrial sector, to protect and sustain their operations.”

The former head of DABS told TOLONews that although industrial parks constitute seven to eight percent of Breshna’s customer base, a significant portion of Breshna’s revenue comes from these manufacturing plants.

Amanullah Ghalib, former head of DABS, said: “It is very important for Breshna to provide more and better electricity to industrial parks because Breshna derives 45 to 50 percent of its revenue through these parks. Although the electricity supply to industrial parks is less compared to residential areas, the revenue from these parks is substantial because their consumption is higher.”

# GD of Traffic initiates taxi repainting across 7 zones

KABUL (TOLONews): The General Directorate of Traffic stated that a contracting company will begin the process of painting taxi within the next ten days across seven zones in the country.

Abdul Wadood Khairkhwah, the head of Planning and Policy at the General Directorate of Traffic, told TOLONews that currently more than 20,000 taxis have been painted in four country zones, including 7,000 in Kabul.

According to Khairkhwah, the number of taxis needed for each city has been determined based on the population of each province, with the capital requiring 70,000 taxis.

“In Kabul city, nearly over ten million people reside, our assessment concluded that approximately 70,000 taxis are essential. Previously, we had about 17,000 registered taxis in the capital,” Abdul Wadood Khairkhwah said.

However, some taxi drivers in the capital said that taxis with the new color, in addition to creating order in the transportation service system, also increase public trust.

Barkzai, who converted his personal car into a taxi at a cost of about 25,000 afghani over the past two months, told TOLONews: “My car was for personal use, I used to work before, and people did not trust personal cars much, but now that I have turned it into a taxi, people’s trust has increased, and business has improved compared to before.”

Yet some other taxi drivers, while noting the improvement with the new

taxi color in the country, say they lack the financial capability to change the color of their taxi vehicles.

Abdullah, a taxi driver, said: “I have had this taxi for ten years now. The new taxi color is good, but given that the economy does not help, I cannot afford to paint my car. Without money, painting is difficult.”

According to information from the General Directorate of Traffic, taxis initially operated in the country in black and white. Likewise, for the past 15 years, taxis in yellow and white have been providing transportation services; however, the directorate has now changed the taxi color to turquoise and white, and it is said that this process will continue for the next three years.

# Hindu, Sikh citizens lands to be returned: Ministry of Justice

KABUL (TOLONews): The Ministry of Justice said that to return the lands seized from Hindu and Sikh Afghans has been started the country.

Barkatullah Rasooli, the spokesperson for the Ministry of Justice, said that the Commission for the Prevention of Land Seizure has directed its delegations in provinces to identify the lands of Hindus and Sikhs to better investigate the matter.

“The Commission for the Prevention of Land Seizure has instructed provincial technical committees to thoroughly investigate the seized lands of Hindus in the provinces to prevent land seizure and return the seized lands to their rightful owners,” Said Rasooli.

In the meantime, the India’s Ministry of External



Affairs has welcomed the decision of the interim government of Afghanistan, calling it a positive step.

Randhir Jaiswal, the spokesperson for the India’s Ministry of External Affairs at a press conference, stated, “We have seen reports that the Taliban government has decided to

return the properties of Hindus and Sikhs in Afghanistan; indeed, it is a positive action, and we acknowledge this move.”

Experts in legal and political issues also believe that the interim government should liberate all the lands of Hindus and Sikhs from usurpers and return them to them.

“The leader of the Islamic Emirate must issue a decisive order as soon as possible so that all the lands that have been seized are returned to our Hindu and Sikh brothers,” said Hamidullah Hotak, a political analyst.

Mohammad Asif Faqiri, another expert in legal affairs, said, “Respecting the rights of minorities is a very serious topic in social justice and its construction relates to internal actions.”

The Ministry of Justice also reported that since the establishment of the Commission for the Prevention of Land Seizure and the recovery of seized lands, more than two million jiribs (acres) of land have been reclaimed from usurpers and powerful individuals across the country.

# Inhumanely treated in Turkey, grumble Afghan migrants

KABUL (Pajhwok): “We face a number of challenges in Turkey and inhumane treatment by Turkish authorities”, a number of Afghan migrants in the country say.

Afghanistan Ministry of Refugees and Repatriates (MoRR) admits Afghan migrants are facing various problems in Turkey and insist they have shared the issue with Turkish officials several times. According to the BBC, more than 300,000 immigrants from Afghanistan live in Turkey, and hundreds of thousands asylum seekers enter the country illegally.

Afghan migrants say they face forced deportation to Afghanistan.

According to reports, Turkey forcibly deported more than 3,000 Afghan migrants during the first three months of 2023 on 20 chartered flights. The country forcefully deported more than 55,000 asylum

seekers in 2022.

Last year, Refugee Rights Organizations in Turkey said that Turkey’s refugee agency had rejected more than 90 percent of asylum seekers’ applications. Once again, reports about ill-treatment of Afghan refugees and asylum seekers in Turkey have surfaced.

An Afghan asylum seeker Saiful Islam in Istanbul city told Pajhwok Afghan News that after the political change in Afghanistan, many Afghans attempted to enter Turkey illegally from Iran. He said: “The journey from Iran to Turkey is very challenging because the route passes through mountainous areas, sometimes clashes occur between migrants and border police and the migrants get hurt. Problems such as cold weather, arrests and deportations are common.”

He said Afghans were often harassed in different cities of Turkey especially

when there were elections or any other special day or a security incident.

According to Saiful Islam, the arrested Afghans are usually taken to camps where they lack access to healthy food, attorney and are held for months without trial and the government pays no attention to their problems.

Gulbadin Nazari, another Afghan migrant, said: “The refugees in Turkey face many challenges ... police arrest migrants who work in factories and take them to camps where they are treated like animals and have no facilities of life.”

He said those attempting to migrate to Europe risked death, spent a lot of money and then faced arrests and deportations. “They also endure inhumane treatment by security forces.”

MoRR spokesman Abdul Motalib Haqqani told Pajhwok: “No doubt, most Afghans who migrat-

ed to Turkey via illegal routes faced arrests, imprisonments and they are kept in camps where they have no access to primary facilities of life and are treated badly.” He said the MoRR used to hold meetings with the Turkish ambassador and diplomats from time to time about problems of refugees and had also sent delegations to that country to see the problems of migrants closely and share their problems with Turkish authorities.

Haqqani said: “Afghans who leave the country for other countries due to some problems spend a lot of money and suffer hardships. Such people must be given time to live, work and get some money they had spent.”

According to reports, refugees who reside in Pakistan and Iran also face many challenges, but those without legal documents face forced deportations.

# 23 former govt officials return through contact commission

KABUL (TOLONews): The Contact Commission with Personalities of the Islamic Emirate has reported that more than twenty former government members returned to the country over the past month.

Ahmadullah Wasiq, the spokesperson for this commission, provided details stating that among the returnees was also a Hindu citizen.

He assured that efforts to facilitate the return of some former government members are ongoing.

“Through the Contact Commission with Afghan Personalities, 23 individuals

have returned to the country, including recently Narendra Singh, who is one of our Sikh compatriots,” said Ahmadullah Wasiq.

However, the question remains: How effective can the return of some political figures and former government members be in addressing the current challenges of the country?

Tariq Farhadi, a political respondent, “The reason the Contact Commission has not been successful is that girls’ schools are closed, and if people want to come back with their families, their daughters cannot go to



school.”

The spokesperson for the Contact Commission with Personalities emphasized that all individuals returning

ing to the country are safe, and this commission has so far distributed hundreds of immunity cards to the returnees.



# CM Balochistan reviews law and order

QUETTA (APP): A high level meeting on law and order was held at CM Secretariat under the chairmanship of Balochistan Chief Minister Mir Sarfaraz Bugti, IG Police Abdul Khaliq Sheikh, Chief Secretary Balochistan Shakeel Qadir Khan, ACS Jome Zahid Saleem and other senior civil and military officers participated in the meeting.

The law and order situation in the aftermath of Noshki terrorism was reviewed in the meeting.

Commissioner and DIG Rukhshan Division gave a briefing in the meeting regarding the Noshki tragedy wherein the meeting strongly condemned the incident.

Moreover, It was decided to revise the security plan to prevent such incidents in future "War against terrorism is not only for security forces, Balochistan

Chief Minister Mir Sarfaraz Bugti said adding that this war is against the enemies of peace and is the war of the state.

Stressing the need for joint efforts, he said civil armed forces, bureaucracy, judiciary, media all have to fight this war. Government will fight this war of the state against terrorism with political responsibility and a concerted plan of action, he maintained.

He said that all, including bureaucracy, politicians, civil and armed forces, judiciary and media, would have to fight the war against terrorism, adding that war against terrorism would be fought with shared responsibility and common way forward. Condemning the incident of Noshki, it was decided in the high level meeting to plan the security plan afresh in order to curb the occurrence of such incidents in future.

## President, PM felicitate Sikh community on Baisakhi festival

ISLAMABAD (PPI): President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif have felicitated Sikh community on the celebration of Baisakhi festival.

In their message issued today, they that this occasion gives message of love, happiness, peace and affection. He said that Pakistan felt pride over its diverse cultural heritage.

The President said that

Pakistan will ensure all steps to facilitate the Sikh community.

Asif Ali Zardari said that Pakistan acknowledged the contributions made by minorities in the progress and development of the country and is committed to safeguard the rights of all minorities.

In his felicitation message, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said Government of Pakistan and all the provincial gov-

ernments are ensuring provision of all facilities to the Sikh Yatees who were visiting their religious places in Pakistan.

Shehbaz Sharif termed Baisakhi as the festival of spreading love and happiness.

Prime Minister proudly said that Pakistan was a beautiful blend of different faiths and culture and the colours of Baisakhi further add to this beauty.

## Saudi Arabia to invest \$1b in Reko Diq Copper Gold project

ISLAMABAD (PPI): Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's investment of up to one billion dollars is likely next month in the Reko Diq Copper Gold project located in Chagai district in Balochistan, an official report said Sunday.

Special Investment Facilitation Council is trying to remove obstacles in this regard. In order to ensure the smooth completion of Saudi investments, the Prime Minister will constitute a committee of Finance Ministry, comprising all stakeholders of country.

Following this investment, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia will sign agree-

ments for further investment in the mining sector.

Last year in December, Pakistan and Barrick Gold Corporation signed \$8 billion landmark agreement on Reko Diq project. Reko Diq is one of the world's largest undeveloped copper-gold mines. The project is being restarted after remaining on hold since 2011. A delegation of Barrick Gold during meeting with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif provided an update on the project and stated that the feasibility study will be finished by the end of 2024.

The Reko Diq Mine is a planned mining operation, located near Reko Diq town

in Chagai District of Balochistan. It represents one of the largest copper and gold reserves in the world having estimated reserves of 5.9 billion tonnes of ore grading 0.41% copper and gold reserves amounting to 41.5 million oz, and a mining life of at least 40 years.

The Reko Diq area is part of the Tethyan Magmatic Arc, extending through central and southeast Europe (Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Greece) Turkey, Iran and Pakistan through the Himalayan region into Myanmar, Malaysia, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea. It contains wealth of large copper-gold ore deposits of varying grades.

## G7 leaders condemn Iran, warn of risk of escalation

ROME (Reuters): Leaders of the G7 nations condemned Iran's attack on Israel and said on Sunday they would work to try to prevent an "uncontrollable regional escalation" in the Middle East.

Italy, which holds the rotating presidency of the G7, had called a meeting of G7 heads after U.S. President Joe Biden pledged a coordinated diplomatic response to the unprecedented drone and missile attack launched overnight by Iran.

"With its actions, Iran has further stepped toward the destabilization of the region and risks provoking an uncontrollable regional escalation. This must be avoided," a statement issued by Italy said. The G7 leaders, who spoke for just under an hour on a video conference, called for Iran to exercise restraint.

"In this spirit, we demand that Iran and its proxies cease their attacks, and we



stand ready to take further measures now and in response to further destabilizing initiatives," it said.

President Biden has warned Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu the U.S. will not take part in a counter-offensive against Iran if Israel decides to retaliate.

Iran launched the attack in response to a suspected Israeli strike on its consulate in Syria on April 1 that killed top Revolutionary Guards commanders and followed

months of clashes between Israel and Iran's regional allies, triggered by the war in Gaza. The G7 statement also pledged to work "towards an immediate and sustainable ceasefire" in Gaza after more than six months of fighting.

The G7 groups the United States, Canada, Italy, Britain, France, Germany and Japan, as well as the European Union. Its foreign ministers are scheduled to meet over April 17-19 on the Italian island of Capri.

## Omar Ayub asserts PTI founder's imminent release, end of incumbent governments

QUETTA (INP): Opposition leader and central general secretary of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Omar Ayub has made bold claims regarding the impending release of PTI founder and the eventual downfall of the incumbent governments. Ayub revealed plans to orchestrate nationwide protests and rallies, asserting that their movement would bring an end to the current regimes. In a press briefing in Quetta, taking a swipe at the ruling authorities, Omar Ayub derisively labeled the governments as "mountains of

sand" propped up on crutches formed by Form 47. He insisted Sharif family was afraid of prisoner number 804, reference to the PTI founder detained in Adiala jail.

He criticized the detention of 106 prisoners under military courts, vehemently denouncing civilian trials conducted within military courts jurisdiction.

Omar Ayub emphasized the PTI founder's pivotal role in raising awareness among the youth.

He reiterated that the PTI movement harbors a singular agenda of upholding the rule of law

and the constitution.

PTI leader Omar Ayub lauded the unwavering support of party workers during challenging times and announced the inclusion of PPP's Sharif Khilji into the party, welcoming him for his commitment to the party's ideology of justice and the rule of law.

Opposition leader Omar Ayub commended the public's participation in two historic processions in Balochistan despite governmental restrictions.

PTI leader condemned any undue influence on judges and interference in judicial matters.

### Repatriation efforts continue as illegal Afghans return home

ISLAMABAD (INP): The repatriation of Afghan nationals from Pakistan continues at a steady pace, with significant progress made as of April 13, 2024. A total of 535,940 illegal Afghans have now returned to their homeland, marking a significant step in the ongoing efforts.

Over the past ten days, from April 3 to April 13, a total of 8,581 Afghan citizens have made the journey back home. Among them, 3,127 men, 1,972 women, and 3,482 children have returned. In a coordinated effort, 310 families have been safely repatriated to Afghanistan, utilizing 287 vehicles for their journey.

This indicates the scale of the operation, also the logistical planning involved in ensuring the safe return of these families to their home country.

The ongoing repatriation efforts underscore the commitment to address the issue of illegal Afghan immigrants in Pakistan while prioritizing the safety and well-being of those returning to Afghanistan.

### Bahawalnagar incident Punjab govt issues JIT notification

LAHORE (PPI): The Punjab government has issued a notification with regard to the formation of a joint investigation team (JIT) to investigate the Bahawalnagar incident.

According to the notification, Special Home Secretary Fazal-ur-Rehman will be the convener of the team whereas Bahawalpur Commissioner Nadir Chatha and DIG Special Branch Faisal Raza will be the members of the joint investigation team.

The team will also include a member each from Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and Intelligence Bureaus (IB).

Previously, in a statement issued by the SSP, it was said that the tragic incident in Bahawalnagar had been resolved immediately through the joint efforts of the army and police authorities.

However, despite the resolution of the matter, certain elements started negative propaganda on social media. The Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said on Friday that recently a "tragic" incident took place in Bahawalnagar but the matter was resolved immediately with the joint efforts of the Pakistan Army and Punjab Police.

The military's media wing in a statement said that despite the matter being resolved, certain elements began propaganda on social media.

"An attempt was made to divide state institutions and government departments for nefarious purposes. Those responsible for violation of laws and misuse of powers will be determined," the ISPR said. It added that a joint inquiry will be conducted to find out the facts as well as identify those responsible. A team consisting of security and police personnel will conduct a thorough inquiry, the ISPR concluded.

### Thousands gather in Iran in show of support for attack on Israel

TEHRAN (AFP/APP): Thousands of Iranians took to the streets of Iran early Sunday in a show of support for the unprecedented drone and missile attack under way against arch foe Israel.

"Death to Israel!" and "Death to America!" chanted demonstrators in Tehran's Palestine Square shortly after the Revolutionary Guards announced the launch of "Operation Honest Promise". A mural saying "the next slap is fiercer" was unveiled in the square where a huge banner has hung for days calling, in Hebrew, for Israelis to "take shelter".

On Sunday, demonstrators waved Iranian and Palestinian national flags alongside banners reading "God's victory is near". Iran's attack came in retaliation for an April 1 strike that levelled the five-storey consular annexe of the Iranian embassy in Damascus and killed seven Revolutionary Guards, two of them generals. Tehran has since vowed to avenge the strike which was widely blamed on Israel.



ISRAEL: The remains of a rocket booster that, according to Israeli authorities critically injured a 7-year-old girl, after Iran launched drones and missiles towards Israel, near Arad, Israel

## World reactions to Iran strikes on Israel

PARIS (INP): Countries around the world condemned Iran's strikes on Israel late Saturday, warning the attack threatened to further destabilise the Middle East, as per a foreign news agency.

Here are some of the main reactions so far:

**- United States -**

US President Joe Biden promised "ironclad" support for Israel after holding an urgent meeting with top security officials.

"I just met with my national security team for an update on Iran's attacks against Israel. Our commitment to Israel's security against threats from Iran and its proxies is ironclad," Biden said on X, posting a picture of the meeting in the White House Situation Room.

**- Britain -**

UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak condemned the "reckless" strikes, which he said "risk inflaming tensions and destabilising the region. Iran has once again demonstrated that it is intent on sowing chaos in its own backyard."

**- European Union -**

The European Union's foreign affairs chief Josep Borrell said the strikes were "an unprecedented escalation and a grave threat to regional security" in a message on X.

**- United Nations -**

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres condemned "the serious escalation represented by the large-scale attack launched on Israel by the Islamic Republic of Iran."

"I am deeply alarmed about the very real danger of a devastating region-wide escalation," he added, calling on parties to "avoid any action that could lead to major military confrontations on multiple fronts in the Middle East".

**- Egypt -**

Cairo's foreign ministry expressed its "deep concern" at the escalation of hostilities and called for "maximum restraint". The ministry's statement also warned of the "risk of the regional expansion of the conflict", and added that Egypt would be "in direct contact with all parties to the conflict to try and contain the situation".

**- Saudi Arabia -**

The Saudi foreign ministry issued a statement voicing its concern at the "military escalation" and calling on "all parties to exercise utmost restraint and spare the region and its peoples from the dangers of war".

It went on to urge the UN Security Council "to assume its responsibility towards maintaining international peace and security".

**- China -**

China's foreign ministry also urged restraint, characterising the attack as "the latest spillover of the Gaza conflict" and calling for the implementation of a recent UN Security Council resolution demanding a ceasefire there, saying the "conflict must end now". "China calls on the international community, especially countries with influence, to play a constructive role for the peace and stability of the region," it added.

**- France -**

France's Foreign Minister Stephane Sejourne on X said that "in deciding to take this unprecedented action, Iran has reached a new level in its acts of destabilisation and is risking a military escalation".

**- Germany -**

Berlin's top diplomat also warned the attack would have a destabilising effect, and urged Tehran to halt the strikes. "We condemn the ongoing attack -- which could plunge an entire region into chaos -- in the strongest possible terms," Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said on X.

"Iran and its proxies must stop this immediately," she continued, adding that Berlin stands "firmly by Israel".

## CAA tightens monitoring of airspace

KARACHI (INP): In response to heightened tensions in the Middle East, Pakistan's Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has implemented stricter monitoring procedures for incoming flights.

Media reports citing aviation sources reveal new instructions issued to Pakistan Air Traffic Control (ATC). These directives mandate close scrutiny of all flights entering Pakistani airspace from Afghanistan and Iran. Additionally, the CAA is keeping a watchful eye on any suspicious activity within Pakistan's western airspace. This move comes as the Foreign Office spokesperson voiced Pakistan's deep

concern over the escalating situation in the Middle East. The spokesperson emphasized Pakistan's ongoing assessment of the situation with worry and its months-long calls for international intervention.

"Stalling diplomacy has demonstrably led to today's developments," the spokesperson remarked.

Pakistan, reiterating its previous stance, has urged for an immediate cessation of hostilities and a ceasefire in Gaza. The recent events, according to the spokesperson, expose the shortcomings of diplomacy and its potential for severe repercussions.

"With the failure to

maintain a ceasefire, the urgent need now is to stabilize the situation and restore peace. All parties must exercise restraint and work towards de-escalation," the spokesperson concluded.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia has also echoed these concerns, expressing deep unease over the escalating regional tensions and their potential ramifications.

It underscored the importance of fulfilling international security responsibilities, highlighting the sensitivity of the issue for regional and global peace. The kingdom warned of serious consequences should the crisis escalate further.

## Imran Khan caused trouble for himself: Murad

SEHWAN (PPI): Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah has said the extent of Imran Khan's political acumen was an open secret, therefore, he turned a witness against himself in the cypher and Tosha Khana cases, and caused trouble for himself. This statement was made by him to the media after offering fatiha at his father's Mazar on his 17th death anniversary, in Wahur on Sunday.

In response to a question about the expected release of PTI Chief Imran Khan, the CM stated that he had also heard about the news through the media. He added that despite the unprecedented support and power, Imran could not deliver and instead pushed the country towards a serious economic crisis. Imran Khan is the only prime minister in the history of the country who was removed through a vote of no confidence.

The CM also remarked that the extent of Imran Khan's political acumen was an open secret, and everyone was well aware of it. Imran Khan has admitted all his blunders, and he is a witness against himself in the Cypher case

and even in the case of Tosha Khan, where he said he had sold the wrist-watch. The CM went on to say that Imran Khan was creating trouble for himself.

Despite all the support and backing he received, Imran Khan lost them within a few weeks and months. The courts are hearing his cases, and they can give him relief, said the CM.

When asked about the recent rally of six parties, Murad Shah explained that these six parties had participated enthusiastically in the recent election, but the people of Pakistan did not choose to vote for them. He also mentioned that two condolence meetings are held every year on April 4 (this year on April 14) and December 27 at Garhi Khuda Bux. Similarly, other parties have the right to form alliances, hold public meetings and express their point of view, but it is ultimately up to the people of Pakistan to decide which party or alliance will succeed. Regarding the weather, he stated that while light rains are usually expected in April, this

time heavy winds along with rains have been predicted. He also mentioned that he had noticed on his way from Karachi to Sehwan that Sehwan had received rain last night, and Karachi had also received rain.

Mr Shah said that he has already informed the civic agencies across Sindh, including Karachi, and he hopes that everything will remain under control.

When asked about his service to Sehwan, his constituency, the CM said that he has been serving the people of Sehwan since they first elected him in 2002. He also mentioned that his repeated success in successive elections from 2002 to 2024 is a testament to the people's confidence in him and his services to them. Additionally, he stated that being chief minister his services are not limited to Sehwan, but to the whole province.

Shah also mentioned that he is working on various proposals to restore Manchar Lake. When a workable proposal is made, he will take the necessary steps to restore the lake.

### Rescue staff continues training sessions to operate air ambulance

LAHORE (APP): In its initial phase, rescue staff of the Punjab air ambulance underwent rigorous training sessions on Sunday, as the Punjab government recently secured lease of aircraft for launching the air ambulance service.

According to sources, rescue staff are undergoing rigorous training sessions for the first-ever air ambulance service. Health experts say that the aircraft will play a crucial role in transporting patients from farthest localities of the province, particularly those with serious head injuries or multiple traumas, requiring urgent medical attention. The primary objective of the air ambulance initiative is to extend immediate relief to all districts in Punjab, that are lacking rescue services. Rescue sources told APP, the air ambulance would serve various emergency purposes. It could aid in detecting flood-affected areas during inundations, facilitating evacuation of trapped individuals and enhancing rescue coverage.

### Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon reopen airspace closed over Iran attack

DUBAI (INP): Iraq has reopened its airspace hours after suspending all air traffic as neighbouring Iran had launched an unprecedented drone and missile attack on Israel, the Iraqi aviation authority announced.

Jordan, which neighbours Iraq as well as Israel, and Lebanon similarly reopened their respective airspace on Sunday, as did Israel which said the Iranian attack had been "foiled" with most launches intercepted overnight.

The Iraqi civil aviation authority announced in a statement "the reopening of the airspace" and resumption of flights to and from airports across the country, saying there were no longer any "security risks to civilian aircraft". Local Kurdish media in northern Iraq reported that Iranian drones had flown over the autonomous Kurdish region overnight.