

#### Hanged body found

ISLAMABAD (INP): Hanged body of a teenage housemaid was found from kitchen of a house in the federal capital. The body of 14-year-old Amina d/o Saif Ali was found from house where she was serving in a private housing society in Lohi Bher police station jurisdiction. The police instead of instead of conducting postmortem and investigating into the incident termed it as suicide and handed over the body to heirs.



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#### Elahi moves LHC

LAHORE (INP): Senior PTI leader Ch Parvez Elahi moved Lahore High Court (LHC) against harassment of his voters and polling agents ahead of the by-elections scheduled for April 21. The election commission, Gujrat Police and others were made respondents in the petition moved by Elahi. The petitioner maintained that he is contesting the by-election from PP-32 and his supporters and family members are being harassed by the police.

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ISLAMABAD: A delegation of Shanghai Electric Group called on Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

## KP CM says JUI-F chief wants to 'set his price'

### F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Kyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur Wednesday lambasted Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) Chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman for looking to "set his price" amid Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's (PTI) attempts to secure support for its protest movement.

"Fazlur Rehman doesn't even have a [single] vote in his own house [...] Even my [PTI's] worker will beat him [in elections]," Gandapur said while talking to journalists in Islamabad. He appeared before an anti-terrorism court today in cases pertaining audio leaks, violation of Section 144 and alleged involvement in vandalism at Islamabad's judicial complex.

His remarks come days after the PTI and the JUI-F 'agreed on increasing party-level contacts' following Asad Qaiser's telephonic conversation with Fazl wherein the duo exchanged views on the current political situation and the process of forming a government.

Stressing that both parties have "ideological coordination" regarding the

public movement against the February 8 election results, Qaiser, during his interaction with the JUI-F chief, pitched an idea for those parties who believe in the supremacy of law should start a political movement against the incumbent government from the united platform of "Tehreek-e-Tahaffuz-e-Dastoor".

Elaborating on the prospects of joining hands with the JUI-F, the KP chief minister today said that he had no objections if Fazl extended his support to the PTI. "PTI founder [Imran Khan] has said that he is ready to sit [with anyone] for Pakistan's [interests]," he noted.

Addressing the country's political situation, Gandapur fired a fresh salvo at the Shehbaz Sharif-led Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz's (PML-N) government, saying that the country suffered adverse consequences due to the experiment that was carried out to bring the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) into power. "The country cannot afford [any] further experiences," he said while referring the current PML-N-led coalition government as "PDM 2.0".

During Wednesday's

hearing, PTI leaders including Shibli Faraz, Omar Ayub, Ali Nawaz Awan Amir Mughal and Shibli Faraz appeared before ATC Judge Tahir Abbas in various cases pertaining to their alleged involvement in vandalism following last year's May 9 riots.

At the onset of the hearing, PTI leaders' counsel Babar Awan apprised the court that the challan judicial complex vandalism case has already been submitted and urged the court to hear his arguments on granting of bail on April 18. To this, the judge directed the lawyer to abstain from combining pre-arrest bail with challan and present his arguments on the issue of bail instead.

Addressing the investigation officer, Judge Abbas questioned whether the authorities still wanted to interrogate Shibli Faraz — also named in judicial complex vandalism case — to which the official replied in the negative.

Meanwhile, appearing before the court KP CM Gandapur, who is facing multiple cases, was allowed to leave after marking his attendance. The court then extended Gandapur and Faraz's bail till April 27.

## PPP leader Chattan escapes blast in Bajaur



### F.P. Report

KHAR: Pakistan People's Party (PPP) leader Akhunzada Chattan on Wednesday escaped a blast in Mamund tehsil of Bajaur district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

According to the police, the blast went off near the vehicle of the PPP leader. However, Chattan remained safe as he was inside the bomb-proof vehicle, they added. Akhunzada Chattan is the PPP's candidate for NA-8 of Bajaur in the by-elections scheduled for April 21.

It is pertinent to mention that the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) had postponed elections in Bajaur's NA-8 and PK-22 after a Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) backed independent candidate Rehan Zeb Khan was killed in the Siddiqabad area of Bajaur. The notification to postpone the polls on the National Assembly's NA-8 and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly's PK-8 has been issued by the ECP. Rehan Zeb Khan was shot dead during his election campaign in the area. Some unidentified assailants opened fire on his vehicle, leaving him dead on the spot. Four other people were also injured in the attack.

## 7 terrorists killed in operation

### F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: Movement of a group of seven terrorists, trying to infiltrate Pakistan-Afghanistan border, was detected by security forces in general area Spinkai, Ghulam Khan of North Waziristan District.

The infiltrators were surrounded, effectively engaged and after an intense fire exchange, all seven territories were sent to hell. A large quantity of weapons, ammunition and explosives was also recovered from the killed terrorists.

Pakistan has consistently been asking Interim Afghan Government to ensure effective border management on their side of the border. Interim Afghan Government is expected to fulfill its obligations and deny the use of Afghan soil by terrorists for perpetuating acts of terrorism against Pakistan. Security forces of Pakistan are determined and remain committed to securing its borders and eliminating the menace of terrorism from the country.

How those who could not create unity among the party ranks, could form an alliance with other parties, he remarked. He said that good developments on the economic front and good response at international level was a breath of fresh air for the country. "The opposition does not have any agenda. We invite them to support us for the sake of the country's development and revival of the economy."

He said that the PTI leaders were in jails due to corruption cases and instead of trying to politicise issues, they should focus on their defence in the courts of law. "The PTI cannot create unity in its ranks," the minister remarked. Replying to the questions of media persons, Atta Tarar said that no discussion took place on the Faizabad sit-in reports in the Federal Cabinet.

## Tarar hopes May 9 cases will reach logical conclusion

### F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar on Wednesday said that the response received by the prime minister at international level was a new milestone in the country's foreign policy.

Addressing a press conference after the Federal Cabinet meeting, the minister said that it was a good omen that Pakistan — a strategically located nuclear state — was in news for good reasons especially on the economic front. He said that the news about improvement in Pakistan's economy from international institutions and journals was encouraging.

Bloomsberg, the United Nations Development Programme and the Asian Development Bank had predicted growth and development of Pakistan's economy, he added. The minister said the stock exchange had witnessed a historic bullish trend which was the proof of restoration of investors' confidence. He assured that the impact of improvement in the economy would reach the masses soon.

Atta Tarar said that friendly countries were now valuing their relations with Pakistan which was an achievement. "The positive news about the economy is due to the hard work of prime minister and his cabinet members," he added. The minister said that the international community knew that Shehbaz Sharif who was a hard working leader, had always delivered.

He said that the PM's visit to Saudi Arabia was very successful and as a result of it, a high-level Saudi delegation had come to Pakistan. The delegation led by the Saudi Foreign Minister discussed investments in minerals, tourism and other sectors, he added. He said that during the cabinet meeting, a detailed briefing was given on the prime minister's visit to Saudi Arabia and progress on investment related matters.

He disclosed that a delegation from the private sector of Saudi Arabia would also visit Pakistan soon and hold meetings with the private sector for collaboration in various fields. Both Pakistan and Saudi governments would facilitate that visit which would help boost the national economy and create job opportunities, he added. The minister said that the cabinet discussed the wheat crop situation. It was informed that a bumper wheat crop yield was expected in the country.

He said that letters were being written to all four provinces regarding increasing the target of wheat procurement so that the farmers could get a better reward of their hard work. The step would not only benefit the farmers but would also give a boost to the rural economy, he added. He said that delegations from more friendly countries would also visit Pakistan soon.

He said on Eid-ul-Fitr, the prime minister received congratulatory messages from various world leaders. During the exchanges, he said, concerns were

expressed over the situation in Gaza with calls for an immediate solution to the crisis. About the opposition's public meeting in Balochistan, he said it was a flopped show. Camera techniques were used to show the participants which proved that there were not many people in the rally.

He pointed out that the top leaders of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf was issuing statements contradicting one another's stance. He said that Barrister Gohar's statements were contradicted by Sher Azal Marwat and vice versa. Similarly Umar Ayub's statements were contradicted by some other leader which was a proof of an internal rift within the party ranks.

He said that the PTI leaders were in jails due to corruption cases and instead of trying to politicise issues, they should focus on their defence in the courts of law. "The PTI cannot create unity in its ranks," the minister remarked. Replying to the questions of media persons, Atta Tarar said that no discussion took place on the Faizabad sit-in reports in the Federal Cabinet.

# The Frontier Post

## No compromise on security of Chinese workers in Pakistan

### Prime Minister says Saudi delegation's visit to help bring huge investment in Pakistan

#### F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday assured that the government would make no compromise on the security of the Chinese workers in Pakistan.

The prime minister, in a meeting with a delegation of Shanghai Electric Group led by Chairman Wu Lei, said that the government would ensure all possible facilitation of the Chinese investors to further expand the ongoing projects. He urged the Chinese firms to switch the power plants from imported to the local coal and increase their investment in the coal mining sector.

In the meeting, the prime minister was briefed about the projects being executed by the Shanghai Electric Group. Citing cordial and time-tested ties with China, Prime Minister Shehbaz said that Pakistan desired to further promote its friendly ties and strengthen economic partnership with the country. The Shanghai Electric Group is currently working on Thar Coal mine development and a 1320MW coal power project.

It was told that the Shanghai Electric Group was one of the biggest firms engaged under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor in Pakistan. The Thar Coal projects executed by the Group were annually saving around \$400 million. The meeting was attended by Chairman of Thar Coal Block 1 Power Generation Company Meng Donghai, Economic Affairs Minister Ahsan Khan Cheema, Energy Minister Sardar Awaiz Khan Leghari, Petroleum Minister Dr Musaddik Malik, Deputy Chairman of Planning Commission Muhammad Jahanzeb and relevant senior officers.

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, chairing a meeting of the federal cabinet, said investment worth billions of dollars, was expected as a result of recent visit by the Saudi delegation.

Commending the endeavours of federal cabinet and relevant authorities over the successful visit, he said the

Saudi delegation was impressed by the preparations of Pakistani ministers and officials. He also expressed special thanks to Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman for special interest in Pakistan, which led to a successful visit by the Saudi delegation.

"We must ensure the completion of this investment in Pakistan with the same spirit and dedication," he added. He warned that no obstacles or hindrances in this regard, will be spared. He also reiterated the commitment to working day and night for Pakistan's progress and prosperity, as pledged to the people. "If we continue to work hard, we will soon achieve Pakistan's development, prosperity, and economic stability." Meanwhile, the prime minister also extended Eid greetings to the participants and prayed for Pakistan's progress and prosperity due to the blessings of Ramadan.

**Development of Balochistan, among govt's top priorities:** Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday reiterated that the development and prosperity of Balochistan province were among the top priorities of the government.

He stressed upon maximum utilization of the natural resources in the province so that it could be used for its development and said that in that regard, the Federal Government was taking all possible steps. The prime minister expressed these views during a meeting with Balochistan Chief Minister Sarfraz Bugti who called on him, the PM Office Media Wing said in a press release.

During the meeting, different matters pertaining to the province were discussed. The meeting was attended by Minister for Foreign Affairs Ishaq Dar, Minister for Interior Syed Mohsin Naqvi, Minister for Commerce Jam Kamal and Jaffar Khan Mandokhel, a PML-N leader. The prime minister expressed his deep grief over the recent rain related losses and assured that the Federal Government was supporting the provincial government in the rehabilitation of the affected people.

He maintained that the Federal Government would also provide all-out support to the provincial government in the promotion of education, adding that the network of Danish Schools was being expanded to the province.

**PM reaffirms significance of Pakistan-Turkmenistan longstanding, historic ties:** Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday reaffirmed the significance of longstanding, historic and cultural ties between Pakistan and Turkmenistan. He also underlined that there was a need to enhance bilateral cooperation, particularly in the domains of trade, energy and connectivity.

The prime minister expressed these views during a meeting with Ambassador of Turkmenistan Atadjan Movlamov who paid a courtesy call on him at the Prime Minister House, the PM Office Media Wing said in a press release. During the meeting, cooperation on regional initiatives was also highlighted. In this regard, the prime minister stressed that high level exchanges between the two countries needed to be enhanced.

The importance of regular meetings of the bilateral institutional mechanisms was also impressed upon by the prime minister. The ambassador conveyed the felicitations of the Turkmen leadership to the prime minister on his re-election. The prime minister thanked Turkmen President Serdar Berdimuhamedov as well as National Leader of the Turkmen People Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov for their congratulatory messages.

He fondly recalled his meetings with them and said he looked forward to continuing the exchanges in the future. The Turkmen ambassador briefed the prime minister on various ongoing bilateral activities. The ambassador, who is also the Dean of the Diplomatic Corps in Islamabad, expressed his gratitude for the cooperation and support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other government departments in the discharge of his functions.

## Rs50m released for assistance of rains victims

### F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has released Rs. 50 million so far to PDMA for financial assistance to the heirs of the deceased persons of rains in various districts.

According to the details, Rs. 20 million have been released for district Nowshera, and Rs. 5.00 million for Lower Dir, Rs. 3.00 million each for Swat and Malakand, Rs. 2.00 million each for Upper Dir and Tank, whereas Rs. 1.00 million have been released each for Lower Chitral, Battagram, Karak, Peshawar and Charsadda. In addition to this Rs. 10 million have also been released for general relief in Lower Chitral.

These amount was released on the special directives of Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Gandapur. The process of providing financial assistance to the families of those who have lost

their lives in the various incidents due to recent torrential rains has been geared up.

Expressing his satisfaction over the steps taken by PDMA and other relevant departments in providing relief to the rain affected families, the chief minister Ali Amin Gandapur has said that the provincial government will not leave the affected alone; providing immediate relief to them is the first priority of the provincial government and all available resources are being utilized for this purpose.

He directed the concerned authorities to carefully assess the damages in all the affected districts and to ensure that all the victims are provided with relief and assistance. He directed them to speed up work on the rehabilitation of rain-affected infrastructure so that the issues faced by general public can be resolved as soon as possible and they can return to their

normal lives. "Nothing can replace a human life, however, the provincial government not only equally shares grief of the bereaved families but it is also going all out to provide them relief and assistance", he remarked. The chief minister also prayed for the eternal peace of deceased ones and the patience for their bereaved families.

Meanwhile, the Director PDMA, Sobia Hassam on Wednesday informed that an amount of Rs 80 million has been released for relief activities in Newly Merged Districts (NMDs).

She said the amount has been handed over to the relevant district administration for carrying out relief activities in their respective jurisdictions. The amount contained Rs 20 million each for North and South Waziristan, Rs 5 million for Kurram district, Rs 10.5 million for Khyber district and Rs 10 million each for Bajaur and Mohmand districts.

## NAB gives clean chit to Nawaz in Toshakhana reference

### F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) on Wednesday gave a clean chit to former prime minister Nawaz Sharif in the investigation regarding Toshakhana reference.

As per details, the accountability bureau submitted report regarding the Toshakhana reference to the Accountability Court (AC). The NAB investigation report stated that Pakistan Muslim League — Nawaz (PML-N) supreme Nawaz Sharif did not pay the amount via a fake account to buy the vehicle from Toshakhana.

The report informed the court that vehicle was surrendered to Toshakhana in 1997

and it was not owned by Toshakhana when Nawaz bought it in 2008. Moreover, the accountability court holds the authority to acquit former prime minister Nawaz Sharif in the Toshakhana reference, the bureau report stated.

Meanwhile, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) supreme and former prime minister Muhammad Nawaz Sharif has initiated consultations with senior party leaders to re-activate the party. Senior Sharif has been advised to separate the government and party offices including central and provincial presidents and secretary generals of the party, according to reliable PML-N sources.

Nawaz Sharif has been

advised to hold the party's presidential office again and also change the secretary general. "The decision about other party offices except the president and secretary general, should be taken later".

Nawaz Sharif likely to hold meetings with the party's divisional and district presidents soon and if the majority of them supported the proposal, he will summon the PML-N General Council's session to introduce change in major offices of the party, sources said. Nawaz Sharif, who has been the PML-N's supreme leader, has also directed the party leadership to focus on Punjab instead of the Centre, sources added.

## 14 killed, 50 injured two road mishaps

### F.P. Report

DADU/JAMSHORO: As many as 14 people were killed and 50 others injured in two different road mishaps in Dadu and Jamshoro districts of Sindh, on Wednesday.

According to details, eight persons were dead and 20 others were injured when a bus collided with an oil tanker and a mini-truck on Indus Highway near Manjhand and Dadu early Wednesday morning. The bus was going from Larkana to Karachi when accident happened. On receiving information, police and rescue teams reached to the accident site and launched a rescue operation.

The injured were shifted to LUMHS Jamshoro and Manjhand hospital. The identity of the victims could not be ascertained yet. Police said that the accident occurred due to over taking while further investigation into the accident was underway.

Moreover, six passengers died and more than 30 were injured when a passenger coach, an oil tanker and a Mazda van collided on the Indus Highway near Jamshoro. Police sources said that all the vehicles were going to Karachi from Larkana when the unfortunate incident occurred near Paranj Hotel on the Indus Highway.

Police further said that the bodies were shifted to the nearby hospital while injured were shifted to Jamshoro Hospital in Hyderabad. The deceased passengers and other injured were belonged to Larkana, Karachi and Khairpur Nathan Shah.

Federal Interior Minister Naqvi expresses regret over Jamshoro accident. He expressed deep sorrow and regret over the loss of life in the traffic accident. Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi expressed his heartfelt sympathy and condolences to the families of the deceased.



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PESHAWAR: Vehicles passing through flood water at Bara Hazar Khuwani bridge after heavy rain in Provincial Capital created flood-like situation. — APP photo

## Pak-China friendship exemplary: Qasim

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Provincial Health Minister KP, Syed Qasim Ali Shah, has said that Pakistan and China are long-standing friends whose friendship is considered exemplary worldwide. He expressed these views while talking to the media during his visit to China Window, a Chinese cultural center in Peshawar.

The provincial minister visited various galleries of China Window, signed the friendship wall, and recorded his comments in the guest book.

On this occasion, he said that the main reason for Pakistan-China relations is the full trust of both countries in each other and helping each other in difficult times.

Syed Qasim Ali Shah said that besides the friendly relationship between the two countries, the economic and cultural relations are also enviable.

In this regard, he referred to CPEC and said that this project is a proud project for the economic development of Pakistan. He said that with the establishment of Rashkai Economic Zone, more than two hundred thousand employment opportunities will be created where the factories will be set up.

Likewise, Pakistan will also get valuable foreign exchange from exports to Central Asian countries, including Afghanistan.

In response to a question related to law and order, Syed Qasim Ali Shah said that the provincial government and security



agencies are using all resources to establish law and order, and all foreigners, including China, should be provided with all possible security.

The provincial minister said that the founder chairman of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, Imran Khan, also wanted to build better relations with China, but some circles tried to create misunderstandings in which they did not succeed.

Regarding the Chinese cultural center established in Peshawar, he said that the China Window has given the people of Peshawar and the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa an opportunity to come closer to their Chinese brothers and sisters, and they believe that the message of friendship to the Chinese people from Peshawar is commendable, while the Chinese language teaching program in China Window is also commendable.

Syed Qasim Ali Shah, on behalf of the provincial government, assured that Pakistan-China relations, especially at the public level, are rich for communication and cooperation will be provided.

## Operation against smuggling conducted

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Frontier Corps North Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has conducted extensive operations to curb smuggling activities. These operations targeted the trafficking of drugs, currency, and various foreign commodities, including but not limited to food items, household appliances, clothing, tires, auto parts, and modern arms.

The recent operations



resulted in the successful confiscation and destruction of 42 metric tons of prohibited items, such as cigarettes, paan, chalya, and foreign medicines.

Additionally, the Frontier Corps intercepted six kilograms of illegally smuggled gold from Afghanistan, along with a significant amount of foreign currency.

In the fight against narcotics, the Frontier Corps seized a total of 5100 kilograms of various drugs, which have been handed over to relevant authorities for legal proceedings.

These operations have led to the apprehension of 104 individuals involved in criminal activities, with legal actions initiated against them.

Frontier Corps North Khyber Pakhtunkhwa reaffirms its commitment to collaborating with other law enforcement agencies to combat smuggling activities and maintain peace and security.

## Assuring quality education need of the hour: Minister

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa minister for higher education, archives and libraries Meena Khan Afridi has said that focusing on quality research work in universities is need of the hour and without it neither the higher education institutions can be stable nor can be developed.

He urged the concerned authorities to give special attention towards promotion of research culture in universities.

The provincial minister told these while presiding over a meeting convened regarding bringing positive amendments in University

Act held in committee room of higher education department.

Secretary higher education Arshad Khan, special secretary, higher education, director Quality Assurance Cell (QAC), professors of University of Peshawar and officers of law and higher education department participated in the meeting.

In the meeting various agendas were discussed including positive amendments in University Act, vice-chancellors appointments while different suggestions for betterment of universities and to come out the universities from financial crisis also came into discussion.

Mr Meena Khan said that bringing amendments in the University Act aimed at controlling and stopping the loopholes in universities and putting the universities on developmental track.

"Quality research work is very important for development of higher educational institutions" said the KP higher education minister.

Talking about the vice-chancellors, the provincial minister said that vice-chancellor has a key and important role in a university and a leader must have the qualities to put the institution in developmental track and solve all the issues and problems being faced by the university.

## PHC orders NAB submit reply for enlisting in ECL

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: A divisional bench of Peshawar High Court (PHC) comprising of Justice Ijaz Anwar and Justice Waqar Ahmad ordered National Accountability Bureau (NAB) for submission of reply regarding enlisting of tribesman named Haroon Khan resident of Landi Kotal in Exit Control List (ECL), on Wednesday.

The counsel Danyal Asad Chamkani advocate argued that Haroon Khan had invested Rs1.5 million in online business but the company had closed its offices and looted millions of rupees from public

while escaped from the market.

The petitioner had approached Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) for actions against the company, the counsel stated. He added that applicant had also filed 22A plea after closure of the matter by FIA.

In the meantime, other victims of the company filed complaint at NAB and initiated inquiry in 2021 while including petitioner in the probe and enlisted Haroon Khan in ECL in 2023, the lawyer argued.

The petitioner is employed at Dubai while his original passport, mobile and visa is confiscated

by immigration's official, the lawyer added. He argued that the petitioner had filed review before Ministry of Interior but to no veil, so approached PHC in the writ jurisdiction.

The counsel Danyal Asad Chamkani advocate argued for removal of petitioner's name from ECL as it was enlisted against the law and unconstitutionally. He also pleaded to directed NAB for returning of original passport, I-Phone mobile and United Emirate Visa to the petitioner.

PHC's divisional bench comprising of Justice Ijaz Anwar and Justice Waqar ordered NAB for submission

of reply after conclusion of arguments while adjourned further hearings.

**MNA approaches PHC against enlisting in PNIL**

Meanwhile, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader and Member National Assembly Asif Khan approached PHC against enlisting his name in Provisional National Identification List (PNIL) in writ plea.

The counsel Syed Sikandar Hayat Shah advocate filed the plea in which federal government along with FIA had made respondents while arguing for removal of MNA name from PNIL as he is going abroad.

## People of Punjab need health card not air ambulance: Saif

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Advisor to the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, on Information and Public Relations

Barrister Muhammad Ali Saif, has stated that the people of Punjab need a health card scheme, not air ambulances.

In a statement issued on Monday he mentioned that Maryam Nawaz Sharif is copying everything from Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ali Amin Gandapur, so it would be pleasing if they also copy the health card scheme.

The information advisor

further stated that the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has transparently distributed Ramadan and Eid packages through bank records.

He said that the big bosses are busy trying to flee to London but are stuck badly. Maryam Nawaz had also put up pictures of Nawaz Sharif on the Ramadan package, and she has also brought forward the record of the Ramadan package, whereas the Punjab government has only distributed the Ramadan package among league workers.

Barrister Dr. Saif said that Maryam Nawaz is still

targeting PTI projects, while the Punjab government first gave a revolutionary project like the health card and then staged a drama of air ambulances.

He said that Maryam Nawaz has allocated the entire health department budget for the elite.

The Sharif family goes to London even for minor ailments, and those who used to dream of becoming prime minister for the fourth time are now touring hospitals, while the Punjab government has so far failed to provide the people with a project like the health card.

## Belgian envoy, spouse immerse in Pashtun culture

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Belgian Deputy Head of Mission (DHM) Stef Commers, accompanied by his wife, Jeanne Frechede, embarked on a cultural journey through the heart of Pashtun traditions during their visit to Nowshera district. Hosted by Arsalan Khattak, the esteemed guests were welcomed with warmth and hospitality, commencing their exploration from the quaint setting of Akora Khattak.

The day unfolded with a vibrant brunch, where the nuances of Pashtun hospitality were shared in the traditional setting of a hujra. Mr. Khattak graciously introduced the concept and significance of the hujra in Pashtun culture, providing a firsthand glimpse into the rich tapestry of traditions that define the region.

Continuing their cultural odyssey, the distinguished visitors paid homage to the legacy of Khushal Khan Khattak at the memorial library, where they participated in a tree planting ceremony symbolizing growth and solidarity between nations. A solemn moment followed at the tomb of Khushal Khan Khattak, underscoring the enduring reverence for the iconic poet and warrior.

Venturing further into the spiritual fabric of the region, DHM Commers and Mrs. Frechede visited the revered Sufi shrine of Kaka Sahib, honoring the spiritual heritage that resonates deeply within the Pashtun ethos. Their gesture of laying a chaddar symbolized respect and reverence for the Sufi saint.

The day culminated in a gracious reception at Al Jameel House, where



Mian Babar Shah extended the timeless tradition of high tea, epitomizing the fusion of cultural exchange and camaraderie. The occasion provided a platform for meaningful dialogue and exchange of insights between the guests and their hosts.

Reflecting on the day's experiences, Arsalan Khattak remarked, "It was an honor to showcase the richness of Pashtun culture to our esteemed guests. Today's journey epitomized the essence of hospitality and cultural exchange, fostering bonds that transcend borders."

Amidst the festivities, DHM Commers and Mrs. Frechede also graced the Mehendi function of Dr. Tahir's daughter, further immersing themselves in the vibrant tapestry of local customs and celebrations. The visit of Belgian DHM Stef Commers and Jeanne Frechede served as a testament to the enduring spirit of cultural diplomacy and mutual respect between nations, reaffirming the bonds of friendship between Belgium and Pakistan.

## 5-match T20 International Series

# Babar-led Pakistan to face New Zealand in first T20 today

Shahid Afridi

A series of five T20 matches between Pakistan and New Zealand will be played starting from 18th April. The first T20 will be played tonight at seven o'clock in Pindi Stadium, Rawalpindi. The second and third matches will also be played at the same stadium on April 20th and 21st. The fourth T20 match will be played on April 25th, and the fifth T20 match will be played on April 27th at Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore.

Good contests are expected between both countries. Pakistan will benefit from home ground advantage and local fans but New Zealand is also a strong team and Pakistan will need to work hard for victory. However in a series played on New Zealand's soil in January, Pakistan faced a 4-1 defeat. Shaheen Shah Afridi led Pakistan in that series. The National Selection Committee of the Pakistan Cricket Board has announced a 17-member squad for the series of five T20 internationals against New Zealand.

Two new players Usman Khan and Irfan Khan have

been included in the Pakistan team for the first time. The Pakistan cricket team includes Babar Azam (captain), Saime Ayub, Mohammad Rizwan, Usman Khan, Iftikhar Ahmed, Azam Khan, Irfan Khan Niazi, Shadab Khan, Imad Wasim, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Naseem Shah, Zaman Khan, Mohammad Amir, Abbas Afridi, Osama Mir, Fakhar Zaman, and Abrar Ahmed.

The team's reserves include Hasibullah, Muhammad Ali, Sahibzada Farhan, Agha Salman, and Waseem Junior. On the other hand New Zealand's team includes Michael Bracewell, Tom Blundell, Mark Chapman, Josh Clarkson, Jacob Duffy, Dean Foxcroft, Ben Lister, Cole McConchie, Zac Gibson, Jimmy Neesham, Will O'Donohue, Tom Robinson, Ben Sears, Tom Siefert, and Ish Sodhi. So far 39 T20 international matches have been played between Pakistan and New Zealand while New Zealand winning 17 matches and losing 21.

Overall, New Zealand has played 194 T20 matches, winning 99 and losing 80, while Pakistan has played 224 matches, winning 135 and losing 80. Pakistan's highest



score against New Zealand in T20 matches is 201 runs which they scored on January 25, 2018, in Auckland while New Zealand's highest score against Pakistan is 226 runs for the loss of eight wickets on January 12, 2024, in

Auckland. Pakistan's lowest score against New Zealand is 101 runs which they scored on January 22 2016 in Wellington where the entire team was bowled out. New Zealand's lowest score against Pakistan

is 80 runs which they scored on December 30 2010 in Christchurch where they were all out.

Overall in batting Pakistan's Babar Azam and New Zealand's MS Chapman are the only batsmen to have

scored centuries. Chapman scored 104 runs and Azam scored 101 runs both remaining not out. Following them the highest individual score is held by Mohammad Hafeez who scored 99 runs on December 20, 2020, in Hamilton and remained not out. On the table Mohammad Rizwan is second having played an innings of 89 runs on December 22, 2020 in Napier. At third place is New Zealand's GD Phillips who played an unbeaten inning of 87 runs on January 17, 2016 in Hamilton. In T20 matches, Babar Azam leads the overall runs and batting table against New Zealand having scored 755 runs in 21 matches at an average of 44.41.

Babar Azam has scored one century and seven half-centuries. For New Zealand KS Williamson has scored 667 runs against Pakistan in 21 matches at an average of 39.23, with his best innings being 72 runs. Williamson has scored six half-centuries against Pakistan.

At third place for Pakistan is Mohammad Rizwan who has scored 622 runs against New Zealand in 19 matches at an average of 38.87, with his best innings being 98 not out. Pakistan's Mohammad Hafeez

has scored 563 runs in 18 matches at an average of 37.53 with his best innings being 99 not out. Hafeez has scored three half-centuries.

On the bowling table the most wickets against Pakistan have been taken by New Zealand's TG Southee, who has taken 38 wickets in 17 matches at an average of 17.05, giving away 18 runs and taking five wickets. Second on the table is Pakistan's Haris Rauf, who has taken 32 wickets in 16 matches, with his best bowling figures being 18 runs and four wickets. Third is New Zealand's IS Sodhi, who has taken 26 wickets in 13 matches with his best bowling figures being 33 runs and four wickets.

After them, Pakistan's Shaheen Shah Afridi has taken 25 wickets in 17 matches, with his best bowling figures being 20 runs and three wickets. At fifth place is former captain Shahid Afridi who has taken 21 wickets in 18 matches at an average of 18.47, with his best bowling figures being 14 runs and four wickets.

**Writer is Peshawar-based sports journalist and is General Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Sports Writers Association**





## In brief

### DPO visits police station F.P. Report

D I KHAN: Dera Nasir Mehmood on Wednesday visited Police Station Choudwan and reviewed the overall security situation. According to the police spokesman the district police chief visited Choudwan Police station where he inspected the security arrangements made to ensure law and order keeping in view the recent threats and incidents. SP Saddar Umar Hayat Khan was also present on this occasion and briefed about the security arrangements. The DPO issued directions for further improvement in security arrangements at the police station. DPO asked the officers concerned and on-duty personnel to take precautionary measures for their own safety along with ensuring the safety of the lives and property of the citizens. He asked them to keep a close watch on suspicious persons to maintain the law and order situation. DPO expressed satisfaction on security arrangements and said the bravery and courage of the Dera police against the menace of terrorism was admirable. He said "I am well aware of the problems being faced by the police force and all the issues would be resolved."

### 4 killed in land dispute shooting

LODHAN (INP): Four people lost their lives in a tragic shooting incident stemming from a land dispute in Lodhran on Wednesday. The deceased have been identified as Malik Mujeeb Mangala, Malik Bashir Watto, and Muhammad Rafiq. Investigations into the incident are ongoing to determine the circumstances leading to the shooting.

### Man shot dead wife, cousin

FAISALABAD (INP): A man killed his wife and a female cousin after a dispute on his second marriage without the consent of family in Faisalabad, police said on Wednesday. According to the officials of the Sadar police station Faisalabad, accused Babar, a resident of Noorpura, got married secretly without consent of his wife Robina Bibi. When his wife Robina came to know about the second marriage of his husband, she got into a heated argument at home with her husband Babar. Accused's cousin Saniya also supported her sister-in-law in this regard on which the accused became enraged and shot dead both. However, the accused managed to escape after from spot after committing crime. The bodies of the deceased women were shifted to the hospital for post-mortem while police started searching the accused after registering a case.

### 131 electricity thieves held

MULTAN (INP): In a major operation against electricity theft and defaulters, the Multan Electric Power Company (Mapco) apprehended 131 individuals in the Mapco region under the directive of CEO Rana Muhammad Ayub Khan. According to a Mapco spokesperson, two significant power thieves were identified and fined a hefty sum of Rs. 51.9 lakh for stealing a staggering 2.25 lakh units of electricity. Furthermore, cases were registered against 107 additional individuals suspected of electricity theft at various police stations. The operation also led to the arrest of three individuals from DG Khan and Bahawalpur. The spokesperson did not disclose the specific modus operandi employed by the apprehended individuals for stealing electricity.



MARDAN: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Food, Zahir Shah Toru interacting with a patient during his visit to Mardan Medical Complex and District Headquarter Hospital.

## Tourism industry to prosper Swat valley

Shafi Ullah

MINGORA: The Ambassador of Belgium Charles Delogni said that Swat valley has great potential in natural, cultural and religious tourism which would pave way prosperity as well as development in the region.

This he said during his visit to Swat valley to explore natural beauty of hilly tourism station of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Pakistan Boys Scouts Association commissioner Sardar Waqar Shahzad welcomed the dignitary and had the distinct pleasure of extending a warm welcome to His Excellency, Ambassador Charles Delogni of Belgium, as he graced the picturesque Swat Valley with his presence.

During this memorable visit, Sardar Waqar Shahzad and His Excellency embarked on a journey to explore the enchanting valleys of Swat,



where the splendor of nature left a lasting impression.

Engaging in insightful discussions, they found common ground in the belief that the challenges faced by one nation could serve as opportunities for the other. They envisioned a promising collaboration wherein Pakistan's dynamic youth, in pursuit of employment opportunities, could synergize with Belgium's quest for skilled labor due to its aging popu-

lation. Such collaboration not only promises solutions to long-term challenges but also strengthens the bonds of friendship between our nations. Here's to the enduring friendship between Pakistan and Belgium, nurtured by shared visions and collaborative endeavors. The Ambassador Charles Delogni claimed that the beautiful Swat valley had great potential in both cultural and natural tourism.

## MPA urges govt officials to facilitate public

F.P. Report

WANA: Member Provincial Assembly (MPA) Ajab Gul Wazir held a detailed meeting with the line departments at DC compound Wana, on Wednesday. Officers of all departments were present in the meeting including Deputy commissioner Nasir khan (South Lower) and ADC Kashmir khan and AC Faisal ismail.

In the meeting, detailed discussion was held on the performance of all the departments of lower Waziristan. During the meeting all heads presented the performance of their respective departments.

MPA Ajab gul Wazir while talking to the participants of the meeting, made it clear that the experiments done in the past will not be repeated under any circum-

stances in future, we would move forward together and use all our energies to bring revolutionary changes in health, education and agriculture departments. He stressed.

The MPA made it clear that after today they would make a joint effort and pledge that all people of Waziristan will get their genuine rights. Every tree and plant of the forest will be protected.

## Commissioner briefed about health facilities

BAHAWALPUR (APP): Commissioner Bahawalpur Division Nadir Chatha has emphasized the need to provide facilities for medical treatment to the general public.

He stated that steps should be taken to further improve the facilities for medical treatment in hospitals across the division. These views were expressed during a briefing with health department officials.

Medical Superintendent Bahawal Victoria Hospital Dr Syed Aamir Mahmood Bukhari, Medical Superintendent Sir Sadiq Hospital Dr. Muhammad Hamid, District Health Officer (HRM) Dr. Zeeshan Rauf, District Coordinator Preventive Program Dr. Khalid Chanar, District Health Officer Syed Tanveer Shah, and Medical Superintendents of Tehsil

Headquarters Hospitals along with relevant officers were present during the briefing.

It was informed that under the Annual Development Program of Bahawal Victoria Hospital, a scheme worth Rs. 3145.138 million has been approved for the construction and maintenance of various wards, including the emergency block, medical and surgical wards, gynecology and pediatrics, external patient department, neuro block, ENT block, as well as provision of bio-medical and non-biomedical machinery and equipment.

The meeting revealed that Bahawal Victoria Hospital has 1609 beds and 25 operating theaters, providing treatment facilities to an average of 2 million patients annually.

Similarly, since its

establishment in 2013, Sir Sadiq Mohammad Abbasi Hospital has treated more than 8.2 million patients. It was also mentioned in the meeting that in Bahawalpur district, Ahmedpur East Tehsil Headquarters Hospital has 100 beds, Tehsil Headquarters Hospital Hasilpur has 100 beds, THQ Yazman has 100 beds, and Tehsil Yazman has a hospital with 70 beds, while there are 12 Rural Health Centers with 240 beds and 75 Basic Health Units with 150 beds providing treatment facilities.

Commissioner Bahawalpur Division has directed health department personnel to utilize their capabilities and government resources efficiently under the spirit of national service to ensure the provision of medical treatment to patients.

## Security measures tightens in Sukkur

SUKKUR (APP): Keeping in view of the current security situation in the northern Sindh, SSP Sukkur Abid Baloch on Wednesday has ordered the implementation of various checkpoints and search operations across different locations within the district. The Primary objective of these measures is to

safeguard the lives and properties of the public.

People have been urged to extend their cooperation, as these initiatives are taken towards ensuring the safety and security of the community. They are encouraged to remain vigilant and promptly report any suspicious activities or individuals to the

police control or Madadgar 15. Vehicles and individuals are being thoroughly checked at all checkpoints during this security operation. SSP Sukkur appealed to the public to cooperate fully and remain alert to their surroundings, urging them to report any suspicious incidents or individuals without delay.

## Police arrests two alleged mobiles snatchers

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: Police arrested two alleged motorcycles and mobile phones' snatchers and recovered a stolen motorcycle, 7 mobile phone sets, mobile phone SIMs and a pistol from their possession.

Briefing local journalists, the station house officer Timergara Muhammad Imran said that several reports of motorcycle and mobile phones' theft in the limits of Timergara police station were received on which an investigation team started its efforts to trace the culprits.

The SHO said that after investigation two accused, Imran and Yar Zaman, residents of Bajaur district were arrested. He said the accused confessed to the crimes and a stolen motorcycle, 7 mobile phone sets, a pistol along with charger 30 bore, 6 cartridges, 11 mobile phone SIMs and five different CNICs were recovered from their possession. He said that cases against the arrested accused were registered under sections 401, 382, 400, 34 and 86 CrPc. The SHO said that three more motorcycles would soon be recovered.

## Armed men snatched mobile, cash from journalist

F.P. Report

LARKANA: Unknown armed men looted journalist Abdul Khaliq Jagirani, Senior Vice President of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Press Club at Manganiya village near Larkana.

According to details, the culprit snatched 70,000 in cash and two mobile phones while escaped from the crime scene. They also threatened with death if they resisted. Against the growing unrest in the district, journalists of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Press Club, Sarfaraz Saleem Pahlutto, Abdul Khaliq Jagirani, Alhadad Chandio and others, protested in front of the press club, while addressing them, they said that the administration has no control over the unrest in Larkana district.

No, journalists are being looted every other third day, but no action is being taken by the administration. The accused who looted lakhs of rupees should be immediately arrested and the looted goods should be returned in cash and mobile phones.

## LUMHS team took charge of Civil Hospital

F.P. Report

THATTA: Liaquat University of Medical and Health Sciences Jamshoro on Wednesday took charge of Trauma and Surgical department of Civil Hospital Makli at Thatta. Vice Chancellor LUMHS Jamshoro Dr. Ikram Ullah Ujan said during an event organized at the Civil Hospital Makli vowed to transform the hospital into a modern hospital to facilitate poor population of district.

## Minister Food visits MMC, DHO hospitals in Mardan

Fazal Haq

MARDAN: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Food, Zahir Shah Toru on Wednesday paid a surprise visit to the Mardan Medical Complex and District Headquarter Hospital Mardan to assess health facilities met to the patients.

During his visit, the minister visited different medical wards and engaged with the patients and their attendants about the medical facilities under Sehat Insaaf Card. During his hospital visits, Toru also issued directives to hospital and district administration officials to resolve some issues promptly.

The minister also disclosed that a meeting will be held soon with health minister for timely completion of ongoing projects and for availing certain major health improving facilities as well. While talking on the occasion, Minister Zahir Shah Toru stated that the provincial government is fully committed to fulfill Imran Khan's vision, highlighting that reinstating the Health Card scheme aimed to provide free treatment to the

public.

The minister also criticized the previous caretaker government for discontinuing of the free health facility. Talking to media, despite economic challenges, Zahir Shah told that the government has reduced the price of roti (bread) to facilitate the lower and middle classes of the society. He further explained that a 100-gram roti would cost Rs. 15, while a 200-gram roti would be priced at Rs. 30.

Toru, also extended that instructions have been issued to commissioners, deputy commissioners, and food department officials to ensure strict implementation of the new roti prices. The minister warned that violator Nanbaies would be dealt with iron hands. Zahir Shah Toru reiterated that the KP government is not just about slogans and announcements but is focused on delivering tangible services to the people. He assured that the provincial government will continue its efforts to prioritize public welfare initiatives.

**Husband kills wife:** In Abdul Rahman Kali an urban area of Takhtbhai a

husband shot-dead his wife inside the house in the department of informing for the opposition. The accused managed to escape from the scene.

According to reports, accused Samar Gul killed his 27-year-old wife by shooting inside the house as soon as the incident was reported the medical team of Rescue 1122 reached the scene and took the dead body for postmortem to THQ Takhtbhai. According to the sources, it has been learned that the accused migrated from Dargai a few days ago due to personal enmity and shifted to Haji Abdul Rahman Kali Takhtbhai. He suspected his dead wife that she was informing for our enemies.

On the report of the victim's brother Saif-ur-Rahman son of Haji Muhammad resident of Dargai Saroshah Police registered a case under Section 302/34 against the accused Samar Gul, son of Haji Muhammad resident of Dargai, Haji Abda Lar Rehman Kali Takhtbhai and investigated the case closely efforts have been made to arrest the accused.

## Entry of Afghan patients without visa restricted

F.P. Report

LANDI KOTAL: Entry of Afghan patients without proper travelling documents were banned at Torkham border since last night. It is to be stated here that the Pakistani authorities as a good gesture had granted visa-exemption to the Afghan patients at Torkham border and according to the health official 90 to 105 Afghan patients along with an attendant were daily permitted to cross into Pakistan to get treatment for their disease somewhere in the country.

An official in Torkham

on the condition of anonymity said on Wednesday that last night the Pak border forces denied entry of Afghan citizens including patients who were supposed to come to Pakistan for treatment. They Afghanis were asked to produce a visa and passport at the border while crossing into Pakistan, he stated.

A health official in Pak-Afghan Dosti (friendship) Hospital, Torkham also confirmed it and said the forces asked their Afghan counterpart that they only permit eight to ten serious Afghan patients to come to Pakistan without legal documents.

However, the Afghan border security force in reaction discontinued entry of all Afghan patients to Pakistan via Torkham to express distress.

The Afghan Commissioner in Torkham, Haji Hikmat said that they had been informed by the Pak officials not to send Afghan patients without visa and passport. Following Army Public School on 16 December, 2014 mishap, passport and visa policy had been made compulsory at Torkham border; although Afghan patients and the drivers had been exempted from proper visa documents.

## Enrolment campaign continue in full swing

F.P. Report

KARAK: Parents and institutions should fulfill their responsibility in the school admission campaign, Deputy Commissioner Karak. This he said during Khyber Pakhtunkhwa school enrolment campaign for out of school's children. As part of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa school admission campaign, a ceremony was held at the Government Higher Secondary School.

Teachers and students participated in large numbers. The ceremony officially started with the recitation of Holy Quran, District Education Officer Karak while giving a briefing said that like the entire province, the admission campaign has started in the district of Kirk which will continue for the whole year. DC said that the performance of the district education department and schools in the field of education is commendable and in this

regard the district administration will continue its support so that no child is deprived of the right to education.

The role of teachers and parents in the campaign is very important. If we are sitting here today, it is the result of the sacrifices of teachers and parents. I still remember those teachers who have played their role in making our lives. Society is incomplete without it. The Deputy Commissioner appealed to the parents.



QUETTA: Vehicles' passing through damaged Serki road, needs attention of authorities concerned.

## Baisakhi Mela begins in Kartarpur

KARTARPUR (INP): The Sikh community in Pakistan started celebrations of the Baisakhi Mela in Kartarpur, Narowal on Wednesday. According to the channel, the arrival of thousands of Sikh pilgrims from all over the world including India has also been started in Kartarpur.

For foreign visitors, there are special arrangements of residence, food, medical, transport and fool-proof security for Sikh yatris in Kartarpur. The channel reported that more than three thousand Sikh yatris will reach Kartarpur

by special trains today to pay for their religious rituals connected to the Baisakhi Mela.

It is worth mentioning that special food (langar) made with vegetables from the lands used by Baba Guru Nanak will be provided to the visitors of the Kartarpur during the Baisakhi Mela. As per the channel report, pickles, potatoes, special halwa, tea and other food items are included in the langar.

Baisakhi, also known as Vaisakhi, marks the first day of the month of Vaisakh and is traditionally

celebrated annually on 13 April and sometimes 14 April.

It is seen as a spring harvest celebration primarily in Punjab. For Sikhs, in addition to its significance as the harvest festival, during which Sikhs hold kirtans, visit local gurdwaras, and community fairs, hold nagar kirtan processions, raise the Nishan Sahib flag, and gather to socialize and share festive foods. Vaisakhi observes major events in the history of Sikhism and the Indian subcontinent that happened in the Punjab region.





GAZA: A woman reacting next to the bodies of Palestinians killed in an Israeli attack in Rafah.

## NK buying Chinese surveillance cameras in a push to tighten control

SEOUL (AP): North Korea is putting surveillance cameras in schools and workplaces and collecting fingerprints, photographs and other biometric information from its citizens in a technology-driven push to monitor its population even more closely, a report said.

The state's growing use of digital surveillance tools, which combine equipment imported from China with domestically developed software, threatens to erase many of the small spaces North Koreans have left to engage in private business activities, access foreign media and secretly criticize their government, the researchers wrote. But the isolated country's digital ambitions have to contend with poor electricity supplies and low network connectivity. Those challenges, and a history of reliance on human methods of spying on its citizens, mean that digital surveillance isn't yet as pervasive as in China, according to the report, published by the North Korea-focused website 38 North.

The study's findings align with widely held views that North Korean leader Kim Jong Un is stepping up efforts to tighten the state's control of its citizens and promote loyalty to his regime. These efforts were boosted by the COVID-19 pandemic, during which the North imposed stringent border controls that were maintained for three years before a cautious reopening in 2023.

New laws and recent reports of harsher punishments suggest that the government is cracking down on foreign influence and imported media, likely helped by fences and electronic monitoring systems installed on the border with China during the pandemic. "Having seen that it's possible to close the border this tightly, I think they are now keen to keep it that way," said Martyn Williams, an analyst who co-authored the study with Natalia Slavney.

"In terms of broader surveillance across the country, the pandemic could have played a part, but I think a much bigger role has been played by the fast-reducing cost of surveillance equipment," Williams said. The

report examined North Korean surveillance technologies through information gained from domestic and international media coverage and publicly announced research at North Korean universities and state organizations. The researchers also said they interviewed 40 North Korean escapees about the surveillance they experienced when they lived in the country and, through unspecified partners, surveyed 100 current North Korean residents in 2023 via phone, text messages and other forms of encrypted communication to ensure their safety.

State media reports show that video surveillance is becoming more common at schools, workplaces and airports. The cameras are mostly sourced from Chinese vendors and range from basic video feeds to more advanced models that include features like face recognition. Experts have warned that China is exporting the technology that powers its AI-powered surveillance to countries around the world.

North Korean state media reports show that cameras now appear in most schools in the capital, Pyongyang, and other major cities, allowing school staff to remotely monitor what's happening in classrooms by panning and zooming to focus on individual students or teachers. Cameras are also widespread in factories, government buildings and other workplaces, both to improve security and to prevent theft, while facial recognition systems have been used to record visitors at Pyongyang's Sunan airport since 2019.

North Korea has also been expanding its network of traffic cameras beyond Pyongyang since 2021, installing them at major roads heading into and out of the city, likely for the purpose of automatically recording license plates, the report said. The government may not yet be fully able to utilize the data it collects, and it currently doesn't have an intensive network of security cameras in streets and residential areas, possibly due to electricity shortages and the large number of security agents already monitoring public life in Pyongyang

and elsewhere.

But North Korea does appear to be envisioning a future of more pervasive video surveillance - North Korean universities and research institutions for years have focused on developing technologies related to movement detection and facial and license plate recognition, according to the report. Meanwhile, the state is also building detailed biometric profiles of its citizens. The latest version of North Korean national identification cards comes in a smartcard format and requires citizens to provide fingerprints, facial photographs and, at least according to one report, to take a blood test.

"For North Koreans, the spread of CCTV means even greater surveillance of their lives, especially if the cameras include automatic detection systems. If such cameras become more broadly used, citizens involved in illicit activities would be especially at risk as facial detection could track their movements throughout cities," Williams and Slavney wrote. "At present, North Koreans who get caught in activities such as smuggling or distributing illegally imported goods and foreign content can bribe local security services, but, unlike humans, security cameras cannot be bribed," they said.

Williams said the government will push to expand its surveillance network beyond major cities as infrastructure improves. It still won't be easy to make use of vast amounts of video data, he said, but North Korea can draw lessons from the surveillance state next door. "Perhaps the biggest hurdle is the computing infrastructure to process all of this data in real time. Doing so on a national or even provincial level is not an easy task, if the network is to be truly pervasive and consist of multiple cameras," Williams said. "The country would have to build a small data center and ensure a constant supply of power. I think it definitely can be inspired by China, which is a comparatively freer society in general but has a much more Orwellian digital surveillance network."

## Trudeau's govt raises taxes on wealthiest Canadians

OTTAWA (AP): Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's government announced it is imposing higher taxes on the wealthiest Canadians as part of the federal budget. The budget proposes to increase the capital gains inclusion rate, which refers to the taxable share of profit made on the sale of assets.

The taxable portion of capital gains above \$250,000 Canadian (US\$181,000) would rise from half to two-thirds, which the federal government says will only affect 0.1% of Canadians and raise nearly \$20 billion Canadian (US\$14.5 billion) in revenue over five years. "I know there will be many voices raised in protest. No one likes paying more tax, even - or perhaps particularly - those who can afford it the most," Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland said. "But before they complain too bitterly, I would like Canada's one per cent - Canada's 0.1% - to consider this: What kind of Canada do you want to live in?"

Freeland presented the federal budget, which pledges \$53 billion Canadian (US\$38 billion) in new spending that she says is focused on economic justice for younger generations. Freeland denied that her latest budget is mainly a political exercise - but nonetheless acknowledged that for anyone under 40 in Canada, it's "just harder to establish yourself" than it was for the generations that came before. Freeland delivered a budget that she said capped the federal deficit at \$40 billion Canadian (US\$29 billion).

## UN's Libya envoy quits

NEW YORK: The UN's special envoy for Libya says he is his resigning as the world body cannot successfully support the country's political transition when its leaders put their own interests above finding a solution. "I tendered my resignation to the secretary-general," Senegalese diplomat Abdoulaye Bathily told reporters after briefing the Security Council on the situation in the North African country.

The UN support mission in Libya (UNSMIL) "made a lot of efforts under my leadership over the last 18 months", but the situation has deteriorated, Bathily said, condemning a "lack of political will and good faith" by Libyan leaders. "Under the circumstances, there is no way the UN can operate successfully," he concluded. "There is no room for a solution in the future."

Bathily also announced the delay of a national reconciliation conference, originally scheduled for April 28. A new date has not been set. Libya is still riven by conflict and civil war more than a decade after the 2011 NATO-backed overthrow of long-time ruler Muammar Gaddafi. The country is divided between a UN-recognised government based in Tripoli and a rival administration in the country's east. Although relative calm has returned to the oil-rich country in the past four years, clashes periodically occur between armed groups.

"The selfish resolve of current leaders to maintain the status quo through delaying tactics and manoeuvres at the expense of the Libyan people must stop," Bathily said. Bathily had been named to his position in September 2022, after the abrupt resignation of his predecessor Jan Kubis in November of the year prior. Kubis, of Slovakia, quit less than a year after taking on the role, giving no precise reason for the decision. — Aljazeera

## Croatia votes in parliamentary election

ZAGREB (AP): Croatia is voting Wednesday in a parliamentary election after a campaign centered on a bitter rivalry between the president and prime minister that has sparked a political crisis in the small European Union and NATO member.

The ballot pits the ruling conservative Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) led by Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic against an alliance of centrist and left-wing parties informally led by populist President Zoran Milanovic and his Social Democratic Party (SDP). The election is being held as Croatia struggles with the highest inflation rate in the eurozone, a labor shortage, illegal migration and reports of widespread corruption.

At stake in the race for Croatia's 151-seat parliament is not just the Adriatic Sea country's future domestic policies but also the EU's unity as it grapples with the instability from Russia's invasion of Ukraine. If the HDZ stays in power, the country would continue a pro-Western course in supporting Ukraine in its fight against Russia. A success for SDP could put it on track for victory in the European Parliament elec-

tions in June and the presidential election in December. It would shake the HDZ's long dominance of politics and potentially open space for stronger pro-Russian influence in the country, akin to Hungary and Slovakia. Polls close Wednesday evening and official results are expected Thursday.

Most pre-election polls predicted a HDZ victory, but without enough seats to rule alone. The left-wing opposition may benefit from discontent with the country's high inflation and the general economic malaise in most EU member states. Smaller parties on the right and the left could be key to both the HDZ and SDP in their quest to power. The HDZ has largely held power since Croatia gained independence from the former Yugoslavia in 1991. The Balkan nation became the newest member of the European Union in 2013, and joined Europe's passport-free travel area and the eurozone last year. The president holds a largely ceremonial role in Croatia, while the prime minister exerts most of the political power. The election has played out as the final episode in the long-running rivalry between Plenkovic and Milanovic. After

Milanovic scheduled the election and announced his surprise bid for prime minister, he began campaigning on behalf of the SDP. But Croatia's constitutional court judges stepped in, saying the move was unconstitutional.

They said that the president can't run for prime minister, take part in the parliamentary election or campaign in favor of any party, unless he first resigns. Milanovic refused, openly ignoring the top court and continuing to campaign in favor of the left-wing alliance. He accused Plenkovic and the HDZ of rampant corruption and "massive theft" of state funds, referring to past and present scandals, some of which had ended up in the courts. Plenkovic, who has led the government since 2016, repeatedly denied the accusations, saying Milanovic as the prime minister would shift the country away from the EU and closer to Russia. Milanovic has often voiced a pro-Russian stance during the war in Ukraine, opposing the training of Ukrainian soldiers in Croatia as well as sending weapons to Ukraine because, in his view, it only prolongs the war. He also criticized EU's policies over Ukraine.

## EU to start work on expanding Iran sanctions

BRUSSELS (Reuters): The European Union will prepare to expand its sanctions on Iran in response to Tehran's attack on Israel, EU top diplomat Josep Borrell said after an emergency video conference of the bloc's foreign ministers. Borrell cited UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres in declaring that the Middle East was "at the edge of an abyss" following Iran's missile and drone attack at the weekend.

"Today, ministers took a strong stance, asking all actors in the region to move away from the abyss, in order not to fall into it," he told reporters after the meeting, called to discuss the repercussions of the Iranian attack. Borrell, the EU's high representative for foreign policy, warned the Middle East would be in "full war" if every development in the current crisis is followed by an escalation. Borrell said several EU members proposed expanding a sanctions regime that seeks to curb the supply of Iranian drones to Russia to include

the provision of missiles and cover deliveries to Iranian proxies in the Middle East. Germany, France and several other EU members have publicly backed such a proposal.

Borrell said he supported the proposal and diplomats would work on it in the coming days so ministers could discuss it again at a meeting in Luxembourg. He said some EU members also raised the prospect of sanctioning Iran's dominant military force, the Revolutionary Guard Corps. But Borrell reiterated the EU's position that the corps could only be designated as a terrorist organisation if a national authority in the EU found that the group had been involved in terrorist activity. He said the EU was not aware of any such case but he would ask the EU's diplomatic service to examine the matter again. Borrell said all the ministers from the 27-nation EU strongly condemned the Iranian attack and reaffirmed their commitment to Israel's security.

But he also voiced strong criticism of Israel's conduct of the war in Gaza, launched in response to the Hamas attack on Israel from the Palestinian enclave on Oct. 7 last year. He said far too little aid was getting into Gaza to deal with a "catastrophic humanitarian situation" and questioned Israeli calls for Palestinians in the south of the enclave to move to the north. "It's impossible for any human being to live there. There is no water, there's no electricity, there's no sewerage. There's no houses, there is no nothing. It's like the moon," he said. "If they wanted to make Gaza a place where human life is not possible, in the north they managed to succeed." Israel has dismissed such accusations and Israeli officials have voiced irritation at Borrell's repeated criticism of their conduct during the war. Some EU member states have also voiced frustration at his criticism of Israel while others have given him strong backing.

## Zelenskyy signs new army draft law

KYIV: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has signed into law a bill overhauling army mobilisation rules as Ukraine seeks to address acute troop shortages in its fight against Russia's invasion. The law will come into force a month after its publication on Ukraine's parliamentary website.

It obliges men to update their draft data with the authorities, boosts payments to those who volunteer and adds new punishments for draft dodging. It remains unclear how many soldiers could be mobilised under the new provisions although some serving military personnel and analysts have expressed concern that the law will not be enough to address shortages.

The law lacks much tougher sanctions for draft evasion that were contained in the initial version of the

legislation. The draft caused a public outcry, and there were more than 4,000 amendments before the final reading in parliament. Al Jazeera's Charles Stratford, reporting from Lyman in eastern Ukraine, said the law was expected to make it easier to boost conscription amid fears that Russia could launch a new offensive in the coming months.

"Western intelligence agencies and the Ukrainian military say they expect the Russian forces to mount what is being described as 'a concerted push' in the next few weeks, certainly by early summer," he said. "This is very important when we already know that Ukraine is suffering a severe manpower shortage," he said. Zelenskyy recently signed a separate law cutting the draft age to

25 from 27 to try to secure more fighting power. Ukraine began mobilisation immediately after Russia's invasion in February 2022. The country initially saw a significant influx of volunteer fighters, but numbers later plunged, and thousands of cases of draft evasion have been reported since.

Kyiv's troops are facing a shortage of ammunition as vital funding from the United States has been blocked by Republicans in Congress for months and the European Union is failing to deliver munitions on time while Russian forces are inching forward. Army chief Oleksandr Syrskyy said last week that the situation on the eastern front had significantly escalated recently and Russian troops aimed to capture the town of Chasiv Yar by May 9. — Aljazeera

## UN demands Israeli forces end support of settler attacks in West Bank

WEST BANK: The United Nations human rights office has called on Israel to halt its support of attacks by settlers in the occupied West Bank. The call came a day after Israeli settlers shot dead two Palestinians in the West Bank following the killing of a Palestinian teenager during a military raid.

Separately, dozens of settlers stormed the village of al-Mughayyir, northeast of Ramallah, killing one Palestinian and wounding

at least 25 others after a 14-year-old Israeli settler went missing. Ravina Shamdasani, spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, said, "Israel, as the occupying power, must take all measures in its power to restore, and ensure, as far as possible, public order and safety in the occupied West Bank."

"This obligation includes protecting Palestinians from settler attacks, and ending unlawful use of

force against Palestinians by the Israeli Security Forces," she said. The spokesperson described the escalating violence as "a matter of grave concern" and called on countries "with influence to do everything in their power" to ease tensions. The Palestinian Health Ministry has said at least 466 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli forces or settlers in the West Bank since October 7, when Israel launched a war on Gaza following

an attack on southern Israel led by the Palestinian group Hamas, which governs Gaza.

Separately, the Palestinian human rights organisation Al-Haq said in a statement that 112 children have been killed by the Israeli military and another three by settlers since October 7. Settler attacks have more than doubled from an average of three to eight incidents a day, Al-Haq found. The rate of Palestinians displaced more than doubled, with

280 Palestinians displaced on average every month due to settlement expansion, which is at its highest level since UN monitoring began in 2017. Al-Haq, Al Mezan Center for Human Rights and the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR) urged the international community, as well as private actors and businesses, to act to stop the violence against Palestinians.

Meanwhile, the UN announced that it would launch on Wednesday a

\$2.8bn appeal for donations to help Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, according to a senior agency official. "Of course, 90 percent of [the budget] is for Gaza," Andrea De Domenico, head of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the Palestinian territories said, noting that the original plan had been \$4bn for 2024, but budgeting was slashed given the "limited ability" of humanitarian aid distribution access. — Aljazeera



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Strategic dialogue

THE Significance of Pakistan's Finance Minister's Visit to Washington D.C.\*\* In a climate of global economic volatility, the recent visit of Pakistan's Finance Minister to Washington D.C. underscores a critical juncture not only for Pakistan's economy but also for its diplomatic relations with the United States. This visit is significant as it highlights the ongoing strategic dialogues and economic partnerships between the two nations, while also emphasizing Pakistan's efforts to stabilize its economy amid internal and external challenges.

Firstly, the visit comes at a time when Pakistan is grappling with severe economic hardships, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, political instability, and increasing trade deficits. The discussions in Washington are therefore not just routine diplomacy but a desperate quest for stability and support.

The agenda likely included seeking aid, investments, and favorable terms for trade, all of which are crucial for Pakistan's struggling economy. Moreover, the finance minister's trip is pivotal in terms of securing continued financial assistance from international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), where U.S. influence is significant.

Past dialogues have often resulted in crucial funding that helped Pakistan navigate through economic crises. The current scenario makes this interaction even more crucial as Pakistan seeks to avoid defaulting on its international obligations. However, the implications of this visit extend beyond mere financial negotiations. It is also a litmus test for the strength and depth of Pakistan-U.S. relations. Historically, the relationship between the two countries has been a roller-coaster, influenced by geopolitical dynamics, including U.S. policies in Asia. The finance minister's visit is an opportunity to reaffirm ties and ensure that bilateral relations remain favorable.

This visit also presents a platform to discuss broader issues such as security, regional stability, and cooperation in the fight against terrorism. These are areas where Pakistan has been a key player historically, often aligning its efforts with U.S. interests in the region. Strengthening economic ties cannot be viewed in isolation from these broader strategic interests, which are intertwined with economic stability.

Critically, the outcomes of this visit should also be a reflection of Pakistan's own long-term economic strategies. Relying on external financial assistance is a stop-gap measure, not a solution. Pakistan must leverage this opportunity to attract more sustainable investment and trade relations, which are essential for the country's autonomy and economic sovereignty. In conclusion, the finance minister's visit to Washington is not just another diplomatic engagement.

It is a nuanced blend of economic pleading, strategic partnership, and geopolitical maneuvering. The effectiveness of this visit will be measured not just by the immediate financial aid or investments secured, but by the long-term sustainability and stability it brings to Pakistan's economy, and by extension, its impact on regional and global stability. This visit is an opportunity for Pakistan to assert itself as a resilient, viable partner on the international stage, capable of contributing positively to global economic and political stability.

A steadfast resolve

PAKISTAN'S Commitment to Eliminating Terrorism and Enhancing National Security The recent 264th Corps Commanders' Conference (CCC), presided over by General Syed Asim Munir, Chief of Army Staff (COAS), at the General Headquarters in Rawalpindi, has once again underscored Pakistan's unwavering resolve to eliminate the scourge of terrorism from its soil.

The conference was not only a reflection of the military's commitment to national security but also an affirmation of its role in the broader socio-economic stability of the country. The forum rightly paid homage to the supreme sacrifices made by the Shuhadas—heroes from the armed forces, law enforcement agencies, and civilians who have laid down their lives for the peace and stability of Pakistan.

These sacrifices form the bedrock of the nation's resilience against threats both internal and external, reminding us of the price paid for the security we often take for granted. General Munir's appreciation for the Pakistan Army and law enforcement agencies' successful operations against terrorist activities is commendable.

Their proactive efforts have thwarted several attacks and neutralized key terrorist commanders, demonstrating a significant stride in counter-terrorism operations. The directive to deny any space to terrorists is a clear message: Pakistan will not tolerate any threat to its people and sovereignty. The condemnation of the terrorist attack against Chinese nationals in Besham and the killings in Balochistan highlights the external threats and internal challenges Pakistan faces.

It is crucial to recognize the regional dynamics, especially the adverse activities originating from Afghanistan, which not only threaten Pakistan but also pose risks to regional and global security. These activities undermine Pakistan's economic interests, notably the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a pivotal project for the nation's future economic prosperity.

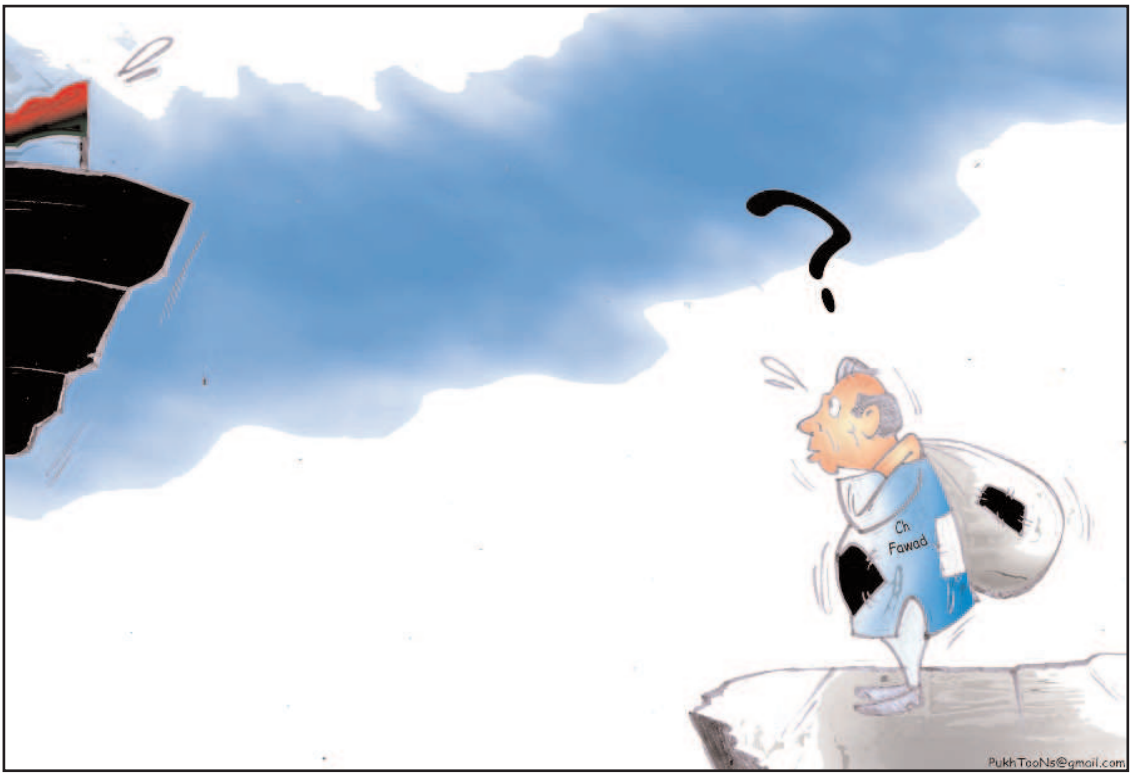
The conference also touched upon the ongoing aggression in Jammu and Kashmir, reaffirming Pakistan's support for the Kashmiri struggle. This stance is consistent with Pakistan's long-held policy of providing moral, political, and diplomatic support to the Kashmiris. Similarly, the expression of solidarity with the people of Palestine emphasizes Pakistan's position on international justice and human rights.

Moreover, the commanders' concern over the malicious propaganda campaigns aimed at demoralizing the armed forces is a serious issue. Such divisive tactics, designed to weaken the bond between the military and the populace, must be met with unity and legal measures to preserve the integrity of the state. The commitment to supporting the government's initiatives for socio-economic growth, including combating illegal activities like smuggling and electricity theft, is a testament to the military's broader role in national development. The emphasis on maintaining high standards of operational preparedness and professional excellence underscores the military's role as a stable and progressive force within the country.

In conclusion, the outcomes of the CCC illustrate a comprehensive approach to national security, one that integrates military might with socio-economic initiatives. Pakistan's path to stability is fraught with challenges, but with a concerted effort from the military and supporting civilian agencies, the nation can look towards a future where peace and prosperity prevail. This conference has not just been about setting directives but reaffirming a commitment to the nation—a safer, more prosperous Pakistan.

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It is time for a democratic world order

Muhannad Ayyash

THERE has been much discussion about South Africa's landmark case against Israel at the International Court of Justice, accusing it of committing the crime of genocide. When it comes to tangible action, this case has been one of the few bright spots in an otherwise lackluster response from states around the world to the Israeli slaughter of the Palestinian people.

One of the lesser known parts of this story in Western public discourse generally, but more pertinently within activist spaces, is that the US empire is threatening to punish South Africa for bringing this much needed case against Israel. Republican Representative John James and Democratic Representative Jared Moskowitz introduced in early February the US-South Africa Bilateral Relations Review Act in the United States House of Representatives. This legislation would require a full review of the relationship between the US and South Africa on the baseless and spurious grounds that South Africa is supporting "terrorism".

South African International Relations and Cooperation Minister Naledi Pandor recently said on a visit to Turkey: "In terms of responses, unfortunately, there are some legislators in the United States of America that have taken a very negative position against my country." Although this story has received little attention and many pro-Palestinian activists in the US, Canada, the United Kingdom and elsewhere have not even heard about it, it is part of the discourse in activist and scholarly circles in South Africa. Among other things, people are concerned about what these threats will mean to their economic wellbeing: funding for the arts; scholarly, community, social and cultural projects and initiatives; and the sustainability of funding models for non-governmental organisations since many of these are economically dependent on various US institutions.

It is incumbent on activists across the world, but especially in the US, to speak up against the US threat to punish South Africa and demand that their government does not pursue such a path. This should become a protest demand along with the other demands that activists are currently making. South Africa has put its neck on the

line for the Palestinian cause, and the least Palestinian supporters can do is to support South Africa against the threats of US imperialism in this moment. It is also incumbent on middle powers across the world to begin forming a coalition to protect not just South Africa today but also themselves from US imperial power.

It is clear to any honest observer that without direct action from states to isolate the Israeli state economically and politically and place pressure on it legally, it will not depart from the path of genocide - not now, not in the future. When pressed on the necessity of taking this course of action, one of the common off-the-record responses activists, policy analysts and scholars receive from government officials around the world, including South Africa, is: "We want to pursue more meaningful direct action to help the Palestinian people, but we cannot withstand a punishing reaction from the US."

I do not see this response as a form of diversion, nor do I consider it cowardly. Government officials cannot so easily dismiss the economic hardships their country would face from a harsh US reaction. But it is not good enough to end the conversation with this response. Since the US empire is a major obstacle to Palestinian rights, freedom, liberation and sovereignty as well as the sovereignty of middle powers, then middle power states have both a duty and a self-interest to plan and follow a path of action that deals with this problem.

Obviously, the best path forward is for countries around the world to become less dependent on US and Western imperial economic power. Although there are efforts to accomplish this goal, such as BRICS, it remains a long way from changing global economic structures. The Palestinian people cannot afford to wait this long. Another more immediate path is to make it difficult for the US to respond harshly to states that cut off all diplomatic and economic ties to the Israeli state. The principle of this more immediate path is simple: There is strength and safety in numbers.

If a coalition of middle powers forms and together announces their severing of ties with Israel, then it will be more difficult for the US to punish them all because it would become too costly for

the US itself to do so. What might such a coalition look like? It can start with countries like South Africa, Turkey, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Egypt, Morocco, Spain, Norway, Ireland and others. Countries that already don't claim any diplomatic and economic relations with Israel - such as Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan and others - would also join the coalition to offer support and protection from the US. Lesser powers can also join when this momentum builds, adding pressure and making it virtually impossible for the US to target all of them.

Momentum can build, and countries such as Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Belgium and others that understand that this is the right course of action but are either too cowardly or too unwilling to pursue it for reasons of economic self-interest and their role in the US imperial alliance might be pressured to join, even if partially, by imposing a full two-way arms embargo on Israel. None of this will be easy. But it is necessary, and it can work. And here I think that activists should begin to speak to their government's self-interest to pressure them towards forming such a coalition. Governments will only move so much on the basis of a "name and shame" strategy and electoral politics calculations. State self-interest has to also be addressed; activists, policy analysts and scholars can convince their governments that it is in their best interest to follow this policy path.

Challenging the US empire on the question of Palestine will have tremendous consequences for building a more democratic world order. Although some of the states listed above believe that by simply ignoring the plight of the Palestinian people, they can avoid clashing with the US, this is short-term thinking for two reasons. First, just because they can avoid the wrath of the US on the question of Palestine does not mean that they will not face it on another issue in the future. It is never in the self-interest of middle powers to live under the subordination of a great superpower. Even if temporarily beneficial, at some point, there will be a price to pay for this subordination. So why challenge it now if they do not have to at this moment?

This is where the second reason comes in. There is

currently grassroots momentum around the world to challenge US imperialism. Now is the time to seize the opportunity, draw on this energy and direct it towards a democratic world order that in fact stands up for human rights and freedoms for all. It is critical to seize this moment and send a message to the US empire that business as usual, where US dominance determines international economic, political and cultural directions, is neither wanted nor tolerated. The US empire will either have to come around or itself become isolated. When we reach that stage, we will reach the end of Israeli settler colonialism. We will reach the end of apartheid and genocide, the two most lethal weapons in the Israeli settler colonial arsenal.

Once Israel is globally isolated, it will be forced to change its behaviour. Israelis will have no choice but to cease their settler colonial project. Palestinians and Israelis can then begin negotiating for true decolonial peace and justice under the banner of a one-state solution, under which all have equal rights and freedoms and the land and sovereignty can be shared between Palestinians and Israelis. Such an outcome will not only be beneficial for Palestinians and Israelis, but it will also be a real signal that the US empire is no longer the empire that it once was and people from around the world, Americans included, can begin to build a real democratic world order that is no longer under the thumb of one superpower.

A democratic world order will decrease the chances of great wars, imperial wars and settler colonial conquests and help avoid the tremendous human suffering that the Palestinians today are experiencing. The horrors that the Palestinian people have been facing for more than 100 years did not start with the Palestinians and will not end there. It is in everyone's self-interest to avoid such suffering, and one way to do that is to build a more democratic world.

The great Nelson Mandela once said: "We know too well that our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians." It is well past time that the rest of the world came to truly understand what this quote means and take tangible action to advance freedom from empire and colonialism.

Aljazeera

Israel must understand how it lost support of its friends

Yossi Mekelberg

THE chorus of a very popular Israeli song that topped the charts for weeks goes as follows: "The whole world is against us. Don't worry, we'll overcome. They don't care about us. Don't worry, we'll manage." Despite the gloomy nature of these lyrics, it has a very cheerful tune and, for those of you who are unfamiliar with Israeli music, this is not a new song written in response to Oct. 7 and criticizing the way Israel is conducting the war in Gaza, but one that was written 55 years ago.

Yes, this sentiment is deeply ingrained in Israeli society, allowing a master manipulator like Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his like in the populist far right to exploit it for their personal and political interests and reject any criticisms that originate from abroad.

This sense of fear and vulnerability among many in Israel is currently being fueled by an ultranationalistic and opportunistic government that keeps driving home the message that Israel can do no wrong and all those who criticize it either do not understand the grave dangers Israel is facing, do not care about this or are simply antisemites who want to see the state destroyed.

Without taking anything away from the severity of the atrocities it committed on Oct. 7, from the moment Hamas began to be repeatedly described by top Israeli officials and others as a Nazi movement - and the people of Gaza as active or at least passive collaborators - the death and devastation inflicted on Gazans by the Israeli armed forces has become justified and legitimized in the eyes of most Israelis. Moreover, Israeli media seldom shows the horrors in Gaza, hence it is easier for many to remain willingly oblivious to it and show no sympathy for the great suffering of their Palestinian neighbors.

It is not that all criticism leveled against Israel is necessarily correct, fair or beyond reproach. But much of it is legitimate and constructive and, had its government heeded it, Israel's international standing would have been in much better shape and might have led to some strategic achievements in the war with Hamas. It was US President Joe Biden who, at the beginning of the war, knew in his heart of hearts that Israel under Netanyahu, who depends on the dangerous presence of the messianic-religious far right for his political survival, was not about to take a measured approach with a strategic horizon. Instead, it would react with disproportionate force in a rush of anger, revenge and a drive to deter not only Hamas but the entire region from daring to repeat what Hamas did. And it would do that in the most simplistic and crude manner.

In his visit to Israel only days after Oct. 7, Biden warned the country's leadership not to make the same mistakes as the US did in response to the 9/11 terrorist attack, observing that "those horrors have tapped into some kind of primal feeling in Israel just like it did in the United States. Shock, pain, rage." An all-consuming rage." Such a warning was prophetic, yet such an outcome could have been prevented by the very person who expressed that fear. Nevertheless, within a very

short time, which by now feels like an eternity, Israel has experienced an unprecedented loss of international support because it ignored the warnings of Biden and others. It feels almost inappropriate to speak of a PR battle in a war in which so many thousands of people have lost their lives and many more have been injured and deeply traumatized, while hundreds of thousands have also lost their homes, their belongings and probably their hope for a better future. However, in the sad reality of modern warfare, the battle to win over public opinion is crucial and Israel started from a position where it would have been unimaginable to lose this battle.

The international community showed sympathy and support and genuinely wanted to embrace the Israeli people in their time of great anguish, while those who were rejoicing at the massacre it suffered at the hands of Hamas were a very small minority and were rightly silenced. Yet, six months later, Israel, by its reckless approach to the lives of ordinary Palestinians in Gaza, including thousands of children, has reversed this broad international support and also alienated those who are traditionally and instinctively its friends and allies. Instead of consolidating support for the country, Netanyahu's government has made it almost untenable to maintain it. Staggeringly, this has upset and angered many Israelis, and not only the prime minister's political opponents, who cannot accept that a just war could involve killing more than 33,000 people, the vast majority of whom have committed no acts of militancy against Israel. One cannot maintain the backing of the world when one treats an entire territory and its people as collateral damage in a war with one's enemies, repeatedly displaces them and denies them access to humanitarian aid to the point of starvation and with no access to medical aid.

It is especially unsustainable for those countries that are providing the weaponry and the ammunition that enables this to happen, first and foremost because such aid cannot be justified when it is turned against civilians, but also because it makes these enablers complicit in what one day might be deemed by the International Court of Justice to be war crimes or even genocide. Furthermore, in an age of around-the-clock media coverage, the horror of what is taking place in Gaza is being witnessed by millions of viewers worldwide. The pressure on governments to make their support for Israel conditional on stopping the killings and the destruction has become inevitable.

Whether or not Israelis approve or appreciate it, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict always enters into the domestic politics of many countries and, when it flares up the debate around this, it can become extremely toxic and at times threaten to descend into actual violence. Israel can only ignore this at its own peril. When the war is over and the inevitable investigation is held into the failures that allowed the disaster of Oct. 7 and the nature of Israel's response, some attention should also be paid to the need for Israel to understand how it has lost this PR battle so quickly and at such a cost to the country.

Insurance firms should shun the East African Crude Oil Pipeline

Myrto Tilianaki & Hellen Huang

LAST year was the hottest on record, with extreme weather events in many corners of the globe. It was also the year in which countries reached a landmark agreement at the UN Climate Conference (COP28) to begin "transitioning away from fossil fuels".

If governments are to comply with this agreement and avert global climate collapse, there cannot be any new expansion of coal, oil and gas production. This includes the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP), one of the largest and most controversial fossil fuel projects currently under development. Financing for EACOP is yet to be secured, but if it is and the project moves forward, a 1,443km (897-mile) pipeline will stretch from oil fields in western Uganda to the port of Tanga in eastern Tanzania.

The project's completion would not only contribute to

increased greenhouse gas emissions which fuel climate change but also harm local communities. That is why, Human Rights Watch is calling on insurance firms to stop providing support for it. The pipeline is planned to traverse some of Africa's most sensitive ecosystems, including Murchison Falls National Park and the Murchison Falls-Albert Delta Ramsar site. Pipeline ruptures, inadequate waste handling, and other pollution impacts would cause significant damage to the land, water, air and the species that rely on them.

Our research found that the project's initial land acquisition process has already devastated thousands of people's livelihoods in Uganda, causing food insecurity and household debt that has resulted in children dropping out of school. During our interviews with local communities, many described being largely self-sufficient before the project began, using re-

venue from coffee, bananas and other cash crops to pay for school fees and other household expenses. When their land was allocated for the pipeline construction, they were not compensated immediately for it.

They waited an average of three to five years after the land evaluation process took place, and interviewees repeatedly told Human Rights Watch that the payments they received were not adequate to purchase replacement land. They said they were worse off than they were previously. While they were waiting for compensation, many farmers understood that they were not permitted to access their land to tend perennial crops, and were therefore deprived of crucial income.

Residents described how the payment delays impacted their food security, pushing them to sell household assets, including livestock, or borrow money from

predatory lenders at excessive rates to buy the food they would have previously grown on their plots and cover other expenses. This has left many families poorer and more insecure about their future. If the pipeline is completed, more than 100,000 people in Uganda and Tanzania will permanently lose land to make way for it.

Civil society groups in Uganda and Tanzania have called for the pipeline not to be built, citing climate, environmental and social risks. Ugandan civil society groups say that, instead of building the pipeline, the Ugandan government should develop its abundant renewable energy resources - particularly solar and hydropower - to drive economic development and secure access to energy without further contributing to climate change. Their demands have been met with hostility from the

Ugandan authorities. Our research documented the Ugandan government's systematic harassment, arbitrary arrests of and threats against environmental defenders and anti-fossil fuel activists for raising concerns over the pipeline project and oil development.

In this context, it is deeply troubling that insurance companies are enabling this and other big fossil fuel projects by providing insurance for them. This is despite the fact that new oil projects are wholly inconsistent with limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius and avoiding the worst consequences of climate change. In late 2023, Human Rights Watch wrote to 15 insurance and reinsurance companies and shared our findings on the grave environmental and human rights risks associated with the pipeline. Only two companies - Lloyd's of London and Chubb - responded to us, and neither agreed to reassess their

involvement in the project.

In early March, civil society groups across the world organised a global week of action to end fossil fuels, including confronting insurance companies about their role in the climate crisis and asking them to rule out support for fossil fuel projects. Anti-fossil fuel activists held peaceful protests at regional offices of the insurance companies still involved in the East African project with the message: "Insure our futures, not fossil fuels." Increasing numbers of insurers have made public commitments to not underwrite the pipeline, but others have persisted. Continued support for EACOP is a mistake. By underwriting the project, insurers are helping to build the longest heated oil pipeline in the world at a time when the world is warming at dangerous levels. Insurance companies should refuse to support this project.



# What gun laws can't stop

WHEN news broke of a stabbing, and mass killing, at a Sydney shopping mall in which a baby was attacked, right-wing commentators overseas were quick to falsely diagnose the motive. "Another day. Another terror attack by another Islamist terrorist. Six dead, others seriously injured, including a baby," tweeted the British right-wing commentator Julia Hartley-Brewer.

But Hartley-Brewer was wrong. And she later acknowledged the post was incorrect. The motive was not Islamist but an everyday threat for women: gendered violence. It was "obvious" said the New South Wales Police Commissioner Karen Webb, that now-deceased attacker Joel Cauchi, a diagnosed schizophrenic according to his family, had a specific kind of victim in mind when he entered the beach suburb of Bondi's busy Westfield shopping center on Saturday. "The videos (of the attack) speak for themselves don't they?" Webb told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC). "It's obvious to me, it's obvious to detectives, that that seems to be an area of interest, that the offender had focussed on women and avoided the men.

"Five of the (six) deceased are women and the majority of victims in hospital are also women," she said. Webb added that police didn't know what was in the mind of Cauchi when he launched his attack. Detectives will certainly be trawling through his online activity to see if he belonged to any hate groups that operate in the darkest corners of the web. Cauchi's father Andrew Cauchi - who appeared devastated - believes his "monster" son may have deliberately set out to kill women, he told Australian media.

"Because he wanted a girlfriend, and he has no social skills, and he was frustrated out of his brain," added the visibly distraught father. Like Cauchi's

father, the nation is also traumatised. Multiple people, including a new mother, slaughtered in daylight in an affluent suburb is something Australians read about in the news when it happens in other countries. Rarely does it occur in their backyard. When it did in 1996 after the Port Arthur Massacre when a lone gunman killed 35 people, then-prime minister John Howard, a Conservative leader, acted - with bipartisan support that has remained rock solid ever since. He enacted strict gun control laws and initiated a massive buy-back scheme. He had to stare down political opposition from his own supporters at the time, but his tough stance has been vindicated by the lack of mass shootings ever since.

But restricting public access to weapons with the capability of mass lethality cannot stop hateful ideologies mixing with other noxious ingredients including radicalization and mental health issues. This includes misogyny. Australian women live with some of the most sexist attitudes in the world, according to research presented to the London-based Global Institute for Women's Leadership, chaired by Australia's former and only female prime minister, Julia Gillard. According to Our Watch, Australia's leading national violence prevention organisation which provided me with the following statistics, two in five women have experienced violence since the age of 15, but it is far more likely - 35% versus 11% - to be at the hands of someone they know, rather than a complete stranger.

This is partly why the Bondi attack was so shocking. Our Watch CEO Patty Kinnerly told me that while the motivating factors in Saturday's attack were complex and still not determined, the case showed why addressing sexist attitudes was critical to

Latika Bourke

women's safety. "While we cannot speak directly about the causes or motives for this specific incident, we know that more broadly, evidence does not point to mental illness being a driver of violence against women," she said. "The evidence consistently shows that the underlying causes of violence directed toward women are rigid gender stereotypes, sexism and disrespect.

"The sad reality is that when men hold unequal and sexist views about women, women are not safe." The city was rocked again by a second and shockingly violent attack on Monday night, when a teenager stabbed worshippers, including Bishop Mar Mari Emmanuel giving mass at the Assyrian Orthodox Christ The Good Shepherd Church. Unlike Cauchi's deadly rampage, the church attack was declared a terrorist act. Roman Quaadvlieg, who worked in Australian law enforcement for decades, including on counterterrorism, told me the motivations behind the types of attacks witnessed in Sydney in the space of just a few days were often driven by a complex set of factors.

"These can be rooted in deep-seated emotional or psychological causes and are often accompanied by mental ill-health, and/or substance abuse," he said. "Lone actor terrorists in non-conflict areas like Australia usually are young males with emotional or psychological vulnerabilities, who are often social misfits as a result of those vulnerabilities," he added.

Quaadvlieg said technology meant that the path to radicalisation was so swift, it could go unnoticed. "I do believe that the evolution of technology, online connectivity, and the proliferation of video images, particularly when they lionize violence, does inspire, embolden, normalise and instruct those who have a disposition to extremism and violence,"

he said. He added that the motivations for attacks didn't need to be the same for them to inspire other radicals. "Considering the attacks occurred in the same city, the short span of time between the attacks and the wide publicity dedicated to the Bondi Junction attack, it is possible that the Wakeley attacker was either motivated to seek similar notoriety, or the Bondi Junction attack gave him confidence to act on an intent he had previously harboured," he said. But one commonality between the two males was their history with knives.

Joel Cauchi had a fixation with blades and kept a collection of them, his father told the newspaper The Australian. And the 16-year-old boy arrested for the church attack was charged with possessing a knife, in November last year, according to the ABC. The ABC also reported that the boy used a switchblade, an illegal weapon in Australia. His attack inside the church did not kill anyone. Imagine if they'd been obsessed with guns.

If he had been living in the United States, might Cauchi have been able to slaughter many more women because of that country's much easier access to assault rifle-style semi-automatic firearms? Because of technology, the ability for self-radicalization - whatever the combination of motivating factors - is speedier now than in the days when Howard had the foresight to ban weapons capable of causing mass casualties in seconds. Australia is rocked by the tragedy. Mums and Dads will be holding their children a little tighter this week.

The twin attacks are horrifying, distressing and shocking but partly why it is so especially shocking is that unlike the US where mass shootings sadly never feel out of the headlines for long, violence in Australia at the scale witnessed these past few days has been rare.

CNN

# America's political polarization to fore ahead of 2024 vote

AS we stand on the cusp of the 2024 US elections, it is evident that the country's political landscape remains deeply divided along party lines. What is perhaps more intriguing than the division itself is the stark contrast in the issues that drive Democratic and Republican voters to the polls. This divergence in priorities has been a hallmark of American politics for decades, reflecting the complex interplay of history, ideology and societal dynamics.

The roots of this divergence can be traced back to the founding principles of the two major political parties. From their inception, the Democratic and Republican parties have represented distinct visions for the nation's future that are rooted in their competing ideologies and values. While Democrats have traditionally championed progressive causes and social justice, Republicans have espoused conservative principles and fiscal responsibility.

Throughout American history, the issues that have dominated political discourse have varied significantly depending on the prevailing social, economic and cultural climate. From the abolition of slavery to the expansion of civil rights, from economic depressions to global conflicts, each era has brought its own set of challenges and priorities that have shaped the political landscape.

Yet, amid this ever-changing backdrop, specific themes have remained constant in the priorities of Democratic and Republican voters. Democrats have consistently focused on social welfare and civil rights issues, while Republicans have emphasized national security, limited government and individual freedom. The reasons for this divergence are complex and varied. They are rooted in the ideological differences between the two parties and their respective voter bases' diverse experiences and perspectives. Socioeconomic factors, geographic location and cultural background all shape voter priorities and preferences. Furthermore, the media and political discourses have played a significant role in amplifying and reinforcing these differences. The narratives presented by news outlets, pundits and political leaders often serve to entrench partisan divides and reinforce existing beliefs and attitudes.

Dalia Al-Aqidi

While this divergence may present challenges for political unity and consensus-building, it also speaks to the vibrancy of democracy and the plurality of voices that contribute to the American national discourse. Based on a comprehensive survey conducted last month by the Statista Research Department, insights emerged regarding the divergent priorities of Republican and Democratic voters.

At the forefront of Republican voters' minds stands the immigration issue, which is commanding significant attention. A staggering 33 percent rank it as their primary political concern. This emphasis on immigration reflects the party's long-standing commitment to border security, national sovereignty and upholding traditional American values. For many Republicans, the perceived influx of immigrants poses not only economic and security challenges, but also cultural and identity-related anxieties. Conversely, the survey reveals a strikingly different perspective among Democratic voters, with immigration ranking significantly lower on their list of priorities. Only 5 percent of Democrats identified immigration as their foremost concern, indicating a stark contrast in the issues that resonate among the supporters of the two parties.

The immigration problem has garnered heightened attention recently, particularly following the significant developments that have taken place since President Joe Biden assumed office. The influx of millions of immigrants since his inauguration has amplified concerns and intensified debates surrounding immigration policy, enforcement and humanitarian considerations. The topic of abortion has gained significant traction among Democrats, with it emerging as a key issue since the Supreme Court's decision to overturn Roe v. Wade last year. This landmark ruling effectively transferred authority on the legality of abortions back to individual states, prompting a renewed focus on state-level policies and legislation surrounding reproductive rights.

Abortion will be a central issue for Democrats in the 2024 election, reflecting broader concerns about women's rights and healthcare access. As states grapple with abortion legislation, Democrats will advocate for comprehensive

reproductive healthcare and engage in political mobilization to gain more votes. The economic landscape, with a spotlight on inflation, also holds significant sway over voters' minds. Despite a relatively steady job market, consumer prices have soared in the US. Families are feeling the pinch, particularly at the grocery store, where prices have skyrocketed 25 percent since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. This economic strain shapes perceptions and priorities as voters weigh their options ahead of the upcoming election.

Although typically overshadowed by economic concerns, the significance of foreign policy in voters' minds may prove to be a game-changer for both Biden and Donald Trump. There has been a noticeable shift in American attitudes, with an increasing number viewing foreign policy as one of the foremost issues confronting the federal government. Recent events, such as the ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza, have heightened awareness and underscored the interconnectedness of global affairs with domestic interests. According to a recent Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs poll, the number of voters prioritizing foreign policy has doubled compared to a year ago, signaling a growing recognition of its importance on the domestic stage.

While foreign policy and economic concerns dominate the election narrative, the specter of public safety and crime looms large for both Democrats and Republicans. Republicans and independent voters appear to harbor heightened anxieties regarding the state of crime and public safety within the country. This issue is poised to take center stage for these demographics, reflecting a growing apprehension about law enforcement, community security and the overall well-being of citizens. With two unpopular candidates competing for the presidency, America finds itself at a crossroads, deeply divided over which path to choose. Despite the familiarity of both presidential hopefuls, the nation is grappling with the uncertainty of which leader can best address its pressing challenges. As voters weigh their options, the enduring polarization underscores the complexity of the political landscape. In a climate marked by competing visions and divergent priorities, the decision on the future course of the nation rests in the hands of the electorate.

# EU anti-subsidy probe becomes more absurd

THE European Union unveiled a plan last year to provide \$270 billion in green industrial subsidies in a bid to match the United States' monstrous \$369 billion Inflation Reduction Act, which discriminates against foreign companies. While the EU believes that certain provisions of the IRA are a violation of World Trade Organization rules, it has not shown the courage to launch an investigation or file a case against the US with the WTO.

China, however, filed a complaint before the WTO last month charging that some of the US' subsidies for electric vehicles (EVs) violate WTO rules. The EU, on the other hand, has launched multiple anti-subsidy investigations in the past months against China's green technology sector - from EVs to wind turbines - including launching four investigations in less than two months against Chinese companies using its new Foreign Subsidies Regulation. European Commission Executive Vice-President Margrethe Vestager announced the probe into Chinese wind farms while delivering a speech at Princeton University in the US on Tuesday. She claimed the investigations are not meant to constrain China's success, but the measures she announced and her rhetoric prove otherwise.

Although she did not mention China by name, the ulterior motive behind the investigations against Chinese companies became clear when she said "as we

Chen Weihua

further develop the strategy for clean technologies, we must reflect about the question of trustworthiness". She also said that "we must make sure that we can trust them, and we can make sure that they uphold our values. I believe that like-minded partners, starting with the G7 countries, should develop a list of trustworthiness criteria for critical clean technologies". It is abundantly clear that the European Commission, despite its flowery rhetoric, no longer sees the global fight against climate change and green transition as a common global cause, but rather a battle between different ideologies and political blocs. However, most industrial experts, including those based in EU member states, agree that China today enjoys a huge advantage in the green economy, from EVs to solar panels to wind turbines, because of its early start, innovation capability, economies of scale and efficiency rather than subsidies. The argument that Chinese-made EVs cannot be trusted and may pose a security threat is not only absurd but self-defeating. There are far more European, US, Japanese and South Korean cars running on Chinese streets than vice versa. And Chinese politicians, unlike some of their European counterparts, have never used those vehicles to badmouth those countries.

According to the China Chamber of Commerce to the EU, Chinese companies

facing the Foreign Subsidies Regulation investigations have complained that the EU has broadened the definition of "foreign financial contribution" to include elements that do not qualify as subsidies, and Chinese companies are required to submit a huge volume of materials, often including sensitive information, within a short time. The EU's investigations are clearly aimed at undermining China's successful green technology sector, similar to what the US did by portraying China's competitiveness in the green sector as "overcapacity". No wonder Bloomberg columnist David Fickling criticized US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, an economist by training, for ignoring the fundamental principles of economics to justify the policy of restricting public access to affordable and clean technology. "It's a protectionist disaster in the making - for both the US, and the planet," he wrote on Monday.

There is no doubt the European Commission's protectionist investigations into Chinese green technology products will be a detrimental to the EU's efforts to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050. Protectionist measures won't make the EU's green sector competitive. Instead, biased investigations will only undermine the vital global solidarity and cooperation needed to boost the fight against climate change, especially to reduce carbon emissions.

The China Daily

# Jordan forced to walk a tightrope over Israel-Iran showdown

IRAN'S attack on Israel at the weekend has underlined once more Jordan's delicate geopolitical position, now acting as a buffer between Tehran and its proxies on the one hand and Tel Aviv on the other. An unknown number of Iranian drones and ballistic missiles crossed Jordan's night skies - hours after the kingdom closed its airspace to all flights - on their way to Israeli targets. Later, Amman announced that its air force had intercepted "flying projectiles" and shot them down. Officials said Jordan had acted to defend its people and sovereignty, brushing aside Iranian warnings and ultimatums.

Video footage showed such projectiles being intercepted and shot down across Amman's skies in the early hours of Sunday. Debris of what is believed to be the wreckage of Iranian drones was filmed in the capital's neighborhoods. This was not the first time that missiles heading to Israel had flown over Jordan. During the first Gulf War, Saddam Hussein fired Scuds from the eastern Iraqi desert toward Tel Aviv. And since Oct. 7, Jordan has intercepted several drones and missiles fired from Iraq and Yemen against Israeli targets. The Jordanian air force has defended Jordan's airspace in collaboration with the US and other Western allies, which have previously deployed advanced air defense systems in the kingdom.

Jordanian officials have justified the country's decision to intercept Iranian missiles. Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi said Jordan must protect its sovereignty and will do so again, regardless of where the rockets come from and where they are heading, even if Israel decides to launch them. But he was careful to point out that it was Israel's bombing of the Iranian consulate in Damascus earlier this month - an attack that killed seven senior

Iranian military officials - that caused the recent escalation. In a Sunday call with US President Joe Biden, King Abdullah clearly pointed out that Jordan would not allow a regional war to unfold on its land.

Also on Sunday, Jordan's Foreign Ministry summoned the Iranian ambassador in Amman to protest Iranian media reports, which included a direct warning to Jordan. On Monday, Iran's Foreign Ministry issued a statement underlining its keenness to maintain good ties with Jordan. But Jordanian officials were quick to point out that, despite the Iranian reprisal attack, the pressing issue remains Israel's war on Gaza, the dire humanitarian situation there and the need to end the occupation of Palestinian territories through a two-state solution. For Amman, bringing attention back to the Gaza debacle remains a priority. Jordanian officials hope that US pressure on Israel not to retaliate against Iran will bring an end to this episode and redirect global attention to the war on Gaza.

Safadi told local media that Netanyahu was seeking to ignite a regional war with Iran to deflect attention from the war in Gaza. Such statements appear to ameliorate Jordan's position both locally and regionally. By underlining that Amman will not tolerate its airspace being violated by any party, including Israel, it is hoping to absorb local criticism of its interception of Iranian projectiles. The popular mood in the country has been openly hostile toward Israel and the US over the Gaza massacres. Jordanians have taken to the streets in protest for the last six months and emotions have been running high.

In recent weeks, Jordanian officials and pro-government commentators have criticized Hamas'

Osama Al-Sharif

leadership and the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan for seeking to incite Jordanians. Some even pointed the finger at Iran for interfering in the country's domestic affairs. Israeli and Western media outlets have accused Iran of over-seeing the smuggling of weapons to the West Bank through Jordan. At least one pro-Iran proxy in Iraq claimed last month that it was ready to arm thousands of Jordanians to fight Israel. To be clear, while ties between Jordan and Israel have gone from bad to worse since the latter launched its war on Gaza, coordination at the military and counterterrorism intelligence levels has remained intact. While Jordan has been openly and vehemently critical of the far-right government of Benjamin Netanyahu, even before the Oct. 7 attacks, both sides have been careful not to push ties to the point of no return. Jordan is aware of the need to preserve the peace treaty to protect the kingdom's national security in light of the deteriorating security situation in the West Bank, and most recently in Gaza and what that could lead to.

Still, the king and senior officials have led regional and international criticism of Israel's reckless war in Gaza and warned of the impending humanitarian disaster there. Jordan was the first country to conduct food airdrops over northern Gaza, opening the way for other countries to do the same. The kingdom's position on Gaza brought about an unprecedented rhetorical attack by extremist Israeli officials. Relations between the two countries had reached a historic low point. But while some of the Israeli media praised Jordan's role in downing Iranian drones and missiles, officials in Amman made sure to point out that they were acting in Jordan's best interests

and were not doing Israel any favors. Jordan is skeptical of Netanyahu's prevarications on key issues such as the custodianship of Al-Aqsa Mosque and the two-state solution.

Jordan's relations with the Islamic Republic have always been strained. Amman stood with Baghdad during the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s and refused to join a US-led international coalition against Saddam Hussein in the first Gulf War. Still, the two countries have maintained diplomatic ties for most of the past 40 years, as Jordan always realized that turning Tehran into an enemy would not serve its national interests. At one point last year, the two countries' foreign ministers exchanged calls and met to normalize relations. Amman is yet to send an ambassador to Tehran. Now, such a move will remain on hold. Jordan, a key US ally, has tried to chart a seemingly independent regional foreign policy despite its growing dependence on Washington. It did so with Syria's Bashar Assad and with various Iraqi premiers following the US invasion of Iraq.

Jordan has learned to walk a precarious political tightrope with the outer neighborhood. The fast-changing geopolitical terrain, especially under former US President Donald Trump, has forced the kingdom to adapt quickly while still maintaining this delicate balancing act. With Tel Aviv and Tehran moving from their shadow war toward a more open one, Jordan once again finds itself in an uneasy place. With one eye focused on Gaza and the West Bank, it is also keeping track of a possible regional conflagration. Jordan's utmost priority is to cushion itself against any harmful fallout from both simmering conflicts. It is not an easy task - it never is - but it is one in which Jordan has an impressive track record.

Arab News

# NATO and Middle East: Engaging more for our shared security

NATO will this year mark significant anniversaries for both its Mediterranean Dialogue and Istanbul Cooperation Initiative - platforms through which the alliance has forged partnerships with Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Mauritania, Morocco, Qatar, Tunisia and the UAE.

For decades, we have worked together on common security interests affecting the Euro-Atlantic area, the Mediterranean, the Gulf region and beyond. Our cooperation over the years has been beneficial to all - in areas including small arms and light weapons, countering improvised explosive devices, crisis management, counterterrorism, civil preparedness, resilience and the "Women, Peace and Security" agenda.

NATO has contributed valuable expertise in the defense and security sector, including experience in military training and education, as well as in strengthening the interoperability of military forces. In turn, partner nations have helped

enhance our understanding of regional security challenges. We live in a more dangerous and competitive world, where security is increasingly global, not just regional. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine is a case in point - causing untold damage to Ukraine and creating Europe's greatest refugee crisis since the Second World War - while also driving up food and commodity prices and making the world a more dangerous place. Persistent conflict and instability across the Middle East, North Africa and Sahel regions are of great concern too. While NATO does not play a role in the Gaza conflict, individual NATO allies are working tirelessly to achieve a ceasefire and to deliver humanitarian aid.

We now all face the prospect of the Gaza war escalating into a wider regional conflict. Iran and its proxies are an enduring source of regional instability and pose a serious risk to NATO allies in Iraq and to maritime security in the Red

Mircea Geona

Sea. Russia and China's growing presence across the Middle East and North Africa do not bode well for the region's security. Moscow is promoting anti-Western and anti-NATO views, using mercenaries to fuel unrest and reinforcing its ties with Iran.

Tehran is supplying weapons to help strengthen Moscow's hand in Ukraine. For its part, Beijing is increasing its economic influence in Africa, expanding its military presence and buying up critical infrastructure to increase its control over the region. Global challenges require global solutions. This is why NATO is adopting a global approach and working more closely with partners around the world, including in the Middle East and North Africa.

There is a lot we can build on. NATO has been present in Iraq since 2018, with a mission to support the Iraqis in strengthening their security forces and institutions. NATO is also present in Kuwait, where we have a regional





# Development partners unite to support growth in merged districts

## F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Development partners from around the world joined forces at a landmark conference hosted by the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (GoKP) to catalyze public investments for the advancement of the Merged Districts.

The conference, held in Peshawar, saw a convergence of major stakeholders committed to enhancing the socio-economic fabric of the region. Esteemed participants, including the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and the European Union (EU), alongside prominent United

Nations agencies like UNDP, UNICEF, UN-FAO, WFP, and IOM, reaffirmed their unwavering dedication to the development of the Merged Districts.

During the conference, key presentations highlighted the profile, challenges, progress, and collaborative opportunities within the merged districts. Strategic areas of partnership were outlined, including a robust economic plan, an education literacy campaign ("Ilm Tolo Da Para"), and various development opportunities for Dir and Chitral areas.

Notable commitments were announced, with the Asian Development Bank pledging USD 1 billion towards development initiatives in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, emphasizing sustainable growth.

Similarly, the World Bank shared its commitment of USD 500 million to address critical gaps in infrastructure, energy, and education.

The European Union reiterated its support for Pakistan's development with a significant grant of USD 100 million, focusing on skills development, Alternate Dispute Resolution (ADR), governance, and the rule of law. Chief Secretary of KP expressed gratitude to donors and partners for their steadfast support.

Amid resource constraints, the collaboration of development partners remains essential. The collective efforts towards stability in the merged districts aim not only to promote peace but also to unlock the region's potential for prosperity, benefiting the entire region.



PESHAWAR: Adviser to Chief Minister for Finance Muzammil Aslam addressing conference hosted by the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (GoKP) to catalyze public investments for the advancement of the Merged Districts.

# Wall Street wants answers from Elon Musk on Tesla's Model 2 car

WASHINGTON (Reuters): Elon Musk has kept investors hanging since he issued cryptic social posts following an exclusive April 5 Reuters report that Tesla had scrapped its plans for a \$25,000 "Model 2" electric vehicle.

"Reuters is lying," Musk wrote in one post that day, without identifying any inaccuracies.

Nearly two weeks later, with no concrete updates from Musk, Tesla investors are restless. Some are demanding clear answers on the Model 2, along with Musk's plans for arresting a sales slide amid falling electric-vehicle demand globally and rising competition from cheap Chinese EVs.

Tesla's move to lay off more than 10% of its global workforce and a handful of senior executives, made public Monday, added to shareholder jitters.

"The street wants and NEEDS answers" when Tesla (TSLA.O), opens new tab holds an earnings call scheduled for April 23, wrote analysts for Wedbush Securities after the layoffs were revealed. They cited a months-long "horror show" of bad Tesla news and called for a clear "strategic vision ... with Model 2 a key component."

Wedbush Senior Equity Analyst Dan Ives told Reuters that Musk's silence on the Model 2 was "gut-wrenching" to Tesla investors "because it's so instrumental to the growth story."

Ross Gerber, president and CEO at Gerber Kawasaki Wealth & Investment Management and a Tesla investor, put it more bluntly. "There's no point in even investing in Tesla if they don't come out with this car," he said.

Musk and Tesla did not respond to requests for comment for this story or the April 5 report.

The Street also wants clarity on another key aspect of the April 5 story: That after ditching the Affordable-car project, Tesla plans to move forward with a self-driving robotaxi on the same small-car platform.

Another Musk post that same day raised as many questions as answers: "Tesla Robotaxi unveil 8/8," he wrote, implying some version of the self-driving vehicle might be ready by August, but giving no details. Industry experts call the notion that Tesla will quickly produce a road-ready robotaxi unlikely, given the steep engineering and regulatory challenges.

Tuesday evening, Musk posted again on his social media site X about Tesla's focus on self-driving vehicles: "Not quite betting the company, but going balls to the wall for autonomy is a blindingly obvious move. Everything else is like variations on a horse carriage."

Since the April 5 Reuters report, some investors have cheered the idea of focusing on robotaxis instead of the Model 2. Musk's two initial posts helped reverse losses in Tesla's stock, which dropped 6% after the Reuters report on the affordable model.

Still, Musk's remarks left investors guessing over what vehicle Tesla plans to build next – and, critically, on what timeline. The stock dropped again with Monday's news of the layoffs, and is now down more than 45% since a recent peak in July.

Tesla remains the world's most valuable

automaker with a market capitalization of about \$500 billion, higher than that of Toyota, the world's biggest automaker by volume.

The April 5 report on the Model 2 cited four sources with knowledge of Tesla's strategy and company messages describing the project's termination. Company messages reviewed by Reuters show a person described by a source as a Model 2 program manager telling employees not to inform suppliers "about program cancellation."

"You all have done incredible work and those learnings will carry over into all future programs that you work on," the manager wrote, advising staffers to "tie things off and document things properly" and handle "remaining items for us to close out before moving on."

With no answers from Musk, analysts have issued a flurry of advisories on Tesla's growth prospects both with the Model 2 and without it.

An analysis from Deutsche Bank, echoing others, noted: "we await clarity from Tesla." It described a Model 2 cancellation as "completely thesis-changing," saying it would cause investors betting on Tesla's mass-market growth to throw in the towel, making way for "AI/tech investors with considerably longer time horizons" for robotaxi development.

Wedbush sees a bleak outlook without the Model 2. Wedbush analysts wrote last week that killing the vehicle would be a "debacle" for Tesla's growth prospects and that a robotaxi was no "magic model" to replace it.

# State Grid keen on cutting CO2 emissions

BEIJING (Agencies): State Grid Corp of China, the world's largest utility which shoulders a dual task of safeguarding the country's energy security as well as serving as an economic lifeline, has made innovations in helping enterprises develop new quality productive forces and save electricity expenses.

In the prefecture-level city of Huzhou in Zhejiang province, State Grid Huzhou Electric Power Co has designed a new post — carbon efficiency engineer — among its staff to help local enterprises boost advanced productive forces generated by revolutionary technological breakthroughs, innovative allocations of production factors, in-depth transformation and the upgrading of industries.

Qian Xinhui, a carbon efficiency engineer with the company, has tailor-made carbon reduction plans since early 2023 for Zhejiang Hongfeng Furnace Material Co Ltd — a refractory material production firm whose energy consumption per-unit-GDP has always been high due to its business nature.

The city of Huzhou has made statistics and accounting into 39 kinds of enterprise metrics, such as electricity, gas, coal and oil, and calculated carbon emissions per-unit added-value, offering a five-level "carbon efficiency code" for local firms, with Grade 1 indicating the lowest emissions level.

On March 25, Qian paid a visit to Hongfeng to check its carbon reduction performance, as the city conducts a quarterly, semi-annual and annual evaluation into enterprises' carbon efficiency codes, letting them understand their efficiency levels in a timely fashion.

"Hongfeng's carbon efficiency code was Grade 3 in the first half of 2023, and I found that its nine diesel forklifts could be replaced with new-energy electric forklifts, which can help it save 630,000 yuan (\$87,500) each year," Qian said, adding that he was coming to see how the move was progressing.

Zhou Yong, general manager of Hongfeng, said that with Qian's optimization plan, his company has run some automated guided vehicle battery robots. Meanwhile, they also introduced the first intelligent production line, and by using robots and big data to support management, the firm's total production efficiency can be raised by some 25 percent.

In addition to advising enterprises to "replace oil with electricity" to raise the rate of electric energy usage in terminal energy consumption, eliminate high-energy-consuming equipment and improve production technology, Qian's agency also recommended rooftop photovoltaic arrays for enterprises as a means of elevating energy efficiency.

At the Energy Big Data Center in Changxing county, carbon efficiency engineers from State Grid's local unit can monitor local enterprises' carbon reduction status every day by clicking on a carbon-monitoring module on a big screen and examining their energy efficiency bill generated by their carbon efficiency code.

# Pak International Poultry Expo 2024 on April 30

## F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Pak International Poultry Expo 2024 will be held at Gul Mukai Palace in Peshawar in collaboration with Livestock Department Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Poultry Cooperative Society Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Livestock Farmers Welfare Association.

A review meeting to shed light on the completion stages of the Expo was held at the Civil Secretariat Complex wark Road under the chairmanship of Asghar Ali Additional Secretary Livestock Fisheries and Cooperatives.

Deputy Secretary Yousaf Ali, Director General Livestock (Extension) Dr. Asaf Khan, Director General Livestock (Research) Muhammad Ijaz, President Livestock Farmers Welfare Association Asif Awan and others joined the meeting.

It was informed in the meeting that Pak International Poultry Expo will be held on April 30 and 1st May 2024.

The purpose of the expo will be to provide awareness to the people associated with the poultry sector to acquire the business of poultry farming in a better and useful

manner and this expo will prove to be an important platform for the people associated with this business in raising awareness.

The expo will have a total of 46 stalls in which poultry farmers will be trained in various ways to increase the quantity of meat and poultry and livestock.

The meeting emphasized the importance of exhibiting commercial poultry farming including rural poultry farming and fancy birds farming in the expo because poultry farming is a broad sector and rural poultry farming and fancy birds farming is a part of it which not only improves the economic

status of people, but it will also lead to the promotion of rare species.

It was informed in the meeting that the participation of university students in the expo is inevitable and in this regard letters have been sent to the VCs of the universities so that the students can also benefit by participating.

In the meeting, Additional Secretary Asghar Ali gave instructions to the concerned authorities to make the Expo a success and emphasized the importance of utilizing all the resources in this regard and emphasized on providing better security facilities

# Netflix subscriber growth in focus

NWE YORK (Reuters): Netflix's (NFLX.O), opens new tab plan to maintain subscriber growth after two quarters of blockbuster increases will be in focus when it reports earnings on Thursday, with some analysts warning that gains from a crackdown on password sharing are set to ease.

The streaming pioneer saw its strongest growth since the pandemic in the second half of 2023, with about 22 million people signing up for the service after the company curbed the sharing of passwords globally.

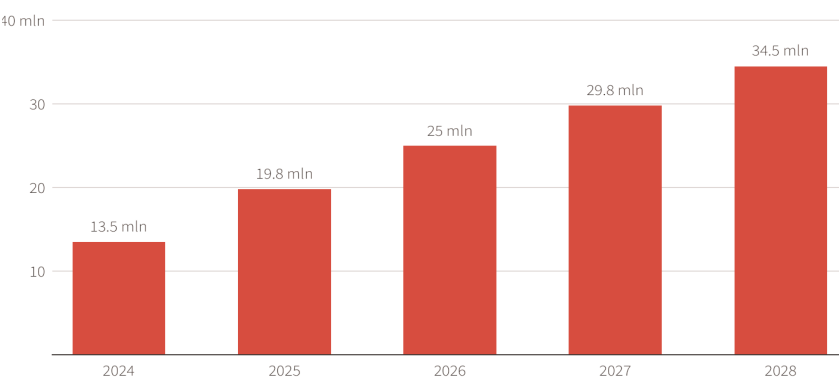
But the bump from the password-sharing crackdown is expected to slow this year, turning the spotlight on its other efforts, including an ad-supported tier and a growing focus on sports.

Here are five things to look out for in Netflix's earnings:

## SUBSCRIPTIONS IN THE MARCH QUARTER

Netflix is expected to add 5 million subscribers in the first quarter ended March, according to LSEG data. While that is nearly

## Ad-tier subscriber growth for Netflix expected to continue



Note: Figures represent U.S. viewers that access Netflix through an ad-supported plan at least once a month

three times the 1.8 million additions it saw in the same period last year, it would mark a slowdown in the bumper growth it witnessed in the last two quarters of 2023.

Netflix originals including "Fool Me Once" and "Griselda" were among the top U.S. streaming programs through January and February, with licensed content such as "Grey's Anatomy" also among the most streamed, according to data from Nielsen.

The company is expected to add 3.7 million subscribers in the second quarter ended June.

## WHAT'S NEXT FOR PASSWORD-SHARING CRACKDOWN?

Implemented globally in May last year, the success of Netflix's password-sharing crackdown has prompted similar moves by streaming rivals such as Walt Disney (DIS.N), opens new tab and helped its share price rise by about a third in 2024.

But some analysts have said the crackdown has hit a saturation point in the United States, even though it may have some room to run in international mar-

kets including India. "There will be some concerns of saturation in key core markets, given the initial growth from password sharing crackdown," said Paolo Pescatore, analyst at PP Foresight.

## AD-SUPPORTED TIER

Netflix has crossed 23 million monthly subscribers for its ad-supported tier and the plan accounts for 30% of all new sign-ups in the 12 countries it is available, the company's president of advertising had said in January.

# Saudi crude production hits 7-month high in February

RIYADH (Arab News): Saudi Arabia's crude production reached a seven-month high of 9.01 million barrels per day in February, data from the Joint Organizations Data Initiative showed.

This represented a rise of 55,000 bpd or 0.61 percent compared to the previous month.

Furthermore, the data indicated that the Kingdom's crude exports rose to 6.32 million bpd, reflecting a monthly increase of 0.32 percent.

In early April, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies, known as OPEC+, chose to keep their existing output policy unchanged as oil prices hit a five-month high.

Led by Saudi Arabia and Russia, OPEC+ extended voluntary output cuts of 2.2 million bpd until June to bolster the market. The decision was reached during the 53rd meeting of the Joint Ministerial Monitoring Committee on April 3.

Oil prices surged due to

supply constraints, attacks on Russian energy infrastructure, and conflicts in the Middle East, with Brent crude exceeding \$89 a barrel. This extension of cuts, alongside voluntary reductions announced in April 2023, including 500,000 bpd cuts from both Saudi Arabia and Russia, now extends through December of this year.

As a result of this decision, despite the monthly increase, crude output remains approximately 14 percent lower than the levels observed during the same month last year.

The next JMMC meeting is scheduled for June 1.

## Refinery output

Meanwhile, refinery crude output, representing the processed volume of crude oil yielding gasoline, diesel, jet fuel, and heating oil, surged to a five-month high. It increased by 10 percent compared to the previous month, reaching 2.68 million bpd, according to JODI data. This also marked a 10 percent increase from the 2.44 million bpd record-

ed during the same period last year. As one of the world's leading oil producers, Saudi Arabia plays a crucial role in supplying these refined products to meet global energy demands.

In February, diesel, constituting 38 percent of the total output, declined by 7 percent to 1.02 million bpd, with its percentage share decreasing from 45 percent in January. Motor aviation or jet fuel maintained a 22 percent share, experiencing an 11 percent increase to 597,000 bpd. Meanwhile, fuel oil, making up 17 percent of the total refinery output, saw a slight uptick of 0.22 percent, totaling 455,000 bpd.

Conversely, refinery output exports surged to a 10-month high, reaching 1.39 million bpd, a 12 percent monthly increase. The most significant rise was observed in motor and aviation oil, up by 45 percent to 275,000 bpd. Fuel oil exports followed with a 38 percent increase to 219,000 bpd, while diesel oil saw a 13 per-

cent rise to 629,000 bpd.

In February, 62 percent of refinery diesel oil output was exported, marking the highest percentage in eight months. Fuel oil and motor and aviation gasoline followed suit with export percentages of 48 percent and 46 percent, respectively.

## Direct crude usage

Saudi Arabia's direct burn of crude oil, involving the utilization of oil without substantial refining processes, experienced an increase of 52,000 bpd in February, representing a 17 percent rise compared to the preceding month. The total direct burn for the month amounted to 360,000 bpd. The Ministry of Energy aims to enhance the contributions of natural gas and renewable sources as part of the Kingdom's goal to achieve an optimal, highly efficient, and cost-effective energy mix. This involves replacing liquid fuel with natural gas and integrating renewables to constitute approximately 50 percent of the electricity production energy mix by 2030.

# Odoo extends cloud hosting from Google's data centre

RIYADH (Arab News): Odoo, a leading provider of open-source integrated business software applications, has announced today its expanded localization efforts in the Middle Eastern market. In alignment with the region's regulatory requirements, Odoo now offers a local data hosting solution for SaaS and Odoo.sh customers, hosted on Google's data centre in Dammam, Saudi Arabia.

This initiative will help Odoo improve the user experience and prioritize data privacy for its customers, aligning with the Personal Data Protection Laws (PDPL). Customers can now leverage the benefits of enhanced data security, reduced latency, and seamless compliance with regulatory requirements in Saudi Arabia.

With this announcement,

all new SaaS and Odoo.sh customers in the MENA region will now be hosted in Google's Cloud data center in Dammam, Saudi Arabia. Meanwhile, existing customers will have the option to migrate their hosting upon request.

"Saudi Arabia's commendable initiative to launch data centers within its country, showcased its role in promoting digital upskilling among businesses in the MENA region. This has helped us expand and meet the hosting requirements of our customers in the region," said Pavitra Singh, Managing Director of Odoo Middle East DWC.

Odoo has established a strong presence in the region, with a particular focus on key markets such as Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and Egypt. The company regularly

organizes roadshows, a series of events held worldwide following the release of a new software version, to engage with the local community. These events serve as platforms for knowledge sharing, networking, and showcasing Odoo's latest Innovations.

As Odoo expands its footprint across the region, it remains committed to fostering digital transformation and supporting regional initiatives in alignment with the ambitious Saudi Vision and broader goals for a thriving digital economy by 2030.

Odoo has recently announced the release of their latest version Odoo 17, packed with exciting AI solutions, new integrated apps, and a WhatsApp connector based on business regional demand. The software is available online at [www.odoo.com](http://www.odoo.com)







## In brief

## Roma's Ndicka 'doing well'

ROME (AFP): Roma defender Evan Ndicka is "doing well" after collapsing on the pitch during last weekend's Serie A game with Udinese, his coach Daniele De Rossi said on Wednesday. The 24-year-old Ivory Coast international dropped to the ground in the 70th minute of Sunday's match, which was abandoned after Ndicka, who remained conscious, left the field on a stretcher. "He's doing well. A collapsed lung is a painful thing but luckily, if we can say that, he's not suffering from what we feared when he collapsed on the pitch," De Rossi told reporters. Roma earlier this week ruled out heart problems as the cause, and Ndicka was pictured smiling while sat upright in his hospital bed just hours after the incident. He spent a night under observation before returning to Rome, with tests revealing no sign of cardiac issues, but instead "a thoracic trauma with minimal left pneumothorax (trapped air between the lung and chest wall)." Sunday's match was level at 1-1 when it was suspended. The final minutes will be played at a later date, which has yet to be confirmed. De Rossi said the call to abandon the match was the only feasible decision. "It's what had to be done, it was an unanimous decision, a normal one even. None of my players were ready to restart the match because the electrocardiogram (done at the stadium) suggested that he had suffered a heart attack." No date for Ndicka's return to training has been given. Roma are at home to AC Milan on Thursday in the second leg of their Europa League quarter-final, holding a 1-0 lead in the tie. As a result of the Ndicka scare, Roma are organising an initiative to offer free heart screenings to supporters over the age of 45 at a local hospital ahead of their next home league game against Bologna on April 22.

## 'No excuses' after defeat on clay return

PARIS (AFP): Naomi Osaka refused to blame a lengthy trip from Japan to France after losing in straight sets to Martina Trevisan in the first round of the WTA event Rouen on Wednesday. The former world number one was making her first appearance on clay since the 2022 French Open, when she was knocked out in the opening round and Trevisan reached the last four. Osaka, who returned to action in January after taking a 15-month break while on maternity leave, had her chances in the first set against Trevisan, but the Japanese star could not capitalise on them and lost 6-4, 6-2. "It was really difficult for me... it was my second time hitting on this type of court. I think that overall I could have done better but I've tried my best," said Osaka, a four-time Grand Slam champion. The 26-year-old only arrived in France on Monday after playing for Japan in a Billie Jean King Cup qualifier last week against Kazakhstan in Tokyo. Osaka has never reached a tour-level final on any surface other than hard courts, admitting the switch to clay was not an easy transition. "I have never been the type to make excuses for myself, I just have to really do better," she said, confirming her presence at next week's Madrid Open. "I think today, obviously, I didn't hit too many great shots and I could have done better. I'm kind of thinking I didn't do too bad but also I'm pretty hard on myself."



KARACHI: Pakistan Women's Cricket Team ODIs Captain, Nida Dar and West Indies Cricket Team Captain Hayley Matthews pose with ODI Series Trophy during unveil at Quaid-e-Azam House. —APP Photo

## Nadal comeback ends in Barcelona Open second round

BARCELONA (AFP): Rafael Nadal suffered his first defeat on his return to tennis after injury as he fell 7-5, 6-1 against Alex de Minaur on Wednesday in the Barcelona Open second round.

The 22-time Grand Slam title winner, back on court this week after three months on the sidelines, battled well but eventually crumbled against the hard-working world number 11 from Australia. Nadal, 37, who missed virtually all of the 2023 season, is hoping to compete at the French Open in May where he is the record 14-time champion.

The Spaniard, who has won the Barcelona clay-court title on 12 occasions,

had eased past Flavio Cobolli on Tuesday in his first ATP Tour match since January, but said he was not favourite against De Minaur who has now won his last two clashes against the former world number one.

It proved a far tougher challenge and despite showing flashes of his supreme quality on the court named after him, Nadal came up short in what he said he believes is his final appearance at the tournament.

The Australian broke in the first game and tested Nadal with a series of brilliant drop shots which Nadal could not reach.

However Nadal hit back with a break of his own in the sixth game and consoli-

dated with a fizzing backhand for a 4-3 lead.

De Minaur broke to love to take a 6-5 lead as Nadal went wide and sealed the first set when the Spaniard pushed a shot into the net, winning the final 10 points as Nadal started to struggle.

The 25-year-old Australian broke for a 2-1 lead in the second set when Nadal could not return a powerful passing shot, and secured another break for 4-1. De Minaur wrapped up his emphatic second set performance with a third break when Nadal went long. Monte Carlo Masters champion Stefanos Tsitsipas faces Sebastian Ofner later Wednesday in the second round.



BARCELONA: Rafael Nadal of Spain returns a shot during his Men's Singles Round of 32 match against Alex De Minaur of Australia.

## James leads Lakers into NBA play-offs

NEW YORK (Agencies): LeBron James scored 23 points as the Los Angeles Lakers beat the New Orleans Pelicans 110-106 to reach the NBA play-offs.

James, 39, also chipped in with nine rebounds, nine assists and three steals to help the Lakers seal the seventh seed in the Western Conference. The Lakers face defending champions the Denver Nuggets in the first round of the play-offs.

"We've got a good group going right now," James said. "We understood after

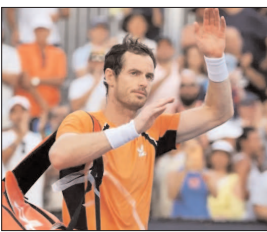
how we had played the last game that they were going to give us everything they had - the whole kitchen sink and the toolbox - and they did that. "So it was a gritty win for us and we punched our ticket to the post-season." James is set to feature in the play-offs for the 17th time in his 21-season career.

Meanwhile, the Sacramento Kings ended Golden State Warriors' hopes of appearing in the play-offs with a 118-94 win. Stephen Curry top-scored for the Warriors with 22

points but Klay Thompson - who has averaged 17.9 points a game this season - failed to score in 32 minutes.

The Warriors have now missed out on the play-offs three times in the past five seasons. Keegan Murray hit eight three-pointers and ended the match with 32 points and nine rebounds for the Kings, while De'Aaron Fox added 24 points. The Kings meet the Pelicans on Saturday, with the winner securing the eighth seed and the final play-off spot in the West.

## Injured Andy Murray on French Open entry list



LONDON (Agencies): Andy Murray has been named on the entry list for the French Open, but fellow Briton Emma Raducanu is not yet assured of a place in the draw.

Three-time Grand Slam champion Murray, 36, ruptured ankle ligaments at the Miami Open last month.

Raducanu missed the last eight months of 2023 but has a protected ranking of 103 and is the fifth alternate.

If she does not make the main draw because of withdrawals, she will need a wildcard or to come through qualifying.

The French Open starts on 26 May.

Murray has played at Roland Garros only once since hip resurfacing surgery in 2019, losing in the first round in 2020.

The Scot, who won Olympic gold at London 2012 and Rio 2016, said this year that he wants to compete at another Games before he retires.

Rafael Nadal, the 14-time French Open champion, is one of five players entered in the main draw to benefit from a protected ranking.

The 37-year-old Spaniard, who on Wednesday played his first match since January, is in line to make his first appearance at a Grand Slam since the Australian Open in January 2023.

Nadal has indicated that this year will be his last before retiring.

2021 US Open champion Raducanu, 21, played only 10 matches last year but has played 12 this year.

On Saturday she helped Great Britain secure a place in the Billie Jean King Cup Finals when coming from a set down to beat France's Diane Parry 4-6 6-1 7-6 (7-1) in Le Portel.

Compatriots Katie Boulter and Harriet Dart have direct entry into the main draw along with Jodie Burrage, although the British number three is unlikely to play following wrist surgery last month. Cameron Norrie, Dan Evans and Jack Draper are also on the men's entry list.

## Trophy for Pakistan-West Indies ODI series unveiled

KARACHI (PPI) The glittering trophy for the three-match Women's ODI series between hosts Pakistan and West Indies was unveiled at Quaid-e-Azam House here on Wednesday.

A day ahead of the opening WODI, a trophy unveiling ceremony was held and the two captains, Nida Dar and Hayley Matthews, posed with the trophy.

The three-match series commences tomorrow, April 18, at the iconic National Bank Stadium. The second and third ODI will be played on 21 and 23 April, respectively at the same venue.

With home advantage in their favour, the Pakistan women's team will aim to earn maximum points in the upcoming ICC Women's Championship 2022-25 fixture against the West Indies.

## Azhar hints at resting Babar in New Zealand T20Is

RAWALPINDI (PPI) Pakistan cricket team's head coach Azhar Mahmood said that captain Babar Azam could also be rested as part of the rotation policy and to refine the team's combination.

Addressing a presser in Rawalpindi, Azhar Mahmood said that any player including Babar Azam could be rested during the five-match series, depending on the situation. "As per policy, we will try to select the best 11 best available players for every match while keeping the conditions in mind," he added.

To a question, Azhar Mahmood said the team's management has not decided on the opening pair yet. "We have not finalised who would be opening the inning. It (opening pair)

could be Babar-Saim, Saim-Rizwan and even Fakhar Zaman can also open the inning," he added.

The head coach also expressed confidence in his team's capabilities, emphasising the squad's robust composition and strategic preparations for their upcoming home series against New Zealand. "The composition of our team, with its blend of experienced batters, agile fast bowlers, and versatile all-rounders, fills me with great confidence," the coach said. Azhar Mahmood was of the view that the return of experienced players like all-rounder Imad Wasim and fast bowler Mohammad Amir boosted the team. "Their comeback will undoubtedly bolster our team's strength," he stated.

## Boys Handball under Prime Minister Youth Talent Hunt Program to start from May 1

PESHAWAR (APP): Provincial handball Men League competitions are being held in Peshawar University in connection with Prime Minister Youth Talent Hunt Program continued under the aegis of Higher Education Commission, Islamabad.

This was stated by Director General Sports University of Peshawar and

International Athlete Bahre Karam while talking to APP here on Wednesday. He said for the smooth conduct of the PM Youth Talent Hunt Boys Handball League, all appropriate measures have been taken to hold the

League inside the premises of University of Peshawar.

The teams from five different Regions including Dera Ismail Khan, Bannu, Mardan, Swat and Peshawar would be reaching Peshawar on April 27. The regional training camps will be held on April 28-29 while the League will begin on May 1, 2024.

The opening ceremony of the League would be organized on May 1, 2024 at 3:00 PM with Peshawar facing Mardan. On the same day at 5:00 PM, Bannu will face Swat. On May 2nd, Hazara will face Mardan and Peshawar will face Swat. On May 3rd,

Bannu and Hazara will face Mardan and Swat.

On May 4, there will be a competition between Peshawar and Hazara, while the teams of Mardan and Bannu will compete, while on May 5, Hazara and Swat and Peshawar and Bannu will compete. Preparations are being completed and the best facilities will be provided to the players and officials. In these competitions, which are being completed, the best players will be selected only on merit, who will join the National League. Out of the National League, a team would be selected to visit other countries.

## T20I series against NZ holds great importance: Babar Azam

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistani Skipper Babar Azam believed the five-match T20I series against New Zealand holds great importance as part of preparations for the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2024 later this year.

Speaking at the pre-series media conferences at the Pindi Stadium Rawalpindi on Wednesday Babar Azam said, "This five-match T20I series holds a lot of importance for us as we look forward to preparing for the all-important mega-event.

We had a great fitness camp in Kakul and are looking forward to express ourselves as unit.

"New Zealand will challenge us at different points in the series, serving as a fine work out for the Pakistan side. The prospect of having a blend of youth and experience in the side excites me as a leader."

Meanwhile New Zealand captain Michael Bracewell said, "I'm proud to be leading the team on this tour. We'll look to play entertaining cricket as a side and take the game forward. Most of the players in our squad have played a lot of T20 Cricket growing up and they are very well equipped with the knowledge of this format. Pakistan are formidable

side at home and we'll look to put challenges in their backyard."

Pakistan would kick-off their ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2024 preparations on Thursday at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium when they take on New Zealand in first of the five matches.

The venue would also host matches on Saturday and Sunday, while Lahore's Gaddafi Stadium will be the stage for the remaining two matches next week on Thursday and Saturday. Both Babar Azam and Michael Bracewell also took part in pre-series photo-shoot.

This would be the third five-match series between the two sides inside a 12-month period. Last year, Pakistan and New Zealand drew the series at two-all in Pakistan, while New Zealand clinched the series 4-1 earlier this year in their backyard.

Pakistan have named uncapped Abrar Ahmed, Mohammad Irfan Khan and Usman Khan in the 17-player squad, which also sees the return of Babar Azam as the white-ball captain.

Mohammad Amir and Imad Wasim were also back in national colours along with fast bowler Naseem Shah. Naseem last played for Pakistan in the ACC

Asia Cup 2023 before suffering shoulder injury in the match against Indies in Colombo that sidelined him from the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup 2023 and tours of Australia and New Zealand.

Azhar Mahmood, for the first time in his career, would be the head coach of the Pakistan men's team. The former Test all-rounder has previously worked as the national side's bowling coach from 2016-2019.

The toss was scheduled to take place at 7pm local time and the first will be bowled at 7:30pm local time.

Squads: Pakistan - Babar Azam (captain), Abrar Ahmed, Azam Khan, Fakhar Zaman, Ifthikhar Ahmed, Imad Wasim, Mohammad Abbas Afridi, Mohammad Rizwan, Mohammad Amir, Muhammad Irfan Khan, Naseem Shah, Saim Ayub, Shadab Khan, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Usama Mir, Usman Khan and Zaman Khan.

New Zealand - Michael Bracewell (captain), Tom Blundell, Mark Chapman, Josh Clarkson, Jacob Duffy, Dean Foxcroft, Ben Lister, Cole McConchie, Jimmy Neesham, Will O'Rourke, Tim Robinson, Ben Sears, Tim Seifert, Ish Sodhi and Zak Foulkes.

## Pakistan-New Zealand 5th T20I Series to start today

PESHAWAR (APP): A series of five T20 International matches will be played between Pakistan and New Zealand from April 18 with the first match played on Thursday at Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium at 7:30 PM.

A lucky series of 5th T20 International matches will be played between Pakistan and New Zealand from April 18. The first T20 International will be played on Thursday at 7:30 PM in Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium.

The second and third matches will also be played in the same Stadium on April 20 and 21. Fourth T20I match will be played on April 25 and the fifth T20I will be played on April 27 at the Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore.

Good matches are expected between the two countries. Pakistan will have the advantage of home ground and local spectators, but the New Zealand team is also a tough team and Pakistan

will need to work hard to win the series. It is worth mentioning here that New Zealand in January this year defeated Pakistan on their home ground by 4-1.

Shaheen Shah Afridi led Pakistan in this series. The team has been announced. Two new players Usman Khan and Irfan Khan have been included in the Pakistan team for the first time. Pakistan cricket team consists of Babar Azam (captain), Saieem Ayub, Mohammad Rizwan, Usman Khan, Ifthikhar Ahmed, Azam Khan, Irfan Khan Niazi, Shadab Khan, Imad Wasim, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Naseem Shah, Zaman Khan, Muhammad Amir, Abbas Afridi, Osama Mir, Fakhr Zaman and Abrar Ahmed. Reserve players of the team include Haseebullah, Muhammad Ali, Sahibzada Farhan, Agha Salman and Wasim Jr.

The New Zealand team includes Michael Bracewell,

Tom Blundell, Mark Chapman, Josh Clarkson, Jacob Duffy, Dean Foxcroft, Ben Lister, Cole McConchie, Zack Fowlkes, Jimmy Neesham, Will O'Rourke, Tim Robinson, Ben Sears, Tim Seifert, and Ish Sodhi.

So far 39 T20 International matches have been played between Pakistan and New Zealand in which New Zealand has won 17 matches and lost 21 matches. In total, New Zealand have played 194 T20 International matches. Out of which NZ won 99 matches and lost 80. On the other hand, Pakistan has played 224 international T20 matches. In which Pakistan won 135 matches and lost 80 matches. Pakistan's highest score against New Zealand in a T20 International is 201 runs for the loss of 4 wickets which was scored by Pakistan on January 25, 2018 at Auckland. New Zealand's highest score

against Pakistan was 226 runs for 8 wickets on January 12, 2024 at Auckland ground.

The lowest score of the innings was scored by Pakistan on 101 runs on January 22 in 2016 at Wellington. The New Zealand team was bowled out by 80 runs against Pakistan on December 30 in 2010 at Christ Church.

In batting, Babar Azam and New Zealand's MS Chapman are the only batsmen who have scored centuries. Chapman played an innings of 104 runs and Babar Azam 101 runs and both were not out. The highest individual score after these two is Muhammad Hafeez when he scored 99 not out at Hamilton on December 20, 2020. The second number on the table is Muhammad Rizwan when he scored two days later at Napier on December 22, 2020. An innings of 89 runs was played at the venue. New Zealand's Guptill at

number three played an unbeaten innings of 87 runs at the Hamilton venue on January 17 in 2016.

Babar Azam has the highest number of runs in T20 International matches and is on the first place in the batting table. He has scored 755 runs at an average of 44.41 in 21 matches against New Zealand. Babar Azam has scored one century and seven fifties.

Kane Williamson of New Zealand has scored 667 runs at an average of 39.23 in 21 matches against Pakistan. In which the best innings is 72 runs. Williamson has scored six half-centuries against Pakistan. The third number is Muhammad Rizwan of Pakistan who scored 622 runs at an average of 38.87 against New Zealand in 19 matches. In which the best innings is 98 runs not out. Muhammad Hafeez from Pakistan has scored 563 runs at

an average of 37.53 in 18 matches in which the best innings is 99 runs not out. Mohammad Hafeez has scored three fifties.

New Zealand's Tim Southee has taken the most wickets on the bowling table. He bowled 38 Pakistan batsmen at an average of 17.05, in which the best bowling is five wickets for 18 runs. The second number on this table is Pakistan's Harris Rauf who dismissed 32 players in 16 matches. The best bowling was four wickets for 18 runs. The third place is for New Zealand lanky fast bowler Adam Melne who took 26 catches in seventeen matches, after him Pakistan Shaheen Afridi who got 25 wickets in 17 matches. The best bowling is three wickets for 20 runs. Shaheen's father-in-law Shahid Khan Afridi is at the fifth place, who has hunted 21 NZ batsmen at an average of 18.47. His best bowling is four wickets for 14 runs.





## In brief

### ITP launches crackdown

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Islamabad Traffic Police (ITP) has taken special measures to ensure safety of lives and property of citizens and to keep them safe from any mishaps. A public relations officer said that SSP Traffic Islamabad Sarfraz Virk directed Zonal DSPs to take legal action against vehicles having gas cylinders and public service vehicles operating without fitness certificate. It has been decided to take legal action more strictly and effectively against vehicles without fitness certificates and gas fitted cylinder public service vehicles, in order to reduce accidents as much as possible and keep traffic flow smooth. Moreover, public service vehicles involved in serious traffic violations will be impounded in police stations along with heavy fines. Additionally, effective action against drivers and vehicles involved in violations of traffic rules at lorry stands, bus stops, wagon stops and other places in the city has been ordered. The SSP Traffic said that safety of life and property of the citizens and providing all possible transport facilities are the foremost priorities of Islamabad Traffic Police, strict legal action will be taken against those violating traffic rules and affecting the flow of traffic in the city, he added.

### Drive with motorcycle safety wire: SP

ISLAMABAD (APP): The city traffic Police have launched a campaign to install safety wires on motorcycles to protect against fatal accidents caused by metal wires. According to PTV news channel, the Superintendent of Police (SP), Shehzad Khan said that the distribution of safety wires among motorcyclists is being carried out free of charge. Capital City Police Officer Shehzad Khan highlighted that the installation of safety wires on motorcycles will help save valuable human lives from metal wire accidents. "Three things are necessary to fix the basic traffic: enforcement, education and road enging. If these three things are combined and run properly, traffic will always be better", he added. He emphasized that the distribution of safety wires aims to protect motorcyclists from fatal accidents caused by metal wires. Additionally, a special awareness campaign is under way to protect citizens from metal wire hazards, he concluded.

### Excise vehicle to provide civic facilities

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Excise department is providing civic facilities to residents of the federal capital to get their vehicle registration as well as access to various essential services at Rose & Jasmine Garden on Wednesday under the ICT doorstep initiative. According to the Spokesman of ICT, Dr Abdullah Tabassum, the excise staff would be stationed at the park's parking lot from 3.00 to 5.00 p.m. Citizens hailing from nearby areas of Rose & Jasmine Garden can get civic facilities through a dedicated van, he said. He said that whether you need a fuel permit for domestic or commercial use, or looking to register your motor vehicle seamlessly, the on-ground service will ensure a swift and straightforward process. This initiative aims to streamline processes and provide ease to the public regarding vehicle registration, transfer, and token tax procedures, he added. In addition to the vehicle registration, transfer, and token tax services, the Facilitation Center Doorstep ICT Vehicle will also be offering the following services.



ISLAMABAD: Minister for Defence & Defence Production Khawaja Muhammad Asif presenting a souvenir to H.E. Reza Amiri Moghaddam, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

## NDMA alerts for intense rainfall, thunderstorms

ISLAMABAD (APP): The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) as per the latest projections from the National Emergency Operations Centre (NEOC) and multiple weather models, in its advisory has highlighted a series of moderate to intense weather systems to cause rainfall and thunderstorms in the country from April 17th to 29th.

"These weather patterns are anticipated to bring heavy rain, thunderstorms, and hailstorms, posing significant risks to various parts across the country," said the NDMA news release issued here Wednesday.

The forecast indicated that a weather system would enter Pakistan on April 17th, initiating a period of heavy rainfall and

thunderstorms lasting until April 22nd.

"The system will influence Balochistan from April 17th to April 19th, followed by impacts on Punjab and Sindh from April 18th to April 19th. Upper Punjab will experience the effects from April 18th to April 21st, while Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Gilgit-Baltistan (GB), and Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) will be affected from April 17th to 22nd April," the advisory said.

Following this, a weaker weather system was expected to enter Pakistan on April 23rd, bringing low rainfall and thunderstorms to certain parts of the country until April 24th.

While Balochistan and upper Punjab would experience slight impacts from April 23rd to April 24th,

KP, GB, and AJK would also be affected.

However, Sindh was not expected to be impacted during this period.

Subsequently, a strong weather system is forecasted to enter Pakistan on April 25th, bringing heavy rain, thunderstorms, and hailstorms with occasional gaps until April 29th. This system will affect Balochistan from April 25th to April 29th, with intermittent gaps. Sindh will experience impacts on April 25th, 26th, and 28th, while South Punjab will be affected from April 27th to April 28th. Upper Punjab will face the brunt from April 26th to April 29th, while KP will experience effects from 25th to 29th April, potentially impacting GB and AJK from April 25th to April 29th.

## Congratulations to Shaza Fatima on her appointment as Minister



F. P Report

ISLAMABAD: Her vision encompasses innovative policy formulation to drive

growth and entrepreneurship in the IT and telecom sectors, ensuring digital inclusion for all citizens,

bolstering cyber security measures to protect critical infrastructure, expanding telecommunications infrastructure to support the digital economy, and promoting skills development to equip individuals for success in the digital age. With her strategic leadership and commitment to progress, She is poised to lead our nation towards a brighter, more connected future.

On behalf of Global Entrepreneurship Network Pakistan, Hon Coordinator for Strategic Alliances and Partnerships Mr Safeer ul Hak offered full support as she embarks on this important role. We look forward to collaborating drive entrepreneurship, innovation, and economic growth in the IT and telecom sectors, ultimately contributing to the prosperity of our nation. Together, we can create a thriving ecosystem that empowers entrepreneurs and fosters technological advancement inshaAllah!

## 54 students of NUML visit Parliament House

ISLAMABAD (APP): A delegation of 54 students from the National University of Modern Languages (NUML) on Wednesday visited the Parliament House.

The delegation expressed keen interest in the statues and historical photographs of prominent politicians of the country in the

Senate Museum, according to a press release. Later, the delegation also visited the Senate Hall, where the delegation was briefed by the Senate officials on the working procedures of the Upper House, legislation, and functions.

A detailed briefing was given regarding the Senate Session.

## IFA inspects 80 food outlets, issues fines worth Rs 0.3 mln

ISLAMABAD (APP): Deputy Director Operations (DDO) of Islamabad Food Authority (IFA), Dr Tahira Saddique, while sharing a last week report of the authority, stated that the authority inspected 80 food outlets and imposed fines totaling Rs 307,000 on errant shopkeepers found flouting regulations.

Talking to APP, she said that with an unwavering commitment to quality assurance, the authority's latest report underscored its relentless pur-

suit of adherence to food safety standards across the Federal Capital. On the directions of Director Food, Irfan Nawaz Memon, she accompanied by the Food Safety Teams (FSTs) inspected 80 establishments and sealed 17 outlets due to sub-standard food quality and inadequate arrangements, she said. Additionally, she said a staggering total of 61 oral warnings were issued, signaling a zero-tolerance approach towards violations.

Responding promptly to citizens' concerns, the authority diligently addressed public complaints, ensuring accountability and responsiveness in its operations, Dr Tahira said. Highlighting its commitment to combating adulteration, Dr Tahira said the IFA disposed of 100 liters of milk, 109 liters of fake cold drinks, 35 kg of defective expired items to upholding stringent quality standards and protecting consumer welfare.

## Aziz Mian remembered on birth anniversary

ISLAMABAD (APP): Renowned Qawwal and poet Aziz Mian was remembered on the occasion of his birthday anniversary on Wednesday.

Born on April 17, 1942, in Delhi, his birth name was Abdul Aziz.

He migrated to Pakistan from Meerut in 1947, at the time of independence. He was an alumni of the University of Punjab in Lahore and got degrees in Persian, Urdu literature and Arabic. The Qawwal holds the record for singing the longest commercially released Qawwali that goes slightly above 115 minutes.

Unlike several qawwals, Aziz Mian wrote his lyrics besides reciting those of different poets. It was only in 1966 after spending years under the tutelage of Abdul Wahid Khan of Lahore starting from age ten that he would deliver his first breakthrough performance. The first time Aziz Mian tasted admiration at a mass level was when he was awarded a gold medal by then Shah of Iran as he had performed before him in a ceremony in 1966.

From this moment on, Aziz Mian gained popularity and started releasing albums. In addition to singing qawwalis, he was also an expert at singing Ghazals. He became a noted member of the qawwal community due to his unique and crisp voice.

## Govt wants to make youth self-employed through tech skills

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister's Coordinator for Youth Affairs Mr. Rana Mashood has said that the government wants to make youth self-employed by providing them with various technical skills. During his visit to the National Vocational and Technical Training Commission (NAVTTTC) Headquarters Islamabad yesterday, he took a briefing regarding its performance. According to the details, all the senior officers of NAVTTTC participated in this briefing.

Chairperson Gulmina Bilal Ahmed and Executive Director NAVTTTC Mohammad Amir Jan gave the briefing. While giving a briefing on this occasion, Executive Director NAVTTTC Muhammad Amir Jan told Rana Mashood that how NAVTTTC is empowering and training the youth in terms of technical training, self-employment in various projects.

He added, that at the same time, it is increasing foreign exchange reserves by sending trained manpower abroad.

On this occasion, Chairperson Gulmina Bilal Ahmed also briefed Rana Mashood Ahmed regarding various programs. She informed that the special initiative of Women Empowerment has been started, that how women can stand on their own feet by giving them technical training in Pakistan. She also said that steps can be taken towards self-employment and self-reliance. On this occasion, Rana Mashood Ahmed praised the NAVTTTC team and their performance under the leadership of Mohammad Amir Jan.

In particular, he expressed the vision of Prime Minister Muhammad Shahbaz Sharif that how the Prime Minister wants to make the youth of Pakistan an asset by empowering them. He also gave some suggestions and recommendations as to how the performance of this institute can be further improved. Rana Mashood Ahmed said on this occasion that NAVTTTC can help Pakistan a lot to get out of the economic crisis and stand on its feet, adding, it is the prime institution that we should focus on.

## Pakistan Railways develops a comprehensive solar strategy to save billions

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Railways intends to transition the power network of all its stations, including major railway stations, offices, workshops, and factories, to solar systems in various stages. This initiative is expected to result in substantial savings for the department, amounting to billions of rupees.

An official from the Ministry of Railways informed APP that the initiative is projected to save Rs. 1.8 billion in the initial phase for the department. Subsequent phases will see more stations, offices, and facilities being included. In the first phase, Pakistan Railways aims to transition approximately 99 formations,

encompassing major railway stations, nine divisional headquarters, and other essential offices, to solar energy.

The official stated that Pakistan Railways will enlist the expertise of the National Engineering Services Pakistan (NESPAK) to convert its network to solar power. The department has opted to transition the railway network to solar energy to alleviate the economic strain on Pakistan Railways. He stated that the choice to adopt solar power is a strategic measure aimed at easing the financial burden on Pakistan Railways, which has been facing economic difficulties.

## CDA to develop number of modern parks in federal capital

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Capital Development Authority (CDA) is all set to develop a number of modern parks within the federal capital to provide enhanced recreational facilities to the residents of Islamabad and surrounding localities. "Over the past decade, approximately 37 public parks have been developed by the Authority in the federal capital and are actively formulating a policy to increase their number in the coming years, official sources told APP here Wednesday.

"The process to develop a new park requires three to four months after the completion of the codal formalities," they added. Presently, the sources said that the federal capital had six amusement parks, which were considered

enough to meet the recreational desires of the resident of Islamabad.

They further said, "The policy has been made that an amusement park will be constructed whenever a new sector is developed."

The sources have indicated that the CDA in the process of developing multiple new sectors such as I-11, I-12, I-14, I-15, I-16, D-12 and Park Enclave.

Concurrently, the efforts are being made to establish Model Villages and parks in these specified regions.

Further they said that once these areas are fully developed and completed, the new parks will be there to meet the demand and requirements outlined in the CDA-approved layout plan.

## Secretary Welfare Fund Ministry of Overseas Pakistani Zulfikar Khan calls on CM Bugti

### F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Balochistan Chief Minister Mir Sarfaraz Bugti was met here on Tuesday by Secretary Welfare Fund Ministry of Overseas Pakistani Zulfikar Khan and while informing about the ongoing social security program in Balochistan, said that 19 thousand workers of the province are under social security program are registered in which 90 percent of the registration is of laborers working in mines, the children of these workers are being provided educational support under the Government of Pakistan Workers Welfare Fund.

Emphasis was placed on the promotion of skill-based education in various fields along with traditional degree programs in institutions. Mir Sarfraz Bugti said that not every youth can be employed in the government sectors in the available resources of Balochistan, there is a



demand for technical people in various fields all over the world, so it is important that we also provide decent employment opportunities to our youth by making them skilled.

Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti said that such programs of technical training and skills in inter-tech and matric-tech should

be introduced in the institutions established under the Workers' Welfare Fund, which are in demand in the global and national market, such institutions should be under public-private partnership, can also be established for which the provincial government will provide all possible support.



ISLAMABAD: Representatives of PRCs, IFRC, ICRC, Norwegian Red Cross, Turkish Red Crescent, German Red Cross and volunteers participating in hiking on the occasion of World Hemophilia Day at Margalla Hills, Trail 5 in Federal Capital.



### 3 Taliban members killed

KABUL (Monitoring Desk): The National Resistance Front of Afghanistan (NRF) announced that during an attack by their forces on a Taliban security forces' vehicle, three Taliban members were killed, and two others were wounded. NRF posted on X social media platform that the incident occurred on Tuesday evening in Kabul city's fourth police district. Releasing a video of the attack, the front said that the target was a vehicle transporting Taliban members.

### Hezbollah claims responsibility

KABUL (BNA): Hezbollah has asserted that it launched missile attacks on three Israeli military bases located in the northern region of the country. According to the Lebanese group, Islamic Resistance fighters targeted the Beit Hillel base using Katyusha rockets at 4:45 p.m. on Tuesday, April 16th. In another statement, Hezbollah reported that its fighters also directed artillery shells towards the Al-Samaqa position in the occupied hills of Kfarshuba on the same day.

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

## Taliban shuts down Barya TV for disagreeing with Talibanism: Hekmatyar



KABUL (Khaama Press): The son of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar says that the Taliban shut down Barya TV station, affiliated with the Hezb-e-Islami, because it raised issues that the Taliban do not adhere to. The Taliban did not approve of its programming despite Barya being "religious and Islamic" in its broadcasts. The Taliban's Media Violations Commission announced on Tuesday that the broadcast of programs on "Noor" and "Barya" TV stations has been temporarily

suspended due to their failure to adhere to "national and Islamic principles and values." Noor TV is led by Salahuddin Rabbani, the leader of the Jamiat Islami Party, founded in Kabul on August 18, 2007. Barya TV also started operating five years ago in 2019 in Kabul, affiliated with the Hezb-e-Islami Party under the leadership of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, usually broadcasting his speeches and the party's news. Recently, critical

remarks by Hekmatyar regarding the Taliban were aired on this television station, which received coverage in the media and on social networks. Habibur Rahman Hekmatyar reacted to the Taliban's decision on Tuesday. He wrote on his social media platform X that the Taliban disagreed with the content of Barya's "religious and Islamic" broadcasts because it raised different values from those of the Taliban. He stated that "interpretation and reading" of religion, which, according to him, is accompanied by "superstitions."

Hekmatyar's son wrote that their interpretation of religion supports "consultation, rights, education, and knowledge." He also added, "Religion regards the ruler as a servant and accountable to the people; religion says the ruler must be openly among the people, religion regards the treasury as being accountable to the people." He added that the television affiliated with this party considered "religious and national values" rather than Taliban values. Since the Taliban took control of Afghanistan, half of the media outlets have ceased their activities due to suspension, leading to thousands of journalists becoming unemployed or leaving the country. According to NIA and other supporting journalists organizations reports, over 90% of female journalists have lost their jobs or been dismissed due to the Taliban's harsh oppressive policies, and over half of them have left the country. According to reports, the Taliban have detained dozens of journalists over the past three years and imposed extensive restrictions on the free operation of the media.

## Doctors Without Borders concerned over deportation of Afghans from Pakistan



KABUL (Khaama Press): The organization Doctors Without Borders has expressed serious concern over the start of the second phase of Afghan migrant expulsions from Pakistan. In a statement released on Tuesday, the organization stated that many of the migrants being expelled from Pakistan are Afghans who have been there for decades. The Doctors Without Borders statement mentioned that for

many Afghans, this return entails packing belongings and transporting them by horse, cart, motorbike, and collectively traveling to a country currently grappling with widespread poverty, inadequate health services, and increasing restrictions on women. Following extensive coverage by Pakistani media outlets on Monday, April 15, the start of the second phase of mandatory expulsion of migrants

and asylum seekers labeled "illegal" from Pakistan was reported. Reports indicate that approximately 800,000 Afghan migrants will be returned to their country in the second phase of expulsions from Pakistan. It is also expected that the third phase of this process will result in the expulsion of holders of UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) identity cards. Previously, the

International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Norwegian Refugee Council, the Danish Refugee Council, and nine other organizations expressed concerns over the second phase of Afghan migrant expulsions from Pakistan. According to statistics, Pakistan has accommodated around 4.4 million Afghans, of which 500,000 have returned to their country so far.

## UK MPs reject plan to protect Afghan 'Heroes' from deportation

KABUL (Khaama Press): Conservative Members of Parliament (MPs) in the UK have opposed a proposal aimed at safeguarding Afghan veterans who worked alongside British troops from being deported to Rwanda. On Monday, a proposed amendment to the contentious Rwanda bill was defeated by a vote of 312 to 253. The amendment sought to prevent agents, allies, and employees of the UK from facing deportation to Rwanda, as reported by the Independent. Stephen Kinnock and Luke Pollard, two opposition party representatives, also called for the implementation of this amendment in a letter. The letter states that this is the third time the British House of Lords has voted for the exemption of former government army personnel from deportation to Rwanda, a decision the government has rejected. Parliamentarians have asked relevant ministers



to reconsider their decision before the amendment returns to the House of Lords for further consideration. This amendment is supported by certain former Afghan army personnel who entered Britain unlawfully after the Taliban's takeover. It also includes translators who worked with British

forces in Afghanistan. The exemption amendment for former Afghan forces from deportation to Rwanda was proposed by Des Browne, the former UK defense secretary, and put to a vote. The British House of Lords has demanded several amendments to the Sonke Review scheme,

Britain's Prime Minister's initiative concerning the deportation of "illegal" asylum seekers to Rwanda. Support for exempting Afghan veterans from potential deportation to Rwanda has garnered strong backing from top levels of Britain's military establishment.

## Deputy PM Hanafi encourages Afghans living abroad to return home

KABUL (BNA): The Deputy PM for Administrative Affairs of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan has called on Afghan professionals and experts residing abroad to return to the country and contribute to its development and prosperity. ARG in a statement said that Mawlawi Abdul Salam Hanafi raised this request during a meeting with a group of academic, cultural figures, and representatives of Afghans residing abroad. During the meeting, Afghan expatriate representatives, along with academic and cultural figures, expressed satisfaction with the Islamic Emirate's achievements, including security improvements, anti-corruption efforts, drug control, and major development projects. They further stated that with the re-establishment of the Islamic Emirate in the country, numerous opportunities have emerged across various sectors, especially in trade and investment, ensuring the safety and financial security of all citizens. They also urged the

Islamic Emirate to pay special attention to enhancing the quality and quantity of education and training and healthcare services, increasing employment opportunities for professionals in government offices, and utilizing existing economic capacities. In response, Mawlawi Abdul Salam Hanafi, the Deputy PM for

Administrative Affairs, reiterated that providing security, bolstering economic stability, and facilitating necessary amenities for citizens are top priorities of the Islamic Emirate, and in this regard, every effort will be made without hesitation. He emphasized that Afghanistan is the common home of all Afghans, and officials of the Islamic

Emirate are committed to eradicating administrative corruption and providing better services for all citizens. At the end, the Deputy PM for Administrative Affairs, urged all Afghan professionals and experts living abroad to return to their homeland and actively participate in its prosperity and development of their country.



## Suspension of Noor and Barya TV stations unlawful: Afghanistan Journalists Center

KABUL (Khaama Press): Afghanistan Journalists Center condemned the Taliban's order to suspend "Noor" and "Barya" TV stations, calling it unlawful and a restriction on free media. They demand the revocation of the Taliban's order and the swift reopening of both channels. Private TV stations "Noor" and "Barya" were temporarily suspended on Tuesday, April 16th by Taliban's media regulatory commission for "failure to

observe national and Islamic principles." Zabihullah Sadat, head of private television "Tolo News" and a member of the commission, told the Afghanistan Journalists Center that until their case is reviewed in the Taliban court, these two channels will not be allowed to operate. He stated that "Noor" TV's operations were halted due to broadcasting music and female staff not wearing masks, while "Barya" TV was warned

for airing Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's remarks about the Taliban's relations with the US. Officials of "Noor" and "Barya" TV stations confirmed to the Afghanistan Journalists Center that their operations have been suspended following the Taliban's order. The Center stated, "Media should be free to carry out their professional duties, and authorities should not restrict or threaten them." The center also criticized the legal structure

of the Taliban's media regulatory commission, stating, "Its function is questionable under media law and is primarily used as a tool to implement the Taliban's media policies." The suspension of these two channels, affiliated with leaders of the Jamiat-e-Islami and the Hezb-e-Islami, comes as the Taliban announced last week that political parties have been dissolved and their continued operation is "illegal."

## Ministry: Afghanistan exports 67 tons of Saffron, all domestically produced

KABUL (Khaama Press): The Ministry of Industry and Commerce states that Afghanistan, with its high-quality saffron, does not need to rely on the saffron of other nations to compete in global markets, as Afghan saffron ranks first in the world. According to the ministry's spokesperson, Afghanistan exported 67 tons of saffron to various countries around the world last year. This comes as Iranian media reported yesterday that Afghanistan annually exports about 70 tons of saffron, with less than 20 tons being domestic production and the rest being Iranian saffron. Iranian media quoted Ali Hosseini, a member of Iran's Saffron Council, on Tuesday as saying that Afghanistan produces less than 20 tons of saffron but exports about 70 tons, indicating that Iranian saffron is sent there, packaged, and then exported from Afghanistan. Abdulsalam Jawad, spokesperson for the Ministry of Industry and Commerce in Afghanistan, responded to the remarks of



an Iranian Saffron Council member in an interview with Khaama Press on Wednesday, April 17th, saying, "Afghanistan exported 67 tons of saffron worth about \$49 million to various countries in last solar year -1402. All of this saffron was produced in Afghanistan." Jawad added that Afghanistan saffron is of excellent quality and ranks first in the world. It is worth mentioning

that Iranian media cited a member of the Iranian Saffron Council yesterday expressing concerns about losing global markets. This member of the Iranian Saffron Council had stated, "We handed over export markets that we had worked hard to prepare for years due to mismanagement in production, harvesting, and dual exports to Afghanistan and some other countries."

Therefore, according to him, Afghanistan does not need to mix its saffron with that of other countries to gain a market share globally. The spokesperson for the Ministry of Industry and Commerce further stated that all 67 tons of saffron exported by Afghanistan were domestically produced, and no other country's saffron was mixed with it.

It is worth mentioning that Iranian media cited a member of the Iranian Saffron Council yesterday expressing concerns about losing global markets. This member of the Iranian Saffron Council had stated, "We handed over export markets that we had worked hard to prepare for years due to mismanagement in production, harvesting, and dual exports to Afghanistan and some other countries."







ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Turkiye to Pakistan, Dr. Mehmet Pacaci, called on President Asif Ali Zardari, at Aiwan-e-Sadr.

## 32 died in KP rain, flood related incident

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) Wednesday issued a report of loss of life and property in the province due to heavy rains and flood related incident as many 31 people have died with 41 injured in different districts across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

According to the report issued by PDMA, 15 children, 12 men and 5 women are among the dead, while the injured include 6 women, 28 men and 7 children. A total of 1370 houses were damaged due to the collapse of walls and roofs in different districts, in which 160 houses were completely damaged and 1210 houses were partially damaged, PDMA report said.

Due to heavy rains, life and financial accidents occurred in various districts of Khyber including Dir Upper and Lower, Chitral Lower and Upper, Swat, Bajaur, Shangla, Mansehra, Mohmand, Malakand, Karak, Tank, Mardan, Peshawar, Charsadda, Nowshera, Bunir, Hangu, Bataghrum, Bannu, North and South Waziristan, Kohat, Dera Ismail Khan and Orakzai District, the report of the PDMA said.

On the special instructions of the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Gandapur, PDMA released Rs. 50 million to the administration of 12 affected districts for financial assistance to the families of those who lost their lives in the recent rains, the PDMA report

### Eight killed in Balochistan lightning, roof collapse incidents

F.P. Report

QUETTA: At least eight people were killed and nine others injured in separate incidents of lightning and roof collapse across Balochistan. A spokesman of provincial government, Shahid Rind said that lightning during heavy rains and roof cave incidents in various districts of the province claimed eight lives besides leaving nine others injured.

He said that 132 houses and link road were damaged in the areas affected of heavy rains and floods. Efforts were in progress for restoration of communication links in affected districts, he added. The spokesman further said that surveys were being conducted in the affected districts for assessment of the damages.

Meanwhile, incessant rains once again wreaked havoc in the province on Wednesday, inundating Gwadar and adjoining areas. Almost all streets and localities drowned. Plaini Canal is in a high flood. Floodwater also entered Malik Muhammad Khan Village. Owing to the flood, Pashkan-Gwadar Road has been washed away. In Harnai, traffic remained suspended on national highways. In Qalat, all roads are giving a canal-like look though the rain has stopped. Rainwater has accumulated in several cities, including Mastung, Harnai, Pishin, Zhob and Jiyoni. On the other hand, the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) has issued an alert of windstorm, hailstorm and rains until April 22.

said. Rs 20 million for Nowshera, Dir Lower Rs 5 million, Swat and Malakand Rs 3.3 million, Dir Upper and Tank Rs 2.2 million, and Rs. 1 million each for Chitral Lower, Bitaghrum, Karak, Peshawar and Charsadda.

The PDMA also released 10 million rupees in general relief to Chitral Lower and Rs. 81 million to the administration of various districts since March 29 to deal with the emergency situation, the report said. According to the relief policy, the said funds can be used for the financial support and relief activities of the victims, PDMA said. Help and rehabilitation of the affected family due to rains is our first priority,

PDMA said.

Meanwhile, Complex Emergency Wing PDMA has released an amount of Rs. 80 million for tribal areas, said Subia Hassam, Director PDMA. The said amount has been given to the concerned district administration for relief activities in tribal areas, Director PDMA informed. The North and South Waziristan were given Rs. 20 million, Kurram five million, Khyber 1.5 million, Bajaur one million and Mohmand also one million respectively, Director PDMA Complex Emergency Wing said. In any emergency situation, more funds will be given to the concerned district administration immediately, said Subia Hassam.

### President for strengthening ties with Turkiye

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari on Wednesday called for further enhancing bilateral cooperation with Turkiye in the areas of trade, economy, education and culture.

The president, talking to Ambassador of Turkiye in Pakistan Dr Mehmet Pacaci, who called on him, said that Turkish companies should benefit from the investment-friendly policies of the country and invest through the Pakistan Stock Exchange. Welcoming the ambassador, the president said that the people of Pakistan and Turkiye had historic and long-standing ties, adding that the two nations had always supported and stood by each other in difficult times.

President Zardari stated that Pakistan could benefit from the Turkish development experience, especially in the area of infrastructure development. In order to promote regional connectivity, he suggested undertaking a joint feasibility study to establish a railway connection between the two brotherly countries.

The president also underlined the need for increasing educational and cultural exchanges to further promote people-to-people contacts. He said that Pakistan looked forward to welcoming Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an to the 7th High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council session in Pakistan.

President Zardari also expressed his gratitude for President Erdo?an's congratulatory messages on his election as President of Pakistan as well as at the beginning of Holy Ramadan. He also conveyed his warm greetings and sentiments for the future success of the Turkish president.

### IHC seeks reply from Secy Interior, FIA

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad High Court on Wednesday issued notices to Secretary of Interior, Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) seeking a reply to the petition of MNA Rai Haider Ali for the removal of his name from the Provisional National Identification List (PNIL).

Chief Justice Amir Farooq issued a notice and sought a reply on April 25. Chief Justice Amir Farooq summoned the Deputy and Assistant Attorney General present in the court to the rostrum. Expressing anger, CJ asked them why people's names are being put on such lists and who makes all these lists.

Chief Justice remarked that there is no scope for such lists in the law. Petitioner's lawyer Shafqat Abbas told the court that his client is an elected MNA from Faisalabad and wanted to go abroad but was stopped at the airport. When asked, it was told that his name is included in PNIL that is why he cannot go because they are in PNIL, said lawyer Shafqat Abbas. Many of the old names are gone, let's see which ones are left, Assistant Attorney General replied. Many have left, many have not yet left, see them too, Chief Justice ordered.

Sometimes they confiscate someone's passport, sometimes they put their name in the stop list, don't do that, Chief Justice further ordered.

## Federal cabinet to enhance wheat procurement targets

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Federal Cabinet on Wednesday directed the Ministry of National Food Security and Research to wok out an effective strategy in coordination with the provincial governments for achieving the wheat procurement target.

Chairing the cabinet meeting, Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif directed to take all possible steps to ensure that the farmers get full reward of their hard work. Acknowledging the endeavours of Federal Cabinet and relevant authorities with regard to the successful visit of Saudi delegation, the prime minister said the delegation was impressed by the preparatory work and comprehensive briefings by the Pakistani ministers and officials.

He also expressed special thanks to Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman for his keen interest in Pakistan, which led to a successful visit of the Saudi delegation. "We must work hard with the same spirit and dedication to ensure the completion of projects under this Saudi investment in Pakistan," he added. He warned that any obstacles or impediments in that regard would not be spared.

He reiterated the commitment to working day and night for Pakistan's progress and prosperity, as pledged to the people. "If we continue to work

hard, we will soon achieve the goal of country's development, prosperity and economic stability." The cabinet, on the recommendation of the Federal Ministry of Education and Technical Training, approved the bill regarding the establishment of the Institute of Modern Sciences in Wah Cantonment.

The prime minister directed to form a committee to further improve the procedure for establishing new universities and higher education institutions, which would be headed by the Minister for Federal Education and Technical Training, while the Minister for Petroleum, the Minister of State for Information Technology and the Attorney General for Pakistan would be its members. The cabinet, on the recommendation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, allowed former ambassador Manzoor Ahmad Chaudhry to receive the Commandeur de l'Ordre National Award from the Government of Cote D'Ivoire in recognition of his services.

On the recommendation of the Ministry of Law and Justice, it gave its approval for the conversion of Accountability Court-VIII Karachi to Special Court (Customs, Taxation and Anti-Smuggling-II), Accountability Court-III Hyderabad to Banking Court Mirpur Khas, Accountability Court-III Sukkur to Banking Court, Ghotki and Accountability Court-IV Sukkur to

Banking Court Shaheed Benazirabad. On another recommendation of the Ministry of Law and Justice, the cabinet gave its consent for authorizing the Special Court II (Anti-Terrorism) to hear cases reported under the Official Secrets Act, 1923. The Special Court II was given the authority in view of proceeding of the Special Court I judge on leave.

The cabinet, on the recommendation of the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development, approved the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the Ministry of Labour, the Government of Qatar and the Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development regarding labour relations, labour inspections, and occupational safety and health.

It was told that currently 300,000 Pakistanis were working in Qatar, who were sending foreign exchange worth Rs 850 million to Pakistan. The cabinet also approved the Federal Public Private Policy of Pakistan 2023-2028 on the recommendation of the Ministry of Planning and Special Initiatives. In this regard, the prime minister stressed that through public-private partnership, the country's economy could be strengthened, and directed all the ministries to submit their proposals in that regard. The cabinet also endorsed the decisions taken in its meeting held on April 4.

## Israel-Hamas talks on Gaza truce ‘stalling’

### Iranian mily says it is ready to deal with any Israeli attack

DUBAI (Reuters): Iran said on Wednesday its military was ready to confront any attack by Israel, with the air force saying it was prepared for action. Iran's navy commander said also that it was escorting Iranian commercial vessels to the Red Sea.

Iran carried out its first-ever direct attack on Israel last weekend in retaliation for a suspected Israeli strike on an Iranian diplomatic compound in Damascus on April 1. Israel has said it will hit back and its war cabinet was meeting on Wednesday to discuss options. "Any attack by the Zionist regime (Israel) on our soil will be dealt with a severe response," Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi said on Wednesday at a parade held for Army Day, state media reported.

The commander of the Islamic Republic of Iran Air Force warned at the same event that its warplanes, including Russian-made Sukhoi-24s, were in their "best state of preparedness" to counter any Israeli attack. "We have full readiness in all fields, including our air coverage and bombers, and are prepared for any operation," Brig. Gen. Amir Vahedi said.

A direct attack on Revolutionary Guards bases or nuclear research facilities within Iran is one of the options Israel has to strike back. Targets outside of Iran are also a possibility. Admiral Shahram Irani said the Iran Navy was escorting Iranian commercial ships to the Red Sea, according to the semi-official Tasnim news agency. "The Navy is carrying out a mission to escort Iranian commercial ships to the Red Sea and our Jamaran frigate is present in the Gulf of Aden in this view," Irani said.

Tehran was ready to escort vessels of other countries, he added. The Red Sea has seen significant disruption to Israel-bound shipping due to attacks from Yemen's Iran-aligned Houthis. On April 13, Iran's Revolutionary Guards seized the MSC Aries, a Portuguese-flagged container ship in the Strait of Hormuz which Tehran says is linked to Israel.

people of Gaza faced "siege and starvation" with humanitarian aid being used as a "tool for political blackmail."

The war began when Hamas launched an unprecedented attack on Israel that resulted in about 1,170 deaths, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally of Israeli official figures. Israel's military has waged a retaliatory offensive against Hamas that

has killed 33,899 people in Gaza, most of them women and children, according to the Hamas-run territory's health ministry. Palestinian militants seized about 250 Israeli and foreign hostages during the October 7 attack on Israel, but dozens were released during a week-long truce in November. Israel estimates 129 remain in Gaza, including 34 who are presumed dead.

## ECP hands over 6.23m ballot papers to ROs for by-polls

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) handed over 6.23 million ballot papers to concerned Returning Officers (ROs) for by-elections in 21 constituencies.

According to the details, approximately 2.55 million Pakistanis will exercise their right to vote for the five National Assembly constituencies, while around 3.61 million people will be voting for 16 provincial assemblies seats across the country.

According to sources, more than 6.23 million ballot papers have been printed, with green-colored papers for the National Assembly and white-colored papers for the provincial assemblies. The ballot papers have been handed over to the ROs of the respective constituencies to ensure a smooth voting process. A total of 47 candidates will be contesting for five National Assembly seats while 16 Provincial Assembly constituencies are also up for grabs.

The by-elections are scheduled to take place on April 21. These elections encompass five National Assembly seats, 12 Punjab Assembly seats, two seats in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly, and two seats in

the Balochistan Assembly, all slated for April 21. Notably, the first lady Aseefa Bhutto Zardari has already been elected unopposed for NA 207, the ECP official said. A total of 237 candidates were vying for 21 vacant seats in both national and provincial assemblies during the upcoming by-elections slated for April 21.

**ECP delegation visits Brazil for feasibility study of polling via EVM:** Headed by Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Mr. Sikandar Sultan Raja, a high-level delegation comprising Provincial Election Commissioner (Punjab) Mr. Aijaz Anwar Chohan, Director General (IT) Mr. Muhammad Khizer Aziz and Director Mr. Nadeem Zubair visited Brazil to examine and carry out feasibility study of electoral processes using Electronic Voting Machine (EVM).

It should be mentioned here that many of the countries were using EVMS partially in the electoral process whereas Brazil and India are using EVMs nationwide. The electoral process of Brazil was considered as one of the best and technologically most advanced in the world.

Therefore, the ECP decided to visit Brazil and

hold meetings with top officials of TSE (Brazilian Election Commission). A number of meetings were held in three days with various heads of wings of Election Management Body of Brazil i.e Tribunal Superior Electoral (TSE). These meetings were held with Secretary of Communication & Multimedia, Secretary Information Technology, Head of Identification Management, who gave detailed briefings on their electoral processes and Brazilian Electronic Voting Machine (EVM).

The demonstration of the EVM was also conducted. The major topics which were discussed include 'Initiatives for strengthening the social confidence on the electoral processes', 'Introduction to the Brazilian EVM', 'Identification System being used in polling process', and 'Special Advisory for fighting Disinformation'.

Finally, an important meeting was held between the Chief Election Commission of Pakistan Mr. Sikandar Sultan Raja and the Chief Justice of Superior Court of Brazil /President Tribunal Superior Electoral (TSE) Mr. Alexander de Moraes on various vital topics including use of EVM.

### Autopsy reveals cause of Maryam's death in train

BAHAWALPUR (INP): The autopsy report of Maryam Bibi's death, who was allegedly tortured by a police officer on train, revealed the cause of her death. According to the autopsy report, five wounds were found on the dead body of Maryam Bibi, whereas her death occurred due to excessive bleeding after her head hit the ground and fractured bones.

On the other side, Bahawalpur district police registered an FIR against the employees of Railway Police, on the complaint of the brother of the deceased, Mariam Bibi who was allegedly thrown out from Millat Express Train and died on the spot. According to the FIR, the body of the deceased woman identified as Mariam Bibi, a resident of Jaranawala Tehsil of Faisalabad and living in Karachi was found within the jurisdiction of Chani Goth police station of Ahmadpur Tehsil of Bahawalpur district.

Plaintiff, Muhammad Afzal, son of Muhammad Shoaib, the resident of tehsil Jaranawala of district Faisalabad submitted his application with Chani Goth police station on 16th April 2024. He submitted that his real sister, Ms Mariam Bibi, 29 years old had been living in C Area, Qayyumabad, Karachi to earn livelihood at a beauty parlour. "My sister had fast of 27th of Ramazanul Mubarak and along with her nephews including 11-years-old Muhammad Ghalib and 9-years-old Kanwal rode train Millat Express on 7th April 2024 to proceed to Faisalabad," he stated in the FIR.

The plaintiff submitted that Mir Hassan, constable of Railway police harassed and misbehaved with his sister, Mariam Bibi and subjected her with violence. "A passenger had captured the incident of torture in video which had gone viral across Pakistan," the FIR said. The plaintiff claimed that Mir Hassan took away her sister, Mariam Bibi to another bogie on the train and deprived her of cash and gold jewelry and later, threw her out of train in Chani Goth area. "Mariam Bibi received fractures in bones of hands and feet and received critical wounds in head which caused her death," the plaintiff submitted.

FIR was also registered on two other employees of Railway Department for allegedly being accomplices of major accused, Mir Hassan. The plaintiff in the FIR submitted that the accused pushed Mariam Bibi out of the train intentionally. It is being mentioned here that postmortem of the deceased woman was carried out by a lady doctor at Tehsil Headquarters Hospital in Ahmadpur tehsil of Bahawalpur district.

Later, the body was handed over to the heirs who took it away to Jaranawala tehsil of Faisalabad district. According to the post-mortem report, the woman received critical wounds which caused her death.