

**Journalist succumbs to wounds**  
**F.P. Report**

KARACHI: Local journalist Nasrullah Gadani, who was seriously injured in a gun attack a few days ago, succumbed to his wounds at a hospital in Karachi on Friday. Gadani suffered serious gunshot wounds in an attack by unidentified assailants near Mirpur Mathelo, Ghotki district, on Tuesday. The incident took place when Nasrullah Gadani was going from his home to Mirpur Mathelo Press Club.



@thefrontierpost

First national English daily published from Peshawar, Islamabad, Lahore, Quetta, Karachi and Washington D.C

www.thefrontierpost.com

Vol. XXXIXI

No. 122

Regd. No. 241

ZIQAAD 16 1445 -- SATURDAY, MAY 25 2024

PESHAWAR EDITION

12 PAGES

PRICE. 30

# KP govt presents Rs1754b budget

— proposes 10 per cent increase in salaries, pensions; Rs28 billion earmarked for Sehat Card Plus program

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Finance Aftab Alam on Friday presented Rs 1754billion annual budget for the fiscal year 2024-25 with a surplus of Rs 100billion. The government has projected Rs 1,654 billion expenses, said the minister during budget speech in the assembly here, adding that as per the instructions of the Chief Minister Ali Ameen Gandapur the budget 2024-25 mainly focused on social protection, peace, employment opportunities, and economic development.

The government has proposed 10 per cent increase in both salaries and pension of the government employees and increase minimum wage from Rs 32000 to 36000. While giving details of the budget 2024-25, he said that the KP government anticipates receiving a total 1754 billion under different heads during the fiscal year 2024-25 including 1212.036 billion from the federal government under Federal Tax Assignment, one percent of divisible pool on war on terror, Straight Transfer under the head of royalties and surcharge on oil and gas, windfall levy and net hydel profit.

He said that the KP province considerably improve its income during the last few years and had chalked out a mobilization plan and fixed a target of achieving Rs 93.5 billion revenue for the fiscal year 2024-25. He said the KP government has decided to improve tax net instead of increasing the taxes and for the purpose several steps have taken including reforms in sales tax, property tax, tobacco tax, cess and other taxes.

The government has decreased the sales tax ratio on different online services in the

budget, adding that the tax has reduced on hotels from eight percent to six percent and bound the hotels to use Restaurant Invoice Management System. Similarly, fixed sales tax rate has been proposed for wedding halls. Aftab said the government has also given relief in property tax and reduced the tax amount on per kanal for factories form Rs 13600 to 10,000.

The tax on commercial property which was 16 percent of the monthly rent previously has been reduced to 10 percent and five percent for private hospital, medical stores and other businesses related to health sector. Additionally, the government proposed to increase tobacco development cess to increase income on the production of tobacco, he said and informed the house that the government has reduced provincial tax from 6.5 percent to 3.5 percent on transfer of properties.

The government has earmarked Rs Rs 362.7 billion for education sector including Rs 35.8billion for higher education and Rs 326.9billion for elementary and secondary education with an increase of Rs 13 percent. Similarly, Rs 228.8billion has been allocated for health sector with an increase of Rs 14 percent. Rs 140.6billion for peace and order in the province with an increase of Rs 15 percent, Rs 60.5billion for roads and infrastructure with an increase of Rs 03 percent, Rs 8.1billion for social welfare with an increase of Rs 06 percent, Rs two billion for mineral with an increase of Rs two percent, Rs 7.5 billion for industry and commerce with an increase of Rs 17 percent, Rs 9.6billion for tourism with an increase of Rs 25 percent, Rs 28.6 billion for agriculture with an increase of Rs 54 percent and Rs 30.8billion for energy sector with an increase of Rs 67 percent.



The current expenditure for the settled districts for the fiscal year 2024-25 was estimated Rs 1093.087 billion including provincial salaries, Health MTIs' salary budget, Tehsil Salary, pension and non-salary expenditures of health MTIs, Tehsil, capital expenditure and ways and means. Similarly, the current expenditure for the merged districts was estimated Rs 144.628 billion including provincial salary, Tehsil salary, pension, non-salary, temporarily displaced persons and non salary expenditure of Tehsils.

The government has allocated Rs 416.284 billion for development expenditures for settled and merged districts including Rs 120 billion for Provincial Annual Development Program, Rs 24 billion for district annual development program, Rs 36 billion for merged districts annual development program, Rs 79.286 billion for Accelerated Implementation program (AIP), Rs 130.587billion for foreign project assistance and Rs 26.411 billion for federal PSDP. The Minister said that the budget 2024-25 was not just a budget document rather it was also a roadmap for development and prosperity of the province and also reflection of

the government's strong resolve to uphold social justice, gender equality.

At the end he thanked the finance department, planning and development in drafting the budget document within very short span of time. KP Govt announced Rs120 billion annual development program for financial year 2024-25.

As many as Rs416.30 billion allocated under head of development expenditure including Rs120billion for provincial ADP, Rs24 billion for district ADP, Rs36 billion for merged districts ADP and Rs79.29 for Accelerated Implementation Program (AIP). The ADP and salient features of KP budget 2024-25 announced by the Finance Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Aftab Alam includes allocation of Rs12 billion for Ehasas Employment Program, Youth Program and Skills program under which 100,000 jobs would be created for people of the province.

Presenting budget 2024-25 at floor of the house, the finance minister said that 5000 new houses would be constructed under Ehasas Own House Program for which Rs3 billion allocated. Likewise, Rs10 billion earmarked for CRBC Lift

Canal to irrigate three lakh acres lands, launching of Tank, Chodran and Daraban dams, allocation of Rs26.90 billion for wheat procurement, Rs6.50 billion for construction of roads, Rs 2.50 billion for emergency works, construction of Dir and DI Khan motorway under public private partnership mode, construction of road to link DI Khan with Hakla motorway and 470 megawatt Lower Spat Gah project.

For education sector including high education, KP Govt allocated Rs362.68 billion for financial year 2024-25 which is 13 percent more compare to last fiscal year. Similarly, Rs35.82 billion set aside for higher education that was 11 percent more than last financial year. Besides establishment of 30 degree colleges and over 350 schools in rent buildings, the government of KP also allocated Rs326.86 billion for elementary and secondary education. Similarly, Rs232.08 billion allocated for health sector in financial year 2024-25 which was 13 percent more compare to last fiscal year while air ambulance service and Peshawar Institute of Cardiology's Satellite Centre for southern districts of KP announced.

Besides allocation of Rs10.97 billion for purchase of medicines, Rs28 billion earmarked for Sehat Card Plus program for settled districts and 9 billion for merged tribal districts. For law and order, KP government announced Rs140.62bn for improvement of law and order which is 12 percent more compare to last fiscal year while PEHL 911 project was being launched in home department.

The budget of social welfare department increased to Rs8.11 billion which is six percent more while shelter homes program budget jacked up to Rs600 million against 300 million in last fiscal year in merged tribal

## Opp leader terms budget based on assumptions

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: Leader of the Opposition in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly, Dr Ibadullah criticizing the provincial budget 2024-25 has termed it based on assumptions.

Interacting with media persons here on Friday, he said there was nothing new for people in the budget as per claims of the provincial government. Dr Ibadullah stated that the finance minister himself had admitted that the KP government was depending for 92 percent funds on the Federal Government but on other hand was making claim that he presented a surplus budget.

A Rs 300 billion supplementary budget was presented to hide the corruption of the government, he alleged. The opposition leader said that the budget had no relief for the common man, rather it was just manipulation of words. The government was in haste to get the budget passed before June 3, he added. Dr Ibadullah said that allocation of Rs 2.5 billion subsidy for the BRT (Bus Rapid Transport) system was unjustified as so many schools could be built by that amount.

districts. Similarly, Rs7.53 billion for industries, Rs9.66 billion for tourism with a project of field heritage school and tourism helpline 1422, Rs28.93 billion for agriculture with olives project, Rs31.54 billion for energy sector with establishment of KP distribution company and launching of Batakundi-Naran hydro project to produce 235 megawatt announced in budget 2024-25.

Besides allocation of Rs14.69 billion for livestock and Rs14.05 billion for forestry with launching of billion trees plus project, the KP Govt also announced 10 each percent increase in basic pay of its employees and pensioners besides increased minimum wages to Rs36000 from existing Rs32000. The total receipts of the province is pitched at Rs1754 billion while total expenditure including current and development was Rs1654 as the present budget which was Rs 100 billion surplus.

The Minister said that Rs one million treatment for each family under universal health coverage provided for around 40 mil-

lion people including 52 percent women population. Besides establishment of Peshawar Institute of Cardiology, orthopedic and spine surgery bloc were established at Hayatabad Medical Complex Peshawar while Saidu College of Dentistry setup.

Likewise, over 2000 community schools and girls cadet college in Mardan were setup besides 10 universities. To counter climate change and desertification, he said billion trees plus program was being launched during 2024-25. Under NFC award, the province share is Rs262 billion against which Rs123 billion received while Rs139 billion annual deficit.

He said that under the AGN Qazi formula approved by the Council of Common Interest, about Rs1800 billion outstanding amount was pending and Rs46.82 billion outstanding amount under the head of oil and gas. He said that a revenue mobilization plan was prepared under which a Rs93.50 target was set and the government was concentrating on increasing the tax base.

## ICJ orders Israel to halt Rafah assault

THE HAGUE (AP): The top United Nations court has ordered Israel to halt its military operations in the southern Gaza city of Rafah. Israel insists it has the right to defend itself from Hamas militants and is unlikely to comply with the ruling. The order by the International Court of Justice further ratchets up international pressure on an increasingly isolated Israel to rein in its war on Hamas in Gaza.

Friday's decision marked the third time this year the 15-judge panel has issued preliminary orders seeking to rein in the death toll and alleviate humanitarian suffering in Gaza. While orders are legally binding, the court has no police to enforce them.

Earlier Friday, the ICJ opened its hearing to rule on the request to order Israel to halt its military operation in Gaza and withdraw from the enclave. Criticism of Israel's conduct in the war in Gaza has

been growing — even from its closest ally, the United States, which warned against an invasion of the southern city of Rafah, where hundreds of thousands of Palestinians have sought shelter from fighting elsewhere. And this week alone, three European countries announced they would recognize a Palestinian state, and the chief prosecutor for another UN court requested arrest warrants for Israeli leaders, along with Hamas officials.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is also under heavy pressure at home to end the war, which was triggered when Hamas-led militants stormed into Israel, killing 1,200 people, most civilians, and taking some 250 captive. Thousands of Israelis have joined weekly demonstrations calling on the government to reach a deal to bring the hostages home, fearing that time is running out.

While the International Court of Justice has broad

powers to order an end to the Israeli military campaign and any such ruling would be a blow to Israel's international standing, it does not have a police force to enforce its orders. In another case on its docket, Russia has so far ignored a 2022 order by the court to halt its full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Israel signaled it, too, would brush off an ICJ order to stop its operations. "No power on earth will stop Israel from protecting its citizens and going after Hamas in Gaza," Avi Hyman, the government spokesperson, said in a press briefing Thursday. The court's president, Nawaf Salam, opened Friday's hearing, as a small group of pro-Palestinian protesters demonstrated outside. The ceasefire request is part of a case filed late last year by South Africa accusing Israel of committing genocide during its Gaza campaign. Israel vehemently denies the allegations.

## PM hails ICJ's ruling on Palestine

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Friday welcomed the decision of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on a petition filed against genocide in Palestine.

The prime minister paid tributes to the courage of the 13 ICJ judges who made the decision and thanked South Africa for filing the petition. In a statement, he reiterated Pakistan's support for the Palestinians and pledged to continue fighting for their rights. He said Pakistan had extended support to the petition filed by South Africa.

The prime minister called upon the United Nations Security Council and the international community to immediately implement the International Court's decision to stop the Israeli operation in Gaza. He also urged the international community to ensure the provision of humanitarian aid and relief to the people of Palestine, besides providing immediate access to the United Nations investigation commission to Gaza and Rafah. Pakistan would continue to play its role in protecting the basic human and legal rights of the Palestinian people, the prime minister assured.

Meanwhile, as the country observed the first International Day of the Markhor on Friday (May 24), Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif called for the efforts to protect the national animal of Pakistan and other species which enrich the planet's biodiversity.

The prime minister said Pakistan was an agriculture country and it wanted to utilize modern technology in the sector. He informed the delegation that the government was taking measures on priority to increase the foreign direct investment in the country. Reforms were being introduced at the government level to expand the tax net, discourage tax leakages and stop tax theft from the system.

He also invited the Chinese companies to invest in Pakistan's electric and hybrid auto sector. The prime minister also directed the authorities concerned to resolve all the issues of the Chinese companies in Pakistan.

## KP govt presented truly welfare, pro-poor budget: CM

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Sardar Ali Amin Khan Gandapur has said that the provincial government, despite difficult financial situation, has presented truly welfare and pro-poor budget with a surplus of Rs. 100 billion, in line with the party vision prioritizing education, health, social protection, economic development and wellbeing of general public.

He has lauded the efforts of all provincial departments especially Finance and Planning and Development for preparing such a brilliant budget, adding that all the departments, now would have to work with the same dedication and passion, in order to ensure implementation of reforms and public welfare initiatives proposed in the new budget.

Addressing the participants of special (budget) meeting of the provincial cabinet, held here at Civil Secretariat Peshawar, the Chief Minister directed that all the departments would have to ensure progress on welfare projects proposed in the new budget as per stipulated timelines.

The Chief Minister said that special attention has been given to increasing revenue stream of the province by enhancing working capacity of the departments. Throw forward of annual development program has been decreased from 13 years to 6 years, which will resultantly ensure timely completion of



development projects in the province, he said an added that we will have to focus on improving governance system and boosting the sectors lagged behind for any reason.

He maintained that the provincial government is introducing reforms that will not only help in steering the province out of current financial crunches, but will also benefit the upcoming generations as well. Similarly, he said that the provincial government has decreased the provincial taxes levied on land mutation, adding that the federal government should also decrease the federal taxes in this regard. Initiatives to reduce the disparity between rich and poor, would also be taken; the tax

money collected from rich classes, would be spent on vulnerable segment of the society.

Initiatives have also been proposed in the budget to keep the tax rate low but to increase the tax net, so as to meet the budgeted expenditures without increasing burden on people. Besides, significant funds would be spent from province own sources on the development of merged districts.

He said that volume of our arrears owed to the federal government is increasing day by day, but we continue to raise our voice to get the due rights of the province and all the available options would be utilized for this purpose.

## Ahmed Farhad Case: IHC summons intelligence agencies' top officials

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Islamabad High Court (IHC) summoned top officials of the intelligence agencies and federal law minister in the poet and journalist Ahmed Farhad Shah's missing case.

In an eight-page written order of Friday's hearing, Justice Mohsin Akhtar Kayani directed the concerned authorities to recover the missing journalist and submit a report to the IHC registrar by May 29. Justice Mohsin Akhtar Kayani also ordered to telecast all cases of missing persons live.

The IHC judge directed Sector Commanders of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and Military Intelligence (MI) as well as the Director Intelligence Bureau (IB) to appear in person in the next hearing scheduled for May 29. Justice Mohsin Akhtar Kayani also summoned Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar and secretaries of defence and interior in the next hearing.

During Friday's hearing, AGP Awan

and Islamabad Inspector General (IG) Ali Nasir Rizvi appeared before the court. The court order, said: "The AGP was asked [whether] the law enforcement institutions, including ISI and MI, were performing their duties under any law to which the AGP said that the ISI is directly accountable to the prime minister of Pakistan while the MI is associated with the defence secretary and the armed forces of Pakistan."

"Looking at the explanation of this matter, the court considers it necessary that all the institutions should work within their constitutional limits, but in the present situation, we cannot do a comparative assessment of the administrative performance of the ISI with the police, FIA (Federal Investigation Agency) and CTD (Counter-Terrorism Department) until the court is briefed about official practices in institutions such as the ISI and MI, including the way to conduct investigation and inquiry."

The order said the defence secretary

was thus summoned in his personal capacity so he could submit a written explanation to the court on the above matters. "This would allow the court to clarify the role of the agencies in the jurisdiction of police investigation in the future and lead them to be accountable in the jurisdiction of the court," the order said.

It further said: "During the discussion, the court has come to the conclusion that the issue of missing persons is the most important issue of public interest at the moment," adding that for this, no legislation was passed by Parliament so far to "make the role of law enforcement agencies usable or responsible". The court order said that no considerable benefit was availed from the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances, adding that all such issues could only be solved currently by understanding the "internal discretionary and administrative matters" of the aforementioned agencies.





# Sindh govt to construct Ring Road: Murad

F.P. Report

KARACHI:Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah in his meaningful meeting with the FPCCI delegation led by its President Atif Shaikh announced the construction of a Ring Road facilitating freight traffic and outlining the boundaries of peripheral growth.

The purpose of the meeting with the FPCCI delegation is to interact with industrialists, listen to their grievances, and seek their proposals for industrial growth by developing new economic zones and infrastructural facilities, Murad Shah said and added that the FPCCI has proposed the construction of

an alternate bridge to reduce only dependence on native Jetty locally called Netty Jetty.

“We are going to constitute a group to take industrialists on board for the development of Commerce & Industry and facilitate serious industrialists to establish their industrial units by providing them security, and necessary facilities.”

This he said while talking to a 15-member delegation of the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce & Industry at CM House. Minister Industries Jam Ikram Dharejo, Minister Labour Shahid Thahim, Secretary to CM Raheem Shaikh, Secretary Industries,

Secretary Labour, Chairman SRB Asif Memon and other concerned officers also attended the meeting.

Mr Shah said that his government was planning to construct an Expressway from Karachi Port to Malir Expressway at Korangi to facilitate freight traffic from the port to the Motorway. “Work on Malir Expressway is going on the fast track and after its opening another Expressway from Port to Korangi would be constructed to make the entire segment a Ring Road.

The FPCCI representatives told the CM that street crime was creating problems, particularly in the industrial areas. The CM

said that his government had taken strict measures and had made the SHOs of the area responsible for any crime. “We have considerably brought the street crime under control and it further be reduced,” he said.

Talking about the measures the Sindh government is taking to deal with repeat criminals, the CM said a mechanism has been developed under which the repeat criminals would be worn with GPS anklets to keep an eye on their movement.

The FPCCI members complained that the development of the Dhabejo Economic Zone’s infrastructure was slow, and the price of the plots was high.

The CM said that he was not happy with the pace of development works and would call a meeting to fix the problem. “As far as the price of the plot is concerned, we would look into it and may evolve a facility for the industrialists/buyers,” Mr Shah said.

Murad Ali Shah told the industrialists that his government was establishing two more economic zones – Karachi and Larkana. The SITE Sukkur was being expanded. “We would offer security, all the facilities and other incentives to the industrialists interested in investing in the economic zone in the rural areas,” he said.

The FPCCI member also complained that heavy traf-

fic was not being allowed on the Lyari Expressway (LEW), therefore LEW remained under-utilised and on top of it failed to serve the purpose.

The CM told the FPCCI members that he has taken up the matter with the National Highway Authority. “I have offered NHA to hand over the repair, maintenance and operations of the Lyari Expressway to the Sindh government and keep collecting the Toll for which the provincial government would not claim,” he disclosed and hoped the matter would be resolved.

The FPCCI member complained about the acute gas shortage, and said they were using wood and

bagasse to meet the gas shortage. They said that the industrial gas rates have been increased many fold as power tariff.

They said that industrial production at such high power and gas rates was not feasible commercially.

They urged the CM to play his role in industrial production and growth. The CM assured them that he would talk to the federal government.

The FPCCI told the CM that the industries have to travel to Hyderabad or Karachi for cargo clearance and trade facilitations.

They requested the chief minister to help them establish Customs Desks at Sukkur and Larkana.

The CM assured the

FPCCI members that he would talk to the federal government to facilitate them in their respective districts/areas.

The chief minister on the FPCCI representatives’ request directed the Minister Industries Jam Ikramullah Dharejo to activate a liaison committee with the industrialists in which a DIG police would also be inducted so that the police-related issues of the industrialists could be resolved easily.

Murad Ali Shah directed Minister Labour Shahid Thahim and Minister Industries Ikram Dharejo to develop close coordination with the FPCCI so that their issues could be resolved.



PESHAWAR: Advisor to the Chief Minister on Finance Mr. Muzamil Aslam addressing post budget press conference.

## SIFCto take steps for improvement and stability of other institutions: Nasir

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Provincial Minister of Energy and Development and Planning Syed Nasir Hussain Shah has said that the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) is our institution which will take steps on a solid basis for the improvement of other institutions and the stability of the country, tourism institutions will remain with the Sindh government.

This institution will take measures with the collaboration and mutual support of the Sindh government. In this regard, a meeting was held between CM Sindh and SIFC in which the institution assured the Sindh government that whatever steps they will take.

They will do it by taking the Sindh government into confidence and by mutual consent. Nasir Shah said that Sindh government will have the authority to decide the final steps regarding SIFC.

He said that there are many rumors and reports of concerns about the institution, which have no truth, only speculations. Sindh Government and SIFC are working together for the best of the country. He expressed these views today in the Sindh Assembly while talking to



media representatives along with senior leaders of Pakistan People’s Party Punjab. Minister Nasir Shah said that work on 5700 development schemes is going on in Sindh province.

In the new budget, priority will be given to all these schemes so that all these ongoing schemes in the larger interest of the people can be completed with quality by 2024. In a question, Nasir Shah said that our students are stuck in Kyrgyzstan and Chairman Bilawal Bhutto directs steps are being taken to bring him back.

He added that just as the federal government has played a key role in this regard, the Sindh government is also playing its full role and is engaged in practical measures.

They are arranging a special flight to bring the children back to their homeland, all the expenses of which will be borne by the Sindh government.

Nasir Shah said that all water projects will be completed on priority basis in view of Chairman Bilawal Bhutto’s directive and public difficulties and sufferings. If the federal government was ours, according to the manifesto of Chairman Bilawal Bhutto, we would have provided free electricity up to 300 units to all the electricity consumers of the country. Since our government is in Sindh province, currently, in the first phase, they are taking steps to provide 100 units of free electricity to the people of Sindh, while gradually free electricity will be provided to those who use 300 units.

In response to a question, he said that he will popularize the use of solar energy in the province. He said that he considers taxation on solar energy to be a complete injustice to the people and discussions are ongoing with the federal government in this regard. Minister said that the Sindh

government is providing electricity to the National Grid by generating cheaper electricity than other provinces.

He added that the need of the hour is to set up more and more solar parks to meet the energy requirements. Nasir Shah said that Chairman Bilawal Bhutto’s vision is to provide maximum relief to the people, if the people are not being given subsidy on electricity, then alternative energy tax should not be imposed. Nasir Shah said that taxing solar energy would be inappropriate and cruel.

On this occasion, General Secretary of PPP Punjab Hasan Murtaza said that the role of PPP has been trampled. They do not support the bill presented by the Punjab government. Punjab government should sit down all the journalistic organizations and then take a decision.

The bill restricts journalists, which the PPP opposes. Mr. Hassan said that we did not go to the House due to opposition to this bill and we stand with the farmers and are part of the farmers’ protest. On this occasion, the newly elected member of National Assembly of People’s Party Punjab, Mumtaz Ali Chang, who won with a huge majority, also addressed the media and expressed his views.

## Maryam inaugurates largest interchange

LAHORE (INP): Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz has inaugurated the largest Punjab, Multan Road Interchange today.

Maryam Nawaz has also inaugurated the Ring Road Southern Loop (SL) 3.

On the direction of CM Maryam Nawaz, the toll tax on SL 3 has been waived off for one month, citizen can travel for free.

Punjab CM has also directed for immediate action on SL 4 project. She also reviewed the road from Addaplot to Multan Road Interchange.

Minister for Communication Punjab Malik Sohaib gave the briefing about the project and highlighted that SL3 Multan Road Interchange was the biggest interchange of Punjab.

Maryam Nawaz underlined about the project vitality stating that traffic congestion within city will be reduced with SL 3. The traffic on Thokar and Canal road will be less crowded. SL 3 Lahore is crucial for traffic management in Lahore.

Maryam Nawaz commended the performance of secretary construction and building and team.

Senior Provincial Minister Marriyyum Aurangzeb, MNA Afzal Khokhar, Special Assistant Zeeshan Malik, Chief Secretary Zahid Akhtar Zaman, IG Punjab Dr. Usman Anwar, Commissioner Zaid bin Maqsood, DC Rafia Haider and other officials attended the inauguration ceremony.

## Bilawal pays tributes to Hakim Zardari

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Chairman of Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has paid glowing tribute to his paternal grandfather, Sardar Hakim Ali Zardari, on his 13th death anniversary, which is being observed on May 24.

In his message, Bilawal stated that Sardar Hakim Ali Zardari’s life was a testament to his indomitable dedication to democracy and the promotion of Pakistan’s positive image on the global stage.

“He believed in the power of dialogue, the strength of unity, and the importance of standing up for what is right.

His allegiance to democratic principles and his sacrifices for the cause of democracy are a guiding light for us all,” he added.

Bilawal said that Sardar Hakim Ali Zardari played a pivotal role not only in shaping the political landscape of Pakistan but also in portraying a positive image of our nation to the world through cultural and social contributions.

He further added, “His legacy is a source of inspiration for me and countless others who strive to continue his mission.

As we honour his meaningful life and enduring legacy, we reaffirm our commitment to upholding the values he cherished and to working tirelessly for a democratic and prosperous Pakistan.”

## IGP orders relief provision on cops pleas

LAHORE (APP): Inspector General of Police (IGP) Punjab Dr. Usman Anwar chaired a meeting with police employees and their families at the Central Police Office on Friday and ordered for provision of relief on their applications and requests.

He directed DIG Welfare to release funds for medical treatment on the request of father of Ghazi Constable Asim Shehzad.To a promotion request of Sub-Inspector Muhammad Pervaiz Mukhtar from Rawalpindi, the IGP directed DIG Establishment-I to provide relief on merit.On the recruitment request under fami-



ly claim from the son of a retired constable Mukhtar Ahmad, he directed the AIG Admin to take necessary action.On a request of driver Constable Muhammad

Ramzan for provision of government quarter, he directed the AIG Development to consider and provide relief.The IGP forwarded departmental promotion request of Sub-Inspector Sanauallah from Lahore Police to DIG Establishment for necessary action.On the district transfer request of Nadeem, a cook from the Special Protection Unit, the IGP instructed AIG Admin to provide relief on merit.

On the request for permission of additional six months of stay in a family quarter by Sub-Inspector Zafar Mahmood, the IGP instructed Commandant PTC Chung to provide relief.

## Sharjeel offers condolence on demise of Raisi

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Sindh senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon visited the Iranian Consulate in Karachi and met with the Iranian Consul General Hassan Nourian here Friday.

Chairman District Council Tando Muhammad Khan Qasim Naveed Qamar and People’s Party leader Rawal Sharjeel Memon were accompanied the minister. Sharjeel Inam Memon offered fatcha and prayed for the departed soul of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, and others who lost their life in a recent helicopter crash.

He conveyed his heartfelt condolences to Iranian Consul Hassan Nourian on the death of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi.

Sharjeel paid tributes to the late Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi for his efforts in promoting peace in the region.

**ANP delegation visits Iranian Consulate**

A delegation of Awami

National Party (ANP), led by provincial president,

Mian Iftikhar Hussain on Friday visited the Iranian Consulate here to condole over the tragic death of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi in a helicopter crash last Sunday.

The delegation comprising of ANP provincial vice general secretary, Sayyed Aqil Shah, general secretary, Hussain Shah Khan, provincial vice president, Shahi Khan Shirani and spokesman Arsalan Khan met with Deputy Consul General, Hussain Maliki and offered heartfelt condolences over the demise of Iranian President and other government officials.

Talking on the occasion, Mian Iftikhar Husain said the death of Iranian President, Foreign Minister Dr Hussain Ameer Abdul Hayan and other government high-ups was a great tragedy. He said the services of late president Raisi were evident to all and his death created a vacuum that would take a long time to

fill.

He said the late president Raisi always wanted brotherly, peaceful and strong bonds with the neighboring countries. The patience and courage shown by the Iranian people at this critical time was commendable, he said adding the Supreme Council of Iran also tackled the situation with great insight and courage. He hoped that the process of selection of the new Iranian president would also be completed peacefully and harmoniously.

The Iranian Deputy Consul General thanked the ANP delegation for their supportive gesture and solidarity and said relations between the two brotherly countries will further strengthen in future. The delegation offered tribute to the Iranian people and prayed for eternal peace to the souls of those martyred in the helicopter crash. Mian Iftikhar Hussain also wrote his condoling remarks in the visitors’ book.



KARACHI: People taking nap under the bridge during extreme hot weather in the city. — APP photo

اطلاع عام برائے عوام الناس			
لائف اسٹائل ہاؤسنگ پشاور واقع موضع بدھنی موضع صاحبی (تحصیل چکنی) اور موضع میاں گجر (تحصیل شاہ عالم) ضلع پشاور			
ہر عام و عام انعام کو بذریعہ اشتہار مدعاً مطلع کیا جاتا ہے کہ "لائف اسٹائل ہاؤسنگ پشاور نے ذریعہ جانب محاذی طور وار مجموعہ آکاش ٹاپ اور سک ہڈی نو اوٹھرا پشاور پاکستان ایسے باؤسنگ سکیم لائف اسٹائل ہاؤسنگ پشاور موضع بدھنی موضع صاحبی تحصیل چکنی پشاور اور موضع میاں گجر تحصیل شاہ عالم پشاور 1361.04 کتاں (1361 کتاں 8 سرکاری) کی منظوری کیلئے درخواست جمع کروائی ہے جس کے ضمنیہ مرات کی تفصیل درج ذیل ہے۔			
نام موضع	شمار نمبر	رقبہ	بدھنی
بدھنی	1415, 1416, 120, 1421, 1424, 1425	585 کتاں 6 سرکاری	
	1428 to 1454, 1456, 1459, 1465 to 1468		
صاحبی	459, 462 to 543, 545, 549, 550	236 کتاں 5 سرکاری 4 سرکاری	
میاں گجر	1702/1, 1703, 1723 to 1728	539 کتاں 9 سرکاری 4 سرکاری	
	1361 کتاں 8 سرکاری		
نوٹ: رقبہ			
لہذا احوال غیر متفقہ ہو کر کثرت پراپیٹ ہاؤسنگ سکیم منجھٹ ایڈریگیشن ریلز 2021 کے تحت لائف اسٹائل ہاؤسنگ پشاور یا س کی زمین کی ملکیت کے حوالے سے کسی بھی قسم کے اعتراضات و تجاویز ہوتا ہے اعتراضات و تجاویز بمبہد صحت و دستاویزات کی بری طور پر پوش ہذا کی بخار میں اشاعت کے 30 دن کے اندر عرضی نام لے چکی پشاور پیکچا دیں مقررہ معیاد میں موصول ہونے والے اعتراضات و تجاویز پر قوت قائم رکھا جائے گا۔			
بعد از معیاد مذکورہ زمرے سے موصول ہونے والے اعتراضات و تجاویز قابل غور ہونا نہ ہوں گی۔			
اداریہ دفتر تحصیل میڈیکل تحصیل میڈیکل ایڈمنسٹریشن چکنی پشاور (فون نمبر 091-2621117)			
تحصیل آفس انفراسٹرکچر	ڈسٹرکٹ آرگنائزنگ	تحصیل آفس انفراسٹرکچر	تحصیل میڈیکل آفس
نی کام لے چکنی پشاور	نی کام لے چکنی پشاور	نی کام لے شاہ عالم پشاور	نی کام لے چکنی پشاور

## Country’s development top priority of PML-N: Azma Bokhari

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Information Minister Azma Bokhari said on Friday that the Punjab Cabinet had given approval to take legal action against Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf founder and other leaders for adopting hatred narrative against state

institutions.

Addressing a press conference here, she said the country’s development and prosperity was the top priority of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz.

She said, “Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf promotes

hatred on social media in an organized way.” Azma said that hatred was being promoted through a propaganda started from Adiala Jail.

She further said that in the 8th meeting of Punjab Cabinet presided over by Punjab CM Maryam Nawaz,

a number of development works had been approved.

She said that Punjab Cabinet had paid tribute to the Punjab CM for reducing inflation to a great extent which helped in mitigating the sufferings of common man.





# DG NAB for academia’s role in creation of awareness against corruption

PESHAWAR (APP): Director General, National Accountability Bureau (NAB) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ghazi Rehman here Friday said that quality research and proactive role of an academia in creation of awareness against the menace of corruption was of paramount importance and urged educationists to focus on character building of students imperative to eradicate this social evil from our society.

Chairing a high-level meeting along with Vice Chancellor, University of Peshawar, Professor Dr Muhammad Jehanzaib Khan, the DG NAB said that corruption undermines progress, development and merit in society and a collective approach was required to win the fight against corrupt practices.

The DG NAB further said that today’s visit to UoP was in line with the vision of Chairman NAB to mobilize educationists at universities and colleges for education of young

minds against menace of corruption.

The NAB’s motto is corruption free Pakistan which is in line with its national anti-corruption strategy of awareness, prevention and enforcement. NAB has chalked out a proactive and effective Anti-Corruption Strategy in order to make Pakistan corruption free.

He said that unfortunately, there was a misconception about plea bargain in some circles in our society, adding that such a procedure also existed in advanced countries aimed at quickly recovering the looted money from the accused.

Under NAB laws, plea bargain is evidenced based procedure under which an accused was given a choice to return the looted money before going into jail or face trial which means that such corrupt elements are deemed to be convicted under the law.

He said that countries like Malaysia had achieved rapid progress because of respect for rule of law and

its people’s resolve against corruption. Emphasizing the need for taking advantage of massive mines, mineral and gemstone resources of KP, DG NAB said that higher educational institutions and universities should take a lead role by conducting quality research for generation of employment opportunities for youth.

From Mohmand to Bajaur and Buner to Shangla, he said Khyber Pakhtunkhwa’s north-western belt was blessed with abundance of mineral and mines reservoirs, if fully tapped would help alleviate poverty and generate dignified employment opportunities for people.

Earlier, Professor Dr Jehanzaib Khan, Vice Chancellor UoP assured full cooperation to NAB in its endeavours to create awareness against corruption.

The meeting which was attended by directors, deans and senior officers of UoP underlined the need for strictly following teaching

of the holy Quran and Sunnah of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) to achieve success in this world and hereafter.

The participants also emphasized the need for strengthening of infrastructure in areas where marble and mines reservoirs existed besides promoting NAB’s anti corruption slogans through small videos on digital media.

The DG NAB said that doors of his institution were open for all and complaints with solid evidence could be filed against elements involved in corrupt practices i.e., money laundering, misuse of authority, cases of cheating the public at large, bank frauds, willful bank loan defaults and embezzlement of Govt/state funds etc.

He said NAB has adopted zero tolerance against corruption and more such events would be held at UoP being the mother educational institution of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for sensitization of students who were the future builders of Pakistan.



PESHAWAR: DG NAB Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ghazi Rehman chairing a high level meeting of educationists of University of Peshawar. VC UoP Prof. Dr. Muhammad Jehanzaib Khan is also present.

# Pesco BOD announces significant improvement in financial position

PESHAWAR (APP): In a joint statement, the PESCO Board of Directors on Friday announced a significant improvement in the company’s financial position during last year saying that the net loss was reduced to Rs. 81 billion in fiscal year 2022-23, compared to Rs. 102 billion in previous year 2021-22, reflecting a reduction in net loss amounting to Rs. 21 billion.

They expressed these views during the 4th HR Legal & amp; other Miscellaneous Matter Committee meeting of the PESCO Board of Directors held at the PESCO HQs here. The members of the Board of Directors Faizullah Khan Chairman Board of Directors PESCO, Ifikhar Ahmad Khan, Syed Samar Shah, Hassan Raza Saeed (Online), Mushtaq

Ahmad Abbasi, Farhan Zafar Jhagra and others were present at the meeting.

The members of the PESCO Board of Directors highlighted the company’s struggle with a severe deficit of technical personnel, operating at only 44% of the sanctioned staff as per yardstick approved in 2002.

Moreover, 40% of the workforce having age 55 years or above and unable to perform physical work on power lines, have eventually reduced the effective workforce to the tune of 27% only. Nevertheless, PESCO has managed to reduce its losses and improved its recovery during FY 2022-23 and FY 2023-24 (July to April 2024) compared to the previous year.

The PESCO Board of

Directors have keenly monitored ongoing projects and Important measures implemented by PESCO Management which include the installation of ABC (Aerial Bundle Cable), implementation of ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning), deployment of PESCO’s GIS (Geographical Information System) infrastructure with mapping of high-tension lines and distribution transformers completed in addition to carrying out geotagging of most of PESCO’s assets.

Additionally, the successful completion of load-shedding-free projects in Mardan and Peshawar Circles, activation of a task force, expansion of AMI (Advanced Metering Infrastructure) meter reading—with over thirty thousand AMR three-phase

meters installed and all major commercial and industrial connections billed via an automated online metering system.

Furthermore, the procurement and installation of sixty-five thousand AMR meters are underway in the World Bank program for complete conversion of all three phase connections to the AMI system, alongside a crackdown on electricity theft in on going antitheft campaign. These measures have significantly enhanced the company’s performance and improved the quality of customer services.

The joint statement said that this statement is issued to set right the record and to rectify the inaccurate and fabricated statistics circulated in print and social media regarding the performance of PESCO.

# Kundi meets JUI-F delegation

## Says meeting all political parties for KP rights

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Governor Faisal Karim Kundi on Friday visited Mufti Mahmood Markaz. He was accompanied by former provincial president of PPP, Najmuddin Khan, and former federal minister Sajid Hussain Turi.

During his visit, Governor Faisal Karim Kundi met with JUI Senator Maulana Atta ur Rehman. The meeting was also attended by JUI General Secretary Maulana Atta ul Haq Darwish, Senator Dilawar Khan, for-

mer provincial ministers Asif Iqbal Daudzai and Maulana Amanullah Haqqani, Mayor of Peshawar Haji Zubair Ali, Abdul Jaleel Jan, and Abdul Haseeb.

Senator Maulana Atta ur Rehman congratulated the Governor on assuming his constitutional office. The meeting included discussions on the political situation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, economic and public issues, and other significant matters.

Governor Faisal Karim Kundi stated that he is meeting with leaders of all political parties for the

rights of the province. He emphasized the importance of developing a unanimous and joint strategy through consultation with all political parties for the rights of the province.

"Our collective goal is to steer the province towards development and prosperity," said Governor Faisal Karim Kundi. He highlighted the economic crisis and law and order issues facing the province and expressed his intention to present the province’s case effectively to the federal government with the consultation of all political party leaders.

# Summer vacation for KP schools announced

## F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Primary and Secondary Education Department Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Friday announced the schedule for summer vacations in schools of the province.

According to a notification issued by the office of Secretary Primary and Secondary Education KP, the primary schools will remain closed on account of summer vacations from June 1st to August 31st while middle schools to observe summer vacations from June 15th to August 31st in the Summer Zone.

In Winter Zone, the notification said all the schools will remain closed from July 1st to July 31st on account of summer vacations.

# Five persons killed in exchange of firing

PESHAWAR (APP): As many as five persons were killed as a result of firing between two rival groups with five other injured here on Friday, an official of the Chamkani Police Station told media men here.

The incident of the cross firing between the two rival groups accused in the jurisdiction of the Chamkani police Station, the Police official said. As a result of firing between two parties, five people were injured, Police said. Three people died from one side and two from the other side, Police officials informed the media men.

According to the Police, there was a property dispute between the two rival groups. The Police reached the spot and sent the bodies for post-mortem. Syed Niaz Ali Shah, Babar, Wasiullah, Jameel Shamil, Police are among the dead. Injured Ifikhar was shifted to hospital for medical assistance, Police said.

# Section 144 imposed to curb dengue

PESHAWAR (INP): To combat the spread of dengue, the district administration on Friday enforced Section 144 in Peshawar for 30 days.

Under this law, actions will be taken against individuals found accumulating garbage, allowing water to stagnate, or leaving water containers uncovered across the district.

The Peshawar administration said, these measures aim to eliminate potential breeding grounds for dengue-carrying mosquitoes and prevent the outbreak of the disease.

The Health Department implored citizens to maintain clean surroundings, emphasizing prevention and urges cooperation with health department teams.

# Saif flays raid on PTI central secretariat

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Barrister Dr. Saif, Advisor to the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for Information and Public Relations, has strongly condemned the raid on PTI’s Central Secretariat under the pretext of encroachment.

He stated that the "fake government" created through forged Form 47 has broken all records of fascism.

He further added that the fake Form 47 government is fearful of PTI’s

Secretariat.

He claimed that lawlessness prevails under this illegitimate government. In their animosity towards PTI and Imran Khan, the country has been turned into a banana republic. PTI will resolutely face the fascism of this fraudulent government and reserves the right to pursue legal action against this nefarious act.

Barrister Dr. Saif mentioned that since the time of the PDM, the fake government has been engaging in underhanded tactics against PTI. Despite these lowly maneuvers, PTI’s populari-

ty continues to grow. He accused the governments of Naqvi and Shehbaz of oppressing PTI workers, imprisoning them, attempting to assassinate Imran Khan, jailing him, and even taking away their electoral symbol.

However, they have failed to remove PTI from the hearts of the people, and the fear of PTI still lingers in Shehbaz Sharif and his associates. Now, they have attacked PTI’s Secretariat, but it should be remembered that such actions will only strengthen PTI further.

# DG Information meets APNS, CPNE heads

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A meeting was held under the chairmanship of Director General Information and Public Relations Khyber P a k h t u n k h w a , Muhammad Imran, with All Pakistan Newspaper Society (APNS) and (CPNE) heads and representatives of various advertising agencies, here at Peshawar.

During the meeting Issues related to previous arrears of newspapers and advertisement agencies were discussed while in this regard, some proposals were also came under discussion for the solution of such issues.

On this occasion, provincial heads of APNS, Pir Haroon Shah, CPNE Tahir Farooq, Deputy Director Advertisement Ibne Amin and relevant sections officials also attended the meeting.

The main purpose of

meeting was disposal of the matter as per suggestions issued by ITNE Islamabad to Information Department, wherein, it was stated that a reconciliation shall be made with newspapers and advertisement agencies regarding the previous arrears.

In this regard, as per the special directives of Chief Secretary, on behalf of Information Department, the reconciliation process was thoroughly discussed by the forum.

Similarly, the meeting attendees of CPNE and APNS expressed that they are fully satisfied by the ongoing efforts of the department and hoped that it will bring better results for the solution of media outlets liabilities.

On this occasion the Director General Muhammad Imran told the meeting that the Information Department has raised the issue of media outlets and adver-

tising agencies arrears on various forums and in this regard we are taking practical steps so that the liabilities of such organization make clear.

He added that the department is working on reconciliation with all his available resources and very soon the good news regarding provision of arrears will be come from the government.

He further said that the department is reconciling with all the departments and such progress reports also furnishes to Chief Secretary office which aims to complete this progress as soon possible.

The meeting participants appreciated the performance of department and hoped that they will receive a good news soon in this regard.

The showed full satisfaction over reconciliation process with departments and highlighted the efforts of department with positive remarks.

# Ayub nominated as Chief Whip in PA

## F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: KP Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur nominated Akbar Ayub Khan, Member Provincial Assembly of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa from PK-46 Haripur-I as Chief Whip in the provincial assembly from treasury benches, said a notification issued here on Friday.

His responsibilities will include engaging with party members and negotiating with other political parties.

# CM to inaugurate U23 Inter-Regional Games on May 28

PESHAWAR (APP): All preparations have been completed for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa U-23 Inter-Regional Games, which will be formally inaugurated by Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Khan Gandapur from May 28 along with ICC Certified Hayatabad Cricket Stadium, Director General Sports Abdul Nasir Khan told media men during a press conference here on Friday.

Advisor to Chief Minister Sports and Youth Affairs Syed Fakhr Jahan, Ministers, Members of the Provincial Assembly, Secretary Sports and Youth Affairs Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Mutiullah Khan will also be present, Director General Sports Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Abdul Nasir informed.

He said 1850 players, both male and female, in 20 different Games are going to participate in 11 male and 9 female Games. He

said 1850 players including male and female players will participate in 20 different games, in which 770 female players will participate in 9 different games and 1150 male players will participate in 11 different games, he said.

The purpose of these games is to play the players at the national level for which the Inter-Provincial games are being organized in which teams from all the provinces besides Gilgit-Baltistan, Azad Kashmir and Islamabad will participate.

Participating in the meeting organized by the Pakistan Sports Board, he said, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa will fully participate in the upcoming third Quaid-e-Azam Games. He thanked Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Gandapur, Sports Advisor Syed Fakhr Jahan and Secretary Sports Mutiullah for their efforts in continuous sports activities. He

said they have taken timely steps to keep continuing the sports activities.

He said that a grant of Rs 100 million has been approved, thanks to Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa while another Rs. 160 million would be released well in time and overall Rs. 3.5 billion grants would be allocated for the completion of all ongoing sports infrastructure development.

He said that the Chief Minister will inaugurate the ICC Hayatabad Cricket Stadium on May 28, which has cost a lot of Rs. 1.5 billion. After the completion of the Stadium, any kind of national and international event can be held here. He said Arbab Niaz Cricket Stadium revised plan has already been submitted which will be completed in the next financial year at a cost of around Rs. 2.4 billion.

With the completion of Arbab Niaz Cricket

Stadium, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa will have the capacity to host Pakistan Super League and other international cricket matches. Regarding the U-23 games, DG Sports Abdul Nasir Khan said that all the players are being provided with kits and international level sports equipment and accommodation is being provided to all the players according to the weather in different hotels.

In the Games, teams from seven regions will reach Peshawar on May 27 and the arrangements for the opening ceremony on May 28 have been completed. A grant of 3.5 billion has been allocated for all ongoing projects. He said that the construction of the cricket stadium in Kalam will start soon as Rs. 2.6 million cost of the land has already been given to the District Administration and soon the land would be transferred to Director General Sports KP.

# Inclusion of SC, HCs in ambit of RTI recommended

F.P. Report

P E S H A W A R : Constitutional bodies i.e. Supreme Court and High Courts needs to be included in the ambit of Right to Information (RTI) Laws. Besides this, the appointment of information commissioners and defining other vexatious issues pertaining to RTI requests and complaints are the prominent challenges in strengthening the RTI cause

throughout Pakistan.

These recommendations in RTI laws were highlighted by a non-governmental organization working on transparency, namely CPDI in a round table meeting of stakeholders here at a local hotel in Peshawar dated 24th May 2024.

Senior officials and ex-information commissioners of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Information Commission (KPIC), selected District and Session Judges of vari-

ous districts of KP, lawyers, journalists, members of academia and civil society members participated in the round table meeting.

Mukhtar Ahmad Ali, Executive Director, CPDI tabbled the reforms and recommendations for discussion.

He said "RTI should also be implemented in all the private functioning public bodies as they get funds on behalf of the public".

Focusing on the KP RTI Act, the Executive Director, CPDI pointed out the exclusion of High Court from the KP RTI Act jurisdiction.

The round table meeting not only recommended the inclusion of the Supreme court, and High Courts in the jurisdiction of Federal and provincial RTI Laws respectively, but also recommended in the increase of fine over the PIO in case of delayed compliance.







## In brief

Employees hold protest  
F.P. Report

BUNER: Class IV employees have protested in front of Buner Press Club in favor of their demands. The protesters were carrying banners with slogans in favor of their demands. The protesters also raised slogans in favor of their demands. Khushal Khan Vice President Hajibullah Khan General Secretary Umar Khan has addressed. The speakers have demanded from the government to give hundred percent increase in salaries for class IV employees in the recent budget in proportion to inflation and to give two class IV in every Primary school. They demanded up graduation and time for them and maximum relief keeping in view the poverty and difficulties of class IV employees.

Poor people at mercy of hoteliers  
F.P. Report

WANA: A thorough investigation has exposed the shocking exploitation of poor tribesmen in Wana bazaar, where hotel owners are profiteering from the misery of vulnerable citizens. Despite the availability of essential food items like flour at lower prices, exorbitant rates are being charged, leaving the poor at the mercy of hoteliers. The lack of effective price regulation has created a lucrative opportunity for hotel owners to fleece poor citizens with inflated prices for basic necessities. Citizens are forced to pay higher prices for food and essentials, pushing them deeper into poverty. Locals alleged that officials were either complicit or turning a blind eye to the exploitation, allowing hotel owners to continue their profiteering unchecked. The law is being brazenly flouted with impunity, emboldened by the administration's inaction. Residents appealed to the administration to take immediate action to address the issue, demanding that it fix the official price list to prevent hotel owners and other shopkeepers from charging exorbitant rates and seek legal action against those who violate the law.

## 4 dead in Zhob traffic accident

ZOB (INP): Four people lost their lives, and five others were injured when a tractor trolley overturned due to over speed in Zhob district, Balochistan. According to a private news channel, the accident occurred when the driver of the tractor trolley, carrying nomads, lost control of the vehicle due to over speeding. Rescue officials responded promptly, arriving at the scene to provide immediate assistance. The bodies of the deceased and injured were transported to the hospital for medical treatment. The victims included women and children, all reportedly from the same family.

Two killed in Katlang firing  
F.P. Report

MARDAN: At least two people were killed when unknown assailants fired at them in Anwar Khan Killay of Katlang tehsil in Mardan district, police informed on Friday. Police said the incident took place in the vicinity of Jabbar police station where two people identified as Sattar Khan and Afsar were killed by the firing of unknown assailants. Another unknown man also sustained bullet injuries in the firing. The officials of Rescue 1122 shifted the dead and injured to DHQ Hospital.

## BISP program aimed to reduce poverty: Rubina

## F.P. Report

SWABI: Chairperson, Benazir Income Support Program (BISP), Ms. Rubina Khalid here Friday said the program was aimed to reduce poverty and financially empower the under-privileged and poor segment of the society.

She expressed the views during her visit to different distribution centres of BISP in Swabi where she reviewed registration process and distribution of stipend amount among beneficiaries.

Talking to beneficiaries, she said that BISP was a unique program launched as per the vision of former Prime Minister Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto Shaheed to take the poor segment of the society out of the poverty cycle and enable them to live with honour and dignity.

Directing BISP staff to provide best facilities and assistance to women at these centres, she also asked the beneficiaries to come to their respective centres for cash after receiving a message from

8171 official number to avoid incontinence during hot weather.

Rubina Khalid visited the survey registration desk and observed the complete registration process of beneficiaries there. She instructed the concerned officers to ensure clear written instructions and banners are displayed for the guidance of beneficiaries and other visitors.

Despite hot weather, Rubina Khalid's visit reflect her strong commitment to improving the efficiency and transparency of the Benazir Income Support Programme payment system and ensuring that all beneficiaries receive their rightful amounts with dignity and respect irrespective of caste and colour or political affiliation. She said the new registration process of poor families continued and the eligible candidates could register themselves at their respective tehsils offices of the BISP.

Ms Rubina Khalid issued spot orders to BISP staff for resolution of public complaints and provid-

ing best facilities to women, adding misconduct and indiscipline would not be tolerated. Director General BISP KP, Zohra Aslam, and other senior officers of the program were present. They briefed the BISP Chairperson about the services being provided to people at Swabi.

The purpose of the visit was to inspect the payment disbursement process besides necessary arrangements and facilities provided to the women beneficiaries receiving their quarterly Benazir Kafalat stipends in Swabi. Rubina Khalid on this occasion interacted directly with BISP beneficiaries and listened to their issues and concerns. Emphasized the importance of resolving all issues faced by the beneficiaries, she insisted on treating the women with respect and politeness. She instructed the staff to address connectivity and device issues with the banks and further directed the staff to issue tokens to individuals only when an amount existed in their accounts.

## Teachers demand rise in varsities' grant, salaries

## F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: The All Public Universities BPS Teachers Association (APUBTA) president Dr Samiur Rehman has demanded the government to triple the universities' grant keeping in view the current inflation and increase salaries of all the university employees.

Talking to local journalists at Chakdara he said the government should ensure a 100% increase in the salaries of all employees in the budget 2024-25 and mention the university employees in the budget with explanation. He said the house rent allowance, medical allowance and conveyance allowance should also be increased by 200%, because inflation was imposed on employees by

subjecting the local currency to dollars.

He said that reforms as service structure should be introduced for in-service teachers, as teachers in higher education institutions had been stuck in the same scale for twenty years. "The federal HEC should be abolished and the budget should be released to the provincial HECs because the federal HEC has failed to fairly distribute the grant and the employees of every other university are forced to protest for their daily salaries", he noted.

The president APUBTA made it clear that if the demands were not met, then on the occasion of the federal budget, on June 6 and 7, they would stage a protest sit-in outside the parliament house in

Islamabad along with all other government employees.

"The government should take the legitimate demands of the university employees seriously and take the leadership of APUBTA into confidence and announce these legitimate demands in the budget of the fiscal year 2024-25", he said, adding that one day before the budget, all the university employees shall stage a protest along with other provincial and federal employees against the government if it failed to meet the demands. He said the government workers would hold a peaceful sit-in in front of the Parliament House for their legitimate and constitutional demands, which would continue until the demands were met.



NOWSHERA: Resident of Khwaishgi Payan, addressing a press conference against SHO, Police Station Nowshera Kalan, Ishfaq Khan.

## Discussion on challenges facing by education organized

## F.P. Report

MARDAN: A one-day discussion on the challenges faced in the field of education and the role of universities was organized by Mardan Press Club. Prominent educationist and former vice-chancellor of Abdul Wali Khan University Prof. Dr. Ehsan Ali and Vice-Chancellor of Engineering University Mardan Prof. Imran Khan were special guests in this discussion.

Abdul Wali Khan University Director ORIC Dr. Tariq Mehmood, Director Administration Prof. Dr. Muhammad Idrees, Government Senatorial Model School Principal Hafiz Zubair Ahmed, Government Post Graduate College Principal Muhammad Abrar, Ansi College and Sarhad University Mardan Campus Director Naseer Afridi, Private Schools Assoc. Association Patron Syed Mohammad Ilyas Toru, Education Council Hafiz Inam, Youth Parliament President Gulam Habib and civil society representatives participated. The participants discussed the educational situation in detail and made suggestions for the improvement of education.

In the discussion, they unanimously demanded the immediate appointment of

vice-chancellors in 18 universities to improve the education sector. We only verbally convinced him and looking at the annual budget can be a warning of our seriousness regarding the education sector. The speakers emphasized on the end of political interference and complete autonomy in educational institutions to improve the education situation.

Emphasis was placed on the improvement of the fields and the guidance of children in it. The speakers said that the government, teachers, parents and civil society are important stakeholders and only with their mutual cooperation, education policy can be set according to the needs of the new era. The participants also agreed that along with education, the training of children is very important. Earlier, the guests of the event visited various offices and the auditorium of the Press Club.

**Rescue 1122 awareness campaign:** Under the direction of Director General Rescue 1122 Khyber Pukhtunkhwa Dr. Mohammad Ayaz Khan, under the supervision of District Emergency Officer Syed Inayat Shah, an awareness campaign regarding heat stroke prevention and preventive measures is going

on at different places in the four tehsils of Mardan.

The government of Khyber Pukhtunkhwa has predicted a severe heat wave in the coming days, in view of which pamphlets have been distributed to the public along with providing awareness about prevention of heat stroke in various schools, colleges, laborers and markets of Mardan. It is reported that workers, children and the elderly can be more affected by heat stroke. Symptoms of heat stroke include fainting, dizziness, excessive thirst, vomiting and nausea, hot, red and dry skin, and lack of sweating.

Avoid hot drinks, take bath with cold water, avoid unnecessary travel during afternoon hours, wear light clothes, wet cloth on head and plenty of water to avoid heat stroke. All stations of Rescue1122 are open 24 hours and the control room is functional. Instructions have been issued to keep medicines and other essential items in ambulances to deal with heat stroke. Call 1122 during any emergency.

**Price Review Committee meeting held:** District Price Review Committee meeting Presided over by Deputy Commissioner Mardan Fayaz Khan Sherpao has decided to reduce the prices of several items.



HYDERABAD: Youngsters enjoying in a tube well at Hala Naka.

Tribesmen seek transfer of two male security guards  
F.P. Report

LANDI KOTAL: Local demanded of the highup of National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) and other concerned authorities to replace male security in Citizen Facilitation Center (CFC), Landi Kotal with female ones as their presence among the women against their religion as well as their Pakhtun tradition.

Score of local tribal led by chairman Village Council, Bazaar Zakha Khel Attaullah Afridi lamented that a number of complaints had been lodged with local officials against misconduct of the two security guards identified as Younas and Jamal Shelmani, but to in avail.

They blamed that the two security guards, who contrary to the Pakhtun rites always wandered inside the CSC were allegedly involved in harassing female visitors. The two guards incited the simple-hearted tribal women and had polluted the calm environment of the center, they opined.

They demanded of the authorities concerned to replace the male security guards with ladies ones so that the tribal women can visit the center without any fear and worry. When in-charge CSC was contacted on the matter he said that routine business was smoothly on-going and rejected the allegations leveled against the security guards.

The guards were executing their duties and no such complaint was noticed, however some councilors had disturbed environment of the center. The councilors daily entered the CSC for their own personal interests and when the guard restricted their entries, they started blaming baseless allegations against them.

Crackdown against criminals launched  
F.P. Report

CHARSADDA: Charsadda police have launched a crackdown against criminal elements across the district, arresting 437 proclaimed offenders wanted in serious cases, including 92 accused of murder and 188 accused of attempted murder. Police traced and apprehended suspects in 9 murder cases and 4 attempted murder cases, recovering a large quantity of illegal weapons from their possession.

Six dangerous gangs involved in theft, robbery, and motorcycle snatching were exposed, resulting in the arrest of 149 suspects, including 16 gang members. District Police Officer Charsadda, Nazir Muhammad, informed the media that under his leadership, Charsadda police have arrested 437 proclaimed offenders, 92 accused in murder cases, and 188 in attempted murder cases over the past several months.

They also traced 9 murder and 4 attempted murder cases, apprehending the culprits. Six dangerous gangs involved in theft, robbery, and motorcycle snatching were exposed, with 149 suspects, including 16 gang members, arrested.

## 2 more arrested in baby murder and assault case

## F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: The Munda police in the Lower Dir district on Friday arrested two more accused in the mysterious death of a little orphan girl Aisha Bibi, 7 at an orphanage-cum-religious seminary in Mandizo area of Jandol after the victim's father Sartaj, 35 formally lodged an FIR stating that his daughter was murdered after a sexual assault at the seminary. The police had taken the orphanage-cum-seminary head Maulana Ziaul Haq Haidari here the other day.

The three accused Maulana Ziaul Haq Haidari, his son Abu Bakar and gunner Sanaullah were produced before a local magistrate who remanded the three into police custody for four days here on Friday. According to the FIR, the victim's father Sartaj told police that his daughter was killed several days ago but her body was hidden when it surfaced on May 17.

He said that after the girl's medical and post

mortem report he registered a case against the seminary head, his son, his gunner and others for sexually assaulting her before her death. He said the seminary head; Maulana Ziaul Haq Haidari, was fully responsible for the incident as he had admitted his daughter in the seminary a month ago under his supervision.

According to official sources, signs of physical violence and sexual assault were found in the baby's medical report. Sources at the orphanage had earlier explained that the little girl Aisha had died due to falling of quilts over her. The victim girl was shifted to the DHQ hospital Timergara for medical examination and then she was buried at her ancestral graveyard in Jandol on May 17.

For the past several days, public circles and social media activists of the Lower Dir have been continuously demanding an impartial and transparent investigation into the case, after which the area

elders met the district police officer Mazhar Iqbal at his office asking him to probe into the matter. Sources said that an investigation team under the supervision of DPS and led by SP Investigation Rashid Ahmad had been formed to thoroughly investigate the case.

Meanwhile social activists from the area demanded the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa chief minister Ali Amin Gandapur and IGP to take notice of the case and order a judicial inquiry for a proper probe.

Maulana Ziaul Haq Haidari is known throughout the region for his fiery speeches and political influence. Earlier he was leading the Pakistan Rah e Haq party as its district head but he joined the Pakistan Tahreek Insaf before the Feb 8, 2024 general elections. He has also contested polls for the provincial assembly seat in the past. Currently he is serving as chairman of the dispute resolution council in the Jandol sub division.

## Sheryar visits Kohat Sports Complex

## Sahibzada Afridi

KOHAT: Former Interior Minister and Senior PTI Leader Shehryar Afridi MNA and Member of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly Shafiqullah Jan visited District Sports Complex Kohat alongwith Deputy Commissioner Kohat Dr. Azmatullah Wazir on Friday.

Additional Deputy Commissioner Finance, Regional Sports Officer, District Sports Officer, authorities concerned of C&W Department and other concerned departments were also present on the occasion. During the visit, they reviewed the cleanliness condition of sports complex, staff attendance and ongoing construction works. Strict legal action against the absent employees was ordered on this occasion. Similarly, instructions were issued to the authorities concerned to further improve the cleanliness situation and complete the ongoing construction work in stipulated time as per the standard. Shafiqullah Afridi directed to provide the best playing environment to the local people and assured to play his full role for providing more facilities in the sports complex.



**KUST students called on DC:** DC Hangu assures solution to problems of students of Hangu Campus of KUST. Deputy Commissioner Hangu Syed Haider Hussain has assured the students of Hangu campus of Kohat University of Science and Technology (KUST) that all their genuine issues and demands will be met on priority basis and he himself will contact the authorities concerned in this regard.

He gave this assurance while talking to a delegation of students of Hangu Campus of KUST in his office. It may be recalled that on May 23, the students of Hangu Campus

had blocked the main Hangu Thall Road for about an hour to resolve their demands and problems. However on assurance of the district administration, the road was opened for traffic. The students met the Deputy Commissioner Hangu in this respect and informed him in detail about their problems and demands.

The Deputy Commissioner said that the students are our future and will try hard to provide them all the facilities of the university level. The students thanked the Deputy Commissioner Hangu for taking personal interest in resolving their problems and demands.

## Mayor Larkana visits Rescue 1122 center

## F.P. Report

LARKANA: On the last day, Larkana Mayor Advocate Anwar Ali Lehar visited the Rescue 1122 service, during which the rescue service officials gave a detailed briefing to the Mayor Larkana and informed about the functional services on this occasion, including water, fire and health rescue service.

On this occasion, Mayor Larkana decided to jointly provide services of Larkana Municipal Corporation and Rescue 1122 service so that citizens can benefit from this functional service as much as

possible. During the visit, Mayor Larkana also reviewed the equipment vehicles used in the rescue and the working procedures of the control room. Meanwhile, Mayor Anwar Ali Lehar also took steps to establish a control room in the Rescue 1122 service in Larkana, assured.

**District Coordination Committee meeting:** An important meeting of District Nutrition Coordination Committee was held in Qamber under the chairmanship of Deputy Commissioner district Qamber, Shahdaktot at DC office Qamber. The main

agenda of which was malnutrition in the district and it was decided to make joint efforts to solve this important problem. On this occasion, the Deputy Commissioner emphasized on the joint cooperation to deal with malnutrition in an effective manner. There is a dire need.

The meeting was attended by various stakeholders including CSDS welfare organization, other NGOs, government departments like Livestock, Education, Health, PPHI, WFP, representatives of CSDS organization were also present in the meeting.





# Chechen leader meets Putin, offers more troops

MOSCOW (Reuters): The leader of Russia's Chechnya region, Ramzan Kadyrov, said he had met President Vladimir Putin in the Kremlin and offered to send more fighters to help Moscow in its more than two-year-old conflict in Ukraine.

Kadyrov, who has led his South Caucasus region as a Kremlin loyalist since 2007, posted a photo of himself with Putin and said he had discussed the region's economic problems and prospects and invited the president to visit. He said tens of thousands of "well trained and equipped fighters from the reserves" were prepared to fight for Russia in Ukraine if such an order were given.

A total of 43,500 troops had already served in Ukraine, including 18,000 volunteers, he said. "I also transmitted the wishes of our people and invited our national leader to come visit the Chechen Republic," Kadyrov wrote.

Kadyrov has repeatedly denied reports that he is unwell and posted pictures of himself exercising and conducting meetings. Chechen separatists fought two wars against the Russian military after the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union, resulting in heavy destruction and casualties. Putin has given Kadyrov wide leeway to run the

mainly Muslim region as he chooses in return for keeping it stable and loyal.

Meanwhile, Russia will identify US property, including securities, that could be used as compensation for losses sustained as a result of any seizure of frozen Russian assets in the United States, according to a decree signed by President Vladimir Putin. G7 negotiators have been discussing for weeks how to best exploit some \$300 billion worth of Russian financial assets, such as major currencies and government bonds, which were frozen shortly after Moscow invaded Ukraine in February 2022.

Russia's ability to mete out like-for-like retaliation if Western leaders seize its frozen assets has been eroded by dwindling foreign investment, but it may go after private investors' cash instead, officials and economists told Reuters this month. Decree stated that the Russian Federation or central bank can ask a Russian court to determine whether its property has been unjustifiably seized and seek compensation.

The court would then order for compensation to be transferred in the form of US assets or property in Russia from a list that would be drawn up by Russia's government commission on foreign asset

sales. The decree listed securities, stakes in Russian companies, real estate, movable property and property rights among the US-owned assets potentially liable for seizure.

Former president Dmitry Medvedev acknowledged last month that Russia holds an insignificant amount of American state property and that any response Russia makes would be asymmetrical, focusing on private individuals' assets. The decree also stated that assets owned by people under US control could be targeted. It did not specify how being "under US control" would be determined.

The assets of many foreign investors, including both individuals and major US investment funds, are held in special 'type-C' accounts Russia introduced shortly after sending its army into Ukraine and being hit by a barrage of Western sanctions in February 2022. Money in those accounts cannot be transferred out of Russia without permission from Russian authorities.

Washington has passed legislation allowing President Joe Biden's administration to confiscate Russian assets held in American banks and transfer them to Ukraine, something Russia has repeatedly called illegal.

## Apartment block fire in Hanoi kills 14

HANOI: A fire at an apartment block in Vietnam's capital Hanoi has killed at least 14 people and injured three others, state media has reported. The fire broke out at a five-storey building in central Hanoi's Cau Giay district, according to media reports.

"The fire was big, with several explosions," Vietnam News Agency (VNA) said. Vietnam's Ministry of Public Security said firefighters rescued seven people from the building after it became engulfed in flames. The fire is believed to have started in the courtyard between two blocks used to sell and repair electric bicycles, state-run VnExpress reported.

Pictures from the apartment block showed charred belongings in the building's courtyard and the fire-damaged interior of the first floor. Neighbour Ngo Thi Thuy, 40, was quoted telling VnExpress that she ran out onto the roof of her five-storey building after hearing people screaming about a fire. "What hit me was something I had never seen before. Fire was burning furiously through gaps of the corrugated iron roof, and the engulfing smoke made it hard to see anything. There were explosions along with screams for help from the burning house as well as nearby houses," Ngo was quoted as saying. Authorities are investigating the cause of the blaze and have yet to identify the victims.

Fires are a common hazard in Vietnam's densely packed urban centres. Between 2017 and 2022, 433 people were killed in some 17,000 house fires in the country, most of them in urban areas, according to the Ministry of Public Security. In September, 56 people, including four children, were killed and dozens injured in a fire at an apartment block in Hanoi. In 2022, at least 32 people were killed at a packed karaoke bar in southern Vietnam's Thuan An due to a fire blamed on an electrical short circuit. — Aljazeera

## US restricts visas for Georgia

WASHINGTON: The United States will impose visa restrictions and review relations with Georgia over a controversial "foreign agent" bill that has sparked mass protests in the country. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the visa restrictions would apply to individuals responsible for undermining democracy in Georgia and their family members.

"US support for Georgia's democracy is longstanding and foundational to our bilateral relationship. Anyone who undermines democratic processes or institutions in Georgia - including in the lead-up to, during, and following Georgia's October 2024 elections - may be found ineligible for US visas under this policy and precluded from travel to the United States," Blinken said in a statement. Blinken said the proposed law would stifle Georgians' freedom of association and expression and "impede independent media organisations working to provide Georgians with access to high-quality information".

"It remains our hope that Georgia's leaders will reconsider the draft law and take steps to move forward with their nation's democratic and Euro-Atlantic aspirations. As we review the relationship between our two countries, we will take into account Georgia's actions in deciding our own," he said. The bill passed by the ruling Georgian Dream party last week requires nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) and media outlets with more than 20 percent of their funding coming from outside Georgia to register as bodies "pursuing the interests of a foreign power".

Organisations that do not comply with the measures will face fines of up to 25,000 lari (\$9,200), followed by additional fines of 20,000 lari (\$7,300) for each month of non-compliance thereafter. Critics have accused Georgian Dream, which has been in power since 2012, of taking inspiration from Russian legislation used to quash dissent. — Aljazeera



KYIV: A sapper inspects fragments of a Russian air bomb that hit a living area injuring ten in Kharkiv, Ukraine.

# US will announce \$275m more in artillery and ammunition for Kyiv

WASHINGTON (AP): The United States is expected to announce an additional \$275 million in military aid for Ukraine on Friday as Kyiv struggles to hold off advances by Russian troops in the Kharkiv region, two US officials say.

This will be the fourth installment of military aid for Ukraine since Congress passed a long-delayed foreign aid bill late last month and comes as the Biden administration has pledged to keep weapons flowing regularly and to get them to the front lines as quickly as possible. The package includes high mobility artillery rocket systems, or HIMARS, munitions as well 155 mm and 105 mm high-demand artillery rounds, according to the two US officials. Additional items in the aid package include Javelin and AT-4 anti-tank systems; anti-tank mines, tactical

vehicles, small arms and ammunition for those weapons, one of the officials said. Both officials spoke on the condition of anonymity to provide details of the aid package before the public announcement.

It follows a monthly gathering of about 50 defense leaders from Europe and elsewhere who meet regularly to coordinate getting more military aid to Ukraine. At this latest meeting, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said Ukraine was in a "moment of challenge" due to Russia's new onslaught on Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city. He pledged to keep weapons moving "week after week." Russia has sought to take advantage of Ukrainian shortages in manpower and weapons while the war-torn country waits for the arrival of more US assistance, which was delayed for months in

Congress. Ukrainian forces have been pushed backward in places, while Russia has pounded its power grid and civilian areas.

In the month since President Joe Biden signed the \$95 billion foreign aid package, which included about \$61 billion for Ukraine, the US has announced and started to send almost \$1.7 billion in weapons pulled from Pentagon stockpiles. It's also announced \$6 billion in funding through the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative. That pays for longer-term contracts with the defense industry and means that the weapons could take many months or years to arrive.

With this latest package, the US has now provided almost \$51 billion in military assistance to Ukraine since Russia invaded in February 2022.

# Russian patriotic bloggers express anger at arrest of former commander

MOSCOW (Reuters): Russian patriotic bloggers expressed anger over the arrest of the former commander of Russia's 58th army, who was detained for fraud, and cast him as a talented general who had the courage to speak the truth to incompetent superiors.

Russia's state news agency TASS reported that Major General Ivan Popov had been arrested on suspicion of "large-scale fraud". It was not possible to contact Popov directly, who Russian media said stood accused of stealing 100 million roubles (\$1.1 million) of metal.

Following a June 2023 mutiny by Wagner mercenaries against Russia's defence establishment, Popov said he had been dismissed after telling the top brass about the dire situation at the front in Ukraine. Popov, whose military call sign was "Spartacus" and

who was popular with the troops, said at the time that Russian soldiers had been stabbed in the back because of the failings of their senior commanders.

"I know one thing: Ivan was at the head of the forces that repelled the enemy's counteroffensive," Alexander Sladkov, a war correspondent for Russian state television, said on Telegram. "Stupid people are forgiven for lies and losses so others, I think, can be forgiven for the ruthless truth," he said. "General Ivan Popov is not a thief. He is a soldier. However... we also forgive thieves."

The support for Popov was widespread among pro-Russian military bloggers, who dismissed the allegations against him and cast Popov as a patriot who was being punished for speaking truth to power. Popov was known for making a report in

2023 to Russia's top general, Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov, which laid out the problems Russia faced on the front including lack of equipment, poor reconnaissance and infrequent rotation of troops. According to military bloggers, Gerasimov - who preserved his position in a reshuffle earlier this month - was outraged at the bluntness of the report and accused Popov of spreading alarmist disinformation. The defence ministry did not comment.

Yuri Podolyaka, a popular pro-Russian military blogger, said he was in shock over the arrest. "Commander Ivan Popov, in the summer of 2023, having built an excellent multi-lane line of defense in the band of his army (unlike many of his allies), in fact, saved our army from defeat and the country

from shame."

Podolyaka said that Popov's defensive line was stronger than others and that his conflict with the general staff was well known in military circles. "General Popov had the courage to speak to the very face of his superiors about those things which others, shyly lowering their eyes, preferred to keep silent," Podolyaka said.

After President Vladimir Putin was sworn in for a fifth time earlier this month, he appointed a new defence minister, Andrei Belousov, an economist who the Kremlin chief said would manage the ballooning defence spending on the war. The changes at the defence ministry came after Deputy Defence Minister Timur Ivanov was detained on suspicion of bribe taking. Others have since been arrested as part of the probe.

# Six killed in Idaho crash were agricultural workers from Mexico

MEXICO CITY (AP): Six people killed when a pickup crashed into a passenger van in Idaho on Saturday were agricultural workers from Mexico, officials said.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mexico said in a news release that the van passengers were all agricultural workers from Mexico who were in the US on H-2A Temporary Agricultural Worker visas, the East Idaho News reported.

The crash happened early on May 18 when a pickup crossed the centerline on US Highway 20 and hit the van in Idaho Falls,

according to Idaho State Police. The van's driver and five passengers died at the scene. Bonneville County Coroner Rick Taylor identified the victims as Abel Mejia Martínez, 43, Pedro Manuel Alcantar Mejia, 26, Brandon Ponce Gallegos, 24, Jose Guadalupe Sánchez Medina, 20, Luis Enrique Sereno Perez, 32 and Javier Gomez Alcantar, 36.

Nine other passengers in the van and the pickup's driver were hospitalized, police said. Signet, the company that employed the workers, is collecting donations on GoFundMe and

donated \$10,000.

"Our hearts are heavy with grief as we mourn the loss of six beloved members of our team who tragically lost their lives in a devastating car accident on May 18th in Idaho," the organizers wrote. "Alongside this profound loss, nine of our colleagues were left with injuries, their lives forever changed by the events of this day." The money raised will be donated to those who were hurt and to each family of those who died, the GoFundMe page said.

The company didn't immediately respond to a

request from The Associate Press seeking comment. It wasn't immediately clear whether Signet owned the van that crashed or whether the van had seat belts. Signet has provided construction services for projects of all sizes since 1994 and has an agricultural division, according to the company's website.

The Mexican Consulate in Boise has said it will help the families of the deceased. Earlier this month in Florida, a pickup truck crashed into a bus carrying farmworkers from Mexico, killing eight of the workers.

# Sunak says no Rwanda deportation flights

LONDON: No deportation flights to Rwanda will take place before a July 4 snap election, United Kingdom Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has said, meaning a Labour Party victory could stop the controversial Conservative Party scheme from ever leaving the tarmac. Sunak made the announcement during the first full day of campaigning. The Labour Party currently maintains a commanding 20-point lead in opinion polls and has promised to scrap the deportation plan if it wins power.

Speaking at a campaign event, Sunak cast the policy as central to the political race. In April, he had promised the flights would take off in 10 to 12 weeks. Mass arrests of potential deportees began earlier this month. "We've started detaining people ... the flights are booked for July, airfields on standby, the escorts are ready, the case-workers are churning through everything, so all that is happening, and if I'm re-elected as your prime minister, those flights will

go to Rwanda," Sunak said.

The deportation plan has been a flagship policy for Sunak since he took office in October 2022. He has continued to champion it even after the UK Supreme Court in November ruled the plan unlawful on the grounds that Rwanda could not be considered a safe third country. In response, Sunak signed a new treaty with the East African country and passed new legislation in June to circumvent the ruling. Nevertheless, more legal challenges remain possible.

For his part, Labour leader Keir Starmer would earlier this month to trash the plan, which has already cost hundreds of millions of pounds, "straight away" upon taking office. But with the number of asylum seekers making the dangerous journey across the Channel rising to record numbers so far in 2024, Starmer also introduced a separate plan to launch a new border enforcement unit and tap counter "terror" powers to tamp down on people smuggling.

Immigration is expected to be a prominent issue in the election campaigns, with the economy and the National Health Service's record waiting times also set to loom large. The decision to call the vote months earlier than expected came as a shock to some members of Sunak's party, with 14 years of at times chaotic Conservative rule leaving many in the country disillusioned.

Conservatives have lagged behind the Labour Party in opinion polls since Sunak replaced former Prime Minister Liz Truss following her resignation after just 44 days in office. Some political observers have questioned the timing of Sunak's announcement, noting there is little reason for optimism the climate will shift. Speaking at an event in Gillingham, south-east England, Starmer portrayed himself as the candidate who can renew, rebuild and reinvigorate the UK. He pointed to the disparity in cities like London, which house massive corporations like Google. — Aljazeera

## Why are thousands of people protesting in Taiwan?

TAIPEI: Protests are expected to resume in Taiwan on Friday over a divisive bill that would greatly expand the investigative powers of parliament and has already drawn thousands of people onto the streets. Protesters gathered outside the legislature to coincide with the first reading of the bill, and legislators are due to sit again on Friday for the second reading.

While many democracies have similar provisions for legislative investigations - like the Watergate investigation in the United States or the phone hacking scandal in the United Kingdom - protesters say authors of the Taiwan bill have railroaded

it through the voting process, and that it lacks the checks and balances necessary to prevent abuse. Civil society and many legal scholars also oppose the bill, but the Kuomintang (KMT), which is backing it, says the reforms are necessary to "consolidate and refine" Taiwan's democracy. Also included in the bill is an ambitious but controversial infrastructure project to link the island's east and west coasts.

This week's protests followed a brawl last Friday in the legislature over the same bill - something of a Taiwanese political tradition. The opposition KMT, along with the smaller Taiwan People's Party

(TPP), secured a majority in parliament in January's election, while William Lai Ching-te, from the rival Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), was elected president.

Here is all you need to know. Critics of the bill say its scope is too wide and potentially unconstitutional. The bill would, in theory, grant legislators the power to question, investigate or demand documents from any government official, military general or the president. This demand includes a vaguely worded clause about "contempt of the legislature", which critics say could be used punitively for asking questions or "talking back", criminalising offi-

cials who are unwilling to cooperate. Critics also say the bill is duplicating the work of the Control Yuan, a special government body empowered to investigate legislators and audit the government.

Critics fear the bill could threaten Taiwan's national security, as it might force government officials to disclose critical information, according to Austin Wang, a US-based political scientist specialising in Taiwanese politics. "In the bill, the legislators can ask the military to hand in sensitive information, which is problematic since some legislators have been accused of leaking information to China. — Aljazeera



## The Frontier Post

Rehmat Shah Afridi (Late)

Founder

Bilal Shah Afridi

Chief Executive

Jalil Afridi

Managing Editor

Printed and published by Mahmood Afridi at Moraka's Printers, 27 Abdara Road, University Town, Peshawar.

Peshawar Office: 091-5700095, 0300- 9009001

Peshawar Fax: 091-5703687, Post Box No. 573

E-mail: fppeshawar@thefrontierpost.com

Lahore Office: 0335-4026284

Email: fplahore@thefrontierpost.com

Islamabad Office: 0321-5066253

Email: mahmoodafridi@thefrontierpost.com

Karachi Office: 021-32213411, 0300-8340907

Email: fpkarachi@thefrontierpost.com

\*USA and Canada Toll Free Number 1-800-5905747

# How (not) to fix border

ONCE again, Washington made a show of doing nothing about the country's broken immigration system — except to try to score political points. Senate Majority Leader Charles E. Schumer (D-N.Y.) on Thursday brought to a vote the bipartisan border security deal that members of both parties agreed upon in February — and that Republican senators ultimately rejected after Donald Trump said its passage would help President Biden.

The bill failed to pass, again, for the same reason. Mr. Schumer resubmitted it to remind Americans of Republicans' cynicism: refusing to do anything to fix the border so they can continue using it to pummel Mr. Biden. Yet Mr. Schumer's maneuvering was also a political ploy, an attempt to shift the blame for an immigration mess that most Americans believe is out of control.

Washington needs to craft a better system to manage the mass migration of people seeking asylum in the United States, as migrants request US protection at massive rates, knowing that the process for vetting their claims will drag out. That requires, above all, clear standards to determine who is entitled to protection that are enforced swiftly and certainly. Otherwise, they will not be credible. The bipartisan bill would have done some good in this respect. But its backers vastly oversold what it could accomplish.

Consider its provision to "shut the border" amid large surges of asylum seekers. There is a close precedent: Title 42, the rule deployed during the covid-19 pandemic, from March 2020 until May 2023, to summarily expel migrants on public health grounds without hearing their asylum applications. Trump adviser Stephen Miller said it could be invoked again to keep out "severe strains of the flu" or "scabies."

Three million people were expelled under the rule. But it didn't stop the flow. Border Patrol encounters with migrants increased sharply, largely because, under Title 42, they didn't face consequences for repeat illegal entries, including criminal prosecution. So those kicked out would turn around and try again, hoping to sneak through undetected. Recidivists rose from 7 percent of encounters in the fiscal year of 2019 to 27 percent in 2021. Unauthorized migrants whom US agents detected but failed to catch — "gotaways" in Border Patrol parlance — also soared as migrants kept trying until they made it.

That was hardly the only glitch. Washington soon discovered it couldn't apply Title 42 to everyone showing up at the border because often there was nowhere to send people back to. Overall, only 41 percent of those encountered at the border were expelled using the rule. The United States could expel single adults coming from Mexico and Central America, because Mexico would accept them. But countries such as Venezuela, Cuba and China would not take back their citizens. Only 8 percent of single adults not from Central America or Mexico got kicked out under Title 42.

Beyond political showmanship, "fixing" the border requires sending a credible signal around the world that the United States can enforce its rules. Today, it can't. The country doesn't have the agents to conduct interviews to determine whether migrants meet the standard to request asylum, the judges to rule on whether asylum is warranted, or enough beds to house migrants until these things are determined.

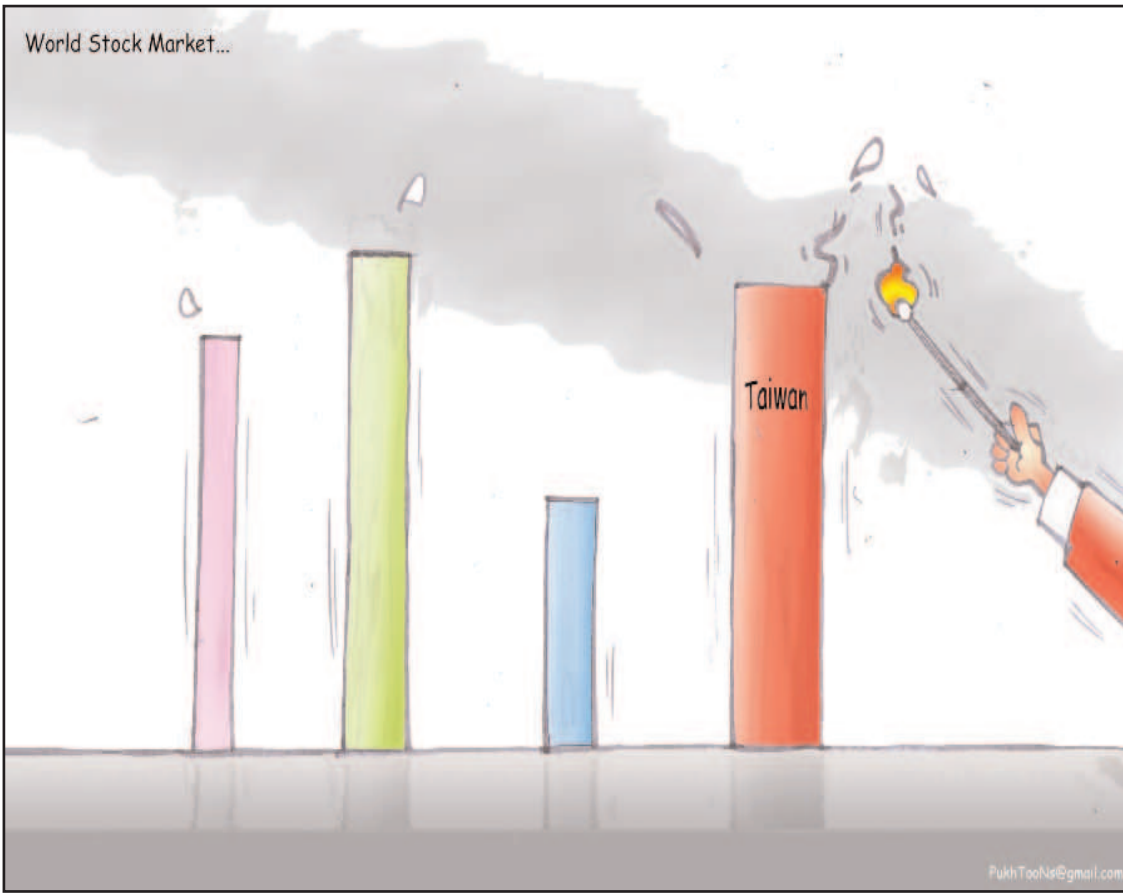
US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, for instance, reports 1.3 million immigrants scattered around the country who have been denied permission to stay and face removal orders. ICE cannot detain 1.3 million people — it has only 40,000 beds. Nor can it deport them quickly, even if their home country would take them back. It has 11 planes.

The job should be easy for a Border Patrol agent facing, say, a single Colombian man caught crossing the border illegally. The man is healthy. He doesn't express fear of being sent back. And Colombia accepts deportation flights from the United States. Except, oops, Immigration and Customs Enforcement flies only two deportation plane loads a week to Colombia, and they depart from Harlingen, Tex., and Alexandria, La. Will there be a free seat on a plane? Can the man be sent there in time for the next flight? Is there space to house him until his deportation flight takes off? If any one of the answers is no, chances are the agent will release said Colombian with a notice to appear before an immigration judge — probably several years in the future. Most migrants caught by the Border Patrol get one of those. Requiring that Colombian men meet a tougher standard to be granted asylum will not change this pattern.

To be fair, the bipartisan Senate deal included provisions to boost the credibility of the United States' rules. It would have funded more than 4,300 new asylum officers and support staff, 100 additional immigration judge teams, 1,500 Border Patrol agents and customs officers, 1,200 Immigration and Customs Enforcement staff to help with deportations. It would have increased detention capacity and added deportation flights. This, but at a grander scale, would offer the best shot at bringing the border under control. After the political skirmishing is done, lawmakers ought to work on a solution.

### Important Notice

The Frontier Post will not be responsible for the comments in the articles and letters. The Frontier Post requests the writers of articles and letters to please make sure that they write their email addresses and mention the names of the cities, towns, districts or tehsil of their residences at the bottom of their articles and letters.



## In Darfur, justice will be key to sustainable peace

Tafi Mhaka

ON May 6, 2004, Human Rights Watch (HRW) published a report alleging that the Sudanese government and its allied "Janjaweed" militias had committed systematic attacks on the civilian populations of the African Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa ethnic groups that amounted to "ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity".

The government and its Janjaweed allies, the report said, deliberately slaughtered thousands of Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa; raped women; and demolished villages, food stockpiles and other critical supplies. On May 9, 2024, almost 20 years to the day it had exposed genocide in Darfur, the HRW released another report titled "The Massalit Will Not Come Home": Ethnic Cleansing and Crimes Against Humanity in El Geneina, West Darfur, Sudan.

In it, the HRW alleged the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) — the formalised version of the Janjaweed militia — and allied paramilitaries have committed a new genocide in el-Geneina, the capital city of Sudan's West Darfur state, from April to November last year, killing thousands of people and leaving hundreds of thousands as refugees. And the carnage in Darfur is far from over. The HRW's Belkis Wille decried the RSF's ongoing siege of North Darfur's capital, el-Fasher, and called for an end to "the new cycle of atrocities in Darfur" just last week on this very page.

The RSF and its allies are still able to systematically kill, maim and displace Darfuris with near complete impunity because Africa's leaders have repeatedly missed opportunities to deliver justice to the region over the years. Indeed, the atrocities we are witnessing in Darfur and across Sudan today could well have been avoided if the architects and perpetrators of the genocidal atrocities of the 2000s were brought to book in the first place. Countless opportunities for justice have been missed in the past 20 years.

In 2004, then-United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan established the International Commission of Inquiry on violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law in Darfur. The commission's

damning report, published in January 2005, led to the UN Security Council referring Sudan to the International Criminal Court (ICC). In 2009, the court issued an arrest warrant for then-Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir for war crimes and crimes against humanity committed under his watch in Darfur. Later, it added genocide to the charges.

The president's arrest and prosecution then would have undoubtedly changed the trajectory of the country and curtailed the powers and reach of the genocidal militias it armed and supported. Claiming the pursuit of justice and accountability would be an obstacle to the realisation of peace in Sudan, the leaders of the African Union (AU) refused to cooperate with the ICC and arrest al-Bashir. As such, they helped al-Bashir evade international justice.

Regrettably, while undermining the ICC's efforts to deliver justice in the international arena, African leaders also failed to heed the advice of the AU's own officials and experts, missing opportunity after opportunity to deliver justice to long suffering Darfuris within the region. In 2004, acknowledging its responsibility to deliver justice to the people of Sudan, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) undertook steps to investigate human rights violations and chart a path forward for the country.

To this end, the Mission of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights to Sudan took place July 8-18, 2004. The fact-finding mission visited camps for displaced people and met officials from the Sudanese government, senior civil servants, and representatives of national and international humanitarian organisations in Khartoum.

After the visit, the mission recommended the establishment of an International Commission of Enquiry, comprising the UN, AU, Arab states, and international humanitarian and human rights organisations, to probe human rights violations in Sudan and to ensure perpetrators of atrocities were brought to justice. Specifically, the mission wanted the commission to investigate the role of the military, police and other security forces in the Darfur

conflict as well as the involvement of rebel movements and armed militias, in particular the Janjaweed, the Pashtun, the Pashmerga and the Torabora.

The commission, it further explained, would identify those responsible for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and other violations of human rights and international humanitarian law in the country and ensure that they were held accountable for their actions.

The mission's recommendations included the disarmament and demobilisation of all irregular armed groups operating illegally within the Darfur region. And it urged the government of Sudan to abide by its obligations under international human rights and humanitarian law and in particular under the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights to guarantee the basic human rights of the Sudanese people. Al-Bashir, as expected, ignored an overwhelming majority of the mission's recommendations.

However, African leaders, surprisingly, also failed to follow through on the well-meaning advice from their top human rights experts. So the International Commission of Enquiry, as envisioned by the ACHPR, failed to materialise, and al-Bashir continued his reign with impunity.

Any talk of regional accountability and justice mechanisms for Sudan was practically abandoned until the ICC took action in the international arena. In July 2008, just a week after the ICC prosecutors announced their request for an arrest warrant for al-Bashir, the AU's Peace and Security Council voiced its demand for a homegrown judicial process for Sudan.

It called for the creation of an African Union High-Level Panel on Darfur to submit recommendations on "accountability and combatting impunity, on the one hand, and reconciliation and healing on the other". Led by former South African President Thabo Mbeki, the panel consulted widely in Sudan and finally recommended a hybrid court for Darfur with Sudanese and non-Sudanese legal experts, a truth and reconciliation panel, and wide-ranging reforms of the country's criminal justice system.

Al-Bashir balked at the idea of launching a comprehensive judicial process, especially one that involved foreign experts, and mostly disregarded this panel's advice as well. In the following years, African leaders refused to push for any other transitional justice instrument, international or regional, seemingly due to fears that the pursuit of justice would derail efforts for peace. As a result, al-Bashir never faced any accountability for the crimes he facilitated in Darfur and the RSF remained able to continue its abuse of Darfuris with impunity.

Today, as Darfur suffers a devastating new wave of atrocities, the AU must change course. It must acknowledge sustainable peace requires accountability and an end to impunity. It must make a strong and explicit commitment to achieving justice for all in Darfur, be it through Sudanese, African or global legal instruments.

Of course, Africa's leaders have every right to criticise the methods and approaches of the ICC. They also have every right to demand justice is delivered through local and regional instruments in Africa. In their approach to the conflict in Sudan, however, they missed a crucial opportunity to make this point and lay the foundations for a strong, independent and responsive human rights culture in Africa.

Had they agreed to implement the proposals advanced by the ACHPR and the African Union High-Level Panel on Darfur, they would have not only helped Darfuris find justice but also showed the ICC that it is indeed not needed in the region. Regrettably, they chose to ignore the advice of their own experts and allowed the perpetrators of egregious human rights violations to get away scot-free. As a result, we are where we are today. The culture of impunity is still strong in Sudan, and the Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa communities are still facing slaughter.

All who have facilitated genocide in Darfur must be subjected to transitional justice processes and mechanisms and other accountability processes, irrespective of their positions. This is the only way to achieve peace. Africa's leaders can no longer afford to deny justice to Africans.

## Why Balkans region is so important to Europe

Luke Coffey

IN another sign that Brussels is starting to give the attention that is due to the Balkans, the leaders of the region and the EU met in Montenegro last week to chart a realistic path toward eventual membership of the bloc.

This meeting followed similar gatherings in recent months held in North Macedonia and Albania. At the top of the agenda was the implementation of the so-called common growth plan established by the EU to get the region on track for membership by 2027. Between now and then, 6 billion (\$6.5 billion) will be dispersed to Balkans countries to help them improve energy and transport inter-connectivity and regional infrastructure.

The Balkans remains an area of unfinished business for Euro-Atlantic integration. Unsurprisingly, other than Ukraine, the region remains the biggest geopolitical challenge for Europe. Albania, Slovenia, Croatia, Montenegro and North Macedonia are already in NATO. Only Slovenia and Croatia are also in the EU. Although membership talks have begun with the other countries in the Balkans, progress toward membership has been painfully slow. For Albania, Montenegro and North Macedonia, the problem has been with the pace of the economic, governance and judicial reforms that are required to meet EU standards. Kosovo has the added problem of not all EU members recognizing its independence as a country.

For Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, the situation is even more complicated. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, two substate entities emerged as a result of the Dayton Accords following the civil war of the 1990s: the ethnically Bosnian and Croat Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the ethnically Serb Republika Srpska. While EU membership remains popular with ethnic Bosnians and Croats, the ethnic Serbian population living in Republika Srpska are not so keen. Because there is no national consensus, there has been no meaningful progress on Bosnia's EU (or NATO) membership aspirations.

Meanwhile, Serbian politicians pay lip service to establishing closer ties with Brussels but have made very little practical effort on this front. Russian influence runs deep in Belgrade and, historically, Serbia has served as Moscow's foothold in the Balkans region. On the other hand, Serbia has very close economic ties to the EU. When it comes to Serbian economics, Russia takes a back seat and its economy cannot survive if cut off from the rest of Europe. What Serbia does regarding the EU also impacts neighboring Bosnia because the leaders of Republika Srpska tend to follow Belgrade's lead on big geopolitical matters. If Belgrade decided to change track and pursue closer relations with Brussels, this would have a positive ripple effect across the region.

The Balkans region matters to Europe's overall

security and has done for decades. The Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913 set the stage for the First World War. NATO's first test on the battlefield after the Cold War ended was in the region. In 1995, a NATO mission was dispatched to Bosnia to stop the ethnic cleansing of Bosnian Muslims by ethnic Serbs. Another NATO operation against Serbia took place in 1999 to stop similar Serbian attacks targeting ethnic Albanians in Kosovo. Today, an EU military mission maintains the fragile peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina and NATO continues with a peace-keeping mission in Kosovo.

The fragile peace that exists in the region is under a lot of pressure. Sectarian and religious divisions are easily exploited by regional and international actors. The lackluster economic situation, exacerbated by poor governance found across the region, is another threat to stability. Secessionist rhetoric coming from the leaders of Republika Srpska threatens to undermine the territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Meanwhile, Kosovo and Serbia remain in a state of constant tension and crisis over the ethnic Serbian population living in the northern part of Kosovo. While major fighting has not broken out in the region in recent years, the possibility cannot be ruled out. One way to prevent this from happening is encouraging regional integration and cooperation with the ultimate goal of EU and NATO membership for all in the Balkans.

In addition to EU influence in the region, other outside actors have been active. Due to the role that NATO played in the 1990s, Americans naturally take an interest in the Balkans. However, in recent years, Washington's interest has waned. Meanwhile, the Russians, through Serbia, view the Balkans as a region where it can easily cause problems for the West. It is no coincidence that the leader of Republika Srpska is close to the Kremlin.

China has been making significant infrastructure investments in the region to gain influence. During President Xi Jinping's recent visit to Europe, Serbia was one of only three places that he visited. Türkiye has also been active in the region, mainly through its economic and cultural soft power in the regions of the Balkans that were once under Ottoman rule.

Europeans will go to the polls next month for European Parliament elections. Afterward, a new European Commission will be formed. At the top of the agenda will be the war in Ukraine and much-needed economic growth across the continent. But the new European Parliament and commission should not ignore the Balkans. The common growth plans are a great step toward getting the Balkan countries into the EU in 2027, but more is needed. It will take political will and leadership in Brussels to finish the unfinished business of Euro-Atlantic integration in the Balkans.

## Wins. Spoiler alert: Sometimes they lose really badly

Marina Hyde

earlier that day: "Who dares wins. You dared, and you will win." Collectors of moments where Michael Gove just says any old deadpan shit for a laugh are going to have a huge cataloguing exercise on their hands in the coming weeks. I myself have a memory palace full of such treasures, which I plan to open to the public on 5 July.

Happily, as well as that emergency cabinet meeting, the surprise election news also forced a huge number of emergency podcasts. I sometimes wonder if political podcasts are to our era what Vietnam movies were to the American late 1970s. A chance to reflect elegiacally, and indeed lucratively, about how sad and pointless it all was. Indeed, the sheer number of frontline politicians who could lose their seats could lead to a flood of future buddypod franchises. Plus a lighthearted perils-of-modern-dating one hosted by

the current defence secretary. Working title: On The Sh-Apps.

In terms of what we have immediately lost, though, the government has explained that its asylum removal flights to Rwanda will not take off until after the election. Have they scuttled their own flagship, or is the Rwanda scheme so badly holed it would have sunk anyway? Truly the Bismarck of policies (the ship not the statesman).

Forgive the suggestion of election spoilers — despite polling maestro John Curtice placing Labour on a 99% chance of victory, I think we have to pretend that it is at least possible that Sunak could pull off history's most unlikely political comeback. But at this stage I would settle for Westminster's snippiest interviewee pulling off even a conversational comeback.

That said, the titchy tetchy does say he wants to have no

fewer than six TV debates with the Labour leader — one every week. Rishi Sunak Versus Keir Starmer — arguably the least watchable limited series you could possibly come up with. And I watched She-Hulk: Attorney at Law, so that means something. Starmer's yours-to-lose position in the polls is allied with both his natural caution and the ancestral psychic pall of pulling on the Labour shirt to play in a general election. So the next few weeks will be like watching a very buttoned-up man try not to have an accident.

As for Nigel Farage, what a surprise to learn that he will be present but not involved in Reform's election campaign. Farage loves his country, but he loves American TV money more, and the prospect that his orange friend might say one throw-away thing about him on one third-tier stage on one night of the US election campaign is simply too much of a draw for this terminal beta, who —

let's not forget — conceded, then unconceded, then re-unconceded even on the night of the 2016 EU referendum. Many people do actually prefer to forget that, of course, so we'll doubtless still have to listen to Nigel when he pitches back up after the election to save the Conservative party, or something.

Ultimately, after the past few years, the one thing most of the country can agree on is that the quality of politics and politicians needs to get so much better. Yet for all the already evident stage management of the campaigns, it should be noted that the Conservatives are currently short of 93 prospective candidates, while about 100 Labour ones have yet to be unveiled. All parties are scrambling to fill the gaps. I hate to rain buckets on anyone's parade, but ... is this really the recipe for a return to political calibre?

The Guardian



# Healthcare in Syria is at risk of collapse

Valeria Gholizadeh Gajkar

ON April 30, the European Union’s eighth annual conference on “Supporting the future of Syria and the region” in Brussels started with a day of dialogue. Members of Syrian civil society, representatives of United Nations agencies and international NGOs, and political leaders from the EU and other stakeholder countries came together to debate and strategise about the most pressing humanitarian issues affecting the region.

On Monday, May 27, the conference will continue with a ministerial segment aimed at mobilising financial support for people in need in Syria. Ministers attending this important gathering will need to take urgent action to avert the escalation of the healthcare crisis affecting millions of Syrians. Today, many Syrian communities are facing circumstances more dire than ever before. Health services – already largely dependent on chronically under-funded NGOs in the absence of an organised healthcare system – are now at risk of collapse due to the threat of significant aid cuts.

My organisation, Relief International, has been one of the main healthcare providers in Northern Syria since 2011. Yet, we have been struggling to meet the needs of people who have already endured 13 years of conflict. Like other organisations active in the region, we are being forced to focus on basic healthcare and scale down the provision of more

advanced and specialist care, which is desperately needed.

For Relief International and the seven other organisations we work with in northwest Syria, any cuts could mean the shuttering of tens of hospitals, paediatric intensive care units, mobile clinics and specialised services including cancer screening clinics, dialysis units, blood banks and gender-based violence units. As a result, more than millions more people could be unable to access the healthcare they need.

Even before the cuts for this year were announced, healthcare in Syria was in ruins due to escalating hostilities, the COVID-19 pandemic and last February’s devastating earthquake. There was already a severe lack of medical professionals, medication and equipment. In a report produced with the Syrian American Medical Society last year, we highlighted the plight of cancer patients in northwest Syria: Just three oncologists serve a population of 5.1 million people and radiotherapy treatment is not freely available, leaving many patients helpless. It is not hard to imagine the devastating impact further funding cuts will have on cancer care.

Earlier this year, health workers in one hospital reported that there haven’t been any free paediatric beds since November. Mothers who have travelled more than 20 kilometres to seek care for their children are being turned away

because facilities are too overrun to admit them. Hundreds of people are on waiting lists to receive prosthetics and assistive devices after being seriously injured by the war and last year’s earthquake. Many families were already struggling to pay for transportation to access free health services. Now, as there are even fewer facilities offering free care, many of these families will have to make do without any care, whatsoever.

As aid organisations, we are doing everything we can to help patients. Relief International and its partners are training existing professionals on under-served conditions, such as malnutrition and mental health, and grouping health facilities together to create networks which increase collaboration, capacity and the quality of care. But these creative solutions – the best we can do with the resources available – are not enough to meet the healthcare needs of Syrian communities in desperate need.

Ministers who will come together in Brussels to discuss Syria on Monday must take a series of urgent steps to sustainably resolve the healthcare crisis in the region. First, they must restore funding and scale up resources. Funding must be restored as quickly as possible to keep life-saving health facilities open and dwindling resources must urgently be replenished and scaled up to meet ever-increasing needs on the ground.

Second, they must invest in building up Syria’s health workforce.

Syria’s healthcare workforce is in dire need of investment, including more training for new and existing health professionals as well as more accredited training programmes. Third, they must allocate funds for more specialist equipment and medication to be made available in the region. Healthcare workers caring for Syrians are struggling with a lack of equipment and medication required to provide secondary and higher-level care. Most healthcare facilities in north Syria do not have the necessary equipment to perform high-level surgeries or the medication necessary to treat conditions like cancer and heart disease. It is crucial to ensure that all Syrians once again have access to more than just basic healthcare in their home country.

Fourth, they must ensure all new approaches are coordinated. For meaningful change to be achieved in Syria, all stakeholders should work together. Critically, local authorities, aid groups and the private sector must collaborate closely on new approaches. Resources must be utilised strategically, ensuring that solutions are coordinated and that healthcare does not become even more fragmented. Today there are numerous crises which deserve our attention and support across the world, but the people of Syria must not be forgotten. Monday’s meeting must mark the beginning of meaningful, long-term change.

Aljazeera

# Recognition of Palestine inconsequential without pressure on Israel

Sharif Nashashibi

be detrimental, contributing to a delusion of progress.

Ireland, Norway and Spain are joining a long and growing list of countries that recognize a state that exists in name only. Due to Israeli occupation, colonization and apartheid, Palestine lacks contiguous, sovereign territory; control over its borders; military, security, legal or administrative control; its own currency; or economic independence. It is a nation entirely held hostage by another, aided and abetted by key Western states, most notably the US.

For recognition of Palestine to make a difference, it needs to be backed by pressure to actually make that state a reality. Otherwise, it is more of a feel-good move than a do-good move. Unfortunately, many states that recognize Palestine have business-as-usual or even close relations with Israel, and that fact is not limited to those in the West.

Beyond just realizing a Palestinian state, pressure must be applied to ensure that it is actually viable. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has repeatedly rejected Palestinian statehood outright, but even predecessors who accepted the idea in principle meant something less in practice.

The late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, who was synonymous with the Oslo “peace process,” told the Knesset in 1995 that he envisioned “an entity which is less than a state.” And writing in the New York

Times, Robert Malley — who was at the Camp David talks in 2000, and was special assistant to then-US President Bill Clinton for Arab-Israeli affairs — described the generosity associated with then-Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak’s proposal as a “myth,” adding: “It was not the dream offer it has been made out to be.”

Israel will never accept Palestinian self-determination without sufficient pressure, including political, economic and military. Apartheid in South Africa did not collapse because of global sympathy with its Black population. It collapsed because that sympathy was backed by sanctions by countries and international organizations.

The will to apply pressure on Israel has been lacking for so long that even if it was to happen now, its purpose may need to change. Israel’s colonization drive has been so thorough, with its illegal Jewish-only settlements on occupied land so pervasive and entrenched, that a Palestinian state — certainly one that fulfills the proper criteria for a state — may no longer be possible.

As such, the application of pressure on Israel may have to revolve around giving it a choice: a truly viable Palestine in accordance with international law, or like South Africa, Palestinian equality in a single state, Israel and its allies will balk at the latter option, but they are the ones responsible for burying the two-state solution.

Arab News

# ICC is not in business of peacemaking, but it can deliver justice

Mark Kersten

WHENEVER the International Criminal Court (ICC) opens an investigation into an ongoing war, versions of the following question will inevitably be asked: Does the pursuit of accountability risk leaving the warring parties with no incentive but to continue the fight? The same question is again being asked now that ICC Prosecutor Karim Khan has made the landmark decision to request arrest warrants for top Israeli and Hamas leaders.

For years, I have tried to get to the bottom of what is often called the “peace versus justice” debate. I wrote a book about how that debate played out with the ICC interventions in Libya and Uganda. I have also published findings on the peace-justice relationship in Ukraine, Israel-Palestine, and elsewhere. While responses to the debate are often driven more by assumptions and hypotheticals than incontrovertible facts, the reality is that there is no special key that helps unlock the relationship between resolving wars and achieving accountability for wartime atrocities.

There is no singular answer to this question that applies across different contexts. But here are a few things that are true: The ICC can complicate peace negotiations. But more “complicated” peace negotiations do not necessarily mean “worse” peace negotiations. Take Colombia, for example, where the ICC had a decade-long preliminary examination. Accountability processes negotiated during the peace process there translated into meaningful justice

for many of the wartime atrocities committed by the government and the rebel group the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Moreover, for the ICC to undermine peace negotiations, there must be a realistic prospect of a peace process in the first place. If such negotiations do not exist, the claim that pursuing accountability will ruin them is likely a red herring, an argument intended to shield the perpetrators of atrocities.

In the conflict between Israel and Palestine, there are no peace negotiations for the ICC to complicate or undermine. Put another way, justice cannot undermine peace if peace is not on the table.

Ongoing negotiations over the release of hostages and a ceasefire seem unlikely to be affected by ICC warrants given that they have been requested for leaders on both sides and that the war already appears to be politically existential for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defence Minister Yoav Gallant. And if the warrants affect the talks, it may actually be positive. Yuval Shany, an international law professor at Hebrew University of Jerusalem, made precisely this point in response to the ICC prosecutor’s application for arrest warrants, saying it “could be another impetus for Israel to bring the war to an end, because it does appear to be in a state of tailspin”. Another hope is that, as Israel is a democracy, ICC action will encourage the people of Israel to bring their government down and replace it with one that seeks peace and Palestinian statehood – and which does not so

eagerly starve and slaughter civilians.

Beyond its possible consequences on ceasefire negotiations or a peace process, could ICC action make matters worse on the ground, more dangerous and deadly for civilians? Israel has said it will punish Palestinians by, among other things, freezing the transfer of tax revenues it collects for the Palestinian Authority, if the ICC issues arrest warrants. The United States, Canada and others have previously threatened Palestinians with consequences, including the withdrawal of aid to Palestinian humanitarian organisations, if the ICC were to target Israeli leaders.

But that is not the ICC’s doing. Israel is not obliged to take out its discontent over arrest warrants by administering further violence against Palestinian civilians. If Israel chooses to respond to the ICC warrants by denying aid to Palestinians in Gaza, it won’t be because of the ICC, but because the Israeli government has normalised the starvation of civilians as an act of retaliation. There is no moral, legal or political justification for Israel’s allies punishing civilians for an investigation by the only credible, impartial and independent court investigating atrocities against Palestinian and Israeli victims of atrocity crimes. Penalising Palestinians for supporting recourse to international law is reprehensible and itself an act opposed to peace that should be condemned.

To those who say the ICC action will make matters worse on the ground, we should ask: Worse than

what? More than 35,000 people have been killed in Gaza in the seven months since October 7. The International Court of Justice has said there is a plausible case to be heard that Israel is committing genocide against Palestinian civilians in Gaza. The United Nations has declared a famine in northern Gaza. Children are being intentionally starved en masse. Every single university in Palestine has been systematically destroyed by Israeli forces, leading to allegations of “scholasticide”. Most hospitals and sources of clean drinking water have been destroyed or damaged. Over one million people face the real threat of slaughter in Rafah.

The list goes on. So, again: How could the ICC possibly make things worse? The last 20 years show how brutal and violent this conflict is without accountability. It is now time to change course. It is wrong to claim that it is accountability, rather than the perpetrators running the show, that might ruin chances at peace between Israel and Palestine.

Does this mean that arrest warrants will deliver peace? Of course not. The ICC is not in the business of peacemaking. It is in the business of pursuing accountability for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. But beware of self-serving claims by the supporters of the Israeli government that the ICC will undermine so-called “peace negotiations” that do little other than promote the status quo of impunity. The starving people of Palestine have also been starved of access to accountability. It might not deliver peace, but it is beyond time to give justice a chance.

# Ukraine can still recover with bolder western support

Timothy Garton Ash

AS I contemplate a forest of small Ukrainian flags on the Maidan in central Kyiv, placed there by bereaved relatives as a memorial to the war dead, I’m accosted by a burly Ukrainian soldier in combat uniform. He’s with the elite 95th Air Assault Brigade and he has been fighting Russian aggression for more than a decade. “At the moment of victory,” he tells me, “please pour the first glass on to the ground for those who have fallen.”

Gesturing to the seemingly normal life around us in the Ukrainian capital, with young people drinking at nice cafes, almost as though this were Paris or Vienna, he says, “Every peaceful day here costs a lot of lives at the front.” But he chokes up on the last words and his eyes fill with tears. “Sorry, sorry!” he exclaims, embarrassed by this moment of weakness. Then he grips my hand one more time, grasps the straps of his khaki rucksack, and marches off through the civilian crowd like a ghost from the trenches of the first world war.

The mood in Ukraine is sombre these days. The casualties keep mounting. In the military cemetery in Lviv, I see widows and bereaved mothers sitting silently beside the fresh graves of their loved ones, heads bowed, a life sentence of suffering etched on their faces. Medical experts estimate that at least half the population is suffering from some degree of post-traumatic stress disorder.

Vladimir Putin’s forces are grinding forward, using their numerical advantages and exploiting the slowness of the west to supply sufficient air defence and ammunition. They have opened a new front north of Kharkiv, which is closer to the Russian frontier than London is to Oxford. It’s feared that Russian forces will now get within artillery range of the besieged city, which is already being pounded by Russian missiles, drones and glide bombs. Only yesterday, I learned that the printing plant in Kharkiv where the Ukrainian edition of my book Homelands was recently printed has been hit, with people killed and wounded. Russia’s main purpose seems to be to stretch the roughly 1,000km-long frontline so that, as Ukraine diverts troops to defend Kharkiv, Putin’s army can push forward in the east, taking more of the Donetsk and Luhansk provinces that he already claims are irrevocably part

of the Russian Federation. One western military expert says this is a “moment of jeopardy” for Ukraine.

Major Andriy Pidlisnyi, a battalion commander who’s been on active service since the first days of the full-scale war, tells me the mood among his troops is “not good”. And, he adds, “They think it’s time for others to go and fight.” But where are those others? A hotly contested law reducing the conscription age to 25 finally came into force last week, but whenever I turn I hear stories of young Ukrainian men trying to avoid the draft.

Russian aerial assaults have destroyed nearly half the country’s energy-generating capacity. Even now, in summer, people experience frequent power cuts. One expert estimates that, at current capacity, many Ukrainians could experience power cuts of up to 12 hours a day next winter – and the winters here are bitterly cold.

There is growing anger towards the west for not doing enough, fast enough, to enable the country to defend itself. One senior government minister told me US Congress “will never be forgiven by the Ukrainian people” for the endless delay in voting the latest round of support for Ukraine. There is also nagging unhappiness with the performance of the president, Volodymyr Zelenskii, whose term would have ended on 20 May were the country not under martial law, and especially with the presidential administration headed by his powerful enforcer, Andriy Yermak.

Several separate sources told me that Zelenskii, the former TV star, obsessively studies his ratings – and those are gradually going down.

Interestingly, one criticism I heard repeatedly is that he continues to feed unrealistic hopes of total victory – that is, the reconquest of all Ukraine’s sovereign territory in its 1991 frontiers, including Crimea. Even senior officials privately give a more cautious definition of victory. “Publicly, I support what the president says,” one told me. “Unpublicly, I think we should survive as an independent western state that has the possibility of development.” And everyone is deeply worried about what Donald Trump will do if reelected president of the United States on 5 November.

Russian aerial assaults have destroyed nearly half the country’s energy-generating capacity. Even now, in summer, people experi-

ence frequent power cuts. One expert estimates that, at current capacity, many Ukrainians could experience power cuts of up to 12 hours a day next winter – and the winters here are bitterly cold.

There is growing anger towards the west for not doing enough, fast enough, to enable the country to defend itself. One senior government minister told me US Congress “will never be forgiven by the Ukrainian people” for the endless delay in voting the latest round of support for Ukraine. There is also nagging unhappiness with the performance of the president, Volodymyr Zelenskii, whose term would have ended on 20 May were the country not under martial law, and especially with the presidential administration headed by his powerful enforcer, Andriy Yermak. Several separate sources told me that Zelenskii, the former TV star, obsessively studies his ratings – and those are gradually going down.

Interestingly, one criticism I heard repeatedly is that he continues to feed unrealistic hopes of total victory – that is, the reconquest of all Ukraine’s sovereign territory in its 1991 frontiers, including Crimea. Even senior officials privately give a more cautious definition of victory. “Publicly, I support what the president says,” one told me. “Unpublicly, I think we should survive as an independent western state that has the possibility of development.” And everyone is deeply worried about what Donald Trump will do if reelected president of the United States on 5 November.

So Ukraine is on the ropes. Using that boxing metaphor, one immediately thinks of the new world heavyweight champion, the Ukrainian Oleksandr Usyk, who was seemingly down and out under the ferocious assault of the giant Tyson Fury, but then came back to win on points at the end of a brutal 12 rounds. A narrow victory in 12 rounds, not a knockout blow in the fifth, is the best that Usyk’s homeland can hope for now.

The big difference is this: unlike the boxer, Ukraine can’t possibly defeat a larger opponent on its own. It needs more and bolder military support from the west right now, so it can put Putin Fury on the ropes. Then, and only then, can Ukraine get to the point where it may achieve an outcome that a majority of its own people will regard as victory, and most Russians as defeat. That should be the west’s objective too.

# Let us spare a thought for forgotten victims of US withdrawals

Arnab Neil Sengupta

EVERY time Americans run for the exits during a war or insurgency or after a terrorist attack, the human suffering and pain does not come to an end. What usually ends is the intense reporting on the topic because the media spotlight shifts to a torrent of overanalyzing, book-writing and filmmaking by contrite American veterans and officials, once safely back in their homeland.

This has happened since the 1960s like a geopolitical show running on a loop, with just the location and actors changing through the years (Vietnam, Lebanon, Iraq, Afghanistan). Since the abandoned allies of Washington and the local populations tend to be non-native English speakers with little or no clout in distant Washington, they are inevitably condemned to a life of danger and deprivation, if not forced “reeducation.”

No wonder pro-Western countries with a sense of history nowadays hesitate to put all their security eggs in the American basket, the logic being: With unreliable friends like these, who needs reliable enemies. Take Afghanistan — the scene of one of the world’s worst humanitarian crises since the botched withdrawal of US and NATO forces in August 2021 paved the way for the country’s second takeover by the ultraconservative Taliban.

Even by the standards of this war-ravaged country, the current state is pitiful. Almost two-thirds of the population needed humanitarian aid last year, with 14.7 million requiring it for basic survival. The UN reported that, by mid-2023, 4 million Afghans were acutely malnourished, including

3.2 million children under the age of five.

After seizing power, Taliban authorities cracked down on local media and increased the use of arbitrary detentions for journalists, human rights defenders and civil society activists. Last August, the UN reported that, in the last 12 months alone, there had been at least 800 instances of extrajudicial killing, arbitrary arrests and detentions, more than 144 cases of torture and brutal treatment, 218 extrajudicial deaths and 14 enforced disappearances of former government employees and security personnel by Taliban forces.

As for women and girls, Human Rights Watch has said the pattern of abuses against them amounts to the crime against humanity of gender persecution. Looking back, Iraqis have actually fared much better than Afghans, but when you come to think of it, just 10 years ago, as Daesh militants rampaged across the country, it was touch and go there for a while too.

Going back further, when a US presidential candidate pledged in 2007 to pull the remaining combat brigades out of Iraq at a pace of about one per month, it signalled to malign regional actors and America’s own adversaries that the end of the democracy-building project, and the time for them to swing into action, was near.

When the 2008 US-Iraq Status of Forces Agreement expired, the Democratic administration proved unable or (more likely) unwilling to use economic and military leverage to get a new agreement ratified by the Iraqi parliament. President Barack Obama’s declaration in

October 2011 that he was “ending the war in Iraq” proved no more prophetic than Republican President Richard Nixon’s announcement in January 1973 that a treaty signed in Paris would bring “peace with honor” and ensure South Vietnam’s independence.

Nearly 13 years on, Iraqis are caught in the crossfire of a shadow war between Iran and Israel, with American forces once again intervening, this time not to quell an insurgency or stamp out a sectarian civil war but to target nonstate armed groups backed by Tehran and operating from Iraqi soil. The head of the UN political mission in Iraq recently said that the spiraling regional violence could leave the country on “a knife-edge.”

It is not just tension among different ethnic and religious factions that stands in the way of national unity and effective governance. Gallup data published in February showed that 86 percent of Iraqis believe corruption is widespread in government, while three-quarters believe that elections are not honest in Iraq.

Although Iraqis’ faith in their political and national institutions rose last year, including confidence in the national government, and 39 percent said now is a good time to find a job, the Heritage Foundation’s 2024 Index of Economic Freedom report noted that “the weak state of the financial system, coupled with its limited role in the economy, makes development of a much-needed dynamic private sector extremely difficult.”

Compared with both Iraq and Afghanistan, the people of

Vietnam are a lot better off today than they were when the last US military unit left the country in March 1973. Since 1986, the Vietnamese authorities have used structural reforms to modernize the economy and build competitive, export-driven industries. But in political terms, the more things have changed, the more they have stayed stuck in a time warp.

The complete withdrawal of US forces did not end the war for the Vietnamese and brutal fighting continued until April 1975, when Saigon fell to the communists. The 1976 reunification of North and South Vietnam triggered a mass flight of so-called boat people, including successful South Vietnamese merchants, who were fearful of execution or relocation to labor camps and were desperate for a better future. By mid-1979, some 350,000 Vietnamese had sought refuge throughout Southeast Asia, with another 200,000 moving to permanent residence in other countries.

The winners of this power struggle are the hard-liners: the police generals and the dogmatic Leninists,” Bill Hayton, an associate fellow at Chatham House, wrote in a recent expert comment, conjuring up memories of the Vietnam War-era The Beatles song “Back in the USSR.” None of this is to argue in favor of Americans starting wars, even if they could somehow develop the strategic patience to see them through to the end. But one thing they should definitely do is produce less cultural, literary and media content fixated on a fading American imperium when countless stories of the victims of US betrayals and withdrawals remain untold.





ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister Industry's production and food security Rana Tanveer chaired high level meeting regarding supply chain and prices of fertilizer.

## Synergy Group celebrates its Silver Jubilee Anniversary

### F.P. Report

LAHORE: Synergy Group, a leader in the integrated marketing communication (IMC) industry, celebrated its 25th Anniversary recently. Founded in 1999 by Ahmed Kapadia, Synergy Group began its journey with a clear mission of fostering a work culture where teamwork, experimentation, and knowledge-sharing are paramount.

The Group's 25th Anniversary was marked by celebrations of its achievements, collaborative culture, and continuous growth. "Synergy Group's success over the years is a testament to our unflinching belief in the power of collaboration, innovation and limitless potential," said Kapadia, Chairman of Synergy

Group. "From our humble beginnings, we have always encouraged our team to dare to dream big, experiment, learn, and grow together. It is this spirit of unity, teamwork and the challenger mindset that has driven us to achieve remarkable milestones over the past 25 years."

Understanding the challenges and the opportunities that the world of IMC offers in Pakistan, Synergy Group remained ahead of the curve and established brands and companies that are involved in BTL marketing, digital media, public relations, media buying, publications, and activation campaigns.

The Group now stands tall in the country, having established 12 companies and brands namely Synergy Advertising for

advertising and communication solutions, Synite Digital for digital media solutions, Synchronize Media for media buying, Syntax Communications for public relations, Synergy Marketing for event and BTL marketing, Syntinel for data lab and analytics solutions, Syndicate – the Synergy Group's Content Hub, and the not-for-profit Latif Kapadia Memorial Welfare Trust (LKMWT) which is aimed at helping the poor and the needy.

With four offices in Pakistan's three main cities – Karachi, Lahore, and Islamabad, and nearly 300 employees at its disposal, Synergy Group has expanded its reach to all the regions of the country, catering to 75+ clients across a wide range of industries.

Synergy Group's

crowning moment came when it won its first international award at Abby Awards and was officially lauded with two Silver Awards at iCOM for the Asia Pacific region.

In total, it has won more than 200 awards including 25 Awards at PDA, 11 Effie Awards (six of which came this year), two PAS Awards, 10 APNS Awards, 17 PAA Awards, and one win each at Dragons of Asia and Dragons of Pakistan. Synergy Group remains committed to its core values of collaboration, innovation, and learning.

With plans to expand its services and explore new markets, the Group is poised to continue its legacy of excellence and drive forward with the same passion and dedication that marked its inception.

## OGDCL Collaborates with IPRI for Endowment Chair Economic Security

### F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Oil and Gas Development Company Limited (OGDCL) on Friday entered into a collaboration with Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI) for an Endowment of Economic Security Chair.

The kick-off ceremony was graced by the Chairman Board of OGDCL and CEO of Bank of Punjab, Zafar Masood; MD/CEO of OGDCL, Ahmed Hayat Lak, and senior officials of the industry.

The Endowment of Economic Security Chair at IPRI is for a period of three years, and it will be known as 'OGDCL- IPRI Chair.' This collaboration is a classic example of interaction between the corporate sector and academia.

The research portfolio will be spread over the themes of Circular Economy and Green Entrepreneurship in Pakistan; De-carbonization of Oil and Gas value chains; Environmental Social Governance; New

Age of Corporate Governance in Pakistan; Economic Viability of Renewable Energy Alternatives in Oil Dependent Economies; Economic Implications of Shale Gas Development; and Exploration &

Production (EP), Climate Change, Inflationary trends and mining.

The role of OGDCL in terms of green financing was also underscored, and the appropriate use of Artificial Intelligence was highlighted.



### Hong Kong offers investors one-stop legal platform to access China

HONG KONG (Khaleej Times): Hong Kong, a leading trade partner of the UAE, said on Wednesday it is well-positioned — as the key gateway to the fast-growing Chinese market — to offer investors and businesses from the Emirates and other GCC countries fast, convenient and safe access to the mainland through a one-stop legal services platform.

Paul Lam Ting-kwok, secretary for justice of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, said as a 'super connector' and a 'super value-adder' between China and countries outside China, the region's unique common law system can provide global investors top-quality, user-friendly and reliable legal services to enable them to explore business and investment opportunities, not just in Hong Kong, but in China as a whole.

In 2023, Hong Kong solidified its position as a major trading partner for the UAE in the Middle East region.

The non-oil foreign trade value between the UAE and Hong Kong surged from \$9.4 billion in 2020 to \$16.23 billion in 2022.

In 2019, the two sides signed an agreement to protect and promote cross-border investment.

Hong Kong also seeks to project itself as a destination for family offices from the Gulf region.

Speaking at a forum titled "Hong Kong - The Common Law Gateway for UAE Businesses to China and Beyond" held in Dubai to promote the Special Administrative Region's legal and dispute resolution services, Lam said Hong Kong has been assigned to be the international legal and dispute resolution services centre under various important national development plans of China.

## PSX continues with bullish trend, gains 868 points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) continued with a bullish trend on Friday and gained 868.56 points, a positive change of 1.16 per cent, closing at 75,983.04 points against 75,114.47 points the previous day.

A total of 609,848,980 shares valuing Rs 23.580 billion were traded during the day as compared to 758,944,398 shares valuing Rs 16.708 billion the previous day.

As many as 382 com-

panies transacted their shares in the stock market; 215 of them recorded gains and 144 sustained losses, whereas the share price of 23 companies remained unchanged.

The three top-trading companies were K-Electric Limited with 130,069,373 shares at Rs 5.21 per share, WorldCall Telecom with 50,574,182 shares at Rs 1.42 per share and Dewan Cement with 28,324,001 shares at Rs 10.49 per share.

Hoechst Pakistan Limited witnessed a max-

imum increase of Rs 102.72 per share price, closing at Rs 1,472.50, whereas the runner-up was Mari Petroleum Company Limited with a Rs 49.66 rise in its per share price to Rs 2,836.07.

Shahmurad Sugar Mills Limited witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs 32.07 per share closing at Rs 567.84, followed by Rafhan Maize Products Company Limited with a Rs 30.00 decline to close at Rs 7,970.00.

## Big Tech execs say Europe's new AI law could harm innovation

LONDON (CNN): Amazon and Meta executives told CNN this week that some of the fears about artificial intelligence are overblown and that the European Union's sweeping new AI rules risk holding back innovation.

The EU gave the final green light to its AI act Tuesday, the same week tech leaders gathered in Paris for the annual VivaTech conference.

The first-of-its-kind law is poised to reshape how firms and other organizations in Europe use AI for everything from health care decisions to policing.

It imposes blanket bans on using the technology in ways deemed "unacceptable" — for example, for social scoring.

The regulation also creates new disclosure obligations for large AI companies and requires

more transparency on uses of AI considered "high-risk," such as for education and hiring.

For Meta's (META) AI chief, Yann LeCun, "the big question" about the new law is "should research and development in AI be regulated?"

"There are clauses in the EU AI act and various other places that do regulate research and development.

"I don't think it's a good idea," he told CNN's Anna Stewart at the Paris event. LeCun, widely known as one of the "godfathers of AI," disagrees with concerns that AI could soon surpass human intelligence.

"I don't believe it's anywhere close," he said. "I don't think it's that dangerous, frankly, certainly not today."

AI systems might become a lot smarter in the future but then they will be designed with

appropriate safeguards, he added.

"But today, trying to figure out how to make future super-intelligent AI systems safe is like asking in 1925 'how do we make jet transport safe?' And jet transport was not invented yet," he said.

Amazon's (AMZN) chief technology officer Werner Vogels echoed concerns that AI regulation could stifle innovation in some areas.

When thinking about risks, regulators should consider the application of the new technology to, for instance, health care and financial services differently from its use to summarize meetings, he told Stewart.

"There's a whole range of areas where I think the risks are minimal and we should let innovation run there," he said.

In other areas, where mistakes can have a big-

ger impact on people's lives, risks should be managed "uniquely for that particular area."

Vogels stressed that Amazon welcomes regulation, and is aligned with regulators in their overall goals, but warned the EU against overregulating AI, pointing to the example of its signature data privacy law, known as GDPR, which he described as a very "thick" book.

"Let's make sure that the regulatory requirements that we put in place, companies — not just the largest company but every company in Europe — can actually implement," he said.

"We need to make sure that innovation continues to happen and that the innovation doesn't just come outside Europe. We already have a very long history in Europe of underinvesting in R&D," he added.

## Over 17,000 traders register under FBR's Tajir Dost Scheme

ISLAMABAD, May 24 (APP): Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) on Friday informed that a total of 17,384 traders have been

registered under the Tajir Dost Scheme by 23 May. FBR spokesperson Bukhtiar Muhammad revealed that 5,173

traders from Karachi, 4,871 from Lahore and 1,406 from Islamabad have registered under the scheme.

Similarly, 1,944 traders from Rawalpindi, 1,409 from Peshawar and 899 from Quetta have also been registered.

## Rising US debt burden spooks some bond investors ahead of election

NEW YORK (Reuters): Investors are bracing for a flood of U.S. government debt issuance that over time could dwarf an expected rally in bonds, as they see no end in sight for large fiscal deficits ahead of this year's presidential election.

While bond markets so far this year have been driven mostly by bets on how deeply the Federal Reserve will be able to cut interest rates, fiscal concerns are expected to become more prominent as the Nov. 5 election nears. Analysts and investors say a reduction in deficit spending does not appear to be a policy priority for President Joe Biden and Republican challenger Donald Trump. Both candidates' teams dispute this notion.

Some investors have already started to allocate funds in ways that would avoid losses if Treasury

yields, which move inversely to prices, start surging because of supply and demand imbalances. Others are concerned that uncertainty over just how much debt will be needed for deficit spending could end up destabilizing the \$27 trillion Treasury market, the bedrock of the global financial system.

"If we take a step back away from the Fed and away from the next six months where we could still get substantial rate cuts, supply numbers are not healthy," said Ella Hoxha, head of fixed income at Newton Investment Management, who favors short-term maturities in Treasuries.

Benchmark 10-year Treasury yields, now at around 4.4%, could go up to 8%-10% over the next several years, she said. "Longer term, it's not sustainable."

So-called bond vigilantes -

investors who punish profligate governments by selling their bonds - made a comeback last year, pushing 10-year Treasury yields to 5% for the first time in 16 years, but concerns over growing U.S. debt issuance subsided after the Treasury Department in November slowed down the pace of increases.

In its latest refunding announcement this month, the Treasury Department said it plans to keep auction sizes steady over the next several quarters. Still, larger auctions for long-dated debt are expected already next year, analysts have said.

Federal debt held by the public could grow by \$21 trillion to \$48 trillion by 2034, according to the Congressional Budget Office, opens new tab. Meanwhile, traditional sources of demand for U.S. government bonds are lagging. Foreign owner-

ship is not keeping up with the growing size of the market and the Fed keeps shrinking its bond holdings.

"One of the things we've been talking a lot about internally is not just the supply but the demand," said David Rogal, managing director and a member of the multi-sector team in BlackRock's global fixed income group.

"An environment where you have a reduced buyer base and more supply definitely makes me think that over time you will see more term premium," he said, referring to a measure of the extra compensation investors demand for lending to the government over the long term.

Democrats as well as Republicans have vowed to reduce deficit spending and debt levels.

"After the prior administration increased the debt by a

record \$8 trillion and didn't sign a single law to reduce the deficit, President Biden has signed \$1 trillion of deficit reduction into law and has a plan to lower the deficit by \$3 trillion more," White House spokesperson Jeremy Edwards said.

Anna Kelly, spokesperson for the Republican National Committee, said Trump's "pro-growth, anti-inflation economic policies will ... bring down interest rates, shrink deficits, and lower long-term debt levels."

"PROBLEM FOR TOMORROW"

A sudden drop in demand for U.S. government bonds is unlikely given the dollar's leading reserve currency status and the size and depth of the Treasuries market.

"The most predictable crisis in history ... is for the moment more a silent crisis," JPMorgan analysts said in a

recent note. "A problem 'for tomorrow' but not right now," they wrote.

Still, some market participants have started to take stock.

Investor pressure on the Treasury Department to become more fiscally conservative would manifest itself with higher long-term yields relative to shorter-term ones, said Jonathan Duensing, head of U.S. fixed income at Amundi US.

"We're much more in the front end and intermediate part of the yield curve right now and prefer to stay away in general from the longer-duration part of the Treasury curve," he said.

In a sign of weakening demand, over the past year 10-year Treasury auctions have seen investors demand a concession to buy the paper more frequently than in recent years. Meanwhile, the U.S.

Treasury 10-year term premium briefly moved back into positive territory, opens new tab last month.

"Ahead of the elections you probably don't want to be owning as much very long-dated U.S. Treasuries," said Brij Khurana, a fixed income portfolio manager at Wellington Management.

Others echoed those concerns.

Craig Ellinger, head of Americas fixed income at UBS Asset Management, said short-term debt "seems like the safer place to be in case deficits do get out of control."

Kathryn Rooney Vera, chief market strategist at StoneX, is positioning for a steeper yield curve partly because she anticipates large issuance will pressure long-term Treasuries.

"The answer is reducing spending, and neither side wants to do that," she said.





# Pakistan announce squad for T20 WC

## In brief

### ICC announces commentary panel

DUBAI (Agencies): Some of the biggest names in cricket will provide their expertise during the broadcast of the upcoming tournament. ICC will continue to deliver an unmatched viewing experience during the Men's T20 World Cup 2024, bringing together some of the biggest names in cricket and broadcasting for the extravaganza from the nine locations across the USA and West Indies. Leading the commentary team are stalwarts like Ravi Shastri, Nasser Hussain, Ian Smith, Mel Jones, Harsha Bhogle and Ian Bishop. Adding to the insights on the modern game, the team will be joined by former Men's and Women's T20 World Cup champions such as Dinesh Karthik, Ebony Rainford-Brent, Samuel Badree, Carlos Brathwaite, Steve Smith, Aaron Finch and Lisa Shalekar. Former 50-over World Cup winners Ricky Ponting, Sunil Gavaskar, Matthew Hayden, Ramiz Raja, Eoin Morgan, Tom Moody and Wasim Akram will also be lending their expert analysis to the upcoming tournament. Making his World Cup debut, American commentator James O'Brien – better known as Jomboy – will aim to add context to the games for our American audiences. The other big names in the team include Dale Steyn, Graeme Smith, Michael Atherton, Waqar Younis, Simon Doull, Shaun Pollock and Katey Martin alongside renowned cricketing names in broadcasting including Mpumelelo Mbangwa, Natalie Germanos, Danny Morrison, Alison Mitchell, Alan Wilkins, Brian Murgatroyd, Mike Haysman, Ian Ward, Athar Ali Khan, Russel Arnold, Niall O'Brien, Kass Naidoo and former West Indies skipper Daren Ganga. ICC will provide extensive coverage of the tournament across the 28 days of action with a pre-match show, an innings interval programme and a post-match wrap-up. Building on the success of the vertical feed at the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup 2023, ICC TV will introduce an AI-supported vertical feed for the T20 World Cup. This innovative feature, produced in collaboration with Disney Star, Quidich Innovation Labs, and NEP, will be a world first for cricket.

### Barcelona axe Xavi

MADRID (Reuters): Barcelona sacked manager Xavi Hernandez on Friday, four weeks after confirming their former midfielder would honour the last year of his contract and lead them through next season. The decision ended months of arguments between Barca and Xavi who made 767 appearances for the club over 17 seasons and helped them win 25 major trophies. "Today Friday, FC Barcelona President Joan Laporta has informed Xavi Hernandez that he will not be continuing as first team coach in the 2024-25 season," Barcelona said in a statement. "Barcelona wish to thank Xavi for his work as coach, as well as for his inimitable career as a player and as team captain, and wishes him every future success in the world." Barcelona will finish second in LaLiga, at least nine points behind champions Real Madrid, and Xavi had announced in January that he would resign at the end of this season.

LAHORE (APP): The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) on Friday announced a pace-heavy 15-member squad for next month's ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2024 in the West Indies and USA and Caribbean from 1-29 June. No reserves have been announced for the Babar Azam-led side.

The 15-member squad is a blend of experience and raw talent with five players including Abrar Ahmed, Azam Khan, Mohammad Abbas Afridi, Saim Ayub and Usman Khan will play their maiden T20 World Cup while eight members have represented Pakistan in the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2022 in Australia.

Shaheen Shah Afridi, Haris Rauf, Naseem Shah, Mohammad Amir, and fast-bowling all-rounder Mohammad Abbas Afridi strengthen the pace-battery while three spinners Abrar

Ahmed, Shadab Khan and Imad Wasim complete the bowling attack. Two part-time off-spinners Iftikhar Ahmed and Saim Ayub are also part of the team.

The batting line-up for the ICC mega event comprises dependable Babar Azam, Mohammad Rizwan, Saim Ayub, Fakhar Zaman, Usman Khan, Iftikhar Ahmed and explosive Azam Khan.

The squad was announced after a two-hour long deliberations during a meeting of the selection committee comprising Wahab Riaz, Abdul Razzaq, Asad Shafiq, Babar Azam, Bilal Afzal, Gary Kirsten and Mohammad Yousuf.

About the ICC T20 World Cup squad, the PCB said, "This is an extremely talented and balanced side that has a mixture of youth and experience. These players have been playing together for some time and look well prepared and set-

led for next month's event."

On Haris Rauf, the PCB said that Haris Rauf is fully fit and bowling well in the nets. It would have been nice if he had gotten an outing at Headingley, but we remain confident that he will continue to maintain an upward trajectory in the upcoming matches, as he will have an important role to play along with other strike bowlers in the T20 World Cup.

**Squad (in alphabetical order):**  
1.Babar Azam (captain)  
2.Abrar Ahmed  
3.Azam Khan  
4.Fakhar Zaman  
5.Haris Rauf  
6.Iftikhar Ahmed  
7.Imad Wasim  
8.Mohammad Abbas Afridi  
9.Mohammad Amir  
10.Mohammad Rizwan  
11.Naseem Shah  
12.Saim Ayub  
13.Shadab Khan  
14.Shaheen Shah Afridi  
15.Usman Khan

Player support personnel: Wahab Riaz (senior team manager), Mansoor Rana (team manager), Gary Kirsten (head coach), Azhar Mahmood (assistant coach), Simon Helmot (fielding coach), David Reid (mental performance coach), Aftab Khan (high performance coach), Cliffe Deacon (physiotherapist), Irtaza Komail (chief security officer), Mohammad Imran (masseur), Mohammad Khurram Sarwar (team doctor), Talha Ijaz (analyst), Raza Kitchlew (media and digital manager) and Drikus Saaiman (strength and conditioning coach).

Pakistan has one of the most impressive records in the ICC Men's T20 World Cup since its inception in 2007 in South Africa. It won the 2009 event under Younis Khan and twice reached the finals under Shoaib Malik (2007) and Babar Azam (2022). In



2010, 2012, and 2021, it reached the last-four stage.

Pakistan's World Cup fixtures:

6 June – vs USA, Grand Prairie Cricket Stadium, Dallas

9 June – vs India, Nassau County International Cricket Stadium, New York

11 June – vs Canada, Nassau County Cricket Stadium, New York

16 June – vs Ireland, Central Broward Park & Broward County Stadium, Lauderhill, Florida

Pakistan has been seeded A2 in the first round and if they qualify for the second round, then their Super Eight matches will be as follows:

19 June – vs D1, Antigua  
21 June – vs C2, Barbados  
23 June – vs B1, Barbados.

## Shahid Afridi named ICC Men's T20 World Cup ambassador

ISLAMABAD (APP): The International Cricket Council (ICC) has named Pakistan's iconic all-rounder Shahid Afridi as the latest name on the star-studded roster of Ambassadors for the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2024 in the USA and West Indies beginning June 1.

A veteran of six T20 World Cups, two of which as captain, Afridi spearheaded Pakistan's 2009 triumph with a Player of the Match performance in the final at Lord's, and will feature in a range of promotional activities around the World Cup and lend expert insights to the event through a series of guest columns, said a press release.

Shahid Afridi, ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2009 winner, said, "The ICC Men's T20 World Cup is an event that is very close to my heart. From being Player of the Tournament in the inaugural edition to lifting the trophy in 2009, and some of my favourite career highlights have come from competing on this stage".

"T20 World Cups have gone from strength to strength in recent years, and I'm thrilled to be part of this edition, where we will see more teams, more matches and even more drama than ever before", he continued.

He expressed his excitement to witness the India v Pakistan fixture on June 9.

He said that it is one of the great rivalries in sport and New York will be a fitting stage for this unmissable encounter between two great teams.

Claire Furlong, ICC General Manager – Marketing and Communications, said, "Shahid competed in six ICC Men's T20 World Cups, two of which as captain and delivering a Player of the Match performance when winning the trophy in 2009, so who better to join our all-star Ambassador team".

"He's a fan favourite around the world and alongside Yuvraj Singh, Chris Gayle and eight-time Olympic gold-medallist Usain Bolt, will be bringing

fans closer to the event ahead of what is set to be the biggest T20 World Cup ever", he maintained.

The ICC Men's T20 World Cup would be played from June 1 to 29 with co-hosts USA taking on Canada in the opening fixture at Grand Prairie Stadium in Texas. A total of 55 matches would be played by 20 teams across nine venues, culminating in the final on June 29 in Barbados.

The historic first match at the Nassau County International Cricket Stadium would be played on June 3 between 2014 champions Sri Lanka and South Africa with 10 teams to feature across eight matches in New York.

## India emerge victorious in ATF Team Competition final

ISLAMABAD (APP): India outplayed Pakistan in the final match of the Asian Tennis Federation (ATF) 12 & under Team Competition by 2-0 at Kathmandu, Nepal.

According to details, despite the loss, Pakistan's overall performance in the tournament was commendable. The team reached the final and secured a spot in the International Tennis Federation (ITF) Asia 12 & under Finals set to take place in Kazakhstan later this year.

Captain Abid reflected on the tournament, saying, "The team's overall performance was very good. The boys played exception-

ally well throughout the tournament, making it to the final and qualifying for the World Championships. Unfortunately, we couldn't overcome India in the final. We need to work harder, and Insha'Allah, we will perform very well in Kazakhstan."

Aisam ul Haq Qureshi President Pakistan Tennis Federation (PTF) and Col. Zia-ud-din Secretary praised the team's efforts and performance in the ATF Competition. Qureshi said, "The team's performance in the competition was very good. We defeated Sri Lanka, Nepal,

Bhutan, and Bangladesh to reach the final.

President PTF highlighted the significance of the achievement, stating, "We are focusing on junior development in Pakistan. Our team's participation in the competition after two years and reaching the final is a substantial achievement. Qualifying for the ITF Asia 12 & under Finals is a significant milestone."

This tournament has laid a strong foundation for the future, and the team looks forward to further success in the upcoming World Championships in Kazakhstan.

## Peshawar region trials for U-23 KP Games completed

PESHAWAR (APP): Trials of male and female players of Peshawar region were completed for the forthcoming U23 Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Games with more than 2,000 players participating in eleven different games.

Cricket trials were held at Muazzullah Khan Cricket Academy in which more than 800 players participated. Trials were conducted by Irfan Babu, Parvez Khan, caches Bakhtiar, Haji Taimur, Amin Khan. Volleyball trials were held at PSB Coaching Center with more than 1000 players.

In the trials at Wadood Hall, 40 Badminton players turned up under the supervision of Provincial Badminton Association Secretary Amjad Khan while international coaches Nadem Khan, Malik Faraz and Hayatullah supervised.

The boys and girls Taekwondo trials held at Hayatabad Sports Complex under the supervision of Provincial Taekwondo Association Chairman Ilyas Afridi, Waqar Afridi while

the athletes trials were held under the supervision of Administrator Hayatabad Sports Complex Abid Nazim, coaches Adnan Khan and Zafaran Afridi supervised the trials wherein more than 150 boys athletes and 62 female athletes turned up.

The Karate tials were held under the supervision of Senior Vice President of Provincial Karate Association, Khalid Noor with international coaches Baz Muhammad monitored the performance of the players. Around 60 players participated.

There were huge participation of the players in the Football trials held at Tahmas Khan Football Stadium where the selectors including former Pakistan team skipper and coach Gohar Zaman, former Pakistan team skipper and coach Arshad Khan, international Atiq Shinwari, international Anwar Khan, international Adil Khan and coaches Abdul Shakur and Directorate General Sports coach Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Jamshed Khan Mohmand

took the trials.

The male Throw Ball trials were held at Tahamas Khan Football Stadium in which more than 250 players participated. The throwball trials were conducted by provincial throwball association Secretary Arshad Hussain, Zafar Iqbal, Dr. Muhammad Imran, and Sohrab Hussain.

Regional Sports Officer Kashif Farhan, District Sports Officer Ms Gul Rukh, District Sports Officer Charsada Mishal Malik, District Sports Officer Nowshera Zaka Ullah, Senior Sports Journalist and Observer Ijaz Ahmad Khan were also present on this occasion.

Regional Sports Officer Kashif Farhan visited all the venues and appreciated the performance of the selectors who successfully completed the trials phase. The players have been advised to bring a National Identity Card to verify their age players' date of birth should be 1-6-2001. People born after June 1, 2001 are eligible to participate in the trials.

## Moeen ready to lead at World Cup if Buttler absent

LONDON (Agencies): Moeen Ali says he is ready to lead England at the Twenty20 World Cup if Jos Buttler misses part of the tournament on paternity leave.

Captain Buttler's third child is due imminently, with England playing their World Cup opener against Scotland in Barbados on 4 June. Vice-captain Moeen has previously led England in one one-day international and 12 T20s.

"I feel I've captained enough for England," Moeen told BBC Sport. "Where he leaves, I just pick it up and then when he comes back he just takes over again." England hope to get their series against Pakistan under way at Edgbaston on Saturday, after the first match at Headingley was washed out on Wednesday.

They are then due to play in Cardiff on Tuesday and at The Oval on Thursday, before leaving for the Caribbean on 31 May. Wicketkeeper Buttler has said he will be at the birth, even if it means missing a portion of England's World Cup defence.

All-rounder Moeen added: "Whatever will



happen, will happen. It's not really difficult, because we speak often, me and Jos. We're on the same page."

Along with Buttler, Moeen is one of only four players in this England squad that played in the 50-over World Cup success of 2019 and again when the T20 title was won in Australia in 2022. Mark Wood and Adil Rashid are the other two.

At 36, Moeen has a one-year England central contract that expires in the autumn. He has retired from Test cricket and says this World Cup could be the end of his international career. "If I'm playing well, I want to carry on playing," he said. "I've never put a number on it."

"It could be at the World Cup if I'm not playing so

well, or whatever it is, and I decide 'OK, this is the time'. "There's no time on it. If I'm playing really well, and my body's good, then I want to carry on playing for as long as I can."

Following the abandonment in Leeds, Jofra Archer will again try to make his England comeback in Birmingham. The pace bowler has not played international cricket since last March following a recurrence of an elbow injury.

Liam Livingstone has also recovered from a knee injury and is likely to be available, but Wood is struggling with his own knee problem.

Fast bowler Wood will still be named in England's final World Cup squad of 15 when it is confirmed in time for Saturday's deadline.

## Djokovic falls to Machac in Geneva semis before French Open



PARIS (Agencies): World number one Novak Djokovic fell to 44th-ranked Czech Tomas Machac, 6-4, 0-6, 6-1, in the semi-finals in Geneva on Friday ahead of his French Open title defence.

Djokovic, 37, took a wild card to the Swiss clay-court tournament in a bid to reverse an alarming dip in form ahead of Roland Garros where the 24-time Grand Slam champion has won three times.

"I have no reaction right now, I just fought for every ball," said 23-year-old Machac. "When you play against Novak you just hope. You just try to play your best and see what it looks like."

Novak Djokovic, bidding to reach his first final of the season, received a medical timeout at the end of the first set. The Serb will head to Roland Garros where he faces Frenchman Pierre-Hugues Herbert in the first round having won no titles

this year. Machac, competing in his maiden tour-level semi-final, rallied from a break down in the first set and after failing to win a game in the second powered back in the third set.

"I'm looking forward to playing in a final for the first time," said Machac who will face two-time champion Casper Ruud or Italian Flavio Cobolli in the title match on Saturday.

Ruud, the world number seven, was the runner-up in the last two French Open finals, including a defeat to Novak Djokovic last year.

**I refused to feel sorry for myself - Murray on Paris return:** Andy Murray says refusing to "feel sorry" for himself helped ensure he would be fit enough to compete at the French Open for what is expected to be the final time.

The 37-year-old Briton, who plans to retire later this year, ruptured ankle liga-

ments at the Miami Open in March. Murray avoided surgery and returned to competitive action a fortnight ago.

He will play at Roland Garros for only the second time since 2017. "Initially I was expecting to miss the French and not play any clay at all," said the former world number one. "So to be here and feeling pretty healthy, and the ankle being good, is a huge bonus."

With Murray indicating earlier this year he plans to "not play much beyond the summer", many wondered whether the nature of his ankle injury would deny him the chance to say farewell to the French Open.

It also cast doubt on how fit he would be to play in potential swansongs at Wimbledon, in July, and the Paris Olympics - which start later that month on the Roland Garros clay. Murray says he initially feared he would be out for "10-12 weeks" but returned just over seven weeks later when he played at an ATP Challenger event in Bordeaux.

"I was surprised how I felt during the rehab - I felt really really motivated," said Murray, who starts against fellow three-time major champion Stan Wawrinka when the French Open starts on Sunday. "I worked extremely hard every single day with my team and physio, there were no breaks

or holidays to feel sorry for myself. I just did the work."

The Scot said he was "proud" of how he approached the setback, when "it would have been easy" to be less proactive.

"That's one of the reasons why I was able to come back a bit sooner than I anticipated," he added. Murray will play 39-year-old Swiss Wawrinka for the third time in a row at Roland Garros, having lost in the 2017 semi-finals - a match which exacerbated the hip injury which led to career-saving surgery in 2019 - and in the 2020 first round.

Boulter using Serena as inspiration to succeed on clay

Katie Boulter is the highest-ranked British singles player but will compete in the Roland Garros main draw for the first time. The 27-year-old, who is seeded 26th, has been handed a tough first-round draw against Spanish former world two Paula Badosa.

Boulter's exposure to clay has been limited, but she feels her powerful game can be adapted to the surface successfully. "If I can master it a little bit more, where I'm using more variety with my shots and continuing to go after my game, I have a game to win on these courts," she said.





## In brief

### IRSA releases 298,300 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Friday released 298,300 cusecs of water from various rim stations with inflow of 335,200 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, the water level in the River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1468.84 feet and was 70.84 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 126,200 cusecs and 115,000 cusecs respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1179.55 feet, which was 129.55 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded at 65,700 cusecs and 40,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu, and Sukkur was recorded as 165,000, 125,500, 73,700, and 26,000 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 93,500 cusecs of water were released at Nowshera and 29,100 cusecs were released from River Chenab at Marala.

### Five drug pushers held

RAWALPINDI (INP): The police arrested five drug pushers and recovered 6.8 kilogram hashish during separate actions in jurisdiction of different police stations of Rawalpindi on Friday. According to details, Ratta Amral Police arrested Abdullah with 2.2 kg hashish, Saifullah with 1.6 kg hashish, Dhamial Police arrested Zulqarnain with 1.35 kg hashish, Chontra Police arrested Baqir with 1.1 kg hashish and Sadder Wah Police arrested Noor Ali with 560 gram hashish. Separate cases against the detainees were registered at respective police stations and further investigations were underway.

### Comedian Rangeela remembered

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 19th death anniversary of comedian, film actor, singer and director, Rangeela was observed on Friday. Rangeela's real name was Muhammad Saeed Khan. He was born in Parachinar Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in 1937. In 1957, Rangeela started his cinematic journey with the film "Jati", marking the start of a remarkable career that soared to great heights. He received eleven Nigar Awards and Pride of Performance in recognition of his services. Rangeela died on this day in 2005, at the age of 68.

### Police arrest 18 drug peddlers

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi police in an action against suspected drug peddlers, bootleggers, illegal weapon holders and other law-breakers here on Friday arrested 18 accused besides recovering 6810 grams charras, a 12 bore repeater, 10 pistols 30 bore, ammunition and other items from their possession. A police spokesperson said that Rattaamral, Dhamial, Chontra and Sadder Wah police arrested five accused namely Abdullah, Saifullah, Zulqarnain, Baqir and Noor Ali on recovery of 6810 grams charras and other items. He further informed that Naseerabad, G u n g a n d i, Rattaamral, Civil Lines, Taxila, Gujar Khan, Mandra, Jati, Sadder Baroni, and Dhamial police conducted raids in their respective jurisdiction and arrested 13 accused namely Aamir, Asif, Azizullah, Dost Muhammad, Kamran, Hamza and others and recovered 12 bore repeater, 10 pistols 30 bore, ammunition and other items. Separate cases have been registered against all the accused while further investigations are underway.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Interior Mohsin Naqvi in a meeting with Sri Lankan High Commissioner Admiral Ravindra C wijegunaratne. —APP Photo

## Sarai Gambila-Kohat road to be completed by end of June: Minister

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Law and Justice Azam Nazeer Tarar Friday informed the Senate that the 128-kilometer Sarai Gambila-Kohat Road in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa would be completed by the end of June, at a cost of Rs 30 billion.

During the question hour in the House, he said that the Muzaffarabad to Mansehra motorway would be constructed with the support of Saudi funds.

He also mentioned that a dual carriageway was currently under construction to connect Kohat to Jand Road with Motorway M-14, linking Islamabad and Dera Ismail Khan. This project, costing Rs 18.7 billion, is also expected to be completed by the end of June.

The minister provided updates on the ongoing construction of the old Bannu Road, slated for completion by September at a cost exceeding Rs 17 billion. He further informed the House about the challenges encountered in the Peshawar Northern Bypass project, with a budget of Rs 27 billion, primarily related to land acquisition.

Despite these challenges, the project is anticipated to be completed by December. Tarar also highlighted the completion of the Chakdara-Fatehpur section at a cost of Rs 7 billion and mentioned that the Pezu to Tank Road was scheduled for completion by June 2024.

Regarding the Khyber Pass Economic Corridor,

aimed at serving as an international trade route, Tarar stated that the project would cost approximately \$460 million. He confirmed the finalization of the agreement and announced that the bidding process would commence soon.

He mentioned the construction of the Chakdara-Chitral, N-95 road in three phases with the assistance of the Korean Exim Bank. Financial arrangements for the first phase of the 130-kilometer project have already been secured.

He addressed the transportation difficulties faced by local residents during winter and announced that the Malakand Tunnel project, costing \$23 million, is set to be completed to alleviate these challenges.

## Two died in a collision between coach-trailer

ISLAMABAD (APP): At least two people were killed and several others injured as a result of a collision between a passenger coach and a trailer in Ghotki on Friday.

According to rescue sources 1122, the accident occurred near Ghotki on the M5 motorway, where the coach traveling from Karachi to Rawalpindi hit the trailer coming from the opposite direction, as a result of which 2 people were killed on the spot, a private news channel reported.

Rescue teams reached the spot after being informed and shifted the dead and injured to hospitals in Sukkur and Rahim Yar Khan.

## NIH issues advisory on heatwave

ISLAMABAD (APP): The National Institute of Health (NIH) has issued an advisory regarding the rising intensity of heatwaves and the associated risk of sunstroke across the country.

The advisory highlights the increasing impact of climate change due to global warming, reported a private news channel on Friday.

According to the NIH, the risks and effects of heatwaves are on the rise, with an expected increase in morbidity and mortality due to heatstroke.

The Institute stresses the importance of immediate measures to combat heatstroke, particularly by avoiding direct sunlight.

The advisory emphasizes that preventing dehydration is crucial in avoiding complications from heatstroke.

Additionally, the NIH warned that extreme heat can also lead to typhoid fever.

The NIH urges the public to take these warnings seriously and adopt measures to protect themselves during the heatwave.

## Action against political party office taken in accordance with law: Minister

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Parliamentary Affairs, Azam Nazeer Tarar, informed the Senate that action against a political party office had been taken in accordance with the law and for violating building bylaws.

Responding to a point of order raised by opposition leader Shibli Faraz, he further explained that the first notice was issued to the political party in 2020 for violating building bylaws. Notices were repeatedly issued from 2020 to 2024 at six-month intervals, with the final notice given on May 10 for ongoing violations.

"In view of the last notice dated May 10, the action is in accordance with the law," the minister said. He elaborated that he

had talked to the chairman of the Capital Development Authority (CDA), who confirmed that the process had been ongoing for the past four years due to the violations. The final notice was issued to ensure compliance with CDA directions, he added.

The minister further explained that reminders were issued to the political party regarding two floors constructed without CDA approval and the misuse of a public place for parking containers. He said that the party had constructed illegal parking sheds.

He said that despite repeated requests, the party did not remove the illegal structures or vacate the public space, causing problems for the public. He

informed that the Senate Committee on Interior, headed by Mohsin Aziz, had also directed the CDA to take action against the encroachments and violations of building laws. In compliance with these directions, the CDA launched a campaign against such encroachments, he mentioned.

Earlier, opposition leader Shibli Faraz raised objections over the closure of the PTI central office in Islamabad. He also criticised the lack of consultation in forming the Senate Finance Committee. He said that political stability is essential for economic stability. Faraz urged all political parties to work together to achieve common goals.

## Govt to fund solarization of agricultural tube wells in Balochistan

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Energy, Awaiz Ahmad Leghari on Friday reiterated the federal government's commitment to fund the solarization of agricultural tube wells in Balochistan.

In response to a calling attention notice regarding the limited electricity supply to agricultural tube wells by the Quetta Electric Supply Company (QESCO), which provides only three hours of electricity per day, he said that once the Balochistan government formulated a mechanism for the distribution of funds to consumers, the federal government would be implementing the solarization initiative.

He highlighted that approximately 12,000 illegal transformers were operating on 404 feeders in Balochistan, with 96 percent of these feeders running at a loss. There was an outstanding amount of over Rs 640 billion owed by various entities, including agricultural tube wells, in the province, he added. The minister called on Senators and Members of the National Assembly to assist in combating power theft.

He assured strict action against officials involved in overbilling and guiding consumers how to steal electricity. The minister acknowledged that distribution companies were not managed professionally in the past and admitted that their officers were involved in illegally activities.

He explained that

Balochistan incurred a loss of Rs 80 billion due to the provision of six hours of electricity. The minister mentioned a positive meeting with the Chief Minister of Balochistan, who assured cooperation with law enforcement agencies to remove illegal transformers across the province.

Quoting the example of the Mardan feeder, Leghari noted that after the implementation of law enforcement measures, there was a 24-hour electricity supply. He stressed that due to electricity theft and lack of enforcement, even his own tribal area received only two hours of electricity, and he did not use his ministerial position to ensure a 24-hour supply to these areas.

## Pakistan Post warns customers of parcel tracking scams

ISLAMABAD (APP): In a bid to safeguard its customers from potential scams and fraudulent activities, Pakistan Post has issued a stern warning, urging them to exercise caution when tracking their parcels.

With the proliferation of online platforms claiming to offer tracking services, the national postal service has emphasized the importance of exclusively utilizing its official website, <http://ep.gov.pk/>, for all tracking endeavors.

Emphasizing on the authenticity of its digital presence, Pakistan Post has made it unequivocally clear that any other website or link purporting to provide tracking services is entirely independent of its operations.

This proactive measure seeks to shield customers from falling prey to malicious entities seeking to exploit unsuspecting individuals.

Furthermore, Pakistan Post also shed light on its operational procedures regarding duty and tax collection, underscoring the absence of an online system or call center designated for such transactions.

Customers are duly cautioned against engaging with any online links, phone calls, or digital payment platforms purportedly associated with tracking orders.

The risks associated with unauthorized transactions through cash apps or credit/debit cards are explicitly highlighted, urging customers to exercise vigilance and discretion. In the wake

of escalating cyber threats and fraudulent schemes, Pakistan Post has assumed a proactive stance, issuing a clarion call for heightened awareness and diligence among its clientele.

The ramifications of falling victim to fraudulent transactions could be dire, potentially resulting in financial losses and compromised personal information.

As a beacon of trust and reliability in the realm of postal services, Pakistan Post said it remains committed to fostering a secure and transparent environment for its customers.

The advisory underscores the imperative of adhering to prescribed protocols and utilizing official channels for all tracking-related activities.

## Pakistan leads in community-based Markhor Conservation: Romina

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister's Coordinator on Climate Change, Romina Khurshid Alam on Friday announced that Pakistan was the leading the world in community-based conservation of Markhor and other wild goats and sheep that were thriving in population across the northern region of the country.

Addressing a press conference, flanked by Inspector General of Forest, Ministry of Climate Change and Environmental Coordination, Ghulam Qadir Shah on the occasion of International Markhor Day, the PM's Coordinator mentioned that the country along with the rest of the world was celebrating its national animal's day under the ambit of the United Nations to raise awareness on its conservation and significance in the ecology.

Romina Khurshid said the United Nations General Assembly on May 2nd approved the resolution to celebrate global Markhor Day to highlight that it was an important member of the natural ecosystem facing existential threats due to irresponsible attitude and anthropogenic activities of mankind.

The mountainous region of the country particularly Gilgit Baltistan, Chitral, Kohistan, Swat, Dir, and Balochistan were the habitats of more than a dozen of wild goats and sheep

including Ibex, Markhor, Urial, Himalayan Goral, Blue Sheep and Marcopolo Sheep, she added. "Markhor is an enchanting tough and highly impressive wild Capra that resides in the harsh mountainous terrain and its not only important part of the natural food chain but also a major source of livelihood for the local populace," she said.

She underlined that the sports hunting meant for conservation through trophy hunting was criticized by the masses but it was a complete conservation programme under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). "Under this programme, only 12 out of 4500 total markhors existing in our mountains are picked who are mainly aged for trophy hunting whereas the massive amount garnered from this activity is mostly spent on the improvement of their breeding spaces and habitats," Romina Khurshid Alam said.

In her message, on the occasion, to the world, the PM's Coordinator said that the government of Pakistan was proud to reckon that the people of Pakistan, public and private organisations, and professional associated to forests and wildlife especially Markhor were committed to ensure the conservation of the biodiversity and wild species.

Moreover, she said the country was also welcoming the entire world to learn from its experiences in the this regard and would share its knowledge to the countries willing to learn. She prayed to the Almighty for progress and prosperity in the efforts to conserve wildlife and forests and other sectors of the country.

In his remarks, IG Forest, Ghulam Qadir Shah mentioned that the population of Markhor had witnessed growth that had further increased the responsibility in the community. Shah added that the data pertaining to the snake-horned wild goat was available with the Ministry.

However, it had a specific territory that also includes other wild animals as well, he said. "In the 1990s, Markhor's numbers had plummeted to a drastic level whereas 18% area of Pakistan is for Markhor and snow leopard. Some 3,000-5,000 Markhors are present in Pakistan. In 2000, a policy was made for trophy hunting that allowed a quota initially of 6 and later 12 Markhors to be hunted in a season whereas this hunting quota is extended to the international level," he explained. Shah informed that during the past year, the most expensive hunting permit was sold for USD186,000, whereas 20% of this amount went to the wildlife department and rest to the community.

## Ombudsman disbursed Rs.13.4 million outstanding dues

RAWALPINDI (APP): On the directions of the Ombudsman Punjab, Major (Retd.) Azam Suleman Khan, various provincial departments have paid 13.4 million rupees in outstanding dues to 48 applicants who registered complaints of negative response to their repeated demands of due amounts from the respective departments.

According to a press release by Rawalpindi's Directorate of Public Relations (DPR) issued on Friday, eight departments of the provincial government were asked by the ombudsman to pay back due amounts of the applicants.

According to details the departments including the Secretary of Punjab Workers Welfare Board Lahore, Administrative Officer of Provincial Welfare Board Punjab, Punjab Government Servants Benevolent Fund Board Lahore, Secretary of Workers Welfare Board of the Labour and Human Resources Department, Secretary of the Department of Construction and Communication, Lahore District Labor Officer, Chief Officer Municipal Committee, District Health Authority, and District Education Authority have paid the said amounts to the concerned 48 com-

plainants from different districts. Consequently, the ombudsman issued orders to the relevant departments to promptly pay the outstanding dues to the applicants.

Following the orders, the mentioned departments paid over 1.044 million rupees in scholarships, over 1.987 million rupees in marriage grants, 3.4 million rupees in death grants, 1.279 million rupees in leave encashment, and 5.7 million rupees in monthly financial assistance. The complainants from various districts expressed their gratitude to Major (Retd.) Azam Suleman Khan for his effective role in resolving their complaints.



80% of Kabul-Kandahar highway drivers lack driver's licenses

KABUL (ToloNews): Officials from Zabul Traffic Management told TOLONews that eighty percent of drivers on the Kabul-Kandahar highway do not have a driver's license. According to the officials, to reduce traffic incidents on the Kabul-Kandahar route, they have begun the process of evaluating all drivers' documents. Ismatullah Obaid, Zabul Traffic Manager, said.

Floods leave 15 dead in Faryab, Sar-e-Pul provinces

FARYAB (Ariana News): Local officials in Faryab and Sar-e-Pul say 15 people died, a large part of agricultural land was damaged and dozens of houses were destroyed due to flash floods in these two provinces. The floods killed five members of a family in Kohistanat district of Sar-e-Pul province. At the same time, in Faryab province, 10 people were killed and 11 others injured, and dozens of houses and more than 50 acres of agricultural land were destroyed.

Afghans released from Pakistani prisons, efforts ongoing for more releases

KABUL (ToloNews): Abdul Jabbar Takhari, the consul of the Islamic Emirate in Karachi, Pakistan, said that 23 Afghan citizens, including one child, were released from Pakistan's prisons and sent back to Afghanistan yesterday (Thursday).  
Abdul Jabbar Takhari mentioned that currently 40 other Afghan citizens are imprisoned in Sindh province prisons in Pakistan, and efforts are underway to secure their release as well.  
Takhari said: "Currently, we have more than 40 prisoners in Sindh prisons. Efforts are ongoing to release them so they can return to their homeland. Afghans here are living their lives peacefully and are not facing any problems."  
Meanwhile, a number of Afghan refugees in Pakistan consider the challenges of obtaining visas as one of the main reasons for the imprisonment of Afghan migrants in the country.  
"Refugees and migrants without residence documents in Pakistan have been arrested and prosecuted by the police, and they have been transferred to Adiala prison. Despite court orders for their deportation, they have been waiting for months for their deportation," Shafiqullah, an Afghan refugee in Pakistan, told TOLONews.  
Meanwhile, some migration activists said that to address the challenges of Afghan migrants in other countries, including Pakistan, the Islamic Emirate and supporting institutions should, based on international laws, ask these countries to treat Afghan migrants fairly.  
"The current governments and the interim government of Afghanistan and international supporting institutions should, through diplomatic channels, provide social, political, and economic opportunities for migrants," said Mohammad Khan Mohammadzai, an activist for migrant rights.  
According to the statistics provided by the Islamic Emirate, over 4,000 Afghans have been released from Pakistani prisons so far, including 230 women and 250 children.

Ministry of Economy Islamic Emirate does not interfere with aid

KABUL (ToloNews): Deputy Minister of Economy Abdul Latif Nazari told TOLONews that the Islamic Emirate is not interfering in international aid.  
Nazari once again denied the SIGAR report and the reaction of the US Secretary of State regarding the Islamic Emirate's interference in aid organizations' work.  
The Deputy Minister of Economy said: "The recent SIGAR report is unrealistic and unprofessional. The reaction of the US Secretary of State and the Chairman of the US House Foreign Affairs Committee is not in line with the realities of Afghanistan. The Islamic Emirate only oversees the aid for transparency and does not interfere in the process."  
This comes two days after the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken reacted to the recent report of the US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), stating that he would review the report.  
SIGAR reported that out of the 65 organizations, 38 responded to the questionnaire, revealing that since August 2021, \$10.9 million in US aid has been paid to various departments of the Islamic Emirate for customs expenses, taxes, electricity bills, and other costs.  
The US Secretary of State said that the US works on it and will see what steps can be taken to address it.  
"Even if aid organizations do not pay taxes, they still need energy supplies; they need electricity and water for their offices, and these issues are very difficult and complicated to avoid," said Mir Shekib Mir, an economic analyst, told TOLONews.  
The SIGAR report, released four days ago, said that from August 2021 to May 2023, 38 implementing partners reported paying an estimated \$10.9 million to the current Afghan government for continued operations in Afghanistan. Of this amount, \$10.4 million was paid in taxes; \$346,839 in payments for utilities; \$176,596 in fees; and \$9,215 in customs duties.

Kyrgyzstan reports surge of terrorist groups in

KABUL (ToloNews): The Head of the National Security Committee of Kyrgyzstan reported on the increase of terrorist groups in northern Afghanistan during a security meeting in Bishkek.  
Kamchybek Tashiev, the Head of Security in Kyrgyzstan, once again expressed concerns over the increasing terrorism threat emanating from Afghanistan soil.  
According to TASS, Tashiev stated on Friday, May 24, during a security meeting of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) member states in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, that terrorist organizations and their financial backers are seeking to exploit social and political tensions worldwide. The Kyrgyz official said, "The number of terrorists in northern Afghanistan provinces is growing to pose a threat to the integrity of the southern borders of the CIS member states."  
However, he did not provide further details on which terrorist groups are growing in northern Afghanistan provinces. Member countries of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) have repeatedly expressed concerns over the increasing terrorism threat from Afghanistan soil. These countries have emphasized that preventive measures to reduce security threats from Afghanistan must be taken.  
Two days ago, on the eve of Kazakhstan's summit, members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) also emphasized the formation of an inclusive government in Afghanistan and the fight against terrorism threats from the country.

Afghanistan: Flood victims in Ghor still waiting for aid

GOR (Amu TV): Some women in Ghor province said they have not received aid nearly a week after floods devastated the area, leaving them in a dire situation.  
The women report that they lost their homes, food supplies, and livestock in the floods, and now have nothing to eat.  
The World Food Program (WFP) announced that \$14.5 million is urgently needed to assist flood victims in Afghanistan.  
Floods in the northeastern regions, as well as Ghor and Faryab provinces, have caused significant destruction, with women suffering the most.  
Some women in Ghor province are now experiencing a severe lack of food and shelter and are criticizing the aid response.  
Several affected women say that almost a week has passed without receiving any assistance for shelter or food, and they are struggling with numerous difficulties.  
"We have no house, no food, no place to stay, we have nothing. Our lives have been destroyed. I have an old man and a child, and no one has helped us. The flood took our house, our possessions, our garden, everything," said Shaima, a resident of Ghor.  
"The flood came and took everything, including our cattle and sheep. So far, no one has helped us with even a tent or any other aid," said Ayesha, another resident of Ghor.  
In Faryab province, flood victims are also criticizing the lack of aid, emphasizing that recent floods destroyed their homes and took all their possessions.  
"The flood took everything. We have no flour or oil to eat. The flood destroyed our homes," said Mohammadullah, a resident of Badghis.  
The WFP stated that \$4.5 million is needed to help 80,000 flood victims.  
The United Nations reported that recent floods have resulted in 347 deaths, over 1,600 injuries, and the destruction of more than 24,000 hectares of land.



Over 1.4m girls deprived of education in Afghanistan

KABUL (ToloNews): Edem Wosornu, director of OCHA's Operations and Advocacy Division, spoke about the deprivation of 1.4 million girls from education in Afghanistan.  
In a press conference in New York, Wosornu said that during her four-day visit to Afghanistan, she requested that the interim government authorities lift the restrictions against women.  
Edem Wosornu said the "de facto authorities" repeated the message that they need time, to which she responded, "we don't have time because the numbers speak for themselves. I was also very clear that the more we wait, the more millions of children will be affected and the more it will impact the society."  
"This is very painful. I have a younger sister who is in sixth grade this year and she asks me what to do, as she will not be able to go to school next year. It is very painful. I can't even imagine," Atifa, who was prevented from attending university, told TOLONews.  
This comes as the Islamic Emirate issued two separate decrees on September 17 and December 20, 2022, ordering the closure of all secondary and high schools for girls and all public and private universities to women and girls until further notice.

Aircraft fuel not imported: ACCI

KABUL (Ariana News): Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Investment (ACCI) says it has been about a month since T1 fuel [aircraft fuel] has not been imported to Afghanistan. The chamber expressed concern, saying that the Islamic Emirate should resolve this issue and should ask Turkmenistan to allow Afghan traders to import the fuel into the country.  
ACCI officials added that the oil purchase contract was signed with Turkmenistan and the money was also transferred, but that country does not allow the oil to enter Afghanistan.  
IEA's spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid, meanwhile, said that they have looked at this problem and want the matter to be addressed through the Ministry of Industry and Commerce.  
According to ACCI officials, not only Turkmenistan does not allow the entry of aircraft fuel, but they also have problems in transporting food, and they want the IEA to share the issue with Turkmenistan to solve it.

Kabul's presence at Doha meeting hinges on acceptance of demands: Kabir

KABUL (ToloNews): Mawlawi Abdul Kabir, the political deputy of the Prime Minister's Office, in a meeting with Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi, Minister of State for the Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar, said that the Islamic Emirate's participation in the Doha meeting is conditional upon the acceptance of the Islamic Emirate's demands.  
In the statement from the Deputy Political Office of the Prime Minister, Mawlawi Abdul Kabir referred to the third Doha meeting as a good opportunity for interaction between the Islamic Emirate and the international community.  
The Minister of State for the Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar, in his meeting with the Deputy Political Prime Minister, said that Qatar wants to play a positive role in strengthening Afghanistan's relations with the world. Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi added that without the participation of the interim government representative, the third Doha meeting will not yield any results.  
Zabiullah Mujahid, the spokesperson for the Islamic Emirate, said: "The Islamic Emirate has received their invitation and it is under review. Whenever we deem it appropriate, we will respond whether we will participate or not."  
Meanwhile, Amir Khan Muttaqi, the acting Foreign Minister, in his meeting with this delegation, presented the Islamic Emirate's position on the issues of the third Doha meeting transparently and expressed pleasure about discussing climate change, the private sector, and drugs at this meeting. According to the Deputy Spokesperson for the Foreign Ministry, Mohammed bin Abdulaziz bin Saleh al-Khulaifi, in his meeting with Muttaqi, said the conditions of the Islamic Emirate for participation in the third Doha meeting are legitimate and he also emphasized the presence of the interim government representative.  
Hafiz Zia Ahmad Takal, the Deputy Spokesperson for the Foreign Ministry,



Minister, in his meeting with this delegation, presented the Islamic Emirate's position on the issues of the Doha meeting.  
A number of political analysts discussed the need for increasing interactions between the Islamic Emirate and the international community and the observance of human rights, especially lifting restrictions on women and girls, in the Doha meeting.  
"The relations of Afghans with international countries should be discussed in [the Doha meeting], not Afghanistan's internal issues. Regarding the representative that the United Nations wants to appoint for us, it should be clarified what their authorities and responsibilities are and ultimately what they want from the people of Afghanistan," Saleem Paigir, a political analyst, told TOLONews.  
"The third Doha meeting, following the unsuccessful second meeting, is necessary for the Islamic Emirate to abandon isolation and utilize the available opportunities," said Nasser Shafiq, another political analyst.  
The third Doha meeting with the participation of special representatives of countries for Afghanistan will be held from June 30 to July 1 in Qatar. The United Nations said that the purpose of this meeting is to increase structured and coordinated international interaction with the interim government.

Russia and Uzbekistan interested in investing in Afghanistan's Oil and Gas



KABUL (ToloNews): The Ministry of Mines and Petroleum states that major companies from Russia, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan have shown interest in investing in the country's oil and gas mines.  
Homayoon Afghan, spokesperson for the ministry, says they welcome foreign companies to invest in Afghanistan's oil and gas mines.  
According to Mr. Afghan, recently two large Russian and Uzbek companies have expressed interest in investing in Afghanistan's oil and gas mines.  
The spokesperson for the Ministry of Mines and Petroleum said: "Interest from Central Asian companies in Afghanistan's oil and gas sector has greatly increased. Recently, we had meetings with Uzbek companies. The Ministry of Mines and Petroleum has announced several oil and gas sites for attracting investments, including the Herat oil and gas fields."  
Meanwhile, the Chamber of Commerce and Investment also considers attracting foreign investment in Afghanistan's oil and gas mines crucial.  
Khan Jan Alokozay, a member of the leadership board of the Chamber of Commerce and Investment, said: "Any foreign company that invests in a country requires economic and banking security to ensure their investment is safe."

Tuberculosis cases increase

KABUL (ToloNews): Since the beginning of 2024, more than 12,000 tuberculosis patients have been registered in Afghanistan, showing a 6% increase compared to last year.  
Khan Mohammad Mangal, head of the National Tuberculosis Control Program, said: "The increase does not mean that the cases have increased; we have used the GeneXpert machine (tuberculosis diagnostic device) extensively."  
Mohammad Jawad, a seventy-year-old man who has contracted tuberculosis and is hospitalized at the Afghan-Japan hospital, told TOLONews: "My chest becomes very tight, even when I drink a glass of water, I feel like my chest is going to burst."  
"My son took me to a private hospital, they examined me and said it was tuberculosis and sent me here. Here, my tests showed tuberculosis and the doctors told me to be hospitalized," said Sakina, another tuberculosis patient.  
Meanwhile, officials at the Afghan-Japan hospital said they are trying to provide necessary facilities for tuberculosis patients.  
Rahmatullah Waziri, chief physician of the Afghan-Japan hospital, told TOLONews: "We have all the medicine and facilities and we provide all the services for free."

McCaul: Catastrophic withdrawal to remain a stain on US foreign Policy

KABUL (Khaama Press): Michael McCaul, the Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee in the United States, deemed the withdrawal from Afghanistan "deadly," "chaotic," and "catastrophic."  
Mr. McCaul stated that this retreat will stain America's foreign policy for generations.  
The Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee in the United States made these remarks on Thursday during the committee's hearing with Antony Blinken, the U.S. Secretary of State.  
The Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee in the United States has described the withdrawal from Afghanistan as the beginning of a display of weakness by this country on the global stage, citing the war in Ukraine and tensions in the Middle East, stating: "It all started with the fall of Afghanistan."

He said, "After the shameful withdrawal from Afghanistan, this administration displayed weakness on the world stage."  
In a newsletter released by this committee, quoting Michael McCaul, it is stated that shortly after America's withdrawal from Afghanistan, Russia deployed its forces on the border with Ukraine.  
According to the Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee in the United States, "the world is on fire" now. According to this American official, the Middle East is on the brink of a full-scale war, and China is testing an attack on Taiwan.  
Mr. McCaul criticized the Biden administration, stating that after America's withdrawal from Afghanistan, "this administration showed its weakness on the world stage." He added, "Despite the President's promise to evacuate



everyone, we now know that over a thousand Americans and nearly 200,000 Afghan partners have been left behind."  
The Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee in the United States also condemned the Taliban's use of American cash assistance as unacceptable two days ago. Michael McCaul urged the Biden administration to take immediate action to prevent the transfer of financial funds from the US to the Taliban.



# Atta Tarar sees great investment in days ahead

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting, National Heritage and Culture Attaullah Tarar on Friday pointed out that the economy and Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) were the lifeline and redline, expressing the optimism that development process would definitely move forward in the country with great investment days ahead.

"Surely, the economy is our lifeline and redline, which is linked with the jobs of millions of people," he said, adding curbing inflation, ensuring bright future for the youth, and enhancing exports and foreign reserves were the prime objectives of the government's policies. "These are our redlines which some disgruntled elements are trying to violate and trespass and they are surely doomed to fail," the minister said while addressing a press conference flanked by Federal Minister for Commerce Jam Kamal.

Atta Tarar said that the efforts led by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to woo investors were bringing positive results with the clear signs of economic stabilization. Steps were underway to create an enabling environment for the foreign investors, he added.

Unfortunately, he said, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leadership was engaged in such steps which were against directly inimical to the national interests, thus misleading the nation at the critical juncture. "Don't be mistaken, the foreign investment will definitely come to the country and we will take all steps to ensure the welfare of the people," he said.

Regrettably, they were the same people who had made a botched attempt in the past to make the GSP Plus status of Pakistan controversial and now were resorting to a malicious campaign against the crucial platform of SIFC, the government and the armed forces just to hamper the process of national progress and development. They intentionally targeted the SIFC on social media on the day the UAE made a pledge of \$10 billion investment in Pakistan, he added.

"It is okay if they just target me or criticize my political party; but they are hell bent on sabotaging the economy, and the nation is witnessing and is fully vigilant to their misadventures." The minister said there was no precedent, till date, that a province presented a budget before the federal one. Normally, the Federal Government had to give budget estimates about receivables with allocating their specific percentages for the provinces, he added.

He regretted that the move might mislead the people while assuming that they would get 14 per cent of the receivables from the Federal Government. "Is there any law in the country; any constitution or a system? How can they estimate the federal budget and declare 14 per cent

(receivables) by themselves?" he questioned.

Atta Tarar said the opponents even did not fathom the exact meaning of the SIFC, which was, in fact, the lifeline of the country. The minister said three chief ministers were striving hard for the welfare of the people, but unfortunately one was bent upon creating chaos and anarchy.

He expressed the hope that the SIFC would bring foreign direct investment in the country. The minister said the Federal Government was committed to ensuring the progress and development of the country. "We are ready to sit and work together with all provinces."

He said that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's visit to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) was very the historic one as the affection demonstrated by UAE President Mohammed bin Zayed was unprecedented. The UAE rulers were cognizant of the fact the current leadership of Pakistan was fully capable to deliver for the nation, he added.

The minister reiterated that the SIFC was on the forefront and the world was also witnessing seriousness on the foreign policy issues. The United Arab Emirates, he said, had allocated \$10 billion for investment in Pakistan which was a landmark achievement of both the incumbent government and the SIFC.

The UAE's official news agency had also formally reported about the \$10 billion investment initiative, he added. The minister said that it seemed that the political opponents were upset due to such mega initiatives on the economic and diplomatic fronts. The successful foreign visits and positive response from the host countries was a 'nightmare' for the opponents, he added.

He said that before the setting up of the SIFC, investors had to visit multiple ministries and divisions as no one-window operation was available. Atta Tarar said PM Shehbaz during all his foreign visits had clearly indicated that Pakistan would welcome investment and not aid or loans. The international community believed that the country had great potential, immense capabilities and natural resources.

"Pakistan has 68 per cent youth bulge, natural resources and skilled human resource." The minister said that during an information technology conference on Thursday, many agreements were signed between Pakistani and UAE companies. It was an era of collaboration with the private sectors as many advanced nations had made progress through that mode of investment. The current leadership always pleaded for investment and trade during their visits abroad, he added. Atta Tarar said about one and a half years ago the dollar rate was fluctuating and exporters were facing great difficulties. He said that talks with the friendly countries like Saudi Arabia and the UAE had resulted in multiple investment agreements.

## No respect for anyone sans honour for courts: LHC CJ

F.P. Report

LAHORE: The Lahore High Court (LHC) Chief Justice Malik Shahzad Ahmad Khan has emphasised the need to avoid confrontation among institutions, saying: "Beware of those who want to sow discord".

Justice Shahzad was addressing the conclusion ceremony organised for the participants of a pre-service training course at Punjab Judicial Academy on Friday. The chief justice expressed his views that confrontation would only weaken the institutions. He clarified that the "judiciary does not want face-off" with any bar, institution, or government, however, "this gesture should be seen by all parties".

Justice Shahzad added that they will "respect everyone until the courts are given due honour, otherwise, no one should set

high expectations". He also clarified that the legal fraternity would not work above the law at any cost. The senior jurist urged the judges, who completed their pre-service training course, to realise a big responsibility on them which demands them to work fearlessly, without accepting any pressure and greed.

"Fear the God on the throne... we will not be afraid of those on the ground," he said. Justice Shahzad stressed the legal fraternity must not become the "B team" of any government, agency or institution, except for enhancing coordination to improve the system. He added that Punjab has 1.4 million cases pending in different courts as the province was facing a shortage of jurists while strikes in courts were also a big factor of the pending litigation.

He praised the legal fraternity of Punjab, especial-

ly the Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) and other Supreme Court judges, for playing a vital role in ending the strike culture at the country's courts. Justice Shahzad said that Justice Alvin Robert Cornelius — the 4th CJP and Pakistan's first Christian chief justice — was the first jurist who started the journey of realising the dream of an independent judiciary.

He went on to say that many justices like Saeeduzzaman Siddiqui, Wajihuddin Ahmed, Nasir Aslam Zahid, Ifthikhar Muhammad Chaudhry, and others played their parts to continue the journey. The LHC CJ added that the judicial system was not established to serve powerful personalities but to defend the rights of innocent, helpless and weak people. He urged the jurists to work tirelessly to realise the dream of an independent judiciary in the country.

## SBP injects over Rs241b into market

F.P. Report

KARACHI: State Bank of Pakistan, Friday, injected Rs241.350 billion in the market through reverse repo purchase and Shariah Compliant Mudarabah based Open Market Operation (OMO).

According to OMO results issued here, the SBP conducted Open Market Operation, Reverse Repo Purchase (Injection) on May 24, 2024 for tenors of 7 and 28 days. The central bank received 4 quotes for 7-day tenor amounting to Rs154 billion offered at the rate of return ranging between 22.09 to 22.11 per cent and 3 quotes for 28-day tenor amounting to Rs23.35 billion at 22.09 % annual rate of return.

The SBP, accepted all the 7 bids for 7 and 28 day tenor accumulatively amounting to Rs176.35 billion at 22.09% rate of return. Meanwhile, the central bank also conducted Shariah Compliant Mudarabah based Open Market Operation for tenors of 7 and 28 days. The SBP received 2 quotes amounting to Rs65 billion for 7-day tenor at the rate of return ranging between 22.09% to 22.10% while no bid was received for 28-day tenor. The SBP accepted all the 2 received quotes at 22.09% cut-off rate.

## Several plan nearing completion

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Senate was informed on Friday that several infrastructure projects executed by the National Highway Authority are nearing completion in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

This was stated Minister for Parliamentary Affairs Azam Nazeer Tarar while responding to a question during the Question Hour in the House today which met in Islamabad today with Deputy Chairman Syedaal Khan in the chair. He said these projects include dualization of Indus highway from Sarai Gambila to Kohat, upgradation and dualization of motorway link from Kohat via Jand, construction of Peshawar Northern By-pass, Chakdara - Fatehpur Highway and upgradation of Pezu to Tank road in Dera Ismail Khan.

The Minister also informed the House that National Highway Authority is planning to execute new schemes in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa which include construction of Malakand Tunnel, Muzaffarabad-Mansehra road, Yark Interchange, interchange on Hazara motorway to connect Abbottabad and Sherwan road, Khwazakhela and Besham expressway, Motorway from Ghulam Khan to Esa Khel, Tanawal interchange on Hazara motorway and tunnel joining Khaki with Oghi in Mansehra district.

Responding to a calling attention notice, Minister for Power Sardar Awais Ahmad Leghari has reiterated Federal Government's commitment to fund solarization of agricultural tube-wells in Balochistan. He said as soon as the Balochistan government formulates a mechanism for distribution of funds to the consumers, the Federal Government will start implementation of the initiative.



ISLAMABAD: Group photo of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif with Chinese Ambassador in Pakistan and representatives of Chinese companies working in Pakistan.

## IHC, LHC issue notices to Pemra on court reporting ban

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD / LAHORE: The Lahore and Islamabad high courts on Friday issued notices to the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (Pemra) after hearing petitions challenging its notifications prohibiting television channels from airing news of court proceedings and directing them to only report on written orders.

The Lahore High Court (LHC), during the hearing of pleas conducted by Justice Abid Aziz Shaikh, also ordered the electronic media watchdog to respond to its notice on May 29. The notice comes after the electronic media watchdog issued two notifications ordering TV channels to not run reporting of court proceedings and for reporters to only report courts' written orders' on May 21.

It should be noted that the proceedings of the petition in the LHC and IHC are not being reported following the Pemra ban. One petition has been filed by Azhar Siddiq and the other was filed by Advocate Samra Malik. Petitioners argued that Pemra's ban is in violation of Article 10-A, 19 and 19-A of the Constitution of Pakistan. One of the pleas also requested the court to reject the prosecutor's plea and declare it "inadmissible".

Article 10-A pertains to the right to fair trial, while 19 and 19-A relates to freedom of speech and right to information. The petitioners mentioned Pemra and the federal government as parties in its pleas. Petitions asked the LHC to declare the notification "null and void", seeking its suspension until a verdict is pronounced. Another petitioner, Advocate Nadeem Sarwar, has also filed a plea, which has not yet been fixed for hearing.

The petitions, challenging the Pemra ban, were filed in Sindh, Lahore and Islamabad high courts as well as the Supreme Court. In a notification issued on May 21, the media watchdog directed all satellite news channel licensees that no content, including commentary, opinions, or suggestions about the potential fate of such sub-judice matter which tends to prejudice the determination by a court shall be aired.

"Further, TV Channels are directed to refrain from airing tickers/headlines with regard to court proceedings till the final order," it added. All satellite TV channel licensees were also directed to ensure strict compliance to the Pemra laws in line with the judgment of the Supreme Court "in Suo Moto Case No. 28 of 2018 (reported as 2019 PLD SC 1) in letter and spirit". The media watchdog also warned of legal action in case of any

violation.

Meanwhile, the IHC also issued notice to Pemra and secretary information on the petition by the IHC Court Reporter's Association challenging its decision. PFUJ moved the IHC against Pemra's decision with the petition filed by Vice Chairman Islamabad Bar Council Adil Aziz Qazi. The hearing was conducted by IHC Chief Justice Aamer Farooq who also restrained Pemra from taking disciplinary action against TV channels. The court also issued a notice on the miscellaneous application to suspend the watchdog's notification. The court adjourned the hearing on petition till May 28. On the other hand, the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists' (PFUJ) also moved the IHC against Pemra, requesting to annul the media watchdog's notification banning reporting of judicial proceedings.

"Pemra should be restrained from issuing any notification or order against fundamental human rights," the plea read. PFUJ maintained that Pemra violated the public's right to access information, while it also misinterpreted the SC judgment. The plea also stated that Pemra's notification violated Article 19 and 19A of the Constitution while it is also against the spirit of PEMRA Ordinance 2002.

## Special status of Jammu and Kashmir FO trashes Indian SC order

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has rejected the fresh order of the Indian Supreme Court upholding its earlier ruling that had endorsed the Indian government's unilateral decision of revoking the special status of Jammu and Kashmir by abrogating Article 370 of the Constitution through legislation in 2019.

At her weekly news briefing here on Friday, Foreign Office spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch said: "We reject the fresh order of the Indian Supreme Court just as we had rejected the earlier order of December 11, 2023. Two verdicts fail to recognize the internationally recognized disputed nature of Jammu and Kashmir... Indian Supreme Court judgments cannot distract the international community's attention from the gross and systemic human rights violation in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir." She said the Kashmiris had an inalienable right to self-determination as enshrined in the UN Security

Council's resolutions. India has no right to make unilateral decisions on the status of disputed territory against the will of parties in the dispute - Kashmiris and Pakistan, she added.

The FO spokesperson welcomed the announcement by Ireland, Spain and Norway to recognise the Palestine state, following a similar announcement by Bahamas, Tobago, Jamaica and Barbados, and called it a milestone in the decades-old quest of the Palestinian people for their right to self-determination.

She said that the Gaza genocide and dire humanitarian situation underlined the urgency of the establishment of an independent Palestine state with Quds Al-Sharif as the capital. The spokesperson told the media that Palestine state was recognized by an overwhelming majority of UN member states which necessitated the UN Security Council to move positively in that direction.

Highlighting the diplomatic engagements during the previous week, she mentioned Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's visit to

the United Arab Emirates where he met President Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, besides interacting with the investors and entrepreneurs.

In his meeting with the UAE president, the prime minister reiterated Pakistan's commitment to ensure meaningful implementation of investment cooperation agreements in energy, port operations projects, wastewater treatment, food security, logistics, minerals, and banking & financial services.

The UAE president also committed that his country would invest \$10 billion in multiple sectors in Pakistan.

She also mentioned the prime minister's visit to Iran to offer condolence on the demise of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian and others. During the visit, the prime minister met with the Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and Acting President Mohammad Mokhber to offer condolence on behalf of the government and the people of Pakistan.

## No sign of attack on Raisi's copter: Iran's military

TEHRAN (AP): The helicopter carrying Iran's late President Ebrahim Raisi caught fire soon after it crashed into a mountain and there was no sign it was attacked, state media reported, citing the military's crash investigators.

The statement from the general staff of the armed forces in charge of investigating the crash was read on state television. The first statement on the crash did not lay blame but said more details would come after further investigation. The crash Sunday killed Raisi, the country's foreign minister and six other people.

The general staff's statement said the communications between the control tower and the crew of the helicopter before the crash contained nothing suspicious. It said the last communication of the crashed helicopter was between it and two helicopters accompanying it some 90 seconds before the crash. There was no sign of anything shot at the helicopter and its flight path did not change, the statement said.

## Putin wants Ukraine ceasefire on current frontlines

MOSCOW/LONDON (Reuters): Russian President Vladimir Putin is ready to halt the war in Ukraine with a negotiated ceasefire that recognises the current battlefield lines, four Russian sources told Reuters, saying he is prepared to fight on if Kyiv and the West do not respond.

Three of the sources, familiar with discussions in Putin's entourage, said the veteran Russian leader had expressed frustration to a small group of advisers about what he views as Western-backed attempts to stymie negotiations and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's decision to rule out talks. "Putin can fight for as long as it takes, but Putin is also ready for a ceasefire — to freeze the war," said another of the four, a senior Russian source who has worked with Putin and has knowledge of top level conversations in the Kremlin. He, like the others cited in this story, spoke on condition of anonymity given the matter's sensitivity.

For this account, Reuters spoke to a total of five people who work with or have worked with Putin at a senior level in the political and business worlds. The fifth source did not comment on freezing the war at the current frontlines. Asked about the Reuters report at a

news conference in Belarus on Friday, Putin said peace talks should restart.

"Let them resume," he said, adding that negotiations should be based on "the realities on the ground" and on a plan agreed during a previous attempt to reach a deal in the first weeks of the war. "Not on the basis of what one side wants," he said. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said on X that the Russian leader was trying to derail a Ukrainian-initiated peace summit in Switzerland next month by using his entourage to send out "phony signals" about his alleged readiness to halt the war. "Putin currently has no desire to end his aggression against Ukraine. Only the principled and united voice of the global majority can force him to choose peace over war," said Kuleba.

Mykhailo Podolyak, a Ukrainian presidential adviser, said Putin wanted Western democracies to accept defeat. The appointment last week of economist Andrei Belousov as Russia's defence minister was seen by some Western military and political analysts as placing the Russian economy on a permanent war footing in order to win a protracted conflict. It followed sustained battlefield pressure and territorial advances by Russia in recent weeks.

However, the sources said that Putin, re-elected in March for a new six-year term, would rather use Russia's current momentum to put the war behind him. They did not directly comment on the new defence minister. Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov, in response to a request for comment, said the country did not want "eternal war." Based on their knowledge of conversations in the upper ranks of the Kremlin, two of the sources said Putin was of the view that gains in the war so far were enough to sell a victory to the Russian people.

Europe's biggest ground conflict since World War Two has cost tens of thousands of lives on both sides and led to sweeping Western sanctions on Russia's economy. Three sources said Putin understood any dramatic new advances would require another nationwide mobilisation, which he didn't want, with one source, who knows the Russian president, saying his popularity dipped after the first mobilisation in September 2022. The national call up spooked part of the population in Russia, triggering hundreds of thousands of draft age men to leave the country. Polls showed Putin's popularity falling by several points.

Peskov said Russia had no need for

mobilisation and was instead recruiting volunteer contractors to the armed forces. The prospect of a ceasefire, or even peace talks, currently seems remote. Zelenskyy has repeatedly said peace on Putin's terms is a non-starter. He has vowed to retake lost territory, including Crimea, which Russia annexed in 2014. He signed a decree in 2022 that formally declared any talks with Putin "impossible." One of the sources predicted no agreement could happen while Zelenskyy was in power, unless Russia bypassed him and struck a deal with Washington. However, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, speaking in Kyiv last week, told reporters he did not believe Putin was interested in serious negotiations.

The Swiss peace summit in June is aimed at unifying international opinion on how to end the war. The talks were convened at the initiative of Zelenskyy who has said Putin should not attend. Switzerland has not invited Russia. Moscow has said the talks are not credible without it being there. Ukraine and Switzerland want Russian allies including China to attend. Speaking in China on May 17, Putin said Ukraine may use the Swiss talks to get a broader group of countries to back Zelenskyy's demand

for a total Russian withdrawal, which Putin said would be an imposed condition rather than a serious peace negotiation.

The Swiss foreign ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment. In response to questions for this story, a US State Department spokesperson said any initiative for peace must respect Ukraine's "territorial integrity, within its internationally recognised borders" and described Russia as the sole obstacle to peace in Ukraine. "The Kremlin has yet to demonstrate any meaningful interest in ending its war, quite the opposite," the spokesperson said. Kyiv says Putin, whose team repeatedly denied he was planning a war before invading Ukraine in 2022, cannot be trusted to honour any deal.

Both Russia and Ukraine have also said they fear the other side would use any ceasefire to re-arm. Kyiv and its Western backers are banking on a \$61 billion US aid package and additional European military aid to reverse what Zelenskyy described to Reuters this week as "one of the most difficult moments" of the full scale war. As well as shortages of ammunition after US delays in approving the package,

Ukraine has admitted it is struggling to recruit enough troops and last month lowered the age for men who can be drafted to 25 from 27.

Putin's insistence on locking in any battlefield gains in a deal is non-negotiable, all of the sources suggested. Putin would, however, be ready to settle for what land he has now and freeze the conflict at the current front lines, four of the sources said. "Putin will say that we won, that NATO attacked us and we kept our sovereignty, that we have a land corridor to Crimea, which is true," one of them said, giving their own analysis.

Freezing the conflict along current lines would leave Russia in possession of substantial chunks of four Ukrainian regions he formally incorporated into Russia in September 2022, but without full control of any of them. Such an arrangement would fall short of the goals Moscow set for itself at the time, when it said the four of Ukraine's regions — Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson — now belonged to it in their entirety. Peskov said that there could be no question of handing back the four regions which were now permanently part of Russia according to its own constitution.