

PTI stages rallies, protests  
F.P. Report

KARACHI: Following the call of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), protests and rallies were held across Sindh, as well as the rest of the country, demanding the release of PTI founder and Chairman Imran Khan. In Karachi, a rally, led by PTI Sindh President Haleem Adil Sheikh, took place in various parts of the city. Key PTI Sindh leaders and others, participated in the rally.



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# Pakistan has special place in China's foreign policy: Liu

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: China's Minister of Central Committee of the International Department of Communist Party of China (IDCPC), Liu Jianchao on Friday said as its "iron brother and time-tested friend", China accorded a special place to Pakistan in its foreign policy and desired to strengthen the all-weather strategic cooperative partnership.

The senior Chinese leader expressed these views in a meeting with Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Mohammad Ishaq Dar, held here in Islamabad. Liu expressed satisfaction at the steady pace of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and said China would extend full cooperation to Pakistan for the timely implementation of all ongoing and new CPEC projects.

He also lauded the political parties of Pakistan for their steadfast support to CPEC and China-Pakistan friendship. He reiterated China's keen desire to further enhance linkages between the Communist Party of China and the political parties of Pakistan.

Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar appreciated the positive contribution of CPEC to Pakistan's socio-economic development, and progress and prosperity. He underscored that as the flagship project of President China's Belt and Road Initiative, CPEC had led to major transformation in energy security.

Lauding the unanimous political consensus on CPEC in the two countries, Dar expressed Pakistan's firm resolve to building upon the achievements of CPEC and for its high quality development in its Phase-II. The two sides agreed to maintain the momentum of high-level engagements and to further enhance communication on important regional and global issues.

Meanwhile, a senior Chinese official also advised Pakistani political leadership to shun differences as "internal stability is imperative for any nation to develop". "In a turbulent world of rising uncertainties, stability within the country is essential for development. Faced with complex internal and external challenges, Pakistan is navigating carefully through turbulent rivers," Minister of the International Department of the Communist Party of China (IDCPC) Liu Jianchao said.

Jianchao made the remarks as he co-chaired — along with Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar — the third meeting of the Pakistan-China Joint

## Pak-China friendship vital for peace, development of both countries: PM

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Friday said that the Pakistan-China friendship was indispensable for peace and development of both the countries as well as the region and beyond.

Emphasizing on historic and unique significance of bilateral relations between the two countries, the prime minister reaffirmed that the Pakistan-China friendship was time-tested and enduring. He was talking to Minister of International Department of the Communist Party of China (IDCPC) Liu Jianchao who along with a delegation called on him at the PM House.

While welcoming the Chinese dignitary and members of his delegation to Pakistan, the prime minister congratulated him as well as political leaders of Pakistan on the successful organization of Pakistan-China Political Parties Forum and the 3rd round of Joint Consultative Mechanism (JCM) of Political Parties on China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

He said it was a matter of great satisfaction that there was complete political consensus in both countries on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. Reflecting on his recent visit to China where he held fruitful and productive meetings with President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Qiang, the prime minister commended the vision of the Chinese leadership for the continued growth of Pakistan-China strategic relations and the shared desire of both countries to work together to ensure success of the CPEC and its upgradation to the next phase. He underlined that early completion and implementation of all ongoing and new CPEC projects would contribute significantly towards Pakistan's economic growth and inclusive development. Appreciating the role of IDCPC in the deepening of bilateral ties, he stressed the importance of enhanced exchanges between the political parties of two countries for experience-sharing, capacity building and people-centered governance. He lauded the CPC for its full support to strengthening of China's iron-clad brotherhood with Pakistan. Liu Jianchao, in his remarks, stressed that Pakistan and China were iron brothers, strategic partners and most-trusted friends. He further emphasized that China accorded a special place to Pakistan in its foreign policy and would continue to support Pakistan's economic development and jointly work for the upgraded version of CPEC. The prime minister hosted a banquet in honour of Liu Jianchao and the accompanying Chinese delegation which was also attended by representatives of major political parties.

## Chinese Minister meets COAS

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: Minister of the International Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (IDCPC), Liu Jianchao on Friday met Chief of Army Staff (COAS), General Syed Asim Munir here at General Headquarters.

During the meeting, they discussed matters of mutual interest, including regional peace and stability, and reviewed progress on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), an Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) news release said. The COAS reaffirmed Pakistan's unwavering commitment to the strategic partnership with China and pledged full support for the successful implementation of CPEC, a flagship project of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Liu Jianchao highlighted that he is visiting Pakistan as a follow up of the successful meetings between the leadership of the two countries in China. He emphasized the significance of the longstanding brotherly relations between the two nations and expressed satisfaction with the progress achieved on CPEC, reiterating China's commitment to its timely completion. The visiting dignitary also commended Pakistan's efforts in maintaining regional peace and stability, acknowledging the support of the Pakistan Armed Forces in providing security to Chinese nationals and projects in Pakistan.

Consultative Mechanism (JCM) of the Political Parties on the CPEC. Leaders belonging to all major political parties, including the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), Pakistan

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ISLAMABAD: China's Minister of Central Committee of International Department of Communist Party of China, Liu Jianchao called on Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

## Five troops martyred at Kurram

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: An improvised explosive device exploded on a vehicle of Security Forces in general area Sadda, Kurram District.

Resultantly, five brave sons of soil: Havildar Aqeel Ahmed (age: 33 years, resident of District Okara), Lance Naik Muhammad Tafeer (age: 30 years, resident of District Poonch), Sepoy Anosh Rufun (age: 24 years, resident of District Attock), Sepoy Muhammad Azam Khan (age: 26 years, resident of District Haripur) and Sepoy Haroon William (age: 29 years, resident of Islamabad Capital Territory), made the ultimate sacrifice and embraced Shahadat.

Sanitization of the area is being carried out to eliminate any terrorists present in the area and perpetrators of this heinous act will be brought to justice, Security forces of Pakistan are determined to eliminate the menace of terrorism and such sacrifices of our brave soldiers further strengthen our resolve.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Governor, Faisal Karim Kundi here Friday condoled with the bereaved families of five troops of security forces martyred in landmine explosion at Sadda in Kurram tribal district.

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Governor, Faisal Karim Kundi prayed for highest ranks of martyrs and expressed sympathies with the members of the bereaved families. He said that sacrifices of our security forces in fight against terrorism would not go waste.

Faisal Karim Kundi held sacrifices of martyred troops of security forces for peace in high esteem. The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Governor, Faisal Karim Kundi said that the entire nation stand with our brave security forces in fight against terrorism.

## President pays tribute to Shaheed BB

F.P. Report

LARKANA: President Asif Ali Zardari on Friday paid tribute to Shaheed Benazir Bhutto on her 71st birth anniversary and termed her as a symbol of democracy.

Celebrating her life and legacy at a ceremony held at the President House in Naudero, the president cut a cake to mark the occasion. The president hailed Benazir Bhutto's courageous struggle for the party and the nation after the martyrdom of her father, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.

He acknowledged her as his political mentor, saying he learned politics from her and considered himself her student. President Zardari also vowed to continue the mission of the martyrs, and work towards a democratic and prosperous Pakistan. The ceremony was also attended by President Zardari's sister, Faryal Talpur, and other party leaders.

## US destroys 6 Houthi drones

WASHINGTON (AFP): The US military said that it had destroyed four Houthi nautical drones and two aerial ones over the Red Sea off Yemen. The Iran-backed Houthis have launched scores of drones and missiles at commercial vessels in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden since November, describing the attacks as being in support of Palestinians during the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip.

## Exporters are back bone of national economy: PM

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Friday said the country's economic growth was directly linked with the fast sustainable growth of exporters.

He was talking to a delegation of exporters, which called on him here at the PM House. The prime minister said the exporters being the back bone of national economy, were extremely important for the government as they were playing a key role in the country's development.

The country's economy would attain sustainable growth when the export sector showed fast growth, he added. PM Shehbaz said the government was providing all possible facilities to promote the non-traditional exports. He expressed the government's resolve to take all the decisions in the larger interest of the people and the country.

The government, he said, was taking measures to boost the export to GDP ratio. The payment of sales

tax refund to the traders and industrialists was also being ensured timely, he added. The prime minister warned the relevant authorities that no laxity would be tolerated in that regard.

He directed the federal ministers to make consultation with the delegation to ensure resolution of all their issues. The exporters expressed gratitude to the prime minister and the government for announcing a historic cut in the electricity prices for the industrial sector, terming it a breath of fresh air.

They also expressed their full confidence in the government's economic policies and assured their all-out cooperation. They said they would fully support the government in taking action against tax evaders and those adversely affecting the revenue for national exchequer. Minister for Finance and Revenue, Muhammad Aurangzeb, Minister for Petroleum, Musadik Malik, Power Minister Awaiz Ahmed Khan Leghari, Minister of State for

Finance Ali Pervaiz Malik, Minister of State for Information Technology Shaza Fatima Khawaja, Salman Ahmed and relevant high officials attended the meeting.

**Shehbaz vows all-out support for KP's development:** Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said the federal government would provide utmost assistance and resources for the welfare of the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

He expressed these views in a meeting with Governor KP Faisal Karim Kundi, who called on him here at the PM House. The meeting discussed the matters related to the development of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

Meanwhile, Minister for Industries and Production Rana Tanvir Hussain called on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif at the PM House. They discussed the overall political situation of the country. Member of the National Assembly Dr Shazra Mansab was also present in the meeting.

## Will not accept loadshedding exceeding 12 hours: KP CM

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur has once again threatened the federal government that he would not accept the power outages exceeding from 12 hours per day in his province.

CM Gandapur chaired a meeting on the issue of loadshedding on Friday in which he was briefed regarding the power outages in province and recovery made by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The chief minister was briefed that an amount of Rs1 billion was recovered with the help of KP government.

The CM was told that zero loadshedding was

promised during the Eid days but it wasn't implemented. "Most of the areas witnessed the power outages from 12 to 18 hours during Eid days. As many as 81 protest demonstrations were staged in the province against the loadshedding since May 1," the CM was briefed.

CM Gandapur said that the provincial government is providing complete support to the centre over the issues of power sector but it is really unfortunate that the federal government isn't fulfilling its promises. "The continuous loadshedding has made the life of a common man miserable," said Gandapur.

He said that the federal government should address

the issue immediately otherwise the situation could get out of control. The loadshedding dispute between Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and centre intensified on Wednesday as Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur entered a grid station in his hometown of Dera Ismail Khan and restored the power supply.

The firebrand KP CM also issued his own loadshedding schedule limited to 12 hours per day. Ali Amin Gandapur had slammed the federal government for the rampant electricity loadshedding in the province after protests erupted in major cities and towns on the third day of Eidul Azha amid ongoing heatwave.

## Balochistan unveils Rs930b surplus budget

F.P. Report

QUETTA: Balochistan government on Friday unveiled the Rs930 billion surplus budget for next fiscal year 2024-25, allocating a major chunk for development sector. Balochistan Finance Minister Shoaib Ahmed Noshervani presented the budget in the provincial assembly.

The minister the salaries of the government employees of Grade 1 to 16 would be jacked up by 25 percent while the officers from Grade 17 to 22 would get an increase of 22pc. The government has also proposed 15pc increase in pensions of the retired government employees.

The provincial government has set aside Rs321 billion for development sector. For the first time in the history of Balochistan,



70 percent of the approved development projects have been made part of the budget proposal. It has earmarked Rs149 billion for education sector, which is significantly higher than previous fiscal year. It has set aside Rs118 billion for construction of schools, which will create 535 new

jobs. This year, the provincial government is giving priority to health sector as it has increased the budget for it by 30 percent to Rs67 billion. It aims at creating 242 new jobs in this sector. The government has allocated Rs84 billion for law and order in the province while 7,000 new jobs in police and levies departments would be created. It has set aside Rs6.81 billion for agriculture sector. Meanwhile, the non-development budget for this sector stands at Rs16 billion. The provincial government has allocated Rs5 billion for fisheries sector. It has also allocated Rs1.2 billion for food department, Rs2 billion for forest department, Rs3.7 billion for industries and Rs7 billion for solar energy.

## Court blocks Kejriwal's release from prison

NEW DELHI (AFP): An Indian court on Friday stopped the release of one of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's chief opponents from jail, a day after the latter was granted bail in a long-running corruption case, reports said.

Arvind Kejriwal, the chief minister of Delhi and the leader of the opposition Aam Aadmi party, denies the charges as a "political conspiracy" by Modi and his Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). He was released from detention to campaign partway through India's weeks-long general election but returned to jail after voting ended this month.

A trial court ordered his release late Thursday, but before he could walk out of jail on Friday the country's top economic crimes investigative agency, the Enforcement Directorate (ED), appealed to the Delhi High Court. It suspended his release until it could decide on the appeal, local media reported.

The decision could come in "two-three days", legal news portal Live Law posted on social media platform X. Kejriwal is one of several opposition leaders in India under criminal investigation over various corruption-related probes, which Modi's opponents say are being used by the premier to weaken any potential challengers. The 55-year-old has been chief minister of Delhi, the region which includes the capital New Delhi, for nearly a decade.

## Govt to fulfil promises made with PPP: Bilawal

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Key partner in the incumbent government, Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari on Friday threw shade at the ruling Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), again, for "not consulting his party for budget FY25".

Bilawal, while addressing an event on the occasion of Benazir Bhutto's 71st birthday in Karachi's Lyari Town on Friday, admitted that the "incumbent government is making all-out efforts to steer the country out of the economic crisis". The former foreign minister, however, recommended the ruling Nawaz-led party to take its allies in confidence to finalise the federal budget. He added that the budget 2024-25 could have been better if the federal government had consulted with the PPP.

Political tensions rose between the coalition partners over the matter of the federal budget as the PPP blamed the ruling PML-N for making unilateral decisions in policy-making without consulting with its key allies. Bilawal, the scion of the Bhutto family, also shed light on prevailing political instability and expressed sorrow, saying: "Politicians from Islamabad are not ready to hold talks and politics of hate is being spread in the society. Political parties are harming Pakistan for their ego."

Despite differences on many fronts, he pinned hopes on Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's adminis-



tration for fulfilling its promises with the PPP. He showed high expectations for finding a political solution to the ongoing crisis and said that the "PPP representatives are holding negotiations" with the federal government in Islamabad. The PPP chairman added: "Democratic powers should only hold talks with democratic powers to improve our democratic system."

He suggested parties play a positive role in the betterment of the country via parliament. Bilawal was of the view that the country would come out of all crises whenever parties were united to make parliament the most powerful institution. Bilawal promised that his party would never promote political infighting and use parliament as a platform to address public issues.

"All powers should interpret a message who think to end the Peoples Party by martyring Benazir Bhutto. Benazir is still alive among us and she is still forming and toppling governments from Garhi Khuda Bakshh," Bilawal said, adding that his party

would fulfil Benazir's dreams. He praised Karachiites for giving a heavy mandate to the PPP for the third time. "I have asked Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah to pay special attention to resolve issues of Karachi citizens," he added.

He said that they witnessed positive outcomes of efforts made by CM Murad's administration to maintain law and order in Karachi. Highlighting the menace of power cut issue, the PPP stalwart said that "Sindh, Balochistan and South Punjab citizens are suffering 18-hour loadshedding". Giving a solution, he vowed to provide free-of-charge solar energy facilities to the deserving masses via a new project.

He added that the provincial government would also provide solar panels at subsidised rates to those citizens who could afford them. He also announced that the solar project would be expanded to across the province in five years. The former FM said that the Sindh government would also launch projects to provide jobs to the youth.





LAHORE: Provincial Minister for Minority Affairs Ramesh Singh Arora is welcoming the Sikh pilgrims from India to participate in Maharaja Ranjit Singh's anniversary at Wagah Border. —APP Photo

## Canadian High Commissioner meets Interior minster

ISLAMABAD (APP): Canadian High Commissioner Leslie Scanlon met Interior Minister and Narcotics Control Mohsin Naqvi on Friday. On her arrival at the Ministry of Interior, Mohsin Naqvi warmly welcomed the Canadian High Commissioner.

During the meeting, they discussed issues of mutual interest including bilateral relations of two countries while both sides also discussed issues of border security, immigration, ille-

gal human trafficking and drug trafficking.

Mohsin Naqvi said Pakistan is making every possible effort to secure its border and making all out efforts to stop illegal movement and human trafficking adding that in this regard, all steps are being taken to increase the efficiency of the relevant institutions.

"We are also innovating and improving the immigration system," he added.

The minister said that further improvements are being made in the electron-

ic travel authorization system through which visa will be issued within 24 hours.

He told the Canadian High Commissioner that Pakistan can provide skilled manpower to Canada in various fields and Migration of skilled manpower to Canada will reduce cases of illegal human trafficking.

Mohsin Naqvi told the High Commissioner that all minorities living in Pakistan have equal rights under the Constitution of Pakistan and added that protection of the

rights of minorities is the responsibility of the Government of Pakistan.

Pakistan is providing all possible facilities for the migration of Afghan refugees to Canada, he added. The Canadian High Commissioner thanked the Interior minister for his cooperation in various fields.

High officials of the Canadian High Commission, Federal Interior Secretary Khurram Ali Agha and senior officials of the ministry were present in the meeting.

## IESCO examines 1,310,874 meters across all six circles

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Electric Supply Company (IESCO) in the light of government and the Ministry of Energy Power Division directives has checked 1,310,874 meters since September 7, 2023 during anti-power theft campaign in all its six operational circles.

Sharing details, Chief Executive Officer of IESCO, Dr Muhammad Amjad said that fines amounting to Rs 627.75 million have also been imposed on the power pilferers. Some 1,872 FIRs have also been registered against the electricity thieves while 1450 individuals have been arrested so far.

Dr Amjad said that a sum of Rs 3,338.66 billion has also been recovered from 130,019 running and dead defaulters during the campaign.

He said crackdown against electricity theft and the recovery of dues would continue across all operational circles, including Islamabad, Rawalpindi City, Rawalpindi Cantonment, Attock, Chakwal, and Jhelum, with the cooperation of the FIA, police, and other law enforcement agencies.

Dr Amjad urged consumers to pay their electricity dues on time and support IESCO in this national campaign against electricity theft. He also urged the consumers to report electricity theft to the relevant SDO complaint office, the IESCO helpline at 118, or the Complaint and Monitoring Cell at 051-9252933-34.

## CM distributes certificates among sanitary workers

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif on Friday paid tributes to chief officers and distributed commendation certificates among the sanitary workers on account of making excellent cleanliness arrangements on Eid, at the Chief Minister's office.

While addressing the ceremony Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz said, "I am happy to sit among the heroes. I did not spend Eid with my family and oversaw cleanliness arrangement across Punjab as well as undertook its monitoring. I am pleased that Allah Almighty has blessed me with an opportunity to serve the people across Punjab."

The CM said, "Everyone acknowledge and appreciate on making excellent cleanliness arrangements on Eid in Punjab. The roads were washed in such a manner as if to clean a house, and rose water was sprinkled on the roads to do away with the stinking smell. We have to keep our country, province, and city neat and clean."

Maryam Nawaz said, "We are introducing waste management system in all the districts of Punjab and will provide resources as well. Cleanliness is observed not only in the urban areas but in the rural areas as well."

Punjab Local Government Minister Zeeshan Rafique, while giving a briefing on the "Suthra Punjab Mission", apprised that 1 lakh 80 thousand tonnes of waste was disposed of on all 3 days of Eid. The animal waste of 1.8 mil-

lion animals was disposed of in an appropriate manner.

More than 32 thousand biodegradable bags were distributed and 55 thousand sanitary workers performed their duties in a severe hot weather, he added.

Provincial Information Minister Azma Zahid Bokhari, Local Government Minister Zeeshan Rafique, Special Assistants - Zeeshan Malik, Rashid Nasrullah - , MPA Sania Ashiq, Chairman LWMC Malik Bilal Zulfiqar Khokhar, Principal Secretary to CM Sajid Zafar Daal, secretaries, officials of local government and LWMC participated while commissioners of Faisalabad, DG Khan Bahawalpur, Sargodha, Rawalpindi, Sahiwal and Gujranwala participated via video link.

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## Minister for providing egg-laying hens to farmers

LAHORE (APP): Provincial Minister for Agriculture, Livestock and Dairy Development Syed Ashiq Hussain Kirmani on Friday directed the Rawalpindi Poultry Research Institute (RPRI) to resume its programme of providing egg-laying hens to farmers at subsidised rates.

During his visit to the institute, the minister said, "We are committed to supporting our farmers and promoting the poultry industry in the province. Resuming this programme will help reduce the cost of production for farmers and increase egg production, making eggs more afford-

able for consumers."

The minister emphasised the need to increase the growth of egg-laying hens to meet the demand of eggs in the province. He directed the RPRI to take steps to increase the growth of egg-laying hens, including improving breeding and nutrition programmes.

## Police arrest killer of mother, three sisters

LAHORE (APP): In the tragic incident of a mother and her three daughters being murdered in the Kabirwala area of Khanewal, Punjab Police took timely action and arrested the accused son, Muhammad Abbas, from Mailsi within two hours.

IG Punjab Dr. Usman Anwar took notice of the incident and sought the report from RPO Multan. He also assigned DPO Khanewal Ismail-ur-Rehman Kharak the task of apprehending the suspect as soon as possible. Under the supervision of the DPO, Khanewal Police utilized modern technology and professional expertise to arrest the suspect.

According to details, upon receiving information about the incident, DPO Khanewal Ismail-ur-Rehman Kharak reached the crime scene at Basti Loharan Wali near Pul Chaun. Crime scene units and forensic teams collected evidence.

The victims were identified as Hasina Bibi (50), Samina Bibi (35), Amna Bibi (20), and Aleema Bibi (15) while the ruthless accused, Muhammad Abbas, aged 20-22, was the real son and brother of the victims. The accused Abbas shot his mother and sisters with a 12-bore repeater and fled the scene.

DPO Khanewal Ismail-ur-Rehman Kharak said that legal proceedings would be completed promptly, and the arrested suspect would be brought to justice.

## ANF seizes drugs from suspect

KARACHI (APP): The Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) in an operation in Karachi, apprehended a suspect following the recovery of drugs in a vehicle in the Sohrah Goth area.

An ANF spokesperson reported on Friday that 210 kg of hashish was seized from the vehicle. The accused, a resident of Quetta, was detained during the operation. The arrested accused has been charged under the Anti-Narcotics Act, and further investigation is underway.

## 9 killed, 1535 injured in road mishaps

LAHORE (APP): At least nine persons were killed and 1535 sustained injuries in 1401 Road Traffic Crashes (RTCs) in all 37 districts of Punjab during the last 24 hours.

Out of these, 691 people with serious injuries were shifted to different hospitals, while 844 victims with minor injuries were treated at the incident site by Rescue Medical Teams.

Furthermore, the analysis showed that 771 drivers, 46 underage drivers, 159 pedestrians, and 614 passengers were among the victims of road traffic crashes. The statistics showed that 310 RTCs were reported in Lahore which affected 353 persons placing the Provincial Capital at top of the list followed by Faisalabad 108 with 111 victims and at third Gujranwala with 86 RTCs and 86 victims.

According to the data 1232 motorbikes, 69 autorickshaws, 150 motorcars, 26 vans, 13 passenger buses, 11 truck.

## 455 Sikh pilgrims to attend Ranjit Singh's anniversary

LAHORE (APP): A group of 455 Sikh pilgrims from India arrived in Pakistan through the Wagah border to participate in the Maharaja Ranjit Singh's death anniversary.

They were warmly welcomed and presented bouquets by Additional Secretary Shrines Saif Ullah Khokhar and Provincial Minister for Minority Affairs and President of the Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (PSGPC), Sardar Ramesh Singh Arora.

The Sikh pilgrims expressed immense joy upon arriving in Pakistan, stating that it was their good fortune to visit the land of their Gurus. Sardar Ramesh Singh Arora, speaking to media representatives, highlighted that the Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB) had made excellent arrangements to

host pilgrims from India and around the world. They are provided with accommodation, security, medical services, and transportation, making this land a paradise for minorities, he said and also mentioned the ongoing renovation and restoration work at Maharaja Ranjit Singh's Samadhi.

Additional Secretary Shrines Saif Ullah Khokhar added that special arrangements, including security, transportation, and medical facilities, had been made for the pilgrims. The pilgrims were transported to Gurdwara Panja Sahib in Hassan Abdal in VIP buses under tight security, where they will perform their religious rituals.

At the Wagah border, the pilgrims were welcomed by PSGPC members Sardar Mampal Singh, Satwant Singh, Deputy Secretary Abdullah Owais, Satwant

Kaur, along with ASO Asim Chaudhry, APS Muhammad Mateen, Muhammad Waqar, and other board officers.

According to the schedule, after staying for one day at Gurdwara Panja Sahib in Hassan Abdal, the pilgrims will travel to Nankana Sahib on June 23. During their stay at Gurdwara Janam Asthan, they will visit Gurdwara Sacha Sauda in Farooqabad on June 24 and then return to Janam Asthan Nankana Sahib. On June 25, the pilgrims will visit Gurdwara Kartarpur Sahib in Narowal, and after a one-day stay, they will proceed to Gurdwara Rohri Sahib in Eminabad on June 27, before returning to Lahore. The main ceremony commemorating Maharaja Ranjit Singh's death anniversary will be held on June 29 at Gurdwara Dera Sahib in Lahore.

## Police ordered to impound smoke-emitting vehicles

LAHORE (PPI): The Lahore High Court (LHC) on Friday ordered police to impound smoke-emitting vehicles running across Lahore to control smog threat.

The ruling was announced by LHC bench hearing pleas seeking the court's intervention to curb smog. Justice Shahid Karim resumed the hearing on the plea of citizen, Haroon Farooq and others.

The LHC ordered traffic police to launch a

crackdown on smoke-emitting vehicles to address environmental pollution issues. Motorway police were also directed to take action against stubble burning.

The court warned IG Motorway police of contempt of court proceedings in case of failure. In today's hearing, PDMA presented its report on heatstroke, stating that an awareness drive has been launched. Furthermore, 20 water bowsters have been

moved to Cholistan to address their water needs in the hot weather.

Smoke from vehicles, factories and burning of the remains of crops have been major factors behind the dense smog that engulfs cities in the beginning days of the winter resulting in breathing issues and other health problems. Punjab badly struck with such weather conditions in recent years in the initial days of winter in the region.

## Sindh to soon provide Rs1.5bn to LB dues: Murtaza

KARACHI (PPI): Karachi Mayor Barrister Murtaza Wahab said on Friday that the Sindh government would soon provide a package of Rs1.5 billion for the dues of local bodies' retired officers and other employees.

He said this while talking to Leader of the Opposition in the City Council, Saifuddin Advocate, in his office. The mayor said: "There is a need to adopt a joint strategy for municipal issues and the development of Karachi."

He said that the development schemes for the upcoming fiscal year would be initiated with the advice of all political parties present in the City Council.

High-rise buildings in the city are creating municipal problems, and many buildings are being constructed without master leases. City Council members are requested to help bring these buildings under regulations, he said.

The Karachi mayor said Municipal Commissioner Afzal Zaidi and Financial Advisor Nayab Saeed were also present on this occasion. Mr Wahab and Mr Saifuddin had a detailed discussion on the budget for the upcoming fiscal year.

Wahab said that the KMC budget for the upcoming fiscal year would be presented in the Council on June 24, adding that dur-

ing the fiscal year 2024-25, 210 ongoing development schemes in various areas of the city would be completed, and development work worth Rs2.5 billion would be carried out.

He said that the leases of many buildings in the Old City Area had expired, and advertisements had been placed in newspapers for their renewal. Necessary instructions had been issued to the Land Department in this regard, he added.

Wahab said that the case regarding the payment of dues between KMC and K-Electric was in the Supreme Court. "We are trying to resolve this issue soon and prioritize pending matters."

## KU declares results of MA Final External Annual Exam 2022

KARACHI (APP): The University of Karachi on Friday announced the results of various MA (Final) External, Annual Examination-2022.

The gazette shows that 477 candidates were registered for MA Economics (Final) exams and 423 students appeared in the papers, 145 candidates were declared passed with first division, and 210 stu-

196 students with second division, and two candidates managed to pass their exams with third division.

The overall pass percentage was 47.28 percent.

It also shows that 489 candidates were registered for MA IR exams of which 458 students appeared in the papers, 145 candidates were declared passed with first division, and 210 stu-

dents with second division. The overall pass percentage was 77.51 percent.

The gazette further shows that 66 candidates were registered and 61 students appeared in the MA Islamic History papers of which three candidates cleared the exam with first division and 12 students with second division. The overall pass percentage was 24.59 percent.

**COURT NOTICE**

IN the Court of Shehnaz Sahiba, Civil Judge II, District Swabi. Case No. 138/1 institution 27-07-2023. Next date of hearing 12-07-2024. Case Title. Wisal Muhammad Vs Javed Ali. Notice to Javed Ali son of Fazal Khaliq R/o Speen Kani presently in Dubai. Whereas in the above case titled the service of above defendant (s) is not possible through ordinary means, therefore, you defendant (s) is / are informed through this publication that on 12-07-2024 at 8.00 AM. You have to appear before this court either personally or through attorney or through counsel to pursue the suit noted above, otherwise, Ex-parte proceeding will be initiated against you.

**COURT NOTICE**

IN the Court of Maliha Allauddin Senior Civil Judge Family Court Kohat. Suit no 75/EC Date of hearing 28-06-2024. Titled:- Mst Rabeel Sajjad Vs Arsalan Hafeez, Notice against:-Arsalan Hafeez Son of Muhammad Hafeez R/o Mohallah Bazar Seni Gumat District Kohat presently R/o (now.in.Abroad Satwa Dubai UAE) (Defendant) Whereas the above plaintiff has instituted a family suit of Dissolution of Marriage on the basis of Khulla against you defendant in which date of hearing 28-06-2024 is fixed for your appearance Since your intimation/service is not possible through ordinary means/mode therefore you defendant is intimated through this publication to appear before this court by person or by pleader on date fixed 28-06-2024 otherwise court shall be proceeded in accordance with law order Issued on 14-06-2024 (Court of S.C.J.F.C Kohat).

**(CORRIGENDUM) تصحيح**

ٹینڈر برائے نیلامی ناکارہ سکریپ  
بجول ہمارا اشتہار شائع شدہ روز نامہ وحدت، پینا، ڈان، فرنیچر پوسٹ، آج اور روز نامہ اوصاف مورخہ 7 جون 2024 بروز منگل کو شائع ہوا تھا۔ جس میں ٹینڈر رکھنے کی تاریخ 26 جون 2024 تھی۔ اس میں ترمیم کر دی گئی ہے جو کہ اب مورخہ 29 جون 2024 ہوئی۔  
10:00

**لیفٹیننٹ کرنل**  
برائے انسپکٹر جنرل فرنیچر کو رجسٹریشن پیشاور

**OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT HEALTH OFFICER, SWAT**  
GULKADA DISTRICT SWAT Phone No: 0946-9240139, Fax No: 0946-9240215, Email: edohswat@yahoo.com

**CANCELLATION OF TENDER NOTICE**  
DATED: 10 JUNE-2024 VIDE NO: INF(P)1271/24  
IN DAILY MASHRIQ PESHAWAR FOR THE PURCHASE OF REHABILITATION EQUIPMENT UNDER THE PROJECT ReLAB-HS-MOMENTUM

It is for Information of all concern that the Tender Notice published in Daily Mashriq Peshawar dated 10-june-2024 Vide No.1271/24 for the purchase of Assistive and rehabilitative product/Instrument item under ReLAB-HS/Momentum project shall be treated as cancelled due to some necessary change in requirement and specifications of Items to be procured.  
INF (P) 1430/24

**District Health Officer Swat**



KARACHI: Former President and PTI leader Dr Arif Alvi addressing to protestors outside KPC. —INP Photo





PESHAWAR: Leaders of PPP cutting the cake to celebrate 71st birth anniversary of Benazir Bhutto Shaheed.

## TEVTA facing financial difficulties in KP

### F.P. Report

PESHAWAR. The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority (KP-TEVTA) is facing severe financial difficulties, with no funds available to pay employees' salaries.

The authority is struggling to provide essential equipment to students due to a shortage of funds, which has also affected the payment of pensions to retired employees. Officials documents

revealed that government allocates PKR 690 million annually to KP-TEVTA which is not enough to run the institution.

The authority requires an additional PKR 738 million to meet its expenses but still the government did not issue the payments.

According to documents the retired employees' pensions amount to PKR 110 million, but the institution is currently unable to pay due to financial difficulties.

The financial crisis has also put the plan to establish new colleges on hold. The institution is facing severe financial constraints, making it difficult to pay salaries and pensions, and threatening the future of new projects.

A senior officer told on the condition of anonymity if the required funds are not provided, it may affect the education of thousands of students, which is a concern for both the institution and the government.

The authority's high officials have warned that if the funds are not provided, it may lead to a financial crisis. The finance department, on the other hand, has stated that KP-TEVTA's revenue is minimal, and it relies heavily on the provincial treasury, which is a burden on the government.

The finance department has suggested that KP-TEVTA should take measures to reduce its expenses and increase its revenue.

## TMA's service delivery should be transparent, directs Arshad

### F.P. Report

PESHAWAR. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Local Government Arshad Ayub Khan has said that the main function of tehsil municipal administrations (TMAs) is service delivery in a transparent way to the best of the satisfaction of the people and that is vision of Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur as this is the yardstick of measuring the performance of a government.

While taking in the briefing about the performance of the four TMAs in the districts of Lower and Upper Chitral here on Friday, he emphasized that the local bodies have to improve their performance to be self-sustained and be able to stand on their own feet financially instead of depending on grants from the provincial government.

He said that TMAs are the important units of municipality providing

civil facilities to the public and it has its own history of performance which was noted during the pandemic of covid-19 when the TMA workers were seen busy in shrouding and burying the dead and many of them sacrificed their lives in the line of duty.

Provincial Assembly Member from Lower Chitral Fateh Mulk Ali Nasir, Tehsil Chairman Chitral Shahzad Amanur Rehman, Chairman Darush Tehsil Syed Faridjan Advocate, Chairman Morkho Torkho Tehsil Janshed Ahmed and Deputy Commissioner Lower Chitral Muhammad Imran Khan and Regional Municipal Officer Ijaz Rahim in the presence of the four TMOs Rehmat Hanif (Chitral), Karimullah (Drosh), Misbahuddin and Aminur Rahman (Mulkhov) presented a briefing about their respective tehsils, on which the Municipal Minister commented point by point.

Arshad Ayub Khan

explained to the elected representatives and senior officers of the four TMAs that these institutions cannot always run on government grants, but it should improve the quality of public service in the future, the performance of the municipal officers will be evaluated by their collected revenue and their expenditure.

He said that 100% attendance of TMA employees should be ensured and departmental action be taken against those who remained willful absent from duty and those who showed negligence will be dismissed from their jobs and to keep an effective check on attendance.

Arshad Ayub Khan also ordered to install a biometric machine, while orders were also issued to attach a chip to every vehicle to keep a close watch on the excessive and unnecessary use of petrol in the vehicles.

He directed the officers

present on the spot to continue working in consultation with the local members of the provincial assembly and the chairman so that the aspirations of the people can be expressed.

The Local Government Minister directed the Regional Municipal Officer Malakand to audit the issues identified about the TMAs through monitoring and evaluation teams and submit a report to him within ten days.

He also approved the transfer of the management of Shaheed Osama Waraich recreation park to TMA Chitral for management after taking advice from DC Lower Chitral.

He also took notice of holding the dual charge of assistant director of local government in Upper Chitral district and TMO Mastuj tehsil by the same officer since long and ordered to post a full-time officer as assistant director instead.

## Court to decide Imran Khan's Release not Ahsan Iqbal: Saif

### F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Barrister Dr. Saif, Advisor to the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for Information and Public Relations, has urged to halt baseless accusations against Ahsan Iqbal, emphasizing that the decision regarding Imran

Khan's release will be made by the court.

He stressed the need for an immediate judicial notice on Ahsan Iqbal's statements, stating that these are not the courts of Justice Qayyum where opponents are brought in on a mere phone call.

He also criticized the PTI government, alleging

that the fake Farm 47 has turned the country into a republic. Supporters have gathered from Khyber to Karachi in favor of Imran Khan's release, and soon Imran Khan will be among the people.

They will fully take the responsibility of the extremists and will also provide the name of the

meeting Advisor to the Chief Minister for Information and Public Relations Barrister Dr. Saif said that it was necessary to take immediate notice of Ahsan Iqbal's statement, that these were not Justice Qayyum's courts, but that opponents were brought in on a phone call.

## PESCO asks federal govt to register cases against PTI MPs

### Umair Muhammadzai

PESHAWAR: The Chief Executive of Peshawar Electric Supply Company (PESCO) has written a letter to the federal government to register cases against Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) supporters, including members of the national and provincial assemblies, and nazims (mayors) for allegedly disrupting electricity supply and damaging grid stations.

According to sources, the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ali Amin Gandapur, had instructed his party members to restore electricity supply in areas where there is excessive load shedding. Despite this, PTI leaders have managed to restore electricity supply to 153 feeders of 20 grid stations in the province, which has led to a confrontation between the federal and provincial governments.

The Federal Minister for Energy, Owais Laghari, has written a letter to the Federal Minister for Interior, Mohsin Naqvi, seeking action against those responsible for damaging electricity infrastructure.

The PESCO Chief has written a letter to the Managing Director (MD) of PPMC, stating that PTI supporters, including members of the national and provincial assemblies, have attacked grid stations in Peshawar, Nowshera, and other districts, and have restored electricity supply by force.

Here is the translation of the article:

"On Thursday, MNA Shandana Gulzar and former District Nazim Peshawar Asim Khan, along with their workers, arrived at the Sheikh Muhammad Grid Station in Budh Bher and restored electricity to the feeder that had been completely shut down for 9 months.

In response to this situation, the PESCO Chief wrote a letter to the Managing Director (MD) of PPMC, stating that PTI supporters, including members of the national and provincial assemblies, had attacked grid stations in Peshawar, Nowshera, and other districts. The letter specifically mentions that

MNA Arbab Amir and MPA Fazal Elahi, along with their guards, attacked the Rehman Baba Grid Station in Peshawar.

MNA Zulfikar from Nowshera attacked the Pabbi Grid Station and tortured the staff While- MNA Asif Khan stormed the WAPDA Superintendent's office in Peshawar and threatened the officials. Simelery Tehsil Nazim Inam Khan from Peshawar's Matra Tehsil broke into the grid station and restored electricity to the high-loss feeder.

The letter also mentions that similar attacks have

been reported on grid stations in various districts of the province." letter states that this situation has created a sense of fear and insecurity among PESCO officials and employees, making it difficult for them to perform their duties.

The PESCO Chief has also stated that the police have not registered any cases against the parliamentarians involved in these incidents, despite requests from PESCO. The letter warns that if this situation continues, it will lead to a complete breakdown of the electricity supply system in the province.

It is worth noting that the Ministry of Interior has issued instructions to all Deputy Commissioners and Divisional Commissioners in the province to ensure that load shedding does not exceed 12 hours in any district, following public protests."

## PHC disposes of 2993 pleas in May while 2602 petitions filed

### Hamayun Khan

PESHAWAR: Peshawar High Court (PHC) disposed of 2993 cases in month of May, while 2602 new cases were filed during the same period. This is revealed in a performance report issued by Peshawar High Court, on Friday.

Chief Justice PHC Justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim along with other judges working tirelessly to expedite the disposal of

cases to decrease pendency. The court has taken various measures to achieve this goal, including the formation of special benches to hear old cases and the cancellation of summer vacations.

The report highlights that the court has been working diligently to reduce the backlog of cases, which has been a long-standing issue in the judicial system.

The Chief Justice and other judges have been

monitoring the progress personally to ensure disposal of pleas efficiently and effectively.

The performance report also notes that the court has been taking steps to improve its overall performance, including the use of technology to enhance case management and the provision of training to judicial officers.

This indicates a remarkable progress in the disposal of cases, with

a disposal rate higher than the number of new cases filed.

The report suggests that the Peshawar High Court is making significant progress in providing swift and affordable justice to the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The court's efforts to dispose of cases efficiently and effectively are laudable, and its commitment to improving the justice system is commendable.

## Marwat appointed focal person

PESHAWAR (APP): Ashfaq Muhammad Marwat has been appointed as the focal person of Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for student affairs here on Friday.

The Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister has issued the notification of the appointment of Ashfaq Muhammad Marwat.

Ashfaq Marwat will perform liaison services with the Chief Minister regarding the welfare of students, educational and co-curricular activities.

## Governor condoles

PESHAWA (APP): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Governor, Faisal Karim Kundi here Friday condoled with the bereaved families of five troops of security forces martyred in landmine explosion at Sadda in Kurrum tribal district.

The Governor prayed for highest ranks of martyrs and expressed sympathies with the members of the bereaved families.

He said that sacrifices of our security forces in fight against terrorism would not go waste.

Faisal Karim Kundi held sacrifices of martyred troops of security forces for peace in high esteem.

## PESCO announces load-shedding in KP

PESHAWAR (APP): PESCO Friday announced electricity load-shedding all across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as there are more than 1,300 PESCO feeders in the province.

According to PESCO, out of 981 feeders of domestic consumers, losses are less than 10% in 156 and only 2 hours of electricity load-shedding is going on at 156 feeders. Losses on

135 feeders range from 10 to 20 percent and load-shedding is happening for 2 hours, PESCO spokesman said.

A total of 135 feeders have 20 to 30 percent losses, where load-shedding is being done for 6 hours, PESCO spokesman said. Losses on 96 feeders are 30 to 40 percent, 7 hours of load shedding is going on, PESCO spokesman

said.

There are 40 to 60 percent losses on 143 feeders, where 12 hours of load shedding is happening and losses of 157 feeders are 60 to 80 percent, load shedding is being done for 16 hours, PESCO spokesman said. Losses on 159 feeders are more than 80%, load shedding continues for 20 hours, PESCO spokesman said.

## First Hajj flight arrived in Peshawar

PESHAWAR (APP): The first Hajj flight arrived at Bacha Khan International Airport in Peshawar with 275 pilgrims on board of a private airline here on Friday.

Airport Manager Zia Ahmed, along with hockey Olympian Rahim Khan,

Hockey Olympian Musadiq Hussain and other officials welcomed the pilgrims. Soon after arriving at the international arrival terminal at the Bacha Khan International Airport Peshawar, pilgrims were garlanded with flowers.

According to officials,

PIA's post-Hajj operations will continue till July 21 to bring back over 35,000 pilgrims from Saudi Arabia through 171 flights.

The flights will be operational for Karachi, Islamabad, Lahore, Multan, Sialkot, and Peshawar.

## Arbab Khizar visits Iranian Consulate



### F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Arbab Khizar Hayat, a leader of Pakistan Muslim League-N, visited the Consulate General of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Peshawar. During his visit, he met with Iranian Consul General Ali

Banafsheh and expressed condolences over the tragic demise of Iranian President Ibrahim Raisi in a helicopter crash.

The Iranian Consul General thanked Arbab Khizar Hayat for his special tribute on behalf of the Iranian government for the late President

Raisi. The meeting included discussions on enhancing trade between Iran and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, strengthening bilateral public relations, and facilitating amenities for visitors. Various mutual interests were exchanged during the interaction.

## KP Speaker presides meeting to address issues of Mansehra

### F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: An important session convened at Mansehra Circuit House under the presidency of KP Assembly Speaker Babar Salim Swati to address the issues of Mansehra and enhance the standard of living for residents. Provincial Assembly members including Akram Ghazi, Vice President of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Kamal Salim Swati, District President of PTI Mansehra Sardar Khan, and former provincial assembly candidate Abdul Shakoor Khan were present at the meeting alongside Speaker Babar Salim Swati.

Addressing the participants, Speaker Babar Salim Swati emphasized the need to foster harmony among government officials and political leadership to effec-

tively work on public welfare projects and resolve civic issues. He stated that it has been observed in the past that newly formed political governments and administrations do not synchronize for long periods, which adversely affects the public. He asserted that the aim of this meeting is to ensure that everyone fulfills their responsibilities with utmost honesty.

Speaker Babar Salim Swati highlighted the presence of tourists from all over Pakistan in Mansehra at this time, underscoring the responsibility of local police and administration to facilitate all tourists and ensure that no officer causes inconvenience to them. He expressed hope that confidence in Mansehra's tourism destinations will increase across the country.







## In brief

### TMA disposes 57 tons waste F.P. Report

SAKHAKOT: Tehsil Municipal Administration (TMA) Dargai disposed of 57 tons residual of sacrificial animals in the premises to ensure hygiene environment for the residents, on Friday. This was disclosed by tehsil Chairman Muhammad Islam Ghazi and added that provision of hygiene is top priority of local government representatives. He claimed that TMA will utilize available resources for facilitation of public. It is worthy to mention that the operation was swiftly conducted due to personal interest of tehsil chairman and awareness campaign. As many as 48 TMA's employees participated in the cleanup operation during Eidul Azha.

### Book reading session held F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: The youth affairs department arranged a session for youth on book reading and taking part in competitive examination at Mian Kalay here on Friday. Dozens of young graduates and under graduates attended the session. Mr. Izhar Ud Din (CSP), Mr. Safi Ullah (PMS Officer) and Mr. Ayaz Khan (Inspector Customs) attended the session as guest speakers. They shared their experiences with the young generation and advised them to resort to book reading. The participants asked a range of questions which the guests speakers responded to. The participants urged all the influential people to arrange such activities for the young generation in order to ensure their exposure to first hand experience.

### Qamber police arrests accused F.P. Report

SHAHADKOT : On the strict orders of the SSP of Qamber Shahdadkot district, Muhammad Kaleem , the very important operation of the police station Mahi Makole a month ago, the second main accused involved in the murder case of six persons in the limits of Mahi Makole police station was also arrested along with the details of the murder instruments. According to SHO Police Station Mahi Makole Sub-Inspector Azhar Hussain Chandio along with the staff conducted a successful operation near Malana Masjid on the secret information of Rajab Ali Mugheri , the second main accused involved in the murder case of six people who were killed in village Dar Muhammad Mugheri a month ago, has been arrested along with pistol and bullets, it should be noted that the accused played an important role in killing 6 people.

### Three killed in road accidents

MURIDKE/OKARA (PPI): At least three persons were killed and two other sustained injuries in two separate road accident in Muridke and Okara on late Thursday night. According to details, the first accident took place on Muridke where a couple died when the motorcycle they were riding on was hit by a bus at the Grand Trunk (GT) Road near Kala Shah Kaku. Police and rescue teams reached the spot and shifted the dead to a nearby hospital. According to police, the bus driver managed to escape from the scene after the accident. The second accident occurred in Okara where a speeding rickshaw hit a motorcycle due to which a man was killed on the spot and his wife and son were critically injured.

# Judicial inquiry into killing of tribal journalist sought

Amjad Ali Afridi

JAMRUD: Members of civil society demanded of the Chief Justice of Pakistan to take suo moto of murder of journalist, Khalil Jibran and conduct judicial inquiry to trace the killers.

In a protest rally organized at Bab-e-Khyber on Friday, former President of Peshawar press club Shameem Shahid, head of Khyber Union of Journalists Nasir Hussain, Central President of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Union of Journalist (KPUJ) Shams Mohmand, district chief of Awami National Party (ANP) Shah Hussain Shinwari, President North Waziristan press club Safdar Dawar, head of

Zwan Koki Khel Organization Sanaullah Afridi, Tehsil Chairman Landi Kotal Shah Khalid, Tehsil Ameer of Jamat-e-Islami Murad Hussain Afridi, President Tribal Union of Journalists Qazi Fazalullah, Afrasiyab Afridi and others condemned brutal killing of a tribal journalist and asked judicial inquiry of it.

With collective efforts we can avert the menace of terrorism they added and said if the security forces have failed to provide security then they have no right to utilize their tax money lavishly. They maintained that it seems that it is the second episode of the previous drama that must be curtailed.

The participants also

expressed their dissatisfaction over the weak sections, lodged in the First Information Report (FIR) and said it seems that the police have no intentions to apprehend the killers. Journalists are the voice of laymen so they cannot compromise on freedom of journalism, they remarked.

They demanded the government to grant ten million rupees (Shaheed package) likewise they urged the Khyber News to give five million rupees financial support to their slain reporter. The protesters while carrying placards and banners marched from Jamrud press club to Bab-e-Khyber, chanted slogans against martyrdom of the tribal journalist, Khalil Jibran.

# JUI demand arrest of Maulana Jan's murderers

F.P. Report

WANA: The third day of mourning for Maulana Mirza Jan saw a continuous stream of visitors offering condolences and reciting Fatiha. Maulana Abdul Rashid, Secretary General of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (F) in the merged districts, spoke to the media, decrying the tribal belt's decade-long deterioration of law and order. He emphasized that advocates for truth and justice are unsafe, resulting in the loss of hundreds of scholars, students, and thousands of lives.

Abdul Rashid stressed that the state and its security institutions are responsible for maintaining law and order, holding them accountable for the lack of safety. He warned that silencing one voice will only give rise to hundreds more, as Jamiat Ulema-e-

Islam's ideology is indestructible, nurtured by the blood of its elders.

The Secretary General criticized the police and security institutions for their failure to establish law and order in the tribal districts. Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam will determine its course of action at the June 27 Jirga in Peshawar.

The mourning ceremony was attended by prominent figures, including Maulana Jamaluddin, former MNA and leader of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (F) in the merged districts, former Senator and Secretary General of FATA Maulana Abdul Rashid, Finance Secretary Ahaj Shamsuddin, and individuals from various schools of thought.

**Rally held:** Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) workers in Lower Waziristan staged a major

rally in Wana bazaar on Friday, led by MPA Ajab Gul Wazir. Addressing the gathering, MPA Ajab Gul declared that the time has come to liberate Pakistan from corrupt elements.

He alleged that the PTI mandate was stolen, enabling notorious looters to gain power. Ajab Gul emphasized Imran Khan's innocence, stating that his only "crime" was challenging the enemies of Islam and striving to elevate Pakistan's dignity. He reiterated the narrative of true freedom, affirming that Imran Khan will remain committed to this stance and achieve true freedom. Ajab Gul dismissed the cases against Imran Khan as baseless. The rally speakers demanded Imran Khan's immediate release, warning of large-scale protests if he is not freed soon.



SHANGLA: Former Senator Maulana Rahat Hussain addressing a press conference.

# Minister, MPA visit Kohat grid station

Sahibzada Afridi

KOHAT: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Law and Finance Aftab Alam Afridi Advocate along with his colleague MPAs Shafi Jan and Daud Shah Afridi made a surprise visit to Kohat Grid Station on Friday where they expressed great concern over the unannounced loadshedding of electricity in Kohat.

The Law Minister Aftab Alam Afridi himself prepared the loadshedding schedule on the spot and directed the WAPDA authorities to ensure implementation of the same schedule.

Talking on the occasion, the Minister said that the federal government is not fulfilling its responsibility adding that WAPDA is a federally administered



authority which is making injustices to our province. The mandate-thief government sitting in the federal government is constantly abusing the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, he said. He further said that they stand with its people on all genuine issues.

The Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Gandapur has given clear instructions to all the

parliamentarians in the province to visit the Grid Stations in their respective areas and fix the load shedding schedule and implement it, he maintained. Aftab Alam said, his today visit to the Grid Station alongwith his members of the assembly is in compliance to the instructions of the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

# Larkana, Shikarpur, Jacobabad and other parts of Sindh receive rain

F.P. Report

LARKANA: Rain with thunderstorm in parts of Sindh on Friday brought the mercury down and provided much-needed relief to the masses from hot weather.

As per details, Larkana, Shikarpur, Shahdadkot, Jacobabad and other parts of Sindh province received rain with thunderstorm. Heavy rain in Larkana

badly affected the electricity supply system in the area as 40 feeders of Sukkur Electric Supply Company (SEPCO) got tripped. The low-lying areas of Larkana are submerged with rainwater.

According to MET office, Larkana has recorded 42millimeter rain from last night. Shadadkot, Shikarpur, Jacobabad and adjoining areas also received showers. Separately, the

weather became pleasant in Lahore due to dusty winds, significantly lowering the temperature on Thursday.

The temperature in Lahore was forecasted between a minimum of 28 degrees and a maximum of 38 degrees. Residents of Lahore anticipated cooler conditions and possible thunderstorms, offering a respite from the typically high summer temperatures.



JAMRUD: Journalists holding banner and placards during a protest against killing of their colleague. - F.P. photo

## Youth kills three sisters, mother for honour

KHANEWAL (INP): A pitiless youth gunned down his three sisters and mother for honour in Okanawala area here on Friday and fled the scene.

According to details, the incident took place in Saddar Kabirwala police station jurisdiction where culprit first shot dead his three sisters working in agricultural field, then went to home and killed his mother. The deceased included Haleema 15, Amina 20, Samina 22, and Haseena Bibi 50.

The accused fled the scene after committing quadruplet murder. Heavy contingent of police reached the scene and shifted the bodies to hospital for postmortem. A case was registered into the incident and raids were being conducted to arrest the culprit.

## Admn comes to protect family

F.P. Report

BUNER: A family living under the open sky for a month long in the famous weekly Mela Dag in the main market of Swari in Buner belongs to Khali Kalay Ghorghashti tehsel Totalai Khadukhel. This family, comprising a poor man Syed Raziq son of Ghulam Qadir, his wife Sultan Zari and a young child Fazal Khaliq.

A report came out on the social media page Insaniyat about this family's living in the open field in the open sky. Deputy Commissioner Buner Hamid Ali Khan took immediate action on the report. DC directed Commissioner Relief and Human Rights Syed Akram Shah to reach the spot and immediately arrange shelter for the family and provide other necessary non food items and food items too.

Additional Deputy Commissioner Relief and Human Rights Syed Akram Shah with relief team rushed the venue and immediately provided tent, foams blankets, kitchen sets, water cooler, hygiene kits and mats to the family. The ADC informed local administration Totalai Khadukhel about the family in order to gather information about the family.

The ADC claimed instruction have also been given to immediately share the information obtained from different sources in Ghorghashti Totalai Khadukhel so that finding out the main problem of this family and solving the problem on a permanent basis so as this family can be settled in a place on a permanent basis and this family can be provided with protection in all respects.

# PHC CJ orders swift disposal of pleas

Syed Waliullah Shah

NEWSHERA: Chief Justice Peshawar High Court (PHC) Justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim stressed that it is high time for judges and lawyers to work together for provision of swift and affordable justice to the people, on Friday.

He expressed these views during his visit district's courts Nowshera, while Chief Justice met with judicial officers and lawyers. The Chief Justice

stressed the importance of restoring public trust in the judiciary and urged judges to dispose of minor cases promptly.

Chief Justice PHC Justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim also visited Nowshera Jail and met with prisoners, ordering the release of those detained in minor cases. He also directed concerned authorities to reduce the load shedding in the jail.

During the visit Chief Justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim also go to the tehsil Pabbi

courts, he met with lawyers and heard their concerns, issuing instructions for prompt action. The Chief Justice's visit aimed to ensure the provision of speedy and affordable justice to the people and to boost their confidence in the judicial system. District and Session Judge Nowshera Muhammad Asif welcomed Chief Justice PHC Justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim at district's court and briefed him regarding disposal of pleas.

# Punjab CM taking steps for Punjab's development

F.P. Report

ATTOK: Provincial Minister for Law, Communications and Works Malik Sohaib Ahmed Bharrh has said that Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz is taking all possible steps for bringing improvements in the province.

He expressed these views while presiding over a meeting at the DC Office, Attock. As per reported by our district representative faisal munir that Members of the National Assembly, Sheikh Aftab Ahmed , Sohail Khan and Members of the Provincial Assembly, Ch Sher Ali Khan , Malik Ahtebar Khan , former

Provincial Minister Jahanjir Khanzada, former MPA Iftikhar Khan, Malik Hameed Akbar Khan and officers of district administration were also present in the meeting.

The relevant officers briefed the minister about development schemes and other affairs. It was informed during the briefing that 103 schemes across the district will cost 32514 Million rupees which include Education, Health and Rehabilitation of basic structure along with undertaking repair work and other schemes. The district heads of govt departments briefed the provincial minister.

The Provincial Minister

directed to complete the development schemes within stipulated time frame along with ensuring high quality of work in the development schemes. He directed the relevant officers to undertake visits of the development schemes regularly.

Later, he visited the govt Asfandyar Bukhari District Hospital where he was given a briefing by the relevant officers of the Health Department. Malik Sohaib Ahmed Bharrh visited different parts of the hospital and reviewed the administrative affairs. He directed to further improve the administrative and other related matters of the hospital.

# Book on history of Sultanabad launched

F.P. Report

HYDERABAD: A book on one of Sindh's earliest modern villages titled 'Sultan Ka Sultanabad' has been published. The village located some 50 kilometers from Hyderabad city is part Tando Alhaiyar district and was established in 1936 by Waris Fadu on directions of Sir Sultan Muhammad Shah Aga Khan the first President of All Indian Muslim League and pioneer of Muslim emancipation movement.

The village is inhabited by Shia Ismaili community with it's current population of around 600 souls. The book has been jointly authored by two young historians Muzafar Mansoor and Latif Pirwani who claimed that

it took them around two decades to compile the history of their village and then transform it into a book. One of the authors Muzafar Mansoor said that the villagers of this village have contributed significantly towards social and economical development of the country adding that the fire fruit and vegetable market of Tando Alhaiyar district was established by the villagers in Collaboration with Aga Khan Development Network around 20 years back and is considered as the corner stone of the economy of the district.

"The first private School of the district was established here in 1938 followed by a dispensary and a community training center", said Lutf Pirwani, adding that when

educating girls was considered a sin the women of this village spent an active social life and went in the remote areas of Hyderabad and served there as teacher and nurses. He further said that teachers from this village were selected to train young teachers in other districts of Sindh during the Muhammad Khan Junejo regime.

The authors explained the content of the book and said that it comprised contributions of local villagers for the country and social development, their struggle, dedication and the city concept of voluntarism. The book also carries history of Aga Khan Family and that led the journey of Village,s development besides Waris Fadu and other major contributors.



HYDERABAD: Gypsy people traveling on their motorcycle rickshaw loaded with water canes after filling from a tap.





# Lebanese officials work for good ties with Cyprus

BEIRUT (AP): Lebanese government officials worked to maintain friendly relations with Cyprus a day after the militant Hezbollah group threatened to attack the Mediterranean island if it allows Israel to use its territories to attack Lebanon.

Lebanon's state news agency said Foreign Minister Abdallah Bouhabib told his Cypriot counterpart that Beirut relies on the positive role that Cyprus plays in support of stability in the Middle East. Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah warned Cyprus in a rare threat not to allow Israel's military to use its airports on the island to bomb Lebanon should a full-blown war break out between Israel and the Iran-backed Hezbollah.

Some Lebanese media outlets reported that the Cypriot embassy was closed but the mission later clarified that they were not accepting visa applications for administrative updates and the embassy will be introducing an appointments-based system for visa applications. The Lebanon-Israel border has witnessed almost daily exchanges of fire between Hezbollah and Israel's military that have left more than 400 people dead in Lebanon since Oct. 8. Most of the fatalities have been fighters but they also include more than 80 civilians and non-combatants. On the Israeli side, 16 soldiers and 11 civilians have been killed over the past

eight months.

The level of threats between Israel and Hezbollah intensified following last week's killing by Israel of Hezbollah's most senior commander since the fighting began. Hezbollah retaliated by firing hundreds of rockets into northern Israel in retaliation. Cyprus and Lebanon have had close and historic relations for decades and the island became a refuge for thousands of Lebanese who resided on the island during Lebanon's 1975-90 civil war. Many Lebanese citizens moved again to Cyprus following the historic economic meltdown in Lebanon that started in late 2019.

In recent years, Cyprus has enjoyed increasingly tight relations with Israel and the island has hosted joint Israeli-Cypriot military exercises, but has not been involved in any military operations. Nasrallah said his group has information that the Israel's military is conducting maneuvers in Cyprus in mountainous areas similar to those of Lebanon adding that they also use Cypriot airports.

He added that Hezbollah has information that Israel believes that in case an all-out war breaks out, Hezbollah will target its airports and for that reason Israel might use "in its war against Lebanon Cypriot airports and bases." Nasrallah added that when Cyprus President Nikos Christodoulides visited Lebanon recently, Lebanese officials spoke

with him about the matter and he denied there were such plans. "The Cypriot government should be careful that opening the airports and bases in Cyprus for the Israeli enemy to target Lebanon, means that the Cypriot government has become part of the war," Nasrallah said. "The resistance (Hezbollah) will deal with it (Cyprus) as part of the war."

Cyprus government spokesman Konstantinos Letymbiotis repeated that any suggestion that Cyprus, either through its infrastructure or territory, would be involved in any military operation in Lebanon is "totally groundless." Nasrallah was criticized by some Lebanese politicians who warned that his comments could harm relations with Cyprus and the European Union. "Cyprus was a refuge and welcomed all Lebanese but Nasrallah is insisting that we have no friend left," legislator Elias Hankash of the Christian Kataeb Party told Al-Arabiya TV. "The threat to Europe leaves Lebanon in complete isolation."

Peter Stano, a spokesman for the European Union's executive arm, said that any threat against Cyprus is a threat against the bloc's 26 other member nations. Last year, Cyprus said it had disrupted an alleged Iranian plot to target Israeli businessmen with the arrest of two Iranian asylum-seekers who were in contact with another Iranian associated with the Revolutionary Guard.

## Gaza pier resumes operations

WASHINGTON (Reuters): The US military's floating pier off Gaza has resumed bringing humanitarian aid into the Israeli-besieged Palestinian territory, the Pentagon said, even as aid continues to collect in a nearby marshalling area since the United Nations has not restarted transporting it to warehouses.

The pier had been re-attached to the shore after being temporarily removed last Friday due to poor sea conditions, the latest challenge to the effort that has been hampered by bad weather since it was put into place in May. US President Joe Biden announced the pier in March for aid deliveries as Israel invaded and bombarded Gaza while also severely limiting aid through land routes, threatening famine conditions.

"Overnight, the transfer of humanitarian assistance from Cyprus to Gaza resumed with more than 656 metric tons, or 1.4 million pounds, being delivered to the marshalling yard in Gaza today," Air Force Major General Patrick Ryder told reporters. The United Nations said on Friday it had still not resumed transportation of aid from the pier to UN World Food Programme warehouses.

The pier has been temporarily removed several times from Gaza's coast. At one point rough seas damaged the pier, forcing repairs. The US military estimates the pier will cost more than \$200 million for the first 90 days and involve about 1,000 service members.

Ryder said the Pentagon had not yet established an end date for the pier, but officials have said it is likely to be a sustainable option only until August or September because the sea state in the region usually worsens after that.



MEXICO CITY: A man fills containers with water due to shortages caused by high temperatures and drought in Veracruz.

# Darfur sees an increase in much needed food aid, UN says

CAIRO (AP): Families in Sudan's embattled western Darfur region have finally received an emergency increase in food aid that is much needed to help avert looming famine, the UN food agency said.

The World Food Program said in an update that five convoys carrying 5,000 tons of food aid have crossed from neighboring Chad into Darfur since the beginning of 2024. Some aid trucks entered the region on June 10 and completed deliveries in southern Darfur, Leni Kinzli, the head of communications at WFP's Sudan office, told The Associated Press. Distribution was continuing in central and western Darfur.

"The food distribution is an emergency scale-up to avert famine and to get to those people in the highest level of food insecurity to prevent widespread starvation," Kinzli said. "But, we need to continue to do more and expand access and we're working on possibly opening new corridors from South Sudan and Egypt and also expanding crossline access from Port Sudan into the Darfur region." Famine looms in parts of Sudan, which has

been engulfed by violence since April of last year. That's when tensions between leaders of the Sudanese military and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces erupted into intense fighting and spread across the country, including to Darfur.

The latest WFP distribution was part of two aid convoys that made their way to Sudan over the past weeks, carrying enough assistance for more than 245,000 people. The first convoy crossed on May 23 and delivered aid for 117,000 people in South and Central Darfur states. "We aren't just delivering for immediate needs but ensuring people have enough to get through the coming months," said Kinzli. "Especially in those areas that we anticipate will become harder to reach when the road conditions further deteriorate in the rains in the coming weeks."

In May, the WFP said in a report that at least 1.7 million people are already experiencing emergency levels of hunger in Darfur, including in Al Fasher, the capital of North Darfur state that is besieged by RSF. Some of the challenges in reaching commu-

nities in Darfur include securing access through negotiations, which Kinzli described as "complicated" because many of the checkpoints are controlled by different armed groups. She added that getting aid into places with intense fighting such as Al Fasher is extremely dangerous.

Some WFP aid trucks encountered mechanical issues in the most recent food aid delivery because of deteriorating road conditions. Still, three more WFP convoys carrying food and nutritious commodities are planned to enter Darfur in the coming weeks from Chad through the Tine crossing to help 675,000 people. Carlos Perea-Milla, with the logistics team for Sudan at the international humanitarian organization Action Against Hunger, told the AP that Tine, which leads to North Darfur state, is the only authorized crossing point for UN agencies. The Adre crossing point, occasionally used by humanitarian organizations, provides access to RSF-controlled areas. The UN's humanitarian agency is pushing for Adre to be used as the other official crossing point to Sudan.

# South Africa's DA party suspends lawmaker

JOHANNESBURG: South Africa's centre-right Democratic Alliance (DA) party has suspended one of its lawmakers after an old video of the legislator using explicitly racist language resurfaced online. The suspension of the recently sworn-in member of parliament, Renaldo Gouws, highlights the uneasy alliance between the DA and its governing coalition partner the African National Congress (ANC), the former liberation movement that spearheaded the struggle against apartheid in South Africa.

"The DA has established that the video, in which Renaldo Gouws uses execrable language, is in fact genuine and not a fake as initially suspected," the party said. "The DA federal executive has therefore suspended Mr Gouws with immediate effect."

In the now-deleted video, posted in 2010, Gouws uses racist slurs against Black people in South Africa. Gouws appears to call for killing Black people before saying that his statement is intended to make an analogy with Black activists singing a decades-old anti-apartheid chant that has stirred controversy in recent years. South Africa's human rights watchdog said that it would "institute proceedings"

against Gouws for "hate speech and/or harassment", saying that the video contained "extremely offensive and derogatory language."

"Given Mr Gouws's position as a Member of Parliament, his alleged actions carry even greater weight and responsibility," the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) said. Gouws, a prolific online poster, had been a sharp critic of the ANC over the years. The lawmaker sparked anger earlier this week after another expletives-laden video of him re-emerged, where he claims that white people in South Africa are enduring "reverse apartheid". "If Africa had to disappear off the face of the earth, no one would f\*\*\*ing notice," he says in the video.

Gouws apologised "unreservedly" for that rant but refuted allegations of racism in a social media post. "Before this and before these snippets were used publicly against me, I posted a lengthy Facebook post from 2013 in which I apologized for how I delivered my message in my videos (angry, hostile, confrontational and crass)," he wrote. The DA emerged as the second-largest party in South Africa's May elections, in which the ANC lost its parliamentary

majority for the first time since 1994, when it swept into power under the leadership of Nelson Mandela after the fall of the apartheid regime.

After the elections last month, the ANC remained the largest party, but it needed to court other parties in order to form a government. Earlier this month, President Cyril Ramaphosa called for a national unity government spanning the entire political spectrum to address the country's challenges, including the high cost of living, unemployment and corruption. But the left-leaning Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) and former President Jacob Zuma's MK Party refused to join the coalition, leaving the DA as the ANC's main governing partner. The DA and ANC have deep differences on the economy. While the ANC calls for a social democracy with policies to uplift all South Africans, "especially the poor", the DA emphasises the free market economy and the ability to "earn a living and accumulate wealth". Ramaphosa was sworn in after being re-elected by the parliament for a second term with the DA's backing last week. "The formation of a government of national unity is a moment of profound significance. — Al Jazeera

## Russia and North Korea treaty played

SEOUL (Reuters): South Korea's foreign minister Cho Tae-yul and US Secretary of State Antony Blinken condemned the new treaty between Russia and North Korea as a serious threat to regional peace and stability, Seoul's foreign ministry said in a statement on Friday.

The two in a phone call also discussed ways to respond to the pact, and agreed to closely monitor the situation, the foreign ministry said. Blinken said the United States supports South Korea's responses to the agreement, in which Moscow and Pyongyang said each country would provide immediate military assistance if either faces armed aggression.

Cho said any cooperation to help strengthen North Korea's military capabilities is a clear violation of the UN Security Council resolutions, according to the statement. The United States will consider various ways to respond to the threat to international peace and stability from Russia and North Korea, Blinken was quoted as saying by the ministry.

# Romanian president quits NATO chief race, paving way for Rutte

BRUSSELS: Romanian President Klaus Iohannis has withdrawn from the race to lead NATO, clearing the way for Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte to become the next secretary-general of the transatlantic military alliance.

All other NATO members had already backed Rutte, a staunch ally of Ukraine and outspoken critic of Russian President Vladimir Putin, to take over from Jens Stoltenberg, who is stepping down this year after a decade in charge. This week, Hungary lifted its veto on Rutte's candidacy after the long-serving Dutch prime minister gave written guarantees that he would not force Budapest to take part in the military alliance's new plans to provide support to Ukraine should he be appointed.

NATO makes all of its decisions by consensus, giving any of its 32 member countries an effective veto, including on whether they should take part in any joint effort or operation. Turkey had also voiced opposition to Rutte's bid but lifted its objections in April.

With the war in Ukraine on NATO's doorstep and European nations concerned about the possible return of NATO-critical Donald Trump to the White House after the November presidential election in the United States, alliance members concluded the highly experienced Rutte was the best person for the post. As it announced Iohannis's decision, Romania's Supreme Council of National Defence said it would donate one of the country's two operational Patriot missile systems to Ukraine, responding to pleas from Kyiv to its allies for more air defence assistance. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Romania's decision "will bolster our air shield and help us better protect our people and critical infrastructure from Russian air terror".

The supreme council, which is chaired by Iohannis, said the president had informed NATO last week of his decision to withdraw and Romania would now support Rutte's candidacy. With all 32 NATO members now back-

ing the Dutchman, diplomats said they expected the alliance's governing North Atlantic Council to formally select him for the post in the coming days. Rutte will face the challenge of maintaining support for Ukraine's fight against Russia's invasion while guarding against any escalation that could draw NATO directly into a war with Moscow.

Under Rutte, the Netherlands has in recent years ramped up defence spending above NATO's target of 2 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP). It is providing F-16 fighter jets, artillery, drones and ammunition to Kyiv as well as investing heavily in its own military. Former Norwegian Prime Minister Stoltenberg's term at the helm of NATO will end on October 1. He took office in 2014, just a few months after Russia annexed Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula. Stoltenberg oversaw NATO's shift from an alliance mainly engaged in crisis management missions in places such as Afghanistan back to its roots of defence against Russia.

Four countries have joined NATO since Stoltenberg took office: Montenegro, North Macedonia, Finland and Sweden. By giving the top job to Rutte, the alliance would pass up the opportunity to appoint its first female secretary-general - something multiple member states had said they were eager to do. Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas was widely considered a contender for the role with strong support from Eastern European countries. But she was seen as too hawkish towards Russia by some Western member states.

Kallas is now the leading candidate to be the next European Union foreign policy chief, according to diplomats. Iohannis, whose second term as Romanian president ends this year, has repeatedly said Eastern European states need better representation in Euro-Atlantic leadership roles. Romania, a member of both NATO and the EU, has raised defence spending to 2.5 percent of its GDP in response to Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine. — Al Jazeera

# Young men trapped between war and conscription in Myanmar's Rakhine

RAKHINE: Since war resumed in his native Rakhine State last November, Thura Maung has seen his options narrow. The 18-year-old, from the state's ethnic Rakhine majority, first fled his home in the coastal town of Myebon in December, when clashes between the military and autonomy-seeking Arakha Army - formerly known as the Arakan Army - seemed imminent.

He and his family escaped by boat, travelling along river inlets at night to avoid being seen by the military. They returned a few days later, but fled twice more over the following months as the fighting escalated. By February, the military and AA were battling for control over Myebon, and Thura Maung could hear shelling from the village where he had taken shelter. The military had also blocked the movement of goods and shut down the internet in areas affected by the conflict, leaving his family struggling to make ends meet. With his university effectively closed due to the fighting, he felt his dreams slipping away. "There were no opportunities for my life to develop, and I saw no future," he said.

It's a feeling shared by Zubair, an ethnic Rohingya from Rakhine State's northern Maungdaw township. The 24-year-old was doing an internship with a civil society organisation

focused on peacebuilding when the fighting broke out and his office closed. Soon, he was running from the war as well as a military conscription drive targeting Rohingya men. "We weren't able to stay at home, go to work or even sleep on time," he said. "Time that we could've spent working on our futures was wasted."

Zubair and Thura Maung are part of a new generation of young people across Myanmar whose lives have been turned upside down by the 2021 military coup. In Rakhine State, people had already lived through years of communal conflict and a brutal 2017 military crackdown on the mostly Muslim Rohingya. The escalating violence between the military and AA has only made matters worse, according to Karen Simbulan, a human rights lawyer specialising in conflict sensitivity in Rakhine. "With the most recent renewed fighting and the looming threat of forced conscription, many who had persisted and stayed in Rakhine despite everything are seeing their futures taken away from them," she said. "Many are taking significant risks to flee to safety, often putting themselves in highly vulnerable situations just to survive."

Al Jazeera spoke with four young men from Rakhine State about the effects of the conflict on their lives. They have all been given pseudo-

nyms to protect their safety. The renewed fighting is the latest crisis to hit Rakhine State, home to Daingnet, Mro, Khami, Kaman, Maramagyi, Chin and Hindu minorities as well as the Rohingya, and the mostly Buddhist Rakhine majority. A category four cyclone hit the region last May, following successive waves of violence in the decade leading up to the coup.

In 2012, mobs of ethnic Rakhine and Rohingya people attacked each other with sticks and knives and burned each other's homes, leaving dozens dead and some 140,000 forced from their homes. Afterwards, the military imposed tough restrictions on Rohingyas' movement and access to services, while continuing to deny them citizenship under a discriminatory 1982 law. The situation deteriorated dramatically in 2016 and 2017 when the military killed thousands of Rohingya civilians and committed widespread sexual violence and arson following attacks on military outposts by a Rohingya armed group. Its "clearance operations" in northern Rakhine State drove more than 750,000 people into neighbouring Bangladesh, and the crackdown is the subject of continuing genocide proceedings at the International Court of Justice.

The AA stepped up its fight for

autonomy in late 2018; over the next two years, Rakhine State endured some of the most intense armed clashes seen in Myanmar in decades. The military also indiscriminately bombed and shelled civilian areas, committing what Amnesty International identified as war crimes. The military and AA reached an informal ceasefire in November 2020, just three months before the generals seized power from the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi. Weeks later, the military cracked down on peaceful protests across Myanmar with gunfire and arrests. An armed uprising soon followed; by mid-2021, all-out war had erupted across the country.

Existing ethnic armed organisations trained and fought alongside anti-coup People's Defence Forces (PDF), but the AA mostly stayed out of the fray, instead focusing on establishing governance mechanisms in its territory through its administrative wing, the United League of Arakan. That changed last October, when the AA joined ethnic armed groups fighting on Myanmar's eastern border with China to launch Operation 1027 declaring their intent to eradicate "oppressive military dictatorship". Within weeks, they had seized strategic territory and other resistance groups were launching new offen-

sives across the country. On November 13, the AA brought the war to Rakhine soil with coordinated attacks on military positions.

The AA and its allies have since driven out the military from most of central and northern Rakhine State as well as Paletwa township in neighbouring Chin State. Following tactics it has long used to punish communities harbouring armed resistance, the military has retaliated with full-scale attacks on AA-controlled and contested areas by air, land and water while cutting off transit routes, communication channels and access to medical care for entire populations. Hundreds of civilians have been injured or lost their lives and more than 185,000 people displaced across Rakhine State and Paletwa since November out of more than three million that the United Nations says have been displaced across the country, mostly as a result of the coup.

Through its forced conscription of Rohingya men as well as by demanding they protest against the AA, the military is also deliberately working to threaten years of fragile progress towards reconciliation between Rakhine and Rohingya communities, according to Simbulan, the conflict sensitivity specialist. "The military is once again resorting to stirring up communal tensions because it is des-

perately losing ground in Rakhine," she said. "As the expected de facto authority in Rakhine, the AA needs to heed its own words that this is a military tactic to divide communities, and not fall into the trap the military has set."

Zubair, in Maungdaw, said that the conflict and military conscription drive left him feeling like the military was attempting to "destroy our Rohingya youth ... from every angle". Since November, he has repeatedly been forced to flee his home due to the conflict. "Our village was attacked a lot, so we moved to another village which was less attacked," he said. By February, he was also running from military conscription. Human Rights Watch reported in April that the military had used methods including false offers of citizenship, nighttime raids and abduction at gunpoint to conscript at least 1,000 Rohingya men, some of whom it sent to fight on the front lines against the AA.

In Maungdaw, Zubair said he had been unable to sleep since military soldiers took his neighbours from their home one night in March because he was fearful he might be next. The military was also blocking the roads between villages, leaving him and other young people with few places to go. — Al Jazeera



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## Putin and Kim: An alarming new pact

**A**SHINY, sanctions-busting Russian limousine for Kim Jong-un. A fawning, rapturous reception for Vladimir Putin. These grand gestures may be welcomed by the North Korean and Russian leaders, but are intended as much for their global audience as for each other. The real prize is the strategic partnership treaty that they signed during Mr Putin's first visit to Pyongyang since 2000. The question is what it will mean in practical terms.

The relationship has been reinvigorated by events outside Asia, but hopes of containing it lie within the region. The proximate cause is evidently Russia's invasion of Ukraine: an isolated and impoverished Pyongyang is already believed to have supplied millions of artillery shells in return for cheap oil, food and other sorely needed goods. Russia might also benefit from North Korean manpower, though much more likely for labour than combat.

Further back lies Donald Trump's disastrous wooing and dismissal of Mr Kim. Entirely predictably, by handing him a top-level summit without any realistic strategy to improve relations in the long term, the then president ensured Mr Kim gave up on improving relations with the US and looked elsewhere. He also prompted Mr Putin and Xi Jinping, who had kept Mr Kim at a distance, to hug him closer.

The revival of a Soviet-era pledge of mutual support against "aggression" sounds primarily symbolic given North Korea's nuclear prowess. More disturbing is Mr Putin's remark that the partnership could include "military technical cooperation". US intelligence officials have said that they believe Russia is providing nuclear submarine and ballistic missile technology, though it is likely to extract a high price for such expertise and to have mixed feelings about North Korea's advances. At a minimum, Russia — which signed up to sanctions in the Obama years — is now obstructing diplomatic action to restrain North Korea.

The west has long feared a stronger relationship between Pyongyang, Moscow and Beijing. The launch of the Australian, UK and US (Aukus) security pact, a reaction to China's growing forcefulness in the Asia-Pacific region, has in turn raised Beijing's hackles. But China does not regard the others as peers and does not want to be seen as part of a trilateral axis with two pariah states, hence the lack of a Beijing stop on Mr Putin's Asian tour itinerary. It would also like to retain primacy in managing North Korea, and to limit its weapons development. It does not want the US to become more active in the region and is concerned that it is growing closer to Japan and South Korea, which are also increasing their defence capabilities. Mr Kim's shift from the long-held commitment to unification with the South to stressing hostility has not helped.

South Korea also said explicitly that it will consider sending arms to Ukraine in reaction to the Russian-North Korean deal, spelling out the message to Moscow. Until now, Seoul has limited direct support to non-lethal supplies, though it has signed hefty arms deals with allies of Kyiv. Russia, which has also ramped up its own arms manufacturing at speed, may in the longer term seek to rekindle relations with South Korea and Japan anyway; their large economies compare strikingly to the limited attractions of North Korea. That too offers hope that this deal could be constrained both in extent and duration. The danger is how much damage is caused in the meantime.

## Cogs of fate turning for Taiwan secessionists

**I**N the latest move in support of the pro-independence forces in Taiwan, the Joe Biden administration has approved a new \$360 million weapons sale to the island, which includes armed drones, missile equipment and related support material. That this is the 15th time the Biden administration has approved an arms sale to the island belies its promise to Beijing that the US does not support "Taiwan independence".

The deal "serves US national, economic, and security interests by supporting the recipient's continuing efforts to modernize its armed forces and to maintain a credible defensive capability", said the US Department of State in a statement, adding that it will "help improve the security of the recipient and assist in maintaining political stability, military balance, and economic progress in the region".

In reality, however, apart from the economic interests of the US military industry, the only other purpose the arms sale serves is emboldening the pro-independence forces on the island. The thank-you note Taiwan administration chief Lai Ching-te, a "pragmatic worker for Taiwan independence", sent to Washington the moment the arms sale was approved confirmed the evil intent of the US' move. What really makes the collusion between Washington and Taiwan ugly is that both know the island can never build enough "credible defense" to prevent the Chinese mainland from reunifying the island with the motherland, and yet they are trying to push the situation toward a conflict across the Taiwan Strait.

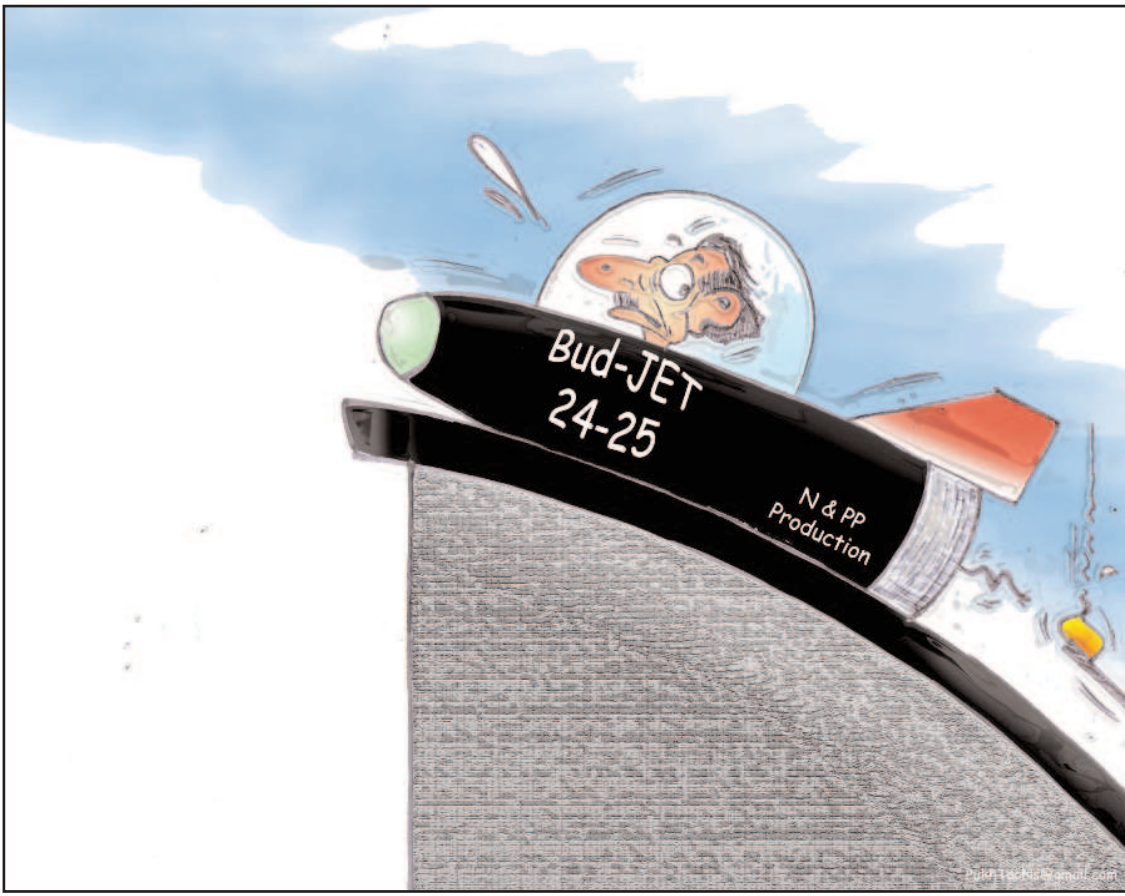
The ongoing Ukraine and Middle East crises, both orchestrated and prolonged by Washington, have once again exposed the Machiavellian character of the US. Ironically, the Biden administration has expressed the desire to ease tensions between US and Chinese militaries, but its interference in the Taiwan question and the South China Sea issue, sanctions against Chinese entities and tariffs on Chinese goods show it is still saying one thing and doing exactly the opposite.

The Taiwan question concerns China's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and therefore brooks no interference. And the US should know that the People's Liberation Army will not allow any power to derail the mainland's plan for the island's gradual reunification with the motherland.

As for the pro-independence forces on island, the set of guidelines the central government issued on Friday on meting out criminal punishment to them should remind Lai and his ilk on the island that they will be served what they have ordered in time and according to law. The guidelines have specific provisions for conviction and sentencing of hardcore "Taiwan independence" activists in accordance with the Anti-Secession Law, the Criminal Law, the Criminal Procedure Law and other legal provisions. It is to be hoped that the Taiwan compatriots will recognize the extreme harm pro-independence activists could cause to the island and resolutely oppose any secessionist activities, while working together with the mainland to promote peaceful development across the Strait.

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## Russia-N Korea partnership sends warning to West

Brad Dress

**R**USSIA and North Korea strengthened an alliance this week, in a blow to the US, with the leaders of both countries vowing to increase trade and defend each other in the event of an attack. Russian President Vladimir Putin's treaty reached with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un during a two-day state visit is the largest pact that Moscow has signed in years. It comes as the US is trying to blunt the Kremlin's war in Ukraine and deter Pyongyang from taking even more aggressive action against South Korea.

The US has tried to isolate both countries, but Putin's first visit to North Korea in 24 years was a counter to Washington's influence, as he and Kim deepened an alliance that was forged last year after Pyongyang began supplying Russia with munitions in return for critical technology, food and cash. Victor Cha, senior vice president for Asia and Korea chair at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), said Russia and North Korea have linked together two theaters of the world - Europe and Asia - posing a unique threat to the international order supported by the US and Western allies.

"It's bad from any way that you look at it," he said, adding that the defense treaty is, in Putin's mind, a renewal of Russian power. "I don't think there's a single bilateral relationship today that is more threatening than what we're seeing between North Korea and Russia." The Putin-Kim summit this week came after about two decades of frozen ties. While the Soviet Union had helped form North Korea in 1948, the collapse of the communist bloc in the 1990s turned Russia toward capitalism and away from Pyongyang.

Putin visited Pyongyang in 2000, and there have been other meetings between Russian and North Korean leaders since, but a strong relationship was never formed. North Korea largely relies on China for trade to support its flailing economy. But Putin's 2022 invasion of Ukraine increased global isolationism for Russia, which is

also struggling with a wave of Western sanctions. The Kremlin has been forced to turn toward other nations to keep a protracted war running; Iran has provided Russia with explosive Shahed drones, and China has given Moscow machine tools and other nonlethal technology.

After Kim visited Russia in September, North Korea supplied Moscow with artillery shells, a strong area of production for Pyongyang, whose forces often shell near the border

**But Putin's 2022 invasion of Ukraine increased global isolationism for Russia, which is also struggling with a wave of Western sanctions. The Kremlin has been forced to turn toward other nations to keep a protracted war running; Iran has provided Russia with explosive Shahed drones, and China has given Moscow machine tools and other nonlethal technology.**

with South Korea. In turn, Russia has given North Korea access to technology that is helping Kim boost development of missiles and spy satellites, along with trade for a struggling economy. Cha said the CSIS has documented busy activity in North Korea around facilities developing munitions, and that this could grow after the Putin-Kim summit, a dangerous sign for Ukraine as the US and Western allies struggle to keep up with the artillery needed for the war.

"This will allow Putin, as we get into the fall, to continue to just pound the crap out of Ukraine with 10,000 rounds of artillery a day," he said. "And it's very hard for the United States and Ukraine to counter that, to match that. All they can try to do is hold the line." The agreement reached Wednesday, which Russian media said overrides previous treaties, includes a commitment to increasing trade and the possibility of more defense and technology sharing in addition to a mutual defense pact, a rare move for Russia to make with another country.

Both Putin and Kim also publicly expressed shared frustrations, pushing for what they call a multipolar world order, meaning the

end of US dominance, and the lifting of sanctions and restrictions on nations. Putin called it a "ground-breaking document" in remarks in Pyongyang. He also vowed to help defend North Korea against a "treacherous, dangerous and aggressive enemy."

Kim said in public comments it was a "powerful treaty." "I have no doubt that it will be a driving force that would accelerate work to establish a new multipolar world," Kim said, according to Russian

state media. Putin was greeted with enthusiasm during his state visit, as Kim personally met him at Pyongyang International Airport with a decorated entourage and the Russian and North Korean flags on full display.

North Korean state media said Kim took Putin in a private car and the two leaders "exchanged the inmost thoughts that had so far been confined to them" as they pledged to increase bilateral relations. The visit prompted a backlash in the US, which has tried to dismantle Russia's war machine. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Tuesday that Russia was "in desperation" trying to prop up its war in Ukraine.

"We are very much concerned about this, because this is what's keeping the war going," he said. "And the fastest way to end the war is for Putin to be disabused of the notion that he can outlast Ukraine and outlast all of Ukraine's supporters, but also, if he knows that the fuel he needs for his war machine won't be there any more." Pentagon press secretary Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder also said the "deepening cooperation" between Russia and North Korea was concerning for the Korean

Peninsula, where Pyongyang and Seoul have both in the past several months abandoned a 2018 military agreement that had defused certain activity at the border.

North Korea has temporarily sent troops over the border and littered South Korea with trash balloons, while keeping up its missile tests and spy satellite launches, which are likely supported by Russian technology. Russia's technology trade with North Korea may also be helping to boost Kim's nuclear ambitions to build a fleet of nuclear weapons, including submarines and intercontinental ballistic missiles that could threaten the trilateral alliance of South Korea, Japan and the US in unprecedented ways.

It's unclear how much technology Putin is sharing. Sue Mi Terry, senior fellow for Korea studies at the Council on Foreign Relations, said Putin may be less willing to provide North Korea with more sensitive technology under a temporary alliance, but that a prolonged war in Ukraine could change his calculus. "If it is a more lasting alliance [then] Putin may be more forthcoming with Russian military technology," she wrote in an analysis this week. "If that is the case, Russia could turbocharge the threat that North Korea poses."

The mutual defense treaty between North Korea and Russia also signals that in the event of a war breaking out on the Korean Peninsula, Moscow would come to Pyongyang's aid, adding another complication to the regional tensions. Howard Stoffer, a professor of international affairs at the University of New Haven, said it was unclear if Russia would actually commit forces to any conflict on the Korean Peninsula.

But Stoffer added that Moscow would likely send military aid to North Korea in the event of a conflict, though he doubted its effectiveness. "I don't think it'll have very much impact, but it just makes Kim Jong Un feel he has his back covered," Stoffer said. "This won't change whatever we provide to South Korea [and] Russia is not going to provide any significant amount of military capability that the North doesn't already have."

## Macron just laid ultimate far-right trap

David A. Andelman

**I**N 1981, fresh off the heels of a triumphal election as France's president, the Socialist François Mitterrand made a bold, snap decision. He invited four members of the far-left Communist Party, long a thorn in his political side, into his new cabinet. Much of France was stunned. President Ronald Reagan was horrified and promptly sent his vice president, George H.W. Bush, racing to Paris to make sure the new leader of America's NATO ally hadn't lost his mind.

Following a two-hour lunch, Bush emerged into the courtyard where I was among a gaggle of reporters to pronounce his reassurance - talks were "warm and friendly" and he had every confidence in Mitterrand's plans for his nation.

In the ensuing months, the Mitterrand government, following a blueprint established by the communist ministers - who had never held government service but were quite adept at sniping from the sidelines - nationalized a host of key industries and banks. Baron Guy de Rothschild, who rarely met the press, gave me a tour of his bank, pointing to the chairs in his board room where his ancestors gazed down from the walls and declaimed how "communists will be sitting in these chairs."

Eventually, these initiatives, a core of the communist gameplan, came undone. First, the costs of the program ballooned as the Constitutional Court said prices paid for the nationalized companies were too low. Inflation skyrocketed past 8%. Taxes for the vast middle class soared. By 1983, two of the four communist ministers were gone from the government. A year later, they were all out. Finally in 1986, the nationalizations were reversed.

Mitterrand went on to notch up 14 years as president, the longest in the history of the French republic, with little further trouble from the radical left. Years later, Mitterrand confided to me what he had told Bush that day in 1981: "Hold your friends close and your enemies closer." Essentially: Give them enough leash, and eventually they'll hang themselves.

That was then, this is now. From the start of Emmanuel Macron's first presidential campaign, the far right - particularly the party of Marine Le Pen, heir to the political empire launched by her father Jean-Marie Le Pen - has been the thorn in his side. On Sunday, that thorn could no longer be ignored. In countries across the European Union, the right was resurgent in this year's European Parliamentary elections. While the right failed to attain absolute control over the European Parliament, their gains, especially in France and Germany, were impressive and leave them in a position for a substantially louder voice for the next five years.

In its wake, Macron called a surprise snap election after Le Pen's National Rally snagged a third of the vote. And if

there was any question why the world should care about this astonishing decision, these returns and all they suggest about voter attitudes will certainly loom over the G-7 summit happening in Italy this week, where President Joe Biden will be on his second visit to Europe in a week, following D-Day commemorations in Normandy. And then, there's the Olympics, with opening ceremonies less than three weeks after the French elections. With it, the risk of voters putting the right in power - and placing in jeopardy every Macron cabinet member who planned the festivities.

Why then, would Macron take this gamble? Apart from holding a handful of seats in the National Assembly, few from the French far right have ever governed, certainly not on the national stage. Instead, they hold any number of plans that from Macron's perspective are mere fantasies with risks of ruining the nation and its economy. Macron is likely counting on the byzantine mathematics of French politics that has three times denied Le Pen the presidency, and her father five times.

If no candidate wins 50% of the vote in a first round that is likely to have a dozen or more contenders, the top two must stand for a second round. (The same holds for every parliamentary seat, which is why there will also be two votes this time - the first round on June 30, the second on July 7.) At no time did any Le Pen manage to win more than a third of the vote in the first round. Then in the second round with just two candidates, only in the 2022 election did Marine Le Pen barely break 40% against Macron.

Of course, Macron will not be on the ballot this time. His term runs to 2027. But even if the right manages to win control of Parliament next month, allowing Le Pen's amanuensis, 28-year-old Jordan Bardella, to take over as prime minister - Le Pen saving herself for one (last) grab for the brass ring (the presidency) in 2027 - it will be a chance to showcase the utter failings of the extreme right. Their platform is staggering: slash immigration, ban Islamic head coverings in public, dial back renewable energy investment, lower inflation by rebating the VAT tax to consumers, expel foreigners who've been unemployed for more than a year, lower the retirement age back to 60, inaugurate a 20 billion euro national health plan, slash the VAT on energy to 5.5% from 20%, build six new nuclear generators and increase the security and justice budget by 1.5 billion euros a year.

All this with little sense of how to pay for it. Oh. And no restrictions any more on hunting, in Le Pen's words, "one of France's most ancestral traditions." Macron's political judgment has always been potent. But will he be able to effectively destroy the far right as a viable force before France gets to the next presidential election? It'll be a rocky road getting there.

## Heat waves deadlier than hurricanes. Make them 'disasters'

Mark Gongloff

**U**NLIKE other natural disasters, extreme heat doesn't topple buildings, flood streets or turn road signs into missiles. It doesn't provide a dramatic backdrop for daredevil weather reporters. What it mostly does is kill people, quietly and efficiently. It's long past time we respect its destructive power, which will only grow as a warming planet makes heat waves more frequent and intense.

This discussion is particularly relevant this week, as a "heat blob" that has punished Mexico and the Southwestern US for months creeps into the Midwest, Northeast and Canada, subjecting possibly 150 million people to unseasonably high temperatures for a miserable stretch of days.

For many Americans, a heat wave is just a nuisance. We'll sweat through our work clothes and blow

out our power bill running the air conditioning. Roads and sidewalks will buckle. Amtrak and public transportation around New York City will lose their spotless reputations for reliable performance (yes, that was sarcasm) as railroad tracks warp and power lines sag.

But for hundreds of thousands of people around the world every year, heat is deadly. In the US, it takes more lives than hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes or floods. It contributed to the deaths of more than 2,300 Americans last year, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the most in 45 years of record-keeping. The number of such heat-related deaths has more than doubled in just the past five years. Though this week's heat wave will have all the hallmarks of a discrete natural disaster like a named hurricane or serious earthquake, including the threat to human life and

health, the Federal Emergency Management Agency will not treat it as such. That's because it doesn't consider heat waves or wildfire-smoke events "major disasters" worthy of federal relief.

This is a huge oversight. On Monday, the Center for Biological Diversity, along with the AFL-CIO, the Service Employees International Union and dozens of other unions, public-health groups and nonprofits, petitioned FEMA to change its policy. The agency should listen. "Major disaster" designations for heat and smoke would unlock federal relief money for local governments to prepare for hot weather and wildfire-smoke season by building cooling centers, upgrading public buildings, communicating with the elderly and other vulnerable people, and much more. This would

save countless lives and billions of dollars in health-care costs and lost productivity. "Heat is the kind of disaster that, in contrast to some others, is actually very easy to address," Johns Hopkins professor Ben Zaitchik said in an interview. "If you can just get people a good response plan, then you can save everyone's life. No one should really die from heat, unlike a tornado."

California spent \$800 million on such preparation in 2022, the petition notes. That same year, FEMA rejected the state's request for federal disaster relief after a heat wave that killed an estimated 395 people. California, like other states, must balance its budget every year and has limited funds for such spending. The federal government is under no such constraint. FEMA itself is currently underfunded, understaffed

and confusingly organized. But Congress can help remedy that and US President Joe Biden can (and should) restore FEMA to its former Cabinet-level position to emphasize its growing importance.

Hotboxes like Phoenix that live with the constant threat of extreme temperatures have tried to become more resilient on their own, but the money is tight and the deaths have kept rising. And such places aren't always the most vulnerable when climate change causes more and deadlier heat waves that increasingly tend to hang around like unwelcome house guests. The heat dome that camped over the Pacific Northwest in 2021 killed an estimated 1,400 people in the US and Canada in a region where most people didn't have AC.

The highest temperatures in this week's heat wave might be in New England, with New

Hampshire possibly hitting 101 degrees Fahrenheit. Parts of Canada will get into the 90s. Such places are high on lists of havens from global heating as the zone of human habitability shifts northward in the coming decades. But this week will be a reminder that even these places won't escape the reach of climate change.

Some have argued we should name heat waves like hurricanes to raise awareness. Meteorologist Guy Walton names them after fossil-fuel companies; the heat blob currently menacing the US is Heat Wave Exxon.

It's a compelling idea, though the World Meteorological Organization argues that naming heat waves would only confuse people. For now, the most immediate heat-wave solution is not clever taxonomy but more urgency and more money.

The Japan Times



# World outlook optimistic but with uncertainties

Jim Reid/David

As we approach the half-way mark of 2024, the global economic outlook is looking increasingly positive. A soft landing for the US economy is a strong possibility now that it has proved resilient against the rapid rate hikes of 2022-23. Growth is looking more positive in the European Union too, although it appears to be more of a cyclical rather than a structural upswing.

In Asia, China's growth has surprised on the upside in the first quarter of this year, while Japan's growth is likely to stay above potential. This will help support risk assets in the near term as well, with our (Deutsche Bank's) strategists seeing the S&P 500 rising to 5,500 by year-end, as credit spreads should grind tighter over the coming months.

But there are plenty of obstacles to navigate. The global economy is still experiencing the lagged effects of tighter monetary policy while quantitative tightening continues. Inflation has come down, but both headline and core inflation are still above target in several major economies, including the United States and the eurozone. The rest of 2024 will also see elections in many countries, with results expected from France, the United Kingdom and the US. The results of the US election will be in particular focus, with the potential for major implications for the global trading system.

Moreover, the elections will be held against the backdrop of several geopolitical hotspots, including in the Middle East and Ukraine. Indeed, given the surprises of recent years, it's hard to imagine there won't be at least some economic shock in the next couple of years.

Looking at the different regions, our US economists continue to anticipate a soft landing with GDP growth of about 2.4 percent this year (close to the 2023 level) and about 2.2 percent in 2025 and 2026. Inflation in the US is running hot but our economists believe that rent prices will ultimately aid the disinflation process and allow the US Federal

Reserve to cut rates in December. The economists see the start of a 75 basis-point mid-cycle adjustment by mid-2025, before edging toward neutral (3.75-4 percent) by 2026.

The greatest uncertainty, however, is the US presidential election in November, especially given how close it looks set to be. It's unlikely there will be any move to reduce the deficit, and for now it's a reasonable assumption that it will remain around 6.5 percent of GDP over the next five years, regardless of which party's candidate wins the presidential election.

However, the nature of that budget deficit could well change after the election, as Republicans would pursue more tax reductions while Democrats would prefer increasing spending, possibly combined with a lapse of tax cuts on upper-income households and some increase in the corporate tax rate. The potential outcomes will depend not just on the new president, but also on which party controls the two chambers in Congress.

For the EU, our economists have made substantial upgrades, raising the eurozone's 2024 GDP forecast by half a point to 0.9 percent. After the stagnation in 2022-23, the European Union's GDP started growing again in the first quarter of this year, with external demand as the driver. However, this optimism is more cyclical than structural. Our economists are not extrapolating the faster 2024 momentum into 2025, and forecast a 1.5 percent GDP growth.

With wage growth peaking, our economists continue to believe inflation would converge back to target in 2025, and expect three 25 basis-point rate cuts by the European Central Bank in 2024, with the risk now skewing toward two.

Turning to Asia, in April our economists raised the forecast for China's growth in 2024 by 0.5 percentage point to 5.2 percent after a stronger-than-expected first quarter. The economic out-

look has not changed much since then; growth in the near term will be supported by a continued recovery in exports and a healthy increase in fiscal spending. Beyond that, growth will likely slow to 4.5 percent in 2025, with the economists expecting the People's Bank of China to cut the policy rate twice this year for a total of 20 basis points.

In Japan, our economists expect growth to remain above potential for the next two years. Japan's external environment is improving, and its domestic demand is expected to remain steady, supported by accelerating wage hikes. Although the underlying inflation trend will continue to decelerate, it is likely to rise again as wage increases are passed through to sales prices. Our forecast for Bank of Japan is more hawkish than the market with a hike to 0.25 percent in July, 0.5 percent in December, followed by further 25 basis-point hikes in the third quarter of 2025 and the first quarter of 2026.

When it comes to our market forecast, a significant shift in fiscal policy could have a material impact on the rates outlook in the longer term. From an economic perspective, there is a strong case for easier fiscal policy in the EU to deal with the strategic geopolitical challenges ahead. From a political perspective, the current fiscal construct in the eurozone in general and Germany in particular are hurdles to easier fiscal policy.

On the other hand, the lack of tighter fiscal policy even under a divided government in the US right now indicates increased political tolerance for fiscal spending. The resolution to the conflict between economic logic and the political environment will ultimately be key to determining the outlook for monetary policy and rates in the years ahead.

In foreign exchange, our strategists' bullish outlook on both the US dollar and foreign exchange continues. More than half of the world's developed market central banks, including the Fed and the ECB, are expected to have identi-

cal easing cycles leading into 2025-26. As long as the US dollar remains a high yielder, the strategists continue to see a potential Fed easing cycle as a bark with no bite for the dollar. And with global growth holding up so far, the dollar can continue doing well, with a break below 1.05 for euro/US dollar being more likely than a sustained move above 1.10.

In Japan, our economists don't see the stars aligning for a stronger yen. Intervention has been aimed at slowing the move rather than defending the levels, and underlying inflation can still afford a gradualist Bank of Japan in the economists' opinion.

Japan's external balance is not responding to a weak yen. And the broader basic balance remains negative, with foreign direct investment and portfolio outflows continuing. A big shift toward repatriation dynamics is the biggest potential positive catalyst for the yen, so our economists are keeping an eye on the upcoming government pension investment fund portfolio review later this year.

In equities, our strategists continue to be constructive as they feel macro upgrades have further to go. While the macro consensus has dropped persistent US recession calls, it has remained below actual growth for the last seven quarters. The strategists' forecasts point to a 2024 year-ending target of 5,500 for the S&P 500 (current 5,235) and 540 for the Stoxx 600 (current 518).

Overall, our economists and strategists are relatively optimistic. Even in this bullish year so far, the narrative has changed many times, with futures going from pricing in almost seven Fed cuts in January to falling to just over one as we go to print. This back and forth in rate expectations, where the market has been too dovish, has been a constant narrative for the last couple of years and suggests that this cycle is struggling to conform to models the market relies on. Given that backdrop, it does feel that it pays to be flexible and to have some contingencies for the unexpected.

# Putin and Kim keep the world guessing about their sanction-busting plans

Anthony V. Rinna

**N**EARLY a quarter-century after his last visit to Pyongyang, Russian President Vladimir Putin has returned to the North Korean capital. The visit hardly went as smoothly as one would hope - time was cut short, some aspects of protocol were poorly coordinated. But it set the stage for an increasingly close relationship between the two states in their efforts to skirt international law.

The revival of a mutual defense agreement between the DPRK and Russia is arguably the most remarkable development from the summit. Even that ground-shaking development, however, went somewhat awkwardly as Kim referred to the agreement as establishing an "alliance," a term Putin did not use. However, analysts and policymakers are also watching for what implications this partnership between Moscow and Pyongyang will have for the current sanctions regime against North Korea.

Among the chief concerns in the West is that the Kremlin is ultimately aiming to upend the international sanctions regime against the DPRK as part of Russian efforts to revise the global order more to its liking. Nevertheless, this may not be what motivates Putin. Rather what we may be seeing is the resumption of a pre-pandemic trajectory of pursuing economic cooperation with North Korea, one in which the Kremlin will be less inclined to adhere to international law regarding the DPRK.

Regardless of Moscow's intentions, pursuing economic cooperation with North Korea - which featured as part of Kim Jong Un's first summit with Putin in 2019 - does pose a grave risk to the current global order. It potentially signals the next step in the full-scale unraveling of punitive economic measures designed to curb North Korea's nuclear and missile programs.

This summit, which Pyongyang hopes will lead to deeper economic and trade relations with Russia, signals that Moscow is continuing with long-standing policies aimed at pursuing economic cooperation with North Korea. Prior to 2020, prospects for DPRK-Russia economic collaboration were on the upswing - including as part of a potential trilateral arrangement with South Korea - before North Korea's self-imposed isolation during the pandemic brought everything to a halt.

Ahead of his visit to the DPRK, Putin announced that North Korea and Russia would jointly oppose the "unilateral and illegal" sanctions laid against them. Such language is a marked departure from Moscow's previous position that UN sanctions were legitimate, but the unilateral sanctions imposed by the US Treasury Department were not.

Konstantin Asmalov of the Russian Academy of Sciences asserts that where as Russia approved UN sanctions against the DPRK in response to its repeated nuclear tests in 2016-2017, Moscow now regards that as a mistake given that the US did not allow for sanctions

merely cooperate in perfectly legal areas or perhaps even in "gray areas."

Indeed, even in the face of well-grounded accusations of misconduct, the Russian government has performed rhetorical acrobatics to justify its actions. These ranged from flat-out denial to claiming that the deployment of North Korean workers to Russian-occupied eastern Ukraine was acceptable because Russia viewed the regions to be independent states, though not members of the

**Nevertheless, even in the face of evidence clearly showing Russia is violating these sanctions, the Kremlin remains adamant that it has remained faithful to them. This shows Moscow understands what the implications would be if it explicitly rejected these sanctions.**

relief in spite of North Korea's moratorium on nuclear testing.

North Korea's importance to Russia is directly tied to the economic development of the Russian Far East, from importing North Korean labor to using the warm water port at Rason close to the DPRK-Russia border. Even amid Russia's efforts to enhance economic ties with countries in the Asia-Pacific, Russia approved sanctions (albeit reluctantly) against North Korea in response to its repeated nuclear tests. These restrictions placed strong limits on economic cooperation, undermining Moscow's desire for an improved economic relationship with Pyongyang.

Today, however, with Russia itself the most heavily sanctioned country in the world, Moscow has fewer incentives to adhere to the very economic measures it approved at the UN Security Council. Russia's adherence to sanctions against the DPRK was patchy even before 2022. Nevertheless, even in the face of evidence clearly showing Russia is violating these sanctions, the Kremlin remains adamant that it has remained faithful to them.

This shows Moscow understands what the implications would be if it explicitly rejected these sanctions. Konstantin Asmalov, an academic studying North Korea at the Russian Academy of Sciences, recently argued that while the possibility that Pyongyang and Moscow would combine forces to undo UN sanctions cannot be ruled out, the Kremlin is well aware doing so would risk its privileges at the United Nations. As such, in Asmalov's opinion, the DPRK and Russia may

UN. Furthermore, Russia's decision to disband the UN Panel of Experts for North Korea in 2024 indicates Moscow is willing to enable North Korea to flout sanctions more easily.

Thus, the most important thing for analysts to do after Wednesday's summit is to watch for the speed and scope with which Russia decides to openly flout the UN's punitive economic measures. Prior to 2020, Russia pursued economic cooperation with North Korea largely (but by no means entirely) within the scope of UN sanctions.

The speed and extent to which Russia ignores sanctions against the DPRK following the 2004 Kim-Putin summit will serve as a metric for how much importance the Kremlin places on this relationship. The more willing Moscow is to act against the global consensus against Pyongyang, the more important the alliance will become. Aside from Russia's interest in North Korean weaponry and workers, the Kremlin is also likely to deepen relations by exporting fuel to the DPRK and importing North Korean coal.

It is in Russia's interests to strengthen economic ties with North Korea to the fullest possible extent. Moscow has an opportunity to build economic leverage over Pyongyang at the expense of China, prevent a North Korean regime collapse and, of course, access to North Korean weaponry. With Kim Jong Un and Vladimir Putin having established a clear working relationship, the two leaders will likely work closely to determine how far they are willing to go to circumvent international law, leaving the rest of the world to find out.

The Moscow Times

# Why is Tory press in a frenzy? Is it WW3 or climate crisis? No - it's VAT on private schools

**B**ASED on a quick glance at headlines from the rightwing press, you might be led to believe that the world as we know it is coming to an end. But this apocalypse is not related to the climate emergency, or geopolitics, or a new pandemic. No, it will come, apparently, as a result of Labour's plan to add VAT to private school fees.

Intent on corralling their loyal readerships into the same frothing hysteria, these outlets blare, like foghorns, variations on a theme: VAT on private school fees is an iceberg to the Titanic that is that cornerstone of British life, the public school. They scoff at the £1.5bn the policy would raise, a sum that could be used to recruit 6,500 new secondary school teachers at a time when only half of the required numbers in England are training to enter the profession. Since the public is too thick to see what is truly at stake here and the Tories are all but mince meat, it's left to these parts of the press to resolutely speak truth to power.

"Labour's VAT raid on private schools poses 'existential threat', says Gordonstoun head", scolded the Telegraph. If that doesn't stir the correct feelings of outrage in you, dear reader, perhaps a headline like "Labour's VAT on private school fees to 'leave legacy similar to closure of mines'" will rouse your sense of injustice?

In case you missed either of the above, news feeds could also alert

you to "Families in crisis as count-down begins to Labour's private school fee hike", or "Private school teachers' pensions under threat from Labour tax raid". The Daily Mail warns that "Labour's school VAT raid 'may harm' vulnerable pupils". It's almost as though the rightwing faction of a profession (editors and broadcasters) in which 43% of the most influential figures attended public school has a vested interest in dominating the debate about this policy.

Away from these hysterical headlines, the reality is that private schools are a bastion of privilege, preserving a cycle where the wealthy can afford an education that puts them at a remove from everyone else and which maintains their social and economic advantages. In a 2019 report, the Sutton Trust revealed that 39% of Britain's most powerful people attended private school, a rate five times higher than the general public. Though only making up 7% of Britain's entire school population, these elites represent 65% of our senior judges, 57% of Rich List members, 48% of FTSE 350 CEOs and 63% of Rishi Sunak's cabinet, on his becoming prime minister.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies notes that the "occupational status advantage" of private school pupils results in higher earnings. Recent studies show that, in 2015, at the age of 25 a private school alumnus

could expect to be earning 17% more than someone who went to a state school. By 40, men born in 1970 who attended private school earned 35% more than their state school peers, reflecting what the IFS calls "a striking return on their parents' investment". You may conclude, therefore, that they do not have a right to a government break. God forbid that those extensive and well-tended playing fields might be levelled, just a tad.

And so this effort to equalise, in the smallest way possible, educational opportunity is twisted and distorted, becoming an outsized threat that is only a "cruel" desire to see the lives of "hard-working" people ruined. Forget about the Jacob Rees-Moggs and Boris Johnsons of our world, and instead consider the "domestic staff, gardeners, caterers, plumbers, maintenance and administrative staff" who could lose their jobs as a result of school closures. And if that doesn't get your tears flowing, there are also the parents "who are both working two jobs" who we do not "associate with putting their children into an independent school".

Even by the right's own logic, the policy doesn't represent a real threat. In spite of considerable fees hikes over the past decade, private school attendance has remained as unruffled as a butler at Downton Abbey. Average fees for private day schools rose by 8% for the 2023-24

academic year, to an eye-watering £18,064, with boarding school fees soaring to £42,459. The Department for Education, rather inconveniently for the VAT scare stories, just reported that as of January 2024, private school enrolment rose from 591,954 the previous year to 593,486. And, ahem, 12 new independent schools opened last year. For all the siren-like wailing about expected enrolment drops should Labour follow through, the data asks that we make another set of inferences. Families choosing private education are more "resilient" and less sensitive to price increases than the scaremongering would have us believe.

For decades, private schools have been the grooming grounds for Britain's political and economic leaders. Countless prime ministers epitomise the journey from an expensive and exclusive education to positions of power in government and the media. These overblown stories of imminent disaster prove that the prospect of these schools facing financial pressure, however small, - or, heaven forbid, closing - is taken as a direct challenge to the entrenched privileges of Britain's elite. While I'm no Labour cheerleader at the moment, it's time for private schools to learn to play fair, even if it means their manicured lawns become a little less perfect. But maybe it is precisely this kind of disruption that so terrifies the elite.

Chen Weihua

# NATO chief's nuclear saber-rattling threatens mankind

**N**ATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has always been known as a warmonger. But just weeks before his scheduled retirement after the NATO summit in Washington, he wants to add the nomenclature of a nuclear warmonger to his sordid legacy.

Stoltenberg told The Telegraph on Sunday that NATO is mulling the increasing number of available nuclear weapons to counter the alleged threat from Russia and China. "I won't go into operational details about how many nuclear warheads should be operational and which should be stored, but we need to consult on these issues. That's exactly what we're doing," he said.

Such irresponsible, belligerent remarks coming from a NATO chief is shocking, because it is an invitation to a nuclear arms race and even a nuclear war which would wipe out the entire human race. According to the estimates of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, which was released on Monday, global spending on nuclear weapons is estimated to have jumped to a record \$91.4 billion in 2023. The United States' share of the total spending, \$51.5 billion, is more

than all the other nuclear-armed states put together and accounts for 80 percent of the increase in nuclear weapons spending last year. The global increase of \$10.7 billion from the previous year was largely driven by the rapid increase in the US military budget.

The US has 1,770 nuclear warheads fitted to missiles or located in bases with operational forces, according to a report by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute on Monday, while Russia has 1,710. Together, the two countries account for 90 percent of the global nuclear arsenal.

Besides, three of the world's top five nuclear powers are NATO members - the US, the United Kingdom and France. It is absurd for Stoltenberg and some in Washington to try to spread fear across the world by claiming that China, whose nuclear arsenal is a fraction of that of the US, poses a nuclear threat to NATO.

More importantly, China has long maintained a minimum deterrence strategy of nuclear weapons. China is the first country to pledge no first use of nuclear weapons; it has also promised not to use

nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapons states.

For decades, China has been urging the US and other countries to make the same pledge but its pleas have fallen on deaf ears in Washington and other capitals.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lin Jian reiterated this week that China's strategy is one of maintaining a high level of stability, continuity and predictability, and asked reporters to pay attention to the huge US investment in upgrading its nuclear arsenal. Moreover, in December, the Scientific American, in its editorial, warned of the dire consequences of the US' plan to modernize its unwanted, unneeded and unsafe nuclear triad of land-, sea- and air-based weapons.

"Perfectly poised to rekindle the cold war, these overhauled bombs will waste \$1.5 trillion and threaten life on Earth for the century to come. We should rethink this miserable folly rather than once again squandering our wealth while driving a new arms race," the editorial said. As for Stoltenberg's saber-rattling, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, a UK-based organization, condemned him for conjur-

ing up the phantom of a nuclear war. CND General Secretary Kate Hudson said "Stoltenberg's suggestion that NATO make more of its nuclear weapons operationally available is a further step towards nuclear war. The latest NATO insanity must be opposed."

The lack of public endorsement for Stoltenberg's nuclear warmongering by European leaders of NATO shows that he may have been echoing the voices of certain Pentagon officials. NATO has been sabotaging global efforts to promote nuclear disarmament since it bombed and invaded Libya to effect a regime change by abusing a United Nations resolution on no-fly-zone in 2011, years after Muammar Gaddafi had abandoned his nuclear program.

NATO has made it much harder, if not impossible, for countries feeling threatened by the transatlantic military alliance to shelve their nuclear programs. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea is a case in point. The whole world, including European Union leaders, should denounce Stoltenberg's nuclear saber-rattling because he has just pushed the world a step closer to nuclear annihilation.

The China Daily

# Lockdown sank both Trudeau and Sunak

Michael Coren

**I**f the political world were a little less harsh, or perhaps slightly more bizarre, the British Conservatives and the Canadian Liberals would form some type of alliance. Not that they're politically allied but misery does demand company, and nobody wants to weep alone.

While Canada's Liberals aren't quite as doomed, the latest polls have what is regarded as one of the most successful electoral machines in the Western world trailing by double digits. There are numerous reasons for each party's decline, but in both cases the evaporation began after the pandemic lockdowns. Many other countries legislated draconian rules and regulations in 2020, but Britain and Canada stand out as being especially harsh.

The jury is still out of course at how effective these responses were, and leaders were for the most part simply listening to the scientific consensus, but a combination of mixed messages, occasional personal hypocrisy, and often unconvincing explanations of the arguments for the lockdowns all made colossal dents in the parties in power. There are echoes of Churchill in 1945 in all this. Genuine dislike of the man existed only on the fringes of British society, and his personal popularity was as high as it had ever been. But the overriding perception was that the job had been done, the war won, and it was time to

move on.

He'd led a coalition rather than a party during the Second World War and the Conservatives did surprisingly well in the election, but not well enough. Those who didn't vote for him saw their decision not as ingratitude but as realism. Regarding Covid, my own opinion is that, faced with a crisis unprecedented in modern times, both the British Conservatives and Canadian Liberals deserved some leeway. People were drowning in panic and fear, hysteria was never far away, and politicians were constantly reacting to terrifying developments, with only hours to construct detailed policy.

Yet government scandals in Britain relating to the lockdown began the unravelling not just of the Boris Johnson government but of the entire party structure. A whole stew of ideological division, personal rivalry, the rise of people unqualified for high office, and the empowerment of any alternative all played into the hands of the Labour Party. In Canada the problems were more dramatic. The Christian Right, conservative elements particularly in western Canada, and a visceral dislike of Justin Trudeau - seen by many as the privileged son of privileged father Pierre - all coalesced to build an alliance of discontent. There were evangelical churches that refused to comply with the ban of public meetings,

with clergy being arrested, and "F--- Trudeau" signs began to appear on cars and flags.

In 2022, what was known as the Freedom Convoy drove across the country and settled in the capital, Ottawa. There were hundreds of lorries and cars, an enormous police presence and a sense of anarchy and trauma that Canada hadn't seen in generations. It helped lead to the fall of the moderate, centrist Tory leader, Erin O'Toole, who was unsympathetic to the demonstrations. He was replaced by Pierre Poilievre, from the Right of the party and someone seen as far more acceptable to those who took their grievances to Ottawa. He's the man who seems likely to replace Justin Trudeau.

Neither Poilievre nor Sir Keir Starmer have outlined what they would have done during the pandemic that was fundamentally different from what actually happened. They've alluded to acting more swiftly, being more selective in their targeting and - the easy one - being more efficient. Canada's Liberals and Britain's Conservatives have both ripped away their chances of electoral success due to any number of failures and foul-ups, but truth be told, when it comes to the lockdowns the main selling points of their opponents are that they weren't the ones who had to do the dirty work. Vote for us, because we weren't there.

The Telegraph





# ICMA International, Dynamics Solution and Technology sign MoU



### F.P. Report

LAHORE: Institute of Cost and Management Accountants of Pakistan (ICMA) and Dynamics Solution and Technology have formalized their collaboration through a

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed at the ICMA Lahore Campus. This strategic partnership aims to leverage the strengths of both organizations in corporate training, seamless HR processes including job

placements and internships, collaborative research projects, and joint events.

The MOU was signed and exchanged by Mr. Muhammad Yasin, Vice President ICMA, and Mr. Imran Bin Naeem, Chief Executive Officer

Dynamics Solution and Technology. The signing ceremony was graced by esteemed attendees including Mr. Salman Farooqi, Chief Marketing Officer; Mr. Affan Farooqi, Chief Technology Officer; Mr. Muhammad Shahroz, Senior Manager HRBP of Dynamics Solution and Technology; Mr. Zia Ul Mustafa, Chairman Strategic Board, Mr. Abdul Qayyum, Member, National Council, Mr. Hamid Zahoor, Secretary Lahore Branch Council, Mr. Muhammad Shahid, Member, Lahore Branch Council, Mr. Muhammad Yaseen, Member, Lahore Branch Council, Mr. Hariss Ahmed, Senior Officer, ICMA Pakistan.

This partnership marks a significant step towards mutual growth and the enhancement of corporate and educational frame-



HYDERABAD: Farmer women working in the field. — INP photo

## WB okays \$535 mln for Crisis-Resilient Social Protection

ISLAMABAD (APP): The World Bank's (WB) Board of Executive Directors on Friday approved \$535 million in financing for Pakistan to support two projects namely Crisis-Resilient Social Protection (CRISP) and the Sindh Livestock and Aquaculture Sectors Transformation (LIVAQUA).

The additional financing for the CRISP program aims to strengthen the country's social protection system and build shock resilience among poor and vulnerable households, while the LIVAQUA project will promote climate-smart and competitive small and medium producers in the livestock and aquaculture sectors in Sindh, said a news release.

"The catastrophic floods that hit Pakistan in 2022 were a tragic reminder of the importance to build resilience to such disasters, including by strengthening both social protection and sec-

tors that support economic growth and recovery," said Najy Benhassine, World Bank Country Director for Pakistan.

"It is also imperative to help the vulnerable absorb climate shocks through innovative climate-smart technology and contingency planning," he added. The additional financing for CRISP (\$400 million) will build on the program's on-going efforts to equip Pakistan's social protection system with the policy and delivery system foundations necessary for more effective and rapid responses to future crises.

The program will focus on longer-term policy actions to further improve the national cash transfer program's effectiveness, coverage and Federal-Provincial coordination.

"Since its inception, the CRISP program has achieved significant results with regular safety net support to more than nine million families and a demonstrated capability of

quickly reaching 2.8 million families during the recent floods," said Amjad Zafar Khan, Task Team Leader for the Project.

"The additional financing would not only assist families in becoming more resilient to climate and economic shocks, but also encourage the use of provincial capacities to take up a larger role in social assistance."

LIVAQUA (\$135 million) will finance interventions to promote climate-smart production, value addition, inclusive access to markets, and help create opportunities for growth in the livestock and aquaculture sectors.

These will include improving sector policy and strategic frameworks, as well as evidence-based decision making. It will also contribute to strengthening the capacity of public and private providers to deliver essential knowledge, inputs, and services such as disease surveillance and control, diagnostic laboratory services,

breeding programs, food safety, and the development and transfer of green technologies.

LIVAQUA will cover all districts in Sindh using a phased approach. It is expected to directly benefit more than 940,000 farm families, including 930,000 livestock households and 10,000 aquaculture producers.

The project also includes measures to ensure female farmers' participation in the project and narrow gender gaps.

"The project will improve the livelihoods of small and medium livestock and aquaculture producers, increase their resilience to animal health and climate-related shocks, strengthen the overall growth of these two sectors in Sindh, and more broadly improve food and nutrition security and reduce the sectors' contribution to greenhouse gas emissions," said Myriam Chaudron, Task Team Leader for the project.

## Wall Street mixed in choppy trade as tech regains ground

NEW YORK (Reuters): Wall Street's main indexes were flat to higher in choppy trading on Friday, with the Nasdaq reversing earlier losses as megacap tech stocks regained ground, while investors also assessed stronger-than-expected U.S. business activity data.

Megacaps Microsoft (MSFT.O), opens new tab Alphabet (GOOGL.O), opens new tab, Amazon.com (AMZN.O), opens new tab and Apple (AAPL.O), opens new tab rose between 0.7% and 2%, lifting the tech-heavy Nasdaq (.IXIC), opens new tab and helping the S&P 500 (.SPX), opens new tab pare early losses.

The S&P 500 Technology index (.SPLRCT), opens new tab reversed early losses, rising 0.1%, while financial stocks (.SPSY), opens new tab were the biggest decliner.

All the three major Wall Street indexes were on track to post weekly gains, with the S&P 500 (.SPX), opens new tab briefly crossing the 5,500-point milestone during

Thursday's session.

U.S. business activity crept up to a 26-month high in June amid a rebound in employment, but price pressures subsided considerably, offering hope that a recent slowdown in inflation was likely to be sustained.

Flash services PMI increased to 55.1 this month, above expectations of 53.7, while manufacturing PMI edged up to 51.7, compared with expectations of a dip to 51.

May home sales fell to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 4.11 million units versus expectations of 4.10 million units.

The market is also assessing a string of weakening economic data, and commentary from U.S. Federal Reserve officials this week that interest rates could remain higher for longer if there is no consistent improvement in inflation numbers.

"It certainly looks like at this point the Fed is going to hold tight for a while ... the market is slowly adjusting to that reality," said Lamar Villere, portfolio manager

with Villere & Co.

Money markets are still pricing in a 58% chance of a 25-basis point rate cut in September, and still expect about two rate cuts this year, according to LSEG's FedWatch data.

AI chip firm Nvidia (NVDA.O), opens new tab slipped 0.5%, while semiconductor stocks Qualcomm (QCOM.O), opens new tab, Broadcom (AVGO.O), opens new tab and Micron Technology (MU.O), opens new tab were down between 0.2% and 2%.

Wall Street's bumper gains since the final leg of 2023 have been primarily driven by the likes of Nvidia and a handful of other heavily weighted stocks linked to artificial intelligence. Analysts, however, have raised concerns whether the strong increase in their valuations is sustainable.

Friday's session will mark the expiry of quarterly derivatives contracts tied to stocks, index options and futures, also known as "triple witching", adding to market volatility. At 12:12 p.m.

ET, the Dow Jones Industrial Average (.DJI), opens new tab was down 9.57 points, or 0.02%, at 39,125.19, the S&P 500 (.SPX), opens new tab was up 2.04 points, or 0.04%, at 5,475.21, and the Nasdaq Composite (.IXIC), opens new tab was up 45.86 points, or 0.26%, at 17,767.44.

Spirit AeroSystems (SPR.N), opens new tab rose 6.1% following a Reuters report that Boeing (BA.N), opens new tab is nearing a deal to buy back the airplane parts supplier after months of talks.

Sarepta Therapeutics (SRPT.O), opens new tab soared 35.2% after the U.S. FDA allowed expanded use of the company's gene therapy for patients with Duchenne muscular dystrophy aged four and older.

Declining issues outnumbered advancers for a 1.36-to-1 ratio on the NYSE and a 1.14-to-1 ratio on the Nasdaq.

The S&P index recorded 15 new 52-week highs and one new low, while the Nasdaq recorded 18 new highs and 116 new lows.

## Rent crosses Dh1 million per year for some villas, flats

DUBAI (Khaleej Times): Rents have reached record highs due to unprecedented demand for uber-luxury properties in Dubai, with 270 rental transactions signed in the first five months of 2024 with annual rents of Dh1 million or more.

This shows that the UAE continued to attract high net-worth individuals, or millionaires, from across the globe who are making the emirate their home.

According to a study by property brokerage firm Betterhomes, the prime locations dominating the high-end market were Palm Jumeirah, Mohammad bin Rashid City, and Dubai Hills Estate as they are renowned for their upscale amenities and prime real estate offering.

Among these luxury rentals, 61 per cent of villas and townhouses, reflecting the preference for spacious and private living environments in the emirate's luxury segment. The remaining 39 per cent

were apartments, which were chosen for their prime locations and high-rise views. The average size for luxury apartments was around 4,000 sqft while villas and townhouses average around 6,300 sqft.

As reported by Khaleej Times earlier, the UAE will see over 6,700 millionaires more this year, the highest for the third consecutive year, according to The Henley Private Wealth Migration Report 2024 released by Henley and Partners. The UAE is home to 116,500 millionaires with a liquid investable wealth of \$1 million plus, 308 centi-millionaires with assets of \$100 million plus and 20 billionaires.

Most of these millionaires relocating to Dubai will look to either buy or rent a property in Dubai due to the safety and security, world-class lifestyle, and easy connectivity with different cities around the world.

According to the latest Destination Dubai report released

by Knight Frank, Dubai took pole position at 67 per cent in 2023 for the most preferred UAE emirate for real estate investments amongst global HNWIs. This figure jumped to 73 per cent this year, highlighting the city-state's enduring and growing appeal amongst the world's wealthy.

Betterhomes data showed that leasing luxury properties are much cheaper than in London, New York, Hong Kong and Singapore but the average size of the units is much bigger than in the four cities. In fact, rents of uber-luxury properties in Dubai cost nearly half of what is charged in Hong Kong and Singapore while per square foot space is almost double that is offered in the two cities.

For instance, the minimum annual rent for the luxury market is around Dh500,000 in Dubai but it costs nearly Dh700,000 in London and New York, Dh1.17 million in Hong Kong and Dh955,000 in Singapore.

## Engro fertilizers completes largest EnVen plant turnaround

ISLAMABAD (APP): Engro Fertilizers has invested approximately USD 50 million in a plant turnaround to enhance its reliability and operational efficiency and the company successfully completed the largest-ever scheduled maintenance activity for the EnVen Plant, spanning 55 days, as planned on June 18, 2024.

Established in 2011 with an investment of USD 1.1 billion, the EnVen Plant has an annual production capacity of 1.3 million tons and is the most energy efficient fertilizer plant in Pakistan,

with the lowest consumption of gas per ton of urea, said a news release.

The project scope of the turnaround included over 5,000 technical activities, including the first-ever replacement of the waste heat boiler, overhaul of the furnace convection section, ammonia storage tank inspection and a comprehensive overhaul of six major turbo trains and gas turbines.

At peak, more than 6,000 people were engaged round-the-clock at the Plant site for these turnaround activities.

According to Ali Rathore – CEO of Engro Fertilizers, "The safe and successful completion of this major turnaround, despite extreme weather conditions, showcases the engineering excellence of the Engro Fertilizers team in executing large-scale projects within planned schedules and budgets, while prioritizing the safety of everyone involved in the activity.

These critical projects were executed in-house by our talented engineers using innovative techniques and global best practices of safety and

quality."

He added that, "The meticulous planning and execution ensured that the availability of urea to our hardworking farmers was not impacted, demonstrating the entire Engro Fertilizers team's firm commitment to our purpose of enabling the food security of Pakistan.

We would like to thank our employees, contractors, global technical partners, local administration, and all other key stakeholders for their seamless support and guidance that contributed to the success of this major turnaround."

## Boeing expected to evade criminal charges for violating settlement

NEW YORK (Reuters): The U.S. Justice Department is expected to allow planemaker Boeing (BA.N), opens new tab to escape criminal prosecution for violating the terms of a 2021 settlement related to the fatal 737 MAX crashes in 2018 and 2019, the New York Times reported on Friday.

The DOJ plans to offer Boeing a deferred prosecution agreement, which requires the company to install a federal monitor to oversee safety improvements, the New York Times reported, citing people familiar with the situation. The U.S. government is expected to extend its settlement offer to the planemaker before the end of the month, the report said. Boeing was not immediately available for comment, and a spokesperson for the DOJ declined to comment.

Reuters could not independently verify the report. Boeing shares were flat in afternoon trade. In May, the DOJ said Boeing failed to "design, implement, and enforce a compliance and ethics program" to prevent violations of U.S. fraud laws. Boeing in January 2021 agreed with the DOJ to pay \$2.5



billion to resolve a criminal investigation into the company's conduct surrounding the fatal crashes.

The agreement included money to compensate victims' relatives and required Boeing to overhaul its compliance practices.

Had the DOJ wanted, it could have charged the company criminally, which could have affected the iconic planemaker's ability to secure government contracts, according to a Reuters review of prosecutors' actions following findings that companies violated other similar

agreements.

But after an intense internal debate, department officials appear to have concluded that prosecuting Boeing would be too legally risky, according to the New York Times report on Friday.

Any DOJ move to not prosecute Boeing will bring some relief to the beleaguered planemaker, which has been engulfed in a crisis since the Jan. 5 accident involving a 737 MAX 9 jet. Boeing shares have slumped over 30% this year.

Relatives of the victims

of the fatal 737 MAX crashes asked the Justice Department on Wednesday to seek a fine against the planemaker of nearly \$25 billion and move forward with a criminal prosecution.

Senator Richard Blumenthal, who chairs the Senate's Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations and held a hearing with Boeing CEO Dave Calhoun on Tuesday, said there "is near overwhelming evidence in my view as a former prosecutor that prosecution should be pursued".







In brief

Afridi urges people not to believe on social media

KARACHI (Web Desk): Shahid Afridi issued a statement on Thursday to clarify himself from controversy which stirred up after he was seen in a selfie alongside the Co Chair and Deputy Director of a private Israeli organisation named Northwest Friends of Israel. In his recorded video message, Shahid Afridi urged people not to believe everything they see on the internet. He also tweeted: "Imagine strolling down a street in Manchester (UK) and so-called fans approach you for a selfie. You oblige, and moments later, they upload it as some form of Zionist endorsement. Unbelievable! Please don't believe everything that is uploaded." "Seeing innocent lives in Palestine suffer is truly heartbreaking. Thus, any photo or association shared by in Manchester does not reflect my support for any situation where human lives are at stake. "I take pictures with fans from all over the globe, and this situation was no different. I pray for peace, I pray for an end to this war, I pray for freedom." #HumanityFirst #Peace MiddleEast It must be noted that an organisation with the name: NW Friends of Israel had shared a picture of Shahid Afridi with its co Chair and Deputy Director on X where they thanked Shahid Afridi for supporting it.

Ali Ilyas receives grand welcome

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan's first-ever cycling gold medalist, Ali Ilyas, was given a grand welcome at Karachi Airport last night, following his historic victory in the Asian Road Cycling Championship in Almaty, Kazakhstan. The celebration was attended by a large gathering of dignitaries, including Sui Southern Gas Company (SSGC) management, coaches, players, Sindh Cycling Association members, and enthusiastic fans, all united in honoring his outstanding achievement, said a press release. Ilyas, a two-time gold medalist, made history by leading Pakistan to the top of the South Asian ranks, surpassing India and showcasing the exceptional skills and abilities of Pakistani cyclists. This monumental achievement has been hailed as a source of national pride and a bright future for Pakistani cycling in the region. Syed Azhar Ali Shah, President of the South Asian Cycling Federation, commended Ilyas for achieving a prominent position for Pakistan and expressed hope that other athletes will follow in his footsteps with dedication and hard work. Ilyas's victory serves as an inspiration to future generations, demonstrating the heights that can be achieved with determination and hard work.

Garcia handed 1-year doping ban

NEW YORK (Agencies): Ryan Garcia has been handed a one-year ban from boxing by the New York State Athletic Commission after failing a drugs test. The 25-year-old tested positive for banned substance ostarine in two separate tests taken before his fight with Devin Haney on 20 April. Garcia's victory against Haney will now be recorded as a no-contest - meaning Haney's undefeated record is restored. As well as the ban, Garcia must forfeit his \$950,000 (\$1.2m) contract purse from the Haney fight and pay a £7,900 (\$10,000) fine. The New York State Athletic Commission confirmed Garcia would be suspended until 20 April 2025 and would need to provide a clean urine test before his licence could be reissued.



GROS ISLET: Quinton de Kock of South Africa plays a shot during the ICC Men's T20 Cricket World Cup West Indies & USA 2024 Super Eight match between England and South Africa.

Pakistani shooters shine at Thailand C'ship with gold and silver medals

LAHORE (INP): Pakistan's shooting fraternity has reason to celebrate after a stellar performance at the ongoing Thailand Shooting Championship in Bangkok. The contingent returned with a gold and a silver medal, further bolstering the country's hopes for success at the upcoming Paris Olympics. Leading the charge was Kushmala Talat, a proven champion. Talat dominated the women's 25m pistol competition, clinching the gold medal with a commanding score of 575.

This victory wasn't just another podium finish; it served as a crucial qualifier for the prestigious Paris Olympics. Talat, already a bronze medalist at the Asian Games in Jakarta, has now secured her spot on the Olympic stage. Pakistan's double act at the Thailand Championship was complete with Gulfam Joseph's impressive showing in the 10m air pistol event. Joseph displayed remarkable accuracy, securing the silver medal and etching his name among Pakistan's Olympic representatives.

This achievement adds to the growing list of Pakistani shooters qualified for Paris. Joining Talat and Joseph will be Ghulam Mustafa Bashir, who had previously secured his Olympic berth. The Thailand Championship has served as a valuable platform for Pakistani shooters, showcasing their talent and potential on the international stage. With the Olympics on the horizon, the nation's shooting contingent is generating excitement and raising expectations for a successful outing in Paris.

Afghanistan batters failed the Jasprit Bumrah test, says Trott

BRIDGETOWN (Agencies): Afghanistan coach Jonathan Trott was disappointed with the shot selection of his batters in their defeat by India in Thursday's T20 World Cup Super Eight match and said they failed to execute their plans for facing Jasprit Bumrah. Bumrah was almost unplayable once again, India's pace spearhead claiming three Afghan wickets and conceding only seven runs in four impeccable overs at Kensington Oval. Bumrah deceived Rahmanullah Gurbaz, Afghanistan's leading scorer in the tournament, with clever change of pace and got the better of the other opener, Hazratullah Zazai, with an off-cutter that resulted in a leading edge at point. "Obviously disappointed with a few of the shots or the decision-making," Trott said after their 47-run loss in the Group 1 contest. "Obviously, Bumrah is going to be a key bowler for any side. For India, he's crucial and we needed to play him better. His figures suggest we didn't play him very well. "We'd obviously spoken about it and how we were going to play him. So, we weren't able to execute that and, yeah, that's very disappointing." India posted a strong 181-8 riding Suryakumar Yadav's second successive half-century. Afghan captain Rashid Khan, also their main strike bowler, finished his quota by the 14th over and India milked 66 runs from the final six overs.

Trott, however, backed Rashid's decision to exhaust his overs so early and said other bowlers should have stepped up. "When you bowl three for 26, I think no matter when you bowl you've done a good job," Trott said of Rashid. "It's not just one bowler. Other people have to bowl the 16 other overs to be bowled, and it's the responsibility of other bowlers to be able to execute the plans that we put in place ... "I thought Rash bowled brilliantly today. He has high expectations of himself and he delivered today. Everybody else, could follow suit. That would be great." Even if they were unable to take wickets the bowlers should have been trying to stem the runs and put pressure on the Indian batters, he added. "Wicket taking, and certainly in T20 and on these types of wickets, comes from creating pressure. "So you need to find a way to create pressure on these types of wickets where there's a short boundary and with the wind. "So you need to (make sure) if you're not getting wickets, you're not leaking for too many runs. "For me, we just weren't able to do that." Afghanistan face Australia in their next match in Kingstown on Saturday.

England hopes in balance after South Africa win thriller

ST LUCIA (Agencies): England left their hopes of reaching the T20 World Cup semi-finals in the balance after losing a final-over thriller against South Africa in St Lucia. Harry Brook resurrected a floundering chase of 164 on a tricky pitch to leave 14 runs to get from the final six balls. But he was brilliantly caught for 53 by Aiden Markram off the first ball of the final over as the game swung back to the Proteas. Sam Curran flicked a four meaning nine were required from the last three balls but Anrich Nortje closed out a seven-run win.

South Africa are now on the brink of qualification for the semi-finals, having won both of their Super 8 matches so far. Their score of 163-6 was helped by a rapid start, with Quinton de Kock hitting 65 from 38 balls before England fought back through their spinners and some superb fielding.

England return to Barbados to play the United States on Sunday and a win would still put them in a strong position to progress.

There is rain forecast, however, and if West Indies beat the USA later on Friday (Saturday, 01:30 BST) and follow that by overcoming the Proteas, England's fate could again come down to net run-rate.

England edged out by Australia in a rain-hit T20 World Cup match: Pat Cummins claimed a hat-trick and David Warner thrashed a quick-fire 53 not out as Australia beat Bangladesh by 28 runs in a weather-disrupted T20 World Cup Super Eight clash in Antigua on Thursday.

Australia, who are bidding to complete a historic treble of World Test Championship, ODI World Cup and T20 World Cup titles, were awarded the victory under the Duckworth-

Lewis formula after motorily have won it. The pendulum swung England's way when Otheinl Baartman bowled five full tosses in the 17th over which cost 21. That left England, who earlier needed 104 from the last 10 overs and 77 from the last six, needing 25 from 18 balls. But Liam Livingstone hit another full toss, this time from Kagiso Rabada, to deep square-leg, in the next over, with the South Africa quick only conceding four singles.

Marco Jansen did not concede a boundary in the penultimate over but still, with Brook at the crease, England were right in the game. It was fitting the decisive moment was a piece of superb fielding, in a match packed with such efforts. Brook tried to clear long-off but captain Markram ran back, leapt and held onto the catch. Curran turned down a single in the dying moments, backing himself to clear the ropes, but Nortje executed his plans to close out the win.

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Travis Head got off to a sedate start against Bangladesh in T20 World Cup game.

Argentina begin Copa title defence with 2-0 win over Canada

ATLANTA (Agencies): World champions Argentina opened their bid for back-to-back Copa America titles with a 2-0 win over Canada in front of a crowd of 70,564 at Mercedes-Benz Stadium on Thursday.

Julian Alvarez put Argentina ahead in the 49th minute but a combination of inspired goalkeeping from Canada's Max Crepeau and Lionel Messi's surprising lack of precision in front of goal ensured that the underdogs were in the game until Lautaro Martinez settled the contest in the 88th minute.

Backed by a huge support decked out in light blue and white striped shirts, Argentina fully deserved their victory but Canada, ranked 48th in the world, can take plenty of credit for the way they fought with the 15-time Copa America winners.

Alvarez, preferred to Lautaro as Messi's strike partner in attack, had the first opportunity when he charged down an attempted clearance from Ismael Kone and broke away.

But the Manchester City striker took a heavy touch as he bore down on Canada keeper Max Crepeau, who was able to smother the ball.

Messi, who became the most capped player in Copa America history, making his 35th appearance in what is his seventh tournament, then went close to an opener himself but his angled shot from the left flashed just wide of the far post.

While the Argentines were exploiting gaps in the Canadian defence, Jesse Marsch's team were nonetheless competing in midfield and creating some

half-chances for themselves. Alphonso Davies and Liam Millar both had shots blocked inside the box and Tajon Buchanan screamed an effort from a tight angle wide in the 30th minute.

The first true save of the game came in the 40th minute, though, when Alexis Mac Allister's stooping header from an Angel Di Maria cross was well dealt with by Crepeau.

But Argentina needed their goalkeeper, Emiliano Martinez, to be at his very best to ensure they went in on level terms at the interval.

Cyle Larin's cross from the right wing was met with a powerful header from close-range from Stephen Eustaquio but Martinez's sharp reaction save kept the game goalless.

Break deadlock But it took less than four minutes of the second half for Argentina to break the deadlock - Messi threaded a pass through to Mac Allister, who was brought down by Crepeau, but before the referee could blow his whistle Alvarez had slotted home the loose ball.

Within moments, there was another chance for Alvarez, but this time denied by the diving Crepeau and Canada could live to fight on. They did so with more urgency and a little more risk after Marsch introduced winger Jacob Shaffelburg and switched to an attacking 4-3-3 formation.

Suddenly the Argentine defence was under pressure and didn't look at all comfortable as Canada got men forward and exploited the wide areas. But they were almost caught out with a classic

counter-attack as Martinez launched a quick long ball towards Messi, who broke way goalwards but with the crowd expecting to see the eight-time Ballon d'Or winner on target he made a hash of the chance.

His initial effort was parried by Crepeau and although Messi latched on to the loose ball and sought to go round the keeper, his shot was easily cleared by the covering Derek Cornelius.

Incredibly there was another great opportunity for the former Barcelona star to find the target and again he was unable to convert - cutting in from the right with only Crepeau to beat, Messi opened up his body but slid his shot wide of the post.

Crepeau was at his best again to keep out substitute Lautaro as Argentina struggled to put the game to bed but with two minutes of normal time remaining they did just that.

Messi produced another clinical, defence-splitting pass and this time Lautaro made no mistake, slipping past the advancing Crepeau to make it 2-0.

"We had to dig in and close out the game, which is what it's all about in the end," he said.

"Sometimes you can't play your game, as I always say, there are times when the opponent won't let you. In this case it was the opponent and the pitch. We had to play differently and the important thing is that we won," he said.

Marsch was pleased with his team's willingness to go toe-to-toe with the world's best. "We played fearlessly. I think we learnt a lot from it - mostly that we can play with these dudes," he said.

Norris edges Verstappen in Spanish GP practice

BARCELONA (Agencies): McLaren's Lando Norris headed Red Bull's Max Verstappen in first practice at the Spanish Grand Prix. Norris was just 0.024 seconds quicker than the world champion as both set their times on the fastest 'soft' tyre. Ferrari's Carlos Sainz was third fastest, 0.344secs off the pace but using the medium tyre for his best lap, as did Mercedes' George Russell in fourth.

Red Bull's Sergio Perez, McLaren's Oscar Piastri and Mercedes' Lewis Hamilton were next in the order.

Red Bull and Ferrari both have significant upgrades on their cars for the start of a run of races in the European heartland of Formula 1.

But Charles Leclerc was not happy with his Ferrari, complaining midway through the session that it was "horrendous for now". Only Sainz had the full upgrade package on his car for the first session. Leclerc had the new rear wing and some new bodywork around the halo, but not the new floor, diffuser and engine cover.

Spain is the first of races on three consecutive weekends, followed by

Austria and Silverstone, before a week's gap and then Hungary and Belgium back to back before the sport has its August break.

It was a relatively incident-free session, although there was a brief red-flag period when a body part flew off Fernando Alonso's Aston Martin through the high-speed Turn Nine and landed on the track.

Alonso, whose last F1 win was at this event 11 years ago, was ninth fastest, behind the Alpine of Esteban Ocon and ahead of Alex Albon's Williams.







## In brief

## IRSA releases 338,600 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Friday released 338,600 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 298,100 cusecs. As per IRSA's data, water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1457.18 feet and was 59.18 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 190,000 cusecs and 195,000 cusecs respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1180.55 feet, which was 132.55 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 42,200 cusecs and 45,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 157,800, 173,600, 103,300 and 101,700 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 87,200 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 21,100 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.

## Governor visits APP head office

ISLAMABAD (APP): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Governor Faisal Karim Kundi on Friday had a detailed briefing on the operations of Associated Press of Pakistan (APP) during his visit to the head office of the premier news agency. APP Managing Director Muhammad Asim Khichi apprised the KP governor of the modern and state-of-the-art network of the agency, besides its operations in multiple languages. He said the APP disseminated news in Urdu, English, Sindhi, Saraiki, Balochi, Pashto, Arabic and Chinese languages. Moreover, news features were also put on the wire regularly for national, regional and international media outlets, he added. Faisal Karim Kundi appreciated the APP's performance and stressed for additional steps and measures to come up the modern day media requirements. Earlier on his arrival, Governor Kundi was accorded a warm welcome by the APP MD, officers and workers.

## ANF recovers 210 kg charras

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting a raid managed to recover 210 kg charras and arrested an accused. He addressed an ANF Headquarters spokesman, in an operation conducted in Karachi, ANF recovered 210 kg hashish from a vehicle intercepted near service road in Sohrah Goth area. During the operation, the accused resident of Quetta was also netted, he said and informed that a case has been registered against the arrested accused under Anti Narcotics Act and further investigation is under process.

## Police bust street criminal gang

RAWALPINDI (APP): Police have busted a street criminal gang by arresting two of its active members allegedly involved in street and other crimes and recovered two snatched mobile phones, Rs 15,500 cash, weapons and other items from their possession. According to a police spokesman, Airport police held two street criminals namely Dil Agha and Saddam Khan and recovered two snatched mobile phones, cash Rs 15,500, weapons and other items from their possession. The accused have been shifted to jail for identification parade, he added. Superintendent of Police, Potohar, Nisar Nawaz directed the police to make efforts to net other members of the gang.

# CPEC significantly contributed to Pakistan socio-economic development: Ayaz Sadiq

ISLAMABAD (APP): Speaker of National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq said on Friday that the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) had not only transformed Pakistan's infrastructure landscape but had also significantly contributed to its socio-economic development.

"All political parties of Pakistan speak with one voice in complete solidarity with CPEC as a 'Game Changer'."

The bond between the people of the two nations has successfully withstood the test of time," he expressed these views while addressing the event

"Pakistan-China Political Parties Forum and the 3rd Meeting of CPEC Political Parties Joint Consultation Mechanism".

He said, "China and Pakistan have always held each other's hands and shown the world that both nations stand together as one in peace and prosperity, and tragedy and turmoil."

Ayaz Sadiq said, "This 'all-weather friendship' bears testimony to the age-old Chinese saying: A friend -- one soul, two bodies."

While reflecting on the historic visit of President Xi

Jinping to Pakistan in 2015, he said it was a defining moment for this Region as agreements worth 46 billion dollars were signed on the occasion.

He also reminded that on that very occasion President Xi and Muhammad Nawaz Sharif, the then Prime Minister of Pakistan, jointly inaugurated the first-ever complete "GREEN PARLIAMENT" of the world, converting the energy needs of the Parliament of Pakistan to solar energy.

"The unique project symbolizes the sincere desire of our two nations to work jointly for

a brighter, cleaner, and safer future," he added.

Mentioning continuous collaboration between the parliaments of two countries, he said, "Parliaments of Pakistan and China enjoy an all-weather partnership, mutual trust, and practical cooperation."

He said that during his last tenure as Speaker of the National Assembly, he had the privilege of leading parliamentary delegations to China twice on the invitation of the Chairman of the National People's Congress.

"These exchanges paved the

way for deeper bilateral ties and facilitated the implementation of CPEC projects through parliamentary oversight as both nations have actively stood by each other on every international and regional parliamentary forum such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and Speakers' Conference, promoting shared interests, sovereignty, and stability," he added.

Ayaz Sadiq shared that during his previous tenure as Speaker he had the privilege of hosting the first-ever Speakers' Conference on "Regional Connectivity and Countering

Violent Extremism", comprising of countries that included Afghanistan, China, Iran, Pakistan, Russia, and Turkey.

He also mentioned the Parliamentary Committee on CPEC ensured vigilant oversight of the government and followed up on the progress of the projects under CPEC through regular reporting to the Parliament of Pakistan.

The Speaker address reaffirmed the resolve of the Parliament, Government, and people of Pakistan to build on past successes and in ensuring that CPEC reaches its full potential.



ISLAMABAD: A delegation of Lawyers from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Bar Council calls upon Minister for Law and Justice Azam Nazeer Tarar. —APP Photo

## Lawmakers urge govt to provide more relief to agriculture, IT sectors

ISLAMABAD (APP): Lawmakers in the National Assembly on Friday urged the government to focus on people-oriented policies and provide more relief to the agriculture and Information Technology sectors.

Muttahida Qaumi Movement (Pakistan) leader Muhammad Farooq Sattar, while participating in the budget debate, termed the budget for 2024-25 as traditional, reflecting a continuity of policies from the past 77 years.

"The country's current debt servicing issues, noting that most budget allocations are used for this purpose," he highlighted.

He said, "It is the government's responsibility to prepare the budget with the public's issues in mind."

He said, "Unfortunately, every budget seems to favor the wealthy." Sattar urged the government to focus on the agriculture sector and criticized the imposition of more taxes on salaried individuals.

He called for relief measures for the poor in the

budget and asked the government to revise the National Finance Commission (NFC) Award.

He stressed the need to resolve Karachi's water issues and to allocate more funds to improve the city's drain system. He also advocated for more incentives to attract Foreign Direct Investment and for policies that encourage a growth-oriented economy.

Sunni Ittehad Council's Rana Atif thanked his party for giving him the opportunity to contest the elections and promote the party's vision. He highlighted the issues of his constituency and asked the government to solve these issues of every district without discrimination.

He called for the government to address the issue of IPP capacity payments and to take steps to further enhance the country's import. Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz's Asia Naz Tanoli said that in 2018, the government solved the issue of load-shedding and that during

the PML-N tenure, more funds were allocated for development projects.

She recalled that the PML-N government saved the country from bankruptcy and sacrificed its politics. She said, "Muhammad Nawaz Sharif and Shahbaz Sharif always worked for the development of the country, and that global confidence in the country improved during their tenure." She asked the government to start metro bus services from Taxila to Islamabad.

Sunni Ittehad Council's Omer Farooq thanked his party chairman for awarding him tickets and appreciated the people of his constituency for electing him.

He said that the issue of corruption should be resolved. Farooq advocated for more relief for the agricultural, industrial, and Information Technology sectors as these sectors would create more job opportunities for the people. He also highlighted the issue of law and order in his constituency.

## Schools to introduce child-friendly policy

ISLAMABAD (APP): In a bid to alleviate the burden on young students, government primary schools have decided to introduce Child-Friendly Policy in Islamabad Capital Territory.

According to a source of the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional, Training, the federal government primary schools in the ICT are set to introduce a new policy from August 1.

As per the policy, students will no longer be required to carry their school books back and forth between home and school. Instead, the schools will provide pigeon holes and book racks in the classrooms to store the books, making it a child-friendly and convenient learning environment.

This initiative aims to reduce the weight of heavy school bags and promote a healthier and happier learning experience for the students. This policy will effect after summer vacations and the necessary arrangements are being made in all government primary schools in the ICT.

## Lawyers' delegation meets Law minister

ISLAMABAD (APP): A delegation of lawyers from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Bar Council met with Federal Minister for Law and Justice Azam Nazeer Tarar on Friday.

The delegation included KP Bar Council Vice Chairman Sadiq Mohmand, Ahmad Farooq Khattak, former Vice Chairman, Syed Amjad Shah and Tariq

Afridi Member of Pakistan Bar Council, said a press release.

In the meeting it was discussed that after the merging of Tribal Districts, the demand for filling additional posts in Peshawar High Court has not been fulfilled.

However, the minister assured that the government has decided in prin-

ciple to create five more posts of judges in the Peshawar High Court.

He said the posts of judges will be increased according to the necessary legal regulations after the budget.

It was expected that the said decision would make it easier for the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to get justice.

## PUC condemns tragic incident in Swat

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Pakistan Ulema Council (PUC) on Friday strongly condemned the tragic incident in Swat emphasizing that neither Islamic Shariah nor the Constitution and laws of Pakistan permit the killing or immolating any human being.

This was stated in a joint statement by PUC Chairman Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mehmood Ashrafi, Allama Abdul Haq Mujahid, Maulana Muhammad Rafiq Jami, Maulana Muhammad

Shafi Qasmi, Maulana Nauman Hashir, Maulana Asad Zakariya Qasmi, Maulana Asadullah Farooq, Allama Tahir Hassan, Maulana Tahir Aqeel Awan, Maulana Aziz Akbar Qasmi, Maulana Abu Bakr Hameed Sabri, and others.

The Council expressed deep regret over the increasing frequency of such incidents, highlighting that the measures taken against the perpetrators have been insufficient.

The Council believed that it is the responsibility

of the state and judiciary to administer punishment to an accused of blasphemy acts or discretion of the holy book.

The Council condemned the ongoing trend of individuals taking the law into their own hands, acting as judge, jury, and executioner, as wholly unacceptable.

The Council urged the government and all state institutions, particularly the police and judiciary, to handle such cases decisively and without any compromise, vested interests, or fear.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Interior Mohsin Naqvi presenting souvenir to Canadian High Commissioner Leslie Scanlon. —APP Photo

## IESCO notifies 2-day power shutdown programme

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Electric Supply Company (IESCO) on Friday issued 2-day power suspension programme for Saturday and Sunday for various areas of its region due to necessary maintenance and routine development work.

According to IESCO Spokesman, the power supply of different feeders and grid stations would remain suspended for the period on Saturday from 06:00 AM to 11:00 AM, Islamabad Circle, Diplomatic Enclave, Orchard Scheme, CDA Pump, G-8 Markaz, Marvi, F-6 Blue Area, Malik Altaf, Zia Masjid, Highway, Farash Town, Scheme-II, F-10/3, G-10/2, International School, I-10/1, Meera Jaffer, Pir Meher Ali Shah, Rahara, CM Pak Zong, Kurry, Isolation Hospital, PHA-I, Company Bagh, Gharial, MCM, Kotli Sattian, Balawara, Bari Imam, Lohi Bhir, Iqbal Town, Service Road East Feeders, Rawalpindi City Circle, Commercial Centre, Affendi Colony, C-Block, A-Block, Eid

Gah, National Market, Shaheed Mohammad Din, Al Noor Colony, Khanna-I, Farooq Azam, Gulzar Qaid, Tamsamaabad, Liaquat Bagh, Fuwara Chowk, Jama Masjid, Gwalmandi, Pirwadhai, Quaidabad, Bani, People Colony, New Race Course, Railway Colony, Kamalabad, Nust Road, Noon, Chakra, Ratta, Fazahia, Officer Colony, Chakra Feeders, Rawalpindi Cantt Circle, Bank Road-I, Tipu Road, Makkah Chowk, Swan Garden-I, Pepsi Cola, RCCI Express, Model Town, Hamak, Mohra Nagyal, Gulistan Colony, Morgah, Major Riaz, Defense Road, Ranyal, Shah Jeevan, Jhawara, Chontra, Sehala College, Nar, Khawaja, Panjar, Chowk Pandori, Mandra-I, Kalayam, Bengali, Syed Kasran, CB Khan-I, Morgah, Pindi Board, Park View, Car Chowk, Jail Park, Fuji Foundation, Mehboob Shaheed, Wilayat Complex, X-Liar, AOWHS, Qureshiabad, Gurja-I, Hayal, Murt, Ranyal, Gulistan Fatima Feeders, Attock Circle,

Nawaz Shaheed, Sher Shah Suri, Kala Khan, ECHS D-18, Model Town, Colonel Sher Khan, Industrial, Attock Cantt, Hameed, Shaadi Khan, Bara Zee, Kamra Rural, Mansar, 3 Mela, Soni, Malhwali, Azim Shaheed, Qutbal, Nara, Dharnal, Amanpur, Punjab Small Industries, Mix Industries, Kohistan Enclave, Model Town, 500 Bed Hospital, Kohsar Valley, Kashif Gul, Brahma, Jhang, Dhirak, Multan Khurd, Baba Rakhni, Muslim Town Feeders, Jhelum Circle, F-5 Jeddah, Shukrila, Kohar, Jakhar, M. Riaz Shaheed, Madhu Kalis, Captain Nisar Shaheed, Hasnot, Safdar Shaheed, Sanghui, Nathwala, Mumtaz Shaheed, Dinah-4 City, Gujjar Khan, Ghorri Dhamek, Baba Shaheed, Galiana, RTM, KTM, Qazia Feeders, Chakwal Circle, KSM Unit-III, Kariaal, CTM, Line Park, Jamalwal, Khairpur, Islamia Chowk, Jund Awan, Dhadyal Rural, Mulhal, Mughlan, Chakral, Rizwan Textile Mill, Dandut, Duffer, Dalwal, Ahmedabad,

Sagarpur, Sagarpur, Hasal, Danda Shah Bilawal, Dhok Ghazan, GPO Chowk, Malkwal, Akwal, Bilalabad, Multan Khard, CS Shah Feeders, GSO Circle, from 08:00 AM to 12:00 Noon, Dhirkot, Chamankot, Dana Express, Dhalla, Manhasa, Suhawa, Nimble, Birut, Gujjar Kohala Feeders, from 06:00 AM to 09:00 AM, Kalal, Shah Pur, Adiala, Khasala, Humayun-I, Dhok Noor, Gulshanabad, Rose Line, Adiala Jail, Shahigan, Defense Road, Askari-14, PGHS Feeders, On Sunday from 07:00 AM to 12:00 PM, GSO Circle, Gulbarg, 8, 5, 9 & 7, Residency-17, RIU, OPF Feeders, from 06:00 AM to 08:00 AM, Shams Colony, Azharabad, CWO, Golar, Charing Cross, Westridge Feeders, from 08:00 AM to 10:00 AM, Jhangi, Peshawar Road, P&T, EME, Quaid-e-Azam, Sehama, Rajahabad Feeders, from 06:00 AM to 11:00 AM, City No. 1, OPF, AS Mill, PS Mill, City Industrial, HPT Mirpur, City 3 feeders and surroundings.



ISLAMABAD: A view of clouds hovering on the sky of Capital city. —INP Photo



US expresses solidarity with Afghan refugees

KABUL (Amu TV): On World Refugee Day, the U.S. mission for Afghanistan expressed its solidarity with the people of the country who have been forced to flee their homes due to conflict and persecution. The mission underscored a renewed commitment to international laws that protect refugees and to the basic dignity of all humans. "Together, let's build a world where everyone can live in safety and dignity," the U.S. embassy for Afghanistan said.

IEA holds 60 foreigners in prisons

KABUL (Ariana News): The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) is holding 60 foreigners including 10 women in prisons, the Office of the Prison Administration said. Abdullah Hamdard, deputy head of the Office of the Prison Administration, said that foreigners are imprisoned in the country for various crimes. According to him, overall there are nearly 20,000 prisoners in the country, of which 1,500 are women.

Historic Tomb of Nasir Khusraw in danger of collapse: Locals



Badakhshan (TOLONews): The Tomb of Nasir Khusraw, one of the historical sites in Yamgan District, Badakhshan, is facing the risk of collapse.

Local residents said that no attention has been paid so far by the authorities and relevant institutions for the restoration of this tomb.

Nasir Khusraw Balkhi was a prominent scholar, poet, and writer of the country, who is said to have been born in 1004 CE.

This tomb is located on rocky hills, the surroundings of which are at risk of collapse due to rainfall and other natural factors.

"The entire Quran is written on the walls here. Nasir Khusraw was a very knowledgeable and wise person. People come from far and wide to see this place," said Imam Muhammad, a resident of Badakhshan.

repaired," said Mohammad Tahir, another resident of Badakhshan.

Meanwhile, the Badakhshan Department of Information and Culture said that the issue of restoring this tomb has been discussed with the Ministry of Information and Culture and that the restoration work will start soon.

Zabihullah Amiri, head of the information and culture department in Badakhshan, said: "We have discussed this matter with the institutions and the Ministry of Information and Culture, and God willing, the restoration of this historical tomb will begin this year."

According to historical narratives, Nasir Khusraw was born in 1005 CE in the province of Balkh and lived at the courts of the Ghaznavid kings and later the Seljuk court. He eventually turned away from the Seljuk court and went to Yamgan District in Badakhshan, where he spent the last 25 years of his life.

Nasir Khusraw Balkhi was highly knowledgeable in philosophy, medicine, astronomy, and mathematics, and his works include the Safarnama, Jami' al-Hikmatayn, Zad al-Musafirin, Khwan al-Ikhwān, Roshana'i-Nama, Sa'adat-Nama, and Dalil al-Mutahharin.

India beats Afghanistan by 47 runs

BRIDGETOWN (Ariana News): India swept to a 47-run victory over Afghanistan in their T20 World Cup Super Eight clash after Suryakumar Yadav struck his second successive half-century and Jasprit Bumrah proved his worth with the ball on Thursday.

Player-of-the-match Suryakumar's audacious 53 from 28 balls propelled India to a daunting 181-8. In reply, Afghanistan were always behind the required run rate and finished on 134 all out from the final ball of the match, Reuters reported.

Fast bowler Bumrah proved virtually unplayable, taking three for seven runs from his four overs. Afghanistan left-arm paceman Fazalhaq Farooqi and off-spinner Mohammad Nabi opened the bowling on a hot, humid day at Kensington Oval.

India captain Rohit Sharma survived an impassioned appeal for lbw off Farooqi when he missed with an ungainly heave to the leg side but he lasted only five balls more before skying a catch to Afghanistan captain Rashid Khan at mid-on to be out for eight.

Naveen-ul-Haq replaced Farooqi and Virat Kohli, who had scored only five runs in his previous three matches, whipped him imperiously through the covers and lofted a six straight over the bowler's head which hit the sight screen.

Rishabh Pant reverse swept Nabi for four and was then dropped on the boundary by Naveen. The ball crossed the boundary and at the end of the power-play India were 47 for one.

Rashid took the ball and struck in his first over, dismissing Pant for 20 with his final delivery, lbw attempting a reverse sweep.

He struck again in his second over when Kohli on 24 lofted the ball straight to Nabi on the long-off boundary and then dismissed Shivam Dube lbw for 10. Suryakumar seized the initiative back for India with two boundaries off Azmatullah Omarzai and a straight six. Hardik Pandya (32) joined in with a four and a straight six off successive balls from Noor Ahmed.

The pair raised their 50 partnership before Suryakumar was caught but Hardik hit a six on to the top of the Terrace Stand to maintain India's momentum. Afghanistan lost three wickets in the powerplay, including opener Rahmanullah Gurbaz caught behind for 11 off Bumrah who also dismissed Hazratullah Zazai for two. They fell steadily behind the required run and still needed 81 off five overs when Bumrah returned.

Russia delivers 21 Tons of Humanitarian Aid to Afghanistan

KABUL (TOLONews): Russia has announced the delivery of 21 tons of humanitarian aid to the people of Afghanistan.

The Russian news outlet TASS reported that the aid includes food and essential supplies. According to this report, for the first time in 30 years, an air corridor between the two countries was opened, enabling not only the delivery of aid to the Afghan people but also the restoration of diplomatic relations between Kabul and Moscow.

"This aid is beneficial to needy families who require food supplies under current conditions; however, we also ask these countries to provide us with technical exchange opportunities," said Mohammad Nabi, an economic analyst. At the same time, some citizens suffering from economic challenges



and unemployment are requesting assistance from the Islamic Emirate and aid organizations.

"There are nine of us in the house, and I work on this cart. My two sons died in a suicide attack," said Sulaiman, a resident of Kabul. "We ask the Islamic Emirate to provide us with job opportunities," said Shah

Nazar, another resident of Kabul. The Islamic Emirate called the aid from various countries, especially Russia, to be impactful in the current situation in Afghanistan and assured the transparent distribution of this aid.

Zabihullah Mujahid, the spokesperson for the Islamic Emirate, said: "We appreciate Russia's aid and

consider it a humanitarian cooperation. Without a doubt, it will reach those in need." According to the latest report from WFP, more than 12 million people in Afghanistan currently do not know where their next meal will come from, and the people of this country still have an "urgent need" for humanitarian assistance.

Second round of 1403 Kankor exam held in Kabul



KABUL (TOLONews): The second round of the 1403 Kankor exam was held in the capital.

The acting head of the National Examination Authority (NEXA) said that 15,000 candidates from Kabul participated in the exam, which will continue for two days. Abdul Baqi Haqqani, head of NEXA, said: "We are happy that everyone passes this exam, and we never want anyone to be left without results; we are not happy with anyone's failure. Failing one person not only harms them but also harms the country."

At the same time, Osama Aziz, the head of Kabul University, said that nearly fifty curricula recently reviewed by teachers will

also be included in the new academic year's curriculum.

Aziz emphasized that work has begun on establishing new faculties, and among them, the Faculty of Tourism is close to being established at Kabul University.

Osama Aziz, the head of Kabul University, said: "Work has begun to create new faculties. For example, the Faculty of Tourism or the Tourism Industry at Kabul University has been completed and will be established soon."

Meanwhile, some participants asked the Islamic Emirate to take steps toward online Kankor exams and also to include girls in the Kankor exams.

"If the exam goes online, it will be very good because

many students live in remote areas of the country and often do not have sufficient means to take the exam. If this process goes online, it will be very good," Hamid, a Kankor participant, told TOLONews.

"We want our sisters to study and be educated. We need them tomorrow, and just as we want to take the exam and study, they also want to take the exam and study," said Nasibuddin, another Kankor participant.

Since the return of the Islamic Emirate, girls above the sixth grade have been barred from attending schools, and students who have completed the twelfth grade are also waiting to take the Kankor exam and pursue higher education.

Tajikistan to monitor water quality in border regions

KABUL (Amu TV): The Ministry of Health in Tajikistan will supervise the quality of water in the border areas of the Pyanj River and regions of Khatlon bordering Afghanistan, according to a report by Asia Plus.

This initiative is in response to registered cases of cholera in Afghanistan, stated Navruz Jafarov, the deputy head of the State Sanitary and Epidemiological Surveillance Service of the Ministry of Health.

"The main reason for the inspections is the cholera outbreak in Afghanistan. The disease has affected the provinces of Balkh, Kunduz, Takhar, and Badakhshan, including areas bordering Tajikistan. The water in the Pyanj River in these border areas is under the supervision of the Republican Quarantine Diseases Center," Jafarov noted.

A large-scale inspection of open water sources in the Khatlon border areas began on June 3. Experts are taking water samples and conducting tests to prevent the possible spread of infection.

"We have five rivers that cross the border with Afghanistan. If floods or sewage from Afghan villages enter these rivers, an infection may spread," a representative of the Ministry of Health said.

Afghan industry grows with 121 New Factories in 1403



KABUL (TOLONews): Akhundzada Abdul Salam Jawad, the spokesperson for the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, told TOLONews that 121 factories were established in various sectors across the country in the current solar year 1403.

Akhundzada Abdul Salam Jawad said that during this period, 217 production machines have also been imported into the country by industrialists in the heavy, light, and primary sectors.

The spokesperson for the Ministry of Industry and Commerce said: "Since the beginning of the solar year 1403, 121 new factories have been established and 217 machines have been imported into Afghanistan."

This is while last year, 614 factories were established, and 1,098 machines were imported into the country.

This indicates an increase in investment and production within the country. These machines belong to the heavy, light, and primary industrial sectors."

The Afghanistan Chamber of Industries and Mines believed that if more facilities

are provided for industrialists in the country, domestic industries will witness significant growth.

Sakhi Ahmad Paiman, the first deputy of the Chamber of Industries and Mines, told TOLONews: "Fortunately, this year we have witnessed industrial investments in Afghanistan. The heavy and light industries, as much as they are supported, are important for the growth of Afghanistan's industry in terms of energy supply, land distribution, and also the increase in tariffs on similar imported goods."

Some economic experts also emphasized the support of industrialists in the country, saying that a large part of Afghanistan's needs is met by domestic industrial productions.

"Production factories are operating in the absence of ample economic facilities. If some facilities and ease are provided for the public factories, including grants, ensuring needs such as energy, and small loans, it will play a significant role in strengthening our production factories," said Shakir Yaqubi, an economic analyst.

"Our production factories currently do not have land; they face many problems due to the lack of land and electricity," said Shams Rahman Ahmadzai, another economic analyst.

According to statistics from the Chamber of Industries and Mines, more than 5,000 factories in various sectors operate in 18 industrial parks in the country, bringing Afghanistan to self-sufficiency and semi-self-sufficiency in some sectors.

Human Rights

activism had been further circumscribed," the report states.

The rights and fundamental freedoms of women and girls, including access to education and freedom of movement, remained severely curtailed, according to the report. "The rights and fundamental freedoms of women and girls, including access to education and freedom of movement, remained severely curtailed," the report states. On March 20, the new school year in Afghanistan commenced with the ban on girls' education beyond grade six still in place. An invitation issued to media by the de facto Ministry of Education specifically instructed women journalists not to attend the ceremony marking the new school year, citing a "lack of proper place[s]" for women.

During the reporting period, residents in multiple provinces held public protests, expressing concerns over economic and livelihood issues ranging from taxes to water rights. "Residents in multiple provinces held public protests, expressing concerns over economic and livelihood issues," the report notes. While most protests ended peacefully, some were dispersed by force. On March 31, in Helmand Province, shopkeepers protested against a tax imposed by the de facto mayor and demanded the release of two shopkeepers detained earlier for refusing to pay the tax. De facto security forces fired gunshots into the air to disperse the protesters, followed by a physical fight in which they ill-treated at least five male protesters with sticks and rocks. "De facto security forces fired gunshots into the air to disperse the protesters,"

the report states.

On May 3 and 4, protests were held in the Argo and Daraiem districts of Badakhshan Province over the de facto authorities' destruction of poppy fields. "Protests were held in Badakhshan Province over the de facto authorities' destruction of poppy fields," the report indicates. Two people were killed—one in each district—when de facto security force members fired into the crowd. "Two people were killed when de facto security force members fired into the crowd," the report confirms. On May 4, the de facto authorities announced the appointment of a committee to investigate the incidents.

**Education and civil society** The Taliban continued to bolster madrassa education, according to the report. "The de facto authorities continued to bolster madrassa education," it states. Following a countrywide assessment of madrassas in December 2023, the Ministry of Education established a directorate for the professional development of madrassas to improve administration and teacher capacity. Efforts to standardize private madrassa education included conducting exams for 64,000 recent male graduates to determine their qualifications in religious studies. "Following a countrywide assessment of madrassas, steps were taken to standardize private madrassa education," the report noted.

**Security** Between 1 February and 13 May, "the United Nations recorded 2,505 security-related incidents," a 55 percent increase compared with the same period in 2023, according to the UN report.

The report also noted that "nar-

cotics-related incidents rose from 212 to 418," marking a 97 percent increase. The largest increases in narcotics-related incidents were observed "in the central, north-eastern, south-eastern, and southern regions," the report added.

The report indicates that the armed opposition did not pose a significant challenge to the Taliban's territorial control. "The armed opposition did not pose a significant challenge to the Taliban's hold on territorial control," the report states. The Afghanistan Freedom Front and the National Resistance Front conducted attacks primarily targeting de facto security forces in Kabul. ISIL-K conducted six attacks during the reporting period, targeting Taliban authorities on four occasions and civilians on two. "ISIL-K continued to carry out attacks, targeting the de facto authorities and civilians," the report adds.

Tensions along the border with Pakistan continued due to the reported presence of Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) members on Afghan territory. "Tensions along the border with Pakistan continued owing to the reported presence of TTP members on Afghan territory," the report states. On March 18, Pakistan carried out airstrikes against locations in Khost and Paktika provinces.

**Civilian casualties** Attacks using improvised explosive devices caused at least 98 civilian casualties, including 30 killed and 68 wounded. "Attacks using improvised explosive devices caused at least 98 civilian casualties," the report states. Unexploded ordnance also resulted in significant civilian casualties, particularly among chil-

dren. "Unexploded ordnance continued to result in civilian casualties, with children making up the majority," the report noted. The report documented at least three extrajudicial killings, 37 arbitrary arrests and detentions, and four instances of torture and ill-treatment of former government officials and Afghan National Defence and Security Forces members. "Threats to former government officials continued, including arbitrary arrest and detention, torture, and extrajudicial killings," the report states.

**Economy** Afghanistan's economy faces deflationary pressure due to declining import prices and low demand, according to the report. "Afghanistan's economy faces deflationary pressure driven by declining import prices and low demand," it states. By February 2024, headline inflation reached -9.7 percent year-on-year, and core inflation reached -3 percent. "Headline inflation reached -9.7 percent year-on-year," the report noted. The trade deficit increased by 60 percent year-on-year from January 2023 to January 2024, with exports decreasing by 5 percent and imports rising by 37 percent. "The trade deficit increased by 60 percent year-on-year," the report stated. By late March 2024, the Afghani appreciated by 20.4 percent against the U.S. dollar since August 2021.

The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 68/11 and Security Council resolution 2727 (2024), requesting quarterly updates on the situation in Afghanistan and the implementation of the UNAMA mandate.

UN report highlights persistent rift among Taliban authorities

KABUL (Amu TV): A recent report by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) to the U.N. Security Council indicates ongoing divergent views within the Taliban's leadership on governance issues. "The de facto authorities maintained public unity and exerted authority over the entire national territory, although some internal tensions persisted within their structure," the report states.

The report also notes that the Taliban continued outreach efforts to communities to bridge gaps and elicit support, while reducing space for civil and political activities for both men and women. "They continued their outreach with communities to bridge gaps and to elicit their support, while reducing the space for men and women to conduct civil and political activities," the report added.

The report highlights that the new school year, which started in March, saw schools remain closed for girls beyond the sixth grade for the third consecutive year. "The new school year started in March, and schools remained closed for girls beyond the sixth grade for a third year in a row," the report states. Meanwhile, the Taliban has encouraged the enrollment of children in madrassas (Islamic religious schools) and continued to strengthen bilateral diplomatic engagements, particularly with regional countries. "The de facto authorities encouraged people to send children to madrassas and continued to bolster their bilateral diplomatic engagements," according to the report.

According to the report, an estimated 23.7 million people in Afghanistan will require humanitari-

an assistance in 2024. "In 2024, an estimated 23.7 million people will require humanitarian assistance," the report states. As of May 15, the Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan for 2024 had received only 16.2 percent of the required \$3.06 billion in funding, targeting 17.3 million people.

**Political rifts** The report underscores divergent views within the Taliban's leadership on governance issues, such as the enforcement of the drug ban. "There were some divergent views within the structure of the Taliban authorities over governance issues, such as the enforcement of the drug ban," the report said. With fewer cabinet meetings occurring, governance appears to be shifting more towards Kandahar, with Taliban leader Haibatullah Akhundzada exerting greater influence over processes in Kabul. "The center of governance appeared to continue to shift more towards Kandahar, with the Taliban leader exerting greater leverage over governance processes in Kabul," the report noted.

The Taliban leadership focused on outreach to bridge gaps with various communities, often delivering speeches at madrassa graduation ceremonies that emphasized national unity and the promotion of both religious and modern education. "The leadership of the de facto authorities remained focused on outreach to bridge gaps between the authorities and various communities and elicit their support," the report added. However, the space for civil society and political activism has been further restricted. "The space for civil society and political



# National Assembly session Call to make budget pro-public and pro-business

**E.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: The National Assembly on Friday echoed with strong calls directed at the government to provide more relief to the people by making the federal budget 2024-25 pro-public and pro-business.

The calls were made as the Lower House of the Parliament continued with the debate on the budget for the year 2024-25. Legislators urged the government to focus on people-oriented policies and provide more relief to the agriculture and information technology sectors. Taking part in the discussion, MQM-P's Dr Farooq Sattar stressed the need to do away from the continuity of traditional budgeting and suggested that deliberate efforts should be made to make the budget pro-people and pro-business for sustainable growth.

The MQM-P leader said there should be a difference between an overtaxed or wrongly-taxed budget and growth-oriented budget. He said exorbitantly higher prices of electricity, gas, potable water and petroleum are the fundamental issues of the common people, which need to be addressed on priority basis. He said agricultural income of feudal and big landlords should be brought under the tax net instead of overburdening the salaried class with more taxes.

Farooq Sattar termed the budget for 2024-25 as traditional, reflecting a continuity of policies from the past 77 years. "The country's current debt servicing issues, noting that most budget allocations are used for this purpose," he added. The MQM leader said, "It is the government's responsibility to prepare the budget with the public's issues in mind. Unfortunately, every budget seems to favour the wealthy."

Farooq Sattar urged the government to focus on the agriculture sector and criticized the imposition of more taxes on salaried individuals. He called for relief measures for the poor in the budget and asked the government to revise the National Finance Commission (NFC) Award. He stressed the need to resolve Karachi's water issues and to allocate more funds to improve the city's drain system. He also advocated for more incentives to attract foreign direct investment and for policies that encourage a growth-oriented economy.

Sunni Ittehad Council's Rana Atif thanked his party for giving him the opportunity to contest the elections and promote the party's vision. He highlighted the issues of his constituency and asked the government to solve these issues of every district without discrimination. He called for the government to address the issue of IPP capacity payments and to take steps to further enhance the country's imports.

Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz's Asia Naz Tanoli said that in 2018, the government solved the issue of load-shedding and that

during the PML-N tenure, more funds were allocated for development projects. She recalled that the PML-N government saved the country from bankruptcy and sacrificed its politics.

She said, "Muhammad Nawaz Sharif and Shehbaz Sharif always worked for the development of the country, and that global confidence in the country improved during their tenure." She asked the government to start metro bus services from Taxila to Islamabad. Sunni Ittehad Council's Omer Farooq thanked his party chairman for awarding him ticket and appreciated the people of his constituency for electing him. He said that the issue of corruption should be resolved. Farooq advocated for more relief to the agricultural, industrial, and information technology sectors as these sectors would create more job opportunities for the people. He also highlighted the issue of law and order in his constituency.

Meanwhile, the Senate is continuing discussion on the Finance Bill 2024-25. Taking part in the discussion, Bilal Ahmed Khan suggested that the government should focus on broadening the tax net as well as exploiting the country's indigenous resources. He said this is important to free the country from debt trap and take it towards self-reliance.

Muhammad Qasim voiced concerns over terrorist incidents in the country, stressing that the political leadership should work sincerely to take the country in the right direction. Amir Waliuddin Chishti opposed the imposition of tax on stationery in the budget. He emphasized greater focus on bringing improvement in the health and education sectors.

Nadeem Ahmed Bhutto said the budget for next fiscal year is not people friendly. He said the political leadership will have to move towards Charter of Economy to address the chronic issues. Samina Mumtaz Zehri said the employees in one to sixteen grades must be exempted from additional taxes.

Sajid Mir supported the privatization of loss making enterprises including PIA and Pakistan Steel Mills. Shahadat Awan noted that increase in salaries and pension is not significant saying these should be enhanced keeping in view the prevailing price hike.

Zeeshan Khanzada said the private sector and businesses should be fully facilitated to uplift the economy. He said we should also give confidence to overseas Pakistanis to invest in Pakistan. Dr. Afnan Ullah Khan said the PSDP for the next fiscal year envisages important initiatives such as establishment of IT Parks and substantial allocations for water reservoirs. On the occasion of the birthday of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto, the chair paid tributes to her struggle for democracy and supremacy of the constitution. The House also offered feteiha for the departed soul.

## Fixed charges on domestic electric consumers

ISLAMABAD (INP): Monthly fixed charges of Rs200-1,000 have been imposed on consumers, while the fixed charges on commercial consumers have been increased by 300 percent and on industrial use by 355 percent.

According to the details, National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (NEPRA) has introduced new electricity tariffs which will be applicable from July 1. Five monthly charges of Rs200-1000 are fixed in the electricity bills of residential consumers depending on the monthly units consumed. And the same has been increased to 300 percent for commercial and 355 percent for industrial customers.

This will help Distribution Companies (DISCOs) to increase their revenue through fixed charges. Domestic consumers using 301-400 units per month will pay fixed charges of Rs200 per month from July 1, 2024 and those using 401-500 units will pay Rs400. The consumers using 501-600 units will have to pay Rs600.

Residential users using 601-700 units will pay Rs800 per month and those using more than 700 units will pay fixed charges of Rs1,000 per month. The customers using TOU (Time of Use) meters will also pay fixed charges of Rs1,000 per month.

Commercial consumers with a load of less than 5KW will also pay fixed charges of Rs1,000 per month. However, commercial consumers of electricity with a load of 5KW or more will now pay Rs2,000 increasing from the current Rs500, which has been increased by 300 percent. Under TOU metering, industrial consumers falling under B1 category consuming up to 25KW will pay Rs1,000 but B2 category consumers will see a 300 percent increase in fixed charges up to 500KW as they will now pay Rs2,000 instead of fixed charges of Rs500 per month.

B3 category industrial consumers consuming 5,000KW will pay fixed charges of Rs2,000 with a 355 percent increase from Rs460 per month. All load users in the B4 category will also experience a 355 percent increase in fixed charges as they will now pay Rs 2,000 per month from the current Rs440.

At present the total cost of a power unit consists of 72 percent fixed charges and 28 percent variable charges. Still, on the revenue side, fixed charges are only two percent and variable charges are 98 percent. Officials said that the authorities concerned have found a mismatch between the cost and revenue structure in the electricity tariff.



**GARHI KHUDA BAKSH:** President Asif Ali Zardari cutting cake on the 71st birth anniversary of Shaheed Benazir Bhutto.

## Israeli forces step up bombardment across Gaza

CAIRO (Reuters): Israeli forces pounded Rafah and other areas across the Gaza Strip and engaged in close-quarter combat with fighters led by Palestinian Islamist group Hamas, residents and Israel's military said.

Residents said the Israelis appeared to be trying to complete their capture of Rafah, the city on the enclave's southern edge that has been the focus of an Israeli assault since early May.

Tanks were forcing their way into the western and northern parts of the city, having already captured the east, south and center. Israeli forces fired from planes, tanks and ships off the coast, forcing a new wave of displacement from the city, which had been sheltering more than a million displaced people, most of whom have been forced to flee again. The Israeli military said on Friday its forces were conducting "precise, intelligence-based" actions in the Rafah area, where troops were involved in close-quarter combat and had located tunnels used by militants. It also reported actions elsewhere in the enclave.

Some residents said the pace of the Israeli raid had been accelerated in the past two days. They said sounds of explosions and gunfire indicating fierce fighting have been almost non-stop. More than eight months into the war in Gaza, Israel's advance is now focused on the two last areas its forces had yet to storm: Rafah on Gaza's southern edge and the area surrounding Deir Al-Balah in the center.

"The entire city of Rafah is an area of Israeli military operations," Ahmed Al-Sofi, the mayor of Rafah, said in a statement carried by Hamas media on Friday. "The city lives through a humanitarian catastrophe and people are dying inside their tents because of Israeli bombardment," he added. Sofi said there was no medical facility functioning in the city, and that remaining residents and displaced families lacked the minimum of their daily needs of food and water.

Palestinian and UN figures show that fewer than 100,000 people may have remained in the far western side

## Armenia recognizes Palestine as a state

YEREVAN (AFP): Armenia announced Friday its recognition of the State of Palestine, the latest country to do so during the war in Gaza, saying it was against "violence toward civilian populations." A series of countries have recognized the State of Palestine amid the war between Israel and Hamas, drawing strong rebukes from Israeli officials. "Confirming its commitment to international law, equality of nations, sovereignty and peaceful coexistence, the Republic of Armenia recognizes the State of Palestine," Yerevan said. Armenia added that it is "genuinely interested in establishing long-term peace and stability in the Middle-East."

Yerevan, which has itself been ridden by conflict with neighboring Azerbaijan for decades, slammed Israel's military conduct in Gaza. "Armenia deplores using civilian infrastructure as shields during armed conflicts and violence toward civilian populations," the ministry said. It also deplored Hamas for "the captivity of civilian persons" and said it "joins the demands of international community on freeing them." A senior official from the Palestinian Authority, Hussein Al-Sheikh, welcomed the move. "This is a victory for right, justice, legitimacy and the struggle of our Palestinian people for liberation and independence," Al-Sheikh said on social media. "Thank you our friend Armenia."

The Gaza war was sparked by Hamas's October 7 attack on southern Israel, which resulted in the deaths of 1,194 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on Israeli official figures. Militants also took 251 hostages, 116 of whom remain in Gaza, including 41 the army says are dead. Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed at least 37,431 people in Gaza, also mostly civilians, according to the territory's health ministry. Israel is a major arms supplier to Armenia's arch-foe neighbor Azerbaijan, with which Yerevan had been locked in a decades-long territorial dispute over the Nagorno-Karabakh region that Baku recaptured last year from Armenian separatists.

of the city, which had been sheltering more than half of Gaza's 2.3 million people before the Israeli assault began in early May. The military accused Hamas of using Palestinian civilians as human shields, an allegation Hamas denies.

"The soldiers located inside a civilian residence large quantities of weapons hidden in wardrobes, including grenades, explosives, a launcher and anti-tank missiles, ammunition, and arms," the military said in a statement late on Thursday. Hamas' armed wing said on Thursday its fighters had hit two Israeli tanks with anti-tank rockets in the Shaboura camp in Rafah, and killed soldiers who tried to flee through the alleys. There was no Israeli immediate comment on the Hamas claim.

In nearby Khan Younis, an Israeli air strike on Friday killed three peo-

ple, including a father and son, medics said. In parallel, Israeli forces continued a new push back into some Gaza City suburbs in the north of the enclave, where they fought with Hamas-led militants. Residents said the army forces had destroyed many homes in the heart of Gaza City on Thursday.

Later on Friday, an Israeli air strike on a main road in Gaza City killed four Palestinians, medics said. Israel's ground and air campaign was triggered when Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel on Oct. 7, killing around 1,200 people and seizing more than 250 hostages, according to Israeli tallies. The offensive has left Gaza in ruins, killed more than 37,400 people, according to Palestinian health authorities, and left nearly the entire population homeless and destitute.

## Trump promises US green card for foreign graduates

WASHINGTON (AFP): Former US president Donald Trump said he wants to grant green cards to foreign graduates from US colleges, in an apparent softening of his typically hard-line view on immigration, a key election issue.

The Republican candidate made the remarks in a podcast published, days after President Joe Biden announced a citizenship pathway for immigrants married to US nationals, counterbalancing his recent crackdown on illegal border crossings. "What I want to do and what I will do is, you graduate from a college, I think you should get automatically as part of your diploma a green card to be able to stay in this country," Trump told the All-In podcast. A green card is the commonly used name for a permanent resident card in the United States and a step toward citizenship.

Trump said this should include "anybody who graduates from a college", including those who complete two-year programs, known as junior colleges, and doctoral graduates. Asked initially on the podcast if he would promise to help import the "best and the brightest around the world to America", Trump replied: "I do promise." He added: "I know of stories where people graduated from a top college, or from a college, and they desperately want to stay here... and they can't."



**LAHORE:** People suffering during closed OPD at Services Hospital, due to young doctor's strike.

## Pakistan has special place

(Continued from Page 1)

PTI's Barrister Ali Zafar and Raoof Hasan, PML-N's Ahsan Iqbal, Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam's Emir Fazlur Rehman, Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan's Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui, and other top leaders were in attendance. Pakistan and China enjoy close relations with Beijing also investing billions of dollars in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and working in various sectors to boost Islamabad's capabilities.

However, the works on the flagship project have been hindered in recent years due to the security situation with China informing the Pakistani side of its reservations. The Chinese official said that there can be sustainable development only when all political parties in a country join hands to ensure political and social stability. "And for all these years, China has always been striving hard to maintain a good balance of reform, development, and stability — each of the three fundamentals is indispensable."

'Business environment cannot improve without security' The minister noted that over the years, CPEC has boosted Pakistan's economic and social development. However, he said that more efforts need to be made, especially when it comes to security. "We are ready to build the upgraded

version of CPEC [...] we need to improve security and business environment. Security threats are the main hazards disturbing CPEC cooperation," he highlighted.

In the case of Pakistan, he said, the primary factor shaking the confidence of Chinese investors is the security situation. "Without security, the business environment cannot really improve, which can undermine development in the long run." At the same time, he also appreciated the Pakistani security forces for their services in this regard. Moving on, the senior official said that due to the wholehearted support of the people of both nations, Pakistan and China have become "iron friends". "Public support is the bedrock of the China-Pakistan relationship." However, voicing fears, he said that the mutual affinity between the people of the countries is still not commensurate with the iron-clad friendship of the countries.

"In particular, there's a rising risk of Western social media which has a huge impact on the younger generation, eroding the foundation of the China-Pakistan friendship," Jianchao said. He said the Chinese government was ready to promote exchanges between the youth, media, think tanks, academics, and local governments, and help the public understand the

friendship better.

The Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar has said that all parties are on the same page for the execution of CPEC project. Speaking at the China Pakistan Consultative Mechanism meeting, Dar said development and employment opportunities had been created in Pakistan by the CEPC project.

He said this was the important project and the arrival of the Chinese minister in Pakistan was warmly welcomed. "The visit of the Chinese delegates is a part of promoting bilateral relations," he said, adding that the people to people ties between the two countries are of immense importance. "He said investments are made in various sectors including energy through CPEC. The first CPEC project was launched in Pakistan through Belt and Road initiative, he mentioned.

Dar further stated PM Shebaz Sharif's visit to China was a thumping success which has further cemented the bilateral ties. Chinese's Communist Party International Organization Minister Liu Jianchao has said the meeting was a welcome step. He said China attaches immense importance to the friendship between the two countries. Agreements between Pakistan and China will create new opportunities for development and growth, he concluded.

## WB to provide \$535m to Pakistan

ISLAMABAD (INP): The World Bank has announced that it will provide \$535 million to Pakistan for two projects aimed at mitigating the effects of climate change and improving the country's agricultural sector.

According to the official statement by the World Bank, the first project, worth \$400 million, will focus on reducing the impact of climate change in Pakistan, particularly in the agricultural sector. The funds will be used to improve crop yields and protect the sector from the effects of climate change.

The second project, worth \$135 million, will aim to improve the livestock sector in Sindh, making it more resilient to climate change. This financial assistance from the World Bank will support Pakistan's efforts to address the challenges posed by climate change and promote sustainable agriculture practices.

Earlier on June 11, in a major relief for the country's ill economy, World Bank (WB) approved Rs1 billion for Pakistan. The World Bank approved \$1 billion for the construction of Dasu Dam.

This financing will support the expansion of hydropower electricity supply, improve access to socio-economic services for local communities, and build the Water and Power Development Authority's (WAPDA) capacity to prepare future hydropower projects.

BEIJING (Reuters): The United States and China resumed semi-official nuclear arms talks in March for the first time in five years, with Beijing's representatives telling US counterparts that they would not resort to atomic threats over Taiwan, according to two American delegates who attended.

The Chinese representatives offered reassurances after their US interlocutors raised concerns that China might use, or threaten to use, nuclear weapons if it faced defeat in a conflict over Taiwan. "They told the US side that they were absolutely convinced that they are able to prevail in a conventional fight over Taiwan without using nuclear weapons," said scholar David Santoro, the US organiser of the Track Two talks, the details of which are being reported by Reuters for the first time.

Participants in Track Two talks are generally former officials and academics who can speak with authority on their government's position, even if they are not directly involved with setting it. Government-to-government negotiations are known as Track One. Washington was represented by about half a dozen delegates, including former officials and scholars at the two-day discussions, which took place in a Shanghai hotel conference room.

Beijing sent a delegation of scholars and analysts, which included several former People's Liberation

Army officers. A State Department spokesperson said in response to Reuters' questions that Track Two talks could be "beneficial". The department did not participate in the March meeting though it was aware of it, the spokesperson said.

Such discussions cannot replace formal negotiations "that require participants to speak authoritatively on issues that are often highly compartmentalised within [Chinese] government circles", the spokesperson said. Members of the Chinese delegation and Beijing's defence ministry did not respond to requests for comment.

The informal discussions between the nuclear-armed powers took place with the US and China at odds over major economic and geopolitical issues, with leaders in Washington and Beijing accusing each other of dealing in bad faith. The two countries briefly resumed Track One talks over nuclear arms in November but those negotiations have since stalled, with a top US official publicly expressing frustration at China's responsiveness.

The Pentagon, which estimates that Beijing's nuclear arsenal increased by more than 20 per cent between 2021 and 2023, said in October that China "would also consider nuclear use to restore deterrence if a conventional military defeat in Taiwan" threatened Chinese Communist Party rule. The Track Two talks are part of a

two-decade nuclear weapons and posture dialogue that stalled after the Trump administration pulled funding in 2019.

After the Covid-19 pandemic, semi-official discussions resumed on broader security and energy issues, but only the Shanghai meeting dealt in detail with nuclear weapons and posture. Nuclear policy analyst William Alberque of the Henry Stimson Centre think-tank, who was not involved in the March discussions, said the Track Two negotiations were useful at a time of glacial US-Chinese relations.

"It's important to continue talking with China with absolutely no expectations," he said when nuclear arms are at issue. The US Department of Defence estimated last year that Beijing has 500 operational nuclear warheads and will probably field more than 1,000 by 2030. That compares to 1,770 and 1,710 operational warheads deployed by the US and Russia respectively.

The Pentagon said that by 2030, much of Beijing's weapons will likely be held at higher readiness levels. Since 2020, China has also modernised its arsenal, starting production of its next-generation ballistic missile submarine, testing hypersonic glide vehicle warheads and conducting regular nuclear-armed sea patrols. Weapons on land, in the air and at sea give China the "nuclear triad" — a hallmark of a major nuclear power.