

**Court sentences 2 men to death**  
**F.P. Report**

TOBA TEK SINGH: An additional sessions judge in Toba Tek Singh on Monday sentenced to death two men involved in murdering a woman in their family. Additional Sessions Judge Abdul Hafeez Bhutta presided over a hearing for the case on Monday and delivered his verdict. A short order, said Shahbaz and Sumaira were acquitted by extending the benefit of the doubt.



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# Israeli strikes kill 65 in Gaza

CAIRO/JERUSALEM (Reuters): Egypt has floated a new proposal aimed at restoring the Gaza ceasefire deal, security sources told Reuters on Monday, as Palestinian health authorities said Israeli strikes had killed at least 65 people in the enclave in the past 24 hours.

The proposal, made last week, follows an escalation in violence after Israel resumed air and ground operations against Hamas on March 18, effectively ending a two-month period of relative calm after 15 months of war. Gaza health officials said Israeli airstrikes and shelling have killed nearly 700 Palestinians since then, including at least 400 women and children. Among those killed on Monday were two local journalists, Mohammad Mansour and Hussam Shabat, medics said. The Palestinian Journalist Syndicate said at least 206 journalists have been killed by Israeli fire in Gaza since early October 2023, when the conflict erupted. There was no

immediate Israeli comment.

Hamas said several of its senior political and security officials had also been killed. The Egyptian plan calls for Hamas to release five Israeli hostages each week, with Israel implementing the second phase of the ceasefire after the first week, two security sources said.

Hamas is still holding 59 hostages, with 24 of them thought to be still alive, among the more than 250 it seized in its October 7, 2023 cross-border attack on Israel. Most of the rest have been freed in periodic negotiated exchanges. Both the US and Hamas have agreed to the proposal, the security sources said, but Israel has not yet responded.

A Hamas official did not confirm the proposed offer, but told Reuters that "several proposals are being discussed with the mediators to bridge the gap and to resume negotiations to reach common ground that would pave the way to start the second phase of the agreement".

The sources said the Egyptian proposal includes a timeline for a full Israeli military withdrawal from Gaza, backed by US guarantees, in exchange for the release of remaining hostages. Hamas has accused Israel of breaking the terms of the January ceasefire agreement but has said it is willing to negotiate a renewed truce and was studying proposals from US President Donald Trump's special envoy, Steve Witkoff. Israel says it resumed its military operations to force Hamas to release the remaining hostages it is holding in Gaza.

It says it does its best to reduce harm to civilians and has questioned the death toll provided by health authorities in the Hamas-run enclave. Palestinian officials on Sunday put the number of dead from nearly 18 months of conflict at over 50,000. Israel launched its offensive in Gaza after Hamas fighters stormed southern Israel on October 7, 2023, killing 1,200 people, mostly civilians, according to

Israeli tallies.

In Gaza's southernmost city of Rafah, the municipality said thousands of people were stuck inside the Tel Al-Sultan district where some Israeli military forces had entered, with families trapped among the ruins, with no water, food, or medicine. The Palestinian Civil Emergency Service said 50,000 residents remained cornered in Rafah, which abuts the border with Egypt. The Israeli military said troops had encircled Tel Al-Sultan to dismantle "terror infrastructure sites and eliminate terrorists in the area". UNRWA, the UN Palestinian relief agency for Palestinians, said 124,000 people have been displaced in Gaza in recent days. "Families carry what little they have with no shelter, no safety, and nowhere left to go. The Israeli authorities have cut off all aid. Food is scarce and prices are soaring. This is a humanitarian catastrophe. The siege must end," UNRWA said on X.



ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari conferring award of Sitara-i-Basalat upon Captain Syed Amir Raza, during ceremony to confer insignias of military awards, at Aiwan-e-Sadr.

## President confers mly awards on armed forces personnel

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari on Monday conferred insignias of military awards upon 44 officers of Pakistan armed forces.

The Presidential Investiture ceremony was held at the Aiwan-e-Sadr in connection with Pakistan Day and was attended by the Chairman Senate, ministers, senior officers of Pakistan armed forces, government officials, and families of the recipients of the awards.

The recipients of Hilal-i-Intiaz (Military) included Air Marshal Muhammad Sarfraz, Air Marshal Kazim Hammad, Air Marshal Shakil Ghazanfar, Major General Saeed Ur Rehman Sarwar, Major Gen Nadeem Fazal, Air Vice Marshal Shakeel Safdar,

Major Gen Tahir Masood Ahmed, Major Gen Sohail Sabir, Major Gen Fuad Ahmed Siddiqui, Major Gen Zeeshan Ahmad, Major Gen Sohail Ilyas, Rear Admiral Muhammad Hussain Sial, Major Gen Syed Mukarram Hussain, Major Gen Iftikhar Ahmed Satti, Major Gen Ghulam Shabeer Narejo, Major Gen Shahid Pervaiz, Major Gen Muhammad Asim Khan, Major Gen Nadeem Yousaf, Major Gen Ghulam Muhammad, Major Gen Noor Wali Khan, Major Gen Muhammad Naeem Akhtar, Major Gen Muhammad Nadeem Ashraf, Major Gen Naseem Anwer, Major Gen Umar Ahmad Shah, Major Gen Muhammad Shahid Siddeeq, Major Gen Adeel Haider Minhas, Major Gen Syed Ali Raza, Rear

Admiral Shifaat Ali Khan, Rear Admiral Amir Mahmood, Major Gen Abdul Sami, Major Gen Muhammad Yasir Elahi, Rear Admiral Intiaz Ali, Major Gen Kamal Anwar Chaudhry, Major Gen Muneer Ud Din, Major Gen Ahsan Waqas Kayani, Major Gen Farrukh Shahzad Rao, Major Gen Adnan Sarwar Malik, Major Gen Omar Maqbool, Major Gen Azhar Yasir, Rear Admiral Khyber Zaman, Rear Admiral Shafquat Hussain Akhtar, Major Gen Zaheer Akhtar, and Major Gen Mahmood Sultan.

The president also conferred Sitara-i-Basalat upon Captain Syed Amir Raza in recognition of his valour demonstrated while fighting terrorists at Naval Aviation Base Turbat.

## Ambassador Sadiq visits Afghanistan

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: On the direction of the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, the Special Representative for Afghanistan, Ambassador Mohammad Sadiq, visited Kabul on 21-23 March 2025.

The Special Representative called on the Acting Foreign Minister of Afghanistan, Amir Khan Muttaqi, on 22 March. During the meeting, both sides exchanged views on all issues of mutual concern, including peace and security, trade and economic cooperation, as well as people-to-people contacts.

The Special Representative reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to continued engagement and mutually beneficial ties with Afghanistan, and underscored the importance of addressing all issues of concern, particularly security, to further consolidate bilateral ties. Both sides agreed to enhance high-level engagement and dialogue to strengthen bilateral cooperation.

The two sides also reinforced the commitment to a mutually beneficial bilateral relationship, with a view to achieving lasting regional peace and stability.

The Special Representative also met with Acting Commerce Minister of Afghanistan, Nooruddin Azizi. Both sides discussed bilateral trade and economic relations, as well as cooperation in the areas of transit and connectivity. The Special Representative reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to reinforcing mutually beneficial ties with Afghanistan. The two sides agreed to harness full potential of regional trade and connectivity for the mutual benefit of both countries.

Upon his return, the Special Representative briefed the DPM/FM about his meetings with the Afghan leadership. The DPM/FM expressed satisfaction at the discussions held with the Afghan side and issued directions to further consolidate bilateral ties, including through high-level engagement and enhancement of trade and transit cooperation.

## 50 Afghan children deported

**F.P. Report**

LANDI KOTAL: Approximately fifty arrested Afghan children, illegally crossed into Pakistan were deported to Afghanistan on Sunday night, Station House Officer (SHO) said.

SHO, Landi Kotal police station Adnan Afridi flanked by jirga members including tehsil chairman Shah Khalid, President Torkham Clearing Agents Association Mujib Shinwari, former head of Khyber Chamber of Commerce and Industry Jabir Shinwari and tribal elders addressing to a press conference in the police station on Sunday night in the presence of the detained children that the Afghan almost seven hundred Afghan children (boys and girls) cut the fence and again and again illegally crossed the border into Pakistan.

Most of them were involved in narcotics smuggling and other anti-social activities he added and said they were warned repeatedly and the Afghan border officials were asked to stop illegal penetration but to in avail.

# Bilawal calls for unity to end politics of hatred

— urges govt to take opposition on board to counter terrorism

**F.P. Report**

LAHORE: Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto has expressed concern over the growing politics of hatred and division in the country.

Speaking at a ceremony at the Governor's House, he called on all political parties to unite in the fight against terrorism. He claimed that international forces were behind terrorism in Pakistan and vowed to confront its facilitators. Bilawal highlighted that PPP has played a key role in the country's politics, particularly in combating extremism. He stressed that terrorism and the economic crisis are among the major challenges affecting the people.

He pointed out that poverty and unemployment have plagued citizens for years and must be prioritized. He also emphasized the worsening law and order situation in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, urging that public issues should not be politicized. Criticizing some opposition parties, he noted that they skipped the National Security Council meeting to exploit terrorism for political gains.

Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari on

Monday called upon the incumbent government to take on board all political parties, including those that skipped the high-level moot on national security, to counter rising incidents of terrorism.

"Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif should convene another meeting, even if after a month... We hope to build a national consensus to combat terrorism," he said. PPP chairman noted that special attention must be given to law and order in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. "It is indispensable to establish consensus on national issues."

He noted that they must unite to fight terrorists, adding that all political stakeholders must come together for the country and nation instead of personal interests. "There is division in our politics... building consensus on national issues has become difficult," he regretted.

The PPP scion reiterated that Pakistan is once again facing global conspiracies and must stand firm against them. He highlighted the ongoing security concerns, stating that the country is dealing with serious difficulties due to terrorism. He urged political parties to set aside their differences and unite for the

greater good of the nation. Bilawal also invited the opposition to move beyond "narrow-minded politics" and focus on public welfare instead.

The PPP chief assured that efforts would be made to find solutions to the prevailing challenges. He reaffirmed his commitment to combating terrorism, vowing to confront both terrorists and their facilitators. Bilawal said he informed the prime minister that the PPP is ready to play its role in facilitating dialogue among political parties, stressing the importance of collective decision-making.

Addressing the Leader of the Opposition Omar Ayub, he said that his party might have numerous grievances but tends to focus on a single issue. "The people of Pakistan face multiple challenges beyond just political disputes, including terrorism, economic instability, and internal issues." He urged the opposition to prioritise national issues over seeking relief for political leadership. The former foreign minister also clarified that the PPP is neither part of the government nor the opposition. However, he stated that the PPP remains open to dialogue with the government to facilitate constructive discussions.

## PM asks federal, provincial govts to work together to boost agriculture

**Saqib Mushtaq**

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif Monday stressed that federal and provincial governments should work together to provide inputs to farmers at reasonable rates to strengthen agriculture.

He was speaking at the inauguration of Seed Potato Production and Aeroponics Complex established with the assistance of South Korea for indigenous seed potato production using advanced technology. He said timely availability of good quality seed, fertilizers and medicines will bring revolution in the field of agriculture, resulting in increased exports.

He thanked Korea for helping Pakistan in setting up the complex for production of potato seed. Korea had a strong economy and Pakistan wanted cooperation with it in different sectors, he remarked. The prime minister said our farmer was hard working and capable and worked in all kinds of weather and with the use of modern seed the production of potato will increase.

"Our farmer needed best seeds, fertilizers and genuine medicines," he added. He emphasized that agriculture graduates should be provided suitable environment so that they could contribute in the development of agriculture sector. The prime minister said the Minister for Food Security and his team should focus on the progress of agriculture sector.

About 65 percent of our population in rural areas was associated with agriculture, he noted. "We have to increase the share of agriculture in the country's economy. We have to enhance share of production of cotton,



sugarcane and other crops," he added. Prime Minister Shehbaz said, "If we make progress with dedication we will be ahead of other countries in the agriculture sector. We are sending 1000 agriculture graduates to China for training."

He urged the minister for food security to focus on the local manufacturing of agriculture machinery including combined harvester. The prime minister appreciated researchers and scientists of Pakistan Agriculture Research Council for their dedication and hard work to promote agriculture.

Due to efforts of these researchers, agriculture of the country will make progress, he said and added efforts should be intensified for the promotion of small and medium enterprises in the rural areas. "We have to take steps for storage and transportation of vegetables and fruits," he continued. The prime minister said farmers should focus on value addition by making use of fruits and vegetables in abundant supply.

He said Pakistan was wasting precious foreign exchange reserves on export of \$ 4.5 billion of palm oil and

there was a need to reverse the trend by increasing local production. Pakistan's livestock sector also had immense potential, he said adding, "We need to put our act together to take part in the progress of the country. We have to work hard to change our agriculture sector."

**Shehbaz desires emulation of Ramadan Relief Package mechanism in similar govt's run schemes:** Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif said that amounts under the Ramadan Relief Package were being transferred to the beneficiaries through a highly convenient and transparent digital wallet system and this model should be adopted for other government's run schemes.

The prime minister chaired a review meeting on his Ramadan Relief Package 2025. During the meeting, he said the Ramadan package had been introduced across Pakistan, including Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Jammu & Kashmir without any discrimination and lauded the efforts of the State Bank of Pakistan, NADRA, and tech institutions in ensuring transparency in the package.

## JUI-F to play role for countering terrorism: Fazl

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: In an effort to build a broad-based national consensus on the situation in Balochistan, and as part of his ongoing meetings with national leaders on the issue, President The Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBAP), Mian Muhammad Rauf Atta, held a meeting today with the Ameer of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F), Maulana Fazal ur Rehman.

The Provincial Ameer of JUI-F, Senator Maulana Abdul Wasay, and the Opposition Leader of the Provincial Assembly, Mr. Mir Younas Aziz Zehri, were also present on the occasion. President SCBAP was accompanied by Mir Atta Ullah Langove, President High Court Bar

Association, Balochistan. The meeting took place at the residence of Senator Maulana Abdul Wasay.

The discussion centered on the deteriorating law and order situation in the province which has led to wider unrest, an increase in insurgent activities, and road closures that have directly impacted the daily lives of ordinary citizens.

President SCBAP urged the JUI-F Ameer, as a national leader, to take an active role in uniting all political and national leaders of Balochistan on a single platform to find a long-term solution to the province's issues, thereby restoring peace and stability for the public.

The JUI-F Ameer also expressed deep concern over the current law and order situation in both

Balochistan and the country as a whole. He assured his full cooperation in resolving the disputes and committed to playing his role in restoring peace, progress, and development in Balochistan.

To this end, the JUI-F Ameer directed party leaders, particularly in Balochistan, to submit a detailed report on the current situation and their assessments. This would help in formulating a peace restoration plan, which will be pursued after the Eid holidays. Both sides agreed that the only viable solution to Balochistan's issues lies in a democratic approach. In the end, prayers were offered for those who lost their lives in the recent unrest and agreed to continue such consultative meetings until the situation in Balochistan is fully resolved.





## Prof. Dr. Zia Ul Haq honored with *Sitara-e-Imtiaz*

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: The prestigious Sitara-e-Imtiaz has been conferred upon Professor Dr. Zia Ul Haq, an eminent educationist, public health expert, and Vice Chancellor of Khyber Medical University (KMU), Peshawar, and Islamia College University, Peshawar. This national honor recognizes his exceptional leadership and remarkable contributions to academia, research, and professional services. President of Pakistan, Asif Ali Zardari, presented this prestigious award to Professor Dr. Zia ul Haq in a grand

ceremony held at the Aiwan-e-Sadr, Islamabad. Notably, Prof. Dr. Zia ul Haq became the youngest Vice Chancellor in Pakistan at the age of just 40. Prof. Dr. Zia ul Haq completed his MBBS from Khyber Medical College, Peshawar, one of the most renowned medical institutions in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. He then pursued his PhD in Public Health from the University of Glasgow, United Kingdom. Currently, he serves as the Vice Chancellor of two prestigious institutions – KMU and Islamia College University, Peshawar. Additionally, he is the

Convener of the Higher Education Task Force established by the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Prof. Dr. Zia ul Haq hails from a Sadat family of Dir Upper. His father, Syed Mutiullah, is a retired Forest Officer. Under his dynamic leadership over the past four years, KMU has witnessed remarkable progress in governance, financial stability, academic excellence, and research. As a seasoned researcher, Prof. Dr. Zia ul Haq has published 105 research papers in national and international journals. He has also supervised eight PhD scholars and successfully secured

funding worth Rs. 5 billion for international research projects. In recognition of his scholarly contributions, he has previously been honored by the Higher Education Commission (HEC) Islamabad as Pakistan's Best Researcher and Best Teacher. Additionally, he serves as a Visiting Professor of Public Health at the University of Glasgow, UK. The Sitara-e-Imtiaz award is a national acknowledgment of his invaluable services in higher education and public health, further establishing him as one of Pakistan's most distinguished and visionary academic leaders?

## Sharjeel vows to protect Sindh's water rights against controversial canals

**F.P. Report**

KARACHI: Sindh Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon categorically stated that the PPP will never make a compromise on Sindh's interests and will never let the controversial canals be built at any cost. In a statement, Sharjeel Inam Memon stated that the PPP remains steadfast to protect the water rights of the province and will

never allow any step that undermines its resources, as envisioned by the Sindh people. He emphasized that the PPP has always maintained a clear stance on water-related issues and will not yield to any pressure or political expediency in this regard. Sharjeel Inam Memon stated that the president Asif Ali Zardari, Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, the Chief Minister of

Sindh, and the Sindh government have delivered a clear message that the construction of any illegal canal will not be tolerated. He added that the Sindh Assembly has also passed a resolution on this matter, reflecting the aspirations of the people. He further stated that water is a fundamental right of the people of Sindh, and no attempt to deprive the province of its

share will be allowed to succeed. He emphasized that the PPP has always stood for truth and justice and will continue to do so in the future. Sharjeel Inam Memon urged the federal government and relevant institutions to uphold Sindh's water rights and refrain from any scheme or project that would deprive the province's people of their rightful share.



LAHORE: Tailors work tirelessly, stitching clothes to meet the high demand ahead of the upcoming Eid ul Fitr festival. —APP Photo

## Customs foils smuggling attempt, seizes narcotics

KARACHI (APP): Pakistan Customs successfully thwarted an attempt to smuggle a large quantity of narcotics from Balochistan to Karachi. The Anti-Smuggling Organization (ASO) staff stationed at RCD Highway Northern Bypass, and Super Highway were instructed to be extra vigilant and monitor suspicious vehicles. Acting on the information, Customs officials were alerted about the potential smuggling of drugs in a car traveling

from Balochistan to Karachi. The Anti-Smuggling Organization (ASO) staff stationed at RCD Highway Northern Bypass, and Super Highway were instructed to be extra vigilant and monitor suspicious vehicles. Acting on the information, Customs officials were alerted about the potential smuggling of drugs in a car traveling

driver attempted to flee by steering the car into the riverine area adjacent to the highway. The Customs staff at Super Highway were promptly informed and initiated a search operation in the riverine area. After an exhaustive search, the vehicle was located. Realizing that Customs officials were closing in, the driver abandoned the car and fled the scene, evading capture.

Upon inspecting the vehicle, Customs officers discovered 84.5 kilograms of hashish concealed inside. The estimated market value of the seized drugs is Rs. 14.2 million. Both the vehicle and the drugs were taken into custody, and a formal case has been registered. Further investigations are currently underway to trace those involved in the smuggling attempt.

## Commissioner reviews measures against encroachments

KARACHI (APP): Commissioner Karachi, Syed Hassan Naqvi on Monday presided over a meeting with Deputy Commissioners at his office to review measures against encroachments, begging, and profiteering. Deputy commissioners briefed the commissioner on actions taken against encroachments obstructing traffic in their respective districts. According to the report, 132 encroachment sites were cleared between March 17 and 23. The Commissioner directed deputy commissioners to ensure the smooth flow of traffic during Eid shopping and to prevent beggars from causing difficulties for citizens.

A report on actions taken against profiteers on the 23rd of Ramadan was also released. The Karachi administration's campaign against profiteers continues. According to the report, fines exceeding Rs. 4 crore 16 lakh 73 thousand were imposed on profiteers during the 23-day campaign. Commissioner Naqvi commended efforts to enforce official prices and directed officers to continue the campaign against profiteers.

## Administration fines violators on overpricing

LAHORE (APP): During the last Ashra of Ramzan, the district administration had intensified its crackdown against hoarders and profiteers. According to a spokesperson, on the directives of Deputy Commissioner Syed Musa Raza, price control magistrates had been actively inspecting markets to enforce price regulations. As a result of these efforts, 32 violations had been recorded, leading to fines totaling Rs 200,000.

Additionally, 96 warnings were issued, one arrest was made, and one FIR was registered against violators.

DC Syed Musa Raza emphasized that strict price monitoring was ongoing and violators will face fines and legal action. "We are ensuring that price lists are displayed prominently at all shops for the convenience of citizens," he stated.

"Our commitment is to protect consumers from overpricing and ensure they get essential commodities at government-fixed rates," he added. The DC reiterated his resolve to maintain market discipline and urged citizens to report any violations to the authorities to help curb profiteering during Ramzan.

Meanwhile, the district administration arrested three fraudsters posing as price control magistrates in Nishtar Town. Assistant Commissioner Muhammad Saleem Asi caught them red-handed and handed them over to the police. The cases have been registered against them.

## CM orders free medicine supply to govt hospitals

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif has directed immediate payment of dues to government hospitals and ensured free medicine supply across Punjab's public healthcare facilities.

Chairing a special meeting to review Mayo Hospital's administrative affairs, here on Monday, she issued multiple directives to improve hospital management and patient care.

CM Maryam Nawaz instructed that medicine lists be prominently displayed in all government hospitals, with electronic boards showing available medicines. She also emphasized the activation and pro-

motion of 'Maryam Nawaz Complaint Counters' to address patient concerns efficiently. To enhance patient comfort, she ordered the installation of mist fans in open waiting areas and provision of chairs and benches in waiting rooms.

For better hospital monitoring, the CM directed officials to conduct daily visits and prepare checklist reports covering doctors' attendance, staff presence, free medicines, lab tests, and biomedical equipment availability. Multiple organizations will assess the actual situation of hospitals to ensure accountability.

Additionally, waiting lists for operations and tests

will be closely monitored, and daily checks will be conducted for parking, cafeterias, and wheelchair availability in public hospitals.

The meeting also approved the replacement of worn-out hospital curtains with blinds to prevent infections. Furthermore, the CM ordered a quality audit of hospital labs, assigning this responsibility to the Healthcare Commission.

The meeting also discussed the Medical City Project, for which CM Punjab has sought a detailed plan. These initiatives aim to enhance healthcare services and ensure improved facilities for patients across Punjab.

## Aseefa Zardari's message on World Tuberculosis Day

**F.P. Report**

KARACHI: Today, on World Tuberculosis Day, we stand united in our resolve to eliminate a disease that has claimed far too many lives and continues to impact millions around the world. Tuberculosis is not just a health issue; it is a social justice issue that disproportionately affects our most vulnerable communities.

Pakistan remains among the countries most burdened by TB, but we are also a nation of resilience and hope. Our government, in partnership with international organizations, healthcare workers, and civil society, is taking bold steps to strengthen our healthcare system, improve

early detection, and ensure access to free, effective treatment for all.

As First Lady, and as someone who has long championed public health initiatives, I am deeply committed to supporting Pakistan's journey towards ending TB. We must break the stigma surrounding this disease, encourage testing, and stand in solidarity with those affected. No one should suffer in silence when the tools for prevention, treatment, and cure are within our reach.

On this important day, I call upon every citizen to play their part in raising awareness and supporting those in need. Together, we can fulfill our promise of a healthier, TB-free Pakistan.

## Jamaat-e-Islami's protest march to be held on April 27

KARACHI (PPI): Jamaat-e-Islami Karachi Ameer, Monem Zafar, condemned the worst traffic situation in Karachi and Israeli bombing on Gaza while addressing a press conference at Idara Noor-e-Haq. He announced that a large march would be held on April 27 to secure the rights of Karachi's citizens.

During the last ten days of Ramadan, while Muslims are engaged in worship, Israeli bombing on Gaza continues. Monem Zafar expressed concern over this situation, stating that the Muslims in Gaza have been facing these conditions for the past one and a half years, and the government should take united action on this matter.

Speaking about educational institutions, he mentioned that currently, 7.8 million students are deprived of educational facilities and criticized the People's Party for neglecting their future despite being in power for the past 17 years. He demanded that the decision of the committee formed regarding intermediate examination results should be made public.

Due to the worst traffic situation in Karachi, it has become difficult for people to commute from office to home in the evening, and traffic accidents are on the rise. Monem Zafar noted that while preparations for Eid have begun in the city, street crime incidents have increased.

He further stated that according to the government, the K-IV project will be completed by June 2026, but even with its completion, water supply in Karachi will not be feasible. The augmentation project by the People's Party has yet to be tendered.

Monem Zafar announced that the movement would be intensified after Ramadan to ensure the rights of Karachi's citizens. He demanded that the government allocate 500 billion rupees in development funds for Karachi and provide 2.5 million rupees to each Union Council so that UC chairmen can carry out developmental work in their areas.

## Sindh partners with Google, Tech Valley to provide digital skills scholarships

KARACHI (APP): The Sindh government, in collaboration with Google and Tech Valley, has announced more than 30,000 Google Career Certificates scholarships for public sector universities across the province to empower youth with globally recognised digital skills.

The meeting held at CM House was attended by Education Minister Syed Sardar Shah, Secretary to the Chief Minister Raheem Shaikh, Chairman of HEC Sindh Prof Tariq Rafi, Secretary of School Education Zahid Abbasi, Secretary of IT Noor Samoo, Secretary of U&B Abbas Baloch, the Vice Chancellors of 30 public sector universities, CEO of Tech Valley Pakistan Umar Farooq, and other concerned parties.

The Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah presided over a meeting to formalise the initiative with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) here at CM House on Monday. The Chief Minister stated that the aim of the initiative is to equip students with in-demand digital skills in fields such as Artificial

Intelligence (AI), Cybersecurity, Digital Marketing, IT Automation, and Project Management, ensuring they are prepared for the evolving job market.

Murad Shah said that following the success of the 2024 Google Career Certificates Sindh Programme, in which

1,500 students from 10 universities achieved a 100 per cent success rate, the 2025 expansion underscores this government's commitment to digital transformation and workforce development.

Mr Shah emphasised the importance of the programme, commenting: "This partnership is a tes-

tament to our vision of transforming Sindh into a hub of innovation and skill development."

He added that by offering over 30,000 scholarships, we are not merely investing in education; we are investing in the future of our youth and the economic prosperity of our province.

## 277 TB cases per 100,000 people emerge in Pakistan: Experts

KARACHI (PPI): Pakistan records 277 tuberculosis (TB) cases per 100,000 people annually, placing the country fifth among the highest TB burden nations.

This was informed by experts at an awareness walk participants organized by the Ojha Institute of Chest Diseases (OICD) to mark World TB Day today in collaboration with the Center for Disease Control (CDC) Sindh at Dow

University of Health Sciences. During the walk, participants carried banners and placards to spread awareness about TB prevention and treatment.

Dr Iftikhar Ahmed, Director OICD and Dean Faculty of Medicine, informed attendees that in 2001, TB was declared a national emergency in Pakistan. He shared that of the estimated TB cases annually, 494,603 are notified while 191,397 remain unregis-

tered, representing 30 percent of the total. He also noted that 48,500 people die of TB each year in Pakistan.

In Sindh alone, 154,278 people are affected annually. Out of these, 119,741 are registered while more than 34,000 cases remain untracked. The province hosts 455 TB clinics and 16 Programmatic Management of Drug Resistant TB (PMDT) centers to provide ongoing care.



### NOTICE OF BOOK CLOSURE FOR SUB-DIVISION OF SHARES UNDER SECTION 85 OF THE COMPANIES ACT, 2017

The shareholders of M/s. Lucky Cement Limited (the "Company") are hereby informed that pursuant to the resolution approved in the Extraordinary General Meeting of the Company on March 18, 2025 regarding decrease in the face value of the shares from Rs. 10/- to Rs. 2/- per share, the entitled shareholders will receive 5 shares of face value of Rs. 2/- each against every 1 share of Rs. 10/- held in their names.

In order to determine the entitlement, the share transfer books of the Company shall remain closed from Wednesday, April 23, 2025 to Friday, April 25, 2025 (both days inclusive). The Shareholders whose names appear in the Register of Members of the Company as on Tuesday, April 22, 2025 shall be eligible for receiving sub-divided shares of the Company having face value of Rs. 2/- per share.

The shareholders, who possess physical share certificates of the Company, are requested to surrender their original share certificate(s) along with verified transfer deed(s) (if any) with the Company's Share Registrar and Transfer agent i.e. M/s. CDC Share Registrar Services Limited (CDCSRL), situated at CDC House, 99-B, Block 'B', S.M.C.H.S., Main Shahrah-e-Faisal, Karachi-74400, along with certified copy of CNIC after April 25, 2025 for the exchange of share certificate(s).

Karachi  
March 25, 2025

Ali Shahab  
Company Secretary



# Governor Kundi commends NYA for empowering youth

PESHAWAR (APP): Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Faisal Karim Kundi on Monday emphasized that platforms like the National Youth Assembly (NYA) provide young people with opportunities to progress in a positive direction, which is highly commendable. He said this during a meeting with the delegation from the National Youth Assembly here at Governor House led by Youth Governor of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Mujahid Khan, and included Divisional Head Dr. Muhammad Haris, District Leader Muhammad Huzaifa, and other members of the Youth Cabinet. During the meeting, the delegation briefed the Governor about the objectives, role, and achievements of the National

Youth Assembly. The delegation highlighted that the National Youth Assembly conducts various awareness programs aimed at career counseling, social betterment, and promoting leadership skills among the youth. They requested the Governor's support for the Assembly's activities and suggested that the Governor take an oath with the Assembly members and assist in organizing a Youth Convention in Peshawar. On this occasion, Governor Faisal Karim Kundi appreciated the role of youth, stating that they play a pivotal role in the country's development. The Governor assured the delegation that the Governor House will fully support youth development and welfare projects.

He encouraged young people to channel their energies toward educational advancement, social services, and national unity. Meanwhile, a delegation from the Peoples Teachers Forum Charsadda, led by District President Shakeel Ahmad, met with the Governor Faisal Karim Kundi. The 20-member delegation included Navidullah, Hayat Khan, and Kifayatullah, among others. During the meeting, the delegation brought to the Governor's attention the issues faced by teachers, particularly those who were temporarily recruited during the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) government from 1993 to 1996. The delegation explained that after the PPP government ended, a

new administration dismissed these teachers. However, following appeals, legislation was passed to reinstate them, only for the subsequent Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government to terminate their employment again. The teachers' representatives urged the Governor to present their case before the President of Pakistan, seeking their reinstatement. In response, Governor Faisal Karim Kundi assured the delegation of his full support in addressing their concerns, emphasizing that the PPP government has always prioritized providing employment to the people. He reiterated that their efforts are focused on ensuring that no section of society remains deprived of their rights.



PESHAWAR: Chief Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Shahab Ali Shah, chairing a weekly review meeting to assess the progress of tasks assigned to various departments to enhance governance efficiency.

## Over 866,000 applications received for 16,454 teaching positions 406 PhDs, 4 transgender applicants included

### E.P. Report

Peshawar: The Elementary and Secondary Education of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has received an overwhelming 866,152 applications for 16,454 vacancies across various teaching cadres.

According to the Education Testing and Evaluation Authority (ETEA), the applicant pool

includes 395,487 women and 470,661 men. Additionally, 7,161 disabled individuals and 4 transgender candidates have also applied for CT and PST cadre positions. Notably, among the applicants are 406 PhD holders, eager to contribute to the education sector. To ensure a fair and transparent recruitment process, ETEA Executive

Director Adil Saeed Safi has announced a three-phase evaluation system. The process will begin with a screening test, followed by a computer-based test, and conclude with a quality check phase, where candidates' credentials and identities will be verified. Adil Safi further stated that the first phase of testing will commence immediately after Eid, with examinations for Arabic Teachers, CT-IT Teachers, and Qari positions expected to be conducted in the second week of April.

A comprehensive strategy has been developed in collaboration with all relevant institutions to uphold transparency and merit-based selection, ensuring a recruitment process free from any irregularities.

## GIZ representatives meet KP Minister

### Discuss labour welfare and digitalization

#### E.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The representative of the German organization GIZ Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Team on Monday met with the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Labour, Fazal Shakoor Khan at his office in the Civil Secretariat, Peshawar. The meeting was attended by Secretary Labour Department, Captain (Retd.) Mian Adil Iqbal, Vice Commissioner Employees Social Security Institution (ESSI) Khurshid, Adaptive Social Protection (ASP) Project (GIZ) representative Hamid Ullah, Adnan Ahmad, and other concerned officials.

During the meeting, the provincial minister was given a detailed briefing on GIZ's Adaptive Social Protection Project in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. It was told in the meeting that GIZ is collaborating with multiple government departments in the province on various programs. A significant part of the discussion revolved around the launch of the "E-Mazdoor Card" and the digitalization of the Labour Department. However, the establishment of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Social Protection Authority and the inauguration of the Social Protection Strategy were also discussed in the

meeting. On this occasion, Minister Fazal Shakoor Khan expressed hope that GIZ would extend full cooperation in the E-Mazdoor Card, digitalization efforts, and other labour welfare initiatives. Hamid Ullah assured that he would inform GIZ officials about the discussion with the KP labour minister. The minister further announced that the Labour Information Management System (Labour IMS) would be launched soon. He said that the digitalization of the labour department would significantly improve the overall system and efficiency of the department.



PESHAWAR: Asma Ali, daughter of Sajid Ali, had her first fast at age of 10 years.

## CBP organizes Cycle Race 2025

### E.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Cantonment Board Peshawar (CBP) successfully organized the CBP Cycle Race 2025 under the inspiring theme of "Pedal for Fun, Ride for Pakistan" on the eve of Pakistan Day. The event, held under the patronage of the Military Lands & Cantonments Department, showcased the community's spirit of unity, health, and harmony. This initiative not only promoted the importance of physical fitness but also fostered sportsmanship, teamwork, and a sense of collective responsibility among the youth.

The event was conducted in line with the vision of the Director General, Military Lands & Cantonments Department, as part of a broader initiative where similar healthy events are being organized across all cantonments in Pakistan during the holy month of Ramzan. These events aim to encourage a healthy and active lifestyle while strengthening the bonds of community engagement and national pride.

Station Commander Peshawar, Brigadier Omer Saeed, graced the event as the chief guest and appreciated the enthusiasm and sportsmanship displayed by the participants, including young kids aged 10 to 15 years. The youth of Peshawar Cantonment and employees of the Cantonment Board actively took part in the race, making it a lively and energetic gathering.

The event, organized in collaboration with the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Cycling Association, provided a platform for the young generation to engage in a positive, healthy activity that helps divert the youth from negative influences, instilling discipline, focus, and perseverance while reinforcing the values of fitness and community well-being. The public response was overwhelmingly positive. Winners were awarded cash prizes and medals, while all participants received certificates in recognition of their enthusiastic participation. Residents of the cantonment expressed their appreciation for such a vibrant and peaceful event. CEO of the Cantonment Board Peshawar, Ch Baber Hussain, emphasized the commitment to continue organizing such events that contribute to the health and happiness of the community.

### E.P. Report

PESHAWAR: World Health Organization celebrates 24th March 2025 as World TB Day every year with the desire to increase the efforts against this disease because it is not only the problem of developing countries but also due to AIDS it is arise in the whole world. Pakistan chest society arranged a walk and awareness symposium at Khyber Teaching Hospital Peshawar under the supervision of Society President Dr Saadia Ashraf. She stated that TB is a contagious disease but curable. It not only affects the lungs but it can involve other organs of the body like cervical lymph nodes, brain, joints, abdomen, Skin and Genitourinary organs of the body. Chest Department LRH also arranged a awareness walk with message by the Head of Pulmonary Department Professor Dr Zafar Iqbal and Assistant Professor Dr Anila Basit stating that this disease spreading in the society by spitting and coughing to the Healthy Person.

## World TB Day observed

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It effects 14 to 45 years age group of the society. WHO declared Tuberculosis as the Medical Emergency and the Directly observed treatment was started in the country. They said that the symptoms of TB are coughing for more than two weeks, weight loss, Night sweat, loss of appetite, coughing blood and presence of a TB Patient in the Home or Family. Dr Zulfiqar Mehmood District TB Control Officer also arranged a awareness walk at Molvi G Hospital

GT Road Peshawar and all the staff including Doctors, Paramedical Staff and Nurses participated on the occasion and gave a detail lecture about the Tuberculosis stating that prevention by covering the mouth with face mask, avoiding spitting everywhere, good and balance diet, early diagnose by visiting the Health facility for sputum test and Chest X-ray continue treatment and contact screening are the very important thing need full attention to have a healthy life and controlling this disease.

## CS reviews progress on governance, development

### E.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Chief Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Shahab Ali Shah, chaired a weekly review meeting to assess the progress of tasks assigned to various departments to enhance governance efficiency. The meeting was attended by Additional Chief Secretary (Home), relevant secretaries, and officials. The Performance Management and Reforms Unit (PMRU) was directed to generate tasks on the Chief Secretary's instructions and ensure effective tracking. A weekly update on these tasks will be presented to the Chief Secretary to monitor progress.

During the meeting, officials informed that the Tracking Sheet System in the Planning and Development Department has been revived to monitor the progress of development projects, ensuring their timely and efficient completion. The Chief Secretary emphasized strict adherence to timelines for all public interest tasks and directed the expedited approval of unapproved development schemes. A briefing was also presented on strengthening and restructuring the Performance Management and Reforms Unit. Additionally, an update on the Paperless Government System was shared, with MD KPITB outlining its implementation plan. The Chief Secretary instructed all departments to be fully prepared for system operationalization by April 30, aiming to enhance e-governance, improve administrative efficiency, and ensure transparency in government operations.

Furthermore, the meeting was informed that the E-Pak Acquisition and Disposal System (E-PADS) has been launched in eight provincial departments, including Public Health Engineering, Irrigation, Communications & Works, Local Government, Health, Science & Technology, KP IT Board, and KP EZDMC. A province-wide rollout is planned in the next phase, with all provincial departments mandated to conduct procurement through E-PADS from July 1, 2025, minimizing human intervention and reducing errors.

Updates on Peshawar Development Authority (PDA) initiatives were also reviewed, including progress on the Northern Section of the Ring Road, completion of the New General Bus Terminal, and bottleneck clearance at Abdara and Tehkal Bala BRT Stations, which is 60% complete. The beautification of Peshawar was discussed, with a feasibility study to be completed within three months. Additionally, it was highlighted that an SIFC Cell has been established in the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Unit of the Planning and Development Department to coordinate SIFC activities efficiently. Updates on PPP mode projects in 11 sectors were also presented during the meeting.

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## 1510 thalassemia patients registered with Hamza foundation

### E.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Hamza Foundation Welfare Thalassemia Hospital has registered 1510 patients, with the number continuing to rise. Founder Chairman Ijaz Ali Khan emphasizes that implementing a thalassemia test before marriage can prevent this disease.

In addition to thalassemia, patients

suffering from hemophilia, blood cancer, and other blood diseases are registered with the hospital, receiving safe blood transfusions through advanced machinery since 2006. Ijaz Ali Khan stresses that thalassemia screening before marriage is crucial, as healthy individuals can be thalassemia carriers. This hereditary blood disease is transmitted from carrier parents to children, condemning

them to a lifetime of painful monthly blood transfusions. The majority of thalassemia patients come from impoverished backgrounds. Khan appeals to philanthropists, businessmen, and individuals from all walks of life to support Hamza Foundation in its mission to provide relief to these innocent children, enabling them to live without the burden of this debilitating disease.

## Commissioner visits BISEP to ensure prevention of cheating

### E.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Peshawar Division Commissioner Riaz Khan Mehsud visited the Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education to review the arrangements for the upcoming matriculation exams set to begin next month in April. Secretary of Intermediate and Secondary Education Mehdi Jan and other relevant officials were also present during the visit.

Presiding over the meeting, Commissioner Riaz Khan Mehsud expressed his firm commitment to fully implementing the

provincial government's directives to prevent cheating in matriculation and other board examinations. He emphasized that every possible measure would be taken to curb cheating, ensuring strict monitoring of both students and examination staff. Additionally, strong actions will be taken to discourage the "cheating mafia." As part of these efforts, the sale and purchase of pocket guides have been banned under Section 144 across all districts of Peshawar Division, including Chitral. Further strict measures will be introduced to strengthen this initiative.

During his detailed visit to the Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education, Commissioner Riaz Khan Mehsud inspected various departments. On this occasion, the board officials provided him with a list of private schools charging fees higher than the official government-set examination fees for matriculation. He assured that strict action would be taken against these institutions.



PESHAWAR: Hooriya Arsalan (Class 5), Zain (Class 3) and Azaan (Class 1) secured top positions in final exams of The Educators school.





## In brief

### Rich tribute paid to late Mushtaq F.P. Report

PABBI: The Pabbi Press Club cabinet paid tribute to the late Mushtaq Ahmed Paracha, a senior journalist from Nowshera, for his remarkable journalistic career. This statement was issued by PPC president Muhammad Ilyas while addressing a condolence meeting held at the press club, on Monday. The condolence meeting was attended by office-bearers of Pabbi Press Club, including Abbas Khan, Dr. Khairul Abrar, Karim Khan, Shoaib Khan, Maulana Noorul Abrar, Muhammad Abrar, Rohul Abrar, Tahseenul Abrar, Jameel Akhtar, Imran Khan, Safdar Khan, and others. During the meeting, prayers were offered for the forgiveness and mercy of the deceased, and the participants prayed that Allah Almighty grant him the highest place in Jannah and bestow patience on his family and loved ones.

### Three polio case detected F.P. Report

SHAHDADKOT: It has been revealed that three cases of polio virus have appeared in three taluks of district Qamber Shahdadt, while the administration of the district health department has instructed to take measures to protect against the virus. District Health Officer Dr. Gulzar Ali Tunio said that in Shahdadt city of 3 talukas of Qamber Shahdadt and its union council Jamali, Union council of Dera and Qamber city and in Dera of Taluka Nasirabad, total three children have been found to have polio virus. To eliminate the dangerous polio virus, the said union councils have started a five-day polio campaign upto 28 march, which in addition to giving. Meanwhile, a protest rally was taken out by women, children and the elderly in the Naseerabad city, rally started from Noonari mohalla to Arther mori where protester sit-in.

### Special children get Eid gifts F.P. Report

LODHAN: Deputy Commissioner Dr Lubna Nazir distributed Eid gifts among special persons on directions of Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif. The ceremony took place at the Government Special education Center Lodhran where Additional Deputy Commissioner General Muha-mmad Asad Ali, Assistant Commissioner Lodhran Iram Shehzadi, and Headmistress Special Education Hidayat Fatima Hashmi also participated. DC Dr Lubna Nazir highlighted that the initiative aimed to include special children in Eid celebrations, ensuring they feel valued and loved. She emphasized that such efforts by the Punjab government not only bring happiness to these children but also instill confidence and motivation in them. As a part of the event, the deputy commissioner with the special children planted saplings.

### Two people die in accidents F.P. Report

THATTA: Two people died and five were injured in two separate motorcycle accidents near Thatta. The first accident occurred on Makli Ghara Road, where a truck ran over motorcyclists, resulting in the immediate death of two young men, Molabakhsh and Shahid Kehio, from Goth Suleiman Kehio. The police have arrested the truck driver.

# KUST inks MoU with Women & Child hospital



Sahibzada Afridi

KOHAT: Kohat University of Science and Technology (KUST) and Liaquat Memorial Women & Children Hospital (LMWCH) Kohat have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to promote medical and educational cooperation.

The agreement aims to provide hands-on clinical training to health sciences students, marking a significant step forward in bridging theoretical knowledge with practical skills.

The MoU was formally signed by KUST Vice Chancellor Prof. Dr. Muhammad Naseeruddin and Medical Superintendent of

LMWCH, Dr. Ikramullah. The five-year agreement, which can be extended by mutual consent, will enable students from BS and MS Nursing, Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT), Emergency Care Technology, Medical Lab Technology, Microbiology, and Radiology programs to gain practical training at the hospital.

Speaking on the occasion, Vice Chancellor Dr. Muhammad Naseer u din emphasized the importance of such partnerships, stating, "Collaborations between academic and medical institutions help students acquire essential practical skills alongside theoretical knowledge, which is crucial for a suc-

cessful career in healthcare."

Medical Superintendent Dr. Ikram Ullah Khan expressed his commitment to supporting educational institutions. "Our hospital is fully dedicated to providing real-world clinical training opportunities for students, which is essential for producing competent healthcare professionals," he said.

The event was attended by several notable figures, including Member of Provincial Assembly Daud Shah Afridi, KDA Hospital MS Dr. Ikram Ullah, KUST Registrar Rauf Khan, Director ORIC Nadir Sarfraz, Dr. Farman Khan, and Dr. Fareed Ullah Khan.

## Pakistan Day held at GHS Kohat

### F.P. Report

KOHAT: District administration has arranged a grand function to mark 85th Pakistan Day at Government Higher Secondary School No.1 Kohat. Deputy Commissioner Kohat was the chief guest on this occasion.

The function beside the Assistant Commissioner Kohat, School Principal Luqman Bangash, officers and officials of the government departments was, also attended by the teachers, students and elites of the area. The function was formally started with the recitation of the Holy Quran and Naat-e-Rasool-e-Maqbool Peace Be Upon

Him (PBUH) followed by the national anthem.

The students, in their speeches highlighted the history of Pakistan, the freedom movement and the sacrifices of our forefathers including Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Allama Muhammad Iqbal and other leaders for creation of Pakistan. National songs were also presented on the occasion. The guests in their speeches encouraged the students to play their role in the development of the country through hard work, discipline and education.

Deputy Commissioner Kohat said, "The youth of Pakistan are the real asset of the nation and they have

to utilize their talents for the development of the country." Assistant Commissioner Kohat informed the new generation of the importance of participation in national construction and development.

The ceremony ended with a special prayer for the prosperity, stability and integrity of Pakistan. The event not only served as a means of highlighting the historical importance of Pakistan Day but also succeeded in instilling a sense of love for the homeland, national solidarity and responsibility in the new generation. The participants termed the function a memorable moment for building the future.

## 890 special children to get Eidi package

### F.P. Report

TOBA TEK SINGH: On the special directives of Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif, a district-level initiative has been launched to distribute Eidi among special children. In this regard, Deputy Commissioner Toba Tek Singh, distributed Eidi among special children at Government Higher Secondary School for Special Education during a dedicated ceremony, on Monday.

Addressing the event, DC Naqem Sindhu stated that a total of 890 special children across the district would receive gifts to ensure they, too, can share in the joys of Eid-ul-Fitr. He emphasized that special children deserve attention and care, and the Punjab Chief Minister is fully committed to their welfare.

The event was attended

by Principal Medium Shabnam Zafar, District Focal Person for Special Education Haider Ali, Bashir Rabbani, teachers and instructors. Special children showcased patriotic songs, receiving great applause from the audience. DC Naqem Sindhu expressed heartfelt joy at witnessing smiles on the children's faces, stressing that society must play its role in their well-being. He reaffirmed that the district administration remains dedicated to the education and welfare of special children, following the Punjab CM's vision.

Meanwhile, at Government Special Education Center Gojra, Assistant Commissioner Kamran Ashraf and Principal Medium Fareeda Siraj distributed 176 Eid gift bags among special children on behalf of the Punjab CM. Similarly, at Government

Special Education Center Pirmahal, Assistant Commissioner Zulfikar Sabir distributed 81 Eid special gift bags among the children.

Furthermore, DC Naqem Sindhu also participated in the "Plant for Pakistan" campaign by planting saplings at Government Higher Secondary Special Education School for Hearing-Impaired Children in Toba Tek Singh. He highlighted the significance of tree plantation for environmental sustainability, urging the community.

**CEO visits THQ hospital Kamalia:** Chief Executive Officer Health Dr. Kashif Nadeem paid a surprise visit to Tehsil Headquarters Hospital Kamalia. On this occasion, Deputy District Health Officer Kamalia Dr. Asim was also with accompanied him.

## Tribesmen flays doctors strike F.P. Report

WANA: The healthcare crisis in South Waziristan has deepened as the families of kidney patients, accompanied by some of the affected individuals, held an emergency press conference at the District Press Club Wana. They raised concerns over the ongoing strike at Headquarters Hospital Wana, which has left dialysis patients in a dire situation.

According to the patients' relatives, the hospital remains closed except for emergency services due to the suspension of doctors' salaries. The entire medical staff, including doctors, is protesting, leaving critical patients with no option but to seek treatment at Sholam Hospital.

However, the situation at Sholam Hospital is also precarious. The relatives informed the media that while the facility currently offers limited dialysis services, these may be discontinued after March 25 if the pending salaries of hospital staff are not released. This could severely impact over 50 kidney patients in the region who are already struggling with a lack of medical facilities.

In a show of desperation, the families warned that if no arrangements were made by March 25, they would stage an indefinite sit-in in front of the Javed Sultan Camp to demand urgent action.

The protesters urged Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Khan Gandapur, MNA Zubair Khan, and MPA Ajab Gul to intervene immediately and ensure that permanent dialysis facilities are established at both Headquarters Hospital Wana and Sholam Hospital. With time running out, the fate of dozens of kidney patients now hangs in the balance, as they await a government response to their plea for life-saving treatment.

## D&SJ orders to file FIR against SHO

### F.P. Report

SHAHDADKOT: District and Session Judge (D&SJ) Qamber ordered registration of First Information Report against Station House Officer Wagan police station Ghulam Mustafa and two other policemen for illegal raid as well as looting gold and other ornaments, on Monday.

D&SJ Qamber Shahdadt heard the case against SHO Police Station Wagan Ghulam Mustafa Khoso and policemen Muslim Kalhoro, Abbas Jatui and others for breaking into the house and taking gold ornaments and other valuables and asking for a bribe of lakhs of rupees and arresting an elderly man Mansoor Ali Panhwar was held. An FIR should be filed and thus the SHO and other officials have been issued an order to present the SHO and other officials as accused on April 9.

In this regard, when contacted by the media, the petitioner Muhammad Yamin Panhoor said that the SHO illegally broke into our homes in a false case of theft and after misbehaving with women and the elderly, after taking gold ornaments and other valuables worth millions of rupees from the house, the elderly Mansoor Ali Panhoor was arrested and demanded millions of rupees for his release.

# Sindh announces 30,000 scholarships for Varsity students

### F.P. Report

HYDERABAD: Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah has announced 30,000 scholarships for students in 30 universities across the province under the Google Career Certificate Program.

According to the report, the initiative, in collaboration with Google and Tech Valley, aims to equip students with cutting-edge digital skills, enhancing their employment prospects in the global job market. The signing ceremony for this groundbreaking initiative was held at the Chief Minister's House, attended by Education Minister Sardar Shah, vice chancellors from 30 public sector universities, Tech Valley CEO Umar Farooq, and other dignitaries.

Murad Ali Shah officially launched the programme, emphasising that this initiative is an investment in the future of Sindh's youth. "This scholarship programme is a milestone in our efforts to introduce digital education and skill-based training in the province," he stated. He further highlighted that the scholarships will play a crucial role in the socio-economic development of Sindh.

According to the chief minister, the programme builds upon the success of last year's Google Career Certificates Sindh Programme 2024, where 1,500 deserving students from 10 government universities received scholarships. "This year, we are expanding it to 30 universities, benefiting 30,000 students," he added. Students

enrolled in the programme will receive training in advanced fields such as project management, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, UX design, digital marketing, and e-commerce. A special quota has been reserved for women and underprivileged students to ensure inclusivity.

Murad Ali Shah revealed that in 2024, 1,500 students successfully completed their Google Career Certificates with a 100% completion rate. Among them, 250 students specialised in project management, 247 in UX design, 206 in cybersecurity, 215 in digital marketing and e-commerce, and 172 in data analytics. The courses, designed by Google experts, can be completed online within 3 to 6 months. The chief minister stressed that the scholarships will provide world-class training to Sindh's students, making them competitive at the international level. "We have set a target of at least 30% women participants to bridge the gender gap in digital education," he noted.

Highlighting the success of the previous batch, Murad Ali Shah mentioned that many graduates have secured jobs at leading global firms. "Google scholarship recipients are earning salaries ranging from PKR 70,000 to PKR 1.6 million per month," he disclosed. He particularly praised the University of Sindh's Jamshoro student Leena Kumari, who completed the Google AI Essentials course and secured an internship. "Google even published her success story at an international level," he added.

## Regional connectivity road clear after snowfall

### F.P. Report

UPPER CHITRAL: The Mastuj-Broghal Road has been cleared for traffic after removing snow and debris, following the Deputy Commissioner directions. Due to severe snowfall, the Mastuj-Broghal Road was closed, resulting in a shortage of food and medicine in the Broghal Valley. After receiving information through social media,

Deputy Commissioner Upper Chitral, Haseeb ur Rehman Khalil, issued special orders, and the Communication and Works (C&W) department immediately started work on clearing the road. After two

days of continuous efforts, the road was cleared, and traffic was restored.

The district administration of Upper Chitral, in collaboration with the Talha Mahmood Foundation and the Wildlife Department, distributed rations, medicines, and other essential items to the affected people of Broghal.

The district administration of Upper Chitral will continue to take emergency measures to deal with natural disasters in the future, ensuring that the difficulties faced by the people of remote and backward areas like Broghal are minimized, and they do not face

shortages of food and medicine again. The Mastuj-Broghal Road has been restored for 4x4 vehicles up to the Garam Chashma area, while work on clearing the rest of the road is underway.

The district administration of Upper Chitral, Talha Mahmood Foundation, and the Wildlife Department distributed rations, relief goods, and medicines to over 200 deserving households.

The local population expressed gratitude to the district administration for taking prompt action, opening the road, and providing relief supplies during difficult times.

## Unfair distribution of Ramazan package flayed

### F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: President of Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Union Council Khungi and former Village Council Chairman Siyar Dara Shah Nawaz Khan has strongly condemned the alleged unfair distribution of the Rs. 10,000 Ramadan packages in Lower Dir.

He accused Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chairman of allocating funds exclusively to their relatives and favored individuals while ignoring deserving beneficiaries from other political parties.

Speaking to the media, Shah Nawaz Khan criticized

the selective distribution, stating that multiple members of the same PTI-affiliated families were included in the package, while workers of PPP, Jamaat-e-Islami, Awami National Party (ANP), Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N), and Jamaat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F) were unfairly overlooked.

Even some PTI workers have expressed concerns over the alleged bias. He argued that PTI's handling of the package contradicts its claims of transparency and justice. Drawing a comparison with the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP), introduced by PPP, he noted that BISP included deserving women

from all political backgrounds, ensuring fairness in social welfare distribution.

Shah Nawaz Khan demanded an immediate inquiry into the alleged irregularities and called for the publication of the list of beneficiaries to ensure transparency. He emphasized that the public has the right to know whether the distribution was conducted fairly.

Meanwhile, criticism of PTI Lower Dir continues to make rounds on social media, with many calling for accountability. Reports suggest that even PTI workers who were excluded from the package have lodged complaints with party legislators.

## Scholar defends research thesis

### F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: Mr. Tariq Hussain, an MPhil Scholar in the Department of Mathematics, University of Malakand (UoM), successfully defended his MPhil thesis titled "Study of Prandtl Nanofluid Flow with Thermal Radiation and Velocity Slip" at the University of Malakand.

His thesis was supervised

by Dr. Muhammad Yousaf, Assistant Professor, UoM, and co-supervised by Dr. Salman Zeb, Assistant Professor, UoM. The external examiner was "Dr. Nudrat Aamir", Associate Professor and Dean at CECOS University of IT and Emerging Sciences, Peshawar.

It is worth mentioning that the scholar has submitted his research paper to a reputable

international journal.

The examiner, faculty members, and Chairman Dr. Imtiaz Ahmad appreciated the scholar's hard work and encouraged him to continue his research in the field for further exploration. The scholar expressed his gratitude to his family members and well-wishers for their prayers and support.

# Residents demand action against adulterated food items

### Fazal Haq

MARDAN: The sale of substandard chips in schools and markets in Bakhshali, Dubai Adda, Palodheri, Gujrat and its suburbs has become a serious problem. These chips are not only of poor quality but also contain substandard oil and harmful ingredients which can be harmful to the health of children and general consumers.

The ingredients used in these chips can cause indigestion, gastrointestinal disorders, obesity and other diseases. The oil used in many chips is repeatedly heated, which can produce toxic substances. Substandard chips use artificial colors and flavoring chemicals, which can be harmful to health.

Political and social circles of Bakhshali have demanded that Commissioner Mardan Division and Deputy Commissioner Mardan strictly inspect the qual-

ity of chips sold in schools and markets in Bakhshali and its suburbs and issue orders to take legal action against those who make and sell substandard and harmful chips.

**Public services delivery stressed:** Deputy Commissioner Mardan Dr. Azmatullah Wazir has said that solving public problems at their doorstep is the top priority of the present government and the district administration is fully active in this regard.

He was addressing an Khuli katcheri in Tehsil Mardan. Citizens presented their problems and complaints related to various departments before the Deputy Commissioner in the on this occasion. DC listened carefully to the public complaints and issued instructions to the concerned departments to take immediate and practical steps to solve the problems.

**World Water Day observed:**

World Water Day is observed to raise awareness in order to motivate and mobilize the citizens to conserve water. Water and sanitation services company Mardan (WSSCM) and Alkhidmat Foundation jointly organized walk on World Water Day in which people from different walks of life participated.

The main objective of the walk was to raise public awareness about water conservation, safe drinking water and sanitation systems. The speakers said in the world 3.5 billion people have no access to safe sanitation services while 2.2 billion are deprived from safe drinking water.

Pakistan 22.1 million people have no access to water while 15.5 million people are living without sanitation services and 4.5million have no access to hygiene service. The day reminds people of taking actions to conserve water and change

their habits while using water.

The speakers said Pakistani spend 1.3 billion dollars every year on water borne diseases. They said due to poor sanitation practices, human waste contaminates water resources by getting into rivers, lakes, and soil. 79 million people in Pakistan lack of decent sanitation and about 92pc of the wastewater is untreated and goes directly to water bodies. Water reservoirs are rapidly depleting but we are still not taking serious steps to prevent water wastage which is a matter of concern.

**Ramazan package distributed among 100 widows:** The welfare organization Bardasht Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, in collaboration with IFFCO, distributed Ramzan ration packages among 100 widows in Mardan. Special arrangements were also made to provide ration packages to disabled individuals.

During the distribution event,

Bardasht Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chairperson Neelum Toru stated, "Ramadan is a month of blessings, mercy, and generosity. Every year, with IFFCO's support, we arrange ration packages for widows and disabled individuals to ensure they can observe the holy month without financial worries."

Neelum Toru emphasized that while Iftar Dastarkhans are set up at various locations during Ramadan, many widows hesitate to seek help due to their self-respect. The organization carefully identifies such individuals and provides them with ration packages so they can sustain themselves with dignity.

She further added, "Last year, we distributed ration packages to 50 widows. Alhamdulillah, this year, we have doubled the number to 100. Our goal is to expand this support to even more deserving families in the coming years, and we are committed to

continuing this mission."

**Development without education a dream:** Member Provincial Assembly (MPA) Abdul Salam Afridi has said that the dream of development cannot be fulfilled without education, which is why the current government is prioritizing the development of the education sector.

He was speaking as a guest at the annual prize distribution ceremony of The Sarhad School System, Mardan. On the occasion the school children presented national songs and tableaux while the principal presented the school's annual report.

MPA Abdul Salam Afridi appreciated the quality of education of the school. He distributed prizes among the boys and girls who secured prominent positions and congratulated the boys, girls, their teachers and parents for their excellent performance.





SANNA: A view of debris of a house after US air strikes in Syria.

## Thousands of agents diverted to Trump immigration crackdown

WASHINGTON (Reuters): Federal agents who usually hunt down child abusers are now cracking down on immigrants who live in the US. illegally. Homeland Security investigators who specialize in money laundering are raiding restaurants and other small businesses looking for immigrants who aren't authorized to work. Agents who pursue drug traffickers and tax fraud are being re-assigned to enforce immigration law.

As US President Donald Trump pledges to deport "millions and millions" of "criminal aliens," thousands of federal law enforcement officials from multiple agencies are being enlisted to take on new work as immigration enforcers, pulling crime-fighting resources away on other areas -- from drug trafficking and terrorism to sexual abuse and fraud.

This account of Trump's push to reorganize federal law enforcement - the most significant since the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks - is based on interviews with more than 20 current and former federal agents, attorneys and other federal officials. Most had first-hand knowledge of the changes. Nearly all spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss their work.

"I do not recall ever seeing this wide a spectrum of federal government resources all being turned toward immigration enforcement," said Theresa Cardinal Brown, a former Homeland Security official who has served in both Republican and Democratic administrations. "When you're telling agencies to stop what you've been doing and do this now,

whatever else they were doing takes a back seat." In response to questions from Reuters, Homeland Security Assistant Secretary Tricia McLaughlin said the US government is "mobilizing federal and state law enforcement to find, arrest, and deport illegal aliens." The Federal Bureau of Investigation declined to respond to questions about its staffing. In a statement, the FBI said it is "protecting the US. from many threats." The White House did not respond to requests for comment.

The Trump administration has offered no comprehensive accounting of the revamp. But it echoes the aftermath of the 2001 attacks, when Congress created the Department of Homeland Security that pulled together 169,000 federal employees from other agencies and refocused the FBI on battling terrorism. Trump's headline approach to deporting immigrants has intensified America's already-stark partisan divide. The US Senate's No. 2 Democrat, Dick Durbin, described the crackdown as a "wasteful, misguided diversion of resources." In a statement to Reuters, he said it was "making America less safe" by drawing agents and officials away from fighting corporate fraud, terrorism, child sexual exploitation and other crimes.

US Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche, in an interview with Reuters, denied the changes across federal law enforcement were hindering other important criminal investigations. "I completely reject the idea that because we're prioritizing immigration that we are not simultaneous-

ly full-force going after violent crime." He said the crackdown was warranted. "President Trump views what has happened over the last couple years truly as an invasion, so that's how we're trying to remedy that."

On January 20, his first day back in office, Trump signed an executive order directing federal agencies to team up to fight "an invasion" of illegal immigrants. He cast the nation's estimated 11 million immigrants in the US. illegally as the driving factor behind crime, gang violence and drug trafficking - assertions not supported by government statistics - and accused immigrants of draining US government resources and depriving citizens of jobs. Almost immediately, federal law enforcement started posting photos of the crackdown to social media: agents wore body armor and jackets emblazoned with names of multiple agencies - including the FBI, Drug Enforcement Administration, and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, known as ATF - during raids on immigrants without proper legal status.

Before this year, ATF had played almost no role in immigration enforcement. It typically investigated firearms offenses, bombings, arson and illicit shipments of alcohol and tobacco. But since Trump's inauguration, about 80% of its roughly 2,500 agents have been ordered to take on at least some immigration enforcement tasks, two officials familiar with ATF's operations said. The ATF agents are being used largely as "fugitive hunters" to find migrants living in the US. illegally, one of the officials said.

### Chinese premier warns of 'rising instability'

BEIJING (Reuters): Chinese Premier Li Qiang urged countries to open their markets to combat "rising instability and uncertainty" at a business forum in Beijing, as China braces for further US tariffs.

"In today's increasingly fragmented world with rising instability and uncertainty, it is more necessary for countries to open up their markets and enterprises... to resist risks and challenges," Li told dozens of foreign CEOs and visiting US. Republican Senator Steve Daines at the China Development Forum, state media reported. Foreign CEOs including Tim Cook of Apple, Cristiano Amon of Qualcomm, Pascal Soriot of AstraZeneca and Amin Nasser of Saudi Aramco are attending the forum, and some are expected to meet President Xi Jinping, sources have told Reuters.

Beijing is keen to attract foreign investment at a time of heightened geopolitical tensions, as policymakers try to boost domestic consumption to offset fresh US. tariff headwinds.

"We will focus on combining policy intensification with stimulating market forces," Li said, according to a Xinhua report, without elaborating on specific stimulus measures. "We will implement more active and promising macroeconomic policies, further intensify counter-cyclical adjustments, and introduce new incremental policies when necessary."

Li expressed hope that entrepreneurs would be "staunch defenders and promoters of globalisation" and "resist unilateralism and protectionism". There were fewer American CEOs attending the summit than last year due to heightened geopolitical tensions between Beijing and Washington, according to one source. Li met with Daines and seven other American CEOs, which Daines billed as a chance for them to share their views of the business environment in China.

### Iceland's minister for children quits

LONDON (AP): Iceland's president accepted the resignation of the North Atlantic island nation's children's minister, who quit the government over a relationship she had with a teenager more than three decades ago.

Asthildur Lóa Thórsdóttir stepped down after national broadcaster RUV revealed last week that she had a child 35 years ago when she was 23 and the baby's father was 16. RUV said the relationship began after the pair met at a church youth group when the teen was 15.

Iceland's age of sexual consent is 15, but it is an offense for an adult to have sex with a teenager they teach, employ or mentor. Thórsdóttir confirmed the relationship in a statement, saying she was not a leader of the church group, just a member, and that "relationships between people of that age were not at all uncommon, even if they were not desirable."

She said the relationship lasted only a few weeks, though the father was present at the child's birth. RUV reported that the father sought access to the couple's son through the government and church, but was granted only occasional visits, though he paid child support for 18 years. Thórsdóttir, who said the father had made little attempt to establish a relationship with his son, officially stepped down at a meeting of the State Council, involving government ministers and President Halla Tómasdóttir.

Although she has left the government, she remains a lawmaker for the People's Party, which is part of a coalition government led by Prime Minister Kristín Frostadóttir of the Social Democratic Alliance. Iceland is a volcanic island nation tucked below the Arctic Circle with a population of less than 400,000. Its parliament, founded in 930 by Viking settlers, is arguably the world's oldest legislature.

## Ukraine says talks with US on war with Russia 'productive'

KYIV (AFP): US and Ukrainian officials in Saudi Arabia wrapped up "productive and focused" talks on de-escalating the war with Russia, whose delegation was set to hold its own separate discussions with the Americans.

US President Donald Trump is pushing for a rapid end to the three-year war and hopes the talks in Riyadh can pave the way to a breakthrough, but the Kremlin has warned of "difficult negotiations" ahead. Despite both warring sides proposing different plans for temporary ceasefires, attacks have continued unabated. Originally scheduled to take place simultaneously to enable shuttle diplomacy -- with the US going back and forth between the delegations -- the technical-level talks on a partial truce are now taking place separately, one after the other.

The meeting between the Ukrainian team, led by defence minister Rustem Umerov, and the Americans finished up, Umerov said. "The discussion was productive and focused -- we addressed key points including energy," he said on social media, adding Ukraine was working to make its goal of a "just and lasting peace" a reality. Umerov had previously said proposals to protect energy facilities and critical infrastructure would be on the agenda.

In an evening address, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said that "Russia is the only one who is dragging this war out". "No matter what we talk about with our partners, we need to push Putin to give a real order to stop the strikes: the one who brought this war must take it away," he said. Discussions between the United States and Russia were set, with

Russian state media reporting Moscow's delegation had arrived in Riyadh. Trump envoy Steve Witkoff voiced optimism that any agreement struck would pave the way to a "full-on" ceasefire. "I think you're going to see in Saudi Arabia some real progress, particularly as it affects a Black Sea ceasefire on ships between both countries. And from that you'll naturally gravitate to a full-on shooting ceasefire," he told Fox News. But the Kremlin downplayed expectations of a rapid resolution, saying talks were just beginning. "We are only at the beginning of this path," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told Russian state TV. He said there were many outstanding questions over how a potential ceasefire might be implemented.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has rejected a joint US-Ukrainian call for a full and immediate 30-day pause, proposing instead a halt in attacks only on energy facilities. "There are difficult negotiations ahead," Peskov said in the interview, published on social media. Peskov said the "main" focus in its talks with the United States would be a possible resumption of a 2022 Black Sea grain deal that ensured safe navigation for Ukrainian farm exports via the Black Sea. "We mainly intend to discuss President Putin's agreement to resume the so-called Black Sea initiative, and our negotiators will be ready to discuss the nuances around this problem," Peskov said. Moscow pulled out of the deal -- brokered by Turkey and the United Nations -- in 2023, accusing the West of failing to uphold its commitments to ease sanctions on Russia's own exports of farm produce and fertilisers. A senior Ukrainian official previously told AFP that

Kyiv would propose a broader ceasefire, covering attacks on energy facilities, infrastructure and naval strikes.

Both sides launched fresh drone attacks on the eve of the negotiations. Ukrainian officials said a Russian drone attack killed three civilians in Kyiv, including a five-year-old girl and her father. AFP reporters in the capital saw emergency workers treating the wounded in front of damaged residential buildings hit in the strike. Deadly strikes on the well-protected city are rarer than elsewhere in the country. Ukraine's air force said Russia launched 147 drones at the country in the latest barrage. Zelensky urged his country's allies to put fresh pressure on Russia.

"New decisions and new pressure on Moscow are needed to bring an end to these strikes and this war," he posted on social media. Russia said it had repelled nearly 60 Ukrainian drones overnight. Officials said one man was killed in the southern Rostov region of Russia when his car was set alight by falling drone debris, and a woman was killed in the Belgorod border region, also by a drone attack. Ukraine's army, meanwhile, said it had captured a small village in its eastern Lugansk region, a rare battlefield success for Kyiv's struggling forces. Moscow heads into the Saudi talks after a rapprochement with Washington under Trump that has boosted confidence in the Kremlin. Peskov said that the "potential for mutually beneficial cooperation in a wide variety of spheres between our countries cannot be overstated". "We may disagree on some things but that does not mean we should deprive ourselves of mutual benefit," he added.

## Trump envoy dismisses Starmer plan for Ukraine

WASHINGTON (BBC): Sir Keir Starmer's plan for an international force to support a ceasefire in Ukraine has been dismissed as "a posture and a pose" by Donald Trump's special envoy, Steve Witkoff, who said the idea was based on a "simplistic" notion of the UK prime minister and other European leaders thinking "we have all got to be like Winston Churchill".

In an interview with pro-Trump journalist Tucker Carlson, Witkoff praised Vladimir Putin, saying he "liked" the Russian president. "I don't regard Putin as a bad guy," he said. "He's super smart." Witkoff, who met Putin 10 days ago, said the Russian president had been "gracious" and "straight up" with him. Putin told him, he added, that he had prayed for Trump after an assassination attempt against him last year. He also said Putin had commissioned a portrait of the US president as a gift and Trump was "clearly touched by it". During the interview, Witkoff repeated various Russian arguments, including that Ukraine was "a false country" and asked when the world would recognise occupied Ukrainian territory as Russian.

Witkoff is leading the US ceasefire negotiations with both Russia and Ukraine but he was unable to name the five regions of Ukraine either annexed or partially occupied by Russian forces. He said: "The largest issue in that conflict are these so-called four regions, Donbas, Crimea, you know the names and there are two others." The five regions - or oblasts - are Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, Kherson and Crimea. Donbas refers to an industrial region in the east that includes much of Luhansk and Donetsk. Witkoff made several assertions that are either not true or disputed: He said Ukrainian troops in Kursk were surrounded, something denied by Ukraine's government and uncorroborated by any open-source data. He said the four partially occupied regions of Ukraine had held "referendums where the overwhelming majority of the people have indicated that they want to be under Russian rule". There were referendums only in some of the occupied parts of Ukraine at different times and the methodology and results were widely discredited and disputed. He said the four partially occupied oblasts were Russian-

speaking. There are many Russian-speaking parts of Ukraine but this has never indicated support for Russia.

The US is set to hold separate talks in Saudi Arabia with Ukraine and Russia about a ceasefire at meetings. Ahead of that, Ukrainian authorities said Russia had launched drone attacks on Kyiv overnight, resulting in deaths of three people, including a five-year-old child. Officials said that eight people had been injured. Russia also struck the southern city of Zaporizhzhia, killing a family of three.

Meanwhile, Russia's ministry of defence said it had shot down 59 Ukrainian drones across a number of regions in the south as well as in Crimea, the peninsula illegally annexed by Russia in 2014. During his interview, Witkoff also repeated several Kremlin talking points about the cause of Russia's full-scale invasion. He said it was "correct" that from the Russian perspective the partially occupied territories were now part of Russia: "The elephant in the room is, there are constitutional issues within Ukraine as to what they can concede to with regard to giving up territory."

## Iran's top diplomat says US must change its approach for any talks

DUBAI (Reuters): Talks with the US. are impossible unless Washington changes its pressure policy, the Iranian foreign minister said, as Iran prepares to respond to President Donald Trump's letter proposing negotiations on a new nuclear deal.

Trump said earlier this month that he had sent the letter to Iran's top authority, Supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, warning that "there are two ways Iran can be handled: militarily, or you make a deal". Khamenei rejected the US offer for talks as "a deception", saying negotiating with the Trump administration would "tighten the knot of sanctions and increase pressure on Iran".

However, Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi said Tehran would soon

reply to both the letter's "threats and opportunities". While leaving the door open for a nuclear pact with Tehran, Trump has reinstated the "maximum pressure" campaign he applied in his first term as president, including efforts to drive down the country's oil exports to zero.

The US has issued four rounds of sanctions on Iran's oil sales since Trump's return to the White House. "Under these conditions, it is no longer possible to enter into talks with America. Unless certain approaches change," Araqchi was quoted as saying by Iranian state media. "When we say no to negotiations with the US., it stems from a history and experience," he said, referring to Trump's withdrawal from Tehran's 2015 nuclear pact

with six major powers in his first term.

After ditching the nuclear pact in 2018, Trump reimposed US. sanctions that have crippled Iran's economy. A year later, Tehran started breaching the pact's curbs on Tehran's nuclear programme and has far surpassed its limits. Months of indirect talks between Tehran and Trump's predecessor Joe Biden to revive the 2015 nuclear deal failed.

"In my opinion, the 2015 pact in its current form cannot be revived. It would not be in our interest because our nuclear situation has advanced significantly and we can no longer return to previous conditions," Araqchi said. But he said the 2015 pact could still be "a basis and model for negotiations".

## As Russia retakes Kursk, Ukrainians ask, 'Was it worth it?'

KYIV (Reuters): When Mariia Pankova last exchanged messages with her close friend Pavlo in December, she had no idea that he was among the Ukrainian troops fighting in Russia's Kursk region. She found out when a fellow soldier told her several days later that her friend, Pavlo Humeniuk, 24, a combat engineer in Ukraine's 47th Magura brigade, had gone missing near the village of Novoivanivka in Kursk on December 6.

Almost four months have passed and there has been no further information about Pavlo's fate. Pankova told Reuters, citing her conversations with his relatives. She keeps searching on Telegram and Facebook hoping to find out whether he is dead or alive. Pankova, 25, believes the cost of Ukraine's risky incursion into Russia may have been too high. The sentiment is shared by many others in Ukraine, especially after troops retreated from most of Kursk this month following weeks of heavy fighting.

"I'm just not sure it was worth it," she said, large tears running down her face when talking about her missing friend, who she bonded with over their shared love of hiking in Ukraine's mountains. "We're not invaders. We just need our territories back, we do not need the Russian one." In response to questions for this story, Ukraine's armed forces General Staff said the offensive was meant to put pressure on Moscow, to divert Russian forces from other fronts and to prevent Russian cross-border attacks on neighbouring parts of Ukraine.

The operation "achieved most of its goals", the General Staff said. Kyiv's assault on Kursk in August took Russia, and the world, by surprise. It was the biggest attack on sovereign Russian territory since the Nazi invasion of 1941. As Ukrainian soldiers smashed into the Kursk region, largely unopposed, they quickly seized some 1,376 square kilometres (531 square miles) of Russian territory.

But short of troops, within weeks the area under Ukraine's control shrank to a narrow wedge.

Kyiv used some of its top marine and air assault forces but the grouping was never large enough to be able to hold on to a larger area. "From the very beginning, logistics was seriously complicated because as we entered the Kursk region, we ensured sufficient depth but we did not ensure sufficient width," said Serhiy Rakhmanin, a Ukrainian lawmaker on the parliament's committee for security and defence. From the start, Russia had a manpower advantage along the Kursk frontline. But the situation became critical late last year. Russia brought in elite units and top drone forces as reinforcements, aided by North Korean forces. They tightened assaults around Ukrainian flanks and advanced to within firing range of a key supply road, according to reports from Ukrainian military bloggers close to the armed forces. "They not only increased the number

of their group opposing our military, but they also improved its quality," Rakhmanin said. Russian President Vladimir Putin has never acknowledged the role of the North Koreans on the battlefield. Russia's retaking of the Kursk region removes a potential bargaining chip for Ukraine just as US. President Donald Trump undertakes talks to end the war with Russia, which holds around a fifth of Ukraine's national lands. Ukraine's retreat from the Kursk city of Sudzha, confirmed by Kyiv on March 16, prompted questions and deepened the public divide in Ukraine on the benefits of the incursion. Soldier Oleksii Deshevyi, 32, a former supermarket security guard who lost his hand while fighting in Kursk in September, said he saw no logic in the operation. "We should not have started this operation at all," he told Reuters in a rehabilitation centre in Kyiv, where he has spent the past six months adjusting to life after injury.

## US alleges Columbia student covered up his work for UNRWA

NEW YORK (Reuters): The US. government has alleged that Columbia University student and pro-Palestinian demonstrator Mahmoud Khalil withheld that he worked for a United Nations Palestinian relief agency in his visa application, saying that should be grounds for deportation.

The UN agency known as UNRWA provides food and healthcare to Palestinian refugees and has become a flashpoint in the Israeli war in Gaza. Israel contends that 12 UNRWA employees were involved in Hamas' attack on

Israel on October 7, 2023, leading the US. to halt funding of the group.

The administration of US. President Donald Trump on March 8 detained Khalil, a prominent figure in the pro-Palestinian campus protests that rocked the New York City campus last year, and sent him to Louisiana in an attempt to remove him from the country. The case has drawn attention as a test of free speech rights, with supporters of Khalil saying he was targeted for publicly disagreeing with US. policy on Israel and its occupation of

Gaza. Khalil has called himself a political prisoner.

The US. alleges Khalil's presence or activities in the country would have serious foreign policy consequences. A 4judge has ordered Khalil not to be deported while his lawsuit challenging his detention, known as a habeas petition, is heard in another federal court. Khalil, a native of Syria and citizen of Algeria, entered the US. on a student visa in 2022 and later filed to become a permanent resident in 2024.

In a court brief dated, the US. government outlined its

arguments for keeping Khalil in custody while his removal proceedings continue, arguing first that the US. District Court in New Jersey, where the habeas case is being heard, lacked jurisdiction. The brief also says Khalil "withheld membership in certain organizations" which should be grounds for his deportation. It references a March 17 document in his deportation case that informed Khalil he could be removed because he failed to disclose that he was a political officer of UNRWA in 2023.



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## China's calibrated response to Trump challenge

FIRST came the meeting of foreign ministers of Japan, South Korea and China in Tokyo on Saturday. It was convened by Japan, and Japanese Foreign Minister Takeshi Iwaya said at the beginning of the meeting, "Given the increasingly severe international situation, I believe we may truly be at a turning point in history." Iwaya also pointed out at a possible trilateral summit later in the year that would focus on how to tackle falling birthrates in the three countries.

Meanwhile, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi talked of free trade agreements with its neighbours. Wang said, "Our three nations have a combined population of 1.6 billion and an economic output exceeding \$24 trillion. With our vast markets and great potential, we can exert significant influence."

On Sunday, Chinese Prime Minister Li Qiang, addressing the Chinese Development Forum in Beijing, said, "In today's increasingly fragmented world with rising instability and uncertainty, it is more necessary for countries to open up their markets and enterprises...to resist risks and challenges."

Though China is the second biggest economy next to the United States, it is not exactly the polar opposite of the United States. The China-US business linkages are quite huge. And the US is not really in a position to cut off its business links with China despite President Donald Trump's aggressive attempts to bring American companies home from places like China, while also restricting Chinese imports into the country. There are economic problems in the relations between the countries, and the threat of tariffs by Trump seems to be a way of negotiating with China for a better trade deal.

China has however its own set of problems with its neighbours, especially South Korea and Japan. One of them that concerns both Seoul and Tokyo is that of North Korea. Both Japan and South Korea face security threat from Pyongyang, and China being a close friend if not an ally of North Korea, needs to assure South Korea and Japan about the northern neighbour.

Secondly, China will have to open up its markets to its two neighbours. This may not immediately benefit Beijing in terms of trade, but it will set the ball rolling for an informal trade grouping that is not dependent on the US.

China does not want to isolate the US but it has its own stakes in the American markets. But it would want to show that it is indeed the alternate economic big power in the world, and that it can influence other countries to change their trade policies.

China is indeed battling for a free trade regime which is based on rules because China with its advantage of selling its products abroad stands to gain. But it cannot remain an exports only country. It may have to open its markets to other countries and that is where the problems start. The US under Trump feels that its free trade policy has made it excessively dependent on foreign products, and its own economic base has been eroded.

This challenge can only be remedied through some kind of trade balance, and adherence to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) framework. The US, which had been an advocate of WTO, is not happy with the system. And there will come a time when China too may feel that the WTO system is unsatisfactory.

While the power struggle between the two big economies, the US and China, is understandable, it has to be seen that the other economies are not caught in the crossfire. Japan and South Korea would not want to be part of either the US bloc or the Chinese. They need access to both the markets. China and the US will have to adopt the open door policy without inhibitions.

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Pakistan to face water shortage... PM



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## Stifling restrictions for Al-Aqsa Mosque worshippers

Michael Jansen

ON the third Friday of Ramadan, the Israeli authorities maintained restrictions on Palestinian access to Jerusalem to attend mid-day prayers at the Al-Aqsa Mosque. At least 3,000 police have been deployed every day during the holy month at checkpoints in and surrounding the city to control Palestinian residents and West Bankers seeking to visit the city and their religious sites.

While there were no sweeping restrictions on Palestinians from East Jerusalem and Palestinian citizens of Israel, police checking identity papers barred selected individuals from attending services in Al-Aqsa. Israeli police said the authorities had issued permits for 10,000 Palestinians from the West Bank but did not reveal the number who were actually allowed to reach Jerusalem and the mosque compound. Israeli troops manning checkpoints at the entry to Jerusalem turned away dozens of Palestinians from the West Bank whose phones and emails have been monitored by Israeli domestic intelligence.

They have been accused of "incitement" against Israel for criticising its policies or expressing empathy for Gazans displaced, made homeless, killed and wounded in Israel's nearly 18-month war on the coastal strip.

On March 6th, Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu tightened already strict limits on Palestinian Jerusalemites and West Bankers to pray at Al-Aqsa Mosque during this period. Only men over the age of 55, women over 50, and children under 12 are permitted to enter the

mosque although Israel is required to grant freedom of religion for occupied Palestinian Muslims and Christians.

Meanwhile scores of Israeli activists accompanied by soldiers and police are allowed to enter Al-Haram Al-Sharif, the mosque compound where the splendid Dome of the Rock sanctuary is also located.

Around 100 worshippers who were denied access to Al-Aqsa gathered at Lion's Gate below the mosque compound to perform the noon prayer. Once the service was over, their entry into the Old City was blocked by Israeli troops.

Israel also excluded from Al-Aqsa hundreds of Palestinian freed under the Gaza ceasefire and captive-prisoner exchange.

Al-Aqsa is the world's third-holiest site for Muslims after Makkah and Medina while Jews say two ancient Jewish temples were built on this location, the second being destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD during a Jewish revolt. Israel captured and occupied the mosque compound in 1967 — which is administered by Jordan — and subsequently annexed the city in 1980.

Although Donald Trump recognised Jerusalem as Israel's capital during his first term in office, no other countries have taken this step as the status of the city — along with the fate of Palestinian refugees, Israeli settlers and natural resources — was meant to be decided by negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis. But talks ended in April 2014 and have not resumed. Since then, Netanyahu has been prime

minister for almost the entire time.

Last July, the International Court of Justice declared that Israel's 58-year occupation of Palestinian territories is illegal and demanded the evacuation of all Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Israel has responded by stepping up Israeli settlement expansion and clamped down on Palestinians living in East Jerusalem and the West Bank.

Since the beginning of the year, the Israel army and settlers have carried out raids targeting armed groups in refugee camps in Jenin, Tulkarm, and Tubas in the northern West Bank. The onslaught was stepped up on January 21st, two days after the ceasefire in Gaza began and has continued after the ceasefire was voided by Israel which is now fighting on two Palestinian fronts as well as occupying territory and carrying out strikes in Lebanon and Syria.

In the West Bank, more than 40,100 Palestinians have been driven from their homes. Jenin refugee camp, a longterm hotbed of Palestinian resistance, has been destroyed for a second time. The first was in 2002.

Humanitarian agencies argue this is the largest displacement of Palestinians since 1967 when the Israelis drove 250,000 from their homes. "This is unprecedented. When you add... the destruction of infrastructure, we're reaching a point where the camps are becoming uninhabitable," said Roland Friedrich, director of West Bank affairs for UNRWA, the

UN agency established to provide for most of the 755,000 Palestinians who became refugees during Israel's 1948 war of establishment.

It is significant that Israel's West Bank operation was dubbed "Iron Wall," using the strategy proposed by right-wing Zionist propagandist Vladimir Jabotinsky in 1923. Jabotinsky wrote that since Palestinians would never agree to a Jewish majority in their homeland, "Zionist colonisation must either stop, or else proceed regardless of the native population. Which means that it can proceed and develop only under the protection of a power that is independent of the native population [Britain or the US] — behind an iron wall, which the native population cannot breach."

He founded the "Revisionist movement" which favoured the use of force to establish the Jewish state and rejected territorial compromise. His views influenced the Zionist movement as a whole and were adopted by the ruling Likud Bloc.

Netanyahu has a close connection with Jabotinsky as his father subscribed to his ideas and served briefly as his secretary when residing in the US. Netanyahu opposed the 1993-1994 Oslo peace process as he argued that territorial compromise would lead to conflict and that Israel and the Jewish people had to depend on force to survive. In July 2023, Netanyahu declared, "One hundred years after the 'iron wall' was stamped in Jabotinsky's writings we are continuing to successfully implement (his) principles."

## Israel making yet more enemies with Syria intervention

Chris Doyle

SINCE the fall of the Assad regime, the Israeli leadership has consistently shown that it is prepared to hit the new authorities in Syria in a way it never bothered to try when the Assads were in power.

When Bashar Assad was president, Israeli airstrikes in Syria were largely restricted to Iranian targets and to prevent the transfer of weaponry to Hezbollah. At no stage after 2011 did Israel take on the regime. And Russia never tried to thwart Israel's freedom of operation in the air. Yet, from the outset, Israel has targeted the new authorities in Syria. In the two days following Assad's fall last December, Israel carried out more than 500 strikes on Syrian military targets. This included naval facilities and alleged chemical weapons sites.

Israel also helped itself to extra territory. It moved into the 235 sq. km demilitarized zone that was defined by the 1974 disengagement agreement and even beyond. It has set up nine outposts in this new area with the declared aim of complete control of the zone. Israel wants to have the strategic Mount Hermon (Jabal Al-Sheikh) under its control, giving it a view of both Damascus and the Bekaa Valley.

Initially, Israel told the UN Security Council that these were "limited and temporary measures." By February, Israeli Prime

Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was declaring that Israel would remain there "indefinitely."

In addition, Israel has been lobbying the US to retain the sanctions imposed on the Assad regime. The EU and the UK have gradually eased their sanctions regimes, but the US has been reluctant. This holds Syria back because, with US banking sanctions in place, businesses and investors will not take the risk of doing business there — a vital stage in revitalizing the dead Syrian economy. Syrian expats feel nervous about sending remittances to their families. Israel has tried to enforce a demilitarized zone in southern Syria. Defense Minister Israel Katz stated that Tel Aviv would "not allow southern Syria to become southern Lebanon."

He would not allow any attempt by the Syrian government to establish a presence in the security zone and that it has to be totally demilitarized. To reinforce these actions, the Israeli authorities have allocated themselves a role as guardian of the Druze communities in southern Syria. Israeli officials have reached out to Druze figures, trying to tempt them with offers of work in the Golan Heights, with mixed results.

Is all this because Israel is nervous of the Islamist Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham? Its extremist heritage is well

known, having grown out of Al-Qaeda, which it left in 2016. Many Syrians remain nervous about HTS. But what realistic threat does Syria pose to Israel now or in the near future?

Syrian Arab Republic President Ahmad Al-Sharaa has been at pains not to provoke Israel or use it, as he might have done, as a populist move to condemn his southern neighbor at every turn. Al-Sharaa knows that Syrians have endured decades of hollow anti-Israel rhetoric from the Assads, so many would be skeptical if he followed that path.

It is this another example of Israeli aggression and opportunism, expanding its territorial domains at the expense of Syria and to further destabilize its northern neighbor? Much does not make sense. Israeli leaders should have seen, from their vantage point, a positive to the exit of the Assad regime, as well as the weakening of Iranian influence in Syria and Lebanon. Logically, Israel should be supportive of a situation where Iran is kept out. If this Syrian transition fails and Syria falls apart again, Iran could exploit this.

Anarchy in Syria would be ideal for extremist groups. Daesh is looking to exploit every opportunity to stir things up. This is hardly in Israel's interests.

This argument is reinforced by Netanyahu him-

self trying to take credit for the fall of Assad. On the one hand, he is seeking praise for Assad's downfall, while on the other he is disparaging what followed. He is trying to have it both ways.

Another Israeli motivation might be to thwart Turkiye's ambitions in Syria. Israel's relations with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan are close to nonexistent. Israeli leadership figures do not want to see Turkiye being the dominant external actor inside Syria. But Israel's approach to sanctions makes Syria even more dependent on Ankara.

Israel should adopt a different approach. Instead of resorting to its traditional policy of force first, second and third, it has an opportunity to reach out and assist, to help the transition and be seen as a positive force for change in Syria. It could have played an active role in getting US sanctions lifted and appeared to be on the side of the people.

Syrians associate Israel with raining on their parade. Syrians tell me that, every time they celebrate, Israeli bombs fall — just as they did after the Assad regime's demise. This also happened to Deraa as it celebrated the anniversary of the start of the 2011 uprising two weeks ago. Sadly, for all concerned, Israel is busy making enemies rather than winning friends. It has enough of the latter and an ever-increasing number of the former.

## ‘Planes, planes, planes’

Ghassan Charbel

IT was a pleasant night in Beirut. The seaside cafes were full late into the night. The city has a habit of concealing its wounds and disappointments, to challenge death and the rubble and to convince the visitor that bright days are ahead despite the challenges. We used to count the losses and gains and tried to fend off despair. However, the constant buzzing overhead hampered our attempts to forget the pain.

A wandering killer roams the skies. It never tires and it never sleeps. It counts breaths and captures photos. It searches for its prey, corners it and then makes the call to kill it.

The wandering killer flies over the killing fields in Gaza and the West Bank. It violates Lebanon and does not forget to reap woes in Syria. It targets a camp in the West Bank and a car in southern Lebanon. Neither Gaza, Beirut nor Damascus can stand against it.

When the opportunity for a mass killing presents itself, the drone turns into the advanced fighter jet. Funerals ensue. Artificial intelligence is a formidable thing. It strengthens the ability of planes to kill and leave maps awash with blood. The planes are like militias: they don't respect international law or borders.

I paused at two articles in Asharq Al-Awsat. The first said that the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' Quds Force commander conveyed a clear message from the Iranian leadership to the Iraqi factions demanding that they "avoid all forms of provocations against the Americans and Israelis" to avoid the consequences. The second article reported Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein as saying: "Iraq is not part of the 'axis of resistance' Israeli table. Donald

and does not agree to the unity of arenas. We believe in the Iraqi arena alone."

I also noted the Palestinian Health Ministry's announcement that 50,000 people have been killed in Gaza since the launch of the Al-Aqsa Flood Operation.

A retired general said he feared that the Israeli jets may have broken the "balance" in the region more so and more dangerously than during the 1967 war. He noted that Benjamin Netanyahu's planes have completely eliminated what remained of the arsenal of Bashar Assad's army. It destroyed all weapons and facilities as if to make sure that no power hostile to it could emerge in the years to come. The current Syrian authorities had no choice but to watch as the jets struck airports, facilities and barracks. Perhaps the jets wanted to deliver a message that there can be no stability under President Ahmad Al-Sharaa's rule in Syria if he does not completely abandon the idea of ever waging a confrontation with Israel. He must agree to the removal of Syria from the Arab-Israeli conflict, even as the Golan Heights continue to be occupied by Israel. Israel went beyond that by demanding the establishment of a "safe zone" for itself deep into Syrian territory, even threatening to play the minority card in its favor. The same planes changed the scene in Syria.

Trump's Middle East envoy declared this week that Iran cannot be allowed to acquire a nuclear bomb. "It cannot happen and it will not happen," he said.

Israeli planes are violating several maps. They kill, destroy and impose conditions. One has to turn to the American mediator for protection. A heavy price will be demanded, starting with quitting the axis of resistance.

It is a harsh but clear reality. There can be no stability in Syria unless it leaves the conflict. There can be no reconstruction in Lebanon if Hezbollah does not abandon its weapons.

The strikes on Yemen will stop when the Houthis stop attacking Red Sea shipping and Red Sea. There can be no leniency with Iran unless it abandons its dream of a nuclear bomb and the policy of proxies.

Israel is hostile. But did we have the right to plunge our maps into bloody confrontations, all the while neglecting the massive technological gap with Israel and America's unwavering support for it?

The planes reminded me of timeless Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish, who used to watch Israeli planes from his balcony as they pounded Beirut, which was then besieged by Ariel Sharon's forces. I recalled his poem, "This is her Image and This is the Lover's Suicide," in which he repeatedly says, "planes, planes, planes" — a term that could not be a more fitting title for this article.

the Israeli jets were striking the positions or hide-outs of the IRGC generals in Syria, that the IRGC would rush to flee Syria years later. No one imagined that the jets would cause Assad to flee and Al-Sharaa to appear from the palace where Hafez Assad and his son used to sit.

The planes carried out a complete coup in Syria. The so-called axis of resistance lost the Syrian link in the chain that took Qassem Soleimani's dreams all the way to the Mediterranean.

The jets excessively punished Hezbollah in Lebanon after the party launched its "support front" in solidarity with Gaza following Yahya Sinwar's Al-Aqsa Flood Operation. Hezbollah lost thousands of fighters and the most charismatic leader in its history, Hassan Nasrallah. It was an obvious coup.

Gone is the "army, people and resistance" equation from Nawaf Salam's government statement and President Joseph Aoun was clear during his inauguration speech when he spoke about the state's monopoly over weapons.

Despite the ceasefire in Lebanon, Israel is continuing its killings. Its aerial hegemony is not being threatened. Hezbollah clearly cannot return to the war, given the new balance of power in the region.

The planes changed calculations and plans. Some of the Iraqi factions were tempted to pester Israel from afar, the same way the Houthis are doing. So, Israel threatened to turn its planes on Baghdad. Tehran cannot prevent the Israeli jets from targeting its allies in Iraq.

Iran itself can no longer carry on trading blows with Israel, while its nuclear facilities file is open at the American-Israeli table. Donald

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# Japan should value common security

Trump's broad strategy pulsates with the anti-establishment energy that animated his rowdy campaign rallies, and is part of a deeper attempt to destroy what critics see as a liberal in-crowd that dominates Washington

It is important to

His program mirrors the goals of Project 2025,

Trump's attempts to bring legal elites in private firms to heel mirror his assault on another establishment: the president is trying to disempower — the federal judiciary. This is highlighted by his attacks on a US federal judge who sought to halt deportations of alleged gang members that the White House carried out under the rarely used Alien Enemies Act of 1798. Judge James Boasberg is trying to find out whether the administration flouted his orders to halt the deportations last weekend. His efforts have sparked the extraordinary spectacle of an attorney general directly attacking his legitimacy.

runs through all of the administration's goals — from the seizure of control of the White House press pool from journalists to include pro-Trump outlets to trashing generations of US bipartisan policy with threats to annex Canada while officials repeatedly parrot Russian propaganda on Ukraine.

— CNN

Whether incumbent Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba will make efforts to improve Sino-Japanese relations depends on five key factors: whether he abides by the four political documents signed by China and Japan; whether he abides by the 1995 statement by former prime minister Tomiichi Murayama on historical issues; whether he adheres to the one-China principle on the Taiwan question and opposes "Taiwan independence"; whether he properly handles the

If the BRI countries make common security their guideline, comprehensive security their strategy and cooperative security their method, and seek to establish a common security community while promoting interconnectivity and win-win cooperation, it is possible to build the world's largest sustainable security zone by the middle of this century.

— *China Daily*

Similarly, today's repression of pro-Palestinian activism and broader academic freedom may succeed in intimidating academic institutions and individuals in the short term, but it will fail to erase ideas rooted in justice and liberalism. How far this new McCarthyism will go will depend on Americans' will to fight back and protect their freedoms.





# PSX witnesses bearish trend, loses 2,002 points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-Index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) witnessed bearish trend on Monday, losing 2,002.56 points, a negative change of 1.69 percent, closing at 116,439.62 points as compared to 118,442.18 points on the last trading day.

A total of 311,970,520 shares were traded during the day as compared to 369,119,112 shares the previous trading day, whereas the price of shares stood at Rs20.953 billion against Rs23.273 billion on the last trading day.

As many as 468 companies transacted their shares in the stock market, 124 of them recorded gains and 266 sustained losses,

whereas the share price of 78 companies remained unchanged.

The three top trading companies were Pak Elektron with 28,623,330 shares at Rs45.87 per share, Cnergyco PK with 19,218,186 shares at Rs7.94 per share and TRG Pak Limited with 15,741,063 shares at Rs70.20 per share.

Rafhan Maize Products Company Limited witnessed a maximum increase of Rs57.07 per share closing at Rs9,157.07 whereas runner-up was Hoechst Pakistan Limited with Rs47.98 rise in its share price to close at Rs3,297.98. Service Industries

Limited witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs82.56 per share price, closing at Rs1,318.43, whereas the runner-up was Unilever Pakistan Foods Limited with Rs40.05 decline in its per share price to Rs23,525.50.

**Rupee sheds 10 paise against US Dollar**

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Rupee on Monday depreciated by 10 paise against the US Dollar in the interbank trading and closed at Rs 280.36 against the previous day's closing of Rs 280.26.

However, according to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the dollar in the open market stood

at Rs280.60 and Rs282.1, respectively.

The price of the Euro increased by 34 paise to close at Rs 304.01 against the last day's closing of Rs 303.67, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP).

The Japanese yen remained unchanged and closed at Rs 1.87, whereas a decrease of 56 paise was witnessed in the exchange rate of the British Pound, which was traded at Rs 363.17 as compared to the last day's closing of Rs 362.61.

The exchange rate of the Emirates Dirham and Saudi Riyal increased by 03 paise each to close at Rs 76.33 and Rs 74.74 respectively.

## Revenue increased by targeting taxpayers and public: Mian Zahid

### F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Chairman of the National Business Group Pakistan, the President of the Pakistan Businessmen and Intellectuals Forum, the President of the All Karachi Industrial Alliance, the Chairman of the FPCCI Advisory Board, and the President and former provincial minister, Mian Zahid Hussain, said on Monday that Pakistan's tax system is a significant obstacle to investment and economic development.

He expressed serious concerns regarding the inefficiencies and inequities within the country's taxation framework, as it discourages business expansion, increases the financial burden on documented taxpayers, and fails to incorporate many crucial sectors and wealthy individuals into the tax net.

Mian Zahid Hussain said that a fundamental flaw in our tax system is its inability to ensure fair tax collection across all economic sectors.

Talking to the business community, the veteran

business leader said that the documented businesses and salaried individuals face excessive taxation, and many wealthy individuals and key sectors remain outside the tax net.

He noted that instead of broadening the tax base, the government repeatedly targets existing taxpayers, which creates an atmosphere of distrust and reluctance to comply with tax obligations.

Consequently, he said, Pakistan's tax-to-GDP ratio remains alarmingly low, significantly impacting the country's financial stability and public welfare.

Mian Zahid Hussain highlighted that many businesses and individuals avoid entering the tax net due to tax authorities' perceived inefficiency and high-handedness.

A lack of transparency and accountability in tax collection discourages people from formalising their businesses, thereby keeping a large portion of the economy undocumented.

He said this underground economy, which is significant in size, escapes taxation, causing the govern-

ment to lose substantial revenue that could otherwise be used for developmental projects and public welfare initiatives.

The business leader said that Pakistan's flawed tax policies have severe economic repercussions. The government's inability to generate sufficient tax revenue increases reliance on external loans and minibudgets, further straining the economy.

Limited revenue restricts the government's ability to invest in infrastructure, industrial growth, and employment generation, leading to stagnation in exports and slow economic progress.

He said that without adequate reforms, Pakistan will continue to struggle with financial instability and slow economic growth.

Mian Zahid Hussain has suggested that the government should prioritise direct taxes over indirect taxes and expand its tax base by including sectors such as real estate, agriculture, wholesale, and retail businesses.

He said that one effective solution could be

implementing a fixed tax system for retailers, which would simplify tax compliance and reduce tax evasion. Such measures would increase revenue and create a fairer taxation system, ensuring that every sector contributes to national development.

Another primary concern is the super tax, initially imposed to support individuals displaced by military operations.

However, he stated that over time, this tax has expanded to include businesses and individuals earning over 150 million rupees.

Mian Zahid Hussain said that the continued imposition of super tax has placed additional financial burdens on businesses, hampering their growth, and he called for a reassessment of such taxation policies.

He noted that our economic future heavily depends on the government's ability to implement meaningful tax reforms. He warned that Pakistan's socio-economic development will remain constrained until such reforms are enacted.



ISLAMABAD: Minister for Railways Hanif Abbasi visiting Islamabad Carriage Factory.

## Pakistan, Netherlands discuss trade and investment expansion

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Commerce Jam Kamal Khan and the Dutch Ambassador to Pakistan Henny Fokel de Vries on Monday discussed

enhancing trade, investment, and economic cooperation between the two nations, focusing on agriculture, technology, fisheries, and textiles.

The minister stressed the need to diversify trade beyond GSP+ by exploring investment in agriculture and industrial innovation, said in a release on Monday.

The Ambassador highlighted Dutch expertise in agricultural technology and water management, offering potential collaboration.

The EU-Pakistan Business Forum was discussed

as a key platform to boost trade.

Pakistan's exports to the Netherlands rose to US\$1.48 billion in 2023-24, with textiles, rice, and alcohol as top products.

Agriculture and Fisheries were central to the talks, with Pakistan seeking Dutch support in precision farming, AI-based solutions, and Karachi's fish harbor to meet EU export standards in fisheries.

An EU fisheries audit is scheduled next month, and Pakistan urged Dutch assistance in ensuring compliance.

The minister also called for investment in Pakistan's textile sector, emphasizing

the modernization of outdated machinery.

The Ambassador suggested exploring Dutch FMO funding for industry upgrades.

Pakistan requested a review of the Netherlands' decision to discontinue technical programs like PUM and CBI, stressing their role in strengthening trade potential.

The meeting concluded with an invitation to the Dutch foreign trade Minister to visit Pakistan with investors in IT, agriculture, and renewable energy.

Ambassador de Vries reaffirmed the Netherlands' commitment to fostering strong economic ties with Pakistan.

## PSX attains ISO 27001:2022 certification

### F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) is proud to announce that it has achieved the ISO 27001:2022 certification, the internationally recognized standard for Information Security Management Systems (ISMS). This significant milestone highlights PSX's unwavering commitment to maintaining the highest levels of information security, ensuring the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of data for all stakeholders.

The ISO 27001:2022 standard outlines the requirements for establishing, implementing, maintaining, and continually improving an Information Security Management System. By adopting this

systematic approach, PSX demonstrates its dedication to safeguarding its critical data assets against potential threats and aligning with global best practices in information security.

The certification was awarded following a rigorous audit process conducted by SGS, a world-renowned inspection, verification, testing, and certification organization accredited by UKAS.

This third-party validation confirms that PSX has implemented a robust and effective ISMS that meets the stringent requirements of the ISO 27001:2022 standard.

Commenting on this achievement, Mr. Farrukh H. Sabzwari, MD & CEO of Pakistan Stock Exchange, said: "The ISO

27001:2022 certification is a testament to our relentless pursuit of safeguarding sensitive information and achieving operational excellence.

This milestone reaffirms PSX's commitment to ensuring the highest standards of data security and adhering to international best practices, thereby preserving the trust of our stakeholders."

PSX remains dedicated to adopting best practices in information security and upholding the integrity of the capital market ecosystem. This certification reinforces PSX's position as a secure and reliable financial market infrastructure provider, offering a robust and trustworthy environment for investors and market participants.

## Egyptian envoy visits ICCI to boost trade ties

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Egyptian Ambassador to Pakistan, Dr. Ihab Mohamed Abdelhamid Hassan paid a visit to the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) on Monday and held a productive meeting with President, ICCI Nasir Mansoor Qureshi.

The meeting focused on enhancing bilateral trade and strengthening economic cooperation between Egypt and Pakistan, said a release issued here. During the discussion, both sides explored opportunities to boost trade in key sectors such as textiles, pharmaceuticals, agriculture, and construction materials.

President Nasir Mansoor Qureshi emphasized the need to improve business linkages between the private sectors of both countries to maximize trade potential.

The Egyptian Ambassador highlighted Egypt's growing market and invited Pakistani businesses to explore investment opportunities in sectors like energy, tourism, and infrastructure. He assured the ICCI of the Egyptian Embassy's full support in facilitating stronger trade ties and exchange of business delegations.

President Nasir Mansoor Qureshi expressed ICCI's commitment to fostering partnerships that would cre-

ate new avenues for investment and mutual growth.

Both sides agreed to hold joint events, including trade fairs and business forums, to connect entrepreneurs from both nations.

The meeting concluded on a positive note, with both parties reaffirming their dedication to strengthening economic ties for the benefit of their respective countries.

Prominent among the attendees included Embassy's Political Officer Ahmed S. Zoweil, ICCI Senior Vice President Abdul Rehman Siddiqui, Vice President Nasir Mehmood Chaudhry and Secretary General Ghulam Murtaza.

## SECP achieves 100 appeal disposals yearly

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Appellate Bench of Securities and Exchange Commission (SECP), the apex quasi-judicial appellate forum, has successfully disposed of 100 appeals from March 2024 to March 2025.

This milestone marks a significant step forward in expediting justice and reducing the backlog of pending cases. All orders issued by the Appellate Bench appear on the official website of the SECP, according to a

release issued here on Monday.

The Appellate Bench Registry has demonstrated efficiency and dedication in assisting the Appellate Bench in upholding the rule of law by ensuring the timely resolution of diverse legal matters.

Among the 100 appeals successfully disposed of, 26 cases pertained to the Insurance Ordinance, 2000, while six were related to the Securities Act, 2015. Additionally, 22 cases

involved matters under the Companies Ordinance, 1984, and the Companies Act, 2017, whereas six cases were associated with violations of the Non-Banking Finance Companies Regulations, 2008. The remaining 40 cases addressed breaches of various provisions of the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan's Anti-Money Laundering and Countering Financing of Terrorism Regulations, 2018 and 2020.

### Court Notice

IN the Court of Javeria Sartaj Khan Additional District Judge II /Azafi Zila Qazi Buner at Camp Court Totalai Buner. Appeal. No.46/13. Institution. 9/5/2024-6/9/2024Date of hearing. 12/4/2025.Mst Husan Zeba VS Mst Rahat Sultana Begum. Notice to No.45/1.Merwahid Khan.45/2.Zahid Khan. 45/3.Zareef Khan. 45/4. Nazer Khan sons of Madar Khan s/o Abdul Hanan resident of Dapuna Totalai Khadukhel Buner.75/1. Zilkifal.75/2. Muhammad Yunas.75/3. Abubakar sons.75/4.Mst Mumina widow.75/5.Mst Khudja d/o Rehman Gul resident Janak Banda Khadukhel Buner.77/4.Rahim Gul. 77/4/2.Usman Gul. 77/4/3.Karim Gul sons of Wazifullah.25/4.Msts Sanaqat Bibi.25/5. Parmen Bibi.25/6. Mumilkat Bibi.25/7. Nahed Bibi daughters of Haqqad 26/4.Msts Salma Bibi.26/7.Nahed daughters of Haqqad. 27/1.Mst Siraja widow. 27/5.Qadar Khan sons. 27/6.Msts Fareeda Bibi.27/7.Nareda Bibi. 27/9.Mst Sabila Bibi daughters of Fazal Dad resident of Totalai Buner. 30/4.Imran Ali s/o Hukam Khan.31/1. Muhammad Sharif. 31/2.Muhammad Ayaz.31/3.Amir Sardar sons of Gul Bar.31/6.Mst Sajda Begum d/o Gul Bar resident of Dapuna Totalai Buner. 33. Muhammad Ayaz.34.Amir Sardar sons of Gul Bar. 38/1. Jamal Khan (Husband). 41.Norul Basar s/o Dilbar.49/3.Azizur Rehman s/o Said Rehman.50/4.Abdul Wahed.50/5.Said Muhammad.50/6.Adil Muhammad sons of Khanpur.50/10/2.Ajmal Khan.50/10/4.Abdul Wahid Khan.50/10/5. Said Muhammad. 50/10/6.Adil Muhammad sons of Khanpur. 56/5/2.Azan Khan s/o Shamali Khan.66.Saeed Zada.67.Sheren Zada sons of Peer Zada. 74/4.Mst Zakia Yasmen d/o Abdul Waris resident of Totalai Buner.Whereas in the above mentioned case the mentioned defendants can not be served in the ordinary way it is, therefore, proclaimed that if the said defendants will /shall not appear personally or through dually authorized agent or pleader in the court at 8.30 am dated 12/4/2025 the proceeding will be taken ex parte. Given under my hand and seal of this Court.

### Court Notice

IN the Court of Javeria Sartaj Khan Additional District Judge II /Azafi Zila Qazi Buner at Camp Court Totalai Buner. Appeal. No.44/13. Institution. 9/5/2024-6/9/2024Date of hearing. 12/4/2025.Niaz Ali etc VS Mst Sultana etc. Notice to No.30/1.Mst Sherom widow.30/2. Fazal Dad.30/3.Fazal Mabod sons.30/4.Mst Sanaqat Bibi.30/5. Parmen Bibi.30/6. Mumilkat Bibi.30/6. Nahed Bibi daughters of Haqqad Totalai Buner. 31/1.Mst Hajay widow 31/2. Nawaz.31/3.Fiaz sons. 31/4.Salma. 31/5.khalida.31/6.Asma daughters of Yardad resident of Totalai Buner. 32/1.Mst Siraja widow. 32/2. Ajaz.32/3. Nisar. 32/4. Gulzar.32/5. Qadar sons.32/6. Fareeda. 32/7.Shakila. 32/8. Mubila. 32/9.Samena daughters of Fazaladad resident of Totalai Buner. 48/7.Mst Najma Begum d/o Gul Bar resident of Dapuna Totalai Buner. 52/1.Mst Shahan widow. 52/2. Nadem Sardar. 52/3. Nabel Israr sons .52/4.Reshma d/o Muhammad Sardar resident of Totalai Khadukhel Buner.62/1. Merwahid Khan.62/2. Zahid han.62/3.Zareef Khan.62/4.Nazer Khan sons of Madar Khan resident of Dapuna Totalai Buner.126/1. Zulkifal.126/2. Muhammad Yunas.126/3. Abubakar sons.126/4. Mst. Mumina widow.126/5.MstKhudja d/o Rehman Gul resident of Janak Banda Totalai Buner. 55/1.Jamal Khan (Husband).55/2.Numan Ali s/o Jamal Khan resident of Salem Khan district Sawabi.131/1. Rahim Gul.131/2.Usman Gul.131/3.Karim Gul sons of Wazifullah heirs of Mst Shereena resident of Totalai Buner.7.Salman s/o Salahuden.9.Mst Sema.11.Mst Rahat Sultana widow Salahuden. 20.Alsar Khan s/o Khan Ghalib. 28.Anwar Hayat s/o Hamed.45.Imran Ali s/o Mst Hukam Jan. 48/1.Muhammad Sheraz s/o Gul Bar.48/2. Muhammad Ayaz.48/3. Amir Sarwar.48/4. Muhammad Sarwar sons of Gul Bar. 48/6.Mst Sajda Begum d/o Gul Bar resident of Dapuna Totalai Buner.50. Muhammad Ayaz.51.Amir Sardar sons of Gul Bar.58.Nurul Basar s/o Dil Bar.67. Faizur Rehman.68.Azizur Rehman.69.Nor Rehman s/o Said Rehman.77. Abdul Wahid Khan.78. Said Muhammad sons of Khanpur.83/4.Abdul Wahid Khan.83/5.Sher Muhammad Khan.83/6. Adil Muhammad sons of Khanpur heirs of Zarsheda resident of Totalai Buner.96/2.Azan Khan s/o Shamas Khan.100.Mst Shah zadgai d/o Munisf Khan.109.Saeed Zada. 110.Sheren Zada sons of Peer Zada. 113.Iqbal Husain s/o Fazal Karim Alyas.115.Muhammad Fayaz s/o Abdul Waris. 123.Muhammad Fayaz.124.Muhammad Naem s/o Abdul Waris resident of Totalai Khadukhel Buner. Whereas in the above mentioned case the mentioned defendants can not be served in the ordinary way it is, therefore, proclaimed that if the said defendants will /shall not appear personally or through dually authorized agent or pleader in the court at 8.30 am dated 12/4/2025 the proceeding will be taken ex parte. Given under my hand and seal of this Court.

## MCB Bank partners with Fauree Tech Limited

— to transform digital supply chain financing for SMEs

### F.P. Report

LAHORE: MCB Bank Limited has announced a strategic partnership with Fauree Tech Pvt. Ltd., a fintech company specializing in digital supply chain finance solutions. This collaboration will expand MCB Bank's portfolio of digital financing products, aimed at facilitating access to finance for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) across Pakistan.

The partnership was formalized at MCB Bank's Head Office in Lahore, with senior representatives from both organizations in attendance. By leveraging Fauree's digital platform, MCB Bank's corporate clients and SMEs will have access to financing solutions designed to optimize working capital, improve cash flow, and streamline financial processes.

Muhammad Nauman Chughtai, President & CEO of MCB Bank



Limited, stated "This collaboration with Fauree Tech is an important step in our digital transformation journey. By integrating innovative financing solutions, we aim to better serve the evolving needs of SMEs while maintaining operational efficiency and regulatory compliance."

Azhar Tasadduq, CEO of Fauree Tech, commented "SMEs are the backbone of Pakistan's economy, and our collaboration with MCB Bank Limited will provide them with the essential financial tools

needed to grow and thrive. We are committed to delivering a robust, secure, and fully digital platform that drives efficiency and enhances customer value."

This collaboration reflects MCB Bank's focus on digital innovation and its ongoing efforts to support SMEs by providing practical and technology-driven financial solutions, in line with SBP's vision.

The partnership with Fauree Tech is expected to contribute to the evolution of digital supply chain finance, improving accessi-

bility and efficiency for businesses across Pakistan.

MCB Bank is one of Pakistan's largest & most innovative banks and operates a strong and vast network of Over 1,400 branches and over 1,450 ATMs in Pakistan and 11 overseas branches. With a customer base of over 7 million, MCB leads the banking & financial services sector in Pakistan and customers across the globe have 24/7 access to MCB Bank via our innovative and accessible Digital Banking Services.

## Stock markets rise on fresh hopes for Trump's tariff approach

LONDON (AFP/APP): Stock markets mostly rose on Monday as worries about fresh US tariffs pencilled in for next week were tempered by hopes that US President Donald Trump was considering a more targeted approach.

Investor sentiment has been jolted in recent weeks by fears that the president's hardball policies could deal a painful blow to the global economy. Wednesday of next week is now the focus of attention, with Trump labelling it "Liberation Day" as he prepares to unveil a raft of supposedly "reciprocal" measures to counter those in other countries.

"Expectations are growing that they (tariffs) could be tweaked and be more focused on specific goods

and sectors, instead of swathes of duties triggered in a blanket fashion," said Susannah Streeter, head of money and markets at Hargreaves Lansdown.

Bloomberg News reported that the US administration was considering a more targeted approach to the tariffs, with some countries being hit harder than others, and the measures not being as severe as initially feared. That came after the president on Friday told reporters that "there'll be flexibility" in his plans.

Those expectations have helped lift market sentiment, with London, Paris and Frankfurt all rising on Monday. Markets also digested purchasing managers' index (PMI) data that showed business activity in

the eurozone increased for the third consecutive month in March.

The closely watched survey also showed that UK business activity hit a six-month high, a glimmer of good news for Britain's struggling economy.

However, positive sentiment has been tempered as the US Federal Reserve last week warned that "uncertainty around the economic outlook has increased" while the central banks of Japan and Britain also warned about the impact of the White House's policies.

Chinese Premier Li Qiang said at the weekend that Beijing was readying for "shocks that exceed expectations" ahead of the latest tariff measures, adding that "instability and uncer-

tainty are on the upswing". His comments came as he met heads of some of the world's biggest companies, including Apple, Qualcomm, FedEx and Pfizer.

Asian markets fluctuated through the day, with Tokyo falling while Hong Kong and Shanghai rose.

Jakarta dived more than four percent at one point, extending a recent sell-off fuelled by worries about Southeast Asia's biggest economy that has seen the country's main index lose around 15 percent since the turn of the year.

Gold held at around \$3,035 an ounce (28.3 grammes), having hit a series of records last week to a peak of more than \$3,057 owing to a surge in demand for safe havens.





## In brief

## Pirzada takes charge as CEO of Anti-Doping Board

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Ministry of Inter Provincial Coordination (IPC) has assigned the additional charge of Chief Executive Officer of the Pakistan Anti-Doping Board to Muhammad Yasir Pirzada, Director General of the Pakistan Sports Board. According to a notification issued by the ministry on Monday, the appointment has been made with the approval of the Prime Minister. Muhammad Yasir Pirzada, a BS-20 officer serving as the Director General of the Pakistan Sports Board under the administrative control of the Ministry of Inter Provincial Coordination, will assume this additional responsibility with immediate effect. The tenure of this assignment will be for a period of 90 days (three months) or until a regular appointment is made, whichever comes first.

## Rabbani, Gulberg dominate in KHA Championship

KARACHI (APP): Rabbani Hockey Club and Gulberg Hockey Club emerged victorious in the ongoing KHA Ramadan Inter-Club Hockey Championship, held at the Olympian Hanif Khan and Dr. Junaid Ali Shah Sports Complex in Gulshan Iqbal. The tournament is organized by the Karachi Hockey Association. In the first match, Rabbani Hockey Club secured a commanding 10-0 win against Dolphin Hockey Club. Aliyan and Wajahat led the charge with hat-tricks, scoring three goals each in the 3rd, 9th, 16th, 32nd, 36th, and 39th minutes. Other contributors to the scoreline included Faisal (12th minute), Aalay Raza (14th minute), Arsalan (26th minute), and Fakhr (28th minute), each adding a goal. In the second match, Gulberg Hockey Club dominated Karachi Tigers Hockey Club with an 11-1 victory. Munhil opened the scoring in the 3rd minute, followed by Daniyal's hat-trick (19th, 26th, and 32nd minutes), Junaid Junior's four goals (22nd, 23rd, 33rd, and 36th minutes), and Mubashir's three goals (31st, 34th, and 35th minutes). Afzal netted the only goal for Karachi Tigers. The semi-finals lineup is now set, with Youth H.C. Police Boys H.C., Hanif Khan H.C. and Rabbani H.C. advancing. The semi-finals will take place on March 25, 2025, with Youth H.C. facing Police Boys H.C. at 4:00 pm, followed by Hanif Khan H.C. against Rabbani H.C. at 5:00 pm.

## Brennan claims Tour of Catalonia first stage

BARCELONA (APP): Matthew Brennan sprinted to victory in the first stage of the Tour of Catalonia in pouring rain on Monday, pipping Tibor del Grosso as the 104th edition of the race began. British Visma rider Brennan, 19, overhauled the Dutchman in a spectacular finish to the first stage, which ran 178.3 kilometres, starting and ending in Sant Feliu de Guixols. Brennan, who celebrated his first professional victory last week at the GP de Denain with another sprint finish, completed the stage in just over four hours 25 minutes in poor weather conditions. Sprinter Kaden Groves took second place ahead of Alpein-Deceuninck team-mate Del Grosso, who had seemed poised to claim the stage after an attempted breakaway. With last year's winner Tadej Pogacar and Jonas Vingegaard not competing in Catalonia, 2023 champion Primoz Roglic and Tirreno-Adriatico winner Juan Ayuso are the favourites to claim the general classification victory. Stage two on Tuesday takes riders 177.3 kilometres from Banyoles to Figueras.

## Karachi Kings appoint David Warner as Captain for HBL PSL

KARACHI (APP): Karachi Kings, the HBL PSL franchise of the largest city of Pakistan, on Monday announced the appointment of Australian cricketer superstar David Warner as captain for the upcoming HBL Pakistan Super League (PSL) Season 10.

The dynamic left-handed batsman, renowned for his aggressive leadership and match-winning prowess, will spearhead the franchise's campaign in the highly anticipated season.

Warner, a World Cup-winning veteran and one of the most explosive openers in T20 cricket, brings a wealth of experience to the role. With over a decade of leadership in global leagues, including Big Bash League (BBL), Warner is poised to inspire a fresh chapter for the Kings. Notably, Warner was the first pick of

Karachi Kings in the HBL PSL Players Draft 2025, held at the iconic Hazuri Bagh in Lahore on January 13, 2025, underscoring the franchise's confidence in his abilities.

The franchise extended heartfelt gratitude to Shan Masood, last season's captain, for his instrumental role in reshaping the team. Shan Masood's steadfast leadership during HBL PSL 9 laid the groundwork for a revitalized Karachi Kings, blending youth and experience. The management praised his professionalism, tactical acumen, and dedication to fostering a cohesive unit.

Karachi Kings Owner Salman Iqbal has said, "We are thrilled to welcome David Warner to the Karachi Kings family as our new captain. His track record as a leader and match-winner aligns

perfectly with our vision for HBL PSL 10. At the same time, we extend our deepest appreciation to Shan Masood for his exceptional contributions last season. His efforts were pivotal in building a strong foundation, and we look forward to his continued role as a key player in the squad."

The HBL Pakistan Super League Season 10 will commence on Friday, April 11, 2025. The Karachi Kings will begin their campaign on Saturday, April 12, 2025, at their home ground, the National Bank Stadium, Karachi, where they will face off against Multan Sultans.

Fans can expect a thrilling showcase of cricketing excellence as the Kings, under Warner's leadership, aim to reclaim the HBL PSL trophy.

## Philippine wild card stuns Keys, Djokovic sets Masters 1000 record

MIAMI (Agencies): Australian Open champion Madison Keys was dumped out of the Miami Open third round on Sunday, falling 6-4 6-2 to Philippine wild card Alexandra Eala, while Novak Djokovic earned a record-setting 411th ATP Masters 1000 level match win.

For 19-year-old Eala, the upset victory over the American fifth seed extended her dream run in Miami where she has now toppled two Grand Slam champions having beaten 2017 French Open winner Jelena Ostapenko in the second round.

"I am just in disbelief," she told Tennis Channel. "I knew I could win from the start but the chances were low given that she is a great player, but I think my belief and the trust I had in myself is what pushed me through."

Eala, who has trained at Rafa Nadal's academy in Mallorca since she was 13, required a medical timeout for what appeared to be a leg injury but was a force from the baseline against Keys, who reached the Indian Wells semi-final last week.

Up next for Eala, who has not dropped a set in Miami, will be Spanish 10th seed Paula Badosa.

Former champion Iga Swiatek earned a 7-6(2) 6-1 win over Belgian 27th seed Elise Mertens that made the Polish second seed the first



player to reach the last 16 of a WTA 1000 event in 25 consecutive appearances.

Swiatek built a seemingly comfortable 5-2 lead in the first set but Mertens managed to claw back to 5-5 before the Pole ran away with the tiebreaker and breezed through the second frame. "I'm happy that I got my level up in the tiebreaker to close it in two sets. Also in the second set I felt like I was playing good, big confidence," said Swiatek. "Yeah, overall I'm happy with the performance and how I worked through some issues."

Up next for Swiatek will be Ukrainian Elina Svitolina, who beat Czech 15th seed Karolina Muchova 6-2 3-6 6-2 and is looking to build on her run to the Indian Wells quarter-final where she lost to eventual champion Mirra Andreeva.

**Djokovic sets record**

In other women's action, Andreeva's bid for a 'Sunshine Double' ended as American 17th seed Amanda Anisimova beat the Russian 11th seed 7-6(5) 2-6 6-3. Anisimova will next face former U.S. Open champion Emma Raducanu, who advanced after American McCartney Kessler retired due to a lower back injury while trailing the Briton 6-1 3-0.

American fourth seed Jessica Pegula rallied to beat Russian Anna Kalinskaya 6-7(3) 6-2 7-6(2) and will face Ukraine's Marta Kostyuk in the fourth round. Six-times champion Djokovic moved into the fourth round with a 6-1 7-6(1) triumph over Argentine lucky loser Camilo Ugo Carabelli that moved the Serbian fourth seed ahead of Nadal and into top spot on the all-time list of Masters 1000 match wins.

## New Zealand qualify for WC but Chris Wood injured

AUCKLAND (AFP): New Zealand reached the World Cup for only the third time with a 3-0 win over New Caledonia on Monday but lost in-form Nottingham Forest striker Chris Wood to injury.

The All Whites join already qualified Japan and co-hosts the United States, Canada and Mexico at next year's finals thanks to three second-half goals.

But the victory in Auckland in the final of Oceania qualifying came at a cost, with skipper Wood suffering what appeared to be a hip injury.

Soon after half time at Eden Park, Wood hurt himself swivelling for a shot and required treatment before hobbling off in the 54th minute.

"It's not great for us losing our captain and our goalscorer. It was a difficult thing for the team but they came through so well," said New Zealand's English coach Darren Bazeley.

The hosts looked out of ideas after dominating the first half, but then up popped veteran defender Michael Boxall on 61 minutes to head home from a corner with his first goal for his country.

Five minutes later Wood's replacement Kosta Barbarouses chipped the ball over advancing New Caledonia goalkeeper Rocky Nyikeine. Substitute Eli Just put gloss on the scoreline from close range with 10 minutes left.



New Caledonia's unlikely World Cup hopes are not over and they will go into an intercontinental playoff.

Next year's World Cup has been expanded to 48 teams, meaning direct entry for the first time for the team that won the qualifying competition in Oceania.

The region's top side previously had to go through an intercontinental playoff, with New Zealand falling at the final hurdle to Mexico, Costa Rica and Peru in recent editions.

New Zealand have been to the World Cup twice before, in 1982 and 2010, but are yet to win at the competition in six matches.

"Once the World Cup expanded we expected this of ourselves," said Boxall.

"It's not about getting there, it's about what we do when we get there."

Facing a side ranked 152 in the world, 63 places below them, hosts New Zealand immediately went on the front foot.

New Caledonia, a French Pacific territory of about 300,000 people which has never been to the World Cup, twice cleared off the line in quick succession after 20 minutes.

Wood, who is in the form of his life at Forest with 18 goals in the Premier League this season, had a chance in the 32nd minute but Nyikeine saved comfortably.

The 33-year-old Wood then headed over the bar from a corner and at the half-time whistle, with the game unexpectedly level, the New Caledonia players mobbed Nyikeine.

Bazeley had seen enough and made two changes at the break, bringing on winger Just and defender Francis de Vries.

Despite losing talisman Wood, New Zealand's pressure eventually paid off against a rapidly tiring New Caledonia to put the All Whites into the World Cup.



MIAMI GARDENS: Jasmine Paolini of Italy returns a shot against Naomi Osaka of Japan during their match on day 7 at Hard Rock Stadium.

## Abbas earns maiden call-up in NZ squad

KARACHI (Monitoring Desk): New Zealand on Monday announced a 13-member squad for the upcoming PAK v NZ ODI series.

The Black Caps have included two uncapped players including top-order batter Nick Kelly and Pakistan-born left-arm pacer Muhammad Abbas.

The two have featured for Wellington Firebirds in New Zealand's first-class cricket setup. Tom Latham will lead the side in the three-match PAK v NZ ODI series in the absence of white-ball skipper Mitchell Santner.

Among the major names missing in the New Zealand squad are Mitchell Santner, Rachin Ravindra, Devon Conway and Glenn Phillips owing to IPL 2025 commitments.

Experienced batter Kane Williamson was not considered for selection after making himself unavailable for the PAK v NZ ODI series. New Zealand will face Pakistan in the first ODI on March 29 in Napier. The two sides will face off in the second ODI on April 2 in Hamilton, while the third and final ODI will be played in Mount Maunganui on April 5.

**New Zealand ODI squad:** Tom Latham (c), Muhammad Abbas, Adi Ashok, Michael Bracewell, Mark Chapman, Jacob Duffy, Mitch Hay, Nick Kelly, Daryl Mitchell, Will O'Rourke, Ben Sears, Nathan Smith and Will Young

**Pakistan ODI squad:** Mohammad Rizwan (c), Salman Ali Agha (vc), Abdullah Shafique, Abrar Ahmed, Akif Javed, Babar Azam, Faheem Ashraf, Imam-ul-Haq, Khushdil Shah, Mohammad Ali, Mohammad Wasim Jnr, Muhammad Irfan Khan, Naseem Shah, Syfyun Moqim and Tayyab Tahir.

## Court orders seizure of cricketer Shakib's assets

DHAKA (Agencies): A Bangladeshi court ordered the seizure of cricketer Shakib Al Hasan's assets in the latest legal headache for the sports star over his allegiance to the country's former leader. Shakib is a former lawmaker from the party of autocratic ex-leader Sheikh Hasina, who was overthrown in a student-led uprising last year and fled by helicopter to neighbouring India.

His links to Hasina made him a target of public anger and he was among dozens facing murder investigations for a deadly police crackdown on protesters during the uprising. He has not been charged over those allegations but is currently being prosecuted on fraud charges for allegedly bouncing cheques totalling more than \$300,000.

A magistrate in the capital Dhaka ordered the seizure on Monday after a warrant for Shakib's arrest was issued by the court in January. Shakib was playing in a domestic Twenty20 cricket competition in Canada when Hasina's government collapsed and has not returned to Bangladesh since. The left-arm all-rounder has played 71 Tests, 247 one-day internationals and 129 Twenty20s for Bangladesh, taking a combined 712 wickets.

## Ex-Bangladesh captain Tamim in hospital after cardiac arrest

DHAKA (Agencies): Former Bangladesh captain Tamim Iqbal is "under close observation" in hospital after suffering a cardiac arrest during a domestic T20 game in Dhaka.

The 36-year-old opener, who represented Bangladesh 391 times between 2007 and 2023, was playing for Mohammedan Sporting Club on Monday.

Tamim, Bangladesh's record run-scorer in one-day internationals, complained of chest pains after taking to the field in their Dhaka Premier League fixture against Shinepukur.

Plans to transport him in a helicopter were abandoned as his condition deteriorated and he was instead taken for immediate treatment at a closer



facility, the KPI Specialized Hospital.

"Tamim Iqbal Khan suffered a cardiac arrest this morning at the Bangladesh Krira Shikkha Protisthan (BKSP)," read a statement by the Bangladesh Cricket Board.

Tamim received "immediate emergency medical treatment" and underwent a "successful angiogram procedure to address a

blockage in one of the arteries of his heart".

"He is currently under close observation at the hospital's coronary care unit," the statement added.

Tamim became only the second Bangladeshi to play county cricket in England with Nottinghamshire in 2011, and also had a spell with Essex in 2017.

He is the only Bangladeshi batter to score centuries in all three international formats.

"We are very thankful to all the medics and specialists for their swift actions in this critical situation," said BCB president Faruque Ahmed.

"The outpouring of concern for Tamim reflects how much he is loved and appreciated by the nation."

## Germany survive Italy scare to make Nations League semi-finals

DORTMUND (AFP): Germany survived a spirited second-half fightback from Italy, letting a three-goal lead slip to draw 3-3 in Dortmund on Sunday, before reaching the Nations League semi-finals 5-4 on aggregate.

A first-half Joshua Kimmich masterclass, with a penalty and two assists for Jamal Musiala and Tim Kleindienst, had Germany 3-0 up and cruising at the break. However, injury-hit Italy kicked into gear in the second half, Moise Kean scoring a double to rattle the hosts. Italy looked on course to level the scores when they were awarded a penalty with 73 minutes gone, but it was overturned by VAR.

Giacomo Raspadori then converted a stoppage time penalty to give Italy a glimmer of hope. The result not only

secured Germany a first-ever Nations League semi-final spot, where they will face Portugal, but it means the remainder of the tournament will be held on German soil, in Stuttgart and Munich in June.

Despite the second-half scare, the victory continues Germany's resurgence under Julian Nagelsmann. Germany's only loss in their past 17 matches came in extra-time at Euro 2024 against eventual champions Spain in the quarter-finals.

Nagelsmann said Germany "learned lessons for our development" from the game, adding "we know how well we can play football -- but we have to show it throughout the game."

"I'm going home with an understanding of what we're capable of, but it's also nice that we've got a bit more to do," he said. Italy coach Luciano

Spalletti admitted his side lacked "maturity" and said "you always learn from games like this."

"The second half was very good, but we were too afraid to play like that for the whole game."

'Something impossible'

Italy travelled to Dortmund, the site of their 2006 World Cup semi-final win over the same opponents, with a mountain to climb. After letting a one-goal lead slip to lose in Milan in the first leg, Italy saw defenders Riccardo Calafiori and Andrea Cambiaso added to an injury list which already included striker Mateo Retegui and left-back Federico Dimarco.

Spalletti spoke pre-match of needing to do "something impossible" and his side were up against it from the get-go as Germany burst out of the blocks.

## Irfan excluded from IPL commentary panel over alleged bias

NEW DELHI (Agencies): Former Indian cricketer Irfan Pathan has been removed from the Indian Premier League (IPL) 2025 commentary panel following a series of complaints from players regarding his commentary style, Indian media reported citing sources.

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) reportedly made the decision after growing dissatisfaction from several cricketers who accused Pathan of biased analysis and allowing personal opinions to influence his commentary.

"It's been happening for the last two years, where his personal biases were becoming evident," said a source close to the matter. Players raised concerns that Pathan was overly critical of certain individuals, with tensions flaring over his remarks on Virat Kohli during the Border-Gavaskar Trophy and criticism of Hardik Pandya's return to domestic cricket.

One unnamed player even blocked Pathan's number, highlighting the deepening rift. Additional

complaints cited a condescending tone during interviews and a perceived personal agenda in his commentary.

Pathan's exclusion overshadowed the opening match of IPL 2025, held on 22 March between Kolkata Knight Riders and Royal Challengers Bangalore at Eden Gardens. The BCCI's move mirrors previous controversies in Indian cricket broadcasting. In 2020, Sanjay Manjrekar was similarly removed from the commentary team after on-air disputes with players and colleagues.

The 2025 Indian Premier League (IPL) season began on 22 March with a match between Kolkata Knight Riders and Royal Challengers Bangalore at Eden Gardens. However, the spotlight soon shifted from the pitch to the commentary box, with former Indian all-rounder Irfan Pathan missing from the BCCI's official commentary panel.

Pathan, a regular voice in previous seasons, was notably absent this year.

Reports suggest his removal stemmed from discontent among several players regarding his commentary style. Allegations of bias and overly critical analysis were at the heart of the issue, with some cricketers feeling that Pathan's personal opinions were creeping into his professional commentary.

A key moment of tension was Pathan's remarks on Virat Kohli during the Border-Gavaskar Trophy, which reportedly upset the star batsman. His criticism of Hardik Pandya's domestic cricket return also fuelled discontent.

Sources revealed one unnamed player went as far as blocking Pathan's number. One source said, "It's been happening for the last two years, where his personal biases were becoming evident." Some players also accused Pathan of adopting a condescending tone during interviews. With growing complaints, the BCCI reportedly decided it could no longer ignore the issue, ultimately leading to his exclusion from the panel.





## In brief

### PFA initiates tree plantation campaign

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Punjab Food Authority (PFA) has initiated tree plantation campaign under the 'Plant for Pakistan' of Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif. According to a PFA spokesperson on Monday, the Authority had issued instructions to plant saplings in all food points. About 10 saplings were planted at the PFA office in Rawalpindi, 20 in Murree, 10 in Attock, 10 in Chakwal and 20 in Jhelum. The PFA's field teams in Rawalpindi Division also planted saplings in food points and restaurants. The spokesperson said trees were the only means of cleaning the air cover spread around the Earth, and urged the citizens to make the 'Plant for Pakistan' campaign a success by planting saplings.

### IRSA releases 47,900 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Monday released 47,900 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 51,200 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, River Indus stood at dead level of 1402 feet at Tarbela Dam. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 15,300 cusecs and 15,700 cusecs respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1068.75 feet, which was 18.75 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded as 17,400 cusecs and 14,400 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 23,000, 23,900, 18,300 and 6,200 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 10,300 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 1,600 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.

### 2 gangs of street criminals busted

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi Police on Monday busted two gangs of criminals involved street crimes in Race Course and Wah Saddar areas. According to the police spokesman, the Race Course Police arrested the two-member street criminals' gang with looted amount of Rs 34,000 and a snatched motorcycle from their victims. The arrested accused included Arnist Paul and Shahzad. Similarly, the Wah Saddar Police claimed to have arrested three members of the Mani gang involved in street crime incidents. The stolen money of Rs 63,000 and weapons used in the crime incidents were recovered from the accused identified as Imran alias Mani, Qasim and Umair.

### Drug case PO, 4 peddlers arrested

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi Police on Monday continued operations against drug peddlers and nabbed four suspects with over 4.5 kilograms charas and 20 grams ice, and a proclaimed offender wanted in a drug case. According to the police spokesman, the New Town Police held accused Danish with 2.65 kg charas while the Wah Cantt Police recovered 1.62 kg of the contraband item from accused Khurram Shahzad. Similarly, the Civil Lines Police arrested accused Qasim recovering 600 grams charas from him, while the Kallar Syedan Police held accused Saqib Arif with 20 grams ice. The Pirwahai Police also managed to arrest the proclaimed offender Shahid Mahmood, wanted in a drug case since September 2023. Meanwhile, four suspects were arrested for having illegal arms owners. The Airport and Dharmial Police recovered a 30-bore pistol with ammunition from accused Umar Javed and Zubair respectively.

# Pakistan-US ties on upward trajectory: Gilani

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chairman Senate Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani on Monday said that Pakistan's relations with the United States constitute an important pillar of its foreign policy, underlining the longstanding and broad-based partnership between the two countries.

"Our bilateral relationship is on an upward trajectory, and it is important to maintain the current positive momentum," Chairman Senate said during a meeting with Natalie Baker, Chargé d'Affaires of the US Embassy, at the Parliament House.

He said that mutual trust, respect, and shared interests should be the defining principles of Pakistan-US relations. "We wish to further deepen and broaden this relationship," he said, calling for enhanced people-to-people contacts and increased interaction at political, parliamentary, business, education, and cultural levels.

Gilani highlighted Pakistan's efforts to encourage US companies to explore new areas for investment, noting that the United States remains Pakistan's largest export market. "We are keen to diversify our bilateral trade relationship with the US, with a special focus on boosting trade and business

cooperation," he said.

Referring to regional dynamics, the Chairman Senate affirmed Pakistan's desire for better and constructive relations with all neighboring countries, despite prevailing bilateral challenges.

Recalling his tenure as Prime Minister, Gilani mentioned his official visit to the United States in July 2008 and productive meetings with then-President George W. Bush. He also noted his discussions with President Barack Obama on the sidelines of the 2012 Nuclear Security Summit in Seoul, which further strengthened bilateral ties.

He commended the United States for its contributions as an important economic and development partner and emphasized the need to diversify cooperation in areas such as climate change mitigation and adaptation, energy transition, water management, climate-smart agriculture, biodiversity conservation, and waste management.

Gilani also highlighted the strong defense partnership between the two countries, particularly Pakistan's role as a frontline state during the global war on terror. "We must continue to explore new avenues for trade and investment, leveraging our unique strengths to drive growth and innova-

tion," he said.

He welcomed the new US administration under President Donald Trump and expressed hope for further improvement in bilateral relations under the new government. Gilani also appreciated US assistance in Pakistan's flood relief and other humanitarian efforts.

The Chairman Senate acknowledged the vibrant role of the Pakistani diaspora in the US and underscored the importance of educational exchanges in fostering mutual understanding. Reiterating Pakistan's commitment to constructive engagement, he expressed optimism for sustained diplomatic collaboration and deeper cooperation in areas of mutual interest.

Chargé d'Affaires Natalie Baker thanked Chairman Senate Gilani for the warm welcome. She affirmed that Pakistan remains an important partner of the United States and conveyed President Trump's appreciation for Pakistan's role in counterterrorism efforts.

She lauded Gilani's leadership in promoting peace and stability, describing him as a "champion of peace." Baker also emphasized the need to broaden trade and economic ties and extended her best wishes to the Chairman Senate.



RAWALPINDI: A painted man sit on Bank Road Saddar. —INP Photo

## Al Shifa registers 7,500 eye cancer cases

RAWALPINDI (APP): Al-Shifa Eye Cancer Centre has registered 7,500 eye cancer cases in the past four years and successfully treated 3,000 of the total.

Senior consultant and head of the Oculoplastics Department, Prof. Dr. Tayyab Afghani on Monday told the media that the remaining registered patients were being treated in phases. He said that the greatest challenge in dealing with childhood eye cancer in Pakistan was delayed diagnosis and many parents and even general doctors were unaware of the early symptoms, leading to late detection.

Dr Afghnai informed that rural areas suffered the most as they lack specialists while another important issue was the cost of treatment. Many families

cannot afford treatment, which includes chemotherapy and radiation therapy.

"Genetics is also a cause of cancer in children, for which genetic testing of parents should be conducted and informed about the risk assessment," he said.

Dr Afghani emphasized that at Al-Shifa Trust, the entire treatment, from assessment to chemotherapy and follow-up check-ups, was provided free of cost. He proudly stated that the Eye Cancer Centre at Al-Shifa Eye Hospital Rawalpindi was the sole facility in the country equipped to handle complex cases.

Children from one year to fifteen years old were registered and received the best care available. He informed that among all the people who have eye cancer, 85 to 87 per cent

were children, and some were born with cancer.

He highlighted the professional skills of doctors and paramedics and said "Our cancer treatment success rate exceeds 80 per cent." Dr. Tayyab Afghani said that in Pakistan, many cases go undiagnosed until the cancer has progressed to an advanced stage, reducing the chances of successful treatment.

He stressed that parents' and general practitioners' lack of awareness often leads to missed early signs, such as a white pupil, crossed eyes, vision loss, or redness and swelling. Recognizing these signs was crucial, as it can significantly improve the chances of successful treatment.

The primary challenges in managing eye cancer in children in Pakistan



ISLAMABAD: Chairman Capital Development Authority (CDA) Muhammad Ali Randhawa chairing an important meeting regarding sector development was held at the CDA Headquarters. —INP Photo

## AIOU's science faculty holds its faulty board meeting

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 28th meeting of the Faculty Board of the Faculty of Sciences at Allama Iqbal Open University was held on Monday under the chairmanship of Dean, Professor Dr. Sher Muhammad.

The meeting approved the scheme of studies for various departments, including BS, MPhil, PhD, and diploma programs, along with other relevant academic and curriculum matters. All faculty members attended the meeting, along with external members.

The board decided to introduce PhD in Rural Development, BS Software Engineering, Associate Degree in Mathematics, BS Environmental Science, and Diploma in Cyber Security programs through the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) mode.

On this occasion, Prof. Dr. Sher Muhammad emphasized that, following the directives of the Vice Chancellor, Professor Dr. Nasir Mahmood, special attention will be given to quality education.

He stated that all degree programs at the Open University will be aligned with contemporary requirements in accordance with the guidelines of the Higher Education Commission (HEC).

He also highlighted that students will benefit from the modern science laboratories available at Allama Iqbal Open University, enabling them to apply contemporary scientific advancements in practical fields for success.

It is noteworthy that all decisions made by the Faculty Board will be presented for approval in the upcoming meetings of the Academic Council and the Executive Council.

include insufficient facilities, shortage of specialists, and the high cost of treatment, preventing many from accessing timely and effective treatment, Dr. Afghani said and added that despite obstacles, awareness campaigns and screening initiatives were helping detect cases in time. He called for more government and private sector support to improve outcomes for affected children.

## Pakistan-China friendship based on mutual respect: Syedaal

ISLAMABAD (APP): Deputy Chairman Senate Syedaal Khan has said that the friendship between Pakistan and China is built on mutual respect, trust, and a shared goal of development.

Speaking as the chief guest at a photo exhibition and Iftar dinner at the Silk Road Cultural Center, he said this strong bond is a source of stability and prosperity for both countries.

He said that Pakistan and China have always supported each other in difficult times. He also stressed the need to further strengthen these ties in every possible way. The event was held as part of Pakistan Day celebrations and was attended by the Chinese Ambassador, offi-

cial from both countries, diplomats, and other prominent personalities.

Syedaal Khan said that increasing cultural and trade exchanges between the two countries are bringing their people closer. He mentioned that visits by Chinese artists and craftsmen would further deepen this friendship.

Talking about the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), he said the longstanding friendship between Pakistan and China made this major project possible.

He added that CPEC is not only connecting the people of both countries but also creating new opportunities for economic growth and regional development. Roads, bridges,

tunnels, and modern infrastructure are being built under CPEC, which will increase trade and investment between the two nations.

He also highlighted key projects under CPEC, including Gwadar Port and the two phases of CPEC. He described them as important steps towards Pakistan's progress and said their completion will benefit the entire region.

Syedaal Khan reaffirmed that the Pakistan-China friendship will continue and both nations will work together for more cooperation in trade and the economy. He also prayed for Pakistan's development and the lasting success of this strong partnership.

## PTA intensifies crackdown on illegal SIM issuance

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA), in collaboration with the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) Cyber Crime Circle, Lahore, conducted a successful raid on a franchise of cellular company in Mianwali.

The franchise was found to be involved in the illegal issuance of SIMs.

According to a news release, 496 digital fingerprint impressions (single impressions), Biometric Verification System (BVS) devices, two scanners, and a laptop were seized during the operation. The FIA team confiscated these items as evidence, and the franchise owner was arrested with an FIR registered for further legal action.

The FIA Cyber Crime

Circle has launched an investigation to identify additional offenders.

The raids are part of PTA's ongoing efforts to prevent the circumvention of the Multi-Finger Biometric Verification System (MBVS). This resolute and unwavering commitment underscores the Authority's dedication to eradicating the illegal issuance of SIMs.



ISLAMABAD: A large number of people waiting road side for receiving meal from donors vendor to break thier fast during holy month of Ramadan. —INP Photo

## CDA cracks down on illegal marquees and commercial structures in Islamabad

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Capital Development Authority (CDA) launched a major operation on Monday, sealing multiple illegal marquees and commercial structures in different areas of the federal capital.

The action was taken under the directives of the CDA chairman as part of a broader campaign to rid Islamabad of encroachments and unauthorized constructions. Teams from the Directorate General of Building & Housing Control, along with the Enforcement Directorate, carried out the operation in Zone-IV and Zone-V, targeting structures that violated building regulations.

The enforcement drive was conducted under the Building Control Regulations 2020 (amended 2023) to ensure compliance with the city's

development laws. Blessings Marquee (Thanda Pani, Lehtar Road) – Sealed (found operational) Liansa Marquee (Islamabad Expressway) – Construction work halted (renovation underway) Punjab Cash and Carry (Naval Anchorage Access Road) – Sealed (under construction) Wasna Palace – Sealed (both under construction and occupied) White House Marquee (River Gardens) – Sealed (found operational)

The CDA had earlier issued 15-day notices followed by 7-day show-cause notices to the owners of these structures, directing them to regularize their buildings or clear pending dues. However, due to non-compliance, the authority proceeded with the sealing and demolition actions.

A CDA spokesperson reiterated that

the authority is committed to maintaining planned urban development in Islamabad.

Illegal constructions disrupt the city's master plan and create civic issues. We will continue taking strict action against violators," the spokesperson said. The CDA has urged property owners to adhere to building bylaws and obtain necessary approvals to avoid further legal action. The anti-encroachment drive is expected to continue in other parts of the city in the coming days.

**CDA, Chinese delegation discuss cable car project to boost Islamabad tourism:** The Capital Development Authority (CDA) and a Chinese consultancy firm held high-level talks on Monday to advance tourism and recreational projects in the federal capital,

with a key focus on a proposed cable car and chairlift system connecting Daman-e-Koh to Saidpur Village.

The meeting, chaired by CDA Chairman Muhammad Ali Randhawa, included senior officials from the authority's environment, planning, and finance wings, alongside the Chinese delegation.

Discussions centered on the feasibility and economic benefits of the cable car project, which is expected to become a major tourist attraction. Chairman Randhawa emphasized that the project would not only enhance Islamabad's tourism appeal but also stimulate the local economy. "The revenue generated from this initiative will be reinvested in the city's development," he said. He directed officials to expedite the feasibility study, con-

duct a safety comparison between cable cars and chairlifts, and prepare a phased implementation plan, including the necessary PC-1 document.

The Chinese delegation praised CDA's efforts to upgrade tourism infrastructure and pledged technical support, drawing from China's extensive experience in similar projects.

Randhawa noted that Islamabad's tourism potential remains untapped and expressed optimism about further collaboration with China. Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening cooperation for the city's progress. If approved, the cable car system could significantly transform Islamabad's tourism landscape, offering visitors a scenic and convenient travel option between two of the capital's key destinations.



Central bank to auction \$15m

KABUL (Pajhwok): The central bank is all poised to auction 15 million US dollars today (Tuesday) to keep the afghani stable. In a post on X, DAB invited eligible lenders and money-exchange services to take part in the auction. The winners will have to settle their accounts by the end of the day, according to DAB, which said partial payments were unacceptable. Partial transactions are not permissible and the winner is required to deposit the amount in cash.

Medical faculty approved

KABUL (Pajhwok): The leadership of IEA has approved the addition of a medical faculty to Ghazni University on Monday. Hafiz Ziaullah Hashimi, spokesman for the Ministry of Higher Education, wrote on his X handle that the approval was granted in accordance with an order from IEA leadership. He emphasized that this significant step would provide higher education opportunities in medicine not only for the youth of Ghazni province but also for students from across the country.

Muttaqi, Qatari diplomat talk US team’s Kabul visit



KABUL (Pajhwok): Acting Foreign Minister Maulvi Amir Khan Muttaqi and Qatari Charge d’Affaires have discussed bilateral ties and recent developments involving the US.

Muttaqi met Murtid Al-Qashouti, the Qatari charge d’affaires, in Kabul on a statement from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said.

During the meeting, the

two sides discussed bilateral ties, recent developments in interaction with United States and other topics.

Muttaqi underlined the significance of recent developments with the US and extended gratitude to the government of Qatar for its assistance and collaboration.

The foreign minister portrayed Afghanistan’s relationship with Qatar as

evolving and expressed optimism about greater cooperation between the two nations.

Al-Qashouti commended the progress in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan’s foreign relations and reaffirmed his country’s commitment to cooperating with Afghanistan.

Last week, following a US delegation’s visit to

Kabul, MoFA announced the release of American citizen George Glezmann by the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) in a “humanitarian act”.

The ministry also expressed gratitude to the United Arab Emirates and Qatar for their mediation for Glezmann’s release and “resolving the issue between the IEA and the US”.

PVPV enforcers patrol Farah

FARAH (Amu TV): Taliban morality police in the western province of Farah are reportedly conducting nighttime patrols, detaining residents found on city streets and forcing them to perform prayers, regardless of whether they have already done so, according to local sources.

The enforcers, part of the Taliban’s Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (PVPV), reportedly operate after dark, escorting individuals to local precincts and compelling them to pray under pressure.

“They don’t care if you’ve already prayed or not,” one resident told Amu. “You have to pray again, and there’s no room to object.”

Sources also said PVPV enforcers have instructed members of the Shia community not to walk the streets or alleys at night, raising concerns about sectarian discrimination.

Residents noted that the PVPV office in Farah holds nightly tarawih prayers — special evening prayers during Ramadan — from 8 p.m. until 1 a.m., and that patrols are reportedly conducted during these hours.

Several young people in Farah said they now avoid going out after dark or move through the city in fear, describing a growing atmosphere of intimidation.

“We feel like we’re sneaking around our own neighborhoods,” said one young man. “It’s frightening to be stopped just for walking outside.”

The Taliban reestablished the PVPV after returning to power in 2021, enforcing strict religious codes on behavior, dress, and public conduct. Rights groups have condemned the ministry’s tactics, calling them coercive and in violation of basic freedoms.

Noor-ul-Haq urges ethnic, sectarian unity



KABUL (TOLONews): Noor-Ul-Haq Anwar, the president of the Administrative Office, during a ceremony held in Kabul to mark the “Nights of Qadr,” emphasized unity and solidarity among the ethnic and sectarian groups residing in Afghanistan.

Noorulhaq Anwar stated that based on the decree of the leader of the Islamic Emirate, no one has the right to seek revenge, and all citizens, without discrimination, live under the current government which follows an independent policy.

“The Islamic Emirate looks to the future, not the past. Accordingly, a general amnesty has been declared, and even those who fought against the Islamic Emirate over the past two decades are included in it. No one has the right to seek revenge,” he said.

During the same event, Abdullah Sarhadi, the governor of Bamyan, also highlighted ethnic, linguistic, and religious differences as key reasons

behind the past suffering of the Afghan people, saying that it is the government’s responsibility to prevent such divisions from recurring.

“Ethnic, linguistic, and religious divisions should not be repeated. We must all learn from the past,” stated Sarhadi.

Meanwhile, Madar Ali Karimi Bamyani, deputy minister of urban development and housing and the organizer of the event, stressed that the Hazara people and the Shia community in Afghanistan have abandoned the path of violence and support the current system.

“We, the Hazara community of Afghanistan, have closed the chapter of violence and hatred. Just as we had brotherhood with other ethnic groups in the past, this brotherhood continues now as well just the same, my fellow ethnic brothers,” he said.

At the end of the event, speakers condemned the continued Israeli attacks on the Gaza Strip and called for the prosecution of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in international courts.

US removes two Haqqani network members from wanted list

KABUL (Khaama Press): The Taliban has claimed that, in addition to Sirajuddin Haqqani, the group’s interior minister, two other members of the Haqqani network, Abdul Aziz Haqqani and Yahya Haqqani, have been removed from the US list of most-wanted individuals.

According to Abdul Mateen Qani, spokesperson for the Taliban’s Ministry of Interior, these individuals are brothers and a nephew of Sirajuddin Haqqani. This announcement was reported by the Associated Press on March 23.

Sirajuddin Haqqani, the

leader of the Haqqani network, remains on the FBI’s most-wanted poster, with his name still on the US list. US officials have yet to comment on this development.

Taliban officials have linked the recent freedom of an American citizen and the removal of reward offers for Sirajuddin Haqqani’s capture to the deepening relations between the group and Washington.

The Haqqani network, one of the deadliest branches of the Taliban, became notorious for roadside bombings, suicide attacks, and other violent operations, including assaults on

embassies and the Afghanistan presidency.

The Haqqani network has also been accused of criminal activities such as extortion and kidnapping, which has added to its violent reputation.

The group’s strategic actions have significantly shaped the security situation in Afghanistan.

While the Taliban’s alleged improvement in ties with the US remains unclear, the shift in the Haqqani network’s status on the US wanted list has sparked concerns about future diplomatic developments and security implications.

The US State Department classified the Haqqani network as a “foreign terrorist organization” in September 2012. It offered rewards ranging from \$5 to \$10 million for information leading to the capture of key leaders of the network, including Sirajuddin Haqqani, Abdul Aziz Haqqani, Khalilur Rahman Haqqani, Yahya Haqqani, and Abdul Rauf Zakir.

However, the names of these individuals have now been removed from the “Rewards for Justice” section of the US State Department’s website.

Afghanistan’s trade grew in solar year 1403

KABUL (TOLONews): The Ministry of Industry and Commerce said that in the solar year 1403 (solar year), Afghanistan exported goods worth more than \$1.785 billion to various countries around the world.

According to statistics from the ministry, during the same year, Afghanistan’s imports reached \$11.164 billion.

Figs, cotton, raisins, carpets, lead ingots, and precious and semi-precious stones were among the main export items of Afghanistan over the past year.

“Afghanistan’s total exports in the year 1403 reached \$1.785 billion, and imports reached \$11.164 billion. Afghanistan’s major export destinations were Pakistan, India, the United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan, Iran, Kazakhstan, China, Turkey, Iraq, and Tajikistan,” stated Akhundzada Abdul Salam Jawad, the spokesperson for Ministry of Industry and Commerce.

Meanwhile, the Chamber of Agriculture and Livestock, referring to trade challenges with Pakistan, emphasized the need for more.

“We must take advantage of these opportunities. Other countries benefit from such challenges. We can have good markets in the UAE and create alternative routes so that the problems currently hindering traders are resolved by next year,” said Mirwais Haji Zada, deputy of the Chamber of Agriculture and Livestock.

“Resolving transit and transportation issues, establishing proper transport infrastructure, removing banking restrictions, and facilitating Afghanistan’s access to international markets and financial systems are among the measures that can help the country’s trade growth,” said Mir Shakir Yaqoobi, an economic affairs expert.

According to data from the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, Afghanistan’s major imports in 1403 (solar year) included diesel fuel, wheat flour, vehicle parts, liquefied gas, cotton textiles, spices, oil, and rice.

Projects funded through domestic revenue: MoE



KABUL (TOLONews): The Ministry of Economy (MoE) stated that the policies of the Islamic Emirate to reduce unemployment, promoting economic growth, and implement major regional projects, have been effective.

Abdul Latif Nazari, the Deputy Minister for Technical Affairs at the ministry, said during a program titled “The Economic Impacts of the TAPI Project on Afghanistan” that all current projects are being financed through domestic revenues, and the country is no longer dependent on foreign aid.

This academic seminar was held in collaboration with a private university in Kabul. “The TAPI project is not just an economic initiative; it could also mark an end to geopolitical tensions in the region, as it practically connects South and Central Asia and elevates Afghanistan’s position as the connecting hub between the two regions,”

stated Nazari.

He emphasized that despite international sanctions and restrictions, Afghanistan’s economy has grown.

Nazari added: “Our budget is no longer reliant on foreign aid as it was in the past. We have utilized internal capacities, strengthened transparency, eradicated corruption, and implemented strict oversight on port tariffs. Contrary to some narratives, not only has there been no economic collapse,

but we have also achieved monetary stability and growth.”

“Projects like TAPI and CASA-1000 lead to development, social welfare, and ultimately sustainable growth in Afghanistan,” stated Barat Ali Naqawi, a university professor.

This comes as the Ministry of Mines and Petroleum previously announced that construction of the TAPI project has progressed over 10 kilometers inside Afghanistan.

Removal of slogans from walls part of renovation process

KABUL (TOLONews): The Ministry of Public Health has stated that the removal of slogans from the ministry’s walls is part of a renovation process that began in the month of Hoot (February 19–March 20).

The slogans were on walls nearby the gate leading to a compound formerly serving as US embassy.

Sharafat Zaman Amarkhil, spokesperson for the ministry, said that after the completion of renovation work, the slogans will be rewritten in coordination with the Ministry of Information and Culture.

These slogans, written on the walls of the Ministry of Public Health, referred to the Islamic Emirate’s victory over NATO, especially the United States.

The removal of the Islamic Emirate’s slogans from the ministry’s walls coinciding with the visit of an American delegation to Kabul has attracted media attention. The spokesperson said: “The American delegation arrived in Kabul the day before, but this work started in early Hoot



and has no connection to their visit. Our goal was to renovate the ministry’s interior and external walls, which had lost their color due to winter rains.”

Images recorded by TOLONews in the solar month of Qaws (November 21–December 20) of the reopening of the connecting road between the Public Health intersection and

Ariana intersection show that the wall of the US Embassy, which had the Kalima Tawheed written on it, was removed for road reopening. That entrance has now been redesigned and reopened.

“It has been about four months since the gate was connected. It was a good move that it reopened, and painting has been ongoing

for a month,” said Ehsan, a Kabul resident. Slogan writing and renaming of roads and intersections in crowded parts of the capital and provinces have been common practices during different governments.

During the Republic era, slogans on the walls of the Ministry of Public Health promoted vaccination and the ministry’s activities.

Laghman’s Alingar committee to combat harmful traditions

MEHTARLAM (Pajhwok): Religious scholars and tribal elders in Alingar district of Laghman province have formed a 12-member authoritative committee to eliminate harmful traditions that deny women their rights.

Malik Mohammad Aman, tribal elder from the district and chairman of the committee, told Pajhwok Afghan News religious scholars and tribal elders from 63 councils in the district had unanimously decided to set up this committee to eliminate and fight against oppressive and

damaging customs.

He stressed: “From now on, no father has the right to demand any form of dowry, including bride price (Walwar), engagement and wedding expenses, bridal gifts, Eid feasts, funeral expenses, or any other payments from the groom’s family.”

He assured the committee’s work was progressing well. However, if anyone violates its decisions, they will be officially referred to the district authorities for legal action.

Similarly, Maulvi

Mohammad Qasim, a tribal elder and religious scholar from Katah Khel area of the district, said the committee was established to reform society.

He noted that in the past, families would demand exorbitant bride prices and additional payments under various names during weddings and engagements. However, the committee will now strictly prevent such practices.

Meanwhile, Information and Culture Director Maulvi Abdul Noor Rasooli also praised the efforts of

tribal elders and religious scholars of the district.

He urged: “All Afghans should follow the example set by the tribes of Alingar and fight against all harmful and unrecognised traditions.”

Last week, the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) leadership issued a decree aimed at eliminating harmful customs.

The decree specifically bans unnecessary expenses related to weddings, engagements, funerals, and celebrations for returning Hajj and Umrah pilgrims.

Girls’ education crucial for Afghanistan’s prosperity: EU

KABUL (Ariana News): The European Union (EU) has reiterated its concerns about schools and universities being closed to teenage girls and women and said girls’ education is crucial for Afghanistan’s long-term stability and prosperity.

The EU’s office in Afghanistan said in a post on its website that educated women, with their vital skills and knowledge, are the architects of a stronger, more stable and economically independent country, and the EU supports their right to education.

This comes after schools reopened after the winter break four days ago. However, schools for girls above grade 6 remained

closed – for the 4th year.

Other organizations also called this week for the lifting of the ban on girls’ education.

Marking the start of the 1404 academic year in Afghanistan, Amnesty International called on the Islamic Emirate to reopen schools to all girls – no matter their age.

According to a statement issued by the organization, Amnesty International appealed to the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) to stop “continuing discriminatory programs against Afghan women and girls.”

Amnesty International stated: “The academic year has begun in Afghanistan, but girls above the sixth

grade are deprived of education. This is unjustifiable and a violation of the fundamental human right to education.

“The Taliban (Islamic Emirate) must allow girls of all ages to go to school and stop using any excuse to advance the discriminatory program,” the statement read.

The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) announced recently that with the start of the new school year in Afghanistan, another 400,000 girls will be deprived of education, bringing the total number of girls who are not allowed to attend secondary and high schools to 2.2 million.

‘IEA has consolidated power across Afghanistan’



KABUL (Pajhwok): The IEA has consolidated its power across the country in the past three years, the Iranian foreign minister says.

In an interview with Khabar Online, Sayed Abbas Araghchi said, different corners of Afghanistan were under the control of different factions in the past, but the current situation was different. Sovereignty and security were in place, he acknowledged.

Araghchi clarified: “It is a reality that a power is ruling Afghanistan, unlike in the past when every corner of Afghanistan was under the control of a party. This is not the case now and the IEA has consolidated security.”

Iran’s right over Afghanistan’s water was a major and serious issue,

involving its national interests, and must be addressed, the foreign minister commented.

Araghchi pointed to his trip to Kabul and said: “It is a reality that there are some serious issues between Afghanistan and Iran which must be addressed and the

two countries must discuss them.”

Iranian Ambassador in Kabul Alireza Bigdeli had earlier told ISNA their proximity and shared interests necessitated regular communication between officials and people of the two countries.





**KARACHI:** Police personnel arresting an activist of Baloch Yakjehti committee during protest.

## PHC orders KP govt to submit report

**Humayun Khan**

PESHAWAR: A divisional bench of Peshawar High Court (PHC) comprising of Justice Fazal Subhan and Justice Farah Jamshed has issued a notice to the provincial government, seeking a detailed report on the cases registered against social activist Najeab Ullah, on Monday.

The counsel Bashir Khan Wazir advocate, requested the court to provide details of all cases registered against Najeab Ullah. He informed the court that the petitioner named Najeab Ullah, is resident of Orakzai and has been arrested in a 3MPO case. However, the court had ordered his release. Despite this, Najeab Ullah was later nominated in FIR registered in Khyber.

The lawyer argued that Najeab Ullah obtains bail in one case, and arrested in another. He stated that multiple FIRs have been registered against Najeab Ullah in different districts of the province. The lawyer cited the Asad Qaiser case, in which the court had ruled that arrest in one case does not imply arrest in all registered cases.

The court, comprising Justice Fazal Subhan and Justice Farah Jamshed, sought a detailed report from the provincial government after initial arguments. PHC has directed the provincial government to submit a detailed report on the cases registered against Najeab Ullah, providing information on the nature of the cases and the districts where they were registered.

## ATC convicts terrorists’ financier

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) Peshawar has sentenced culprit for 5 years imprisonment and imposed fine for providing financial support to a banned organization, on Monday.

According to prosecution, Khan Muhammad resident of Yakaghund, was arrested by the Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) police in Mardan on 18th August, 2023. He was linked to a banned organization and was arrested for providing financial support to terrorists.

The CTD police informed the court that Khan Muhammad was collecting funds for the banned organization and distributing hate literature against security forces. The police also alleged that Khan Muhammad was involved in providing aid and shelter to wanted terrorists.

During his arrest, 345,000 rupees and a motorcycle were recovered from him. The police further stated that Khan Muhammad used to send money to the banned organization through a hawala (informal money transfer) system. ATC after completing the trial, found Khan Muhammad guilty of providing financial support to a banned organization and sentenced him to 5 years in prison and a fine. If he fails to pay the fine, he will have to serve additional time in jail.

Meanwhile, ATC Peshawar Judge Muhammad Iqbal Khan, has granted a one-day physical remand of three suspects, Zeeshan, Shaukat, and Wazirzada, accused of firing in a crowded market in Zargar Abad.

## KP govt decides to roll out ‘E-Fine System’

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ali Amin Gandapur, has decided to roll out the recently piloted "E-Fine System" (Digital Muhasil) across all relevant departments as part of a major push towards e-governance and the digitization of government affairs in the province.

The Chief Minister's Secretariat has issued a directive to the Chief Secretary of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, instructing all concerned departments to take necessary steps for the implementation of the digital revenue system across the province.

The E-Fine System is a unified and integrated digital platform for the online collection of fines and fees

imposed by the provincial government. Initially launched on a pilot basis in districts Peshawar, Abbottabad, Dera Ismail Khan, and Swat, the system has yielded highly encouraging results, leading to a significant increase in revenue collection in these areas.

According to official data, out of a total of 4,219 challans issued in Peshawar, 4,201 have already been paid under the E-Fine System. Similarly, D.I. Khan has seen full payment on all 36 challans issued, while in Swat, 875 out of 891 challans have been settled, and in Abbottabad, 282 out of 289 challans have been paid. The system has thus generated over PKR 30 million in revenue to date.

The directive further states that the E-Fine

System has not only improved transparency and accountability in the revenue collection process but has also enhanced departmental performance. Most importantly, it provides convenience to the public, as citizens no longer have to visit government offices to pay fines and fees, saving them both time and resources.

Given these advantages, the government intends to expand this modern online system to all departments that impose any type of fines. The directive emphasizes the need to establish an integrated coordination mechanism among all relevant departments and to develop a timeline-based implementation plan to ensure the system is rolled out across the province as quickly as possible.

## Pakistan faces drought alert as rainfall drops up

ISLAMABAD (AFP): The Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD) has issued a drought alert following significantly below-average rainfall across the country, with some regions experiencing up to a 62% shortfall.

The lack of rain has a major financial impact on the agriculture sector as it contributes nearly a quarter of Pakistan's GDP and employs 37% of the national labour force.

From September 1, 2024, to March 21, 2025, Pakistan recorded 40% less rainfall than usual, according to an earlier PMD alert. Sindh saw the severest shortfall at 62%, followed by Balochistan at 52%. Rainfall in Punjab was 38% below normal, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa saw a 35% deficit, and Azad Jammu & Kashmir received 29% less rain than average.

"Mild drought" prevailed in most of Punjab,

all of Sindh and around half of Balochistan in January according to a PMD report published in January, with rapidly on-setting "flash droughts" predicted for the warmer months to come. However, the recent spell of rain has improved conditions in central and northern regions, but drought persists in Sindh, southern Balochistan, and eastern Punjab.

The PMD warned of a severe water shortage in the Tarbela and Mangla dams, while March temperatures in southern areas have been 2 to 3 degrees Celsius above normal. The situation is worsening in some southern regions, where dry spells have lasted over 200 consecutive days. The PMD cautioned that drought conditions could further deteriorate in affected areas.

Pakistan generally relies on water from the Indus river which bisects the

country from north to south, where it empties into the Arabian Sea. However, analysts say a fast-growing population, climate change and poor resource management with an over-reliance on a single water source are all spurring scarcity.

The drought comes less than three years since record monsoon rains caused devastating floods that left nearly a third of the country under water — including the major agricultural areas of Sindh and Punjab. The country also suffers from choking smog in the winter season, caused by poor quality vehicle fuel and farmers burning off crop remnants, with cold weather trapping pollution close to the ground. Rain typically offers temporary reprieve by dampening down airborne particles, but the dry weather has seen Punjab province blanketed by smog with hazardous health effects.

## Jailed Imamoglu elected Turkish opposition’s presidential candidate

ISTANBUL: Close to 15 million people voted for jailed Istanbul Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu in a presidential primary organised by Turkey's main opposition CHP, municipal officials said. In a sign of growing national support, the party announced late on Monday that an estimated 1.7 million members were joined by 13 million non-party members in supporting Imamoglu to become its official candidate for the next presidential election, which is due to take place in 2028.

Mass protests have broken out since Imamoglu, widely seen as the top challenger of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, was detained on Wednesday. On Sunday, he was formally jailed, exacerbating the unrest. Erdogan's critics insist that it was the looming primary that triggered the arrest. People turned out in such large numbers that voting was extended by three and a half hours.

Erdogan's government has denied that the arrest of Imamoglu was politically motivated, insisting that Turkey's courts are independent. Mehmet Celik from the Daily Sabah pro-government daily told Al Jazeera that the CHP and government critics must come up with answers to the "serious allegations" against Imamoglu.

However, the CHP sought to double down on the claims as it established that Imamoglu was its official candidate. "The number of votes for Ekrem Imamoglu

from our members and the solidarity ballot box is over 14 million 850 thousand," wrote chairman Ozgur Ozel on X. "Today's results have completely opened Erdogan's legitimacy to question and made an early election ballot box inevitable. Let's come out and challenge!" Imamoglu was ordered officially jailed by an Istanbul court early on Sunday, pending trial on corruption charges following last week's detention, which triggered mass protests across the country. A separate anti-terrorism charge was dismissed by the court.

Imamoglu was taken to Marmara Prison on Sunday near Istanbul's Silivri district. He has denied all the allegations and has called for more nationwide protests. In a statement from prison, Imamoglu said the "record level of participation" in the primary made him "very happy".

In a separate statement on X, Ozel also complained about efforts to "suppress" the voice of the opposition, as the government sought to order the closure of hundreds of social media accounts on the X platform via the BTK information agency. The Elon Musk-owned free-speech extolling company announced its objections to "multiple court orders from the Turkish Information and Communication Technologies Authority to block over 700 accounts of news organizations, journalists, political figures, stu-

dents, and others within Turkey".

However, it also suspended several accounts linked to the opposition. Politico reported that many of the accounts were associated with university activists organising protests. Turkey's Ministry of the Interior said the authorities had found hundreds of social media accounts suspected of inciting hatred. Late on Sunday night, protesters in Istanbul and Ankara were seen clashing with police. Turkey's Halk TV reported that several people have been detained. On Monday morning, several Turkish media outlets also reported that at least three journalists were detained.

Al Jazeera's Aksel Zaimovic, reporting from Istanbul, said the government has deployed one of the largest instances of police presence across the city and in nearby areas. "Authorities said that this massive security presence is needed to maintain public order," he said, noting that police responded with tear gas and water cannon at protesters who threw flares and bottles. Tansel Can Emzikli, a video journalist, told Al Jazeera that at least six police officers threw him on the ground and began kicking him. The government of Erdogan has condemned the protesters for stoking instability. Turkey's interior ministry has announced the "temporary" suspension from office of Imamoglu, citing his detention. — Al Jazeera

## South Korean court reinstates impeached PM



SEOUL: South Korea's Constitutional Court has reinstated impeached Prime Minister Han Duck-soo as acting president, the latest twist in the meandering political saga set off by the impeachment of President Yoon Suk-yeol.

The court's eight justices voted 7-1 to dismiss Han's impeachment on Monday, restoring him to the country's highest office while they separately consider the fate of Yoon, who was suspended from his duties after briefly imposing martial law on December 3. Five of the court's judges found that there were not sufficient grounds to impeach Han, 75, though the impeachment motion against him was valid.

Two justices ruled that the legislature's impeachment motion lacked legitimacy from the start as it had been only backed by 192 of 300 lawmakers, instead of a two-thirds majority. After being appointed acting president following Yoon's impeachment on December 14, Han was himself suspended from his duties less than two weeks later over his refusal to appoint three more justices to the Constitutional Court.

In a televised address after the ruling, Han expressed gratitude to the court for its "wise decision" and pledged to focus on navigating the geopolitical challenges facing his country. "I believe that all citizens are clearly speaking out against the highly polarised political sphere. I think there is no place for division now. Our country's priority is to move forward," Han said.

The decision comes as the Constitutional Court is yet to rule on whether to confirm Yoon's impeachment or restore his presidential powers. The court has been deliberating Yoon's fate since mid-December and a decision is widely anticipated to arrive within days. — Al Jazeera

## Govt denies reports of sugar price hike

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister Rana Tanveer Hussain on Monday denied reports of a sugar price hike, saying the claim that sugar is being sold at Rs 180 per kg is baseless. Speaking in Islamabad, Rana Tanveer said that sugar is available in the market at Rs 164 per kg, while at utility stores, the price is Rs 153 per kg.

He added that the government has taken action to regulate sugar prices. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has formed a committee led by Ishaq Dar to determine the official price of sugar. The federal minister also dismissed rumours of a price surge, stating that the government is working closely with provinces and will take strict action against hoarders.

According to media reports, it is important to mention that on March 19, Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar set the retail price of sugar at Rs 163 per kg, assuring that there is neither a shortage nor will there be one.

Ishaq Dar held a special meeting with the sugar mills association and other stakeholders on Wednesday to control sugar prices. During the meeting, he clarified that ex-mill prices would range between Rs154 and Rs159 per kg, while the retail price must not exceed Rs164 per kg. However, despite government directives, sugar prices in Karachi have surged again.

Meanwhile, following PM Shehbaz Sharif's orders, the FIA Anti-Corruption Circle has launched an investigation into the sugar mafia. The FIA has formally sought assistance from the PTIA and issued a written request for data.

Earlier, on March 14, reports indicated that sugar prices had further increased in the second week of Ramazan. According to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, sugar prices rose by Rs. 9.26 per kg in just one week. The average price is now Rs. 171.90 per kg, with some areas selling it for as high as Rs. 180 per kg.

## IHC restores Imran's jail meetings

Court summons Islamabad IG over disappearance of journalist's brothers

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad High Court (IHC) has restored the right of PTI founder to meet visitors twice a week, on Tuesdays and Thursdays, while hearing petitions related to jail meetings.

The larger bench, headed by Acting Chief Justice Sarfaraz Dogar and comprising Justice Arbab Muhammad Tahir and Justice Muhammad Azam, issued the ruling.

According to the court's decision, only individuals nominated by PTI founder's coordinator, Salman Akram Raja, will be allowed to meet him. Furthermore, the court has strictly prohibited any media interaction following these meetings.

During the hearing, PTI founder's lawyer, Zaheer Abbas, argued that despite submitting requests according to standard operating procedures (SOPs), jail authorities had not facilitated the meetings. He highlighted that even the scheduled meeting on March 20 was not arranged.

Justice Arbab Muhammad Tahir pointed out that in the intra-court appeal, SOPs had already been set, allowing meetings twice a week. The prison authorities, represented by lawyer Naveed Malik, stated that due to security concerns, they had facilitated two meetings on a single day instead of allowing separate meetings on different days.

Malik further explained that PTI founder's status in jail had changed after he and Bushra Bibi were convicted in January. He emphasized that jail rules grant the Adiala Jail Superintendent the authority to decide on meetings. The authorities also raised concerns that meetings were being misused for political statements outside jail premises.

In response, the court noted that meeting arrangements should not be used for political purposes and questioned why visitors needed to address the media after their meetings. Acting Chief Justice Sarfaraz Dogar suggested taking an undertaking from visitors that they would not engage in political discussions post-meeting. The court ruled that PTI founder's meetings with his children should be addressed by the trial court. However, it reaffirmed that only individuals nominated

by Salman Akram Raja would be permitted to visit him in jail.

Meanwhile, the Islamabad High Court summoned the Islamabad Inspector General of Police (IGP) during a hearing on a plea filed by journalist Ahmad Noorani's mother for the recovery of his two brothers. The US-based Noorani, who works for a news outlet called FactFocus, recently published an investigative report.

Noorani's two brothers, Muhammad Saifur Rehman Haider and Muhammad Ali, went missing from their residence in the early hours of Wednesday. Noorani's mother Amina Bashir had filed a plea with the IHC for the recovery of his two brothers.

During Monday's hearing, Justice Raja Inam Ameen Minhas expressed his dissatisfaction with the SHO's report and summoned the Islamabad IGP on March 26. Advocate Imaan Hazir Mazari, representing the petitioner, appeared before the court along with Noorani's mother and sister.

The mother broke out in tears during the proceedings. She said, "Will the high court be responsible if something happens to my children?" The SHO submitted his report to the court. He said, "We have been using all available sources," adding that the police had carried out geofencing, looked into call detail records and checked the cameras near the house.

Justice Minhas told the police officer that he should have presented his findings but he did not. The lawyer for the Islamabad police said that there was no application to register a case. "We are not discussing that right now," the judge retorted, adding that there was an alternative forum for that purpose. Mazari asked that if the police had not filed a report for five days, then how were they conducting the investigation.

Judge Minhas responded, "I am calling the IGP. He will conduct an investigation." Mazari claimed that it had been six days since the incident but the police had not done anything yet. "I can only order as per my authority," the judge remarked. Mazari said that the intelligence agencies were to be blamed in this case. She alleged that Noorani's brothers were kidnapped because of his recent reporting.

## US fires on Sanaa as action against Houthis continues

SANAA: The United States launched air raids across Yemen overnight, killing at least one person and injuring 13 in the capital, Sanaa, media reports say.

The strike on Monday was the latest in Washington's renewed military offensive against the Houthis, which started earlier this month when the Iran-aligned group said they planned to resume attacks on Red Sea shipping due to Israel's blockade of the Gaza Strip. "A citizen was killed and 13 others were injured, including three children, in the final toll of the US aggression on a residential building in [Sanaa's] Aser area," said the Houthi-run Health Ministry spokesperson, Anees Alasabhi, in a statement.

Footage released by the Houthis showed the rubble of a collapsed building and pools of blood staining the ground. The Houthis also reported air raids on sites around the city of Saada, the Red Sea port city of Hodeidah, and Marib province, home to oil and gas fields under the control of allies to Yemen's exiled central government.

Several social media accounts on Monday made unverified claims that the Houthis had attacked US naval vessels. The US launched its campaign of aerial bombardment against the Yemeni group on March 15, citing its targeting last year of vessels in key shipping routes in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, and pledging their support for Hamas during the war with Israel.

The US launched its campaign of aerial bombardment against the Yemeni group on March 15, citing its targeting last

year of vessels in key shipping routes in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, and pledging their support for Hamas during the war with Israel. The Houthis paused their attacks as a ceasefire was enacted in the enclave in January. However, as the truce fell apart, the Yemeni group threatened to resume its campaign.

National Security Advisor Mike Waltz said on Sunday that the Houthi threat is forcing 75 percent of US-flagged shipping to take the far-longer route around the southern coast of Africa rather than going through the Suez Canal. The Houthis have also claimed attacks targeting Israel in recent days. The Israeli military claimed on Sunday to have successfully intercepted a ballistic missile fired by the group. — Al Jazeera



**LANDI KOTAL:** Detained Afghan children illegally entered into Pakistan sitting on ground at police station in presence of FIRga members. — F.P. photo

## US, Russia in Black Sea ceasefire talks after strikes pound Ukraine

RIYADH (Reuters): US and Russian officials held talks in Saudi Arabia on Monday aimed at sealing a Black Sea maritime ceasefire deal before a wider ceasefire agreement in Ukraine as Moscow and Kyiv used drones to pound each other.

The talks, which followed US negotiations with Ukraine in Saudi Arabia on Sunday, came after Russia launched its third consecutive overnight air attack on Kyiv, wounding one person and damaging houses in the region around the Ukrainian capital. Russia, for its part, said it had downed 227 Ukrainian drones in the last 24 hours, as firefighters in its southern Krasnodar region battled for a fifth day to put out a blaze at an oil depot struck in a Ukrainian drone attack last week.

US President Donald Trump has intensified his drive to end the three-year-old conflict after he last week spoke to both

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Russian President Vladimir Putin. The White House says the aim of the Saudi talks is to reach a maritime ceasefire in the Black Sea, allowing the free flow of shipping, though the area has not been the location of intense military operations in recent months and it was not clear if the talks would swiftly result in a new agreement or if they were designed to give the sides cover to discuss a wider agenda.

"This is primarily about the safety of navigation," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said, noting that a 2022 agreement on Black Sea shipping had failed to deliver what it had promised to Moscow. The focus on the Black Sea is a much narrower one than a broad 30-day ceasefire agreement that the US proposed in Saudi Arabia earlier this month, an indication that Russia may still be some way from

agreeing to any significant pause in fighting.

Ukraine has inflicted significant damage on Russia's Black Sea Fleet since 2022, forcing Moscow to move some vessels out of its base in Crimea. Despite Russian attacks on its ports, Ukraine has been able to export grain, iron ore and other commodities via the Black Sea from its three main seaports in its Odesa region at levels similar to those before the war.

It has not been able to use the port of Mykolaiv, another one-time major export hub, however, and Zelenskyy called on EU leaders earlier this month to support the idea of a truce at sea and in the air. A source briefed on the planning for the Saudi talks said the US side was being led by Andrew Peek, a senior director at the White House National Security Council, and Michael Anton, a senior State Department official.