

NA session adjourned  
F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The National Assembly proceedings were suspended for 15 minutes on Thursday after a lack of quorum was pointed out by opposition member Iqbal Afridi of the Sunni Ittehad Council. Deputy Speaker Syed Ghulam Mustafa Shah, who was chairing the session, initiated the question hour soon after the sitting commenced.



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Repatriation of foreign nationals

# No extension in deadline: Talal

Saqib Mushtaq

ISLAMABAD: Minister of State for Interior, Senator Talal Chaudhry, on Thursday made it clear that there will be no extension in the deadline for the repatriation of undocumented foreign nationals. "Afghans are our brothers, but certain decisions had to be made based on ground realities," he said during a press conference here in Islamabad. The Minister emphasized that all foreign nationals are respected, but the decision to repatriate them was taken in light of the country's security situation.

He explained that the policy for foreign nationals' repatriation was formulated on October 30, 2023. In the first phase, undocumented foreigners were sent back. In the second phase, which began on February 13, 2025, the federal cabinet decided to repatriate holders of Afghan Citizen Cards, giving them a deadline of March 31, 2025. The third phase is now underway, targeting Afghan Card holders.

He confirmed that the repatriation process of undocumented foreigners is ongoing and reiterated that there will be no extension in the timeline. So far, a total of 857,157 undocumented foreigners and Afghan Citizen Card holders have been sent back to their home countries, he added. Talal Chaudhry shared that 815,247 Afghan Citizen Card holders are currently registered in Pakistan. Additionally, the Proof of Registration (PoR) program, which ran from 2006 to 2023, registered 1,569,522 Afghan nationals in Pakistan.

He reiterated, "Afghans are our brothers and we hold great respect for them, but decisions have to be made in light of the current situation. Many incidents of terrorism in Pakistan have been linked to Afghan nationals." He also pointed out that a significant amount of narcotics entering Pakistan originates from Afghanistan, and that the proceeds are often tied to terrorist activities.

The Minister dismissed the misinformation being spread regarding the repatriation policy, stating that the Ministry of Interior has taken all provincial governments on board. He said Pakistan has launched the "One Document Regime," under which foreign nationals, including Afghans, can enter, live, and conduct business in Pakistan legally through proper visa channels.

"There is no longer any space for illegal residency in Pakistan," he said. Transit points were established across provinces to accommodate Afghan citizens during the repatriation process, providing shelter and food facilities. The Minister stressed that the government is fully committed to implementing the One Document Regime for all nationalities. "Just as western borders are regulated, the eastern borders will be similarly managed. This 2,600 km long frontier is a challenge, especially due to security threats," he added.

He concluded by saying that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is in contact with the Afghan government to ensure a proper mechanism for the repatriation process, including registration by both Pakistani and Afghan authorities.

## Time to go beyond cliches for Palestine cause: Mufti Taqi

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Islamic scholar Mufti Taqi Usmani has underscored the need for going beyond conferences and slogans, and offer concrete help to the hapless people of Palestine.

Speaking at a conference on Palestine in Islamabad, the scholar hit out at Israel for unleashing a wave of terror on unarmed people in the Gaza Strip. He called for boycott of Israel's products. In the same breath, he emphasised that the protests (against Israel) should be peaceful.

"Islam is a religion of peace and not of vandalising property or hurting someone in the heat of emotions. Pelting someone with stones is forbidden in Shariah," he categorically said in apparent reference to the recent wave of violent protests against some food chain outlets in the country. He said it's obligatory for leaders of all Muslim countries to declare jihad (holy war) against Israel. He said it's time to move beyond resolutions and conferences and go for concrete steps.

Pakistan, he said, did not recognise Israel and the founder of Pakistan had declared it an 'illegal state'. There was no change in country's policy, he added. He made it clear that Pakistan was not bound by any agreement to support Israel. "Israel respects no law or agreement. It continues to bombard innocent people despite ceasefire agreement," Usmani said. "Therefore pelting stones at someone or harming someone's life and property is forbidden in Shariah. Therefore, do protest and boycott but peacefully in which there should be no element of unrest."

He said the country's rulers should also be convinced in a peaceful manner to carry out their responsibilities and obligations. "Those who are ready to fight their Muslim governments and have taken up weapons in this name [of boycott] is not at all an acceptable way, we have clearly announced this. Whatever you have to do should be done peacefully otherwise ... civil war started in Muslim countries."

## Thousands of Sikh pilgrims arrive

F.P. Report

LAHORE: The arrival of Sikh pilgrims from neighboring India has begun through the Wagah border as part of the annual Vaisakhi Mela celebrations, being organised under the administration of the Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB).

This year marks an exceptional turnout, with a large number of pilgrims entering Pakistan to participate in the religious festivities and commemorate the 326th birth anniversary of the Khalsa. The Sikh pilgrims were warmly welcomed by Punjab Minister for Minority Affairs Ramesh Singh Arora, Additional Secretary Shrines Saifullah Khokhar and members of the Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, including Sardar Bishan Singh, Satwant Kaur, Dr. Mampal Singh, Baba Harmit Singh and Sardar Satwant Singh.



MINSK: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif lays floral wreath at Victory Monument during his two day official visit to Belarus.

# PM arrives in Minsk for two-day visit to Belarus

## Shehbaz directs level playing field for industries, their input in next budget

F.P. Report

MINSK, Belarus (APP): Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif arrived here on Thursday for a two-day official visit to the Republic of Belarus from April 10 to 11, 2025, at the invitation of President Aleksandr Lukashenko.

Belarus Prime Minister Alexander Turchin and officials of Pakistan embassy in Belarus warmly welcomed the prime minister. PM Shehbaz Sharif was accompanied by a high-level delegation comprising Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Muhammad Ishaq Dar, Information and Broadcasting Minister Attaullah Tarar and Special Assistant to PM Tariq Fatemi.

During his visit, the prime minister will hold talks with President Lukashenko to review progress in areas of mutual interest. The two sides are also expected to sign several agreements to further strengthen cooperation. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's visit underscores a strong and ongoing partnership between Pakistan and Belarus.

The PM also wrote on his official Twitter wall, "Arrived in Minsk to brace winter winds against the backdrop of a very warm welcome by H.E. Alexander Turchin, Prime Minister of Belarus at the airport, where I was honored with an age old tradition and a gesture of Belarusian hospitality - the korovai, a decorated loaf accompanied by salt." Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif expressed his optimism for the official engagements particularly his interaction with friend President Aleksandr Lukashenko, as they sought jointly to advance mutually beneficial cooperation between Pakistan and Belarus.

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday directed the authorities concerned to provide a level playing field for local industries and incorporate the proposals of industrial and trade bodies into the upcoming federal budget. The prime minister, chairing a review meeting on the Export Facilitation Scheme (EFS) here, said that increasing the country's exports to boost national revenue was among the government's priorities. During the meeting, interim recommendations of the committee formed to make the scheme more effective and benefitting the export sector were presented.

The prime minister instructed for further consultation with the relevant experts on the committee's recommendations to improve the scheme for facilitating the import of raw materials and machinery for export-oriented industries. He directed the committee to finalize its interim recommendations after further consultations and present the report soon. During the briefing, it was told that the scheme was launched to reduce production costs and enhance the competitiveness of national exports in global markets. The meeting was attended by federal ministers Ahsan Iqbal, Ahad Khan Cheema, Muhammad Aurangzeb, Ali Pervaiz Malik, Sardar Awaish Khan Leghari, Prime Minister's Advisor Syed Tauqir Shah, Coordinator Rana Ehsan Afzal, FBR Chairman Rashid Mehmood Langrial, and prominent figures from the export industry.

The Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif laid a wreath at the Victory Monument of Minsk to pay tribute to the people who died during World War II. As the prime minister, along with his delegation members, arrived at Victory Square, the smartly turned-out contingents of the Belarusian armed forces saluted him. The national anthems of Pakistan and Belarus were played. On the occasion, Belarusian Prime Minister Alexander Turchin was also present, who, earlier, warmly received the prime minister at the airport.

Prime Minister Shehbaz was accompanied by Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister

Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar, Information and Broadcasting Minister Attaullah Tarar and SAPM Syed Tariq Fatemi.

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif paid tribute to Pakistani player Noor Zaman for winning the Under-23 World Squash Championship. In a statement, the prime minister felicitated the entire nation on Noor Zaman's success. Prime Minister Shehbaz said Noor Zaman had made Pakistan's name known all over the world with his game and the entire nation was proud of him. "Inshallah, Pakistan will regain its lost position in the field of squash," the prime minister said.

# Nepra okays slashing power prices

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (NEPRA) has approved a reduction in electricity prices for a three-month period.

According to an official notification, power tariff will be reduced by Rs1.71 per unit for all consumers across the country, including K-Electric users. This decision follows a request by the federal government and is expected to provide a total relief of Rs58 billion to consumers in their electricity bills for April, May, and June.

Following a consensus with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif earlier this month announced a reduction in power tariffs for domestic and industrial consumers by Rs7.41 and Rs7.69 per unit, respectively. The decision has been

forwarded to the federal government for formal implementation. However, Nepra confirmed that lifeline consumers will not benefit from the reduction.

The federal government filed a request for the price reduction with Nepra, which conducted a hearing on the matter on April 4. "The Authority has no objection on the instant Motion, as it does not impact Nepra's determined tariff, since the GOP [Government of Pakistan] has decided to provide additional subsidy from the expected collection of PDL," read the Nepra's decision, published on its website.

"Accordingly, the request of the Ministry [of Energy] to provide [an] additional subsidy of Rs.1.71/kWh to all consumers of XWDISCOs and K-Electric (except lifeline consumers) for the period from April 2025 to June 2025 is hereby

approved," the power regulator said in the notification.

The Nepra quoted the energy minister saying [during the April 4 hearing] that the projected collection of PDL for 3.5 months was around Rs58.6 billion — to be utilised to provide tariff differential subsidies for consumers. "The federal cabinet has approved this proposal and allowed to file the motion before Nepra so that [the] benefit can be passed on to the consumers in the billing month of April 2025," the Nepra document read.

For domestic consumers, the power tariff previously stood at Rs48.70 per unit, which had already been reduced to Rs45.05. The new reduction of Rs7.41 per unit takes immediate effect. For industrial consumers, the June 2024 tariff of Rs58.50 per unit has been lowered to Rs48.19, with a further reduction of Rs7.69 per unit announced.



QUETTA: People offering funeral prayer of three police personnel, killed by unknown persons.

# EU pauses countermeasures following Trump's tariff reprieve

BRUSSELS (Reuters): The European Union will pause its first countermeasures against US tariffs after President Donald Trump temporarily lowered the hefty duties he had just imposed on dozens of countries, European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen said on Thursday.

The bloc was due to launch counter-tariffs on about 21 billion euros (\$23.25 billion) of US imports from next Tuesday in response to Trump's 25% tariffs on steel and aluminium. It is still assessing how to respond to US car tariffs and the broader 10% levies still in place. "We want to give negotiations a chance," von der Leyen said on X. "While finalising the adoption of the EU countermeasures that saw strong support from our Member States, we will put them on hold for 90 days."

Trump's sudden decision on Wednesday to pause most of his hefty

new duties brought relief to battered global markets and anxious global leaders, even as he ratcheted up a trade war with China. His turnaround, which came less than 24 hours after steep new tariffs kicked in, followed the most intense episode of financial market volatility since the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic.

US stock indexes shot higher on the news, and the relief continued into Asian and European trading on Thursday. Before Trump's U-turn, the upheaval had erased trillions of dollars from stock markets and led to an unsettling surge in US government bond yields that appeared to catch the US president's attention.

Trump kept the pressure on China, the world's No. 2 economy and second-biggest provider of US imports with an increase of tariffs on Chinese imports to 125% from the 104% level that kicked in on Wednesday. He also signed an

executive order aimed at reducing China's grip on the global shipping industry and at reviving US shipbuilding. China rejected what it called threats and blackmail from Washington. China will "follow through to the end" if the US insists on its own way, Commerce Ministry spokesperson He Yongqian told a regular press briefing. China's door was open to dialogue, but this must be based on mutual respect, the ministry said.

Beijing may again respond in kind after imposing 84% tariffs on US imports on Wednesday to match Trump's earlier tariff salvo. Trump, who claims the tariffs aim to fix US trade imbalances, said a resolution with China on trade is also possible. But officials have said they will prioritize talks with other countries as Vietnam, Japan, South Korea and others line up to try and strike a bargain. China's yuan hit its lowest against

the dollar on Thursday since the global financial crisis. In Europe, euro zone government bond yields jumped, spreads tightened, and markets scaled back their bets on European Central Bank rate cuts after Trump's latest announcement. European shares surged.

Trump's move was an important step towards stabilising the global economy, von der Leyen said, before announcing a pause in the EU's own counter-tariffs. But she warned they could be brought back in. "If negotiations are not satisfactory, our countermeasures will kick in. Preparatory work on further countermeasures continues," she said, before adding: "As I have said before, all options remain on the table."

Trump's reversal on tariffs is not absolute. A 10% blanket duty on almost all US imports will remain in effect, the White House said. The

announcement also does not appear to affect duties on autos, steel and aluminium that are already in place. The US tariff pause also does not apply to duties paid by Canada and Mexico, because their goods are still subject to 25% fentanyl-related tariffs if they do not comply with the US-Mexico-Canada trade agreement's rules of origin. The EU had been due to impose extra tariffs on US imports including maize, wheat, motorcycles, poultry, fruit and clothing. Those are now suspended. Elsewhere, India was among countries that said it wants to move quickly on a trade deal with the United States.

Meanwhile, oil prices retreated 2% on Thursday as fears of a deepening US-China trade war and a possible recession eclipsed earlier relief created by Trump's announcement of a pause. Some central bankers also remained cautious. European Central

Bank policymaker Francois Villeroy de Galhau, speaking of the pause in the tariff hike, told France Inter Radio it was "less bad news" than before, but uncertainty remained and that was a threat to trust and growth. And business leaders warned that not all was resolved.

The head of the French wine and spirits lobby group FEVS said Trump's decision to hit pause was "half good news." Nicolas Ozanam said the move will initially allow French wine and spirits companies to resume shipments with lower tariffs, and therefore at the same level as other suppliers. But the 90-day window created logistical constraints, and given that 10% custom duties remained in place, the sector still faced inflationary pressures. "This will still lead to a rise in prices and therefore a drop in consumption in the United States," he told Reuters.





# Sindh Apex committee meeting reviews progress on implementation on NAP

KARACHI (APP): The provincial Apex Committee meeting reviewed the progress on implementation on National Action Plan at the Chief Minister House on Thursday.

Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah presided over the 32nd meeting of the Apex Committee attended by Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon, Home Minister Ziaul Hassan Lanjar, Corps Commander Karachi Lt. General Mohammad Avais Dastagir, Chief Secretary Asif Hyder Shah, DG Rangers Maj General Muhammad Shamraiz, Home Secretary Iqbal Memon, IG Police Ghulam Nabi Memon and others.

The meeting announced the establishment of a Special Unit to address cases of social media misuse, setting up a Centre for Excellence on Countering Violent Extremism to focus on strategies to combat violent extremism and emphasised the need for coordination with Punjab and Balochistan to plan joint operations against dacoits in the katcha areas.

"Illegal foreign nationals living in the provinces are being repatriated as per policy of the federal government," CM Sindh said.

The chief minister expressed concern about the increasing number of road accidents in the city, as well as incidents of tankers and dumpers being set on fire. He instructed the police to take strict action against dumpers and trucks plying on the roads in violation of traffic rules and regulations. Additionally, he directed the police to apprehend those responsible for the arson of the tankers.

The meeting was informed that the Sindh government completed Phase-I of the Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan (IFRP) in 2023-



24, during which 85,916 illegal foreigners were repatriated. Transit points were established in Karachi, Hyderabad, and Jacobabad under the supervision of the respective Deputy Commissioners.

Following the completion of Phase I, the Ministry of the Interior has informed that the Federal government to initiate the repatriation of all ACC Holders (Phase II) in February 2025. The repatriation of ACC Holders under Phase II commenced on April 1, 2025, with the Sindh government allocating Rs 200 million for operations at transit points in Keamari and Jacobabad.

The meeting was told that 29,926 illegal foreigners were residing in the province, and their data mapping has been completed for repatriation. At present, 479 have been repatriated, while around 400 are awaiting deportation at a camp. The meeting was told that, under the PECA Law, a

Social Media Protection and Regulatory Authority (fed govt) has been created to ensure online safety and protect the rights of individuals on social media.

Following the Central APEX decision, the Home Department proposes the Sindh Centre for Excellence on Countering Violent Extremism Act, 2025, to combat violent extremism and terrorism. The CM directed the Home Secretary to present the draft law in the next cabinet meeting. The chief minister discussed the issue of dacoits in the Northern districts along the River Indus. He stated that his government is coordinating with the Punjab and Balochistan provinces to plan joint operations against dacoits in the Katcha areas, to prevent their escape into neighbouring provinces.

The Sindh Home Department has contacted the home departments of Punjab and Balochistan to inform them about decisions

made by the CM in Apex Committee meetings. Chief Minister Murad Shah emphasised the need for rigorous pursuit of Counter Terrorism cases, declaring zero tolerance for militants. The main components of the NAP include strengthening Counter Terrorism Departments (CTDs), combating terrorism in various media forms, choking off terrorist financing, regulating religious seminaries, and reforming the criminal justice system.

The meeting discussed the importance of properly following up on counter-terrorism cases in the courts. It was noted that in 2025, a total of 23 cases were registered. Out of these, seven cases were challenged and are currently under trial. Convictions have been secured in four of these cases, while the others are still in the trial process. In 2024, there were convictions in only two cases.

The meeting was informed that

the police had conducted 318 intelligence-based operations, registered 153 cases, arrested 84 and killed 12. The meeting was told that two cases of choking of terror financing and proscribed organisation were registered, of which one was challenged which is under trial. During the meeting, it was reported that Chinese workers involved in both CPEC and non-CPEC projects are receiving security. The security forces include personnel from the Special Protection Unit (SPU), the Army, Rangers, and the Frontier Corps.

The FBR representative told the meeting that during the 3rd quarters of 2024-25, they have seized goods worth Rs16214.54 million being smuggled through 222 seizures. The major seizures include 10,008 mobile sets, 5077 tures. Regarding the Hub Check Post, it was noted that the chief minister has allocated Rs. 214 million for its establishment. Currently, land identification and cost estimates are in progress. The checkpoint will be jointly operated by various agencies to combat smuggling and will be equipped with the latest technology and gadgets.

A Fusion Center has been established within the department, with technical support from the UNODC and INL. Efforts to enforce the Sindh Control of Narcotics Substance Act, 2024, include establishing checkpoints on major routes and the deployment of facial recognition technology and Rapid Response Forces at toll plazas. The meeting was told that 2574 weapons and 14,000 ammunition have been confiscated by registering 10487 FIRs. 301 booked criminals have been convicted while 7957 are under trial during 2024-25.

## Tessori inaugurates 'Air Asia' flight operation from Pakistan

KARACHI (APP): Sindh Governor Kamran Khan Tessori inaugurated the flight operations of Malaysian private airline "Air Asia" from Pakistan. The formal flight operation will start from next month.

A ceremony was held here at a local hotel on Thursday, where Malaysian Consul General in Karachi Herman Hardyanta Ahmad and the airline's CEO and other distinguished guests were in attendance.

Addressing the ceremony, Governor Sindh said SIFC is a project that has also attracted Malaysian investment.

Governor said bilateral relations between Pakistan and Malaysia would continue to flourish with passage of time. He expressed hope that with the start of Sir Asia operation, bilateral economic and cultural cooperation of both the countries will be strengthened.

He said the President, Prime Minister, and the Chief of the Army were working day and night to improve the economy of the country. Governor assured his full support to the Malaysian private airline operation.

Kamran Tessori said that the entire nation must stand together for the development of Pakistan.

Governor said that the arrival of the private airline will give Karachi a prominent place on the global aviation map and this development is in line with the vision of the Government of Pakistan. He said that the launch of an international private airline in Karachi is a manifestation of confidence of the foreign investors and opportunities being provided to them in Pakistan. The Malaysian Consul General Herman Hardyanta and the CEO of a private airline also addressed the ceremony.

Malaysian Consul General said the Airline will start its flights from May 30. He thanked the Governor Sindh for his support in the start of the operation of the Air Asia.

## KPPSC annual report presented to Governor

PESHAWAR (APP): Chairman of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Public Service Commission (KPPSC), Captain (Retired) Munir Azam, met with Governor Faisal Karim Kundi at the Governor's House on Thursday and presented the KPPSC Annual Report for the year 2024.

According to report, the Commission received recruitment requests for 1,187 vacant posts from various provincial departments. During 2024, KPPSC advertised a total of 1,691 vacancies, receiving applications from 39,225 candidates. After conducting tests and interviews, the Commission recommended 992 candidates for appointment to various departments. The report also highlighted that the KPPSC conducted 115 qualification tests during the year and recommended 85 Provincial Management Service (PMS) officers to the provincial government based on the results of the competitive examination.

Chairman Munir Azam informed the Governor that the Commission is working on an electronic shortlisting system as part of the online application process. He said that the implementation of this technology would enhance the efficiency and speed of the recruitment process.

Governor Faisal Karim Kundi appreciated the overall performance of the KP Public Service Commission, calling it a trustworthy constitutional institution. He emphasized the importance of selecting competent and deserving candidates purely on merit. "Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is full of capable and educated talent," he said, stressing the need for greater transparency in both competitive exams and general recruitment processes.

Meanwhile, Director Commercial Audit Sarfaraz Hussain Ansari called on Governor Faisal Karim Kundi, and presented the audit report for the year 2024-25 related to public sector enterprises in the province. The audit report includes financial assessments of several key institutions such as the Forest Development Corporation, Small Industries Development Board, KP EZMIC, and TEVTA Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Prepared by the Auditor General of Pakistan, the report focuses on ensuring financial transparency and accountability in these public sector organizations.

The Governor was informed that the audit reports of 12 different institutions contain nearly 700 audit paras, many of which are pending discussion due to delays in convening Public Accounts Committee (PAC) meetings.

On this occasion, Governor Faisal Karim Kundi emphasized the importance of fully implementing the recommendations provided in audit reports. He said that financial transparency and discipline are essential for achieving economic and institutional objectives, adding, "Without accountability in financial matters, the goals of good governance and institutional reform cannot be realized."

## Ombudsman emphasises swift relief for public grievances

LAHORE (APP): Federal Ombudsman Ejaz Ahmad Qureshi has said that providing immediate relief to the public is the core mission of the Ombudsman's office. He emphasised that restoring public trust in institutions is essential for good governance, and easy access to grievance redress mechanisms is key to resolving citizens' issues.

He expressed these views while inaugurating the Regional Office of the Federal Ombudsman in Sahiwal and addressing the media. The event was attended by Commissioner Sahiwal Division Shoaib Iqbal Syed, Regional Advisor Inayatullah Doula, Vice President of Sahiwal Press Club Mian Waseem Riaz and Deputy Director Yasir Malik. Qureshi said that complaints from the public would be addressed against all federal institutions, including Sui Gas, MEPCO, LESCO, Railways, FIA, Customs, NADRA, Passport Office and the Employees' Old-Age Benefits Institution (EOBI). He added that citizens do not need to hire a lawyer or pay any fees to seek redress. The federal ombudsman further informed that 25 regional offices have been established across the country to facilitate people in remote areas.

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## WB delegation visits Tarbela 5th Extension Hydropower Project

LAHORE (APP): A three-member delegation of World Bank, headed by its Regional Director for Infrastructure in South Asia Pankaj Gupta, visited under-construction 1530 MW-Tarbela 5th Extension Hydropower Project.

WAPDA Chairman Engr. Lt. Gen. (Retd) Sajjad Ghani accompanied the delegation, according to WAPDA spokesman here Thursday. The delegation had a detailed visit of several key sites and witnessed ongoing construction activities. These sites included raised intake, tunnel, penstock and power house.

Earlier, the Chairman welcoming the delegation, thanked World Bank for their support in harnessing the vital resources of water and hydropower in Pakistan. He expressed the hope that over a six-decade long partnership between World Bank and WAPDA would further strengthen in the days to come.

During the on-site briefing, the GM/PD Tarbela 5th Extension Hydropower Project apprised the delegation that construction work on all seven key work fronts are progressing at a good pace.

Highlighting the milestones achieved so far on the project, the delegation was briefed that excavations at raised intake shaft, penstock, power house and switch yard have been completed whereas concrete works at raised intake, power house, switch yard, tailrace culvert and canal are in progress. Draft tubes of all three generating units have been installed. Likewise, installation of penstock pipes and electro-mechanical works at the switch yard are also in progress. Electricity generation from the Project is likely to commence in 2026.

Tarbela 5th Extension Hydropower Project is a component of green, clean and least-cost energy generation plan of WAPDA.

World Bank is providing financial assistance amounting to USD 390 million for the Project. Under the 5th Extension, three generating units - 510 MW each - are being installed at Tunnel No. 5 of Tarbela Dam Project and to provide 1.347 billion units hydel electricity to the National Grid on the average every year. Installed capacity at Tarbela Dam will surge to 6418 MW after completion of Tarbela 5th Extension Project.

## Children visited Traffic headquarters briefed F. P Report

PESHAWAR: The Orphan children from Aghosh Education Unit visited the Peshawar Traffic Police Headquarters in Gulbahar.

The children were welcomed by Chief Traffic Officer Haroon Rashid Khan, who briefed them on traffic rules and regulations.

The objective of the visit was to educate the children about traffic rules and safety. The Peshawar Traffic Police aims to raise awareness about traffic rules among citizens and ensure smooth traffic flow in the city.

CTO Haroon Rashid Khan welcomed the children and briefed them on traffic rules and regulations, Importance of Zebra Crossing and others.

The children were instructed on the importance of using zebra crossings when crossing roads and also the children visited various offices, including the Camera Control Room, DL Van, FM Radio 88.6, and DL Branch.

He emphasized the importance of wearing seatbelts while driving and helmets while riding motorcycles for safety of lives. He distributed stationery, colors, and other items among the children.

## LHC CJ launches ICJS pilot project in two districts

LAHORE (APP): Lahore High Court (LHC) Chief Justice Ms Aalia Neelum Thursday launched the Integrated Criminal Justice System (ICJS) in Lahore and Rahim Yar Khan districts as pilot projects.

The initiative aims to transform the criminal justice process in Punjab by unifying the digital records of the judiciary, prosecution, police, and prisons into a single, accessible platform.

Developed under the guidance of Chief Justice Aalia Neelum, the ICJS is designed to enhance efficiency, transparency, and accountability across the province's criminal justice institutions. By enabling one-click access to centralized data—from FIRs to court judgments and pris-

oner records—the system is expected to streamline procedures and minimize delays caused by incomplete investigations and late challan submissions.

The launch ceremony was held at the New Judges Library Hall of the Lahore High Court. It was attended by key judicial and administrative figures, including Registrar Lahore High Court Amjad Iqbal Ranjha, DG District Judiciary, Advocate General Punjab, Prosecutor General Punjab, District and Sessions Judge Sahiwal Irfan Ahmad Saeed, DG Judicial and Case Management, IG Police Punjab, Additional Secretary Home Punjab, Secretary Prosecution Punjab, Acting IG Prisons, and Chairman of the Punjab

Information Technology Board (PITB).

Speaking at the event, Chief Justice Aalia Neelum—who also serves as Chairperson of the Provincial Justice Committee—congratulated all stakeholders on the successful implementation of the project. "The ICJS is a revolutionary step toward transforming Punjab's criminal justice system. It represents the collective efforts and dedication of all stakeholders involved," she remarked.

Officials including the IG Police Punjab, Prosecutor General Punjab, and PITB Chairman praised Chief Justice Aalia Neelum's leadership in spearheading the project, calling the system a major milestone in modernizing justice delivery in the province.

## Lahore observes holiday on April 12 for Urs of Madhu Lal Hussain

LAHORE (APP): The city will observe a local holiday on April 12 in connection with the urs of Hazrat Shah Hussain, a 16th-century Punjabi Sufi poet and mystic. The event attracts thousands of devotees from across the country and beyond, who gather to pay tribute through traditional practices including lamp lighting, drumming, and folk music performances.

On the first day of the urs, traditional rituals will be held at the saint's shrine in Baghbanpura, while official ceremonies and public festivities will take place at the adjacent Shalimar Gardens, organised by the Walled City of Lahore Authority.

A unique tradition observed during the Mela involves devotees lighting

candles and oil lamps near the shrine. As space runs out, the candles are added to a large communal bonfire, which continues to grow as more devotees participate, creating a powerful visual symbol of collective devotion.

The rhythmic sound of 'dhol's [traditional drums], said to be among the best in the Indian Subcontinent, is a major draw for attendees. Drum circles form throughout the Mela grounds, where people dance and express their spiritual joy in vibrant and emotional displays.

Mela Chiraghan not only honours the life and teachings of Shah Hussain but also serves as a living embodiment of Lahore's rich Sufi heritage, cultural resilience, and communal unity.

## Use of hose pipes for car wash in offices, residences banned

LAHORE (APP): In a bid to check water wastage, the Punjab Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on Thursday has imposed ban on usage of hose pipes in government offices, residences and other buildings for car wash.

Director General, Environmental Protection Agency Dr. Imran Hamid Sheikh informed APP that during the year 2024 the Punjab has received 42 per cent (below normal) rainfall from 1st September 2024 to 15th January 2025, which is likely to leading to moderate drought conditions.

Dr. Imran Hamid Sheikh further said that the move is aimed at mitigating potential environmental hazards and

to ensure the prudent use of natural resources for the benefit of present and future generations.

"We have imposed a complete ban on the usage of hose pipes in all the government offices, buildings, residences for car wash within the territorial jurisdiction of the province of Punjab", he confirmed.

To a query he said that this order shall come into force with immediate effect and shall remain in force until modified or withdrawn. Any violation of this order shall be punishable under Section 188 of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC).

The EPA has already taken steps for conservation of water, including

immediate closure of all illegal / unapproved car wash / service stations, mandatory installation of car wash wastewater recycling system and channels at car wash stations.

Giving the detail of banned practices he said that ban has been imposed on use of oil washing of vehicles, and ban on the use of water for washing of cars through use of hose pipes in the houses have also been imposed.

Likewise, ban on flood irrigation of lawns, gardens, golf courses and green belts including use of groundwater in construction activities, and establishment of new car wash stations have been banned, DG EPA added.

## Wana Welfare Association organizes mass enrollment campaign

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: In a remarkable step toward promoting education in the region, the Wana Welfare Association (WAWA) successfully organized a Mass Enrollment Campaign today across South Waziristan Lower, marking a historic moment for the area's educational development.

The campaign saw enthusiastic participation from 34 schools—both government and private institutions—across Wana. According to reliable estimates, over 8,000 male and female students took part in the event, demonstrating widespread community support for the cause of education.

The campaign was led by WAWA President Rehmatullah who expressed gratitude to the community for their overwhelming response. A key highlight of the day was a vibrant procession held in Wana Main Bazaar, which was graciously attended by



Deputy Commissioner South Waziristan Lower Muhammad Nasir Khan.

The event witnessed active participation from various stakeholders, including the Department of Education, local journalists, social activists, regional elders, and notably, the Police Department, which ensured a secure and peaceful environment throughout the event.

A particularly inspiring aspect of the campaign was the participation of young girls from Angoor Ada, a locality situated next to the

Afghan border—where, in stark contrast, educational access for girls remains heavily restricted. Their presence not only highlighted the significance of the campaign but also sent a powerful message about the right to education for all, regardless of geographical or political boundaries.

This campaign stands as a testament to the collective efforts of the community, local leadership, and civil society in championing education and opening doors to a brighter future for the children of South Waziristan.





PESHAWAR: Participants of the 5th International Public Health Conference in a group photo at the end of the conference organized by Khyber Medical University.

## 5th Int’l Public Health Conference concludes

### F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The 5th International Public Health Conference organized by Khyber Medical University (KMU) Institute of Public Health & Social Sciences (IPH&SS), Peshawar, concluded with great enthusiasm and success. The four-day conference brought together renowned public health experts, policymakers, researchers, and students from across the country and abroad. The event served as an effective platform for dialogue, knowledge exchange, and the formulation of impactful strategies on major public health issues.

The last day opened with a plenary session focused on Communicable Diseases, featuring thought-provoking presentations from leading experts. Dr. Kashif Asghar, former Research Scientist at Shaukat Khanum Memorial Cancer Hospital & Research Centre, delivered the keynote address. He emphasized the importance of biobanking in Pakistan, highlighting its potential to revolutionize diagnostics, treatment, and research in infectious diseases. “Biobanking offers a foundation for evidence-based healthcare in Pakistan and must be integrated into our public health strategy,” he

noted. Dr. Fawad Khan, WHO Sudan Cluster Coordinator, shared insights from the WASH and health response to the cholera outbreak in Sudan, underscoring the strain placed by global funding constraints on effective outbreak response and prevention. Dr. Bilal Ahmed, Immunization Specialist at UNICEF Headquarters, New York, highlighted global efforts toward eliminating maternal and neonatal tetanus, calling attention to Pakistan’s targets for elimination by 2026.

Dr. Razia Fatima addressed tuberculosis (TB) control in Pakistan, advocating for integrated care models that merge TB services with broader health systems to ensure sustainability and equity. Dr. Florian Götzinger, Head of the Transcultural Pediatrics Unit at Ottakring Hospital, Austria, delivered a compelling talk on congenital and perinatal tuberculosis, urging for increased awareness, screening, and research in neonatal TB cases. Closing the first session, Dr. Fozia Parveen from Aga Khan University presented on the nexus between climate change, education, and the dual burden of communicable and non-communicable diseases, emphasizing the urgency for interdisciplinary action.

The second plenary session turned the spotlight on Public Mental Health, a growing priority in both global and national public health agendas. Prof. Dr. Saeed Farooq from Keele University, UK, shared transformative findings from his work in translating implementation research into real-world practice, offering a roadmap for actionable public mental health interventions in low- and middle-income countries.

This was followed by Prof. Dr. Jehanzeb, who delved into emerging research in psychology, emphasizing the need for culturally relevant mental health frameworks in Pakistan.

The session concluded with Director General Health Services Dr. Muhammad Saleem, who lauded the conference for fostering high-level dialogue and collaboration. Vice Chancellor KMU Prof. Dr. Zia Ul Haq expressed his gratitude to all speakers, participants, and organizers for their commitment to advancing public health in Pakistan and beyond. As the conference continues, the exchange of global expertise and local insights promises to pave the way for stronger, more resilient health systems.

## Prominent political figure Malik Saqib Khan joins PPP

### F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Malik Saqib Khan, a well-known political personality from Peshawar, has announced his decision to join the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP).

He is the son of the late Barkat Khan Dauranpur, who served as General Secretary of the Zardari Committee.

The announcement came during the commemoration of the death anniversary of former Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. At the event, PPP Gulf President Mian Munir Hans extended an invitation to Malik Saqib to return to the party, which he accepted.

Speaking on the occasion, Malik Saqib said that he grew up seeing his father express unwavering support for Nawaz Sharif, and witnessed the services his father rendered for the party. He added that he is now ready to make sacrifices for the Pakistan Peoples Party and its leadership.

Expressing his gratitude to Mian Munir Hans for his trust, Malik Saqib vowed to live up to expectations and work tirelessly. He praised the legacy of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, stating that his contributions to the country are widely acknowledged. He also expressed hope that he would work at all levels to promote the PPP in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Malik Saqib emphasized that the public still remembers the PPP and criticized the current government, accusing it of being disconnected from the people and claiming that the police only served their own interests. He concluded by predicting that the public would once again reject such leadership in the upcoming elections.

## Minister pays surprise visit to livestock store

PESHAWAR (APP): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Provincial Minister for Livestock, Fisheries, and Cooperatives, Fazal Hakeem Yousafzai, paid a surprise visit to a government livestock store on Warsak Road here on Thursday to inspect the availability of medicines and vaccines for cattle in merged districts.

During the visit, he reviewed the quantity, distribution mechanisms and quality standards of the supplies.

Addressing the store’s staff and relevant officials, the Provincial minister emphasized ensuring transparency and merit at all stages of procurement and distribution of medicines and vaccines.

He warned that strict legal action would be taken against negligence, corruption or compromises on quality.

Highlighting the storage process for imported vaccines used in artificial insemination, the Provincial minister Fazal Hakeem stressed the need to maintain appropriate temperature controls and ensure timely, transparent distribution to livestock farmers.

He stated, “The livestock sector plays a vital role in the province’s economy. Millions of rural families depend on it for their livelihoods.”

# KPIC not to tolerate negligence in provision of information: Farah Hamid

### F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Information Commission (KPIC) Chief Information Commissioner Farah Hamid Khan has stated that any shortcomings by institutions in providing information will not be tolerated. The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Information Commission has summoned Public Information Officers from various institutions to address citizen complaints, on Thursday.

Additional Assistant Commissioner Karak appeared before the commission regarding three separate complaints against the Deputy Commissioner’s Office Kurram. The complaints included requests for land records, promotion and recruitment information, and details about solar systems and their beneficiaries.



The Chief Commissioner ordered Additional Assistant Commissioner Karak to provide the requested information within 4 days for DPC meeting minutes and 7 days for solar system record.

Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) Karak also appeared before the com-

mission regarding a complaint from a citizen requesting an inquiry report and other information from the DPO office. Moreover, District Officer for Soil Conservation, Lakki Marwat appeared before the commission regarding a complaint.

KPIC will initiate action in failure to comply with

the commission’s instructions will result in disciplinary action under the Right to Information (RTI) Act. Farah Hamid Khan emphasized that access to information is a fundamental right of every citizen. She added that the departments that fail to provide timely information to citizens will face action.

## Service Tribunal grants status quo against MS Satellite hospital

### Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Service Tribunal has staus quo against suspension of Medical Superintendent (MS) of Emergency Satellite Hospital Nahaqi Peshawar, Dr. Khalid Mahmood Qureshi, and ordered the release of his salary, on Thursday.

The counsel argued that Dr. Khalid Mahmood assumed the charge of Medical Superintendent in 2024 and performed his duties professionally with a clean record and no charges against him. He was appointed as MS of Emergency Satellite Hospital Nahaqi Peshawar through a May 20, 2024 and implemented several

reforms at the hospital. The Health Advisor to Chief Minister visited the hospital on January 2, 2025, and claimed the hospital was in poor condition with expired medicines and absent staff. Dr. Khalid was suspended, and an inquiry was initiated against him, with notifications issued on January 2 and February 2, 2025

respectively, the counsel stated.

The tribunal, led by Member Rashida Banu, heard Dr. Khalid Mahmood appeal and suspended the suspension notification, allowing him to receive his salary. The tribunal also directed both parties to submit their responses by the next hearing.

## Senator Nasir visits PHA-F Residencia Housing Scheme

### F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Chairman of the Senate Standing Committee on Housing & Works Senator Nasir Mehmood Butt visited the site of the PHA-F Residencia Housing Project at Surizai, District Peshawar, to review the ongoing development.

Others members of the Standing Committee Senator Husna Bano, Senator Khalida Ateeb and Senator Muhammad Aslam Abro also accompanied the chair in this visit. The project is a joint venture (Government-to-Government) between PHA Foundation (Federal), the Ministry of Housing & Works, and the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Housing Department, initiated through an MoU signed on December 11, 2019, and formalized into a Framework Agreement on January 3, 2025.

This flagship housing project aims to deliver quality, affordable residential units and improve urban infrastructure in Peshawar. Located in Mauza Surizai Bala and Garhi Chandan along the Uch Canal, the project spans approximately 8,500 kanals.

Managing Director PHA-F Shahid Hussain briefed the Chairman through a detailed presenta-

tion at the Federal Lodge, Pak PWD, Shami Road, Peshawar.

He was apprised that the land disputes with the Telaband community resolved through an agreement signed on February 1, 2023, under which 168 plots (Cat-IV, 5 Marla) were allocated to affected residents.

Topographic Survey, Geotechnical Investigations, Electric Resistivity Survey, and Seismic Hazard Assessment have been successfully completed.

The Chairman was further briefed that Phase-I (Block A) includes 2,510 residential units and a commercial strip, with a PC-I approved at a cost of Rs. 43.72 billion by Development Working Party and the PHA-F board.

He was informed that the total number of planned residential plots is 7,786, while 5,632 apartments are included across Blocks A, B, C, and D.

Regarding ongoing construction activities, the Chairman was briefed that the construction of Main Boulevard and related services is underway; temporary police check post is near completion, foundation work for the main police station has commenced, tenders for the construction of 885 grey structure houses has been issued and tenders for boundary wall, main gate, and security check posts launched by KP-PHA; bid evaluation is in progress while the third-party design vetting for infrastructure and housing has been completed.

The Chairman expressed satisfaction over the pace of work and lauded the coordination between federal and provincial stakeholders. He urged all concerned departments to expedite the issuance of pending NOCs to prevent delays in project delivery.

He emphasized the importance of transparency, quality, and adherence to timelines.

Administration of PHA-F and KP-PHA reaffirmed their commitment to completing the project within the stipulated five-year time frame, aiming to provide a transformative housing solution for the region. The visit concluded with an on-site inspection of Block A, commercial areas, and the main service corridor, followed by a meeting with the project team.



## Pir Musavir, Muzammil discuss funds allocation



### F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Special Assistant to the Chief Minister on Forests, Environment, Wildlife, and Climate Change, Pir Musavir Khan, met with the Provincial Finance Advisor, Muzammil Aslam at his office in the Civil Secretariat.

During the meeting, Pir Musavir Khan discussed in detail with the Finance Advisor the allocation of funds for the development and welfare of the people of Malakand district from

the revenue generated through tobacco cess and the Malakand 3 hydropower station.

He emphasized the importance of providing development funds to the local community, stating that this initiative would greatly benefit the people of Malakand.

Pir Musavir Khan further remarked that the Malakand Three hydropower is a significant achievement for the provincial government, as it not only generates affordable electricity but is

also of great importance for the provincial economy.

During the meeting, Finance Advisor Muzammil Aslam assured the Special Assistant that funds from the Malakand Three hydropower project would be provided promptly for the development of Malakand’s people. He also stated that the provincial government’s top priority is to provide services to the people at their doorstep, and all available resources will be utilized for this purpose.

## Arms association delegation meets SSP operations

### F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A joint delegation of Arms Dealers Association, Arms Manufacturers Association, and Sarhad Business Alliance meet with Senior Superintendent of Police

(SSP) Operations Peshawar Masood Ahmad, on Thursday.

The meeting focused on the city’s security situation, challenges faced by arms industry stakeholders, and ways to enhance cooperation. SSP assured the dele-

gation that Capital City Police Peshawar is utilizing all available resources to provide foolproof security to the business and industrial community.

The delegation highlighted security concerns and other challenges faced by industry stakeholders, which the SSP promised to address promptly.

The participants emphasized the importance of cooperation between law enforcement agencies and the business community to maintain peace and order in the city.

The delegation comprised Bilal Khan, Sana Ullah and Pirzada and Ashiq Khan Khalil, a leader of Sarhad Business Alliance also attended the meeting.



## PML-N Launches weekly Public Day initiative in Peshawar

### F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: On the special directives of Engineer Amir Muqam, Provincial President of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Federal Minister for SAFRON, Kashmir Affairs, and Gilgit-Baltistan, the formal launch of a weekly Public Day has commenced in the provincial capital, Peshawar. The initiative aims to directly listen to the public’s everyday issues, assess them thoroughly, and ensure timely resolution through effective measures.

As part of this effort, President of the PML-N Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Women’s Wing and Member of the Provincial Assembly (MPA) Ms.

Sobia Shahid formally began holding public meetings at the party’s provincial secretariat in Peshawar. A large number of delegations from various regions, community elders, women, senior citizens, and youth met with MPA Sobia Shahid to present their concerns.

To facilitate the public and ensure swift resolution of issues, senior party leader and former provincial assembly candidate Azmat Khan also joined Ms. Shahid. He assisted in hearing the grievances and showed personal interest in several complaints, assuring immediate follow-up.

The issues raised by the public included electricity load-shedding, gas supply shortages, problems in health and education sectors, transfers in govern-

ment offices, complaints related to NADRA and other departments, and the lack of facilities for women.

Ms. Sobia Shahid patiently listened to all concerns and issued on-the-spot orders for resolving many complaints by directly contacting relevant departmental officers. She emphasized that the leadership of PML-N believes in public service and, under the guidance of Engineer Amir Muqam, this weekly engagement will continue regularly.

A large number of party workers also attended the event and appreciated the Public Day initiative, noting that it provides citizens with a platform to seek solutions to their problems while strengthening the connection between the party and the

public. PML-N workers and leaders from Peshawar paid tribute to Engineer Amir Muqam for his decision, stating that the party is demonstrating real public representation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Every party member is committed to serving the people, and this initiative will be expanded across the province.

It is worth noting that the weekly Public Day will be held every week at the party secretariat, where citizens can freely present their concerns directly to the party leadership.

The party has reaffirmed its commitment to creating every possible opportunity for public service and continuing efforts for the welfare of the people.





## In brief

### Three die in road mishap F.P. Report

KHAIRPUR: Near Khairpur, on the Mehran National Highway at Korundi, a collision occurred between a passenger van and a Vigo, resulting in the death of three people including the driver, and injuring more than 15 others. The condition of three injured passengers is reported to be critical. Following the accident, the bodies and injured have been immediately transported to a local hospital. During the accident, the passenger van caught fire, but rescue teams quickly brought the fire under control. According to the police, the passenger van was traveling from Sukkur to Nawabshah when the accident took place. Investigations into the accident are ongoing.

### Malgari Wakeelan greeted F.P. Report

D I KHAN: Malgari Wakeelan, a lawyers' wing of the Awami National Party (ANP), on Thursday congratulated the newly elected cabinet of the Dera Bar President. Qaizar Miankhal and his cabinet. They expressed hope that the new leadership will uphold the rule of law and work for the welfare of the oppressed. Shahab Khan, Sherullah Wazir, Shehryar Khattak, and Abdul Rahim Bettani, joined the victory celebration. Malgari Wakeelan General Secretary Abdul Rahim Bettani said that the success of Malgari Wakeelan across the province reflects the trust of lawyers in the ANP. He praised the new president, Qaisar Khan, as a kind and capable leader.

### Free medical camp held F.P. Report

HANGU: District administration and Tal Scouts organized one day free medical camp at Naryab area of Hangu district in which almost one thousand patients obtained treatment and medicine, on Thursday. According to details, Eye Specialist Dr. Muhammad Iqbal along with Child specialist, Orthopedic specialist, general physicians and paramedics staff facilitated local communities in provision of treatment. Deputy Commissioner Hangu Gohar Zaman and Commandant Scouts Alamgir paid surprise visit to the medical camp while inspected provision of facilities.

### Foolproof security to be ensured F.P. Report

HASSAN ABDAL: Deputy Commissioner, Attock Rao Atif Raza has said that the district administration is making arrangements for ensuring foolproof security for Sikh pilgrims on the occasion of "Baisakhi festival" He stated this while visiting Gurdwara Panja Sahib here, District Police Officer (DPO), Dr Sardar Ghias Gul Khan was also present on the occasion. The DPO said that providing foolproof security to the people during religious festival was the prime duty of the police.

### Notorious dacoit gang arrested F.P. Report

GUJRANWALA: The Gujranwala City Police have arrested two members of the notorious Asad dacoit gang on Thursday, recovering two motorcycles and Rs 50,000 in cash. The accused identified as Asad and Nasir, were apprehended by a police team led by CIA DSP Ansar Javed Mohal, demonstrating exceptional performance in tackling crime.

# AI education launched in schools

F.P. Report

MUZAFFARGARH: Eight government schools in Muzaffargarh have introduced Artificial Intelligence (AI) education, opening doors to a brighter and tech-driven future for hundreds of boys and girls in the region.

At Government Girls High School, Shah Jamal, over 300 female students are being trained in cutting-edge tools like Chat GPT, Jasper AI, Canva, QuillBot, and YouTube automation—skills that were once considered distant dreams in rural classrooms.

Sadia Gulzar, an IT educator at the school, shared her pride in the transformation. "From sixth to tenth grade, students are now engaging with a specially designed syllabus that equips them with practical digital skills," she told APP. "Our students can now design certificates, create impressive presentations, draft professional CVs, and explore graphic design—all on their own."

This transformation was made possible through the efforts of Pakistani-American philanthropist Dr Amir Leghari. Through his NGO, Education Innovation Network, he funded and established modern com-

puter labs in different schools, ensuring that even the remotest corners of Muzaffargarh are not left behind in the race toward digital literacy.

In Shah Jamal School, lab is equipped with 30 computers, creating a structured environment for hands-on learning. More than just learning to use modern tools, many of these students are being empowered to explore freelance and remote work opportunities. The initiative is not only nurturing technical skill sets but also inspiring hope and ambition among young learners and their families, said Sadia. She added that Muzaffargarh would emerge as AI hub in future as local students are taking too much interest.

**Police recover unhealthy meat:** The police recovered two maunds of unhealthy meat from a vehicle near here on Thursday.

According to an official spokesman, a van was stopped at the Rind Ada check post and the police seized meat of dead animals which was to supply to multiple restaurants in the district. The police arrested two butchers, Imran and Usman, of Ghazi Ghat area. The police informed the food authority which confirmed that the meat was of dead animals and initiated an inquiry.

## DBA Kohat elects new cabinet for 2025-26

Sahibzada Afridi

KOHAT: The annual elections of the District Bar Association (DBA) for the year 2025-26 have been completed. Aman Bangash was elected as the President of DBA Kohat while Syed Basit Ali Shah was elected as the Vice President. Similarly, Mudassar Khattak Advocate was elected as the General Secretary.

According to the details, the elections of DBA Kohat were held in the Bar Room of Kohat under the chairmanship of Malik Muhammad Ishaq, who was assisted by Malik Mohtasham Advocate and Ishtiaq-ur-Rehman Khattak



Advocate.

According to the results, Aman Khan Bangash Advocate was elected as the President of the Kohat Bar Association. Similarly, Joint Secretary Farid Khan Bangash Advocate, Secretary Finance Fehmida Naz Advocate, Press Secretary Bilal Daraz Khattak Advocate and the



Executive Member Mian Amir Waqas Afridi were elected unopposed.

After announcing the results, all the elected office bearers congratulated each other and pledged that they all will work together to resolve the issues of the legal community and the bar on a priority basis.

## DBA Mardan elects 2025-26 cabinet

Fazal Haq

MARDAN: The elections of the District Bar Association (DBA) Mardan have been completed. Asif Iqbal Advocate of the Grand Alliance was elected as the President with a large majority, while Zulfiqar Ali Khan Advocate was elected as the General Secretary, respectively.

In this regard, the elections of the District Bar Association Mardan were held under the supervision of the Election Committee,

in which there was a close contest between Asif Iqbal Advocate of the Grand Alliance, Noor Badshah Toru Advocate of the Democratic Alliance and Muhammad Muzammil Butt Advocate for the post of President.

Grand Alliance presidential candidate Asif Iqbal Advocate was elected president. For the post of Vice President Wahab Ali Advocate of Grand Alliance was declared successful by securing 400 votes.

For the post of General

Secretary, Grand Alliance candidate Zulfiqar Ali Khan Advocate secured 458 votes. Grand Alliance candidate Taimur Khan Advocate was declared successful for the post of Joint Secretary by securing 493 votes.

For the post of Finance Secretary Democratic Alliance candidate Amir Afzal Khan Advocate won with 325 votes. The total number of voters of District Bar Association Mardan was 891 out of which 765 voters cast their votes.

## Dysfunctional DHQ hospital put patients in misery

F.P. Report

HAFIZABAD: Patients traveling from remote and underdeveloped areas of the district are facing immense hardships due to the continued lack of essential medical services and the prolonged dysfunction of digital X-ray machines at the District Headquarters (DHQ) Hospital and Trauma Centre in Hafizabad.

Despite repeated visits by the Deputy Commissioner, provincial ministers, and other senior officials, these inspections appear to be little more than ceremonial photo opportunities, offering no tangible relief to suffering patients. Disillusioned and frustrated, many patients and their families have voiced harsh criticism of both the current government and local administration, holding them accountable for the worsening healthcare crisis.

According to reports, while Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif con-

tinues to make public pledges about providing quality healthcare at the citizens' doorsteps, the situation on the ground in Hafizabad paints a starkly different picture. The hospital's digital X-ray machines have reportedly been non-functional for an extended period. More recently, the ultrasound machine has also become inoperative, leaving the facility further incapacitated.

As a result, thousands of patients many of whom travel long distances seeking treatment—are being forced to rely on private laboratories and diagnostic centers, incurring significant out-of-pocket expenses. For the economically disadvantaged, this has turned access to even basic healthcare into a burdensome ordeal.

Moreover, even fundamental medications are frequently unavailable at the DHQ Hospital. Patients report that essential drugs are not being provided under the

government's health card scheme either, rendering the state-sponsored initiative ineffective in the region.

Insiders allege that during official visits, only selected patients are presented to visiting dignitaries, and hospital staff present a curated and misleading overview of the facility's operations. This practice masks the deep-rooted issues plaguing the hospital and prevents higher authorities from understanding the true extent of the crisis.

The people of Hafizabad have made an urgent appeal to Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif and senior government authorities to take immediate and decisive action. They demand a comprehensive overhaul of the healthcare system in the district to ensure functional medical equipment, consistent availability of medicines, and transparency in hospital operations, so that the promise of accessible healthcare becomes a reality for all.

## International conference at University of Poonch on 14th

F.P. Report

RAWALAKOT: The Faculty of Management Sciences at the University of Poonch Rawalakot, in collaboration with Lahore Garrison University, is organizing an international conference on April 14. The opening session of the conference will be held at the main campus of the University of Poonch in

Shamsabad.

The theme of the conference is "A Bright Future for the World and Artificial Intelligence, Innovation, and Leadership," and it will continue for five days. National and international experts will present research papers. Arrangements for the conference have been completed.

Vice Chancellor Professor Dr. Zakria Zakar has

expressed confidence in the preparations for the conference. He stated that hosting this conference is an honor and a matter of pride for the University of Poonch as a global academic gathering.

He further mentioned that this conference will provide a platform for scholars and professionals to exchange ideas and offer an opportunity to connect with the global academic community.



QUETTA: Secretary General of Anjuman-e-Tulba Islam Pakistan, Faisal Qayyum addressing a press conference.

## Seminar on 'role of Ombudsman' arranged F.P. Report

LARKANA: A seminar was held at Government Elementary College of Education for Women Larkana about the "role of the Ombudsman". In the seminar, the Regional Director of the Ombudsman Sindh Larkana Ali Akbar Jagirani said that the Provincial Ombudsman of Sindh plays its role in solving administrative justice and administrative problems and promoting good governance.

The workshop was organized by Muhammad Sohail Rajput Satara-e-Imtiaz provincial ombudsman Sindh Karachi. In this seminar organized by Muhammad Malah Principal Government Elementary College of Education for Women, Larkana, lecturers, students were also present in large numbers, while the co-lecturers, students were also asked questions from the regional director of the Ombudsman, Ali Akbar Jagirani, who were also given satisfactory answers.

**Gomibai Ladies Club polls scheduled on 17th:** The schedule of the election of the Gomi Bai Ladies Club, Ladies Club Welfare Cooperative Society Limited has been released, according to which the election will be held on April 17 under the supervision of the authorized election officer Javed Ahmed Laghari.

The election of office bearers and managing committee office bearers of Bai Ladies Club will be held on the 17th of this current month when such a schedule has also been issued.

SHCBA protests against proposed canals: Sindh High Court Bar Association (SHCBA) Larkana, held rally was taken out from the bar room against the illegal extraction of 6 canals from Indus River and the murderous attack on the president of the Karachi Bar Association. Sindh High Court Karachi Bar Association president, Advocate Aamir Nawaz Waraich, was attacked due to his opposition to the plan to forcefully build canals on the Indus River, which is a cowardly act was also done.

## Accumulated toxic gas kills 3 youths F.P. Report

SHANGLA: At least three youths lost their lives due to gas leakage in Martung Bazaar of Shangla district, police informed on Thursday.

The deceased have been identified as Fazlullah, son of Azizullah; Muaz, son of Fazlullah; and Abdul Wali, a resident of Puran Bungalay, Shangla.

Police said, the victims were running a small business, selling ice cream and dairy products in Martung Bazaar. Due to a power outage last night, they turned on a generator to keep their products from spoiling. With all windows and doors tightly closed, the generator buildup toxic gas, killing the youths.

In the morning, locals broke open the door and found all three men unconscious. They were rushed to RHC Hospital Martung, but all three were declared dead on arrival.

## Dir political activist rejoins PTI

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: Malik Rehmanullah Advocate, a former PTI provincial joint secretary who had parted ways with the party two years ago to join Jamaat-e-Islami, rejoined Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) during a function at his Hujra in Talash on Thursday.

The gathering was attended by party workers and key leaders, including former district president Malik Fakhr uz Zaman and district general secretary Ghulam Hussain. Speakers reiterated their commitment to PTI Chairman Imran Khan, calling him the symbol of resistance and "real freedom" despite his prolonged incarceration. Malik Rehmanullah expressed full confidence in the party's leadership at all levels and pledged to continue working for PTI's cause.

**JI youth wing:** Jamaat-e-Islami Youth Lower Dir has appointed Ikramuddin Mashwani as its new general secretary. The decision was made by JI Youth President Atiq-ur-Rehman in consultation with the party's Lower Dir Ameer, Maulana Asadullah Khan.

Party leaders expressed best wishes for the newly appointed office-bearer, expressing hope he would fulfill his responsibilities with dedication. The appointment has been warmly welcomed by JI workers and supporters.

**Tribute paid to forest department official on retirement:** Ghulam Hussain alias Haji Sahib got retired from his illu-

trious 37-year career as Superintendent in the Forest Department Dir Lower!

The officials of Lower Dir district forest department on Tuesday arranged farewell function in honour of Ghulam Hussain Haji Sahib at a local hotel here at Rabat.

Speaking on the occasion conservator of forest Malakand east forest circle Shaukat Fayaz , Abdul Majeed District Forest Officer Chitral, Rafiqullah DFO Upper Chitral, Muhammad Rashid DFO Dir Kohistan, DFO patrol squad Malakand east circle Asif Ali Shah and DFO Lower Dir Shabir Ahmad Jan paid rich tribute to Ghulam Hussain Haji for his matchless services for the department.

SDFOs, RFOs and a large number of officials of the forest department and family members of Haji sahib were present on the occasion. They said that the remarkable journey of Haji Sahib has been an epitome of honesty, duty, and dedication.

His unwavering commitment to his work has left an indelible mark on the Forest Department, and his selfless services will be cherished for generations to come, they added. It's worth mentioning here that Haji Sahib's exceptional contributions were recognized by the government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the cabinet division of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had recommended his name for a prestigious civil award. Although it wasn't conferred upon him by the federal government for unknown reasons, his dedication and hard work remain unparalleled.

## ‘Mines & Minerals Act to face people with poverty’

F.P. Report

BUNER: Emir Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) Malakand division Inayatullah Khan has alleged that the provincial government is handing over its minerals to the Federation and the United States, due to which the province will suffer even more poverty and misery

will be the destiny of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa people. JI Emir also announced commencement of long march towards Islamabad on 20th April and added that the Israeli aggression inside Palestine continues and announced that the Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan has decided to hold a long march to Islamabad on

April 20 to make the government feel its responsibility in this regard. According to Inayatullah Khan, voices are being raised for Palestine from other countries of the world, while the rulers of Pakistan are not showing seriousness in this regard.

He mentioned the government's efforts to implement the tax system in Malakand Division which he has been described as the treatment of a step-mother towards the people of Malakand Division who were already badly affected by terrorism and floods

due to which their businesses were destroyed and still it has not been possible to restore these damages. He expressed these views while addressing a crowded press conference at the Markaz Islami Swari Buner on Wednesday. On this occasion, General Secretary of Jamaat-e-Islami Khyber Pakhtunkhwa North Muhammad Halim Bacha, District Amir Engineer Nasir Ali Khan, District General Secretary Shahrom Bacha, former Provincial Speaker Bakht Jahan Khan, former District Nazim Dr. Ubaidullah, Ba B Amir Ghulam Mustafa Advocate, Muhammad Hanif and Leader of Jamaat-e-Islami Abdul Ghaffar and other district leaders were also present.

## Vigilance committees formed to ensure exam transparency

F.P. Report

KHAIRPUR: In an effort to ensure transparency and prevent cheating in the annual ninth and tenth-grade examinations, vigilance committees have been established at the district and tehsil levels in Khairpur.

This initiative is in response to directives from the Chief Secretary of Sindh and is led by Deputy Commissioner Khairpur, Fayaz Hussain Rahujo.

Deputy Commissioner Rahujo visited several educational institutions, including Government Boys High School, Government Girls High School, and Government Degree College for Girls and Boys in Pir Jo Goth. During these visits, he instructed exam center in-charges, appointed teachers, and officials that cheating would not be tolerated. He stressed that strict action under the Education Act would be taken against any involved officers and staff.

Assistant commissioners, mukhtiaraks, and educational officers will conduct daily visits to

examination centers. They are tasked with taking action against those involved in malpractice or negligence. The vigilance committees will be chaired by the assistant commissioner of the respective tehsil. Other members include the mukhtiaraks and tehsil education officers for primary and secondary education, both male and female.

The notification issued to committee members emphasizes the importance of maintaining transparency at examination centers, preventing cheating, not entertaining any recommendations, and submitting detailed daily reports to Deputy Commissioner Khairpur.

**120 successful bone marrow transplants conducted:** A ceremony was held at the Bone Marrow Hematology Department of GIMS Hospital Gambat to celebrate the completion of 120 successful bone marrow transplant operations. Deputy Commissioner Fayaz Hussain Rahujo and Dr. Captain (R) Rahim Bux Bhatti attended the event.

Patients from Uzbekistan and their fam-

ilies, who underwent bone marrow transplants, also participated in the event. Deputy Commissioner Fayaz Hussain Rahujo and Dr. Rahim Bux Bhatti cut a cake to mark the success.

Families appreciated the medical services provided by the hospital's medical team. The Deputy Commissioner stated that GIMS Hospital provides international standard medical facilities and Khairpur is proud of it.

Director of GIMS, Dr. Rahim Bux Bhatti, shared that so far, 120 patients have undergone successful transplants, including patients from Pakistan and Afghanistan. One Afghan patient hailed from the western border.

He further stated that the successful treatment of patients has brought joy and satisfaction to their families. The family of one patient praised the GIMS team, saying they have been given a new life. Dr. Rahim Bux Bhatti expressed that they are inspired by the prayers and love of the families and are committed to providing the best care to the patients.





# In Myanmar, internet shutdowns hinder earthquake aid response

BANGKOK (Thomson Reuters Foundation): More than a week since a 7.7 magnitude earthquake struck Myanmar, turning buildings into concrete mortuaries where many of the 3,500 confirmed casualties still lie entombed, families do not yet know whether loved ones are among them.

That, in large part, is due to a lack of internet access that local residents and humanitarians say is severely impeding the disaster response in the Southeast Asian country. Gus, a 30-year old LGBTQ+ activist living in the northwest region of Sagaing, said he is yet to learn the fate of two friends.

He knows they were in Mandalay, the epicentre, at the time the country's deadliest earthquake hit on March 28. "It's so difficult to connect our friends, our families and our comrades to make sure that they are okay," he told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. "I'm so worried about them."

Communications have been under control of the military junta since it violently seized power from a democratic government in 2021 in an attempt to stifle opposition, which has come in the form of ethnic armed groups and a civil disobedience movement. The military has been accused of killing close to 6,500 people since the coup in 2021 and imprisoning almost 30,000 people, including children.

Gus himself is living in hiding, wanted by the military for protesting and being a member of the LGBTQ+ community. The crackdown on dissent has left almost a third of the country with no internet at all, whilst other parts have restricted access with firewalls blocking social media and news sites. Despite a call from 120 global organizations saying that internet access is "essential for coordinating live-saving emergency responses," the blackouts remain.

A "digital dictatorship" is denying communities access to lifesaving information and the ability to reach loved ones, said Yadanar Maung, a

spokesperson for the activist and research group Justice For Myanmar. "It is imperative that governments and companies in the telecommunications sector pressure the junta to immediately lift internet shutdown orders and censorship," Maung said.

A humanitarian worker in the country, who could not be named for security reasons, reported how in areas with complete blackouts, residents have had to travel for several days to get connectivity to call in their needs to aid groups. "It leads to an ineffective response," he said. A lack of communications, said Gus, meant three days passed before help reached his town.

The blackouts also meant that much of the Burmese population was denied news of the extent of the earthquake in the immediate aftermath. More than 24 hours went by before Gus, and fellow members of the wider civil disobedience movement, learned that the earthquake had not just hit their locality but was in fact widespread. He was only able to learn the extent of the devastation via access to one of the few clandestine Starlink connections belonging to business owners in the area.

Starlink is a portable Internet device that operates via a direct connection to a satellite, provided by Elon Musk's Space X. But at a starting price of \$389, it is out of reach for most Burmese who earn an average of 4,800 Burmese kyat (\$2.20) a day. For 1,000 Burmese kyat (\$0.48) for two hours, Gus, who currently has no means of earning, was able to read the latest earthquake developments.

He said he believes the lack of internet access stems from the military's intent to stop Burmese citizens from learning "of their crimes and harsh treatment of their own people." Reports have emerged of military-led attacks on earthquake-affected areas since the catastrophe and aid being thwarted on its way to those in need. Technology like Starlink is enabling the humanitarians who have flown in

to mobilise when internet access is unavailable and delivery routes are being blocked, experts said.

"Starlink can provide vital connectivity when terrestrial internet is unavailable – in this case both because of earthquake damage to communications infrastructure and because of pre-existing regime internet and mobile phone shutdowns for security reasons that have not been lifted," Richard Horsey, senior adviser on Myanmar at the International Crisis Group, said in an email. "But Starlink is expensive, and there are not that many units on the ground."

Satellites and AI are being relied upon for communication and response planning when possible, although multiple aid agencies said they could not divulge specifics for fear of military reprisals. Chinese rescue teams are reportedly using a specially created AI translation tool via its DeepSeek programme to help communicating in English and in Burmese with local residents. The European Union's Copernicus is another useful tool, Horsey said, in conducting remote damage assessments, giving a rapid over-arching picture of the situation.

Microsoft's AI for Good Lab is doing something similar. Aerial pictures captured by its 15 Planet Labs satellites are being analysed by AI to reveal the areas most damaged. Such images, the humanitarian worker said, have enabled organisations to identify locations where people have congregated as well as sites of the most severe damage. But there are challenges posed by cloud coverage, he said, as the country is experiencing heavy rains, while "political restrictions" limit the frequency of drone trips.

"None of (these tools) are as effective as being able to go unimpeded where we would like to go," he said, adding that talking to members of communities and in-person assessments would be better than simply guessing what people need based on images.

## PPP UK observes ZAB death anniversary

F.P. Report

LONDON: Pakistan People's Party (PPP) United Kingdom chapter observed 46th death anniversary of late Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto with great reverence and respect at the Baseline Studio, White Church Road, London. The event was presided over by Mohsin Bari, President of the PPP UK, and featured addresses by Choudhry Nisar, Joint Secretary of the PPP UK, Mushtaq Lashari, Aftab Bagi, and Asad Nawaz, spokesperson for the PPP UK, among others.

Dr. Abdul Wajid Khan Daudzai delivered a special address, requesting the current leadership to establish a social media team at the national and international levels to inform the new generation of youth about the sacrifices and achievements of PPP.

He stated that Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto was judicially murdered for making Pakistan a nuclear power and attempting to unite the Muslim world. He claimed ZA Bhutto's efforts leads Pakistan to become nuclear power, developing missile technology, providing passports to Pakistanis and initiating friendship and brotherhood with Gulf countries, enabling thousands of Pakistanis to find employment abroad.

Dr. Daudzai mentioned that the European Union was formed by copying Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's idea of a unified Muslim world. He argued that if Muslim countries had formed a similar union, they would have been able to prevent attacks on Muslim nations and the ongoing atrocities in Palestine.

## Germany is back, says Merz

BERLIN (BBC): Germany's conservatives under Friedrich Merz have reached a deal with the Social Democrats to govern Europe's biggest economy, five months after the previous government collapsed. Merz, 69, said their agreement sent "a strong and clear signal" to Germans and the EU that they would get "a strong government capable of action".

Germany was already in recession before it was buffeted by economic turbulence, caused by US President Donald Trump's trade tariffs. "The key message to Donald Trump is Germany is back on track," said the chancellor-in-waiting, promising to fulfil defence commitments and revive economic competitiveness. Merz and his coalition partners have been under intense pressure to put an end to Germany's political limbo since his Christian Democrats won federal elections in February.

He has also just seen his party overtaken in an opinion poll by the far-right, anti-immigration Alternative for Germany (AfD). Announcing the government deal, Merz promised to reform and stabilise Germany, with a focus on migration, the economy and defence. "Europe can rely on Germany," he said, promising "a strong plan to bring our country to the forefront again". He will have to wait for the week starting 5 May for the new parliament to elect him as chancellor, but should have no problem with a 13-seat majority. The coalition parties had already signalled their urgency last month, when they pushed through significant reform of Germany's strict debt rules. Such changes mean the new government will be able to plough significant investment into the military and the country's crumbling infrastructure.

Included in agreement were a series of measures to "control and largely end irregular migration", and impose border controls aimed at addressing one of the big concerns of voters in the February election. The AfD complained that the plans did not go far enough, accusing Merz of capitulating to the Social Democrats. In a recent report to parliament, Germany's armed forces commissioner highlighted dramatic shortages in the military across the board, from ammunition and soldier numbers to dilapidated barracks. Another significant part of the coalition deal is for defence spending to be increased, and for boosting the strength of the military.



TOKYO: Japanese Prime Minister Ishiba Shigeru and NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte, shaking hands at the end of a joint press briefing, after their meeting.

# Ishiba and NATO chief vow to deepen ties

TOKYO (AP): Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba and NATO chief Mark Rutte vowed to further deepen military ties while stressing the need to tackle together growing threats from China, North Korea and Russia.

Japan, which has stepped up defense ties with the United States, its key ally, and other friendly nations in the Indo-Pacific, has also sought closer ties with NATO, fearing that Russia's invasion of Ukraine could embolden China's assertiveness in the region. "A stronger NATO will benefit Japan greatly," Ishiba told a joint news conference after his talks with Rutte, who was in Japan for the first time since becoming secretary general of the organization in October.

In a joint statement released after their talks, Ishiba and Rutte said strengthening defense industrial cooperation is "a shared priority" and that they plan to focus on developing dual-use and advanced technologies

while enhancing their standardization. They also agreed to step up cooperation in cyber defense and space, as well as joint military exercises. Drones and Artificial Intelligence were also discussed. Ishiba and Rutte also stated they "strongly condemn" growing military ties between North Korea and Russia, including Russia's use of North Korean missiles and troops against Ukraine, while expressing concern about China's support for the Russian defense industrial base.

Russia continues to wage war against Ukraine while maintaining its ambitions to "reshape European security," Rutte said. He also called for upholding a free and open Indo-Pacific and opposed unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force in the East and South China Seas, and encouraged Beijing to improve the transparency of its military and to cooperate in arms control, calling on peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait. The NATO chief told

reporters that China has been pursuing a major military buildup, seeking to control key technologies, critical infrastructure and supply chains, and continues to carry out "destabilizing activities" in the Indo-Pacific.

Rutte praised Japan's contributions to support Ukraine in the war against Russia, and welcomed Tokyo's willingness to participate in a NATO command for the support of Ukraine, expressed by Japanese Defense Minister Gen Nakatani. The NATO Security Assistance and Training for Ukraine, or NSATU, is headquartered at a US military base in Wiesbaden, Germany. Rutte said NSATU "helps Ukraine fight today but also for Ukraine to build up its armed forces for tomorrow." Details of Japan's participation still need to be discussed, but the Japanese Self Defense Force, if stationed, is not expected to involve combat roles because of the country's postwar pacifist principles.

# Are B-2 bombers a message to Iran?

PANAMA CITY (Reuters): US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said it was up to Iran to decide whether the recent US movement of B-2 bombers was a message to Tehran, as he voiced hope that US-Iran negotiations over Tehran's nuclear program could be resolved peacefully.

As many as six B-2 bombers relocated in March to a US-British military base on the Indian Ocean island of Diego Garcia, US officials have told Reuters, amid a US bombing campaign in Yemen and mounting tensions with Iran. There are only 20 B-2 bombers in the Air Force's inventory so they are usually used sparingly.

Experts say that puts the B-2s, which have stealth technology and are equipped to carry the heaviest US bombs and nuclear weapons, in an ideal position to operate in the Middle East. Asked if the B-2s were meant to send a message to Iran, Hegseth

said: "We'll let them decide."

"It's a great asset ... it sends a message to everybody," he told reporters during a trip to Panama. "President Trump's been clear ... Iran should not have a nuclear bomb," he said. "We very much hope - the President is focused on doing that peacefully."

Trump made a surprise announcement that the United States and Iran were poised to begin direct talks on Tehran's nuclear program, warning that Iran would be in "great danger" if the talks were unsuccessful. Iran, which had pushed against Trump's demands in recent weeks, said indirect talks would be held in Oman, underscoring the differences between the two countries.

Trump repeated a threat to use military force if Iran did not agree to end its nuclear program. "I'm not asking for much ... but they can't have a nuclear weapon," Trump told reporters. "If it requires

military, we're going to have military. Israel will, obviously, be ... the leader of that. No one leads us. We do what we want." He declined to address when any military action could begin.

Although B-2 bombers have been employed to strike Houthi targets in Yemen in the past, most experts say use of the stealthy bomber is overkill there. However, the B-2 is equipped to carry America's the 30,000-pound GBU-57 Massive Ordnance Penetrator, designed to destroy targets deep underground. That is the weapon that experts say could be used to strike Iran's nuclear program. Western powers accuse Iran of having a clandestine agenda to develop nuclear weapons by enriching uranium to a high level of fissile purity, above what they say is justifiable for a civilian atomic energy program. Tehran says its nuclear program is wholly for civilian energy purposes.

# Former Russian minister convicted in UK

LONDON (AP): A former Russian government minister became the first person to be convicted in the U.K. of circumventing sanctions put in place after the illegal annexation of Crimea from Ukraine in 2014.

Dmitrii Ovsiannikov, who was appointed governor of Sevastopol in Crimea by Russian President Vladimir Putin in 2016, used a British bank account to illegally receive tens of thousands of pounds from his wife and accepted gifts and payments from his brother, prosecutors said.

Ovsiannikov, who also served as deputy minister for industry and trade, was an important political figure placed under European Union sanctions in 2017 for work that threatened the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of

Ukraine, prosecutors said. The sanctions were adopted in the U.K. in 2019 as it left the EU. "He knew he had been on the U.K. sanctions list since 2017 but chose to ignore this," said Julius Capon of the Crown Prosecution Service. "Another member of his family sought deliberately to breach the sanctions to live their own lavish lifestyle and showed complete disregard for the law."

Ovsiannikov, 48, was convicted in Southwark Crown Court of six out of seven counts of circumventing sanctions between February 2023 and January 2024. The jury couldn't reach a verdict on the final count. He was also convicted of possessing and using criminal property. His brother, Alexei Owsjanikow, 47, was con-

victed of two counts of circumventing sanctions for paying school tuition for Ovsiannikov's children. He was found not guilty of three additional counts of breaching sanctions for buying his brother a Mercedes-Benz worth 54,500 pounds (\$70,000) and giving him access to a bank account.

Ekaterina Ovsiannikova, 47, was cleared of four counts of circumventing sanctions for allegedly funneling 76,000 pounds (\$97,000) to her husband. Lawyers had argued the brother and wife didn't know Ovsiannikov faced sanctions or were unaware he couldn't receive financial assistance. All three are Russian nationals, though Ovsiannikov and his brother have British passports because their father was born in England.

# China's military presence in Western Hemisphere is 'too large': US

PANAMA CITY (AP): US Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth focused again on China's presence in the Western Hemisphere, one day after calling the world power a threat to the Panama Canal.

Speaking at a regional security conference, Hegseth said that China-based companies were controlling land and critical infrastructure in strategic sectors. "China's military has too large of a presence in the Western Hemisphere," Hegseth said. "Make no mistake, Beijing is investing and operating in this region for military advantage and unfair economic gain."

He called on the region's governments to work together to deter China and address threats posed by transnational drug cartels and mass immigration.

Hegseth was speaking a day after meeting Panama's President José Raúl Mulino and touring the Panama Canal. The two countries agreed to step up security coordination and appeared to say they would work toward a way to pay back fees that US warships pay to pass through the Panama Canal.

The visit comes amid tensions over US President Donald Trump's repeated assertions that the US is being overcharged to use the Panama Canal and that China has influence over its operations - allegations that Panama has denied. Shortly after Hegseth and Mulino met, the Chinese Embassy in Panama criticized the US government in a statement on X, saying Washington had used "blackmail" to further its own interests and that who Panama carries

out business with is a "sovereign decision of Panama ... and something the US doesn't have the right to interfere in." Hegseth said, "I don't know anything about blackmail." The concern about China's influence over the waterway was provoked by Hong Kong-based consortium CK Hutchison holding a 25-year lease on ports at either end of the canal. The Panamanian government announced that the lease was being audited and concluded that there were irregularities, which CK Hutchison denied in a statement.

CK Hutchison has already announced that it would be selling its controlling stake in the ports to a consortium including BlackRock Inc., effectively putting the ports under American control once the

sale is complete.

Later, Hegseth said that he would sign an agreement with Panama concerning the security and operation of the Panama Canal that would allow US warships to "sail first and free." The fact that the US has a treaty obligation to protect the canal, but also had to pay to move its warships between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans had been one of the Trump administration's complaints. Panama's Canal Affairs Minister José Ramón Icaza, said the two governments would look for a mechanism to repay the fees from US warships to use the canal. He said annually they had paid on average \$5 million to \$7 million. The canal generated about \$2.4 billion for the government in the last fiscal year, he said.

# Ukraine's military chief says new Russian offensive has begun

KYIV (Reuters): Ukraine's military chief Oleksandr Syrskyi said in an interview published that Russia had launched a new offensive on the northeast of the country, adding that a large increase in assaults was already being observed. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy had warned earlier that Russia was preparing an offensive on the two regions of Kharkiv and Sumy.

"I can say that the president is absolutely right and this offensive has actually already begun," Syrskyi said in an interview with Ukrainian publication LB. "For several days, almost a week, we have been

observing almost a doubling of the number of enemy attacks in all main directions (on the front-line)," he said. Moscow is close to fully pushing Ukrainian forces out of their foothold in Kursk region, which they held since last August and which lies over the border from Sumy region.

Zelenskyy said that Ukrainian forces were also present in the adjacent Russian region of Belgorod. The war, the first year of which was marked by rapid Russian territorial gains followed by Ukrainian counter-attacks, has since become far more of a battlefield stalemate,

with Moscow grinding out relatively small gains by attacking with wave after wave of infantry squads. Meanwhile, Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal said it was vital for the country's economy to extend a permit-free freight regime with the European Union until at least the end of the year. Introduced following Russia's invasion in early 2022, the regime - which allows Ukrainian cargo permit-free entry to EU markets - is set to expire on June 5.

Shmyhal told reporters that he had extensive discussions with European officials regarding the agree-

ment during his visit to Brussels. "We are extremely pragmatic while talking with European partners, we understand our level of responsibility," he said, adding that partners were listening to Ukraine. Marta Kos, the EU's enlargement commissioner, said at the same press conference that the Commission would bring a solution before the regime expires. The regime was designed to support Ukraine's war-ravaged economy, but has since sparked protests in several countries, such as Poland and Hungary, where producers complained that cheaper Ukrainian goods were hurting local producers.

# US says Moroccan proposal should be sole basis for Sahara talks

WASHINGTON (Reuters): Talks to resolve the conflict over Western Sahara should take place on the sole basis of a Moroccan plan that would give the region some autonomy under the North African kingdom's sovereignty, the Trump administration said.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio set out the US position in a meeting with Moroccan Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita in Washington, making clear

that President Donald Trump's 2020 move to recognize Moroccan sovereignty over the region remains US policy, State Department spokesperson Tammy Bruce said in a statement. "The Secretary reaffirmed President Trump's urging for the parties to engage in discussions without delay, using Morocco's Autonomy Proposal as the only framework, to negotiate a mutually acceptable solution," Bruce said.

The long-frozen conflict, dating back to 1975, pits Morocco, which considers the territory as its own, against the Algeria-backed Polisario front, which seeks an independent state called the Sahrawi Republic in Western Sahara. Rubio said a proposal first put forward in 2007 by Morocco was "serious, credible, and realistic" and "the only basis for a just and lasting solution to the dispute," according to Bruce.

"The United States continues to believe that genuine autonomy under Moroccan sovereignty is the only feasible solution," she added. Trump at the end of his first term in office recognized Moroccan claims to Western Sahara as part of a deal under which Morocco agreed to normalize its relations with Israel. Trump's successor Joe Biden shunned making a statement on Trump's move, leaving the US position ambiguous.







# The US-China trade escalation has no end in sight. Here’s why Beijing’s not backing down

**WHAT was supposed to be a historic, era-defining trade war launched by US President Donald Trump against a range of countries has, for now, narrowed in on a singular target: China.** Trump announced a three-month pause Wednesday on all the “reciprocal” tariffs that had gone into effect hours earlier – with one exception, deepening a confrontation set to dismantle trade between the world’s two largest economies. Then on Thursday, Beijing made good on its vow to bring in its own retaliatory tariffs.

The pace of that escalation has been stunning. Over the course of a week, Trump’s tariffs on Chinese imports have jumped from 54% to 104% and now 125% – figures that add to existing levies imposed prior to the president’s second term. And China has retaliated in kind, raising additional, retaliatory duties on all US imports to 84%.

The showdown sets up an historic rupture that will not only cause pain for both of these deeply intertwined economies – but add tremendous friction to their geopolitical rivalry.

“This is probably the strongest indication we’ve seen pushing towards a hard decoupling,” said Nick Marro, principal economist for Asia at the Economist Intelligence Unit, referring to an outcome where the two economies have virtually no trade or mutual investment.

“It’s really hard to overstate the expected shocks this is going to have, not just to the Chinese economy itself, but also to the entire global trading landscape,” as well as on the US, he said.

Trump appeared to link his decision not to grant China the same reprieve as other nations to Beijing’s swift retaliation, telling reporters Wednesday that “China wants to make a deal, they just don’t know how quite to go about it.”

But the view from Beijing looks dramatically different.

Chinese leader Xi Jinping, China’s most powerful leader in decades, sees no option for his country to simply capitulate to what it calls America’s “unilateral bullying.” And he’s playing to the crowd. Publicly, Beijing has drummed up fervent nationalism around its retaliation – part of a strategy it’s been quietly preparing for more than four years since Trump was last in office.

While China has long said it wants to talk,

Trump’s rapid escalation instead appears to have confirmed for Beijing that the US doesn’t. And in Xi’s calculation, observers say, China is prepared not just to fight back, but to use Trump’s trade turmoil to strengthen its own position.

“Xi has been very clear for a very long time that he expects China will enter a period of protracted struggle with the United States and its allies, that China needed to prepare for that, and they have quite extensively,” said Jacob Gunter, lead economy analyst at Berlin-based think tank MERICS.

Trump appeared to link his decision not to grant China the same reprieve as other nations to Beijing’s swift retaliation, telling reporters Wednesday that “China wants to make a deal, they just don’t know how quite to go about it.” But the view from Beijing looks dramatically different. Chinese leader Xi Jinping, China’s most powerful leader in decades, sees no option for his country to simply capitulate to what it calls America’s “unilateral bullying.” And he’s playing to the crowd. Publicly, Beijing has drummed up fervent nationalism around its retaliation – part of a strategy it’s been quietly preparing for more than four years since Trump was last in office. While China has long said it wants to talk, Trump’s rapid escalation instead appears to have confirmed for Beijing that the US doesn’t. And in Xi’s calculation, observers say, China is prepared not just to fight back, but to use Trump’s trade turmoil to strengthen its own position. “Xi has been very clear for a very long time that he expects China will enter a period of protracted struggle with the United States and its allies, that China needed to prepare for that, and they have quite extensively,” said Jacob Gunter, lead economy analyst at Berlin-based think tank MERICS. “Xi Jinping has accepted that the gauntlet is thrown down, and they are ready to put up a fight.” Whether Trump would have suspended his so-called retaliatory tariffs on China alongside other nations had Beijing not moved so swiftly to retaliate remains an open question. Canada had retaliated but was included in the reprieve, which does not remove a 10% universal tariff imposed last week. Regardless, Trump, who the White House described earlier this week as having a “spine of steel,” and Xi now appear locked in a war of attrition with the potential to upset a lopsided but highly integrated trade relationship worth roughly half a trillion dollars. For decades, China has been the world’s factory floor, where increasingly automated and high-tech production chains churn out everything from household goods and shoes to electronics, raw materials for construction, appliances and solar panels. Those factories satisfied the demand of American and global consumers for affordable goods but fueled an enormous trade deficit – and a feeling among some Americans, including Trump, that globalization has stolen US manufacturing and jobs. Trump’s ratcheting up of tariffs to well over 125% could now cut China’s exports to the US by more than half in the coming years, before new factories come online.

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Simone McCarthy

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Trump’s ratcheting up of tariffs to well over 125% could now cut China’s exports to the US by more than half in the coming years, by some estimates.

Many goods from China won’t be able to be quickly replaced – driving up US consumer prices, potentially for years, before new factories come online. That

“In response to US tariffs, we are prepared and have strategies. We have engaged in a trade war with the US for eight years, accumulating rich experience in these struggles,” a commentary on the front page of Communist Party mouthpiece People’s Daily said Monday.

It noted Beijing could take “extraordinary efforts” to boost domestic consumption, which has been persistently weak, and introduce other policy measures to support its economy. “The plans to respond are well-prepared and ample,” the commentary

could ring up a tax hike for Americans of roughly \$860 billion before substitutions, JP Morgan analysts said Wednesday. In China, a wide swath of suppliers are likely to see their already narrow margins completely erased, with a new wave of efforts to establish factories in other countries set to begin. The scale of the tariffs could lead to “millions of people becoming unemployed” and a “wave of bankruptcy” across China, according to Victor Shih, director of the University of California San Diego’s 21st Century China Center. Meanwhile, US exports to China could “go close to zero,” he added. “But China can sustain that (situation) much more so than American politicians can,” he said. That’s, in part, because China’s ruling Communist Party leaders do not face swift feedback from voters and opinions polls. “During Covid they shut down the economy (causing) untold employment, suffering – no problem.” Beijing too believes it can weather the storm.

And in the face of unknowns about how much further measures could escalate, voices from Beijing appear calm.

“The ultimate outcome hinges on who can withstand a longer ‘economic war of attrition,’” economist Cai Tongjun of China’s Renmin University wrote in a state media op-ed earlier this week. “And China clearly holds a greater advantage in terms of strategic endurance.”

Beijing in recent weeks has also been talking to countries from Europe to Southeast Asia in a bid to expand trade cooperation – and one up the US by winning over American allies and partners exasperated by the on-again-off-again trade war.

But it’s been bracing for US trade frictions since Trump’s first trade war and his campaign against Chinese tech champion Huawei, which were a wake-up call to Beijing that its economic rise could be derailed if it wasn’t prepared.

“The Chinese government have been preparing for this day for six

years – they knew this was a possibility,” said Shih in California, who added that Beijing had supported countries to diversify supply chains and looked to manage some of its domestic economic challenges in preparation, among other efforts.

Today, China is much better placed to weather a broader trade conflict, experts say. Compared with 2018, it’s expanded its trade relations with the rest of the world, reducing the share of US exports from roughly one-fifth of its total to less than 15%.

Its manufacturers have also set up extensive

operations in third countries like Vietnam and Cambodia, in part to take advantage of potentially lower US duties. China has also built out its supply chains for rare earths and other critical minerals, upgraded its manufacturing technology with AI and humanoid robots and ramped up its advanced technology capabilities, including semiconductors. Since last year, the government has also worked, with varying success, to address issues like weak consumption and high local government debt.

“China’s weaknesses are significant, but in the context of an all-out brawl, these are manageable. The US is not going to be able to, on its own, bring China’s economy to the edge of destruction,” said Scott Kennedy, a senior adviser at the Center for Strategic and International Studies think tank in the US.

“As much as Washington doesn’t want to admit it, when China says you can’t contain China economically, they have a point.” — CNN

# Macron’s building blocks with Egypt and Lebanon

**LOVE him or hate him, you must acknowledge that French President Emmanuel Macron is relentless. I will admit that I have always been skeptical of his approach and strategy for Lebanon, but his perseverance, consistency and sustained focus on helping Beirut has won me over. He has, for one thing, kept Lebanon at the top of the news agenda and, in times of superpowers colliding, that is precious help.**

Since Macron started his Lebanon initiative, the country has changed. Hezbollah is no longer at the same level of power as it used to be. Between the Israeli punishment and the political change in Syria, the Iranian proxy is now in a dire situation, whether it admits it or not. This means there is now a path to deep and real change in Lebanon. And this could apply to the entire Mediterranean.

Macron’s consistency also carries a broader strategy focused on the coastline. This is not new, but he has painstakingly added the building blocks to try and bring about change. In this context, Lebanon cannot be isolated from Macron’s approach to Egypt or, to a broader extent, Syria or even Algeria. It is about building stability by empowering greater local agency.

Although these efforts seem isolated, there is a logic in creating partnerships between the north and south of the Mediterranean and building trust among countries. Despite the ongoing global commercial and geopolitical storm, I would highlight the French president’s visits to Lebanon in January and Egypt this week as the turning of a new page for the Mediterranean.

When it comes to Egypt, there has been a reciprocal will to enhance and strengthen relations into a strong partnership. This was clear for Cairo as it emerged from the so-called Arab Spring, as France appeared to be the best potential ally to rebuild and diversify the Egyptian armed forces.

Since 2015, this has resulted in France and Egypt concluding major military and naval deals totaling more than 10 billion (\$11 billion).

Key agreements include the purchase of 30 Rafale fighter jets in 2021, following an earlier 2015 deal for 24 jets. The navy has also acquired two Mistral-class amphibious assault ships (delivered in 2016) and four Gowind 2,500-tonne corvettes, one built in France and three in Egypt under a technology transfer agreement. Additionally, Egypt procured a French Future Multi-Mission Frigate in 2015.

These deals highlight

Khaled Abou Zahr

France’s position as one of Egypt’s top defense suppliers. This collaboration also extends to infrastructure and culture, which are just as important, with a clear will to highlight the historical bond between the two countries. The year 2019 — the 150th anniversary of the opening of the Suez Canal — was named the France-Egypt “Cultural Year.”

In addition, Egypt and France last year signed an agreement to enhance international partnerships between their universities. It is through this mix that greater agency for the region is built and the pillars for real geopolitical cooperation are developed.

It was also not a surprise that new Lebanese President Joseph Aoun’s first Western visit was to Paris.

He met with Macron at the Elysee Palace last month. Unsurprisingly, the meeting included a videoconference with interim Syrian President Ahmad Al-Sharaa, as there can be no security and peace

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in Lebanon without stability and balanced relations with Syria.

The approach was actually even broader, as it included a five-party summit with the leaders of Greece and Cyprus focused on stability and maritime safety in the Eastern Mediterranean. This meeting highlighted the importance of containing security concerns at the Syrian-Lebanese border, where confrontations had recently escalated.

Macron has also committed to hosting an international reconstruction conference for Lebanon.

However, this needs to be done while also developing the country’s political stability. Hence, Beirut must include within the country’s reform process the disarmament of Hezbollah, as stipulated in the ceasefire deal that ended the November 2024 conflict with Israel.

Despite France’s continuous support, it is Lebanon’s responsibility to achieve real reforms in the financial, judicial and governance sectors. These steps are a precondition to unlocking international funding.

There is a clear vision of how empowering historical allies in the Mediterranean can help solve problems for all and bring stability. During Macron’s three-day visit to Egypt this week, this was quite clear. The agenda focused on regional security, humanitarian aid and strengthening ties, underlining that it is with the help of countries like Egypt and through proposals that come from within the region that change can be implemented.

This was exemplified by Macron calling for an urgent ceasefire in Gaza and the resumption of humanitarian aid during meetings with President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi and Jordan’s King Abdullah. He also toured aid facilities and a hospital in El-Arish near the Gaza border.

The visit resulted in

new strategic partnership agreements covering the transport, health and education sectors. There is no doubt that Macron’s building blocks between the giants of the Mediterranean, such as Egypt, and involving them in the peace and security of the pearl that is Lebanon is a positive way to increase the agency of the countries of the Mediterranean. It is an approach that is also close to the people. Macron’s symbolic gestures — such as riding the Cairo metro alongside Egyptian citizens and walking through a historic bazaar, just as he did in Beirut in January — show real solidarity with the people of the region and highlight long-standing cultural ties. His message that “you can always count on France” is genuine, but it is also up to the countries themselves to push for change.

# Why I don’t cheer for Israel’s ‘pro-democracy’ movement

**IN conversations about Israel and Palestine, I am often asked about my views on the internal resistance to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s government.**

My questioners point to hundreds of thousands of Israelis who have been taking to the streets to protest against the government and its efforts to introduce a judicial overhaul over the past two years and inquire why I remain apathetic to these efforts to end Netanyahu’s rule.

My answer is simple – the real problem facing Israel is not its current government. The government might fall, but until we radically transform the nature of the regime, not much will change, and particularly not in relation to the basic human rights of Palestinians. A recent Israeli Supreme Court decision underscores my point.

On March 18, 2024, five Israeli human rights organisations filed an urgent petition with Israel’s Supreme Court, asking the court to instruct the Israeli government and military to fulfil their obligations under international

humanitarian law and address the civilian population’s humanitarian needs amid the catastrophic conditions in Gaza.

The petition was submitted at a time when aid was entering Gaza, but the amount crossing the border was far from sufficient to meet the minimal needs of the population, of whom 75 percent had already been displaced. The rights groups wanted the government to lift all restrictions on the passage of aid, equipment and personnel into Gaza, particularly in the north where there were already documented cases of children dying from malnutrition and dehydration.

The court did not issue a ruling for more than a year, effectively allowing the government to continue restricting aid unchecked. Three weeks after the rights groups filed the petition, the court convened only to provide the government additional time to update its preliminary response to the petition. This set the tone for how the petition would proceed over the next 12 months.

Each time the petitioners provided data on the worsening conditions of

the civilian population and emphasised the urgent need for judicial intervention, the court simply asked the government for further updates.

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In its April 17 update, for example, the government insisted that it had significantly increased the number of aid trucks entering Gaza, claiming that between October 7, 2023, and April 12, 2024, it had allowed 22,763 trucks to cross the checkpoints. This amounts to 121 trucks per day, which according to every humanitarian agency

working in Gaza, does not come close to meeting the population’s needs.

In October 2024, at least half a year after the petition was submitted, the rights organisations asked the court to issue an injunction after the government deliberately blocked humanitarian aid for two weeks. In response, the government claimed that it had been monitoring the situation in northern Gaza closely and that underestimated the number of Palestinian residents trapped in northern Gaza – thus acknowledging that the aid entering the Strip was insufficient. On March 18, 2025, after Israel breached the ceasefire agreement and resumed its bombardment of Gaza and the minister of energy and infrastructure halted the supply of electricity to

Neve Gordon

the Strip, the petitioners submitted yet another urgent request for an interim order against the government’s decision to prevent the passage of

humanitarian aid. Again, the court failed to issue a ruling.

Finally, on March 27, more than year after the rights organisations had filed the petition, the court issued a verdict. Chief Justice Yitzhak Amit and Justices Noam Sobelberg and David Mintz unanimously ruled that it lacked merit.

Justice David Mintz

Palestinians – reveal that the Supreme Court of Israel is a colonial court – one that protects the rights of the settler population, while legitimising the dispossession, displacement and horrific violence perpetrated against the Indigenous Palestinians.

And while the Supreme Court might not reflect the values of the existing government – particularly on issues relating to political corruption – it undoubtedly reflects and has always reflected the values of the colonial regime.

Hence, the liberal Zionists who fill Tel Aviv’s streets every weekend are not demonstrating against a judicial overhaul that endangers democracy, but against an overhaul that endangers Jewish democracy. Few of these protesters have any real qualms about the court’s horrific ruling on humanitarian aid, or, for that matter, on how the court has consistently upheld Israeli apartheid and colonial pillars.

The regime, in other words, can continue to eliminate Palestinians unhindered as long as the rights of Israel’s Jewish citizenry are secured.









In brief

Over 5,000 cops to be deployed during PSL matches

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi Police had made foolproof security arrangements for the Pakistan Super League (PSL) 2025, which commenced on April 11(Friday) at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium. According to a police spokesman, the security arrangements were made in coordination with the Pakistan Army, Rangers and other security agencies. "Over 5,000 police personnel along with more than 367 cops of Traffic Police will perform security duties," the spokesman said. Regional Police Officer Babar Sarfraz Alpa and City Police Officer Syed Khalid Hamdani, along with other high officers, were in the field to supervise the arrangements, he added. Special police teams, including Dolphin Force and Elite Force personnel, were deployed around the stadium and its surroundings, the spokesman said. A special control room, he added, had been set up to monitor the stadium and its surroundings and the entire city through Safe City and other CCTV cameras. He said expert snipers were deployed on the rooftops around the stadium and the route of the teams. The spokesman further said that the visitors were allowed to enter the stadium through a walk-through gate and full body search.

Mbappe to recouping 55mn euros from PSG

PARIS (AFP): Real Madrid forward Kylian Mbappe moved closer on Thursday to receiving the 55 million euros (\$61 million) in unpaid wages and bonuses he says his former club Paris Saint-Germain owe him. The player's lawyers announced that the sum will be seized from PSG's accounts and protectively frozen while the case is heard. The Judicial Court of Paris has been given the green light for the funds to be taken from the Qatari-owned club. A legal hearing in the increasingly bitter dispute is scheduled for May 26. "This is just an employee against a bad payer," one of Mbappe's lawyers, Delphine Verheyden, said. "Kylian Mbappe is determined to enforce his rights, not just for himself but for all the other players" who believe they have been wronged by their clubs. The lawyers also announced that Mbappe would take his case to the labour court as part of a wider complaint from the French players' union (UNFP). The union lodged a complaint with the labour court a year ago claiming players were being sidelined at their clubs, something Mbappe believes he was the victim of at PSG. A PSG representative, speaking anonymously, told AFP it had "no problem" in fighting the case at the labour court and said Mbappe "is not going to win". Mbappe joined Real Madrid in June 2024 after seven years at PSG during which he scored 246 goals in 269 games. After a shaky start in Madrid, he has hit a run of form, scoring 22 goals in La Liga and seven times in the Champions League so far this season.

Salah to get new Liverpool deal

LONDON (Agencies): Liverpool are making progress on talks over a new contract for Mohamed Salah and the Premier League leaders are increasingly confident he will stay at Anfield next season, according to reports on Wednesday. The 32-year-old Egypt international is out of contract at the end of this season along with Liverpool team-mates Virgil van Dijk and Trent Alexander-Arnold.

# Noor Zaman clinches World U23 Squash Title, nation celebrates major comeback



KARACHI (APP): Pakistan's rising squash star, Noor Zaman, secured a historic victory at the inaugural WSF World Under-23 Squash Championships on Thursday, defeating Egypt's Kareem El Torkey in a thrilling final at Karachi's DHA Creek Club.

After trailing 2-0 early in the match, Zaman staged a remarkable comeback, dominating the next three sets to clinch the title 3-2. His road to the final saw him overcome Malaysia's Ameeshenraj Chandaran in the semi-finals, where he advanced after his opponent retired while Zaman was two games up.

This victory marks a significant moment for Pakistan squash, signaling

a strong revival on the world stage.

In addition to Zaman's success, Pakistan also excelled in the Plate Event of the Under-23 Championships. Muhammad Ammad won the gold medal in the men's category by defeating Canada's Karim Michael, while Amna Fayyaz earned a silver medal in the women's category after a hard-fought match against Yeheni Kuruppu of Sri Lanka.

With these victories, Pakistan not only celebrated individual triumphs but also secured its place as the World Champion at the 2025 Under-23 World Squash Championships by defeating Egypt — a historic moment hailed as a major comeback for the nation's squash legacy.

## PCB bans Corbin Bosch from PSL for breach of contract

KARACHI (Monitoring Desk): The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) on Thursday banned South African all-rounder Corbin Bosch from the Pakistan Super League (PSL) for one year after he breached his contract by withdrawing from the tournament.

Bosch, 30, was drafted by Peshawar Zalmi in January's PSL player auction but later opted to play in another league instead.

The PCB also imposed an undisclosed financial penalty on the player. The board did not disclose the penalty amount. A source revealed that it was due to the board's signing of an NDA with the cricketer.

In a statement released by the PCB, Bosch apologised for his decision, saying he took "full responsibility" for his actions.

"I deeply regret my decision to withdraw from the HBL Pakistan Super League and offer my sincere apologies to the people of Pakistan, the fans of Peshawar Zalmi, and the wider cricket community," Bosch said. The PCB said Bosch would not be eligible for next year's PSL but did not specify whether the ban extends to other leagues.

The PSL, Pakistan's premier Twenty20 tournament, has grown in stature in recent years, attracting



international stars.

Bosch, who has played in various T20 leagues worldwide, said he hoped to return to the PSL in the future. "This has been a hard lesson, but I am committed to learning from

this experience," he said.

The 10th edition of Pakistan Super League starts in Rawalpindi on Friday with Islamabad United taking on Lahore Qalandars in the opening game.

## Shabbir off to a flawless start in JA Zaman Golf Professional Event

LAHORE (Monitoring Desk): The professional event of the JA Zaman Golf Tournament kicked off Thursday at the picturesque Gymkhana Golf Club in Lahore, featuring 110 top golfers from across Pakistan. The tournament is one of the most anticipated events of the season, with Shabbir Iqbal, often referred to as the "Tiger Woods of Pakistan," being a strong favorite.

With Ahmed Baig participating in international events, the field is wide open for a lot of professionals to take it head on. However, the next three days are expected to bring tough competition, with many talented golfers vying for the top spot. The weather took a harsh turn, with extremely hot conditions making it a challenging day to play.

The participating players shared their thoughts on the tournament, the course, and the experience of being part of this prestigious event. "It's always a pleasure to be part of this prestigious tournament

hosted by the Zaman family. They have played a vital role in promoting golf in Pakistan, and every year this event sets new standards," — stated Zainur Rehman, a Professional and American Certified Master Instructor Teaching Professional.

"The JA Zaman Golf Tournament is always one of the most anticipated events on our calendar. The level of competition, the quality of organization, and the respect the event commands make it a special experience for every participant." Expressed by Adil Jahangir, another notable professional playing the tournament. Another promising player, Mr. Matloob Ahmed opined: "What sets this event apart is the tradition and legacy associated with it. The Zaman family's passion for the game is reflected in every aspect of this tournament. It's an honor to compete here once again, and I'm excited for the challenges ahead."

The leaderboard after round one is beaming with

13 professionals played under par. Shabbir Iqbal took the lead with a score of 65, playing flawless golf with two eagles on par fives and a single bogey at the third hole. Asif Ali and Tabligh Hussain are in second place with a score of 67 each, while Muhammad Minhaj and Akber Mehzoz are a further one stroke back in joint fourth. There are 33 players at par or better after the first round. With many talented golfers competing for the top spot, it will be interesting to see how the leaderboard unfolds tomorrow.

Behind the scenes of the JA Zaman Golf Tournament, a team of dedicated professionals worked tirelessly to ensure the event's success. The Gymkhana Golf Club staff, often unseen by the public eye, played a crucial role in making sure everything ran smoothly. From morning till night, they worked diligently to meet the high standards expected of such a prestigious tournament.

The greenkeeping team deserves special recognition

for their exceptional work in maintaining the fairways and greens despite the challenging hot weather conditions. Notably Muhammad Azam and Muhammad Islam making sure the fairways are lush green and putting areas are smooth and challenging. They are led by the deputy manager Mr. Taimoor with his assistant Usman play a pivotal role. Their efforts did not go unnoticed, as the players appreciated the quality of the course and acknowledged the team's hard work.

The tournament management team also played a vital role in the event's success. Their dedication and expertise ensured that every aspect of the tournament was well-planned and executed. While the players took center stage, it was the behind-the-scenes staff who made it all possible. Their hard work and commitment are a testament to the importance of teamwork and dedication in making events like the JA Zaman Golf Tournament a success.

## Messi scores twice in Miami's frantic comeback over LAFC

FORT LAUDERDALE (AFP/APP): Lionel Messi scored twice as Inter Miami fought back from 2-0 down on aggregate to defeat Los Angeles FC 3-1 and clinch a place in the semi-finals of the CONCACAF Champions Cup on Wednesday.

The Argentine World Cup-winner yet again proved decisive in what was a frantic, chaotic and entertaining encounter, sealing a 3-2 aggregate victory from the penalty spot

with six minutes of normal time remaining.

While there has never been any doubt that the eight-times Ballon d'Or winner still has the technical ability to win games at the age of 37, this was a night when Messi showed he retains the passion and aggression needed for a battle.

In the final minutes of stoppage time, Messi was chasing down opponents and putting in challenges as his team just about hung on for

the win. It was a display which left his coach and former Argentina and Barcelona team-mate Javier Mascherano describing the forward as the "soul" of the team.

"He's a guy who has already done everything in football, he's the greatest in history and he continues to set an example of how to compete," said Mascherano.

"Until the last day he plays on a pitch he's going to want to win and he's going to do the impossible to win. And it's not just about wanting to, you also have to be able to, and he has that ability," he said.

Trailing 1-0 from the first-leg in California, Miami quickly found themselves in big trouble when Aaron Long put LAFC ahead in the ninth minute.

After Miami keeper Oscar Ustari punched a corner out -- Mark Delgado knocked the ball into the box and in the scramble Nathan Ordez laid off to Long and the defender fired home.

With Long's goal carrying extra weight as the away goals rule remains in place in CONCACAF's club competition, Miami knew they had to score three times to stay alive in the tournament.

# HBL PSL X to begin Friday

ISLAMABAD (APP): The HBL Pakistan Super League (PSL) is all set to welcome its tenth edition HBL PSL X, when defending champions Islamabad United take on Lahore Qalandars at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium on Friday night.

A glittering opening ceremony before the start of play on Friday will mark the beginning of this historic edition. HBL PSL X is slated to run from April 11 to 18 May with night matches starting at 8pm PKT.

The 34-match tournament comprises of three double headers scheduled on April 12, May 1 and 10, while the remaining fixtures will be single headers taking place across Karachi, Lahore, Multan and Rawalpindi. The three afternoon games will begin at 4pm PKT.

The six teams will also be locking horns to take away the USD 500,000 prize money set for the winners, while the runners-up team will be awarded USD 200,000. The HBL PSL X Draft, which took place on January 13, gave the six franchises an opportunity to refurbish their squads ahead of the historic edition.

The newly renovated Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore is set to play host to 13 HBL PSL X matches including Qualifier, Eliminator and the May 18 final. The Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium will host 11 matches, while Multan Cricket Stadium and National Bank Stadium will witness five HBL PSL X matches each this season.

Babar Azam, the leading run-scorer in the HBL PSL with 3,504 runs to his name, will be leading the HBL PSL 2017 winners Peshawar Zalmi. Australia's David Warner becomes the fourth overseas player to lead the 2020 champions Karachi Kings

after Ravi Bopara, Kumar Sangakkara and Eoin Morgan.

Mohammad Rizwan, who led Multan Sultans to glory in the 2021 edition in Abu Dhabi, will continue to reign as Sultans' skipper having done so 48 times in the previous four HBL PSL editions. Quetta's Saud Shakeel will take the leadership duties of the Gladiators from Rilee Rossouw. Shadab Khan, who has led Islamabad United in 55 HBL PSL matches so far, has been entrusted leadership duties for HBL PSL X as well, while Shaheen Shah Afridi, the only captain to have won consecutive HBL PSL titles will be in charge of the Lahore Qalandars.

In HBL PSL 2024, Islamabad United emerged winners bagging the title for third time, while Multan Sultans ended up as runners-up for the third consecutive time. In the pre-tournament press conference Babar Azam, captain Peshawar Zalmi said, "This season we are focusing on what we missed out in the last couple of editions and not to repeat the same mistakes. We have strengthened our core on both bowling and batting front so that we don't struggle at any stage of the game."

"We will look to field XIs according to the conditions on the four venues. I think all the six teams are strong making the HBL PSL X highly competitive."

Hasan Ali, vice-captain Karachi Kings said, "Karachi Kings have changed their combination to bring firepower to their batting and in HBL PSL X we intend to play with aggression early on as powerplay is the key to increasing your chances of winning."

"The team environment has been great over the last few days and we will try to play entertaining cricket wherever we go."

Mohammad Rizwan, captain Multan Sultans said, "The HBL PSL X has become a huge brand that every family in the country has supporters of different teams, while all the fans wait for this sporting spectacle whole year. Whoever wins the tournament will be a success for this country as the league has entered the 10th edition."

Saud Shakeel, captain Quetta Gladiators said, "The last few seasons haven't been good for Quetta and like all other teams we have tried our best to assemble a quality squad. We look forward to playing well and entertaining the fans this time around. "Our squad looks well balanced and it will be exciting to lead Quetta Gladiators this season."

Shadab Khan, captain Islamabad United said, "Islamabad United is excited to play five home games at the Rawalpindi Stadium this season and we look forward to performing well in front of our fans. You will get to see a different Islamabad United outfit this season. "Being the defending champions, we will look to continue the consistent performances this season as well and expand our trophy cabinet."

Shaheen Shah Afridi, captain Lahore Qalandars said, "One of the key goals for Lahore Qalandars throughout the HBL PSL has been developing and producing quality players and we will stick to that goal in the 10th edition of the league as well."

"I am highly excited for the young players in the Lahore Qalandars squad and hopefully they will deliver well during this season. I am enjoying the leadership duties for Lahore Qalandars and looking forward to celebrate the HBL PSL throughout the next few weeks."

## Alcaraz eases into Monte Carlo quarter-finals, Draper out



Monte Carlo (AFP): Carlos Alcaraz cruised into the Monte Carlo Masters quarter-finals for the first time on Thursday with a straight-sets win over Daniel Altmaier.

British fifth seed Jack Draper was knocked out by Alejandro Davidovich Fokina, while Lorenzo Musetti won an all-Italian duel against a limping Matteo Berrettini.

Elsewhere, Alexei Popyrin saved match points as he beat 2024 runner-up Casper Ruud and eighth-seeded Alex de Minaur dismantled ninth seed Daniil Medvedev in two sets.

Four-time Grand Slam champion Alcaraz brushed aside 84th-ranked German Altmaier 6-3, 6-1 to set up a last-eight clash with rising French star Arthur Fils on Friday.

"His (Fils') level is really high right now," said Alcaraz. "I saw a little bit from his match today, and he's playing great."

Alcaraz took some time to find his rhythm as Altmaier broke back to level at 3-3 in the first set, but it was one-way traffic from then on.

The second seed reeled off three straight games to take the first set before racing through the second in just over half an hour.

"At the beginning of the match, we played really long and tough rallies, really close games,"

added Alcaraz.

The 21-year-old, the reigning French Open and Wimbledon champion, is the favourite to lift the title this weekend after early exits for top seed Alexander Zverev and Novak Djokovic.

Alcaraz lost in his first match on his only previous appearance at the tournament in 2022.

Fils eased into his third successive Masters quarter-final with a 6-2, 6-3 thrashing of 2023 champion Andrey Rublev.

The 20-year-old Fils is aiming to reach the semis of a Masters event for the first time, after losing in the last eight at both Indian Wells and the Miami Open this year.

"If it's him, it's going to be the first time I'm going to play him," Fils said of meeting Alcaraz.

"It's going to be a good experience. He's a big champion. He won four Grand Slams already. I didn't win a single one."

Draper beaten Draper lost in three sets to Spaniard Davidovich Fokina.

Draper, who won the Indian Wells title last month, slipped to a 6-3, 6-7 (6/8), 6-4 loss as he failed to reach a first Masters quarter-final on clay.

Davidovich Fokina edged a hard-fought opening set which featured three breaks of serve. Draper let three break

points slip away in the ninth game, with Davidovich Fokina taking his second set point.

In the second set Draper saved a match point and then levelled the contest in a tie-break. In a topsy-turvy third set, though, both broke twice inside the first six games.

Davidovich Fokina delivered the decisive blow in the 10th game to secure his first win over a top-10 opponent on clay since 2023.

Davidovich Fokina will take on Australian Popyrin in Friday's quarter-finals.

Popyrin, the world number 27, beat Ruud 6-4, 3-6, 7-5, after saving two match points at 3-5 in the third set.

Musetti, seeded 13, beat Davis Cup team-mate Berrettini 6-3, 6-3 and then talked of "the difficulty of playing a friend, a mate, a team-mate".

"This is a special court for me and also for Matteo. We share a lot of moments here in Monte Carlo where we live," Musetti said. "Definitely one of the toughest challenges for me."

World number 10 De Minaur crushed former US Open winner Medvedev 6-2, 6-2.

"I'm finding my feet on clay," said De Minaur of Australia. "It's taken me a while in my career. I can be dangerous on this surface."





## In brief

### IRSA releases 86,300 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Thursday released 86,300 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 110,800 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, the water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1411.27 feet which was 9.27 feet higher than dead level of 1402.00 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 31,500 cusecs and 25,000 cusecs respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1097.50 feet, which was 47.50 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 35,000 cusecs and 17,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 54,900, 31,600, 27,100 and 6,400 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 26,300 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 12,700 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.

### PHA decorates Rawal Park

RAWALPINDI (APP): Parks and Horticulture Authority (PHA) continuously carried out the beautification of the garden city while colourful flowers and plants were planted in the green belts and parks of the city. Director General PHA Ahmed Hassan Ranjha on Thursday told the media that fine-looking flower vases and small beds of beautiful plants have also been primed at the Rawal park. He said that hands-on steps were taken for the beauty of the city, and PHA was committed to providing the best kind of hygienic and environment-friendly mesosphere to the residents. Ranjha said that efforts were underway to make the city Clean and Green according to the mission of the Punjab government, adding, "Rawalpindi will be made the most beautiful city in Punjab. We want the people to breathe in the green atmosphere." He expressed hope that the residents would join hands with PHA to make the city more aesthetic and prestigious.

### Bike-lifter gang arrested

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi Police, during the crackdown launched on the instructions of City Police Officer Syed Khalid Hamdani on Thursday, busted three members of a gang of bike-lifters and recovered 12 motorcycles from them. According to the Rawalpindi Police spokesman, the Waris Khan Police recovered stolen motorcycles from the accused Akash, Naveed and Abdul Moez. Meanwhile, the Rawalpindi Police, in its ongoing operation against drug dealers according to the drug-free vision of Chief Minister's Punjab, netted 13 big drug smugglers, including a lady suspect and an Afghan national with more than 31 kilograms of charas. The Waris Khan Police nabbed an accused Arshad alias Tala, and recovered 11 kg 200 grams of hashish from him. Dharnial Police recovered 1 kg 160 grams of hashish from an Afghan national, Irshad. Similarly, Pirwadahi Police nabbed the lady smuggler, Nasima Batool and recovered 1 kg 250 grams of hashish from her. RA Bazar Police arrested Shoaib and recovered 3 kg 600 grams of Charas while 2 kg and 100 grams of hashish was recovered from the suspect Atif. The Gujar Khan Police recovered 2 kg and 100 grams of hashish from the accused Wajid, while Sadiqabad Police nabbed Shahbaz and recovered 1 kg 600 grams of hashish from him.



ISLAMABAD: Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi inspecting newly installed MRP and e-passport machines at Directorate General of Immigration and Passports. —APP Photo

## Ayaz highlights importance of inter-parliamentary cooperation for regional development

ISLAMABAD (APP): Speaker National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq Thursday said that stronger cooperation among the parliaments in the region is crucial for sustainable peace and development.

During meeting with Secretary General of Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO) Dr Asad Majeed Khan here, he emphasized the importance of parliamentary diplomacy in fostering closer ties among ECO member states.

Both the sides discussed ways to enhance inter-parliamentary cooperation among ECO member states and other matters of mutual interest.

During the meeting, Ayaz Sadiq welcomed Dr Asad Majeed Khan on his appointment as the Secretary

General of ECO. He congratulated him on assuming his new role and expressed confidence that his leadership would strengthen regional collaboration. Ayaz Sadiq further highlighted Pakistan's active role in the Parliamentary Assembly of Economic Cooperation Organization (PAECO), reaffirming the country's commitment to regional integration through legislative engagement.

The Speaker expressed pride in the National Assembly of Pakistan's role in hosting the ECO Parliamentary Assembly twice. He also pointed out that the Interim Secretariat of Parliamentary Assembly of Economic Cooperation Organization (PAECO) is currently located within the National Assembly of Pakistan

and encouraged Dr Khan to take a proactive approach toward transitioning it into a permanent secretariat.

The Speaker also commended the role of Parliamentary Friendship Groups in strengthening ties between Pakistan and other ECO member countries. Secretary General Dr Asad Majeed Khan thanked Ayaz Sadiq for his warm welcome and praised his efforts in advancing regional parliamentary relations. He assured the NA Speaker of his full support for the establishment of a permanent secretariat for the PAECO in Islamabad.

The meeting concluded with a shared commitment to deepening parliamentary engagement as a key component of regional peace, connectivity and progress.

## Speakers urge swift action to tackle out-of-school children issue

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Director-General of Civil Services Academy, Farhan Aziz Khawaja has stressed the need to tackle and address the issue of out-of-school children on an urgent basis, as it is being ignored continuously.

He was speaking at a two-day Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) workshop, organized by the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) with the collaboration of the British Council, said a press release issued here on Thursday.

Khawaja said: "Pakistan, as a nation and society, is facing multiple challenges; and the issue of out-of-school children is one of the most pivotal among them." Despite numerous interventions,

we have yet to make a significant dent in this problem, he added.

He further said that global public policies and knowledge-based frameworks have proven successful, and we're optimistic that this consortium will bring a real change in our education system by engaging people and communities at grassroots level.

The workshop that assembled key stakeholders from across Pakistan called for strengthening collaborative efforts addressing the country's educational challenges, particularly the pressing issue of out-of-school children. It served as a platform to review progress, exchange ideas, and shape future strategies under a shared commitment to

inclusive education.

The ILMpact Programme, funded by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and led by the British Council, aims to bring about a systemic change in access to school and quality of education.

The event brought together representatives from leading organizations, including Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), British Council, Think Equal, NRSP, SRSP, ITA, Mojaz Foundation, Muslim Hands, Sightsavers, PAMS, and Pratham, all of whom contribute actively to ILMpact's mission.

Speaking to the workshop participants, Farhat Hussain Farooq, the Additional Secretary of

School Education Department, and Dr Syed Shabbir Zaidi, the Director of the Civil Services Academy, underscored the significance of institutional support in this initiative.

The workshop participants were given an orientation on: i) ILMpact's MEL Strategy and LFA (operationalization and way forward), ii) MEL toolkit mapping with clear roles and responsibilities for each partner, iii) tools development deadlines (prioritization of urgently required tools), iv) dashboard orientation and update (reporting and tracking mechanism), and v) partners' approach and MEL plans (team composition, responsibility matrix, and organization-wide integration of the project).

## PTI's tenure led to economic ruin, democracy erosion: Minister Bilal

ISLAMABAD (APP): State Minister for Railways Bilal Azhar Kiani on Thursday accused the previous PTI government of causing economic collapse and weakening democracy, as the country marks over three years since its removal from power.

On the third anniversary of former Prime Minister Imran Khan's removal through a no-confidence vote (April 10, 2022), state minister took to social media platform X to accuse the deposed premier of subverting democratic norms while alleging foreign involvement in his government's collapse. He said the

National Assembly was unlawfully dissolved by the PTI through deceit.

The same elements that stole former prime minister Nawaz Sharif's electoral mandate in 2018 went on to plunder the nation's wealth, pushed the economy to the verge of collapse, and crushed citizens under unprecedented inflation, joblessness, and poverty. They isolated Pakistan internationally and allowed terrorism to resurge.

Regrettably, he said, the architects of Pakistan's crises have neither reformed nor altered their harmful objectives. Their recent attempts to obstruct IMF assistance demonstrate

the same destructive mindset. The May 9 incidents revealed their true nature, while their ongoing vilification of our martyrs and armed forces shows their continued disrespect for national institutions.

While condemning those inciting chaos and unrest, minister Kiani honored PMLN chief Nawaz Sharif, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, and Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) leadership for steering Pakistan back to constitutional governance, democratic stability, and sustainable development - while providing crucial relief to the public.

## CDA's cleanliness, plantation campaign on its peak during spring

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Capital Development Authority (CDA)'s cleanliness and tree plantation campaign in the federal capital on its peak during the spring season to focus on planting as many trees as possible to enhance the green cover and ensure clean ambience.

Talking to APP on Thursday, an official of CDA told that in line with the direction of Prime Minister Muhammad Shahbaz Sharif, the campaign would ensure neat and clean environment to the residents of the metropolitan.

He said that this year, CDA in collaboration with Ministry of Education and Ministry of Climate Change will plant one million trees across the city as part of the Spring Tree Plantation Campaign.

He urged the residents, civil society, educational institutions, corporate sectors and the private sector not to only cooperate with CDA but actively participate in the Spring Tree Plantation Campaign 2025.

The official informed that this year, fruit-bearing trees such as loquat, guava, figs, pomegranates, and other fruit plants will

be planted. Similarly, indigenous species like mulberry, citrus, maple leaf, and other varieties will also be included in the campaign. Olive, rubber plants, willow, and other varieties are also part of the Spring Tree Plantation Campaign.

He stressed that everyone should join hands and contribute actively to make the plantation campaign a success. Fatima Rasool, a resident of G-II, highly appreciated CDA's drive which would provide healthy atmosphere to the citizen in the federal capital. She further said that

CDA's always play key role in ensuring the neat and clean ambience which would eliminate several health diseases.

She emphasized that everybody should play their role in cleanliness and tree plantation during the spring and said that she had already planted a sapling to play her own part in this campaign.

Waqar Ahmed, a student, appealed the Ministry of Education to encourage students to conduct research on carbon credits and to organize seminars on this topic in educational institutions.

## Government tightens passport rules to curb begging, illegal immigration

ISLAMABAD (APP): In a decisive move to curb the rising trend of begging and illegal immigration, Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi has announced strict new measures, including tightening passport issuance procedures and blocking passports of deported individuals.

During a high-level visit to the Directorate of Immigration and Passports, Minister Naqvi chaired an important meeting attended by Minister of State for Interior Talal Chaudhry, Secretary Interior Muhammad Khurram Agha, DG FIA Riffat Mukhtar Raja, and DG Passports Mustafa Jamal Qazi.

Addressing the meeting, Naqvi directed officials to complete all legal formalities related to the newly introduced passport requirements. He emphasized that these steps would serve as a strong deterrent

against organized begging rackets and unlawful migration attempts.

"The new passport conditions will significantly prevent begging and illegal immigration," Naqvi stated, adding that the initiative would portray a positive image of Pakistan on the global stage.

Minister Talal Chaudhry echoed similar sentiments, saying, "This decisive action will send a strong, positive message to the international community regarding Pakistan's commitment to law and order."

In a major operational directive, Mohsin Naqvi ordered strict implementation of the policy to block the passports of individuals deported from abroad, ensuring 100 per cent compliance.

Following the meeting, the Interior Minister inspected six newly installed Machine Readable Passport (MRP) machines

and two e-passport machines at the Directorate. He was also briefed by the German technical team responsible for the installation.

Highlighting the operational upgrades, Naqvi remarked, "With the addition of these advanced machines, the passport office's capacity will increase significantly, enabling faster processing and issuance of passports."

DG Passports Mustafa Jamal Qazi provided a detailed briefing on the enhancements and announced plans to launch a citizen-friendly mobile application soon, aimed at further simplifying passport-related services.

The federal government's robust initiative signals a new era of stricter immigration control and enhanced public service delivery, as Pakistan moves to align itself with international best practices.

## Turkish envoy seeks new avenues for cooperation with Pakistan

ISLAMABAD (APP): Turkish Ambassador to Pakistan, Irfan Neziroglu on Thursday urged to explore more areas of cooperation and joint ventures between two brother countries.

During a meeting with the Chairman of the Prime Minister's Youth Programme, Rana Mashhood Ahmed Khan, the ambassador highlighted the potential of youth exchanges and collaborations.

He emphasized to avail opportunities for Turkish students to pursue higher education at Pakistan's prestigious universities.

The meeting underscored

the deep fraternal bonds shared by Pakistan and Türkiye, transcending traditional diplomatic ties and youth-centric initiatives between the two nations.

He expressed gratitude for Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's visit to Türkiye during the devastating earthquake, lauding it as a testament to the solidarity between the two countries.

Chairman Rana Mashhood revealed that Pakistan would offer fully funded scholarships to Turkish students, paving the way for stronger academic linkages.

He also sought collabora-

tion on the National Youth Council of Pakistan, inviting Turkish expertise and participation to empower the youth of both nations.

The meeting also explored cooperation in media and sports, with both sides expressing enthusiasm for joint projects that would further cement cultural and people-to-people connections. The Chairman reiterated Pakistan's commitment to deepening ties with Türkiye, emphasizing that such initiatives would unlock new opportunities for the youth and strengthen the historic brotherhood between the two nations.

## Bus catches fire on motorway; driver died

ISLAMABAD (APP): A major accident on the M4 Motorway near Pansira left one person dead and dozens at risk when a passenger bus caught fire after colliding with a truck. Swift action by the motorway police helped save the lives of all passengers on board.

According to motorway police spokesperson Syed Imran Ahmed, a passenger bus traveling from Dera Ghazi Khan to Rawalpindi

was collided with a truck early Thursday morning near Pansira on the M4 Motorway.

The bus reportedly collided with a moving truck, leading to a crash that triggered a fire in the vehicle.

There were 43 passengers on the bus at the time of the incident. According to officials, the driver of the bus died in the crash. The remaining passengers were quickly evacuated from the

burning vehicle.

Motorway police and rescue teams arrived promptly at the scene to control the fire and assist in the evacuation process.

The Sector Commander of the Motorway Police also reached the site and led the rescue operation. Officers managed to remove all passengers from the bus before the fire could spread further, preventing a larger tragedy.

## Pakistan, Japan agree to deepen digital cooperation

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Information Technology and Telecommunication Shaza Fatima Khawaja and Japanese Ambassador to Pakistan Akamatsu Shuitsi discussed enhancing bilateral cooperation in information technology, digital transformation, and innovation on Thursday.

In a meeting held here, the minister said the government's commitment to fostering digital growth and embracing emerging technologies is in line with the Prime Minister's vision of a "Digital Pakistan."

Both sides agreed to strengthen collaboration in the technology and digital economy sectors, focusing on benefiting from Japan's expertise in digital transformation. The discussion also centered on human resource development, particularly in areas like artificial intelligence (AI), education, skills training, and employment for Pakistani youth.

The two parties underscored the importance of launching joint initiatives aimed at building a skilled workforce and encouraging partnerships in educa-

tion, research, and advanced technologies. Shaza Fatima and Ambassador Akamatsu also explored the possibility of introducing training programs in ICT, AI, and digital governance.

The Japanese envoy assured full support for Pakistan's efforts in technological and educational advancement. The meeting concluded with a reaffirmation of the shared commitment to expanding cooperation and unlocking new opportunities for youth under the Digital Pakistan vision.

## 4-Day convention for Overseas Pakistanis set for April 13

ISLAMABAD (APP): Overseas Pakistanis Foundation (OPF) an attached department of Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development (OP&HRD) was organizing a four day International Convention of Overseas Pakistanis here from April 13 to April 16, 2025.

An official source told APP here on Thursday that the main theme of this event was proud Pakistanis, Stronger together.

OPF was established

under the Emigration Ordinance, 1979.

It was registered on 8th July, 1979 as Not for Profit Company under the Companies Act, 1913 (now Companies Act, 2017, Section-42). It is a public sector company to be governed under Public Sector Companies (Corporate Governance) Rules, 2013 of Securities & Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP). The Board of Governors is supreme body and all operations of OPF are

managed under overall control of the Board and policy directions from Government.

The main mission of this organization was provide all basic facilities to expatriates to support the national economy.

To ensure welfare of Overseas Pakistanis and their families and contribute towards their systematic rehabilitation on return, by generating sufficient resources and coordination with the stakeholders.



4 hurt in blast at police HQ

KANDAHAR CITY (Pajhwok): An explosion occurred inside an old ammunition container at the police headquarters in southern Kandahar province on Thursday. Police spokesman Mullah Asadullah Jamshid said the explosion took place in a container belonging to the Department of Counter-Narcotics. Four security guards were wounded in the blast, which shattered windowpanes in nearby buildings. It remains unclear how the ammunition exploded.

Two killed in Farah clash

FARAH CITY (Pajhwok): Two persons have been killed and a third injured during a clash between two families in Farah, an official said on Thursday. Police spokesman Mohammad Nasim Badri said a father and his son were killed and another person was injured in a conflict between two families in the Refugee area of 1st police district. He said the families were relatives. Security forces have reached the scene and arrested one person in connection with the case.

Work begins on new 50-bed hospital in Khost



KHOST CITY (Pajhwok): Construction work a 50-bed hospital was launched by a charity in Khost province on Thursday and the project will be completed within six months.

Deputy Governor of Khost, Maulvi Mahboob Shah Qanet, who laid the foundation stone, said the hospital was being constructed on nearly two acres of land along the Ring Road on the western out-

skirts of Khost city by Al-Badr Charity Foundation at a cost of 1.5 million US dollars and will be equipped with advanced medical equipment.

He added many patients would need not travel to other countries for treatment after the construction of this hospital.

"The 50-bed hospital will provide high-quality treatment, so many of our compatriots will not be

forced to travel to foreign countries. Insha Allah, many diseases will be treated here in Khost."

Meanwhile, Dr. Shera Gul Zadran, deputy director of the Khost Public Health Department, said that the hospital will provide high-quality health services.

He added that the construction of the new hospital will also help reduce pressure on the civil hospital to some extent.

According to him, "This hospital will have various departments, such as pediatrics, internal medicine, cardiology, ophthalmology, otolaryngology, obstetrics and others."

Meanwhile, residents of Khost said they were happy with the construction of the Al-Badr hospital and said many Afghans still take their patients to foreign countries.

Mohammad Arif Irfan, a resident of Khost, told Pajhwok Afghan News that if there were standard hospitals within the country, people would not have to send their patients to foreign countries for treatment.

"Great attention should be paid to quality in the construction of this hospital, and modern technology should be used. Most of our patients go to Pakistan and Iran for treatment."

Construction work on the Al-Badr hospital was launched at a time when patients in the Khost Civil Hospital are suffering from poor health services due to increasing number of patients.

3 children killed in Kunar roof collapse

ASADABAD (Pajhwok): Three children have been killed and a fourth injured as result of a roof-collapse incident in eastern Kunar province, an official said on Thursday.

Chapa Dara District Governor Maulvi Habibullah Zubair told Pajhwok Afghan News the incident took place last night when roofs of two rooms in a house caved in due to rainfall.

The roof cave-in occurred in the Sori Ghara village of the district, leaving three children dead and another wounded, the official said.

Rescuers reached the scene and took the injured child to hospital, the district chief said, adding the minor was in stable condition.

Italy to take in 700 Afghan refugees

KABUL (Pajhwok): Italy has announced it will accept 700 Afghan refugees in line with the country's humanitarian corridor programme. The announcement came in a statement from the Community of Sant'Egidio.

Around 700 Afghan refugees will be welcomed to Italy thanks to a new agreement under the Community of Sant'Egidio's long-standing humanitarian corridors initiative.

It is in collaboration with the Italian government and various national and internationally organizations.

In a press release, Community President, Marco Impagliazzo, said: "For Afghans, who were forced to flee their country in great distress following the mass exodus from Kabul in August 2021, and who have been forgotten by the international community while waiting to be resettled, this is finally a sign of hope."

In total, the humanitarian corridors initiative, promoted by Sant'Egidio alongside various organisations, has enabled 8,200 refugees to arrive safely in Europe.

The project, which is entirely self-funded, is carried out through a widespread network of hospitality, supported by the generosity of many Italian citizens.

‘Opponents seek help from foreign states’

PARWAN (TOLONews): Mohammad Siddiq Mokhles, the intelligence chief of Parwan province, in a public gathering accused political opponents of the Islamic Emirate who reside in neighboring countries of receiving aid from foreign states.

In this gathering, Mokhles stated that these groups also misuse some youth with-

in the country against the Islamic Emirate. The gathering aimed at addressing the challenges of residents in Sayd Khel district of Parwan province.

"You must be aware of history and the political situation. The people who have gone from the country to Iran and Tajikistan, sometimes go to Pakistan and at times even seek help from Israel," The intelligence chief said.

The governor of Parwan said that there exist no types of discrimination in Afghanistan and among the officials of the Islamic Emirate.

Mohammad Idris Anwari said "There is no ethnic, linguistic, or regional discrimination among your officials. Rather, your officials consider such biases and preferential attitudes as a major deviation."

Meanwhile, some residents of Sayd Khel district—located near Charikar, the center of Parwan—say that with the destruction of their agricultural lands due to flooding from the Panjshir, Salang, and Ghorband rivers, as well as the lack of



electricity and damaged roads, they are facing serious problems.

They called on officials to address these issues.

Nasir Ahmad Mohabbat, a resident of Sayd Khel district, said: "A survey has been done but it is not enough, because from Gulbahar to the end of Sayad, these people are under the threat of flooding from two rivers."

Mir Rafiullah Munib, another resident of Sayd Khel district, said: "Projects that remain incomplete—whether in education, roads, or electricity—I hope the governor will make more efforts to complete these projects."

Local officials in Parwan have also added that many public meetings have been organized across various areas of the province to discuss and resolve residents' challenges.

20m Afghans accessed healthcare services: UN

KABUL (Pajhwok): The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) says over 20 million people, half of them children, accessed primary healthcare services through UNICEF-supported facilities in Afghanistan last year.

UNICEF Afghanistan's 2024 annual report highlights the progress made for children and families across the country, as well as the complex challenges the organization continues to face.

Over 20 million people, half of them children, accessed primary healthcare services through UNICEF-supported facilities.

Nearly 12 million children and mothers

received vital nutrition interventions.

About 564,000 children – 64% of them girls – gained access to education through community-based learning initiatives.

Over 1.1 million people were provided with emergency water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services.

"We would like to thank our partners and donors for their invaluable support to every achievement in 2024, as well as the people of Afghanistan, whose bravery and strength are reflected in every result described in this report", the organization said

"This report is a testament to the spirit of the people of Afghanistan and the resilience of its children."

Taliban ban images of living beings in Badakhshan

KABUL (Amu TV): Taliban have prohibited the publication of images depicting living beings — including humans and animals — in the northern provinces of Badakhshan and Jawzjan, according to local media sources.

The directive, issued by the Taliban's

Minister calls for revision of Farah city's strategic plan

KABUL (BNA): Sheikh Hamdullah Nomani, the Minister of Urban Development and Housing, has called for further revisions to the strategic plan for Farah city during a recent meeting with a review delegation. The delegation shared their findings from a recent assessment of Farah province's urban planning.

Mawlawi Mohammad Haroon Siddiqi, Head of Urban Studies, highlighted significant issues in the initial plan, including zoning, transportation, canal buffer zones, public urban services, and water supply.

Siddiqi reported that these concerns have been addressed in the newly revised strategic plan. However, Minister Nomani urged for additional improvements and the need to share the revised plan with relevant departments for comprehensive development. The Ministry remains committed to fostering systematic urban growth across all provinces, focusing on modernizing and implementing necessary plans that meet contemporary needs.

provincial Departments of Information and Culture, was delivered this week following a meeting of the local Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, sources familiar with the matter told Amu. The order was reportedly communicated to local media outlets on Wednesday.

According to those sources, the ban has been imposed "by force" and media organizations have been instructed to comply. Taliban officials warned that outlets found violating the restriction would face "serious consequences."

In Jawzjan, Taliban representatives told journalists that the decision originated from Taliban supreme leader Hibatullah Akhundzada, and that all institutions must obey the directive without exception.

The policy marks an expansion of earlier restrictions on visual media under Taliban rule. Similar bans on broadcasting or publishing images of living creatures have previously been imposed in at least 13 other provinces, including Kandahar, Farah, and Helmand. Several outlets have reportedly been forced to close for non-compliance.

Media workers in the affected regions described the ban as part of a broader campaign of censorship and cultural suppression.

"This is aimed at erasing visual and cultural identity," said one media employee, who asked not to be named for security reasons. "It's not just a ban — it's part of a policy of silencing and erasing public life."

UN documents widespread detentions by PVPV enforcers

KABUL (Amu TV): The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in a report released Thursday has documented widespread enforcement of the Taliban's "law on the propagation of virtue and prevention of vice," or the morality law, reporting the deployment of more than 3,300 enforcers across 28 provinces and detailing broad-scale detentions, restrictions on daily life, and economic impacts since the law's implementation in August 2024.

In this report, UNAMA has revealed that enforcement operations by the Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice (PVPV) have led to arbitrary detentions, forced compliance checks, and harsh penalties across the country. The law, which codifies prior decrees restricting personal freedoms, has particularly targeted men's appearance and women's access to public life.

Key figures:  
3,300 male PVPV inspectors deployed in 28

of Afghanistan's 34 provinces.

Over half of all documented arbitrary detentions were related to men's non-compliant haircuts or beard length.

Multiple detentions were reported for men who failed to attend congregational prayers or were caught listening to music, taking photographs, or playing videos.

Inspectors have detained individuals for up to three days in police lockups, mobile checkpoints, or makeshift detention containers.

UNAMA notes that the Taliban have established provincial implementation committees in at least 28 provinces to oversee enforcement. These committees, led by provincial governors, coordinate with religious leaders and local officials to monitor public compliance.

Women and girls have borne the brunt of the law's restrictions. Enforcement has intensified bans on female education, employment, and public visibility:

Hijab enforcement surged from 13% to 70% in surveyed areas.

Restrictions on public access for women rose from 38% to 76%.

Girls' education above grade six is restricted in 98% of communities, up from 79%.

The law's socioeconomic effects are also stark. Women-owned businesses reported diminished revenue and limited access to clients due to mahram travel restrictions. Barbers, tailors, and photographers have seen income plummet due to enforcement against modern grooming, music, and image creation. Health workers, particularly women, face increased barriers to employment, and patients struggle with mahram travel requirements.

In the humanitarian sector, enforcement has disrupted aid delivery:

46% of aid agencies say women can no longer travel to field sites.

49% report they are no longer allowed to meet with female beneficiaries.

60% say they can no

longer take photographs during aid distributions, further complicating documentation and reporting.

UNAMA warns that the PVPV law is contributing to a climate of fear and self-censorship, with community and family members increasingly enforcing Taliban edicts at the household level. A growing number of families are sending daughters abroad due to education bans, resulting in the outflow of substantial financial resources.

The report concludes that these developments are pushing Afghanistan further from international norms, noting that the United Nations Security Council has urged the Taliban to reverse the policies, including the vice and virtue law, as part of its call for restoring basic rights and freedoms.

"The propagation of virtue and prevention of vice law is not only reshaping Afghan society—it is actively compounding the country's humanitarian and economic crises," the report stated.

Taliban plan ‘propaganda’ radio broadcasts

KABUL (Amu TV): The Taliban are preparing to install radio transmitters in at least nine provinces as part of an effort to expand state-run media broadcasting aligned with their messaging, according to a source at the Taliban-controlled national television network.

The source, who spoke to Amu on condition of anonymity due to security concerns, said the initiative follows a directive from Taliban leader Hibatullah Akhundzada and is intended to disseminate what the Taliban describe

as its "achievements," as well as to publicize corporal punishments and counter opposition narratives.

"The goal is to promote Taliban achievements, publicize flogging and executions, and target those who speak against the Taliban," the source said.

According to the source, the initiative began in Spin Boldak district of Kandahar Province and is being overseen by Yusuf Ahmadi, who serves as director of the Taliban-run radio and television authority.

The Taliban reportedly plan to use equipment from the national broadcaster under their control, as well as radio infrastructure left behind by NATO forces after the 2021 withdrawal.

The move comes amid continued restrictions on independent media in Afghanistan. Since the Taliban returned to power in August 2021, dozens of media outlets have been shut down, journalists have been arrested or intimidated, and content has been tightly censored — leading to what press

freedom watchdogs have described as one of the most repressive media environments in the world.

International organizations have repeatedly called on the Taliban to uphold media freedom and allow independent journalism, but the Taliban have increasingly consolidated its control over information, promoting content that aligns with its religious and political ideology.

There has been no official public statement from Taliban authorities regarding the radio expansion plan.

Childbirth carries deadly risk for women in Badakhshan

FAIZABAD (Pajhwok): For women in the remote district of Kiran wa Minjan in northeastern Badakhshan province, childbirth often carries a deadly risk.

Inadequate medical facilities, a lack of trained doctors, and impassable roads have led to countless preventable deaths. For many, giving birth means gambling with life.

One such tragedy is that of Abdullah, a 35-year-old man from Kiran wa Minjan, who has yet to come to terms with the loss of his wife. His hands tremble, a lump forms in his throat, and his voice cracks with emotion as he speaks: "If there had been a doctor and medicine, if there had been a hospital in our district, she would have been still alive, and my child would have been born."

Abdullah's wife died while being transported to Faizabad, the provincial capital, after enduring three days of excruciating labor. Initially, she was

taken to the local clinic in Kiran wa Minjan, but due to the lack of medical equipment and trained staff, she was referred to Faizabad. Tragically, she did not make it to her destination and passed away in Ab Jukhan area of Yaman district.

Reflecting on the heart-wrenching experience, Abdullah says, "It had been a year since our marriage, and it was my wife's first pregnancy. She endured three days of pain. We took her to the clinic in Kiran wa Minjan, but nothing could be done. When we tried to transfer her to the hospital in Faizabad, she died on the way. If there had been a proper hospital with trained doctors here, my wife and child would still be with me."

Lack of life-saving resources

Abdullah's brother-in-law, Abdul Rauf, speaking at his sister's funeral, described the situation with sorrow. "My sister suffered

three days of pains because there were no trained doctors. Despite our best efforts, we couldn't get her to a hospital in Baharak or Faizabad. She passed away on the way to Faizabad. We brought her lifeless body back to the village of Askaspeek."

Abdul Rauf emphasized the lack of medical facilities, long travel distances, and poor road conditions as the primary factors in his sister's death.

He urgently called on the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) to build a modern hospital in Kiran wa Minjan to prevent further tragedies.

Mahsa, a mother of three from Badakhshan, shared the struggles women in the province face during childbirth. "Many women in remote districts cannot get to a hospital or health center in time. As a result, some mothers either lose their lives or their babies." She highlighted the lack of

skilled midwives and proper transportation as critical issues.

"Building equipped hospitals and clinics with trained midwives and specialist doctors in each district would significantly reduce maternal mortality rate. Currently, only a few districts have well-equipped clinics. In remote areas, there are no health services or the ones available do not meet people's needs," Mahsa said.

She warned that unless these issues are addressed, women in rural areas will continue to suffer, with more mothers' lives lost, particularly during childbirth.

In the previous solar year (1403), 29 women in Kiran wa Minjan died from complications related to childbirth before reaching a health facility.

Bakhsh Mohammad, head of the primary health center in Askazar, the district center, confirmed that health-related problems had

exacerbated by the district's remote location.

"We do not have surgical or operational facilities here," he explained. "Patients who need to be referred often die from complications like excessive bleeding during the journey to Baharak or Faizabad."

He stressed the need for a Comprehensive Health Center (CHC) to provide advanced care on-site, without the need for dangerous and time-consuming travel.

Bakhsh Mohammad further revealed that, while three people died at the Askazar health center in 1403, 29 others lost their lives on their way to Faizabad or Baharak. He called for the urgent establishment of a CHC in the district to reduce these deaths.

Inaccessible health care

Residents of villages in Kiran wa Minjan, like Amarullah from Yamak Bala, also voiced their

frustration with the lack of medical facilities. "In our area, we are more than four hours' walking distance from the nearest health center, and there are no advanced clinics or qualified doctors nearby. We always lose our patients on the way to other hospitals."

The long distance to the provincial capital, combined with poor roads and harsh winter conditions, make it extremely difficult to transfer patients in time for critical care. "We need a modern health center here. If we don't get one, we will continue to lose our loved ones," Amarullah added.

Sayed Akbar, who lost his young son a month ago due to the lack of medical facilities, echoed these concerns. "In the entire district, there is only one ambulance. Even for simple illnesses, there is not enough equipment. A month ago, my son fell ill, and despite trying to transfer him to

Faizabad, he passed away on the way."

The clinic in Kiran wa Minjan has severe shortages. "They may have medicine for three months, but when it runs out, there is no guarantee when it will be available again," Sayed Akbar lamented. He called for more doctors and specialists in the district.

Officials' promises

Bakhsh Mohammad, the representative of Skaspak village, added to the growing call for better medical infrastructure. "Our patients must travel 10 to 11 hours to reach Faizabad. Many pregnant women die during this journey because of bleeding or severe pain. Some families can't afford the high costs of transferring patients to Faizabad or Panjshir. The government and international organizations must address the lack of health services in our district."

Qari Atiqullah Faizi, the head of Badakhshan's public health department, acknowledged the district's health challenges but did not confirm the maternal mortality figures.

He said that upgrading the existing primary health center (BHC) to a CHC had been approved but had yet to be implemented due to budget constraints.

Faizi also revealed that the Ministry of Public Health plans to build 318 district general hospitals across Afghanistan this year. If Badakhshan receives 27 new hospitals, one will be constructed in Kiran wa Minjan. If fewer hospitals are allocated to the province, one will either be built in Kiran wa Minjan or Yaman, along with necessary buildings and services to improve healthcare in the region.

Currently, 10 districts in Badakhshan have primary health centers, and three have district-level health facilities. However, only a few districts have fully functioning comprehensive health centers (CHC).



# WB arm's \$300m lifeline sets tone for \$2b global push into Reko Diq

ISLAMABAD (Reuters): The World Bank's private investment arm, International Finance Corporation (IFC), will provide \$300 million in debt financing for Pakistan's Reko Diq copper-gold mining project, according to a disclosure issued by the lender.

Located in the Chagai District of Balochistan province, the mine is considered one of the world's largest underdeveloped copper-gold areas and its development is expected to have a significant impact on Pakistan's struggling economy.

Barrick Gold owns a 50% stake in the Reko Diq mine, and the governments of Pakistan and Balochistan own the other 50%. The mine's Project Director, Tim Cribb, told Reuters on Tuesday that Barrick Gold's Reko Diq copper and gold project in Pakistan intended to lock in upwards of \$2 billion in financing from international lenders, with term sheets signed by early Q3.

In an interview with Reuters at the Pakistan Minerals Investment Forum 2025, Cribb said the mine was looking at \$650 million from the International Finance Corporation and International Development Association. Cribb further said that the funding would support the development of the mine, and hoped to generate \$70 billion in free cash flow and \$90 billion in operating cash flow.

Barrick Gold and the governments of Pakistan and Balochistan own the project jointly. The financing for phase one of the project, which is expected to start production in 2028, is being discussed with multiple

lenders. The Reko Diq project director added that the mine was also in talks with the US Export-Import Bank for \$500 million to \$1 billion in financing, as well as \$500 million from development finance institutions, including the Asian Development Bank, Export Development Canada, and Japan Bank for International Cooperation.

He said railway financing talks were underway with the IFC and other lenders, with infrastructure costs estimated at \$500-800 million, with roughly \$350 million as the initial cost. A recent feasibility study has upgraded the project's scope, with phase one throughput increasing to 45 million tons per annum from 40 million, and phase two throughput rising to 90 million tons per annum from 80 million.

The mine life has been revised from 42 years to 37 years due to the rising throughput, although the company believes unaccounted-for minerals could extend the life to 80 years. The cost of phase one has also been revised upwards to \$5.6 billion from \$4 billion. The World Bank plans to invest \$2 billion annually in Pakistan's infrastructure over the next decade.

The project, which was delayed due to a long-running dispute that ended in 2022, is expected to start production by the end of 2028. It will produce 200,000 tons of copper per year in its first phase, with an estimated cost of \$5.5 billion. The first phase is expected to be completed by 2029.

**Pakistan, WB discuss strategic energy sector collaboration:**

Federal Minister for Petroleum Ali Pervaiz Malik and World Bank's Regional Director for South Asia, Pankaj Gupta, on Thursday discussed strategic partnerships and technical support to advance Pakistan's energy sector. The meeting focused on accelerating sustainable energy development, enhancing infrastructure, and addressing key challenges in the oil and gas sectors.

Ali Pervaiz reiterated the government's commitment to modernizing Pakistan's energy landscape through integrated energy planning, improved efficiency, and clean energy initiatives. He emphasized the importance of international collaboration and investment in meeting the country's long-term energy security and sustainability objectives.

Pankaj Gupta reaffirmed the World Bank's continued support for Pakistan's energy reforms and expressed optimism about expanding cooperation. He acknowledged the progress made by the government and discussed potential technical assistance programs to further strengthen institutional capacity and infrastructure. The Petroleum Minister thanked the World Bank for its longstanding partnership, underscoring the importance of such engagements in achieving national energy goals.

Both sides agreed to maintain close coordination for upcoming projects aimed at fostering economic growth and promoting energy sustainability. Senior officials from the Ministry of Petroleum and the World Bank also attended the meeting.



ISLAMABAD: Activists of Jamaat-e-Islami holding a protest against Israel attacks on Gaza.

## Rubio says direct US-Iran talks to take place Saturday

WASHINGTON (Reuters): US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said on Thursday the United States will hold direct talks with Iran on Saturday to discuss Iran's nuclear program. The talks between US special envoy Steve Witkoff and a senior Iranian leader are scheduled for Saturday in Oman.

"We hope that'll lead to peace. We've been very clear what Iran is never going to have as a nuclear weapon, and I think that's what led to this meeting," Rubio said during a Cabinet meeting chaired by President Donald Trump. Iran may suspend cooperation with the UN nuclear watchdog if external threats continue, an adviser to Iran's supreme leader said on Thursday, after US President Donald Trump again warned of military force if Tehran does not agree to a nuclear deal.

Iranian and American diplomats will visit Oman on Saturday to start dialogue on Tehran's nuclear programme, with Trump saying he would have the final word on whether talks are reaching a breakdown, which would put Iran in "great danger". "Continued external threats and putting Iran under the conditions of a military attack could lead to deterrent measures like the expulsion of IAEA inspectors and ceasing cooperation with it," Ali Shamkhani, an adviser to Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, published on X, referring to the International Atomic Energy Agency.

"Transferring enriched material to safe and undisclosed locations in Iran could also be on the agenda," he wrote. While the US insists that the talks with Tehran will be direct, Iran has stressed the negotiations will be indirect with intermediation from Oman's foreign minister.

## Russian advances in Ukraine slow down

MOSCOW: Russia's territorial gains in Ukraine are slowing down dramatically, two analyses have found, continuing a pattern from 2024 at a time when both nations are trying to project strength in the face of United States-mediated negotiations aimed at ending the war.

Britain's Ministry of Defence last week estimated that Russian forces seized 143sq km (55sq miles) of Ukrainian land in March, compared with 196sq km (76sq miles) in February and 326sq km (126sq miles) in January. The Institute for the Study of War, a Washington, DC-based think tank, spotted the same trend, estimating Russian gains at 203sq km (78sq miles) in March, 354sq km (137sq miles) in February and 427sq km (165sq miles) in January.

These estimates are based on satellite imagery and geolocated open-source photography rather than claims by either side. Should this trend continue, Russian forces could come to a standstill by early summer, roughly coinciding with US President Donald Trump's self-imposed early deadline for achieving a ceasefire.

Russia's diminishing returns have come even as it has greatly expanded the size of its forces from an estimated 150,000 soldiers who carried out its initial invasion in February to May 2022. — Aljazeera

## PPL and BME sign deal with GoB at PMIF 2025

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Petroleum Limited (PPL) and its subsidiary Bolan Mining Enterprises (BME) signed a milestone agreement with the Government of Balochistan (GoB) for the Barite-Lead-Zinc (BLZ) project on April 8 at the Pakistan Minerals Investment Forum (PMIF) 2025, held in Islamabad.

The signing ceremony was attended by the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Mr. Shahbaz Sharif, and the Chief of Army Staff, General Syed Asim Munir, reflecting the national significance of the initiative. The agreement was signed by Mr. Imran Abbasy, Managing Director and CEO of PPL, and Mr. Saidal Khan Luni, Secretary Mines and Minerals, GoB.

As a Strategic Partner of PMIF 2025, PPL actively showcased its growing presence in the mining sector through a dedicated and



visually engaging booth, set up by BME. The stall attracted a large number of visitors, including government officials, foreign dignitaries, mining professionals, investors, academics, and media representatives.

A major highlight of PPL's participation was the launch of a comprehensive Mineral Map of Pakistan, capturing the country's immense mineral wealth including industrial minerals, metals, rare-earth elements, and gemstones. The map drew widespread attention and appreciation from attendees for its clarity and depth.

The BLZ project represents a significant step forward in unlocking the mineral potential of Balochistan. Operated by BME, a longstanding joint venture with the GoB since 1974, the project promises to spur economic growth in Khuzdar through value addition, job creation, and infrastructure development. This landmark agreement reaffirms the Government's commitment to fostering public-private partnerships for sustainable mineral development, positioning Pakistan as an emerging hub in the global mineral value chain.

## IHC summons Islamabad, Punjab IGP's

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Thursday summoned Inspector General of Police (IGPs) of Punjab and Islamabad in personal capacity on April 16, in a case for the recovery of four missing Afghan brothers.

IHC's Justice Muhammad Asif heard the petition of Afghan woman Gul Seema for the recovery of 4 Afghan brothers missing from Islamabad since January 2024. The court summoned the IG Islamabad and IG Punjab in personal capacity on April 16 at 11 am.

At the outset of hearing, Justice Asif said in a conversation with Islamabad and Rawalpindi police officials that if this happens to you and me, then we could feel the situation. How long will the chain continue? He remarked that the mother of the missing sons comes to my court again and again. In this case, we are going to form a JIT. Whomever should be included in it, he asked.

Meanwhile, the Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Thursday rejected the report of Islamabad Police regarding drug use in educational institutions of capital and summoned the concern. Additional Inspector General (AIG) responsible for compiling the document.

The court remarked that the police are busy on VIP duty instead of eliminating drugs and crimes. The case against drug use in educational institutions was heard in the Islamabad High Court, in which the court declared the Islamabad Police report as against the law and indicated action. It said that the Islamabad Police report is not in accordance with the law.

The court summoned the AIG of Islamabad Police, who compiled the report, in his personal capacity. Earlier, in the application submitted by the Islamabad Police to the court, it was stated that the duty of VIPs is more sensitive and time-consuming. The police is busy maintaining the law and order situation.

Later, Justice Inaam Ameen Minhas issued a written order, which said that the response of the Islamabad Police was pointed out before the court. Instead of eliminating drug crimes, the Islamabad Police said that they are busy on VIP duty.

The court said that the police's lack of interest in eliminating drug crime (in educational institutions) shows incompetence. The report is not correct as per law. The police officer who compiled the report should appear in person at the next hearing. Why should action not be taken on submitting such a report? Why should action not be taken on incompetence in discharging the responsibility as per law, the court said.

## Mly trials: SC questions lack of independent forum

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court's constitutional bench observed that while the Army Act is a valid law, questions remain about the absence of an independent forum for military trials.

The remarks came during a hearing on the legality of trying civilians in military courts. The case was heard by a seven-member larger bench, led by Justice Aminuddin Khan. During the proceedings, Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar pointed out that "Defence of Pakistan" and "Defence Services of Pakistan" are two separate concepts.

Justice Naem Akhtar Afghan remarked that entering a restricted area is also considered a violation. "Shopping malls have been built inside Cantonment areas. If I forcibly enter

without a permit, will I also be tried in a military court?" he asked. "This is the first case under the post-1967 amendments that we are hearing."

He added that civilians could be at risk in cities like Lahore, Quetta, and Gujranwala where Cantonment areas exist. Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhail said such disputes are frequently seen in Quetta Cantt. Justice Mazhar noted that shopping malls are not declared restricted zones, adding that Karachi has six to seven Cantonment areas, but major roads there are not marked as restricted.

Justice Mandokhail shared a personal incident where he was denied entry into a Cantonment due to not having a permit. He questioned the broad interpretation of "Defence

of Pakistan," saying even the Supreme Court and parliament could fall under it.

He added that although the Army Act is a valid law, since the insertion of Article 10-A in the Constitution (which ensures the right to a fair trial), earlier practices need to be reassessed. "Why is there no independent forum for military trials?" he asked.

Justice Mandokhail further remarked that if military trials are allowed simply for entering a restricted area, then it would be very easy to try anyone under such laws. "Do cases go to military courts because harsher punishments are expected there? Why can't these trials be conducted in standard courts?" The court adjourned the hearing until April 15.



LAHORE: Sikh pilgrims carrying their belongings as they arrived from India through Wagah border to attend Baisakhi festival.

## KP CM directs legislation to curb professional begging

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Khan Gandapur, while taking notice of the issue of professional beggary in the province has decided to carry out proper legislation to effectively curb professional begging and ensure a safe environment for citizens. In this regard, a letter has been sent from the Chief Minister's Secretariat to the Chief Secretary.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, asking for the preparation and enactment of a new law titled "Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Vagrancy (Control and Rehabilitation) Act."

The objective of this legislation is to control the practice of forced begging involving children and disabled persons and to counter exploitation-based criminal activities. The letter, mentioned for the formation of a multi-departmental committee under the supervision of the Secretary Social Welfare with representation from the concerned departments including Law, Local Government, Police, Child

Protection Commission, Bureau of Statistics, the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner of Peshawar, NGOs, and civil society to oversee the proposed legislation and related matters. It has also been mentioned that the committee must present the draft law and an operational and enforcement framework within thirty days.

The letter further noted the proposed law should clearly categorize child and forced begging, professional beggary, vagrancy, and other related activities. It should also prescribe penalties for the use of children, disabled individuals, and drug addicts in begging, and criminalize the operation, financing or sheltering of begging groups. Moreover, the law should include punishments for professional beggars who obstruct public movement or harass citizens. Designated officers from the police, social welfare, and local government departments will be authorized to apprehend violators and process their cases.

Additionally, it has also

been mentioned to establish a WhatsApp hotline for citizen facilitation and reporting of professional beggars. Through this, citizens can report incidents by uploading pictures of persons involved in professional begging or child exploitation. Furthermore, designated traffic points, terminals, markets, and other public places should be declared "No Begging Zones." The new law will also incorporate provisions for on-the-spot fines and summary trials of offenders. To identify and register repeat offenders, an AI-based facial recognition or biometric mechanism be employed.

The letter states that children found begging will be handed over to the Child Protection and Welfare Commission, while legal action will be proposed under relevant laws against guardians, handlers and groups forcing children into begging. The legislation will also include measures for the rehabilitation of homeless individuals involved in professional begging.

## US, Russia exchange prisoners in Abu Dhabi

ABU DHABI (AFP): The UAE mediated a prisoner exchange between Russia and the US on Thursday, which took place on its soil in Abu Dhabi. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs facilitated the exchange of one Russian citizen for one US citizen, with representatives from both countries present in Abu Dhabi.

The ministry expressed appreciation for the confidence placed in the UAE by the American and Russian governments in designating Abu Dhabi as the location for the prisoner exchange process, WAM reported. It added that "choosing Abu Dhabi for the prisoner exchange process reflects the close friendship ties of both countries with the UAE."

Abu Dhabi hopes these efforts will de-escalate tensions and enhance dialogue, contributing to regional and international security and stability, WAM added. It is the second swap since President Donald Trump returned to the White House as Russia and the US push for closer ties.

Moscow released US-Russian ballet dancer Ksenia

Karelina, who had been sentenced to 12 years in prison on treason charges, with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio confirming early Thursday she was on a plane to the United States. In exchange, the United States released Arthur Petrov, a Russian-German citizen who had been facing up to 20 years in a US prison for violating export controls and who was arrested in Cyprus in 2023 at Washington's request for allegedly exporting sensitive microelectronics.

CIA Director John Ratcliffe was present at the Abu Dhabi airport, where the exchange took place on Thursday, the AFP reported. A CIA spokeswoman told the Wall Street Journal that "the exchange shows the importance of keeping lines of communication open with Russia, despite the deep challenges in our bilateral relationship."

"While we are disappointed that other Americans remain wrongfully detained in Russia, we see this exchange as a positive step and will continue to work for their release," she said.

Russia has yet to confirm the swap, which would be the second since Trump returned to the White House in January.

Trump and Russian leader Vladimir Putin have since pushed for a restoration of closer ties between the two countries that were severely damaged by Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. Several meetings between the two sides have taken place, with a new round of talks beginning Thursday in Istanbul on restoring some of the embassy operations that were scaled back following the Ukraine invasion.

Karelina, who was born in 1991 and lived in Los Angeles, was serving a 12-year prison sentence for having donated around \$50 to a pro-Ukraine charity. She was arrested in the Urals city of Yekaterinburg in January 2024 while on a trip to visit her family. She was charged with "treason."

Russia's Federal Security Service accused her of collecting funds for Ukraine's army that were used to purchase "equipment, weapons and ammunition" — charges she denied.