

Quake jolts twin cities, KP  
F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Tremors were felt in Islamabad and Rawalpindi on Saturday as an earthquake rattled several cities across northern Pakistan. The tremors were also experienced in Attock and Chakwal, where jolts were reported across the region and its surrounding areas. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, tremors were felt in Peshawar, Mardan, Mohmand, and Shabqadar.



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

SBC calls for strike  
F.P. Report

KARACHI: Sindh Bar Council (SBC) on Saturday announced to boycott Sindh High Court (SHC) and other court across the province against construction of new canals. Karachi Bar Association will hold a lawyers convention against the construction of six canals from Indus River. Sindh Bar Council urged all its members not to appear in any courts.

Vol. XXXIXII

No. 74

Regd. No. 241

SHAWWAL 14 1446 -- SUNDAY, APRIL 13 2025

PESHAWAR EDITION

12 PAGES

PRICE. 30

# Iran, US agree to hold more talks

MUSCAT: Delegates from the United States and Iran agreed to hold more talks next week after concluding "indirect" nuclear negotiations in the Omani capital, Muscat.

Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs described Saturday's talks as having been conducted in a "constructive atmosphere and based on mutual respect", and said chief negotiators "spoke for several minutes in the presence of the Omani foreign minister while leaving the negotiations venue".

asked to produce a position paper, laying out the areas they think are important for the discussion and their red lines.

Iran has emphasised that the talks will solely be focused on its nuclear programme, and not its military capabilities or its "axis of resistance" of aligned forces across the region. Shortly before the talks, US President Donald Trump again warned Tehran of military action if a deal is not reached.

"I want them not to have a nuclear

because Trump unilaterally withdrew from Iran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers in 2018 during his first term as president.

It remains unclear whether the second round of the talks will be direct or carried out similarly to Saturday's mediated negotiations. Ahead of the talks, a senior aide to Supreme Leader Khamenei said that Tehran is seeking a "real and fair" agreement with Washington.

"Far from putting up a show and merely talking in front of the cameras, Tehran is seeking a real and fair agreement, important and implementable proposals are ready," Ali Shamkhani posted on X on Friday. The 2015 accord put stringent limits on Iran's enrichment of uranium, stockpiles of nuclear material, and research and development in exchange for lifting United Nations sanctions. The US had imposed its harshest sanctions yet in the aftermath of reneging on the deal in 2018. Those sanctions were only exacerbated by Trump's successor Joe Biden, dealing heavy blows to the economy and 90 million Iranians.

Iran's currency continues to hover around all-time low rates as a result of external pressure and local mismanagement, but it regained some lost ground after the talks concluded without collapsing, showing market eagerness for a deal. The European powers party to the 2015 accord, namely France, United Kingdom and Germany, have also been imposing sanctions on Iran, both due to its nuclear advances in the aftermath of Trump's withdrawal and because of tensions over the Russia-Ukraine war. The European Union on Friday said that there was "no alternative to diplomacy" while Germany urged both sides to reach a "diplomatic solution". China and Russia, the other signatories of the deal, have opposed Western efforts to pressure Iran through passing censure resolutions at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). — Aljazeera



Special Envoy Steve Witkoff headed the US delegation, while the Iranians were led by Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi. He was accompanied by his deputy for political affairs Majid Takht-Ravanchi, deputy for international affairs Kazem Gharibabadi, and foreign ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei. Omani Foreign Minister Badr bin Hamad al-Busaidi acted as chief mediator, taking messages between the delegations who were sitting in separate rooms.

While Trump and his officials had insisted the talks will be "direct" and "in the same room", Tehran had stressed that the negotiations will be indirect. Al Jazeera's diplomatic editor James cited a source close to the negotiations that both sides were

weapon. I want Iran to be a wonderful, great, happy country, but they can't have a nuclear weapon." Trump told reporters on board Air Force One on his way to Florida on Friday night. White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt also reiterated a refrain favoured by the Trump administration, saying "there will be all hell to pay" if the president's demands are not met.

"We've been very clear what Iran is never going to have a nuclear weapon, and I think that's what led to this meeting," US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said on Thursday. Iran and its supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, have emphasised that the US cannot be trusted and Iran won't sit down with US officials directly



SHANGLA: Officials inspecting the site and vehicles after attack on convoy of DPO. — F.P. photo

## Bilawal elected as PPP Chairman F.P. Report



ISLAMABAD: The Intra-party elections of Pakistan Peoples Party were held at the Central Secretariat PPP, Islamabad on Saturday. The outcome of the elections have been notified and issued by Ms. Fauzia Habib, The Central Election Convener of the PPP.

According to the notification, the following have been elected for a term of four years:- Bilawal Bhutto Zardari – Chairman, Humayun Khan – Secretary General, Nadeem Afzal Gondal (Chan) – Secretary Information and Anna Piracha – Secretary Finance.

## Shujaat once again wears PML-Q cap F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain was re-elected as president of the Pakistan Muslim League (PML) during the party's intra-party elections held in Islamabad on Saturday.

Meanwhile, Chaudhry Salik Hussain was elected senior vice president, while Chaudhry Shafay Hussain and Tariq Hasan were chosen as Punjab general secretary and central secretary general, respectively. All office-bearers were elected unopposed, according to a party statement.

The PML's Central General Council convened at the party's headquarters in Islamabad under the chairmanship of Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain. Members from all four provinces, the federal capital, and Gilgit-Baltistan attended the session. Through a unanimous resolution, Dr Mohammad Amjad was appointed chief organiser, while Ghulam Mustafa Malik was named central secretary information.

The council also passed resolutions condemning ongoing acts of terrorism in the country, as well as atrocities committed against Muslims in Palestine and India-occupied Kashmir. Tributes were paid to Pakistan's armed forces, Rangers, and police for their sacrifices in combating terrorism.

Addressing the council, Chaudhry Shujaat reiterated that the Holy Quran remains the party's manifesto. He urged party members to engage in politics of public service. "The Muslim League founded Pakistan, and it is this very party that will safeguard its future," he stated. He thanked the council for re-electing him as party chief and called upon all office-bearers to work towards strengthening, organising, and activating the party across the country.

## 8 Pakistani car mechanics gunned down in Iran

TEHRAN: At least eight Pakistani car mechanics were shot dead by gunmen in Iran's restive Sistan and Baluchestan province, diplomatic sources told media on Saturday.

The firing incident took place at a workshop situated in Mehrestan district near the Afghanistan border, according to Iranian media. The sources said that the Iranian officials launched an investigation into the

incident. After completing legal procedures, steps will be taken to send the bodies of the slain mechanics to Pakistan, they added.

The victims were identified as Delshad, the owner of the repair shop; his son Naeem; and individuals named Jafar, Danesh, and Nasir — all hailing from Pakistan's Punjab province, Halwosh news agency reported. The region, located near the Iran-Pakistan

border, has witnessed several similar incidents in recent years, including shootings, smuggling, and border clashes due to its strategic location.

Pakistani labourers commonly work in vehicle repair and agriculture in Iran's border region; however, the recent killings signal growing insecurity for foreign workers in the country's eastern areas. — Agencies

## DPO escapes IED blast in Shangla

F.P. Report

SHANGLA: District Police Officer (DPO) Shangla, Shah Hassan Khan, and the police personnel accompanying him survived a remote-controlled bomb attack in the area of Doah Khwaro Shakolai Mor, within the jurisdiction of Choga Police Station. Fortunately, the DPO and all personnel remained unharmed in what is being termed a miraculous escape.

According to details, DPO Shah Hassan Khan was on patrol in Shakolai, an area considered sensitive and dangerous. As the convoy was returning and reached Doah Khwaro Shakolai Mor, a powerful explosion occurred. The bomb detonated between

two vehicles, one ahead and one behind creating a gap that prevented casualties.

A private vehicle belonging to a Special Branch official, which was part of the convoy, sustained minor damage. Following the incident, police launched a large-scale search and strike operation in the area, and the Bomb Disposal Unit (BDU) is currently analyzing the nature of the blast.

Meanwhile, police foiled terrorists attacked launched at midnight on the Shekholai police post in Shangla's Chaga police station. However, the Shangla police responded promptly and bravely, repelling the attack and forcing the terrorists to flee.

According to details, the

terrorists used light and heavy weapons to attack the police post, but the police were well-prepared and responded with force. Police put up a strong defense, and a fierce exchange of fire ensued between the police and the terrorists.

Fortunately, there were no casualties reported in the attack. After repelling the attack, the police launched a search operation in the area and found signs of terrorist presence.

Inspector General of Police (IGP) Zulfikar Hamid praised the bravery of the Shangla police officers involved in foiling the attack. The IGP announced cash rewards and commendation certificates for the brave police officers who repelled the attack.

## Israel takes control of key Gaza corridor

GAZA CITY (AFP): Israel announced on Saturday that its military had completed the takeover of a new corridor in southern Gaza, advancing its efforts to seize large parts of the war-battered Palestinian territory.

The announcement from Defense Minister Israel Katz came as Hamas expected "real progress" toward a ceasefire deal to end the war in Gaza, with senior leaders from the Palestinian movement scheduled to hold talks with Egyptian mediators in Cairo on Saturday. "The IDF (military) has now completed its takeover of the Morag axis, which crosses Gaza between Rafah and Khan Yunis, turning the entire area between the Philadelphi Route (along the border with Egypt) and Morag into part of the Israeli security zone," Katz said in a statement addressed to residents of Gaza.

"Soon, IDF (military) operations will intensify and expand to other areas throughout most of Gaza, and you will need to evacuate the combat zones. "In northern Gaza as well — in Beit Hanoun and other neighborhoods — residents are evacuating, the area is being taken over and the security zone is being expanded, including in the Netzarim corridor," he added.

Since a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas collapsed

in mid-March, Israel's renewed offensive in Gaza has displaced hundreds of thousands of people while the military has seized large areas of the war-battered territory. Top Israeli officials, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, have repeatedly said that the ongoing assault aims to pressure Hamas into freeing the remaining hostages held in Gaza.

Hamas on Saturday said that the offensive not only "kills defenseless civilians but also makes the fate of the occupation's prisoners (hostages) uncertain." Katz's announcements came ahead of a meeting between Hamas and Egyptian mediators in Cairo on Saturday.

The scheduled talks also came days after US President Donald Trump suggested an agreement to secure the release of hostages was close to being finalized. A Hamas official told AFP that the group anticipated the meeting in Cairo would yield significant progress. "We hope the meeting will achieve real progress toward reaching an agreement to end the war, halt the aggression and ensure the full withdrawal of occupation forces from Gaza," the official familiar with the ceasefire negotiations said on condition of anonymity, as he was not authorized to speak publicly

on the matter.

According to the official, Hamas has not yet received any new ceasefire proposals, despite Israeli media reports suggesting that Israel and Egypt had exchanged draft documents outlining a potential ceasefire and hostage release agreement. "However, contacts and discussions with mediators are ongoing," he added, accusing Israel of "continuing its aggression" in Gaza.

The Times of Israel reported that Egypt's proposal would involve the release of eight living hostages and eight bodies, in exchange for a truce lasting between 40 and 70 days and a substantial release of Palestinian prisoners. President Trump said during a cabinet meeting this week that "we're getting close to getting them (hostages in Gaza) back." Trump's Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff was also quoted in an Israeli media report as saying "a very serious deal is taking shape, it's a matter of days."

Since Israel resumed its Gaza strikes, more than 1,500 people have been killed, according to the health ministry in the Hamas-run territory to which Israel cut off aid more than a month ago. Dozens of these strikes have killed "only women and children," according to a report by UN human rights office.

## SC to hear KP Varsities' VCs appointment case on 15th F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court of Pakistan is set to hear the long-awaited case regarding the appointment of vice chancellors in universities across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) on April 15. A three-member bench, led by Justice Shahid Waheed, will oversee proceedings.

This case underscores a prolonged administrative and governance crisis, as 25 out of 34 universities in KP currently lack permanent vice chancellors. Despite directives from the Supreme Court mandating prompt appointments within six months, these pivotal positions have remained vacant for over two years. The delay has led to massive crises in management and financial administration. Students are facing problems in attesting their degrees, while the absence of effective leadership has opened floodgates of corruption. Universities have, alarmingly, turned into employment exchanges for the powerful elite of the system. This has compounded stress for the entire teaching community, which fears further delay will irreparably harm the structure of higher education in KP.

The issue stems from the decisions made by successive governments. In 2022, the previous PTI government advertised these positions, yet failed to conduct interviews. Subsequently, the caretaker government completed the interview process and shortlisted candidates after obtaining approval from the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP). However, the recommendations faced rejection from the incoming PTI government in mid-2024, which opted to re-advertise the positions. This led to legal challenges and rulings in favor of petitioners in the Peshawar High Court.

The universities in KP, many of which are in conflict-prone areas, are grappling with severe financial crises and administrative instability. Faculty members have voiced concerns, citing inadequate funding and a lack of transparent processes as major impediments.

## PM gets briefing on Belaz manufacturing vehicles

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Saturday had visited Belaz, the major global manufacturer of the mining dump trucks, transport equipment of mining and construction, located in Minsk during his two-day official visit to Belarus.

Upon arrival, the prime minister was received by Belarus Prime Minister Alexander Turchin, relevant authorities and engineers. The prime minister, accompanied by his delegation, was taken to different sections of the factory and given a detailed briefing.

The prime minister was informed that its first product was made in 1950 with production of 25 tonnes truck and since 60s, the factory had been producing heavy trucks, dumpers and mining machinery, besides, electric dumpers and battery driven trucks with payload capacity of 550 tonnes. They were delivering supplies to more than 70 countries around the world including Pakistan.

In addition to heavy

vehicle used in the mining, construction, metallurgical and other sectors, it was manufacturing heavy-duty mining dump trucks and specialized vehicles. The factory had the capacity to manufacture 30 quarry trucks on monthly basis earning them millions of dollars. The factory was also producing parts of machinery, equipment and electromechanical transmission mining dump trucks.

Talking to his Belarusian counterpart, the prime minister invited a high-level Belarusian delegation to visit Pakistan so that they could discuss in details as to how these machines could be used in Pakistan for productive purposes.

The prime minister termed his visit to the factory as very impressive and said that if not had visited the plant, the visit to the great country would be incomplete. He also expressed his gratitude to President Aleksandr Lukashenko for his hospi-

tility. He also hinted to visit Belarus in future to hold further detailed meeting in this regard. The prime minister was also seen speaking to the authorities in Russian language. The Belarusian prime minister said that he would personally visit Pakistan along with his delegation.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz expressed his grief and sorrow over the death of Safdar Javed Syed, former chairman Bank of Punjab and former chairman Punjab Public Service Commission.

The prime minister prayed for the high ranks of the departed soul and for the bereaved family to bear the loss with fortitude, PM Office Media Wing said in a press release. He also expressed his sympathies for the bereaved family in this hour of grief. The prime minister observed that late Safdar Javed had been a competent, honest and sincere officer and his life was worth emulating for others to follow.

## Sindh CM threatens to quit govt over canals project

F.P. Report

THATTA: Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah threatened to quit the government if consensus isn't reached over the canals project. He has initiated a province-wide development campaign while strongly criticizing federal canal projects, which he considers a threat to Sindh's water rights.

Addressing Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) workers in Thatta, Shah pledged significant development funds for each district and emphasized the need for community-driven projects.

Following directives from PPP Chairman Bilawal, CM started the campaign in Thatta and Sujawal, promising to visit every district in Sindh throughout April. He announced a minimum allocation of Rs 5 billion for development schemes in each district, with Rs 1 billion specifically for projects proposed by party workers.

To streamline the process, Shah plans to set up committees at the union council, taluka, and district levels to compile project proposals. Deputy Commissioners will prepare cost estimates for these proposals, with approved schemes included in the upcoming provincial budget. Emphasizing the importance of community-led planning, he set a 15-day deadline for Thatta and Sujawal to submit their project proposals.

Shah highlighted the government's achievements in infrastructure, mentioning the newly constructed Karachi-Thatta Highway and updates on regional road projects. The CM also announced the operational status of Liaquat Medical University College in Thatta and reported on completed water channels to enhance irrigation in Thatta and Sujawal.

Regarding the contentious water issue, Murad Ali Shah condemned the Cholistan and Choubara canal projects,

claiming they are politically motivated to divert Sindh's water. He vowed to resist any attempts to construct these canals and stated that the PPP is the main barrier to such projects, as they oppose Sindh's interests.

Murad recalled a clear message from PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari to the Prime Minister on April 4: if the canal project is not canceled, support for the government will be withdrawn. Shah dismissed claims that the PPP had endorsed the canal projects and clarified that the party actively obstructed them.

The controversial proposal gained momentum during an Indus River System Authority (IRSA) meeting on January 17, 2024, under the caretaker government. Shah explained that the IRSA approved the proposal without verifying data, but the Sindh representative appointed by the PPP submitted a dissenting note.



# Pakistani nation stands with Palestinians: Mashhood

LAHORE (APP): Chairman of the Prime Minister’s Youth Programme Rana Mashhood Ahmad Khan on Saturday reaffirmed Pakistan’s unwavering support for the people of Palestine. Speaking at a rally organized by the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) to express solidarity with Palestinians and appreciation for electricity bill relief measures by the government, he said that nationwide protests continued against Israeli brutality.

He emphasized that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif had raised a strong voice for the oppressed Muslims of Gaza on all international platforms. “No government in the past has defended Palestinian rights as boldly as the current leadership,” he said, adding that the prime minister even boycotted the Israeli Prime Minister’s speech at the United Nations.

Rana Mashhood said that PM Shehbaz Sharif’s people-friendly policies had brought down electricity bills and inflation, offering relief to the common man. He criticized the PTI’s IMF programme, blaming it for worsening the economic conditions of the masses. He recalled that under Nawaz Sharif’s leadership in 2017, Pakistan had ended its reliance on the IMF and significantly improved the power sector.

However, a political conspiracy toppled the government, pushing the country toward economic collapse.

Rana Mashhood praised the efforts of PM Shehbaz Sharif during his term to prevent default, calling it a selfless act to save the state. “Today, Pakistan

is once again moving on the path to progress,” he stated.

He lauded Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz for launching daily relief initiatives and said the government was committed to fulfilling all promises made to the people during the elections. “Inflation is at its lowest, and the upcoming budget will bring further relief.” International investors were also showing interest in Pakistan’s mineral sector due to improved governance and investor-friendly policies, he added.

The rally, attended by hundreds, began at Shera Kot and concluded at Chauburji Chowk. Prominent coordinators of the PML-N Muhammad Akbar, Javed Sarwar Bhatti, Yamin Mughal, Moon Shah, and Waqar Bhatti were also present.

## Every child deserves education: CPWB

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Child Protection and Welfare Bureau (CPWB) Chairperson Sarah Ahmad has said that every street child has the right to a safe environment and access to education. In her message on International Day for Street Children being observed on Saturday, she said that the bureau not only rescues street children but also provides them with essential facilities including education.

Sarah Ahmad highlighted that the bureau is focused on rehabilitating the children by equipping them with vocational skills, enabling them to become self-reliant members of society. “As responsible citizens, it is our collective duty to ensure the safety and protection of street children,” she said.

The chairperson added that the government of Punjab is taking the issue of street children very seriously. “Under the leadership of Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz, the Child Protection and Welfare Bureau is actively working for the welfare of these vulnerable children,” she remarked.

Sarah Ahmad also urged all stakeholders to collaborate for the better future of these children.

## Shahrah-e-Faisal to host millions in support of Gaza

KARACHI (PPI): Jamaat-i-Islami emir Karachi, Monem Zafar Khan said that on April 13, the people of Karachi will demonstrate their spirit by participating in the solidarity march for Gaza. Millions of citizens will join the march on Shahrah-e-Faisal. He also called for a boycott of Israeli and American products.

This he said while visiting a camp in Liaquatabad in connection with the solidarity march for Gaza, which will take place on April 13 on Shahrah-e-Faisal. Speaking to the media, he said that Israeli bombing on the people of Gaza has been ongoing for the past 18 months, using American weapons. He stated that Israel has ended the ceasefire agreement as part of a conspiracy.

He further informed that over 600 children and women have been martyred in the past 22 days. He stated that the bombing of Gaza is against the Geneva Convention, which prohibits attacks on schools, hospitals, and innocent individuals.

He criticized the U.S. for vetoing United Nations resolutions and said that the rulers of the Muslim world should be urged to assist the people of Gaza. On this occasion, Naib Ameer of Jamaat-e-Islami Karachi, Muslim Pervaiz, Ameer of District Gulberg Central, Kamran Siraj, Town Chairman of Liaquatabad, Faraz Haseeb, and officials of the Market Association were also present.

## Overseas convention aimed at national unity: Aun Chaudhry

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister of State for Overseas Pakistanis Aun Chaudhry on Saturday said the upcoming Overseas Pakistani Convention is being organized purely in the national interest, beyond party lines or political affiliations.

Talking to a private news channel, he said that Pakistani Diaspora is our heroes, and the convention was to organize to honor their invaluable services.

“This convention belongs to every Pakistani, regardless of political association. Its slogan ‘Hum Pakistani – Hamara Pakistan’ reflects unity, pride, and national ownership,” he said.

Calling overseas Pakistanis the true ambassadors of the nation, the minister said their tireless work and the remittances they send sustain Pakistan’s economy. He said that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif will make key announcements during the convention, to be held from April 13 to 15.

Lashing out at PTI for spreading misinformation, Aun Chaudhry said, “Instead of creating divide among the nation, they need to think about the country. Personal agendas should not override national interest.”

Answering a question, he said that all the coalition partners were, including the PPP were united in working as a team for Pakistan’s prosperity.

## Listening to the Unheard: Narrative Therapy in Refugee Camps as a Mental Health Intervention among Displaced Adolescents

Fatima Saeed Khan

My passion for culturally sensitive mental health interventions comes from my own background as an ethnic Pashtun, where understanding the unique cultural dynamics within marginalised communities has always been essential. Growing up in a region that values tradition and community, I’ve seen firsthand how mental health is often overlooked or stigmatised. This exploration of narrative therapy in refugee camps reflects my commitment to bridging those gaps and providing meaningful support to adolescents in displaced and marginalised communities.

In refugee camps throughout Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), the mental health needs of adolescents are significant but often neglected. Many young individuals here have lived through unimaginable trauma—displacement, loss of family members, and the uncertainty of their futures. Traditional mental health services can be challenging to implement in such settings, where diverse cultures, languages, and transient conditions present unique obstacles. Narrative therapy, however, offers an alternative approach. Through storytelling, young people are given a voice, a safe space to process their experiences, and a way to rebuild their sense of identity.

Narrative therapy is a therapeutic approach that encourages individuals to externalise their problems and view them within the context of their life stories. By reframing their narrative, they can find meaning, agency, and empowerment. This method is particularly effective in culturally sensitive settings as it aligns with traditional storytelling practices, making it both familiar and approachable. For adolescents facing additional challenges like racism or ethnic discrimination, narrative therapy provides a

framework to address these layers of trauma, often left unspoken. This culturally congruent intervention creates opportunities for young refugees to reclaim control over their stories and find validation within their experiences.

### Real Stories of Resilience from Adolescents in Kohat’s Refugee Camp

**A 15-year-old Hazara Girl**

"Sometimes, I feel like my whole life has been a question mark. I don't know why I was born into conflict, why my family had to leave everything behind, or why people look at me like I'm not welcome. In our talk sessions, we start by sharing small stories, but mine always seem too painful to tell. One day, I finally shared about my father and how he kept our family together, even when he was terrified. As I talked, I felt a weight lifting. I realised I could talk about him without feeling ashamed of our story. I don't have answers to my questions, but I don't need them. What I need is to keep telling my story until it feels like mine again."

This story highlights the importance of reclaiming one's narrative and embracing personal experiences as part of one's identity. For this young girl, narrative therapy provided a path to healing that traditional therapy methods might not offer, especially in a setting where discussing trauma openly is stigmatised. Through “storytelling”, she moves toward acknowledging her hardships while finding strength in her own voice.

**A 14-year-old Boy from Khyber Agency**

"When the fighting started, my family left everything. I remember looking back at our home as we ran, wondering if I'd ever see it again. In the camp, it's easy to feel like you're just a number, another person in a sea of people. I've faced a

lot of bullying here, too, because people see me as different. In the storytelling sessions, I shared how lonely it feels to be a stranger everywhere you go. But I also talk about the good things, like my friends back home and the little goat we had. Now, I want to work on making new memories. We're writing our stories together in group sessions, and it's strange how good it feels to have my story heard. I don't feel so invisible anymore."

This boy's experience shows how narrative therapy can help young refugees process feelings of isolation and otherness. Sharing his memories allows him to begin rebuilding a sense of home and connection—a crucial step in finding stability amid the instability of displacement. His story reflects the potential for storytelling to encourage community bonding among adolescents.

### A 17-year-old Kuchi Boy

"I've spent years not being seen. When I first came here, no one even asked my name. They just gave me a number, a tent, and some food. In the story sessions, I told mine for the first time. I spoke about the river near my home, my brother who I haven't seen since we left, and the way the air smelled on rainy days. Kho'har (sister) listened like every word mattered. That's when I realised that I matter, too. For the first time, I'm more than just another boy in a camp. I have a story, a history. One day, I hope my brother hears it, too."

This particular narrative emphasises the transformative power of being seen and heard. Through narrative therapy, he found a space where his past mattered, contrasting sharply with his prior experiences of anonymity. Reclaiming his history reinforced his sense of self and gave him hope for a future where he mattered.

### A 13-year-old Girl from Quetta

"In our community, girls are often told to stay quiet. We don't talk about the things that hurt us, and we definitely don't talk about our dreams. When I started talking, I wasn't sure what to say. But slowly, I learned that it's okay to talk. I shared stories about how I want to study, about the times my father would encourage me even when others didn't. My favourite session was when we talked about our futures. I said I wanted to be a teacher, and everyone listened like it was the most natural thing in the world. Now I'm not just a girl from a poor background—I'm someone with dreams."

This story demonstrates how narrative therapy can empower young girls, giving them the confidence to voice their dreams and ambitions. In a community where silence is expected, her experience highlights the pivotal role that storytelling can play in redefining self-perception and fostering resilience.

This exploration has significant implications for mental health interventions in refugee camps. By assessing the use of narrative therapy in culturally diverse, transient settings, I aim to show how adaptive mental health strategies can bridge gaps in trauma recovery. In contexts where traditional mental health services are scarce or stigmatised, narrative therapy offers a practical, culturally aligned solution. It not only addresses personal trauma but also tackles collective struggles related to discrimination and marginalisation, creating space for individual and community healing.

**Disclaimer:** Permission was obtained before sharing these stories to ensure the privacy and dignity of all participants. The names/description has been altered to maintain confidentiality.



LAHORE: Devotees light oil lamps at the shrine, creating a spiritual ambiance during the Urs celebrations of the Sufi saint Madhu Lal Hussain at Baghbanpura. —APP Photo

## Mayor Karachi calls on Sindh Governor

KARACHI (APP): The Mayor of Karachi Barrister Murtaza Wahab called on the Governor of Sindh Kamran Khan Tessori at Governor House on Saturday.

The Mayor of Karachi briefed the Governor Sindh on his performance, a Governor House communique said. They discussed about a letter written to the Chief Justice of Pakistan. They expressed commitment to improve the city together.

The Governor said that Karachi is an economic hub, and everyone has to work together for its development. Karachi's development is actually Pakistan's development, he added. The Mayor said we are working together day and night for the development of Karachi.

## PR to resume Khushhal Khan Khattak Express from 24th

LAHORE (APP): In a move to enhance public convenience, Pakistan Railways has announced the resumption of the Khushhal Khan Khattak Express (19up/20dn), connecting Karachi City and Peshawar Cantt via Kot Adu, Dadu, Habib Kot, and Jacobabad, starting April 24.

According to a statement released by Pakistan Railways on Saturday, the Khushhal Khan Khattak Express (19up) will depart from Karachi City Railway Station at 8:00 PM, traveling through Kotri, Dadu, Habib Kot, Jacobabad, Kashmir Colony, Kot Adu, Kundian, and Attock City, before arriving at Peshawar Cantt Railway Station at 9:30 AM on the third day.

The return journey, Khushhal Khan Khattak Express (20dn), will leave Peshawar Cantt Railway Station at 4:00 PM, following the same route, and reach Karachi City Railway Station at 5:50 AM on the third day. The train will comprise 8 economy coaches, 1 TL van, and 1 brake van. The Pakistan Railways noted that the service will operate with a one-day interval from both ends, ensuring regular connectivity for passengers.

## Punjab police achieves 90pc eviction target of illegal residents

LAHORE (APP): Punjab police has deported 9,165 illegal residents out of 10,000 verified persons from the province.

The detail of the evacuation of illegal residents, including Afghans, has come to light, following which the unregistered and non-cardholders residents would be deported to their countries.

According to Punjab police sources, they have deported 9,165 illegal residents out of 10,000 verified persons. The Punjab police has achieved 90 percent of the target of evacuation of verified illegal residents.

Sources said that the Punjab Police achieved 90 percent of the target of evacuation of verified illegal residents in just 9 days after Eid-ul-Fitr holidays.

After the verification, the Punjab Police has also started the process of tracing non-verified illegal residents. After tracing the illegal residents, an operation would be carried out shortly, they said.

## PTI founder begging for NRO since day one: Azma

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Information Minister Azma Bokhari had said that the PTI founder has been begging for an NRO since day one, but no one is willing to listen to him.

She said that the nation's interests align with the Pakistan Muslim League (N), which is taking practical steps to solve public issues and promote investment. Speaking at the inauguration of the electricity installation at Lahore Press Club Housing Scheme F-Block, Azma Bokhari said that the Journalist Colony Phase II is a continuation of Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz's "Apni Chhat Apna Ghar" program. Basic facilities including water and electricity will be provided in the colony at a cost of 360 million rupees. Solar backup at the Press Club will be enhanced, while the canteen, insurance, and subsidy schemes will also be improved, she

added.

During her conversation with the media, she said she considers herself a part of the journalist community and will take every possible step for their welfare. Under the RUDA project, work is underway to make the Journalist Colony state-of-the-art, with essential facilities including water and electricity being provided at a cost of 360 million rupees.

The Information Minister said that the government will allot land directly to journalists, who will only have to pay construction charges. Expressing her commitment to resolving the longstanding issues of F-Block, Azma Bokhari assured that these problems will now be addressed on a permanent basis. She also commented that the incidents of May 9 were not in the nation's interest and that the Pakistan Muslim League (N) is the only party taking practical

steps to attract investment and address the problems of the underprivileged.

Azma Bokhari emphasized that in Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz's government, lower-level employees are no longer scapegoated — instead, accountability starts at the top. Strict monitoring is being conducted on incidents like kite-flying and dog-bite cases.

She said, "Balochistan is an integral part of Pakistan, and internal and external conspiracies will, as always, be foiled." She said that any politician supporting terrorists does not deserve to be called a politician.

Additionally, Azma Bokhari announced that there are no longer any restrictions on wheat transportation and that under Maryam Nawaz's leadership, farmers' protection will be ensured to prevent an increase in bread prices.

## CDA warns resident to dump, burn waste material

ISLAMABAD (APP): Capital development Authority (CDA) has strictly warned the citizens of the federal capital to refrain from dumping or burning the waste materials other than the designated places, announcing swift legal action against violators.


Violators will face legal action and fines under the notice.

ٹیڈر مطلوب ہے

نہیل کور فاؤنڈیشن منیجر سوات کے زیر انتظام نہیل کور رنگ ایجنسی ماسٹرکالغیر راہی کے لئے درج ذیل اشیاء کے لئے ٹیڈر مطلوب ہے۔  
جو کہ بروز 28/04/2025 کو صبح 11:00 بجے تک زیر دستاویز پیش کیا جائے  
ٹیڈر راسی دن دوپہر 15:14 بجے ٹیڈر دہندگان یا ان کے مجاز نمائندوں کی موجودگی میں کیلی کے سامنے کھولے جائیں گے مکمل تفصیل درج ذیل ہے۔

S.No	Description	S.No	Description
1	Electric Generator 30KW	8	False Ceiling
2	Computers all in one Core i5 8 generation	9	Electrical Cable
3	Photocopier Machine (Latest)	10	Sanitary Goods
4	Projector (Latest)	11	Doors and Windows (Wooden / Steel)
5	Classroom Furniture	12	Fans
6	Tiles	13	Labour Work
7	Smart Boards	14	Glass
		15	Wall Panel

ارشاد اعلیٰ / ٹیڈر فارم دفتر ٹیڈر کو فاؤنڈیشن منیجر سوات سے برائے کے لئے مبلغ ۱۰۰۰۰ روپے (دعا کا نام) کی ادائیگی پر دفتری اوقات کے دوران حاصل کیے جاسکتے ہیں۔  
سرخ و سفید حضرات یا ان کے ذریعہ ٹیڈر میں حصہ لینے کیلئے ہر آئٹم کیلئے دو مکمل ڈیمانڈ نام لکھ کر فاؤنڈیشن کی جی ٹی ڈیولر تک سے جاری کردہ دفتر ٹیڈر کو فاؤنڈیشن ٹیڈر فارم کے ساتھ جمع کروانا لازمی ہے۔  
سرخ و سفید ڈاؤن لوڈ کیلئے مندرجہ بالا صفحہ کے تحت میں لایا جاسکے گا۔  
ہر ذم / اپنی طرف سے مکمل ٹیڈر کا ضمانت مسودہ کے جائیں گے۔  
ہر ٹیڈر کو فاؤنڈیشن کی جی ٹی ڈیولر تک سے جاری کردہ مکمل کو اختیار حاصل ہوگا کہ غیر مکمل پیش کردہ کی بنا پر عوامی مقاموں کی جی ڈیولر تک سے جاری کردہ مکمل کو اختیار حاصل کرے۔ اور اس پر ٹیڈر اور کوئی اعتراض یا قانونی چارہ جو کی کا حق حاصل نہیں ہوگا۔  
ٹیڈر کی مکمل تفصیل اور دیگر شرائط ٹیڈر فارم کو مفت میں موجود ہے۔  
کے تمام ٹیڈر حکومت پاکستان اور حکومت خیبر پختونخوا کے مقرر کردہ شرائط کے تحت کئے جائیں گے۔  
ٹیڈر دہندگان کو اختیار ہوگا کہ غیر معیاری اشیاء کو مسودہ کر دے اور ایسا کرنے کی صورت میں ٹیڈر کو کسی قسم کی ادائیگی نہیں کی جائے گی۔  
ہر ذمہ داری کے لئے دفتری اوقات کی جی ٹی ڈیولر کو ہر ذمہ داری پر رابطہ کیا جاسکتا ہے۔  
فون: 0946-729211  
ڈائریکٹر خیل کور فاؤنڈیشن منیجر سوات



OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER PUBLIC

HEALTH ENGINEERING DIVISION DIR UPPER

CORRIGENDUM/ADDENDUM

The Notice Inviting Tender (NIT) No. Info. 1242 was published on the newspapers vide this office letter No. 03/5.2 Dated 27-03-2025. The following Corrigendum Addendum must be incorporated.

- Serial No. 01 under term and condition may be read as: **Notice Inviting E-Bidding shall be read as E-PAK Acquisition & Disposal System (EPADS)**
- Serial No. 02 under term and condition may be read as:  
Bids shall be submitted electronically through the EPADS System not later than 28-04-2025 at 12:00 PM, which will be opened on the same day at 12:30 PM in the office of undersigned in the presence of the contractors or their representative opted by them.

**Note.**  
Other columns of the above serial nos, and terms and conditions of the NIT will remain the same

INF (P)1364/25

**Executive Engineer**  
**Public Health Engg: Division Dir**



# SMEs are backbone of economy, says Governor

PESHAWAR (APP): The Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Faisal Karim Kundi, on Saturday emphasized the vital role of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the economic development of Pakistan, calling them the backbone of the national economy.

The Governor participated as the chief guest at the Gujranwala Expo 2025, organized by the Gujranwala Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Islamabad.

Upon his arrival, he received a warm welcome from Chamber President Siddique Khan and prominent members of the business community.

The expo witnessed a large turnout of industrialists, entrepreneurs, and youth from various sectors. Governor Kundi visited multiple stalls at the exhibition, expressing keen interest in the products presented by Gujranwala-based manufacturers.

He praised their innovation and contribution to the national economy.

In his address to the audience, Governor Kundi extended his gratitude to the Gujranwala Chamber of Commerce and expressed hope that the expo would give new direction and encouragement to the SME sector.

"SMEs not only generate employment but also contribute significantly to exports and economic stability," he said. The Governor highlighted the government's efforts to promote this sector through business-friendly policies, incubation centers, and support programs aimed at empowering youth and women, and creating a conducive environment for entrepreneurship.

He lauded Gujranwala's industrial community, saying that its industrialists, artisans, and traders play a significant role in strengthening the country's economy. Encouraging the younger generation, he stressed the importance of adopting modern technology, digital marketing, and exploring new export avenues to enhance Pakistan's global trade presence.

The event concluded with a renewed commitment from both government and business leaders to support the growth of SMEs and strengthen Pakistan's industrial base.

Meanwhile, the Chashma Lift Canal project in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has taken a significant step forward as the financial bidding process for its first phase has been completed under Wapda supervision.

Governor Faisal Karim Kundi expressed gratitude to the federal government, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, and Wapda for their support.

Governor Kundi emphasized that unlike past hollow promises, this project reflects real progress.

He said the canal has been a long-standing demand of Dera Ismail Khan's people and will bring thousands of barren acres under cultivation, boosting agricultural growth and benefiting the entire province and country.

The Governor also recalled that the region's development was first prioritized by PPP founder Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto and announced that the project's inauguration will soon be held with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Chairman Bhutto.



PESHAWAR: U-23 World Squash Champion Noor Zaman addressing a reception after his arrival.

## Governor congratulates office-bearers

PESHAWAR (APP): The Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Faisal Karim Kundi, on Saturday extended heartfelt congratulations to the newly elected office-bearers of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) following their success in the party's intra-party elections.

In his message, Governor Kundi conveyed his best wishes to Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, Secretary General Humayun Khan, Information Secretary Nadeem Afzal Gondal (Chan), and Finance Secretary Amina Piracha on assuming their new responsibilities.

He said that the elections, held in accordance with the party's constitution, are a reflection of the strength of democracy and institutional stability within the PPP.

Governor Kundi expressed hope that the newly elected leadership would play a vital role in making the party more dynamic and aligned with public expectations.

# Noor Zaman receives hero's welcome

## F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Pakistan's flag was once again raised high in the world of squash as young star Noor Zaman returned to Peshawar after winning the Under-23 World Squash Championship. He was given a warm and enthusiastic welcome upon his arrival. The reception was attended by his grandfather and former world champion Qamar Zaman former provincial sports minister Syed Aqil Shah, legendary squash champions Jansher Khan and Mohibullah Khan, AIPS General Secretary Amjad Aziz Malik, Director of the National Society for Sports Development Malik Hidayat-ul-Haq, President of the Pakistan Cycling Federation Syed Azhar Ali Shah, Nisar Ahmed and a large number of athletes and sports personalities.

As soon as Noor Zaman reached Peshawar a special ceremony was held in his honor at the PAF Squash Complex. Legendary squash icons Jansher Khan and Qamar Zaman personally welcomed him. Noor Zaman was adorned with garlands and praised with heartfelt words being hailed as a national hero.

Speaking to the media on the occasion Noor Zaman said First of all I thank Allah Almighty for granting me the honor of becoming the Under-23 World Champion for Pakistan. This is not just my achievement but a success for the entire nation. He emphasized that nothing is possible without hard work and expressed his determination to perform well in upcoming tournaments.

The world champion extended special thanks to the Pakistan Squash Federation and acknowledged the role of his family-many of whom have been squash champions themselves for their guidance and support in shaping his game. His victory he added is not only a personal milestone but a source of national pride, especially at a time when Pakistan is in dire need of international recognition and success.

Noor Zaman's grandfather and former world champion Qamar Zaman stated that his grandson's achievement serves as a beacon of hope for young athletes. In his address to the media Qamar Zaman said, "After thirty years Pakistan has achieved such a major success in squash which is nothing short of a blessing for us."

Other speakers at the event described the victory as a historic moment that has breathed new life into the sport and ignited fresh passion among young players. Experts believe that if the government, federations, and former champions continue to support and encourage youth in this manner, the day is not far when Pakistan will once again reign as the world's squash champion.

Former world champion Jansher Khan also expressed hope in his speech that the golden era of Pakistan squash will return provided that young players receive consistent and dedicated support.

## Deputy MD visits ongoing uplift work in Industrial Park



## F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The construction of a 230-foot long and 80-foot wide

bridge over the storm drain in the new industrial estate of Industrial Park Peshawar, managed by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Small Industries Development Board, is still ongoing, while the construction of a 2,000-foot long protective wall to

protect the storm drain from water is in the final stages of completion, according to a SIDB press release.

According to a press release, Deputy Managing Director Engineer Zulfiqar Ali Sahibzada visited the site to review the ongoing development work in the Industrial Park Peshawar and termed the ongoing work satisfactory.

According to him, if the pace of work continues at the same pace, this project will definitely be completed within the stipulated time of two years.

SIDB officer Zulfiqar Ali took a detailed review of the chambers established for the water tank, solar energy-powered tube well and the under-construction roads and termed it satisfactory.

# Bench, bar cooperation imperative for speedy justice to litigants: Aide

PESHAWAR (APP): The Prime Minister's Coordinator for Information and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Affairs, Ikhtiar Wali Khan on Saturday visited Pabbi Tehsil and Nowshera district bars, underlining the need for cooperation of bench and bars for provision of speedy justice to the litigants.

He congratulated the newly elected cabinet of Tehsil Bar Pabbi and Nowshera Bar on behalf of the Prime Minister and his party.

Addressing the lawyers, he said that people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have always made sacrifices for the country.

He said the emotional decisions especially by youth during general election have negatively impacted on the province's

progress and development. He claimed that KP were deceived on the name of change during last 12 years where PTI has failed to resolve masses problems.

Ikhtiar Wali said Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has been kept backward in term of development and that unnecessary experiences in education and health have marred these sectors in KP.

He said that most of public sector universities in KP were facing financial problems that caused negative effects on education of students and research work.

Ikhtiar Wali said that Prime Minister Muhammad Shahbaz Sharif was working tirelessly to provide relief to masses.

He said that Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif has

announced a mega power relief package by providing relief to domestic and industrial consumers.

He said the PMLN led coalition government have saved the country from an imminent economic default. The price hike and policy rate were significantly reduced and international monetary institutions were praising the Govt economic progress.

He said that former Prime Minister Muhammad Nawaz Sharif have said goodbye to the IMF programme and eradicated loadshedding besides defeated terrorism.

Ikhtiar Wali claimed that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf leadership has always made false statements whether it was construction of five million houses or 350

dams. He questioned that where is 10 billion trees in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

He said that Pakistan Muslim League N has made the country defense impregnable and established the network of motorways.

Earlier, he was warmly received by the elected cabinet of both the bars.

The PM aide said that the Federal Government especially the Law Minister would be informed about the issues of Pabbi and Nowshera Bars.

## Fakhar inaugurates gymnasium

PESHAWAR (APP): The Minister for Sports and Youth Affairs, Syed Fakhar Jehan inaugurated the upgraded gymnasium facility of the Peshawar University Teachers' Association (PUTA) during a ceremony held at the university's Teachers' Community Centre (TCC).

The event was attended by Vice Chancellor Professor Dr. Naeem Qazi, senior faculty members, and teaching staff. The Minister was briefed on the upgraded sports and fitness facilities now available through the association.

Addressing the inaugural ceremony, Sports Minister Syed Fakhar Jehan emphasized the importance of promoting physical fitness alongside academic excellence in universities. "A healthy body is vital for a healthy mind," he remarked, highlighting the provincial government's commitment to enhancing educational institutions through comprehensive development initiatives.

He commended the efforts of the Teachers' Association, acknowledging their personal contributions made by faculty members towards establishing the gymnasium.

He described it as a commendable initiative and extended his gratitude to all members of the association for their dedication to improving staff well-being.

## Jalil assumes charge acting president



## F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Abdul Jalil Jan, senior vice president of the Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry took charge as acting president of SCCI on Saturday.

A notification issued by the office of secretary general of the chamber here stated that senior vice president Abdul Jalil Jan has started activities and performing duties as acting president at the chamber level. It is noted to mention that SCCI president Fazal Moqem Khan is currently on a 10-day foreign trip for participation in the International Conference on Small and Medium Enterprises Development in Germany.

# CM stands with Imran like a rock: Ghulam Bilal

## F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Senior leader of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, Ghulam Bilal Javid, in a strong statement, said that Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Gandapur is among those few loyal, ideological, and courageous leaders who endured state oppression, fascism, imprisonment, and mental and physical torture after May 9, yet never wavered in his loyalty to Imran Khan.

Ghulam Bilal Javid stated that the false accusations and social media propaganda against Ali Amin Gandapur are not only attacks on his character but also an attempt to undermine Imran Khan's leadership and ideology. These conspiracies are being spread simply because Gandapur, now serving as Chief Minister, continues to fiercely defend the party's stance and the public's rights.

He added that regarding the recently proposed 139-page Minerals Bill, confusion is being deliberately created. However, Chief Minister Ali Amin has made it clear that the bill will only be passed with Chairman Imran Khan's approval. Despite this clarity, propaganda against him is not only unfortunate but also ill-intentioned.



Ghulam Bilal Javid further said that when many turned their backs during difficult times, Ali Amin Gandapur held high the flag of Imran Khan, resisting at every front. He never traded his principles for power, pressure, or personal gain. To question his loyalty today is sheer injustice and political malice.

He concluded by saying that Ali Amin's political and ideological commitment, sacrifices, and resilience are unmatched, and PTI leadership and workers must stand firmly beside such devoted and loyal comrades.

# The paradox of connection: How media and individualism are driving us apart

## Kamran Khan

In an era where social media platforms enable us to connect with billions across the globe, a perplexing irony emerges: we are growing increasingly estranged from one another. The tools designed to unite us from linking friends, families, and strangers worldwide seem to be eroding the very bonds they promise to strengthen. As we celebrate personal achievements and embrace modern individualism, a fundamental sense of belonging to something greater is slipping away. Is this disconnection the hidden cost of our hyper-connected age?

This trend toward isolation, rather than cooperation, is palpable across the world from local neighborhoods to global communities. A 2020 National Community Engagement Program study revealed that over 40% of people in

major cities like New York and London lack close relationships with their neighbors. Where once communities gathered to share meals and support one another, many now live side by side as strangers. This shift reflects a broader societal move toward eccentricity and apathy, fueled by an emphasis on individual success over collective well-being.

According to a 2019 study 90 percent of Americans identify as Christians but only 10 percent are actively participating in communal and religious activities. The media amplifies this divide, acting as a powerful force in shaping modern perceptions. Rather than fostering unity, news outlets and social platforms craft narratives that prey on rivalry, fear, and self-interest.

These stories feed our egos, encouraging us to define our identities through differentiation

rather than commonality. The result is not just societal fragmentation but a mental isolation that blinds us to our shared humanity. We're urged to distrust those who differ from us whether by culture, religion, or background further dismantling the empathy that once held communities together.

If this trajectory continues, the societal fallout could be profound. The disintegration of communal structures risks deepening mental health crises, social isolation, and mistrust. A world without solidarity leaves people more divided, more susceptible to manipulation, and more prone to conflict than collaboration. The basic pillars of society empathy, mutual respect, and collective responsibility face collapse, threatening not just our social fabric but the essence of civilization itself.

Yet this outcome is not inevitable. The rise of indi-

vidualism, while offering personal freedom, has unwittingly fueled loneliness and diminished our care for one another. Recognizing this, we must actively reclaim the value of social cohesion. Whether through rebuilding local neighborhoods, revitalizing religious communities, or fostering global solidarity, the task ahead is clear: we need to restore the ties that bind us. Without a shared consciousness, we risk losing what makes us human.

At our core, we are interconnected. True progress be it personal or societal depends not on standing apart, but on standing together. The challenge of our time is to bridge the gap between our digital connections and our human ones, ensuring that the tools of modernity serve to unite rather than divide. Only then can we reverse the tide of alienation and build a future worth believing in.



PESHAWAR: Assistant Commissioner visiting examination center in Zaryab Colony to oversee ongoing matriculation examinations.





## In brief

### Dental college inaugurated F.P. Report

QUETTA: Lieutenant General Rahet Naseem Ahmad Khan has inaugurated the Quetta College of Dentistry, marking a significant advancement for healthcare and education in Balochistan. This institution is the province's first dental college, reflecting a collaborative effort between the Balochistan government and the Pakistan Army. The college, which was constructed and made operational in under a year, is a testament to effective teamwork and swift execution. It is equipped with modern facilities designed to provide comprehensive education and training in the field of dentistry. With the first batch of 50 students ready to commence regular classes on April 14, the institution sets the stage for enhancing dental healthcare in the region. The students will benefit from the college's expert faculty and a curriculum aimed at future-proofing dental education in Balochistan.

### 20 kg hashish recovered F.P. Report

LARKANA: Excise police arrested alleged drug smuggler and recovered more than 20 kg of hashish from the tires of a tractor. He has been handed over to the jail on judicial remand for the 14 days. When contacted by the media, Inspector of Excise Police, Abdul Hameed Baghio, said that the Excise Police, acting on a tip-off, conducted an operation near Larkana Ratodero Road, Jagirani Bypass, seized 20 kg of 800 grams of hashish from the tires of a tractor, and arrested a suspect along with the tractor. Ur Rehman Noorzai is the one who filed such a case. Meanwhile, Sindh's renowned historian and researcher Professor Dr. Ghulam Mustafa Shar has revealed that the center of the ancient civilization of Sindh is not 5000 years old but 25 million years old. He made this statement while addressing the lecture organized under the theme of Sindhology lecture series under the title "New revelations of the rise and fall of the Indus civilization" in the Pir Husamuddin Rashidi Auditorium of Sindhology Jamshuri.

### School holidays announced F.P. Report

NANKANA: The district administration of Nankana Sahib has announced school holidays for five days in connection with the Baisakhi festival. According to reports, all educational institutions in the district will remain closed from April 12 to April 16. The announcement of school holidays comes as thousands of Sikh pilgrims arrive from India to take part in the Baisakhi celebrations. According to officials, the closure is aimed at ensuring smooth arrangements and tight security during the event. An official notification confirmed that these school holidays would be in effect across the entire district. The main Baisakhi celebration is scheduled for April 14, with preparations already underway. As part of the security measures, over 2,000 police officers and personnel will be deployed. The District Police Officer (DPO) has issued a detailed security plan for the occasion. Under the Pakistan-India religious tourism agreement, 3,000 Sikh pilgrims are allowed to visit, but this year, more than 7,000 have expressed interest. A request has been submitted to the Pakistani High Commission in New Delhi to issue more visas.

# Action to be taken against foreign medicine

## F.P. Report

BAANU: A joint meeting of the Chemist and Druggist Association and health department officials agreed to take strict action against the sale of foreign medicines without a license and violation of government orders. Distributors announced to stop supplying medicines to people involved in the medicine business without a license.

Shopkeepers of the three hospitals of Bannu were ordered to strictly follow the orders of the health department. The association indicated that it would stop supplying to Waziristan if the demands were not approved. A joint meeting of the Chemist Association and distributors from across the district was held under the chairmanship of the Provincial Vice Chairman of the Chemist and Druggist Association, Muhammad Alam Khan.

The meeting was attended by the President of the Distributors Association, Shahidur Rehman Khattak, Senior Vice President of the Chemist Association, Asif Khan, Press Secretary Anwar Ullah and other leaders, while Chief Drug Inspector Chaudhry

Aurangzeb Khan, Drug Inspector Hafiz Abrar and other officers of the health department also participated. The association officials discussed the issues.

A detailed discussion was held regarding the problems and a plan of action was drawn up to solve the problems faced by the chemists in Bannu district and adjacent areas. It was decided in the meeting that no pharmaceutical company will change its distributor without taking the association into confidence, nor will stock of medicines be given to unlicensed people. However, if any company violates the decision of the organization in this regard, action will be taken against the organization under the Drug Act.

**Police held five alleged culprits including PO:** Police have arrested scores of criminals including drug peddlers during a search and strike operation in parts of Bannu district on Saturday. An official said that the operation was launched in the limits of Mandan, Township and Domel police stations on the special instructions of DPO.

"In the Mandan area, the police raided hideouts of anti-social elements and

narcotics dens and captured five drug traffickers", he maintained. He said that the arrested men included Samiullah, Hasnain, Arshad, Sajjad and Yasir and the law enforcers seized 5110 grams hashish from them.

The official said that one of the arrested suspects, Yasir was also wanted by police in a theft case. He said that the cops also apprehended anti-social elements and recovered an AK 47 assault rifle, a repeater shotgun, four pistols and ammunition from them.

He said that DSP Khanan led the operation in the Domel and Township areas wherein the commandos of Elite Force and District Special Branch personnel backed by armoured personnel carrier vehicles also participated.

"During the operation, the policemen arrested several suspects and seized two AK 47 Assault Rifles, two Kalakov Rifles, three pistols, a rifle and ammunition from them", he claimed. He said that the arrested men were shifted to the concerned police stations where separate cases were registered against them under relevant sections of law.

# Colorful spring flower show held in D I Khan

## F.P. Report

D I KHAN: A vibrant and colorful flower exhibition was held in the Cantonment area, on the occasion of spring, attracting widespread participation from educational institutions, organizations and residents.

The event featured competitive stalls set up by various organizations, celebrating the beauty of nature and community involvement. Among the standout participants, the Cantonment board Dera secured first position for its outstanding preparations and aesthetically pleasing floral displays. The presentation drew praise for its

creativity and elegance.

Educational institutions from the Cantonment area also actively took part in the event. The Cantonment Board school Dera earned second place among schools for its uniquely arranged and visually captivating flower stall, showcasing both talent and teamwork. In addition to institutional competitions, a separate contest was held for the most beautiful home lawns within the Cantonment area.

Cantonment House claimed second place for its naturally arranged garden and impressive flower cultivation, which captured the attention of judges and visitors alike.

itors alike.

The exhibition drew a large number of visitors, including children, women, and the elderly. Attendees showed great interest in the stalls and appreciated the effort put into organizing such an event. Many lauded the show as a valuable initiative that not only enhanced the aesthetic appeal of the Cantonment but also promoted awareness about preserving the natural environment. Participants and visitors alike emphasized that such seasonal events foster eco-friendly attitudes and offer citizens a wonderful opportunity to appreciate the charm of nature and refine their aesthetic sensibilities.

# Foot and mouth disease epidemic outbreaks in South Waziristan

## F.P. Report

WANA: A severe outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) has gripped Lower South Waziristan, sparking alarm among residents, health professionals, and local officials. The epidemic, which has taken hold in multiple tehsils including Toi Khulla, Zarmelan, Birmal, Wana, and Shakai, is rapidly spiraling out of control, with over a dozen livestock deaths already reported and hundreds more animals falling ill.

Sources on the ground reveal that for the past year, no vaccination drives have been conducted in the region. Veterinary hospitals remain ill-equipped and understocked, with a critical shortage of medicines. The absence of timely funding

from both federal and provincial governments has left these facilities unable to respond to the crisis effectively, leaving local veterinary staff helpless.

Perhaps even more troubling is the sale of meat from sick or deceased animals in local markets. With no regulatory checks on the quality of meat being sold, consumers are unknowingly buying potentially contaminated products, putting their health at serious risk. Health experts warn that the consumption of such meat could lead to the spread of zoonotic diseases, endangering not just animals but humans as well.

**Tribesmen hold grand jirga:** In a powerful show of unity and resolve, the Ahmadzai Wazir tribe con-

vened a crucial jirga on Thursday at the Angoor Adda crossing along the Pak-Afghan border, where a national sit-in continues to protest the imposition of the One Document Regime (ODR). The jirga drew wide participation from tribal elders, youth leaders, and members of civil society, marking a pivotal moment in the growing resistance against passport-only travel policies.

Unanimously, the jirga declared a firm rejection of the government's policy requiring passports for cross-border movement, asserting that the Ahmadzai Wazir tribe — which has resided on both sides of the border for generations — will not accept what they call a disruption to their historical, cultural, and familial ties.

# Free medical heart screening camp scheduled for 15th

## F.P. Report

LAKKI MARWAT: Lucky Cement Limited will hold a three-day free heart screening camp for the residents of Lakki Marwat district at its plant premises located in the Darra Pezu town. Medical experts from Tabba Heart Institute, a leading name in cardiac healthcare will provide heart health services at the camp from April 15 to 17, 2025.

An official of the cement production unit asked the people especially those suffering from heart ailments to visit the camp to avail essential heart health services such as ECGs, cholesterol checks, blood pressure monitoring, and consultations with qualified cardiologists - all free of charge.

"This initiative reflects Lucky Cement's ongoing efforts to promote preventive healthcare and improve access to medical services in remote communities", he maintained. He said that local residents should attend and benefit from the free cardiac checkups and expert medical advice.

**Health asks for joint effort to prevent dengue spreading:** The health department has

approached the district administration for the constitution of district dengue prevention and response unit (DDPRU) in Lakki Marwat district to launch integrated efforts for elimination of dengue virus and contain prevalence of the vector borne disease.

"In this connection, District Health Officer Dr Abdulgul has sent an official letter to the deputy commissioner with the request to notify DDPRU in pursuance of the directives of provincial government", said an official on Saturday. He said that the deputy commissioner would head the unit as chairman while the district health officer would perform as secretary.

"Other members of the DDPRU will include public health coordinator, medical entomologist, coordinator national programme for LHWs, N-Stop (National Stop Transmission of Polio) Officer, tehsil municipal officers, district education officers (Male and Female), executive engineers C&W and public health engineering, assistant director local government and district police officer", he maintained.

The official said that the health workers carried out fumigation in

the judicial complex and surrounding residential areas to knock down the adult population of mosquitoes. He said that under a proactive plan, the fumigation and anti-mosquito spray was being conducted to kill mosquitoes and eliminate dengue virus before they could pose a threat to humans.

**Admin fixes wheat threshing rates:** The district administration has fixed wheat threshing rates in Lakki Marwat to facilitate farmers to get their harvested crops threshed on control rates. The new rates applicable till further orders were fixed during a meeting held here at the Tehsil Building in Lakki city with Assistant Commissioner Faqeer Hussain in the chair.

Officials of the agriculture department and representatives of tractors' owners and farmers' bodies were in attendance. The wheat harvesting season is expected to kick off in the district during the ongoing week.

An official said that after the meeting, the assistant commissioner notified the new rates under the Price Control and Prevention of Profiteering and Hoarding Act 1997. He said that the owners of thresher machines



**MALAKAND:** Special Assistant to KP Chief Minister on Wildlife and Forests, Pir Musawar Khan visited Haryankot, Dargai and inspected various sites for construction of mini zoo.

## Tele education in Swabi

### Syed Ghayur Ahmed Shah

**UNDER the umbrella of UNICEF with colobration with Education Department Khyber Pakhtukhwa organized a one-day training workshop in Tele education for male and female teachers in district Swabi, earlier today in Haqnai Library at Swabi.**

We have started this student education based program in 90 district through out Pakistan in 2010, using latest IT technology, says UNICEF director Program Mr. Khurram Sultan. We expend our services to KP education department with the help of Tele Education in 2018, where we entered in all of district of KP, he further added.

In a comment Mr.Sultan says that we have a result based monitoring and follow-up system. In 2023 we added Kohat and Swabi to the next level of Tele Education with great effort of Teachers and KP Education Department. There is recoded lectures, full selesub, different education activity and teachers assisment are available on Tele Education App, and students will able clear their concept through interactive and community based education system says Madam Yasmin, Academic Specialist of Tele Education, an NGO working in Pakistan at Education platform. In last Tele Taleem, UNICEF distributed tablets to the teachers in colobration with KP education department.

## Man shot injures uncle

### F.P. Report

BAHAWALPUR: A man shot at and injured his uncle over a property dispute in the Hasilpur area. Rescue 1122 said that they received information on helpline that a man had been injured as he received bullet wounds in Satellite Town Hasilpur.

"Rescuers along with an ambulance rushed to the scene and provided first aid to the injured and shifted him to Tehsil Headquarters Hospital Hasilpur," they said. The victim was identified as 70-year-old Rasheed Ahmad, a resident of Satellite Town Bahawalpur.

## Enrollment campaign for 2025 launched

### F.P. Report

SHANGLA: Deputy Commissioner Shangla, Mr. emphasized that education is the foundation of a nation's progress and prosperity. He stated that nations that do not achieve self-sufficiency in education can never truly advance. He urged the people of Shangla to enroll their children in schools, increase the literacy rate, and contribute to national development.

He was speaking at a seminar held at Government Primary School No. 1 in Alpura during the inauguration of the 2025 new academic year enrollment campaign. The seminar was also addressed by District Education Officer Muhammad Aurang Zeb, Deputy District Education Officer Syed Al-Hussain, and SDO Alpura Aurang Zeb.

Deputy Commissioner Muhammad Fawad Khan highlighted the rapid changes in global circumstances and stressed that only an educated nation can

tackle the challenges of the modern era.

He attributed the country's current struggles to the low literacy rate and emphasized the importance of acquiring education in line with contemporary requirements. He called on the youth to equip themselves with modern education to confront the challenges faced by the nation. He pointed out that Pakistan currently ranks 157th out of 159 countries in terms of education and is among the most backward nations in terms of educational standards.

**PTI protest held:** Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) held protests in Bisham and Puran, led by Shawkat Yousafzai and Haji Abdul Menem, demanding the release of Imran Khan. The demonstrations saw significant participation from party workers.

Protest in Bisham: The protest rally turned into a public gathering, where Shawkat Yousafzai addressed the crowd, stating that Imran Khan cannot

be detained for much longer. The Karakoram Highway was blocked for several hours during the protest.

The protests showcased PTI's strong presence in Shagla, with a massive gathering of people. The party's leadership and workers demonstrated their unity and determination to push for Imran Khan's release.

**DEO launches enrollment campaign:** District Education Officer Muhammad Aurangzeb has launched a new campaign, stressing that education is not just a program, but a national duty. He believes that enrolling children in school is crucial for their development, as it guides them from ignorance to knowledge, progress, and self-release.

**E d u c a t i o n ' s Significance:** Aurangzeb highlighted Islam's emphasis on education, citing the Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) instruction to release prisoners in exchange for teaching 10 Muslims how to read and write.

## DC pays surprise visit to THQ hospital Gojra

### F.P. Report

TOBA TEK SINGH: In line with the vision of Punjab Chief Minister, efforts to improve public healthcare facilities across the district are underway with renewed focus and pace. As part of this initiative, Deputy Commissioner Toba Tek Singh, Muhammad Naeem Sindh, paid a surprise visit to THQ Hospital Gojra, accompanied by Assistant Commissioner Gojra, Kamran Ashraf, on

Saturday. During the visit, DC inspected various departments, including the registration counter, OPD clinics, emergency unit, laboratory, pharmacy and inpatient wards. He inquired from patients about the availability of free medicine and sought their feedback regarding the quality of treatment, the attitude of doctors and paramedical staff, and the overall hospital facilities.

Muhammad Naeem Sindh directed the hospital

administration to further improve cleanliness, ensure staff attendance, and streamline overall management. He emphasized that the provision of free medicines must be ensured at all costs and warned that negligence in this regard would not be tolerated. He reiterated that the Punjab government is prioritizing the uplift of the healthcare sector and added that Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif envisions quality and free medical care for every citizen across the province.

## Govt sets multi-dimensional urban developmental plan: Minister

### F.P. Report

FAISALABAD: Provincial Parliamentary Secretary for Housing, Urban Development and Public Health Engineering Sultan Bajwa has said that the current Punjab government under the leadership of Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif has focused on multi-

dimensional urban development. In this regard, long-term development measures are being taken in line with the future requirements. However, development agencies should complete development projects quickly under an integrated strategy and deliver these benefits to the masses.

He said this during a brief-

ing on development projects at Faisalabad Development Authority committee room here on Saturday. Director General FDA Muhammad Asif Chaudhry and DMD WASA Shoaib Rashid informed about the details of ongoing and proposed development projects related to urban development and sanitation.

duced himself as Muhammad Roman.

He said that he got suspicious and on repeated questioning, the candidate confessed he was Jawad and was attempting the paper in place of his relative Muhammad Roman. The exam official said that he forwarded the impersonation case against Roman to the relevant authorities of the educational board. SHO Muzaffar Khan said that he was in the school premises with a police party to check the security of the examination hall. "Upon receiving a complaint from the superintendent, the accused Jawad was arrested and a case was registered against him under relevant sections of law", he added.

**Awareness walk for enrollment held:** On the instructions of District Education Officer Lakki Marwat Shaikat Ali Khan, separate walks were held in the Bilankhel and Wanda Banochi areas of Ghaznikhel tehsil to raise awareness about the kids' enrollment to schools.

The participants included teachers and students carrying banners, placards and posters highlighting messages about the importance of school enrolment drive. At the culmination of

walks, the teachers went door to door, met with parents and sensitized them about enrolment of children. They told people, especially parents, that getting education was their children's fundamental right and they should not deprive them of it.

Ghaznikhel tehsil SDEO Qadeer Shah and Circle Titterkhel ASDEO Nisar Muhammad Khan who had organized the awareness walks told Dawn that the school enrolment drive was going on with full swing in the entire tehsil. He said that the school-based targets had been set and the schools' bosses and teachers had been directed to ensure admission of the targeted population.

DEO Shoukat Ali Khan said that the public sector schools had expert and professionally committed teachers, besides the provincial government provided free textbooks to the students. He said that the provincial government had also ensured other basic facilities in government run schools for the well-being and betterment of students. He directed teachers to cooperate with parents visiting schools in connection with the admission of their children.





## Beijing ups diplomatic pressure on Africa

BEIJING (AP): Chinese diplomats threatened to cancel a summit and called top officials in two African countries to pressure lawmakers to quit an international parliamentary group critical of China, officials from the group told The Associated Press. It's an example of how far China will go to influence politicians overseas, and how that pressure can succeed behind closed doors.

In the past year, lawmakers from Malawi and Gambia withdrew from the Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China, or IPAC, a group of hundreds of lawmakers from 38 countries concerned about how democracies approach Beijing, according to letters, messages and voice recordings obtained by The Associated Press. Founded in 2020, the group has coordinated sanctions on China over rights abuses in Xinjiang and Hong Kong and rallied support for Taiwan, a self-ruled democratic island Beijing claims as its territory. African politicians and experts say it's an escalation of Chinese diplomatic pressure in Africa, where Beijing's influence is growing. Beijing has built deep ties with African leaders by developing mines and building infrastructure through state-owned construction companies, often funded by loans from state-owned banks.

The pressure is also part of Beijing's longstanding effort to influence groups and lawmakers across the world, including in New York state, where a former governor's aide faces charges for acting as an agent for the Chinese government. In January, Gambian lawmaker Abdoulie Ceesay sent a voice message to an IPAC staffer saying the Chinese government had complained to the Gambian foreign ministry about his membership. "We have very shocking news ... it's a problem right now," Ceesay said in the recording, which IPAC provided to AP. "The president is not happy with us at all."

Later the same month, Ceesay and fellow lawmaker Amadou Camara informed the alliance they were withdrawing. Ceesay told IPAC in a written message that his decision was "not influenced by the Chinese embassy," a position Ceesay reiterated when contacted by AP. Gambia's information minister said he was unaware of any attempt by China to influence his country's politicians. "They decided on their own behalf to opt out of IPAC after realizing it goes against the government's bilateral (relationship) with China," said the minister, Ismaila Ceesay, who is not related to Abdoulie Ceesay.

The Chinese government has targeted

lawmakers over the alliance before. Beijing has sanctioned some members and last year, lawmakers from at least six countries were pressured by Chinese diplomats not to attend the group's summit in Taiwan. Kenyan lawmakers cancelled their plans to attend but stayed in the alliance. The group was also targeted by Chinese state-sponsored hackers in 2021, according to a US indictment. "Foreign legislators are being bullied out of a free alliance between them and other politicians," said IPAC head Luke de Pulford. "This is clearly a result of Chinese pressure." In a statement, the Chinese Foreign Ministry accused IPAC of "smearing China" and said that "China has never engaged in coercive diplomacy."

But a Malawian lawmaker, Ephraim Abel Kayembe, told an IPAC staffer he had been contacted by the speaker of the Malawian National Assembly shortly after he and another lawmaker joined the group at last year's Taiwan summit, according to the staffer. The staffer declined to be named for fear of damage to their relations with other politicians. The speaker told Kayembe the Chinese government had threatened to cancel the president's upcoming visit to Beijing for a regional summit and meeting with Chinese leader Xi Jinping, according to IPAC head de Pulford, programs director Tom Fraser and the person who spoke directly to Kayembe. Less than two weeks after the summit, the two Malawian lawmakers said they were withdrawing. Kayembe said in a letter to IPAC that he had been tricked into joining.

"I want to extend my sincere apology to the People's Republic of China," Kayembe wrote in the Aug. 7 letter. When contacted by AP, Kayembe denied being coerced by the Malawi or Chinese governments, writing in an email that he withdrew because the alliance appeared "aimed at achieving geopolitical intentions against China." Malawi's government did not respond to a request for comment.

For decades, Beijing has cultivated ties with African governments, seeking diplomatic partners and access to natural resources. Many African leaders have welcomed Beijing's presence since it brings much-needed capital and construction expertise that can contribute to economic growth and development. Critics say China strikes secretive, sometimes corrupt deals with African leaders that mainly benefit Chinese companies and workers brought in to build mines, bridges and railways.

## Russia says it investigating eight civilian deaths

MOSCOW (Reuters): Russian investigators said that they were probing the alleged killing of eight Russian civilians by Ukrainian soldiers in Russia's Kursk region, parts of which were controlled by Kyiv before Russia regained ground this year. In a statement on Telegram, Svetlana Petrenko, a spokesperson for Russia's Investigative Committee, which handles serious crimes, said the charges related to deaths of residents of the village of Gulyovo, which Russia said it had retaken. "The investigation established the fact of targeted shelling by Ukrainian armed forces of civilians during their evacuation in April 2025, as a result of which six people were killed," Petrenko said.

She said that the investigation also concerned two more civilian deaths in Gulyovo in March 2025, alongside reports of alleged looting by Ukrainian forces. Reuters was unable to verify the reports. There was no immediate response from Ukraine's defence ministry or its general staff to emailed requests for comment. Russian forces in Ukraine have been accused of committing crimes against civilians since Moscow began its full scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Russian officials have denied the allegations.

## US envoy to Ukraine stepping down

WASHINGTON (Reuters): US Ambassador to Ukraine Bridget Brink is stepping down from her role, a State Department spokesperson said, in a move that injects new uncertainty into the relationship between Washington and Kyiv. Reuters reported earlier that Brink was considering stepping down and leaving the foreign service, according to a US official and two other people familiar with the matter.

"Ambassador Brink is stepping down. She's been the ambassador there for three years - that's a long time in a war zone," a State Department spokesperson said in an emailed response. Brink was nominated for the post by former President Joe Biden and has served as ambassador in Kyiv since May 2022. She is leaving of her own accord, the sources said. Brink is one of the highest-ranking career diplomats to leave the State Department since President Donald Trump took office on January 20. She joins other departing veteran officials with decades of experience, such as the agency's No. 3 official John Bass, who stepped aside in January.

Her departure comes as the Trump administration tries to broker a deal between Ukraine and Russia to end the war that started with Moscow's full-scale invasion in 2022. Washington has tried to implement two limited ceasefire agreements in recent weeks - one for energy infrastructure and one in the Black Sea - but both have fallen through. "Ambassador Brink's been ambassador at the embassy in Ukraine for three years during a time of war... An extraordinary performance there, and we wish her well," State Department spokesperson Tammy Bruce told reporters at a regular news briefing. "We're working for that war to end, and that is our focus, and we expect, of course, our work ... will continue in that regard."

It is unclear who will take over as US ambassador to Ukraine. The US official and another person familiar with the matter said Chris Smith, the deputy assistant secretary for Eastern Europe and policy and regional affairs in the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, is being considered. Smith previously served as deputy chief of mission in the US embassy in Kyiv from 2022 to 2023. Brink, who has overseen the transition between two administrations with vastly different Ukraine policies, was recently criticized in Ukraine for her response to a Russian strike that hit a playground in President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's hometown of Kryvyi Rih and killed 11 adults and nine children.



GAZA CITY: Civil defence teams conducting a search and rescue operation amid the rubble of a collapsed building following an Israeli attack on the Shujayea neighbourhood.

## Pentagon chief says will not let China 'threaten' Panama Canal

WASHINGTON (AFP): The United States will not allow China to "threaten" the operations of the Panama Canal, US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth warned during a visit, earning a rebuke from Beijing over Washington's "bullying nature." Hegseth is the second senior US official to visit Panama since President Donald Trump took office in January vowing to "take back" the US-built canal to counter what he sees as China's influence over the waterway. "Today, the Panama Canal faces ongoing threats," Hegseth said in a speech at a police station located at the entry to the shipping route. "The United States of America will not allow communist China or any other country to threaten the canal's operation or integrity," he added. The United States built the more than century-old canal and handed it over to Panama in 1999.

Beijing hit back at Hegseth's remarks, saying "senior US officials have maliciously attacked China, smearing and undermining China-Panama cooperation." The criticism from Hegseth is "once again exposing the United States' bullying nature," Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Lin Jian said. Hegseth met with Panama's President Jose Raul Mulino, with the two issuing a joint statement that affirmed security ties.

However, there was a notable discrepancy in the versions released by both sides on the issue of Panama's sovereignty over the canal. "Secretary Hegseth recognized

Panama's leadership and inalienable sovereignty over the Panama Canal and its adjacent areas," read a Spanish-language statement released by Mulino's office. That sentence did not appear in the English-language statement released by the US government. A Hong Kong company operates two ports at either end of the canal connecting the Atlantic and Pacific, through which five percent of all global shipping passes. The Trump administration has put immense pressure on Panama to reduce what it calls Chinese influence on the canal, which Washington sees as a threat to US national security.

Panama has denied the assertions that China exercises undue control over the waterway. But on the eve of Hegseth's visit, it accused the Hong Kong company of failing to meet its contractual obligations. "I want to be very clear. China did not build this canal. China does not operate this canal. And China will not weaponize this canal," Hegseth said, calling it a "wonder of the world."

Hegseth added that the United States and Panama together would "take back the Panama Canal from China's influence" and keep it open to all nations, using the "deterrent power of the... most lethal fighting force in the world." He claimed that China's control of critical infrastructure in the canal area gave Beijing the power to conduct spying activities across Panama, making Central American nation and the United States "less secure, less prosperous

and less sovereign." The Chinese Embassy in Panama issued a statement refuting Hegseth's claim, labeling it as "not at all responsible or founded."

"China has never taken part in the management or operation of the Panama Canal, nor has it interfered in issues" concerning the waterway, the statement said, calling on Washington to halt "blackmail" and "plundering" of Panama and other countries of the region. It added that the United States "has orchestrated a sensationalist campaign based on the 'China threat theory' so as to undermine cooperation between China and Panama." "China has always respected Panama's sovereignty with regard to the canal," the embassy said. The concession to the Hong Kong-based company's subsidiary to operate Balboa port on the Pacific side of the canal and Cristobal port on the Atlantic side was first granted in 1997 and renewed for another 25 years in 2021.

But faced with Trump's repeated threats to seize the canal, Panama has put pressure on CK Hutchison to pull out of the country. In January, it began an audit of Panama Ports -- the subsidiary -- to determine if it was honoring its concession contract. On the eve of Hegseth's visit Panama's comptroller announced that the audit had revealed "many breaches" of the contract and said Panama did not receive \$1.2 billion it was owed from the operator.

## Ukraine 'coalition of willing' presses ahead with force planning

BRUSSELS (AP): Britain's defense minister urged his counterparts from around 30 countries to press ahead with plans to deploy troops to Ukraine to police any future peace agreement with Russia, as questions remained over whether the United States would provide backup.

Chairing the first meeting of the so-called coalition of the willing at the level of defense ministers, U.K. Defense Secretary John Healey said its members must ensure "that we're fully prepared for the moment a peace agreement is reached." "We must be ready for when that peace comes. That's why the work of this coalition is so vital," Healey said at NATO headquarters in Brussels. He added that 200 military planners have been developing plans to deepen European involvement in Ukraine.

In a post on social media, Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov said that "Ukraine is ready for peace - one that is just and backed by strength." Ukrainian

government officials and military analysts have said that Russian forces are preparing to launch a fresh military offensive in Ukraine in the coming weeks to maximize pressure on Kyiv and strengthen the Kremlin's negotiating position in ceasefire talks.

As usual with coalition gatherings, the United States did not take part. The success of the coalition's operation hinges on US backup with airpower or other military assistance, but the Trump administration has made no public commitment to provide support. The Netherlands, Sweden and Finland underlined the "crucial" role of the United States. "The United States is a crucial player still in guaranteeing lasting security" in Ukraine, said Finnish Defense Minister Anni Hakkänen. His Swedish counterpart, Pål Jonson, said success in Ukraine requires "some form of US engagement" while Dutch Defense Minister Ruben Brekelmans called American support "very important" but said

the form it took might differ, depending on the chosen type of European mission in Ukraine.

EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas said ministers were "trying to keep the United States on board." Amid that uncertainty and US warnings that Europe must take care of its own security and that of Ukraine in future, the force is seen as a first test of the continent's willingness to defend itself and its interests.

Its make-up will depend on the nature of any peace agreement, but the contingent is unlikely to be stationed at Ukraine's border with Russia. It would be located farther from the ceasefire line, perhaps even outside Ukraine, and deploy to counter any Russian attack. Building a force big enough to act as a credible deterrent is proving a considerable effort for nations that shrank their militaries after the Cold War but are now rearming. U.K. officials have talked about possibly 10,000 to 30,000 troops. Healey said the "reassurance force for

Ukraine would be a committed and credible security arrangement to ensure that any negotiated peace does bring what President Trump has pledged: a lasting peace for Ukraine."

But some countries are reluctant to contribute personnel without US support. The Europeans cannot match US weapons systems, intelligence gathering and satellite surveillance capabilities. More fundamentally, members of the coalition are still trying to establish how the force would operate: Leading countries want a robust deterrence force to defend against any Russian attack.

Brekkelmans said key questions must be answered like "what is the potential mission? What is going to be the goal? What is the mandate? What would we do in different scenarios, for example, if there would be any escalation regarding Russia?" Some countries - Italy and the Netherlands, for example - require the approval of their national parliaments before they can deploy troops.

## UK announces £450m mly support to Ukraine

LONDON (BBC): The government has announced a further £450m of military support to Kyiv, as the UK and Germany prepare to host a meeting of 50 nations in Brussels. Defence officials are convening to "pile pressure" on Russian President Vladimir Putin and force him to end his invasion of Ukraine, UK Defence Secretary John Healey said.

"We must step up to deter Russian aggression by continuing to bolster Ukraine's defences," he added. The package includes funding for hundreds of thousands of drones, anti-tanks mines and repairs to military vehicles. About £350m will be provided by the UK, with extra funding from Norway via the UK-led International Fund for Ukraine.

The package includes £160m to provide repairs and maintenance to vehicles and equipment the UK has already provided to Ukraine. A "close fight" military aid package, with funding for radar systems, anti-tank mines and hundreds of thousands of drones, worth more than

£250m is also part of the package, the government said.

Healey said the work of the group "is vital to put Ukraine in the strongest possible position". "We cannot jeopardise peace by forgetting the war, which is why today's major package will surge support to Ukraine's frontline fight," he said. "2025 is the critical year for Ukraine. Our job as defence ministers is to put into the hands of the Ukrainian war fighters what they need."

The fund follows a series of military pledges to Ukraine from the UK. Last month, Sir Keir Starmer announced a £1.6bn missile deal for Ukraine, following a summit of European leaders in London, on top of a £2.2bn loan to provide more military aid backed by profits from frozen Russian assets. The Lib Dems said the support package announced was "small change" and called for the government to seize Russian assets in Britain to give Ukraine more funding.

"While we welcome any increase in support for Ukraine, this package is

small change compared to what's needed to combat Putin's barbaric war," the party's defence spokeswoman Helen Maguire said. Healey and his German counterpart, defence minister Boris Pistorius, are co-chairing meeting of the Ukraine Defence Contact Group, which had traditionally been hosted by the US defence secretary until Donald Trump became president in January. Since then, in a sign of the US stepping back from European security matters, Healey has taken over as chair.

The meeting follows a similar gathering of defence ministers from 30 countries in the Franco-British-led "coalition of the willing", who met in Brussels to discuss installing a force in Ukraine to ensure enduring peace, Healey said he did not envisage "a reassurance force" that will "separate the currently warring sides down the line of contact", according to the AFP news agency, but added that bolstering Ukraine's armies would be a key part of the plan.

## China, NK and Russia mly cooperation raises threat: US

WASHINGTON (AP): The top US commander in the Pacific warned senators that the military support China and North Korea are giving Russia in its war on Ukraine is creating a security risk in his region as Moscow provides critical military assistance to both in return.

Adm. Samuel Paparo, head of US Indo-Pacific Command, told the Senate Armed Services Committee that China has provided 70% of the machine tools and 90% of the legacy chips to Russia to help Moscow "rebuild its war machine."

In exchange, he said, China is potentially getting help in technologies to make its submarines move more quietly, along with other assistance. Senators pressed Paparo and Gen. Xavier Brunson, commander of US Forces Korea, on

China's advances in the region, including threats to Taiwan. And they also questioned both on the US military presence in South Korea, and whether it should be shielded from personnel cuts..

Both said the current US force there and across the Indo-Pacific is critical for both diplomacy in the region and America's national security, as ties between Russia and China grow. The US has 28,500 forces in South Korea. Paparo said North Korea is sending "thousands, maybe hundreds of thousands of artillery shells" and hundreds of short-range missiles to Russia. The expectation, he said, is that Pyongyang will get air defense and surface-to-air missile support. "It's a transactional symbiosis where each state fulfills the other state's weakness to

mutual benefit of each state," Paparo said.

In his opening comments, Sen. Roger Wicker of Mississippi, the Republican committee chairman, said the greater alignment of Russia, China and North Korea "should be of great concern to all in the West. This concern should then lead to action. If we are to maintain global peace and stability, we must continue taking steps now to rebuild our military and reestablish deterrence."

Brunson said North Korea has shown the ability to send munitions and troops to Russia while advancing development of its own military capabilities, including hypersonics. Pyongrang, he said, "boasts a Russian-equipped, augmented, modernized military force of over 1.3 million personnel."



The Frontier Post

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

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## NATO's 76th anniversary

ON Apr. 4, 2024, NATO celebrated its 75th anniversary, commemorating the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty in 1949. The mood was positive: Russia's invasion of Ukraine had given the "braindead NATO" an "electroshock," said French President Macron [1]. Finland and Sweden had just joined NATO, significantly strengthening the alliance's northern flank. Although the US Congress was withholding a new supplemental package to Ukraine and then-candidate, now US president, Donald Trump questioned the US commitment to "delinquent" allies on the campaign trail, NATO appeared "Trump-proof." At the Washington Summit in the summer, allies reaffirmed transatlantic unity. They established a new NATO command to oversee aid to Ukraine (NATO Security Assistance and Training for Ukraine) in the US base in Wiesbaden, Germany [2].

Fast forward to Apr. 4, 2025, and everything looks different. The words and actions of the new Trump administration have shattered trust in the American commitment to defend Europe. According to a recent survey, most Europeans now see Trump as an "enemy" rather than an ally of Europe [3]. The possibility of Europe needing to defend itself without America has emerged, and the very survival of NATO is at stake.

A few weeks after taking office, Trump reversed US policy towards Ukraine, opening negotiations with Russia, accepting many of the Kremlin's requests, and forcing Kyiv to the negotiating table by withholding aid and intelligence for a week. Now, Ukraine faces the prospect of signing an unfavorable ceasefire agreement or losing American assistance for good.

Unlike Ukraine, the rest of Europe is tied to the US by the North Atlantic Treaty's Article 5 commitment that an attack on one ally is an attack on all. However, many in Europe are now wondering: will we be next? Trump and his advisors are lashing out at traditional allies. They see them as "freeloaders" that need to be "bailed out" [4]. Future US commitments to NATO could be made conditional on certain concessions, such as increased defense spending or revision of trade policy vis-à-vis America - turning defense into a "product" to be paid for.

Some of America's demands could be interpreted as a more advanced form of burden-sharing, consistent with new strategic priorities. Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth stated that Europeans should take the lead in conventional deterrence of the continent. At the same time the US focuses on other issues, such as China and homeland defense [5]. Burden-sharing is a long-term trend, shared by previous US administrations, and other allies could contribute more by increasing defense spending and meeting a greater portion of NATO capability requirements.

However, these requests are hard to separate from other, more sinister elements that are now recurring themes in US rhetoric. Trump's continuous references to annexing Greenland (part of Denmark) and Canada directly threaten the territorial integrity of America's closest allies. Special Envoy Witkoff's claim that Russia does not represent a threat to Europe - together with indications that the US is considering pausing cyber offensive operations and lifting sanctions on the Kremlin, suggests that Washington could seek appeasement with Putin over Europe instead of reassuring exposed allies [6].

All these actions are detrimental to deterrence. Even if the US did not have the goal to abandon Europe, adversaries such as Russia would see the current crisis of confidence as an opportunity to further strain the Atlantic alliance. NATO's strategic concept emphasizes the transatlantic bond as a core pillar of deterrence [7]. Today, that pillar is cracking dangerously.

NATO is more than just the transatlantic bond. It is also an integrated military structure that binds together 32 armies. No other alliance approaches NATO's level of institutionalization. Allies develop their force structures collectively, follow the same defense plans, and train and exercise under unified command. While the NATO command structure relies heavily on a US backbone (in terms of bases, enablers, and commanders - including Supreme Allied Commander Europe or SACEUR), European armies are well integrated inside it [8].

The best way for NATO to survive might be to make its structure less reliant on the US. European countries and Canada can do so by increasing their share of the defense burden and by developing European capabilities that could, over time, make up for the US backbone. All this will require significant investments. The European Commission's ReArm Europe-Readiness 2030 initiative, unlocking a potential 800 billion euros, represents an opportunity for EU member states - as well as potential candidates and selected partners- to boost their defense spending and build a strong European deterrent component [9].

However, this will not solve all problems. If Trump really wanted to break up NATO -either to force concessions or because he has no interest in European security- he would be capable of doing so. The congressional resolution adopted in 2023 makes it harder for the US president to unilaterally withdraw from NATO [10]. However, Trump could make matters worse by staying within the alliance and blocking its functioning - for instance, if a confrontation with some allies broke out. That is not necessarily the most likely scenario. But it is within the realm of possibilities. In that case, European countries and Canada would need a backup plan. They would need a backup plan not just to save NATO, but to ensure their own security.

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## Helping Syria's recovery the smart thing to do

Dr. Majid Rafizadeh

**AFTER more than a decade of war, Syria finds itself at a crucial turning point. Its infrastructure is devastated, its economy shattered and its people exhausted, yet, amid the ashes of destruction, a new chapter is unfolding.**

A new government, led by President Ahmad Al-Sharaa, has taken the reins. This fresh leadership has launched a series of efforts aimed at stabilizing and rebuilding the war-torn nation. However, despite the determination of this administration to bring the Syrian Arab Republic back to its feet, the enormity of the challenges it faces cannot be overstated. Without robust and sustained international support - particularly from the West - Syria's road to recovery will be long, slow and fraught with further hardship.

The Syrian people, who have borne the brunt of the conflict, deserve a genuine chance to rebuild their lives. This can only happen through meaningful cooperation, especially in the form of lifting economic sanctions and providing aid for reconstruction.

The new government has moved swiftly to demonstrate its commitment to national reconciliation and stabilization. One of its most notable steps was the forging of a political agreement with the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces, which control significant portions of northeastern Syria. The agreement includes the withdrawal of SDF fighters from critical areas such as Aleppo's Sheikh Maksoud and Achrafieh neighborhoods, allowing for their integration into the national army.

In return, the Kurds have been promised constitutional recognition, including the right to teach the Kurdish language in schools and to secure citizenship for stateless Kurdish residents. This initiative marks a radical departure from the divisive and authoritarian policies of the previous regime and is geared toward unifying Syria's fractured society.

In parallel, Al-Sharaa has launched a regional diplomatic offensive, including planned high-profile visits to the UAE and Türkiye next week, in an effort to rebuild diplomatic ties, attract investment and foster goodwill.

These actions underline a genuine desire to end Syria's isolation and reengage with the international community, but these efforts will falter if Syria continues to be encircled by sweeping international sanctions.

Reconstruction is at the heart of Syria's recovery. The sheer scale of the destruction is staggering. Entire neighborhoods have been reduced to rubble. Schools, hospitals, power stations, water facilities and transport networks have been either heavily damaged or completely destroyed. Many schools have been rendered unusable and, according to international estimates, nearly half a million children are currently out of school in the northeast of the country alone. Scores of hospitals are nonoperational and many that remain open are working without electricity, clean water or basic medical supplies. Without reconstruction, there can be no return to normality. People cannot return to cities that have no running water, no schools and no jobs. Refugees and internally displaced persons will not go home if there is nothing left to return to. Reconstruction is not merely about building roads and bridges, it is about rebuilding hope.

To achieve this monumental task, Syria needs far more than goodwill - it needs substantial financial assistance and expert knowledge. The cost of rebuilding the country has been estimated at more than \$250 billion. Syria, in its current economic condition, cannot finance this on its own. In recognition of this, international donors have already pledged about \$6.5 billion at various summits, including the most recent gathering in Brussels last month. While this is a valuable start, it is only a drop in the ocean compared to what is required.

Beyond capital, Syria needs expertise: engineers to design modern infrastructure, educators to reform the education system, healthcare professionals to revive public health services, and urban planners to create livable, resilient cities. International aid should also include training programs for Syrians so that

the country can build local capacity and reduce long-term dependency. The involvement of international institutions, nongovernmental organizations and private companies is essential - not only to bring in the required skills and materials but also to provide oversight and ensure that funds are used transparently and effectively.

Reconstruction and international assistance will directly improve the lives of millions of Syrians. With foreign investment and expertise, power plants can be repaired, hospitals can go back to school. Jobs can be created through infrastructure projects, which will stimulate the local economy and give people a sense of purpose and stability.

As livelihoods return, the incentive to migrate will decrease. Refugees will feel more confident about returning home. Restoring dignity to the Syrian people is perhaps the greatest achievement such assistance can bring. The wounds of war are deep, but with coordinated support and a comprehensive rebuilding strategy, they can begin to heal.

The benefits of supporting Syria's reconstruction are not limited to the country's borders - they extend globally, especially to Western nations. A stable Syria reduces the threat of extremism and armed conflict in the region, which in turn lowers the risk of terrorism and destabilization in Europe and beyond. Rebuilding Syria would also mitigate the refugee crisis that has strained the social and political fabric of many European countries.

Economic recovery in Syria can open new markets for international trade, investment and cooperation. Moreover, playing a leading role in reconstruction would give Western countries a renewed moral standing in the region - showing that their foreign policy is not solely defined by sanctions and military intervention, but also by a commitment to peace, recovery and human dignity. The return on investment is not only humanitarian, but also geopolitical and economic. It is in the West's long-term interest to have a functioning, stable

partner in Syria rather than a broken state at the heart of the Middle East.

Finally, sanctions remain one of the greatest obstacles to Syria's recovery. Originally imposed to punish the Assad regime for its brutal repression and human rights abuses, these measures have now morphed into a blanket punishment of the Syrian population. Some of these economic restrictions have plunged Syria into an abyss of poverty and deprivation.

More than 90 percent of the population now lives below the poverty line. Food insecurity affects more than 13 million Syrians and inflation has pushed basic necessities beyond the reach of ordinary families. Power grids remain down in large swaths of the country. Clean water is a luxury in many areas. The dire situation has discouraged even well-meaning NGOs and international institutions from investing in recovery projects.

Lifting all sanctions would be an acknowledgment of the new political reality in Syria and a recognition that punishing the population only fuels instability. It would open the doors for humanitarian assistance, economic investment and technical cooperation, which are desperately needed to set Syria on a path to peace and prosperity.

In conclusion, the international community - and the West in particular - must rise to the occasion and assist Syria in its journey toward recovery. The new government has taken bold and promising steps to stabilize the country and reach out for support. But unless all sanctions are lifted, and unless there is a concerted effort to fund and lead reconstruction efforts, the suffering of the Syrian people will continue. Syria's recovery is not only a moral imperative, it is a strategic necessity. It will benefit not only Syrians but also the broader international community by enhancing regional stability, curbing extremism, reducing refugee flows and opening new avenues for cooperation and development. Helping Syria back on its feet is not charity - it is smart, forward-looking policy that serves shared global interests.

## Le Pen ready to divide France in bid to win power

Mohamed Chebaro

**HOW to punish a corrupt politician while preventing democracy from being tarnished? And how to prevent an opportunist political party from instilling doubt in the justice system of a country, US-style? This is the test that is facing France due to the affair of its rising populist politician Marine Le Pen, who was found guilty of diverting EU funds to pay for her party's political staff, falsely claiming that they were working as assistants to its deputies in the European Parliament.**

Last week's court ruling in Paris led to the sentencing of Le Pen and 24 of her associates belonging to the National Rally party with a myriad of fines, prison terms and bans from campaigning, a ruling that landed like a bombshell in French political life. It was only normal for the party's leader and her allies to attack the ruling. It is in the far-right populist playbook everywhere in the democratic Western world to claim to be the victim of a political witch hunt. Some believe that Le Pen's sentence - she was barred from running for public office for five years, which means sitting on the sidelines in the 2027 French presidential election, which she stood a good chance of winning - was harsh and others believe it was appropriate.

Nowhere has this divide been more visible - and likely to spell more headaches for France as a country - than in the slogans at Sunday's demonstration organized in support of Le Pen. It was normal that Le Pen, though convicted by a court of law, would evoke decades of fighting injustice and state that she plans to continue to fight like her father, Jean-Marie, did before her. But symbolism could not be discarded when thousands of her supporters gathered in central Paris, near the golden dome of Les Invalides and the tomb of Napoleon. They tried to claim her martyrdom through what was billed as a protest, but one could not dismiss that it was mainly electioneering and a campaign rally.

The choice of Les Invalides for the location of the demonstration pointed to a revolution in the making, or at least to the revolutionary mood among National Rally supporters. Louis XIV ordered the building of Les Invalides in recognition of the sacrifices made by the soldiers who fought in his wars. The location reflects some foundational periods in French history. It was the place from which a mob stormed the Bastille prison, using firearms and cannon they had looted from the Hotel des Invalides, during the French Revolution. Chants heard at the protest referred to Le Pen and her supporters' defiance. They voiced opposition to the "politically motivated" verdict, adding "Marine for president" and "they won't steal 2027 from us." This was reminiscent of the populist defiance of Trumpism and was aimed squarely at the French institutions as a whole.

Jordan Bardella, Le Pen's 29-year-old protege, made a speech in which he accused France's judges of trying to silence the opposition and claimed that the date of the verdict was a dark day for France. In fact, it was the day of the protest that was a dark day for France, as more poignant than the allegations were the shirts bearing the slogan "Je suis Marine" (I am Marine) or comparing Le Pen's situation to that of US President Donald Trump, who, despite being found liable for civil fraud, was able to run for election. So, if Trump could run, why not Le Pen, they asked.

On the other side of the divide, the ruling was clear and necessary, as Le Pen was found guilty of using European Parliament funds to pay party staff in France - a scheme the court described as "a democratic bypass." Many in this camp believe that French voters understand the issue and respect the ruling and the judiciary's independence. The voices on this side of the argument were alarmed at Le Pen being offered any favors, such as speeding up or tailoring her appeal to suit her timetable, warning of parallels with the US. In some anti-Le Pen demonstrations, this attitude resulted in leftist and centrist parties warning that the National Rally had adopted a form of US-style authoritarianism by refusing to bend to the justice system. They said the appeals process should not be sped up to meet the whims of a controversial political party and its convicted leader, even if the National Rally has more than 120 representatives in parliament. Proponents of this view insist that the rule of law must remain supreme and not become optional to suit political arrangements, while clearly alluding that Trump-style political victimization has no place in France.

What is more dangerous is the game that the National Rally has been playing since the guilty verdict and Le Pen's sentencing, which is to try to make people doubt the courts. The populists are twisting the truth to suit their goals. Many in France believe that the party has long wanted to launch a "judicial coup," as they floated the verdict as a political "execution" in the courts. And with this, it aims to convince voters that the current legal system cannot be trusted. This is the same strategy embraced by Trump in the US: claiming the courts are biased and subject to manipulation and that the system is broken and only the ballot boxes matter.

What comes next for France? Will the republic and its democratic processes survive? Le Pen might be barred, pending an appeal, but her party machine marches on. The question is: will the far right convince the French people that their state cannot be trusted and that the system is as twisted against their interests as America's? This is what is at stake for the republic. Can the far right convince enough French voters that justice is no longer neutral and that only they can return the power to the people? How that question is answered may shape not only the 2027 presidential race - but the future of French democracy.

Arab News

## Washington disrupting global trade system

Zhang Xifeng

**CHINA has filed a lawsuit with the World Trade Organization's dispute settlement mechanism following the US decision to raise the "reciprocal tariffs", the Chinese Ministry of Commerce announced on Wednesday. What's worse, on the same day US President Donald Trump raised the additional tariffs to 125 percent, hours after China took a countermeasure of an additional 84 percent duties on American goods.**

The world is undergoing unprecedented changes, marked by a shift in the global power structure and a full-scale rewriting of international rules. The US has been ignoring established norms and making a mockery of the rule of law. Discriminatory trade laws and unilateral sanctions, for some countries, have become the order of the day, pushing global legal frameworks into a crisis. The surge in trade disputes, compounded by the paralysis of

the World Trade Organization's Appellate Body, has led many countries to bypass multilateral solutions in favor of retaliatory actions.

The rise of unilateral, discriminatory trade measures has intensified disputes between countries, turning global trade from a cooperative effort into a zero-sum game. The very foundation of the global trading system is crumbling because international relations are no longer anchored by rules or legal frameworks. In such a situation, the global trade system is bound to collapse, dragging the world into a potential disaster. Global trade isn't only about the exchange of goods; it's the "engine" driving global economic growth and the "ballast" preventing the ship of global peace from capsizing. But this engine runs on rules, rules that guarantee fairness, transparency and predictability.

After the end of World War II, the United States and other developed countries

devised the global trade system, laying special emphasis on multilateralism. As the chief architect of the postwar multilateral order and a founding member of the WTO, the US has led the charge in promoting these trade rules. Yet today the US seems to have consigned the very spirit of multilateralism that it helped build to the trash can. Instead of leading by example, the US is increasingly undermining the system it once championed. The struggle for global economic dominance has turned into a contest over the rules that govern global trade. In this new "rules war", the US has been using "national security" as a pretext to impose trade and investment restrictions on China, including sanctions on semiconductor exports. In its latest move, the US administration has violated the WTO's most-favored-nation principle and slapped massive additional tariffs on Chinese

goods on the pretext of safeguarding "national security" and protecting the interests of American industries.

This brazen violation of international law has put international trade relations in peril, making it clear the US, instead of being a champion of the rules-based world order, has become a disrupter of global trade and violator of international rules. China's efforts to reshape the global trade system is not aimed at dismantling the existing global trade framework; they are meant to breathe new life into multilateralism, and reform the WTO to make it fairer, and more equitable and representative. China wants to engage in rule-making to ensure global trade rules reflect the changing international landscape and align with the world's highest standards, exemplified by agreements like the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership.

China is stepping up to the plate with a clear goal: to build a global trade system that is open, fair and cooperative in nature. It is committed to promoting a model of shared opportunities, advocating trade and investment liberalization, and creating a level playing field where every country can thrive. As part of this reshaping process, China aims to secure a seat at the table to discuss the future of global trade, and have a say in global economic affairs commensurate with its growing economic power and influence. The global trade rules need to be upgraded to reflect the global economic reality of today, and China is determined to be at the center of that evolution. This means pushing for a greater role in setting the global economic governance agenda.

As for the WTO, it is more than just a trade body; it is the upholder of multilateralism. The rules-based WTO has been a crucial force fostering global economic coopera-

tion, which China firmly supports. China has been calling for the revival of the WTO's dispute settlement mechanism to ensure the global trade system is fair and balanced. The "Multi-Party Interim Appeal Arbitration Arrangement", an alternative system for resolving WTO disputes and a temporary solution to the WTO dispute settlement crisis, which China established in cooperation with the European Union, is just one example of China's proactive role in promoting multilateralism. The WTO must be reinvigorated, and global trade should once again be governed by law. Trade should be a pillar for the development and future prosperity of all our people. If we are to navigate the tumultuous waters of global economic uncertainty and achieve common prosperity, the rules-based multilateral trading system, with the WTO at its core, will be our most important anchor.

The China Daily



# A new age of nuclear proliferation is here. What can we do about it?

Becky Alexis-Martin

**FRENCH Rafale fighter jets laden with nuclear missiles soar through the skies above Geneva as the Armée de l'Air et de l'Espace, the French air and space force, simulates a nuclear attack. Nuclear war training is usually conducted at night, but Exercise Poker was held during the day of March 25, so that France could showcase its capabilities to the world.**

The rules-based order is collapsing, Europe is worried and, all of a sudden, nuclear proliferation and a new arms race is very much on the cards again. On March 5, President Emmanuel Macron warned of a "new era" of instability, and floated the idea of developing a French nuclear umbrella for Europe. "I want to believe that the United States will remain by our side, but we need to be ready if that were not the case," he said before vowing to expand France's nuclear capabilities, including forty new Rafale jets and a £1.5 billion investment to equip one of the country's main air bases with the latest nuclear technology.

"The world we live in is increasingly dangerous, and increasingly uncertain," he added. "Our country and our continent must continue to defend, equip, and prepare itself if we want to avoid war." It is not just in Europe that there is evidence we have entered a new age of proliferation. The well established threats posed by Iran and North Korea remain, and new actors - including Saudi Arabia, South Korea, and Japan - are starting to voice nuclear aspirations. China's capabilities and ambition are also expanding.

For the first time since the Cold War, the taboo around tactical or battlefield nuclear weapons is eroding, with Russia's President Vladimir Putin increasingly using the threat of the Russian nuclear arsenal to pressurise the West over its military and diplomatic support for Ukraine. "Russia has placed its weapons on heightened alert, tested and deployed new nuclear capabilities, threatened to resume nuclear testing, and suspended participation in a key nuclear arms control treaty with the US," said a House Of Commons briefing document in December.

It added: "In March 2023 Russia said it would deploy tactical nuclear weapons to Belarus. This is the first time that Russia has deployed nuclear weapons outside of the country since the collapse of the Soviet Union." No one knows where the current situation will end, but it can be said with certainty that the risk of nuclear war is once again increasing, making the world a more dangerous place.

It is well-documented that we came within a whisker of nuclear conflict during the 1962 Cuban Missile crisis, its prevention credited to just one of three Russian submariners who refused, against the wishes of his two colleagues, to approve the firing of a nuclear tipped torpedo at an American warship. "A guy called Vasily Arkhipov saved the world," Thomas Blanton, director of the US National Security Archive, would note at a conference on the anniversary of the incident 40 years later. As we once again enter a phase of rising geopolitical tensions and shifting nuclear deployments we urgently need to ask - how did we get here? And what can we do to mitigate if not eradicate the rising risks we face?

The fall of the Berlin wall in November 1989 marked the end of the Cold War, and ushered in a wel-

come and prolonged period of nuclear disarmament. Memories of Cuba and the nuclear anxieties of the 1970s and 1980's, captured by popular books and films, including When the Wind Blows and Threads, swiftly dissipated. The "nuclear freeze" was a product of US hegemony, and for security wonks like me, it was a golden age. The US and Russia had ceased nuclear testing, the development and deployment of new nuclear weapons had all but paused, and the world's stock of nuclear weapons - especially Russian and US arsenals - started to fall dramatically.

Agreements including the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) (1987-2019), the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) (1996), and the NewSTART agreement (2010) removed intermediate-range missiles from the equation and reduced nuclear warheads from a peak of 63,600 in 1985, to about 12,400 weapons today. Redundant Cold War nuclear bunkers were repurposed as data centres and even holiday homes. I worked from one doing resilience planning for the 2012 London Olympics. Only a bundle of dusty "Protect and Survive" pamphlets in the back of a cupboard told the story of its former life.

With hindsight, we were lulled into a false sense of security during the nuclear freeze. The relatively serene geopolitics of the time really did give the impression we had reached the "end of history". We forgot, perhaps, that raw power is as important as ideas in shaping the world. And we missed the significance of the long-term erosion of US economic hegemony, and the emergence of a new multipolar world - a world of many competing powers. This long term shift has been dramatically turbo charged by Donald Trump's second arrival in the Whitehouse. As raw power takes on greater importance than values, worried and frightened states are starting to leverage their nuclear latency - their capacity to make and deploy nuclear weapons. The four key factors long linked to nuclear proliferation are all in play: security threats, treaty breakdown, domestic political shifts and access to nuclear technologies.

Putin's Russia has taken on a starring role in this nuclear chaos, posturing in Ukraine and withdrawing acrimoniously from several arms control treaties. The US and Russia pulled out of the INF in 2019, choosing to grow their tactical deterrence instead.

Former Defence Secretary Dr Mark Esper said: "This withdrawal is a direct result of Russia's sustained and repeated violations of the treaty over many years and multiple presidential administrations."

The NewSTART agreement is the last hope for Washington and Moscow. This treaty limits the number of warheads that can be deployed by both countries - but there are already concerns it will not be extended after February 5th 2026. In the Middle East, Iran has dramatically stepped up production of weapons-grade uranium and Saudi Arabia is contemplating the possibility of becoming a nuclear power. Not surprising, perhaps, with a right-wing Israeli cabinet minister with security responsibilities threatening the use of nuclear weapons in Gaza last year.

In theory - but probably not in

practice - Iran has enough material to produce six nuclear weapons in a matter of months, after Trump pulled out of a nuclear agreement known as the JCPOA in 2018 during his flirt term in office. Recent efforts by the new Trump administration to revive the deal have so far come to nothing, although that could yet change, with indirect talks expected to open shortly. The desperate situation in Gaza has meanwhile precipitated a desire in the Middle East for a "Muslim deterrent" - and nuclear Pakistan may prove a willing collaborator. The Saudi crown prince Mohammed bin Salman has said his civilian nuclear programme could be redirected to make weapons, if Iran proliferates first. A US-Saudi-Israeli deal could end this discussion but seems unlikely in the short term with war still raging in Gaza and Israel showing no appetite for a broader regional peace.

The situation is no better in the Far East. China is developing hypersonic weapons, North Korea is becoming ever more volatile, and Japan and South Korea both feel under threat. Kim Jong Un has a new stash of AI integrated drones with nuclear delivery utility, and military spy satellites. He has vowed to "exponentially" increase North Korea's nuclear arsenal and deploy tactical nuclear weapons on the battlefield.

South Korea feels threatened by its northern neighbour, and doubts about US security guarantees are creeping in. South Koreans want Korean nuclear deterrence instead of US peacekeeping. South Korea already has the raw materials and equipment to proliferate. President Yoon Suk Yeol said: "What we call extended deterrence was also the US telling us not to worry because it will take care of everything, but now, it's difficult to convince our people with just that." Despite its commitment to pacifism after the Second World War, in a dramatic policy shift Japan's prime minister, Shigeru Ishiba, has called for "an Asian version of Nato, which must ensure deterrence against the nuclear alliance of China, Russia, and North Korea." To back this up, he requested "America's sharing of nuclear weapons or the introduction of nuclear weapons into the region".

Similarly profound changes are underway in Europe, where the US-UK deterrent and Nato no longer feel adequate. European countries now anticipate that, sooner or later, the American nuclear umbrella will fold - and are preparing alternatives. One of these is an expansion of the French umbrella. "I've decided to open the strategic debate on the protection by our deterrence of our allies on the European continent," Mr Macron said last month. "Our nuclear deterrence protects us, it is complete, sovereign, French from end to end... This protects us much more than many of our neighbours."

Unlike France, Britain is unable to claim the same degree of sovereignty over its nuclear deterrent. Though the UK has autonomy over the final decision to launch, thanks to the Mutual Defence Agreement with the US, it remains highly dependent on Washington because the technologies at the heart of the Trident system are US-designed and leased - and there is no suitable alternative. Héloïse Fayet, a researcher at the French Institute of

International Relations, said: "Due to the continuous threat from Russia and the lack of US commitment to the defence of Europe under Donald Trump, there is a sudden surge of interest from European allies for the role that French nukes could play."

Germany and Poland, meanwhile, are pushing for a broader "European deterrent". Friedrich Merz, the German Chancellor, fears that Trump is "indifferent to the fate of Europe" and recently asked "whether their nuclear protection could also be extended to us" by France and the UK to "supplement the American nuclear shield". Echoing the chancellors concerns, Donald Tusk, Poland's prime minister, stated: "We would be safer if we had our own nuclear arsenal." Changes in Europe could extend to Europe obtaining its own tactical nuclear weapons. However, a new European deterrence presents two issues: credibility and capacity.

In the absence of US protection, the best-case scenario could be a joint French-UK deterrent - but even with updated systems, we would be limited to second-strike capabilities. This means that we could retaliate against a nuclear attack but we wouldn't possess sufficient clout to launch a first strike. While second strike capability can support a no-first-use policy, the capacity to second strike could also escalate to mutually assured destruction. We live in a complex nuclear age with many players - and there is no going back. If the Cold War was a chess match between East and West, our current nuclear situation could be described as a game of Twister, with many players jostling for position. Because there is no single dominant power, we can only anticipate further escalation - extra hands on new nuclear attack buttons can only increase the likelihood that a nuclear weapon will be used - and this makes managing nuclear risks more complex.

There is no easy way to deal with this dangerous situation. We need to be flexible, innovative, and proactive if we want to manage these risks and prevent the devastating harms of nuclear war. We need to change global norms and make non-proliferation and disarmament the preferred option for anxious states.

We need to prevent misunderstandings and re-establish the taboo surrounding nuclear weapons. If we can re-embed no-first-use and de-escalation policies amongst nuclear-armed states, we might reduce the incentive to use nuclear weapons in the first place. Immediate action is needed to modernise arms control agreements, like the Non-Proliferation Treaty. We must work with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to prevent broad access to fissile materials like plutonium. We must also improve conflict resolution between nuclear and non-nuclear states in volatile regions, including South East Asia and the Middle East, so that everyone feels safer. Crisis management during nuclear conflict is not enough. It is vital to maintain all forms of diplomacy and to keep lines of communication open between hostile states, even if it feels impossible. We must not become desensitised to atrocity - as we need to prevent the normalisation of mass killings. For it is when we lose our humanity, and our ability to see others as human beings, that nuclear war becomes more likely.

The Telegraph

# Cosying up to China now is even more mistaken than it was 15 years ago

David Blair

**NO minister will use the phrase, but a new "golden era" in Britain's relationship with China has quietly begun. Even as Chinese soldiers are being captured in Ukraine, proving once again how Beijing is aiding the aggressor in Europe's biggest war for 80 years, the Government is moving steadily closer to China.**

The first "golden era" during David Cameron's premiership rested on the idea that Britain should be more open to Chinese trade and investment than any other big Western economy. A Chinese state company was even allowed to buy a stake in British nuclear power stations.

Just how much sense that made was shown by the decision of a later government to spend nearly £700 million buying China out again. Sir Keir Starmer is once again making Britain uniquely open to China while conveniently forgetting this cautionary tale. Today the UK is the only G7 country with no tariffs on Chinese electric vehicles. America, under the Biden administration, levied 100 per cent tariffs. Canada did the same. The EU went for 38 per cent and Japan 10 per cent. Britain alone has stuck resolutely to zero. China has amassed by far the biggest EV manufacturing capacity in the world. Guess where those new vehicles will be heading - and imagine the consequences for what remains of Britain's domestic car industry.

But what else can Sir Keir do if he remains com-

mitted to net zero? The rationale behind what we should now call "Golden Era II" is straightforward. Achieving net zero requires the decarbonisation of power generation and transport. And achieving this cannot happen without China. If we are going to eliminate the sale of new petrol vehicles by the target date of 2030 - and hybrids by 2035 - then Chinese EVs will have to flood our roads no matter what. If we are going to generate enough electricity from renewables and other clean sources to satisfy national demand by 2030, then we will have to get the solar panels and wind turbines from somewhere. China makes virtually all of the former and supplies most vital components of the latter. So net zero must inescapably require the UK to base our energy and transport systems - and therefore our economy and society - on Chinese-supplied cars, turbines and solar panels.

No wonder that British ministers have processed one-by-one to Beijing: starting with David Lammy, the Foreign Secretary; followed by Rachel Reeves, the Chancellor; and then - most significantly - Ed Miliband, the Energy Secretary. Do not underestimate the huge risks of "golden era II". The easy argument is that harnessing the sun and the wind - which even Vladimir Putin cannot switch off - must be safer than an energy system requiring ceaseless imports of oil and gas. But all the

new wind farms, solar panels and EVs will require a lot more than sun and wind. They will need maintenance, components and software updates from their Chinese manufacturers.

At present, almost half of the UK's fossil fuel comes from the North Sea and most of the rest derives from allied countries, mainly Norway and the United States. To maintain and operate an energy system dominated by renewables must, by contrast, make Britain dependent on a single hostile state: China. I spent nearly eight years working in the Foreign Office and Downing Street. Will our officials subject net zero and renewable energy to critical scrutiny? Or will they just endorse the comforting and simplistic argument that a renewable energy system, even if Chinese-supplied, must entail less risk than importing hydrocarbons? One indicator is the fact that the Foreign and Home Secretaries have both endorsed China's plan to build in London the biggest embassy ever constructed in the history of diplomatic relations. This new citadel, spanning 5.5 acres beside the Tower of London, would be a fitting symbol of "golden era II".

Whoever serves as China's first ambassador in this new Forbidden City by the Thames will also represent the country supplying Britain's energy and transport infrastructure. If so, "golden era II" risks becoming a golden opportunity for China to exert significant power over us.

The Telegraph

# Down and out

Devendra Sakesena

**UNQUESTIONABLY, the first half of the twentieth century, and the century before that, belonged to Britain. At its apogee the British Empire covered one-fourth of the globe and it was said that the sun never set on the Empire, allegedly, because God could not trust Britons in the dark.**

However, after Britain lost its colonies to nationalist movements, its fall was precipitous; to maintain a semblance of its non-existent importance, wholly unmindful of the epithet 'American poodle,' British governments, regardless of party affiliation, determinedly stuck to its wartime ally US's coat-tails.

Now, Donald Trump has brought even the days of reflected glory to an ignominious end, making it markedly clear that Britain should look after its own, and the US will give no preferential treatment to Britain, subverting British goods to the same tariffs that the US levied on other countries. The economic jolt, even before it was delivered, has almost dismantled the socialist welfare paradise that Britain had turned into; Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rachel Reeves had to cut welfare allocations all around, including those for the old and disabled.

Savings from the welfare budget cut were repurposed for increasing the defence budget. After some unsuccessful wheedling at the White House, the British PM, in his meetings with his European peers, who had been similarly rebuffed by Trump, bravely talked about enhancing Britain's defence capabilities. Like the rest of the Western World, Britain had long outsourced its manufacturing to China, relying on services that were cleaner, non-polluting, and required little labour for earning its bread and butter.

Now, the chickens have come home to roost. America was much in the same boat, but had become serious about reindustrialising and having an indigenous supply chain for producing military hardware, during the Bid en Presidency - motivated mainly by its aim to reduce dependence on arch-rival China. Right from the nineteenth century, industrialisation and its symbiotic relationship with colonisation, had fuelled British dominance over the rest of the world; colonies provided raw material to industries, and a ready market for industrial products.

Hapless colonies also provided a large store of manpower to further British interests in far corners of the globe, and act as cannon fodder in Britain's numerous wars. Moreover, scientific and technological innovation kept Britain far ahead of its European rivals. None of these conditions exist today; British industry is almost defunct, and the era of colonialism is long over. So far

has Britain travelled from its nineteenth-century war-like avatar that despite Ms. Reeves' promise of making Britain a 'defence industrial superpower,' a resurgence of Britain's industrial and military power does not look possible in the near future. British planners aiming to build a military-industrial complex at the behest of Ms. Reeves were agast to discover that British Steel was now Chinese owned, and on the verge of closing its last blast furnace giving Britain the dubious distinction of not being capable of producing a single ton of virgin steel. Almost all of the North Sea oil, which was a lifeline for Britain from the 1970s to recent years, had been pumped out, with billions in decommissioning costs looming on the horizon. Britain's foundries are floundering, with output down by 85 per cent since 2000. The chemicals sector is on its swansong, and so is the ceramics sector.

The share of manufacturing in Britain's GDP is 8.3 per cent - half of what it was in 1990. For comparison, the share of manufacturing in India's GDP is double that of Britain - around 17 per cent. With such poor fundamentals, according to analyst Rian Chad Whitton, Britain is incapable of producing anything physical, what to say about the hi-tech weaponry that it has set its heart on.

Ominous, after the recent increase in worker insurance contributions, employment levels are also set to fall. To further complicate matters, since May/June 2022, a series of labour strikes and industrial disputes have bedevilled various industries, with striking workers demanding pay increases in line with inflation. Members of the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT), were the first to vote to strike over planned changes to their pay and working conditions. RMT were soon joined by oth - er railway unions, and a series of oneday strikes halted trains in many parts of the British mainland. Train services operated at 20 per cent of normal capacity on strike days. The next two years saw strikes by barristers, postal workers, bus drivers, teachers and professors of all hues, refuse workers, and finally by doctors, nurses and even senior consultants.

After strike threats, airport workers, and some others, were placated by hefty pay rises. As of now, even the ruling classes have lost faith in an early British renaissance; in an article in the Daily Telegraph in May 2023, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, Jeremy Hunt, started a debate about Britain being in decline. Hunt's article was preceded by essays in prominent newspapers, pre-

dicting the decline, not just of the UK, but of the entire West. Economic collapse, takeover of Britain's cultural and national identity by 'aliens,' the dominance of immigrants in politics and the incompetence of government, have been part of daily news for the last few years.

Columns with titles like "Britain isn't in 'managed' decline, the country is about to fall off a cliff" are often seen on oped pages. The four "declines" - in external power, in economic performance, in State capacity and in 'British' culture, provide grist to the mill of negative public opinion. Things have come to a pass where many see the State as the problem - ineffective, spending and taxing prodigally, destroying businesses, and entire sectors of the economy. Brexit, quickly followed by the Covid-19 pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, caused unprecedented inflation and a shrinking of the economy, resulting in a cost-of-living crisis for a large section of Britshers, who genuinely wondered if the British government and politics, had irretrievably broken down.

Such negative sentiments were reinforced by a steep decline in public services - ranging from healthcare, to transport, to housing, to sewage disposal, to education - often culminating in industrial action. To rescue Britain from a downward spiral and boost growth and productivity, the new Labour Government optimistically planned to adopt a green growth strategy which could tackle climate change. Simultaneously, the Government aimed to build a close partnership with the EU.

This entire strategy, except the now imperative partnership with the EU, has been effectively upended, by shockwaves generated by recent Trumpian antics. Obviously, MEGA (Make England Great Again) will require a resetting of goals and an overhaul of State policy. As for today, what arch-imperialist Winston Churchill had to say about the Roman Empire rings uncannily true for modern day Britain: "By the end of the century Rome seemed as powerful and stable as ever. But below the surface the foundations were cracking, and through the fissures new ideas and new institutions were thrusting themselves.

The cities are everywhere in decline; trade, industry, and agriculture bend under the weight of taxation... The Empire is gradually dissolving into units of a kind unknown to classical antiquity, which will someday be brought together in a new pattern, feudal and Christian. But before that can happen generations must pass, while the new absolutism struggles by main force to keep the roads open, the fields in cultivation, and the barbarian at bay" (Birth of Britain, 1956).

# Team Trump's negotiators are just enabling Putin

Jonathan Sweet & Mark Toth

**UKRAINE is learning the hard way that it is not in good hands with the Trump administration's negotiators. Instead of stopping the killing, US Special Envoy Steve Witkoff's negotiating efforts are accelerating Moscow's intentional targeting of Ukrainian civilians. On April 4, Russian forces struck Kryvyi Rih - Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky's hometown - with a ballistic missile armed with a cluster warhead. The brazen attack targeted a residential neighborhood, wounding 72 and killing 20, including nine children. Many of the children were killed and wounded in a playground. The youngest victim was a three-month-old baby.**

Since January, Team Trump has repeatedly asserted that President Trump "wants to be a president of peace." Putin's response? Repeated war crimes and crimes against humanity in Ukraine. We are now in the second week of April after two failed ceasefire attempts. Rubio's hope that "the shooting will stop, the killing will stop, the dying will stop, and the talks can begin about how to end this war permanently in a way that's acceptable and enduring for both sides," is as elusive and far off as ever.

Why is this happening? Because Russia does not want peace - at least not peace as the West envisions it. For Putin, peace is accomplished when Ukraine stops resisting. His intended end-state is the complete annihilation of Ukraine, its people, and its culture. Putin made that clear again on March 6, when he stated that Russia does not intend to "give in to anyone" or make any compromises in future peace negotiations. For Russia, the ceasefire discussions are merely a tool for the Kremlin to

gain a momentary advantage in time to exploit.

Former Army Chief of Staff Gen. Gordon R. Sullivan taught us in 1997 that "hope is not a method." This was required reading for military officers, something Mike Waltz and US Special Envoy for Ukraine Keith Kellogg have seemingly forgotten. The naive belief that Russia would keep its word has killed or wounded hundreds of Ukrainian civilians since Mar. 11 when Moscow rejected a full 30-day truce agreed upon by the US and Ukraine in Jeddah. Russia instead agreed only to a cessation of strikes against energy facilities and in the Black Sea - terms it has not honored anyway. Now Rubio seemingly wants to give Putin more time. When asked about the status of the Black Sea ceasefire talks and whether he believed that Putin was dragging his feet during a press conference at NATO Headquarters in Brussels, the secretary of State responded, "We will know soon enough - in a matter of weeks, not the months - whether Russia is serious about peace or not."

Spoiler alert - it is not. The killing and dying continue. With each day, Russia targets Ukrainian civilians in population centers with ballistic missiles and drones with impunity. Once the US stopped sharing intelligence with Kyiv in early March, Russia targeted Ukrainian cities with massive ballistic missile and drone strikes. Trump responded, "Based on the fact that Russia is absolutely pounding Ukraine on the battlefield right now, I am strongly considering large-scale banking sanctions, sanctions, and tariffs on Russia until a cease-fire and final settlement agreement on peace is reached." That has yet to happen.

The day after Russia rejected the initial Trump ceasefire proposal, Moscow attacked multiple Ukrainian cities with missiles - Odessa, Kryvyi Rih, Kharkiv, Dnipro, Kyiv and Sumy regions, killing at least five people and wounding 11. Between Mar. 19 and Mar. 24, at least 25 civilians were killed and 225 injured, Ukraine's Air Force reportedly intercepted 521 of 949 Russian drones launched. On the frontlines, Russia continues to attack Ukrainian defensive positions. Russian casualties now total 926,310. Between Mar. 11 and Apr. 8, Ukraine inflicted 38,690 casualties on Russian forces - an average of 1,334 a day. At this pace, they will surpass one million by the first week of June.

There is no end in sight. The Kremlin has announced it is conscripting an additional 160,000 men by July 15. This coincides with the recent Associated Press report that Russia is likely preparing to launch a new "multipronged offensive in the coming weeks to strengthen its position in possible peace talks with Ukraine." According to Zelensky, Russia is preparing for new offensives in the northeast in the Sumy, Kharkiv and Zaporizhzhia regions, adding, "They're dragging out the talks and trying to get the US stuck in endless and pointless discussions about fake 'conditions' just to buy time and then try to grab more land."

Add to that reports that Ukraine captured two Chinese men fighting alongside the Russian army in the eastern Donetsk region. These are not the actions of a country seeking a ceasefire or peace negotiations. Quite the opposite - Russia is escalating.

Russia is building up combat





# ‘Minerals, IT going to be game changers for economy’

LAHORE (APP): Federal Finance Minister Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb said on Saturday that Information Technology and mineral sectors are going to be game changers for Pakistan's economy and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif is leading the economy and the nation would see best results soon.

He was addressing the business community here at the Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI). LCCI President Mian Abuzar Shad, Senior Vice President Senior Vice President Engineer Khalid Usman, Vice President Shahid Nazir Chaudhry, SAARC Chamber's Vice President Mian Anjum Nisar and Executive Committee Members also shared their problems and suggestion with the Finance Minister. Representatives

of Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) and other chambers were also present.

The Finance Minister said that only nickel became a major export driver for Singapore with USD 22 billions of share in exports, citing that copper has the potential to yield similar dividends for Pakistan. He said that global interest in Pakistan's mineral sector and IT potential is growing and the government is focused on removing all barriers to attract and facilitate both local and foreign investment in these key sectors.

Muhammad Aurangzeb said, "We are here to serve the people. I am visiting chambers to listen, understand and resolve problems of the business community. The legitimate demands of the chambers will be accepted. We talk about

economic stability. It is very important that if we cannot return the money of our country's investors on time, how can we move forward? Lowering inflation is essential for economic stability. The interest rate was at 22 percent, today it is at 12 percent."

He was of the view that industrial growth is only possible if financing costs, power tariffs are reduced and improve taxation policies are put in place. Under Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's leadership, he mentioned, the economic direction of the country has clear goals and positive results would soon be evident.

The Finance Minister said that hurdles to profit repatriation for foreign investors have been addressed which boosted their confidence in the Pakistani market. "We are

ensuring that the benefits of reduced inflation directly reach the common man. Middlemen will not be allowed to exploit the system," he vowed.

While talking about taxation, he admitted that the salaried class is bearing the tax burden, as income tax is deducted at source, and "we intend to offer relief to the salaried segment." He disclosed that 24 national entities have been earmarked for privatization, stressing the need for reduced human interaction to resolve systemic issues.

"If we can increase the tax-to-GDP ratio to 13 percent, we can offer broader relief to various sectors," he observed. If our policies are not having an impact on the common man, then there is no point, he said, citing that edible prices are lowering and now it is

impossible for the middleman to continue to take benefits.

During the question and answer session, he said, the visas issue was discussed whenever the Prime Minister visits abroad, asserting that this is being resolved on a priority basis.

Muhammad Aurangzeb said that the government would continue to consult with the private sector which plays a key role in running any country. As per the Prime Minister's direction, he said, a committee has been formed which is working on GSP Plus.

LCCI President Mian Abuzar Shad appreciated government initiatives for economic revival of the country. He praised the government's efforts in curbing inflation and reducing the policy rate, saying, "We appreciate the reduc-

tion in the policy rate from 22 percent in June 2023 to 12 percent now. This will ease access to capital for businesses. With inflation dropping sharply from 20.7 percent in March 2024 to just 0.7 percent in March 2025, we are hopeful of continued improvement."

He also paid tributes to the launch of the "Uraan Pakistan" programme, led by the Prime Minister, which aims to raise economic growth, increase exports to USD 60 billion, attract USD 10 billion in private investment annually, create one million jobs per year, raise the renewable energy share to 10 percent, eradicate poverty and mitigate climate challenges. He also highlighted the role of the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) in enhancing investor trust.

He stressed the need for tariff structure reforms to promote industrial growth and recommended adopting a cascading tariff model to ensure raw materials are taxed minimally, encouraging local production and value addition.

LCCI Senior Vice President Engineer Khalid Usman stressed the need to reverse the turnover threshold for withholding agents, proposing an increase from Rs. 100 million to Rs. 250 million in light of the sharp depreciation of the currency and prevailing economic conditions. He expressed concern over the FBR notices and freezing of bank accounts despite the pending court case regarding one percent Capital Value Tax (CVT) on declared foreign assets under the amnesty scheme. "This practice is causing

undue hardship to individuals and must be halted immediately," he added.

Vice President Shahid Nazir Chaudhry underscored the importance of long-term economic policy planning, suggesting that key economic strategies should be framed within a consistent 10-year roadmap to ensure stability and sustainable growth.

He proposed that private companies engaged in Research and Development (R&D) should be allowed to deduct R&D expenditures from their taxable income. "This will encourage the private sector to invest in technological innovation and research, ultimately benefiting Pakistan's economy. SAARC Vice President Mian Anjum Nisar highlighted the role of innovation in economic advancement.

## Team to be sent to US to negotiate tariffs

KARACHI (APP): The Special Assistant to Prime Minister (SAPM) on Industries and Production Haroon Akhtar Khan on Saturday said that a delegation would be sent to the United States (US) of America to negotiate tariffs so that our all exports were least affected.

He said that the Prime Minister would send a delegation to the US for talks on the new tariff.

Addressing the business community during his visit to the Karachi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) here, he said that the Prime Minister had a desire to revive industrial sector and make progress the country.

SAPM Haroon Akhtar said that the federal government was focused on the industrialization.

He said that Pakistan had potential and she was a resilient country. He said that policies should be based on export-led industrialization and no policy

could be made without hearing stakeholders.

Akhtar was of the view that he did not believe in too much regulations.

He said that Industrial Policy would be rolled out and they would make sure that the industrialist were not harassed by investigative agencies dealing with taxes or frauds without any reason.

He further said that they would also introduce bankruptcy law in the country.

The SAPM said that the PM had focused so much on Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). He said that the PM had given a new vision to put the country on the path to development.

Giving assurance to the business community of Karachi, he said that their problems would be resolved.

He said that Karachi was the New York of Pakistan and 'We have to create jobs.'

He said we would not be

able to reduce fiscal spaces in the upcoming budget but may be in the next budget they would provide relief in taxes.

Akhtar said, 'We have to change with the world.'

He said that Pakistan had to rely on industrial based export economy instead of imports.

The SAPM said that the federal government had brought down electricity prices for the industries and intended to further reduce power and corporate rates.

He saluted brave soldiers for lying their lives to establish peace in the country, which improved trade and business activities.

Earlier, President KCCI Muhammad Jawed Bilwani and other office-bearers of KCCI, informed the SAPM about their problems and hoped that their problems would be resolved.

Bilwani said that the Prime Minister had a vision and he had fulfilled his promise of bringing down the interest rate.

## President attends pre-budget meeting

SIALKOT (APP): Sialkot Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) President Ikram-ul-Haq attended a high-level pre-budget meeting at the Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) with Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue Muhammad Aurangzeb.

According to the Sialkot Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI), the session centered on economic reforms, improving the ease of doing business, and fiscal policy recommendations from chambers and trade bodies.

The Sialkot Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) president actively participated in the discussion and presented budget proposals on behalf of Sialkot's business community, with a strong emphasis on the revival of the Final Tax Regime (FTR) and other facilitative measures for exporters.



ISLAMABAD: Vice President of China's Donkey Industry Zaho Fei meeting with Federal Minister for National Food Security and Research Rana Tanveer Hussain.

## Gold prices reach all time high to Rs340,600

ISLAMABAD (APP): The price of 24 karat per tola gold increased by Rs1,800 and was traded all time high at Rs340,600 on Saturday as compared to its sale at Rs338,800 on previous trading day. All Pakistan Sarafa Gems and Jewelers Association reported.

The prices of 10 grams of 24 karat also increased by Rs1,543 to Rs292,009 from Rs290,466 whereas the prices of 10 gram 22 karat gold also went up to Rs267,684 from Rs266,261 respectively.

The prices of per tola and ten gram silver remained constant at Rs3,234 and Rs2,772 respectively.

The price of gold in international market increased by \$18 to \$3,236 from \$3,218 whereas that of silver remained unchanged at \$31.30, Association reported.

## ‘PM has a vision to turn economy around’

KARACHI (APP): The Special Assistant to Prime Minister (SAPM) on Industries and Production Haroon Akhtar Khan on Saturday said that the Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif had a vision to turn the economy around.

He said, "Digitalization is a key agenda point of the Prime Minister."

He stated these views during two separate meetings with the members of Pakistan Business Council (PBC) and Korangi Creek Industrial Park (KCIP) here. The SAPM Haroon Akhtar said that the PM had directed him to contact the stakeholders to take them in confidence.

He said that it was a dream of the PM to give a major break in corporate tax net.

He said, "this is the first federal government, which

had worked hard for the revival of the economy."

He said that the federal government made efforts and decreased electricity rates for the industrial and domestic consumers.

Akhtar said that the PM was determined to bring about change in the country. He said that the PM Shehbaz Sharif had been working day and night for the economic development of the country. He said that Artificial Intelligence (AI) had changed the way of working, which gave information in no time.

The SAPM said that Pakistan could not go without industrialization and they had to bring it back.

Replying to a question on Super Tax, he clarified that it be abolished.

The PBC members urged the SAPM for strong advocacy with USA on new

tariffs and for the use of unutilized industrial assets.

Later, talking to media persons, he said that Karachi was the economic hub the country. He said that the meeting with business community of Karachi was successful.

He said that the business community of Karachi had raised some issues regarding land allocation, infrastructure, electricity, gas and taxes.

Answering a question on US tariff, he said that it is an evolving situation and it will keep on changing. The tariff had been suspended for sometime.

The SAPM said that inflation had come down in the country and electricity rates had also been decreased. He said that the government would continue making efforts for welfare of the people.

## Pak implements comprehensive trans fats’ regulation

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan has achieved a significant public health milestone with the Pakistan Standards and Quality Control Authority (PSQCA) passing a national standard that limits industrially produced trans fats to less than 2 percent of total fat across all food categories.

This landmark decision aligns Pakistan with international best practices that limit the use of industrially produced trans fatty acids in the food supply chain, said a press release on Saturday. Trans fats are a harmful compound used in foods including fried foods, margarine, and commercial baked goods that increases the risk of heart attack and deaths.

Every day, millions of people consume trans fats in their diet without knowing it. The approval of this new standard is the result of a collective effort between governmental and non-governmental organizations working in Pakistan, including the Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations & Coordination, the federal and provincial food regulatory authorities, World Health Organization, Pakistan Youth Change Advocates (PYCA), Centre for Peace and Development Initiatives (CPDI), Heartfile, and other civil society organizations.

The adoption of this nationwide standard represents the sustained collabora-

tive efforts and coalition-building by key stakeholders dedicated for improving Pakistan's food safety regulations. The joint efforts of government bodies, civil society organizations, think tanks, and policymakers played a crucial role in strengthening the country's regulatory framework to protect public health. The journey toward this achievement gained momentum in June 2023, when regulatory standards to limit industrially produced trans fats were introduced by the PSQCA for six major food categories available in the country. While a step forward, these regulations left gaps that allowed trans fats to remain prevalent in various food products, including widely consumed street foods.

Recognizing the need for comprehensive coverage, committed partners worked extensively with regulatory authorities, academia, parliamentarians, and other policymakers to ensure that the new standard applies across all food items and meets global best practices to protect public health. This multi-sectoral engagement included policy dialogues, technical consultations, youth engagement, grassroots mobilization, and media sensitization to build momentum for a robust regulatory action.

It has been established with research-based evidence that industrially pro-

duced trans fats are among the major contributors to cardiovascular diseases and other non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and pose serious health risks to millions of Pakistanis. With the introduction of this new standard, followed by its enforcement, Pakistan is now positioned itself to significantly reduce the economic cost due to trans fats intake, leading to reduced disease burden, improving life expectancy and quality of life of its population. By eliminating harmful trans fats from the food supply, Pakistan joins the growing list of countries adopting stringent measures to combat NCDs and promote healthier dietary habits.

While the implementation of these new trans fats limits is another challenge to be dealt with, there is a growing need to continue collaborative action to ensure lasting health benefits for all Pakistanis. In this regard, the next critical step is to secure a national legislative ban on the production and distribution of partially hydrogenated oils (PHOs)—the primary and major source of industrially produced trans fats.

Collective efforts shall continue now to focus on legislative measures to permanently eliminate PHOs from the food supply, ensuring that the progress achieved through regulatory reforms is institutionalized for long-term public

health protection. Strengthening enforcement mechanisms, increasing public awareness, and mobilizing support from food industry stakeholders will be key priorities moving forward.

This policy win reflects the power of collaboration between government agencies, civil society organizations, and national and international health experts in driving meaningful change. Pakistan's commitment in eliminating industrially produced trans fats is a testament to the effectiveness of evidence-based collaborative efforts and policy reform.

## Cybertrucks in desert: Tesla launches in Saudia

RIYADH (Arab News): Tesla launched operations in Saudi Arabia, a sign that CEO Elon Musk has patched up relations with the Kingdom and that the oil capital was moving forward with an ambitious electric-vehicle policy.

A Tesla Cybertruck and a redesigned Model Y sedan dominated a plaza dotted with palm trees, as the EV maker officially opened for business.

A small crowd tried out the vehicles as a massive outdoor video screen showed a Cybertruck plowing through a dusky desert, leaving behind plumes of sand.

Tesla needs new cus-

tomers: globally, it posted a 13 percent drop in first-quarter sales, its weakest performance in nearly three years, driven by a backlash against Musk's role in the Trump administration, rising competition and an aging product lineup, beyond the refreshed Model Y.

The Kingdom, a major investor in Tesla rival Lucid, aims for 30 percent EV adoption five years from now, up from about 1 percent last year.

Musk engaged in a high-profile feud with the Kingdom's sovereign wealth fund over a potential investment nearly a decade ago, but relations between

Riyadh and Musk have improved since he took a high-profile role in US President Donald Trump's election campaign and administration.

Trump is set to visit Saudi Arabia in the coming weeks in his first foreign trip. Local Tesla executives at the launch described plans to allow online ordering of vehicles, open pop-up stores in malls and to build Supercharger stations and service centers, but Musk did not show up in person or by video.

"I'm honestly very disappointed I cannot see him," said fan Mohammed Usama, who said he was "in love" with the

Cybertruck. "I was very close to the stage, but unfortunately he didn't come."

Saudi has a long way to go to hit its EV goals. The country's main east-west highway does not have a single charging station in the 900-kilometer (559 mile) stretch linking the financial and religious cities of Riyadh and Makkah.

Saudi Arabia in 2024 had just 101 EV charging stations, compared with 261 in neighboring UAE, a country with a third the population, data from Statista based on Electromaps showed. Tesla plans to put its first charg-

ing stations in three cities.

Rival EV brands like China's BYD and Zeekr, along with the Saudi Public Investment Fund-backed Lucid, already have Saudi beachheads.

The feud between Musk and the governor of the Kingdom's sovereign wealth fund began when Musk tweeted in 2018 that he had "funding secured" to take Tesla private after a meeting with the fund.

That led to a lawsuit from investors when a bid failed to materialize. "You are throwing me under the bus," Musk wrote in a text to fund chief Yasir Al-Rumayyan, according to court documents.

## Peshawar Zalmi and Fly Jinnah renew partnership for PSL 10

### FP Report

ISLAMABAD: Peshawar Zalmi, one of the most celebrated franchises in the Pakistan Super League (PSL), proudly announces the renewal of its partnership with Fly Jinnah, Pakistan's low-cost carrier ahead of PSL 10. Strengthening their collaboration for another exciting season, Fly Jinnah will continue as the Official Airline Partner of Peshawar Zalmi, with its logo featured on the collar of the team's kit throughout the tournament.

The MoU signing ceremony took place at the airport, set against the dynamic backdrop of a Fly Jinnah aircraft and cabin crew, symbolizing the spirit of travel and sportsmanship. The event was attended by Peshawar Zalmi COO Mr. Abbas Layag, Fly Jinnah CEO Armaan Yehia, and key Zalmi players Mehran Mumtaz, Hussain Talat, and Muhammad Harris, along with officials from both organizations.

This renewed partnership signifies a shared commitment to promoting cricket in Pakistan, enhancing fan

engagement, and delivering exceptional experiences to supporters nationwide. Mr. Javed Afridi, Chairman Peshawar Zalmi, expressed his excitement, "We are thrilled to extend our partnership with Fly Jinnah for PSL 10.

Their support has been invaluable in elevating our team's performance and connecting with our fans. Together, we aim to soar to new heights this season and bring unparalleled excitement to cricket enthusiasts across Pakistan. Fly Jinnah's spokesperson said, "Fly Jinnah is proud to



continue its journey with Peshawar Zalmi. Our partnership reflects a mutual dedication to excellence

and community engagement. We look forward to supporting the team as they strive for success in PSL 10

and beyond. This partnership will focus on fan engagement and digital in-

teraction, ensuring that supporters of Peshawar Zalmi experience the thrill of the game like never before. Peshawar Zalmi and Fly Jinnah will collaborate on exclusive content and interactive campaigns across social media platforms, bringing fans closer to their Favorite team. Founded in 2015, Peshawar Zalmi is the number 1 franchise of PSL in terms of ROI to partner brands according to Nielsen and YouGov Sport. Beyond cricket, the franchise actively engages in philanthropic initiatives through the Zalmi

Foundation, focusing on youth development, education, gender equality, health and more. Established in 2022, Fly Jinnah offers a comfortable, value-driven travel experience with modern Airbus A320 fleet, featuring the most generous seat-pitch in economy. Passengers can enjoy Sky Cafe's affordable meals and snacks, along with Sky Time, a free in-flight streaming service. The airline also provides "Air Rewards," a generous loyalty program to earn, transfer, and spend points.





In brief

ICC urged to consider future status of T10

DUBAI (Agencies): The International Cricket Council is being lobbied to make T10 an officially recognised format in the future. Sources have told BBC Sport at least two full members are pushing for the ICC to consider granting List A status to T10 franchise domestic competitions. The inclusion of the format would enable the statistics from sanctioned T10 leagues and tournaments organised by full members to be included in a player's official averages. Discussions over the subject took place at the ICC's latest board meeting which is being held in Harare, Zimbabwe from 10 to 13 April. The issue was not listed as an official item on the agenda at the meeting, presided over by ICC chair Jay Shah, but was brought up on an informal basis. It was said to have gained little traction from the majority of those in attendance, but it is a topic which will be revisited should it garner further support. The ICC is responsible for the classification of official cricket, external and since 2007 has been responsible for the definition of List A, which is the limited overs format of the sport. Prior to 2007 the definition of List A matches and the application of the definition was overseen by the Association of Cricket Statisticians and Historians. When approached by BBC Sport the ICC declined to comment. The first major T10 competition took place in December 2017 in the United Arab Emirates in what is now known as the Abu Dhabi T10. The tournament has attracted some high-profile white-ball players since its inception and former England captain Jos Buttler participated in the 2024 edition. West Indies, Zimbabwe and Sri Lanka have all staged domestic T10 tournaments. A men's T10 franchise tournament in Scotland was supposed be held last August but was called off after it was not cleared by the ICC.

**Denver fight back for big win**

LOS ANGELES (AFP): The Denver Nuggets strengthened their playoff position with a triple double from history-making Nikola Jokic helping them to a 117-109 win over the Memphis Grizzlies on Friday. The Serb put up 26 points, 13 assists and 16 rebounds, and his 34th triple double performance ensured he will finish the regular season as just the third player averaging a triple double across an entire season. The 15-point comeback victory was the second straight win for interim head coach David Adelman, who took over when Michael Malone was fired on Tuesday in a surprise move. Malone, who led Denver to the NBA championship in 2023, was dismissed after a four-game losing streak. The win means the Nuggets improve to 49-32 on the season and have a real chance of grabbing fourth place and home court advantage in the playoffs. Aaron Gordon top scored with 33 points for Denver while Jamal Murray, back from a six-game injury absence, played a key role down the stretch and ended with 15 points and seven assists. The game was tied at 108 with 3:30 left but Murray and Jokic saw the Nuggets to the victory. Adelman paid tribute to Murray for the physical effort he put in after a lengthy absence with his ankle injury. "You can tell he was exhausted.



ISLAMABAD: Mohammad Amir dismissed Babar Azam for a duck.

## 3 Pakistani boys reach finals at ITF Memorial Tennis Championship

ISLAMABAD (APP): The ITF Pakistan Zainab Ali Naqvi Memorial World Juniors Tennis Championship 2025 concluded successfully at the PTF Tennis Complex in Islamabad, featuring participants from 14 countries. According to a press release, the tournament saw 38 boys and 21 girls compete, showcasing young talent from nations including Kazakhstan, Japan and the United Kingdom. In an exciting boys' singles final, Abubakar Talha triumphed over Nadir Mirza with a score of 6-3, 7-5. The boys' doubles final also featured Nadir Mirza, who partnered with Mikaeel Ali Baig to defeat Singapore's Abubakar Talha and Luke Jie Xi Ho,

winning 6-3, 6-4. The girls' doubles final saw Haniya Aman Minhas from Saudi Arabia and Zihan Feng from China beat Kazakhstan's Aruzhan Bayalina and Sofiya Malysheva, with a score of 6-1, 6-2. This year's championship was particularly memorable as three Pakistani boys—Nadir Mirza, Abubakar Talha, and Mikaeel Ali Baig—reached the finals on the same day, highlighting the country's growing talent in junior tennis. The event was dedicated to the memory of Zainab Ali Naqvi, a young tennis player who tragically passed away in February 2024 during an ITF tournament. The championship served as a

heartfelt tribute to her dedication to the sport. The closing ceremony was attended by Mr. Aisam-ul-Haq Qureshi, President of the Pakistan Tennis Federation (PTF), along with Zainab's parents as guests of honor. Mr. Qureshi expressed pride in the achievements of the young players, stating, "This reflects the promising direction our junior talent is heading toward." Col. Zia-ud-Din Tufail, Secretary PTF, and other dignitaries also congratulated the winners and participants for their outstanding performances. The ITF Pakistan Leg-2 commenced today (Saturday) with the main draw set to begin on Monday, April 14, 2025.

## Shabbir continues to dominate 11th JA Zaman Memorial Open

LAHORE (Monitoring Desk): The 11th JA Zaman Memorial Open Golf Championship has proven to be a remarkable display of golfing excellence. Some of the finest golfers from across Pakistan have gathered at Lahore Gymkhana, and the event has truly become a celebration of the sport. In the third round, Pakistan's golfing legend, Shabbir Iqbal, showed nerves of steel to retain his lead despite a strong challenge from Minhaj Maqsood. Starting the day with a comfortable five-shot advantage, Shabbir was in full control, delivering a series of steady pars and birdies. His standout moment came on the par-4 6th hole, where he drove the green and rolled in an eagle putt, finishing the front nine at 3-under par. However, the back nine tested Shabbir's composure. A double bogey on 10th and a bogey on 11th suddenly opened the door for Minhaj, who had a stunning front nine with four birdies. Minhaj added another birdie on 10th, taking a one-shot lead by 11th hole. As any champion does, Shabbir responded under

pressure. A birdie on 12th leveled the scores, and another birdie on 13th restored his lead. Minhaj, on the other hand, faltered with a bogey and a double bogey on the closing holes, allowing Shabbir to secure a four-shot cushion heading into the final round. Sunday promises an exciting finish. It will take something special from Minhaj to mount a comeback, while Shabbir will look to stay calm and composed to seal yet another title in his illustrious career. After rain and thunder forced the cancellation of the opening round Friday, the Men's Amateur category finally teed off on Saturday at the 11th JA Zaman Memorial Golf Championship at Lahore Gymkhana Golf Club. Out of 108 registered participants from across Pakistan, 75 golfers returned to the course for their first and only qualifying round. Leading the field after 18 holes was Hussain Hamid from Royal Palm Golf Club, who carded an impressive 71 gross. His round featured 3 birdies and a superb eagle, though 4 bogies kept him from going lower. Trailing him

closely was Gymkhana's Qasim Ali Khan with a 73 gross, followed by Ahmad Jabran and three other golfers tied at 74 gross in third place. Remarkably, 22 amateur golfers managed to break 80, a clear sign of the high level of competition. After the first round, a cut was applied at 50% and ties – with 40 golfers making it through to the final round today. "This championship remains the only one in Pakistan to offer comprehensive live streaming and digital coverage across social media platforms, setting a national benchmark. Significant efforts have been made over the years to ensure inclusivity, such as the addition of the Ladies Amateur WAGR Category, which aligns with the vision of expanding the game's reach. Plans are underway to elevate the tournament to the international stage by welcoming foreign players in the next edition, despite the previous attempt to align with the Asian Development Tour not materializing. After hosting over 500 participants, the event concludes today.

### I'm the captain of 250 million Pakistanis, says M Rizwan

KARACHI (Monitoring Desk): Pakistan cricket team and Multan Sultans captain Mohammad Rizwan stated that he considered himself the captain of all 250 million Pakistanis, expressing pride in his leadership role. Speaking to the media during a final training session at National Stadium Karachi ahead of the match against Karachi Kings, Rizwan said the team was determined not to repeat past mistakes. "We'll avoid the errors we've made previously," he remarked. Acknowledging the fans' disappointment, Rizwan said, "The frustration of our supporters is justified. We couldn't fulfill our responsibilities. While we face criticism, we also receive immense love. Listening to fans is part of our job, though unfair criticism does hurt." Rizwan emphasised the importance of constructive feedback: "Everyone learns, and criticism should be for improvement. Shahid Afridi's comments were in my favor, but he should not have questioned my authority as a captain." He also commented on the selection process, noting, "Everyone is aware of the Pakistan selection committee's powers. I'm fortunate to have decision-making authority in Multan Sultans. I'm proud of speaking the truth."

Rizwan added, "I regret not pursuing education. My focus has always been on cricket. I admit my English isn't great, if you want perfect English, I'll become a professor. Misbah-ul-Haq's decision to play me as an opener during his tenure as head coach was absolutely right." Looking ahead to the match, Rizwan praised the opposition, saying, "Karachi Kings is a strong team with excellent players. I have love for both the Karachi Kings and the city of Karachi. Multan Sultans also have quality players—ultimately, team performance depends on the right combination."



ISLAMABAD: Aisam UL Haq Qureshi President-PTF in a group photograph with int'l players during the closing ceremony of the ITF Pakistan Zainab Ali Naqvi Memorial World Juniors Tennis C'ship 2025.

# Gladiators secure 80-run win over Zalmi

ISLAMABAD (APP): Opener Saud Shakeel and Finn Allen's half-centuries while Abrar Ahmed's four-wicket haul led Quetta Gladiators to an 80-run win over Peshawar Zalmi in the second match of HBL PSL X at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium on Saturday. Quetta, after being asked to bat first, posted 216 for five in their 20 overs. The opening pair of Saud (59, 42b, 6x4s, 2x6s) and Allen (53, 25b, 5x4s, 4x6s) added 88 runs in just 7.1 overs, setting the tone for a big total. Allen took on the Zalmi bowlers early, hitting 22 runs in an over off Sufyan Moqim before falling on

the last ball of it. Hasan Nawaz made 41 off 32 balls but got out to Alzarri Joseph. Saud was dismissed in the 16th over by Ali Raza, who claimed his maiden HBL PSL wicket. Quetta finished strongly with Rossouw (21\* off 10) and Mendis (35\* off 14) scoring 44 runs in the last three overs. In reply, Zalmi lost captain Babar Azam in the first over to Mohammad Amir. Abrar then dismissed Mohammad Haris and Tom Kohler-Cadmore in the same over to leave Zalmi reeling at 30 for three. Saim Ayub scored a fighting fifty in his comeback game but was dis-

missed soon after reaching the milestone. Hussain Talat struck 35 off 19 balls, including two sixes against Shoaib Malik, before falling to Usman Tariq. The mystery spinner also removed Max Bryant on the next ball and ended with two wickets. Zalmi could only manage 136 in 15.1 overs. Scores in brief: Quetta Gladiators: 216-3, 20 overs (Saud Shakeel 59, Finn Allen 53; Ali Raza 1-31, Sufyan Moqim 1-39). Peshawar Zalmi: 136 all out, 15.1 overs (Saim Ayub 50, Hussain Talat 35; Abrar Ahmed 4-42, Mohammad Amir 2-11, Usman Tariq 2-26).

## Alcaraz beats Davidovich Fokina to reach first Monte Carlo final



MONTE CARLO (AFP): Carlos Alcaraz booked his place in the final of the Monte Carlo Masters for the first time with a dominant 7-6 (7/2), 6-4 win over fellow Spaniard Alejandro Davidovich Fokina on Saturday. He will face either Alex de Minaur or Lorenzo Musetti on the red clay in Sunday's final. "I knew how well Davidovich Fokina had played in Monte Carlo so I had to be ready to fight," said Alcaraz. Alcaraz, a four-time Grand Slam champion, is targeting his first Masters title since winning in Indian Wells last year and his first on clay since the 2024 French Open. "It's been a long time since I've had the chance to win a title on clay and I can't wait to try my luck again here," said

Alcaraz, who was beaten in the final of the Olympic tournament by Novak Djokovic in August. "At the beginning of the week, the first tournament on clay, you have to get used to the conditions," he added. "The ball comes different. You know, the play on clay is different..." "I'm just really happy to get the level that I wanted at the beginning of the week." His only title this season remains the ATP 500 event in Rotterdam in February, but he appears to be enjoying his return to clay. Alcaraz quickly became the tournament favourite following early exits for top seed Alexander Zverev and Novak Djokovic, while world number one Jannik Sinner is still serving a doping ban. The 21-year-old admitted that he has felt

some added pressure due to Sinner's absence. "The first question, you know, since Jannik was unable to play tournaments, a lot of people were asking me and talking about, how important (the) moment that I have ahead is to reach the number one (ranking) again or to win tournaments or whatever," Alcaraz said. "I was thinking so much about it instead of playing my good tennis and enjoy the time that I have stepping on the court and playing matches." The victory also continues the uptick in his fortune at an event where he had lost his only other match in 2022. Alcaraz won his only previous encounter with Davidovich Fokina, ranked 42 in the world, on the clay in Barcelona two years ago and he started quickly this time, breaking early. Davidovich Fokina, who reached the last 16 of the Australia Open in January, broke back to make it 5-5 and then took the first set into the tie-break which he lost 7/2. Alcaraz again broke early in the second set and this time there was no way back for 2022 runner-up Davidovich Fokina although he scrapped hard, saving 13 break points and four match points.

## De Bruyne leads Man City comeback, Forest beaten by Everton



MANCHESTER (AFP): Kevin De Bruyne inspired a Manchester City fightback from two goals down to beat Crystal Palace 5-2, while Nottingham Forest's challenge for a place in next season's Champions League stumbled after a 1-0 defeat by Everton on Saturday. In De Bruyne's first appearance at the Etihad Stadium since announcing his decade in Manchester will come to an end at the end of the season, the Belgian rolled back the years to save City's blushes. Unbeaten in seven games, Palace made the trip north full of confidence and found themselves 2-0 up after 20 minutes. Eberechi Eze slotted home Ismaila Sarr's pass before Chris Richards took advantage of poor City defending to head in from a corner. Eze had a third goal narrowly ruled out for offside before De Bruyne stirred the City fightback. The 33-year-old fired in a free-kick off the post before heading down for Omar Marmoush to level just three minutes later. City were rampant after the break as De Bruyne teed up Mateo Kovacic on 47 minutes to complete the comeback. Goalkeeper

Ederson provided his fourth Premier League assist of the season for James McAtee to make it 4-2 before Nico O'Reilly's sweet strike rounded off the scoring. Victory lifts Pep Guardiola's men back into the top four, with the top five in the Premier League this season qualifying for the Champions League thanks to the strong performance of English sides in European competition. Forest remain in third and on course for their first taste of Europe's elite competition since they were holders in 1980. However, Nuno Espirito Santo's men have lost their last two games to allow the chasing pack back onto their tails. A forgetful game at the City Ground appeared to be meandering towards a stalemate until Abdoulaye Doucoure struck in the 94th minute to secure Everton's first win in seven games. Asensio misses two penalties Aston Villa's Champions League run this season may have just days left in it as they trail Paris Saint-Germain 3-1 after the first leg of their quarter-final in the French capital. Unai Emery's men are

making a charge to get back into the competition next season after maintaining their winning Premier League run with a 3-0 victory at already-relegated Southampton despite Marco Asensio having two penalties saved by Aaron Ramsdale. Ollie Watkins was again left on the bench by Emery but made a stunning impact with a volley over Ramsdale from Yuri Tielemans' dinked pass 17 minutes from time. Donyell Malen then sealed the points with his third goal in as many league games. Asensio's second spot-kick was saved in stoppage time, but John McGinn pounced on the rebound. Villa climb above Chelsea into fifth, just one point behind City. Leicester scored their first league goals since January to snap a nine-game losing run, but a 2-2 draw at Brighton still did little to help the Foxes' hopes of survival. Twice the Seagulls led through two Joao Pedro penalties. But Brighton's ambitions of European football next season were dealt a blow as Stephy Mavididi and Caleb Okoli levelled for Ruud van Nistelrooy's men. Arsenal can cut the gap on leaders Liverpool to eight points later when they host Brentford. Mikel Arteta, though, showed his priority is in finishing the job against Real Madrid in the Champions League quarter-finals as Bukayo Saka and Martin Odegaard were among those to start on the Gunners' bench.





## In brief

### Maid arrested for looting house

RAWALPINDI (APP): Police on Saturday arrested a maid who had stolen valuables from a house after giving poison to its owner. According to the Rawalpindi Police spokesman, the accused Shazia Younis alias Koko Jan worked as a maid in the house of Sajid in Gujar Khan. It was reported to the police in August 2024 that the accused had given poison to the house owner and decamped with his money and other valuables. The victim Sajid died during treatment in the hospital. Gujar Khan police registered a case of the incident and used all means including human intelligence to trace out and arrest the accused. During the investigations, it transpired that the accused was involved in many cases of theft after giving poison to house owners in Peshawar, Rawalpindi and Wazirabad.

### 10 drugs suppliers netted

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi Police in the anti-drugs crackdown on Saturday morning arrested 10 accused including a lady drug supplier recovering more than 12 kilograms charas from them. According to the police spokesman, the Naseerabad Police nabbed two accused Night with 1.56 kg 560 charas, while the Civil Lines Police recovered 2.2 kg of the contraband item from accused Raheel. Similarly the Wah Cantt Police held two accused Waqar and Azam on the recovery of 1.8 kg and 1.56 kg charas from them respectively. Likewise the Rawat and New Town Police also netted accused Khalid and Sajjad respectively with 1.54 kg and 1.5 kg charas. The Race Course Police caught three accused Irfan, Ghulam Abbas and Zeeshan Rasheed on the recovery of 540 grams, 520 grams and 600 grams charas respectively from them. The Taxila Police also captured accused Zaki with 450 grams charas. City Police Officer Syed Khalid Hamdani in a statement said the crackdown launched as per the Punjab chief minister's vision for a drug-free Punjab would continue in the Rawalpindi region till the elimination of the scourge from the area.

### Police nab 18 outlaws

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi Police during operations against outlaws arrested 18 accused, including four liquor suppliers, 12 illegal arms owners and two proclaimed offenders. According to the police spokesman, four accused were held with 40 litres of liquor. The Bani Police arrested two accused Mujeeb and Najibullah with 20 litres of liquor. The Chaklala Police also recovered 20 litres of liquor from two accused Amir Shahzad and Sajid. Similarly, 12 accused were arrested during operations against illegal arms possession. The Rawat Police nabbed four accused Zar Muhammad, Khalil, Safdar and Ahsan Saleem recovering a 30 bore pistol from all of them. The Ganjmandi Police also caught two accused Abdul Sattar with a 30-bore pistol and Umar with a dagger. Likewise, the Sadiqabad, Chaklala, Wah Saddar, Gujar Khan, Jatli Police and Khuta Police held accused Bilal, Iftikhar, Noman, Mamoon, Ikram and Awais respectively on the recovery of a 30-bore pistol from them. Meanwhile the Bani Police managed to nab two proclaimed offenders Muhammad Ikram and Zahoor wanted in the cases of attempted kidnapping and rape, and breach of trust.



## Pakistan and Uzbekistan officials meet to promote bilateral tourism

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: In a landmark step to deepen bilateral tourism and promote people-to-people connectivity, senior tourism officials from Pakistan and Uzbekistan gathered today at the Head Office of Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC) in Islamabad for a high-level meeting dedicated to strengthening mutual tourism and cultural exchange.

The meeting was attended by H.E. Mr. Umid Shadiev, Chairman of the Tourism Committee of Uzbekistan, H.E. Mr. Alisher Tukhtaev, Ambassador of Uzbekistan to Pakistan, Mr. Aftab Rana, Managing Director of PTDC, and prominent tourism industry stakeholders from both countries' public and private tourism sectors.

Welcoming the Uzbek delegation, PTDC's Managing Director Aftab Rana highlighted the shared Silk Road legacy between Pakistan and Uzbekistan, underscoring the long-standing historical, spiritual, and cultural ties between the two nations. "Tourism is not just an exchange of money; it is an exchange of stories, experiences, and friendships," said Aftab Rana. "By traveling to each other's countries, we become ambassadors of goodwill and build a future of peace, collaboration, and prosperity."

He elaborated on Pakistan's immense tourism assets—from the majestic peaks of Gilgit-Baltistan and

the scenic valleys of Chitral and Swat to the rich archaeological wonders of Mohenjo-Daro and Lahore's Shahi Fort. He also stressed the importance of improving air connectivity, visa facilitation, collaborative marketing, and capacity building to unlock the full potential of tourism cooperation.

In his remarks, H.E. Mr. Umid Shadiev, Chairman of the Tourism Committee of Uzbekistan, expressed appreciation for the hospitality and reaffirmed Uzbekistan's strategic intent to advance tourism relations with Pakistan. "Uzbekistan sees Pakistan not only as a neighbor, but as a true friend. We are committed to creating a tourism bridge that connects our peoples, cultures, and economies," he said.

Mr. Umid Shadiev endorsed the proposals put forward by PTDC's Managing Director, particularly regarding enhanced flight operations between Tashkent and Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad, streamlining visa processes, and targeted tourism promotions. He also shared that Uzbekistan has taken key structural steps to support this vision, including the establishment of a dedicated Tourism Committee under the Uzbek Government and the creation of the UN Tourism Academy in Samarkand, a world-class institution aimed at regional tourism education and training.

Another significant development discussed was the updating of the Memorandum of Understanding

(MoU) signed between Pakistan and Uzbekistan in 2021, to reflect new goals, align policy frameworks, and foster deeper institutional cooperation.

H.E. Mr. Alisher Tukhtaev, Ambassador of Uzbekistan to Pakistan appreciated the support of PTDC in holding the Uzbek tourism roadshows at Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad. He assured his cooperation to strengthen ties among the tour operators of both sides to promote group tours.

The two sides agreed on the key initiatives to boost bilateral tourism which included launching joint cultural festivals and heritage tourism packages, promoting youth, media, and professional exchange programs, enhancing direct flight connectivity and simplifying visa regimes to promote group tours, increasing awareness of tourism destinations through joint digital and media campaigns, strengthening B2B collaborations between travel agencies and tour operators, supporting capacity building and workforce training through institutions like the UN Tourism Academy at Samarkand and COTHM in Pakistan.

Both countries are members of ECO and these steps will also greatly support the promotion of regional tourism. The meeting concluded with a mutual resolve to make tourism a cornerstone of Pakistan-Uzbekistan relations—paving the way for economic growth, cultural diplomacy, lasting friendship and regional cooperation.

## Salik welcomes overseas Pakistanis as 'State Guests', emphasizes cooperation

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Overseas Pakistanis, Chaudhry Salik Hussain Saturday warmly welcomed overseas Pakistani participants, terming them state guests at the inaugural Overseas Pakistanis Convention, emphasizing unity and cooperation.

In an exclusive video message with PTV news channel, minister lauded the overseas Pakistani community's achievements and reaffirmed the government's commitment to their welfare at the convention.

He stressed the need for stronger ties with overseas Pakistanis and emphasized that overseas Pakistanis are equally contributing to the country's progress.

"Overseas Pakistanis are

a precious asset and ambassadors of our country, contributing significantly to our nation's progress," said Chaudhry Salik Hussain.

They play a vital role in Pakistan's economic growth and development through valuable remittances, investments, and knowledge transfer, he added.

Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif is set to hold his first interaction convention for overseas Pakistanis from April 13 (tomorrow), aiming to strengthen ties with the diaspora and explore ways to benefit from their expertise and investments in Pakistan's economic growth and development, as part of his government's efforts to boost foreign investment and economic diplomacy, he mentioned.

Minister for Overseas Pakistanis, emphasized that overseas Pakistanis are his top priority, highlighting their significant contributions to the country's progress and development.

He also underscores the importance of supporting and engaging with the overseas Pakistani community.

He also appreciates Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif's efforts to engage with the overseas Pakistani community, given the PM's emphasis on strengthening ties with the diaspora. Ch Salik Hussain emphasized the need for strong policies to support overseas Pakistanis, focusing on skill development initiatives and collaboration with external companies to establish state-of-the-art training institutes.

## Pakistan to export female nurses staff to Malaysia

ISLAMABAD (APP): Overseas Employment Corporation (OEC), an attached department of Ministry of Overseas Pakistan and Human Resource Development (OP&HRD), would export the female nurses staff to Malaysia who meet the prescribed qualifications and experience.

An official source told APP here on Saturday that the selection of nursing staff would be finalized as per job requirements including coronary care, medical /surgical, ICU, Pediatric ICU, Neonatal ICU and Cardiac Units.

He said that the required

qualification was diploma in General Nursing & must have specialized Post-Basic, with minimum 5 years of ICU (Cardiac) experience and age not more than 45 for females.

All candidates are required to bring the required documents on the interview day including updated resume with color photographs - please refer to the sample of resume provided + must use GMAIL email address.

General Education Certificates with a certified true copy, nursing training certificates - diploma and nursing degree, registration certificate with own nursing

board/council or with another Nursing Board/Council, academic transcript with a certified true copy, current Practicing License, birth Certificate, International passport (If you have), Marriage certificate, Testimonial from a recent employer (If you have one), Recent passport-size color photographs (5 copies) and 3 months' pay slips (If you have).

The applicant will submit/attach the deposited Bank challan amounting to Rs. 500/- generated at the time of online application submission. All applications must be received by 11th April 2025.

## PTI opposes every national effort: Qaiser Sheikh

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for the Board of Investment, Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh, on Saturday said that Pakistan possesses vast reserves of mines and minerals which, if properly utilized, can significantly boost the national economy.

Speaking to a private news channel, he said a successful investment conference was recently held, attended by global experts, investors, and

business leaders, highlighting Pakistan's potential in the mining sector.

Responding to Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's (PTI) objections to related legislation, the minister remarked, "This is not the first time PTI has opposed laws made in the national interest their politics remains rooted in protest and disruption."

He criticized the party for resisting progress, saying, "It seems their only demand is that

Pakistan should stop moving forward."

Qaiser Sheikh added that the government has extended multiple invitations for dialogue, but PTI has consistently prioritized personal agendas over national development.

"We are open to talks, but their lack of seriousness and continued focus on individual interests hampers constructive engagement," he concluded.

## RDA gets possession of two plots from illegal encroachers

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi Development Authority (RDA) enforcement squad recovered and vacated two plots from the illegal encroachers in the Saidpur Housing Scheme.

On the directions of the Director General, RDA Kinza Murtaza, the RDA has intensified its ongoing anti-encroachment efforts across the city.

During the operation, the squad recovered and vacated two plots measuring 11.4 Marlas, plots no. 11-12 in the area of Saidpur Scheme No-2 to ensure proper land management and maintain the integrity of urban development. In another operation, the RDA has also sealed Grand Pearl Marquee on Adiala Road, Mouza Jarahi, for violations of land regulations.

## ANF recovers 85 kg drugs

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF), conducting six operations across the country, recovered as many as 85 kg drugs worth more than Rs 30 million and arrested two suspects, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman on Saturday.

He informed that around 54 kilograms of Ice were recovered from an abandoned vehicle in the Panni area of Gawadar.

In another action, 13 kg of opium was recovered from a parcel being sent to Canada from a courier service office in Rawalpindi, while 620 grams of opium was recovered from a parcel being sent to the Okara through a courier service in Peshawar.

As many as 14.4 kg of hashish was recovered from hidden parts of a vehicle in Mansehra from a lady smuggler. In another operation, ANF recovered 1,480 kilograms of hashish from a suspect at GT Road, Islamabad. Cases have been registered against the arrested accused under the Narcotics Control Act, and further investigations are underway.

## 49 percent construction work on Ring Road project completed

RAWALPINDI (APP): As many as 49 percent of construction work on the Rawalpindi Ring Road project had been completed, which started under the leadership of former Prime Minister Muhammad Nawaz Sharif during his last tenure.

This was briefed by the Chief Engineer Rawalpindi Development Authority (RDA) Anwar Baran to Brig(R) Babar Alauddin, Sitara-e-Imtiaz (Military), Chairperson Chief Minister's Surveillance Directorate Punjab here Saturday.

During a visit to the

Rawalpindi Ring Road project site, Babar Alauddin inspected the ongoing construction work and directed the officials concerned to speed up the work on the project as Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif was committed to the prompt completion of the project.

The Chairperson of the Chief Minister's Surveillance Directorate directed the RDA officials to take strict action against illegal construction and illegitimate housing societies operating in the RDA jurisdiction.

He further said that after completion of the Ring Road project, the traffic problems of Rawalpindi would be solved.

The 38.3KM long Ring Road is a big gift from Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz to the people of Rawalpindi, which would provide employment opportunities to the residents, he added.

Later, Brig(R) Alauddin planted a sapling in the lawn of the RDA office and said that a maximum plantation of trees was essential for purifying the environment and reducing pollution.

## PCCR hosts Provincial Consultative Session on OOSC

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Parliamentary Caucus on Child Rights of the National Assembly, under the leadership of its Convenor Dr. Nikhat Shakeel Khan, hosted a Consultative Session on National Education Emergency to address the issue of Out-of-School Children in Punjab.

The meeting focused on identifying the reasons behind the OOSC issue in Punjab province and to devise a tailor-made strategy as per the unique ground realities of Punjab.

Dr. Nikhat Shakeel Khan extended a warm welcome to the participants, including MNAs Syed Ali Qasim Gillani, Dr. Shazia Sobia Aslam Soomro, Ms. Asia Naz Tanoli along with Convenor of the Provincial Caucus for Child Rights in the Provincial Assembly of Punjab, Ms. Sarah Ahmed, Chief Planning Officer Education Department Multan, Officials of the Education Department Multan, representatives from the Civil Society and Officers of the National Assembly Secretariat.

During her opening remarks, she stressed on alleviation of the OOSC problem in Pakistan by addressing the root causes of OOSC, including financial constraints, accessibility of students, poverty, child labour, migration & displacement, societal norms that discourage girl student enrollment, and

early child marriages.

Member of the National Assembly/Advisory Council Member of Parliamentary Caucus on Child Rights (PCCR) Syed Ali Qasim Gillani, while apprising the participants of the initiatives undertaken in Multan District and emphasizing the need to replicate these efforts in other districts, also proposed additional measures to address the issue of Out-of-School Children (OOSC).

He stressed the importance of focused attention from the provincial government on districts in South Punjab that have the highest OOSC rates. His recommendations included counseling parents of OOSC students, allocation of funds to ensure the necessary school infrastructure, provision of clean drinking water in schools through the installation of Reverse Osmosis Plants, establishment of IT labs to promote skills in Artificial Intelligence and Information Technology, and the initiation of School Alumni Programs in all districts to enhance social and financial support.

He further emphasized the need for improved facilities such as solar energy systems, clean drinking water, sanitation services, and the comprehensive identification of OOSC across all districts. MNA Ms. Asia Naz Tanoli stressed on setting the minimum standard of all teachers being appointed in public and private schools to set

to 16 years of Education, ensuring provision of subject-based training & refresher courses to teachers in the schools of all provinces of Pakistan, initiation of public service/awareness messages through sms, TV programs and other programs for raising awareness among parents of students in rural areas bearing the most burden of Out-of-School Children (OOSC), resumption Taleem-e-Baligha, acknowledgement of parents and students and to highlight the success stories of parents and students who have struggled and ensured to receive education despite challenges.

Dr. Shazia Sobia Aslam Soomro, MNA, emphasized the need to initiate programs for children and students focused on basic personal safety, teaching them how to defend themselves, immediately inform their guardians or parents when in a dangerous situation, and escape from dangerous situations.

Citing an example from the Sindh Province, Dr. Shazia Sobia Aslam Soomro underscored the value of collaborative efforts among schools, government departments, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to address the exploitation of street children by drug traffickers, reduce the number of Out-of-School Children, and provide vocational training through well-designed intervention programs.



ISLAMABAD: A view of garbage accumulated in the nullah near Expressway, obstructing the water flow and posing a risk of flooding, an issue that requires urgent attention and cleanup by the concerned authorities. —APP Photo



263 Afghans return home

KABUL (Pajhwok): The Ministry of Refugee and Repatriation (MoRR) says 263 Afghans released from prisons in Pakistan have returned to their homeland. These individuals returned to the country on April 10 and 11, MoRR wrote on its X handle. Citing Spin Boldak border authority in Kandahar, the ministry wrote the 263 Afghans, who had spent one to five days in jails, had been arrested in various parts of Pakistan.

45,000 Afghans returned: UN

KABUL (Amu TV): 45,000 Afghan nationals have returned from Pakistan since April 1, including more than 14,000 who were deported, according to UNHCR. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said the current rate of deportation—31 percent during the first 10 days of April—is significantly higher than in early November 2023, when Pakistan launched the first phase of its mass expulsion plan and the rate stood at 6 percent.

## Taliban tighten security in Kandahar

KANDAHAR (Amu TV): The Taliban have intensified security measures in Kandahar province following a deadly airstrike on Thursday, local sources told Amu, adding that they have bolstered their presence around the provincial capital and established multiple checkpoints along the Spin Boldak-Kandahar route. At the newly established checkpoints, Taliban forces are thoroughly inspecting individuals crossing into Afghanistan. Sources said individuals lacking identification documents are being detained. The heightened security comes in the wake of an airstrike that reportedly tar-

geted a gathering of members from TTP and the Baloch Liberation Movement. According to sources, the militants had vacated the area before the strike occurred. The strike took place in Kandahar, a symbolic stronghold of Taliban power and home to their reclusive supreme leader, Hibatullah Akhundzada. Though the Taliban have denied it was an airstrike—claiming the blast was caused by unexploded ordnance—sources indicate that the attack resulted in at least 12 fatalities. No group has claimed responsibility for the strike. However, officials have previously signaled

that military operations within Afghanistan were possible in response to TTP activity. Analysts suggest that the Taliban’s enduring ties with the TTP have hindered their ability to contain the group, further straining already tense relations. “There are many issues and problems in Afghanistan. The TTP is one of them. Controlling it is not always easy or possible,” said a journalist. This marks the first reported airstrike in Kandahar since the Taliban’s return to power in August 2021, occurring at a time of heightened tensions over militant activity along the border.

## Construction of 50-bed hospital started

KHOST (TOLONews): A charitable foundation has launched the construction of a 50-bed hospital in Khost province at a cost of \$1.5 million. Local officials in Khost and representatives of the foundation said that once the hospital is operational, the number of patients traveling to neighboring countries for treatment will decrease. Mahboob Shah Qanit, deputy governor of Khost, said during the groundbreaking ceremony: “This is a 50-bed hospital. God willing, it will provide high-quality medical treatment for patients.”

Shirgul Zadran, deputy director of Khost public health department, said: “This hospital will be fully functional in all departments, not limited to a few. It will initially start with 50 beds, but it may expand in the future based on demand.” The hospital is being built on three jeribs of land (approximately 1.5 acres), and construction is expected to be completed within six months. “We are trying to complete the construction of this hospital in six months. The initial budget is 1.5 million dollars, and we plan to expand the facility in the future,” said Ahmad Zahir

Waqas, head of the charitable foundation. Some residents of Khost say that with the completion of this hospital, their challenges in accessing health services will be significantly reduced. Enayatullah Hakimzoy, a Khost resident, told TOLONews: “The needs of patients in Khost will be partially met, and the number of Afghans traveling abroad for treatment will decrease with the construction of this hospital.” Currently, due to a lack of standard medical centers in Afghanistan, many citizens travel to neighboring countries for treatment.

## Fire at Herat industrial park causes \$10m in damages



HERAT (Amu TV): A massive fire that tore through a cardboard production facility at Herat’s industrial park has caused more than \$10 million in financial losses, according to local investors. Hamidullah Khadem, head of the Herat Chamber of Industries and Mines,

said the blaze inflicted extensive damage on the factory and surrounding infrastructure. The fire reportedly broke out Friday and continued into the early hours of Saturday. The Taliban’s provincial authorities said the fire raged for several hours

before being brought under control. Firefighting units from the Taliban’s 207 Al-Farooq Corps responded to the emergency and worked for hours to contain the flames, officials said. There were no immediate reports of casualties. The cause of the fire remains under investigation.

## Afghani weakens as dollar surges despite IE’s efforts

KABUL (Am TV): The Afghani has sharply depreciated against the US dollar over the past week, with the exchange rate rising by nearly 300 Afghanis per hundred dollars in just three days, despite continued efforts by the Taliban-run central bank to stabilize the currency. Da Afghanistan Bank, the country’s central bank, put \$20 million up for auction last Thursday in an attempt to maintain the Afghani’s value. However, as of Saturday, the exchange rate stood between 73.23 and 73.50 Afghanis per dollar — a notable jump from around 70 Afghanis just weeks earlier. The decline coincides

with a significant reduction in US foreign aid to Afghanistan. The weakening of the Afghani has raised fresh concerns about the country’s economic stability under the Taliban administration, particularly as the effects of recent US policy changes ripple through the region. Since returning to power in 2021, the Taliban have repeatedly claimed they are managing the economy through national revenue and without dependence on foreign assistance. But analysts say the group has relied heavily on US dollar auctions to artificially prop up the currency. “The Taliban have main-

tained the Afghani’s value by injecting large amounts of dollars into the market,” said an economist based in Kabul. “Now that the flow of dollars is diminishing, we’re seeing the currency’s actual vulnerability.” The depreciation also follows US President recent executive orders aimed at reducing — and in some cases cutting off — aid to Afghanistan, a move that has begun to affect liquidity and foreign exchange reserves in the country. Economists warn that continued currency instability could drive up inflation and deepen the economic hardships faced by millions of Afghans.

## IEA team off to Uzbekistan

KABUL (Ariana News): A delegation of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA), led by Acting Minister of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock Attaullah Omari, has left for neighboring Uzbekistan for talks.

The ministry said in a statement on Saturday that the purpose of the visit is to discuss and exchange views on climate change and its impact on the water resources of the Amu Darya Basin, expand cooperation in the fields of agriculture, irrigation, livestock, food security, capacity building and other issues of mutual concern.

The delegation comprises the Deputy Minister of Energy and Water, the Deputy Interior Minister for Counter-Narcotics, the Director of Constructions of the Ministry of Defense, the Director of Economy of the Office of Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs, the Director of Administration of the Ministry of Agriculture, the Technical Advisor to the Acting Minister of Agriculture, a representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a representative of the General Directorate of Intelligence and a representative of the PM’s Office of Administrative Affairs.

## Taliban flog 13, including five women

KABUL (Amu TV): The Taliban have publicly flogged 13 people, including five women, in the provinces of Khost and Jawzjan on charges ranging from “illicit relations” and “fleeing their home” to blasphemy, bribery, and false reporting, the group’s Supreme Court said in a statement on Saturday.

The court claimed that those punished in Khost received between 35 and 39 lashes and were sentenced to prison terms ranging from two to five years. The floggings, the statement said, were conducted in public following the approval of the Taliban’s Supreme Court.

Witnesses to the punishments reportedly included relatives of the accused women, Taliban judicial officials, and local residents. The floggings are part of a broader surge in corporal punishments and public executions across Afghanistan. On Friday, the Taliban carried out executions of four men in the provinces of Farah, Nimroz, and Badghis on murder charges.

## Volleyball tournament concluded

PUL-I-ALAM (Pajhwok): A two-week long volleyball tournament, featuring 38 top teams, has concluded in Pul-i-Alam, the capital of central Logar province, with the Logar Champions team winning the title.

Sports and Physical Training Director Eng. Muzamil Naemzai told Pajhwok Afghan News that the tournament had been organized in collaboration with the Volleyball Federation.

“These competitions were aimed at promoting volleyball, encouraging the exchange of experiences among athletes, and strengthening relationships between players,” he said. Naemzai added that Logar Champions and Tangi Stars teams found their way to the final, where the Logar Champions defeated their rivals by 3-1 to claim the championship title.

foremost need is for social justice, so that no one feels disappointed or alienated.” This comes as the leader of the Islamic Emirate had previously, during Eid al-Fitr prayers in Kandahar, emphasized the importance of setting aside differences and said that an Islamic system can only succeed when there is unity and harmony among all citizens.

## New township being built for returnees

JALALABAD (Pajhwok): Construction work has been initiated on a new township for returning Afghan refugees in Behsud district of eastern Nangarhar, an official announced on Saturday.

Refugee and Repatriation Director Baz Mohammad Abdul Rahman said the foundation stone of the township was laid by Deputy Prime Minister for Administrative Affairs Mullah Abdul Salam Hanafi, alongside Nangarhar governor Mullah Mohammad Naeem Akhund and several other officials.

He said the township was being built on 1,500 acres of land in Qasimabad area of the district.

According to him, all essential living facilities have been planned in the township. Initially, only basic facilities will be provided for returnees, with



additional services to be introduced in due course.

He explained that up to 4,000 families would be provided with shelter, with priority given to those from Nangarhar who are current-

ly without housing.

In recent weeks, neighbor country has started forcibly deporting Afghan refugees, with hundreds of families returning daily via the Torkham crossing.

Officials say these families are being offered initial humanitarian assistance and arrangements are in place for their transportation to their respective hometowns.

## Afghanistan exported over 32,000 tons of figs in 1403

KABUL (TOLONews): Afghanistan’s fig exports saw a significant rise in the year 1403 (April 20, 2024 – March 19, 2025), with shipments valued at over \$165 million sent to various countries.

According to the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, this marks a notable increase compared to the previous year, 1402.

The ministry reports that 32,814 metric tons of figs were exported in 1403 to countries including India, Pakistan, the United Arab Emirates, the United States,

Oman, Qatar, the United Kingdom, Canada, and the Netherlands, generating over 165 million USD in export value.

Akhundzada Abdul Salam Jawad, spokesperson for the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, stated: “Fig exports in 1403 amounted to 32,814 tons, valued at over 165 million dollars, with the majority going to India, Pakistan, the UAE, the US, Oman, Qatar, the UK, Canada, and the Netherlands.”

However, the Chamber of Commerce and

Investment and the Dry Fruit Exporters’ Union have highlighted key obstacles to expanding dried fruit exports—especially figs. These include banking limitations, visa issues, and the lack of standard processing facilities.

Mirzaman Popal, acting head of finance and administration at the Chamber of Commerce and Investment, told TOLONews: “There should be investment in fig processing and packaging within the country. We also call on international partners to support our traders

and investors in the packaging sector.”

Khalid Rahmani, spokesperson for the Kabul Dry Fruit Exporters’ Union, said: “If business challenges such as lack of export facilities and visa delays are resolved, we can confidently say that exports of dried fruits, especially figs, will increase.”

Figs are considered one of Afghanistan’s key horticultural products and have recently become an important export commodity, shipped both fresh and dried to various global markets.

## Ghazni’s remote districts lack access to health services

GHAZNI CITY (Pajhwok): Residents of remote districts of southern Ghazni province are facing significant challenges in accessing healthcare, particularly maternity and obstetrics services.

Many areas lack health-care centers and those that exist are often without essential services, leading to preventable deaths. One such district is Nawa, located 170 kilometres from Ghazni City, the provincial capital, near the Durand Line.

Abdul Khaliq, a tribal elder, told Pajhwok the district lacked maternity care and patients often lost their lives due to poor road conditions and the absence of female doctors.

“Most expectant mothers face serious complications during childbirth due to lack of clinics and midwives. More often than not, this leads to deaths of mothers and babies in some cases,” he said.

Ajristan, another remote district located 180 kilometres from Ghazni City, is also faced with a shortage of female staff at the health

centre.

Nawab Khan, a local resident, shared the story of a woman who died after experiencing complications during childbirth. She had been transferred to Ghazni City with great difficulty.

Residents called on national and international organisations to prioritise the availability of maternity and obstetrics services in their areas.

Director of Public Health Dr. Mohammad Zeerak acknowledged the issue and assured that steps would be taken to address it.

He explained 22 health-

care centres had been established or upgraded under the General Hospital programme, with construction work on the projects set to begin soon.

The most affected districts, including Nawa, Jaghori, Giro, Nawar and Rashidan, will be prioritised for improvements.

However, the problems are not limited to just five districts. Residents across many areas of Ghazni are facing similar challenges and are seeking urgent solutions.

## Sugar prices fall, gold surge in Kabul markets

KABUL (Pajhwok): The prices of sugar declined, but that of gold increased during the outgoing week in Kabul, market sources said on Saturday.

**Food items** Zmarai Safi, head of the Food Traders’ Association, said the price of a 49-kilogram bag of Indian sugar fell from 2,550afis to 2,500afis.

The price of a 49-kilogram sack of Kazakh flour cost 1,350afis, a 24-kg bag of Pakistani rice stayed stable at 2,600afis, a 16-litre bottle of Malaysian cooking oil remained unchanged

at 1,700afis, a kilogram of African black tea at 400afis and the same amount of Indonesian green tea at 350afis.

Hamid Sufizada, a retailer at Dahna-i-Bagh market, put the retail price of a 49-kg bag of Kazakh flour at 1,400afis, a 24-kg bag of Pakistani rice at 2,650afis and a 49-kg sack of Indian sugar at 2,550afis.

A 16-litre bottle of cooking oil accounted for 1,750afis, one kilogram of black tea for 400afis and the same quantity of green tea for 450afis, he added.

### Fuel prices

A worker at the Ahmadyar pump station told Pajhwok the price of one litre of petrol stayed unchanged at 62afis and diesel at 57afis.

He also said one kilogram of liquefied gas was sold for 52afis, the same rate as last week’s.

### Gold prices up

Mohammad Fawad, a jeweller in Timor Shahi area, said the price of one gram of Arabian gold went up from 5,650afis to 5,900afis and the same amount of the Russian vari-

ety surged from 4,600afis to 4800afis.

Haji Mohammad Hussain, owner of the Sadaqat Money Exchange Service, said the local currency strengthened during the week as one US dollar was traded at 73.30afis and 1,000 Pakistani rupees at 250afis.

During the previous week, one US dollar consumed 71.50afis and 1,000 Pakistani rupees 250afis. The spike in the afghani value is essentially linked to periodic dollar auctions by the central bank.

## IE leader met with governor

K A N D A H A R (TOLONews): The leader of the Islamic Emirate met with the governor of Paktia and other provincial officials in Kandahar.

During the meeting, Sheikh Hibatullah Akhundzada emphasized that the time has come to implement Sharia in the country’s political, economic, and military sectors. He called on local

officials to make serious efforts to enforce Islamic rulings, especially the law of “Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice.”

The deputy spokesperson of the Islamic Emirate, Hamdullah Fitrat said: “The esteemed Amir al-Mu’minin instructed officials to strengthen the Islamic system, implement Sharia, enforce the law of

Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, and serve the people.” Fitrat further stated: “The Amir al-Mu’minin urged the people to cooperate with ministries, find solutions to public problems, and eliminate ethnic divisions.”

Political analyst Abdul Sadiq Hamidzoy said: “If the government wants the support of the people, the

foremost need is for social justice, so that no one feels disappointed or alienated.”

This comes as the leader of the Islamic Emirate had previously, during Eid al-Fitr prayers in Kandahar, emphasized the importance of setting aside differences and said that an Islamic system can only succeed when there is unity and harmony among all citizens.

## UNAMA calls for immediate halt to executions in Afghanistan

KABUL (Khaama Press): United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) has urged the Taliban to immediately stop executions in Afghanistan, calling for a suspension of capital punishment to uphold human rights.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) has strongly condemned the recent execution of four individuals by the Taliban, calling it a violation of the fundamental right to life. The agency urged an immediate halt to capital punishment in the country. In a statement, UNAMA

declared, “The death penalty is incompatible with the fundamental right to life. United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) calls for an immediate moratorium as a step toward abolition.”

According to the Taliban officials, four men were executed publicly across three Afghanistan provinces.

Two were executed in Qala-i-Naw, the capital of Badghis Province, one in Zaranj, Nimroz Province, and another in the central area of Farah Province.

These executions have drawn criticism from inter-

national human rights organizations. Richard Bennett, the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in Afghanistan, and Amnesty International both expressed deep concern, labeling the act a clear violation of human rights.

Since returning to power in 2021, the Taliban have increasingly resorted to public executions despite widespread international opposition.

The total number of known executions by the group over the past four years has now reached nine.

Human rights experts

emphasize that the use of capital punishment without transparent legal proceedings undermines justice and accountability.

Amnesty International has repeatedly urged the de facto authorities to adhere to international human rights standards.

The United Nations (UN) and other watchdogs continue to call on the Taliban to stop public punishments and align Afghanistan’s judicial practices with global human rights conventions. A failure to do so, experts warn, could further isolate the regime diplomatically.



# At least 500 children killed since Israel broke Gaza truce

GAZA: At least 500 Palestinian children have been killed by sustained Israeli air attacks and bombardments in Gaza since Israel broke the ceasefire with Hamas last month, said Mahmoud Basal, spokesperson of the Gaza Civil Defence, while a UN official described the war-torn territory as a "post-apocalyptic" killing zone.

Meanwhile, Israeli air raids in Gaza on Saturday killed at least six people, including a child, bringing the death toll in the last 24 hours to more than 20. More than 1,500 people have been killed since Israel resumed its bombardment of Gaza on March 18, according to figures from the Palestinian Ministry of Health.

In the latest Israeli attacks on Saturday, two people were reported killed, and two children were injured in Gaza's Tuffah neighbourhood, while two others were killed in al-Atatra district of Beit Lahya, in the northern part of Gaza. Another Palestinian was killed in an Israeli drone attack in the Qizan an-Najjar area, south of Khan Younis.

Several casualties were also reported following Israeli air raids on the tent shelters of civilians in the al-Mawasi area, west of Khan Younis, which Israel had designated a so-called "safe zone". Al Jazeera's Hind Khoudary, reporting outside Al-Ahli Hospital in Deir el-Balah, central Gaza, reported that a newborn named Sham was severely injured after the child's family was hit in an attack.

"She was in very critical condition where her arm was amputated and she died a couple of hours later, because her injury was very critical and doctors were unable to help her situation," she said. The death brings to six the number of deaths early on Saturday. Khoudary also reported that two forced evacuation orders were issued on Saturday in Shujayea and Khan Younis. "Palestinians do not know where to go," Khoudary reported the ambulances arriving daily to the hospital have mostly been carrying children and women.

"Due to the lack of medical supplies, most of these Palestinian chil-

## Hamas expects 'real progress' in talks

CAIRO (AFP): Hamas expects "real progress" toward a ceasefire deal to end the war in Gaza, an official said, as senior leaders from the Palestinian movement hold talks with Egyptian mediators in Cairo on Saturday. The scheduled talks come days after US President Donald Trump suggested an agreement to secure the release of hostages held in Gaza was close to being finalized. A Hamas official told AFP that the Palestinian group anticipated the meeting with Egyptian mediators would yield significant progress.

"We hope the meeting will achieve real progress toward reaching an agreement to end the war, halt the aggression and ensure the full withdrawal of occupation forces from Gaza," the official familiar with the ceasefire negotiations said on condition of anonymity, as he was not authorized to speak publicly on the matter. The delegation will be led by the group's chief negotiator Khalil Al-Hayya, he said. According to the official, Hamas has not yet received any new ceasefire proposals, despite Israeli media reports suggesting that Israel and Egypt had exchanged draft documents outlining a potential ceasefire and hostage release agreement. "However, contacts and discussions with mediators are ongoing," he added, accusing Israel of "continuing its aggression" in Gaza. The Times of Israel reported that Egypt's proposal would involve the release of eight living hostages and eight bodies, in exchange for a truce lasting between 40 and 70 days and a substantial release of Palestinian prisoners. President Trump said during a cabinet meeting this week that "we're getting close to getting them (hostages in Gaza) back." Trump's Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff was also quoted in an Israeli media report as saying "a very serious deal is taking shape, it's a matter of days."

dren and women are witnessing a very deteriorating situation," she added. On Friday, Ravina Shamdasani, spokeswoman for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, reported that 36 of the 224 documented Israeli strikes in Gaza, between March 18 and April 9, involved deaths that were only women and children. In a statement, the Palestinian rights group Al-Haq said the findings by the UN further confirmed a pattern it previously identified.

"Such a calculated effort to exterminate women, boys, girls & even infants, has not been witnessed in any other modern conflict," Al-Haq said in a post on social media. In an interview with Al Jazeera's Upfront, UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA) chief Philippe Lazzarini described the situation in Gaza as a "post-apocalyptic" killing zone.

Speaking at the Antalya Diplomacy Forum in Türkiye on Friday, Lazzarini also reiterated that

Israel has been preventing the entry of food, fuel, medicine and other vital humanitarian supplies into Gaza, contravening international law. In a separate post on X on Saturday, UNRWA Director of Communications Juliette Touma warned that all basic supplies "are running out" in Gaza.

"It means babies, children are going to bed hungry," Israel has pledged to press on with its military offensive, with officials in recent days outlining plans to seize new swaths of territory in southern Gaza and issuing a series of forced evacuation orders.

UNRWA said about 400,000 Palestinians have been forcibly displaced across Gaza since the ceasefire ended on March 18. Israel forcibly displaced about 90 percent of Gaza's 2.3 population since it launched war on October 7, 2023. More than 50,000 Palestinians have been killed and 115,981 wounded drawing condemnation from rights groups. — Aljazeera



GAZA: Injured Palestinian children and a baby receive medical treatment at Ahli Hospital.

## CJCSC for strengthens ties with Nigerian mly

**E.P. Report**

RAWALPINDI: General Sahir Shamshad Mirza, NI (M), Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (CJCSC), who is on an official visit to Nigeria, called on Badaru Abubakar, Defence Minister, General Christopher Gwabin Musa, Chief of Defence Staff, Lieutenant General Olufemi Olatubosun Oluyede, Chief of Army Staff, Vice Admiral Emmanuel Ikechukwu Ogalla, Chief of Naval Staff and Air Marshal Hasan Bala Abubakar, Chief of Air Staff of Nigeria.

During the separately-held meetings, both sides engaged in discussions on challenges faced by both countries especially in the domain of Counter Terrorism (CT) and areas of mutual interest, including security, defence cooperation, and the evolving international / regional landscape. Both sides reaffirmed the resolve to further enhance defence and military collaboration between both militaries. The Nigerian civil and military leadership lauded the professionalism of Pakistan Armed Forces and acknowledged their sacrifices in fight against terrorism.

## S Arabia, France chair UN briefing on Gaza cause

RIYADH: The permanent representatives of Saudi Arabia and France to the UN, Abdulaziz Al-Wasel and Jerome Bonnafont, co-chaired a briefing for UN member and observer states at the UN headquarters in New York, the Saudi Press Agency reported on Saturday.

The session "discussed preparations for the upcoming high-level international conference on the peaceful resolution of the Palestinian cause and the implementation of the two-state solution, which is scheduled to be held in June under the joint chairmanship of Saudi Arabia and France," the SPA stated. In his remarks, Al-Wasel stressed that the establishment of an independent Palestinian state is the "cornerstone for achieving security and stability in the region," adding that the Kingdom's support for the two-state solution is a "longstanding and unwavering position."

Al-Wasel also announced the formation of several working groups to address key issues related to the peaceful settlement of the conflict. He called on member states to contribute their visions and proposals to support preparations for June's conference. Al-Wasel noted that the conference represents "a formal and comprehensive track to enhance international efforts aimed at reaching a just and lasting resolution."

Most UN member states and observer delegations from regional blocs expressed full support for the efforts led by Saudi Arabia and France to organize the conference and reaffirmed their commitment to the two-state solution as the only internationally agreed-upon formula to resolve the conflict, stressing the need for tangible outcomes, including the recognition of a Palestinian state. They also voiced their rejection of land annexation and the forced displacement of Palestinians and underscored the importance of supporting the Palestinian government and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees. — Arab News

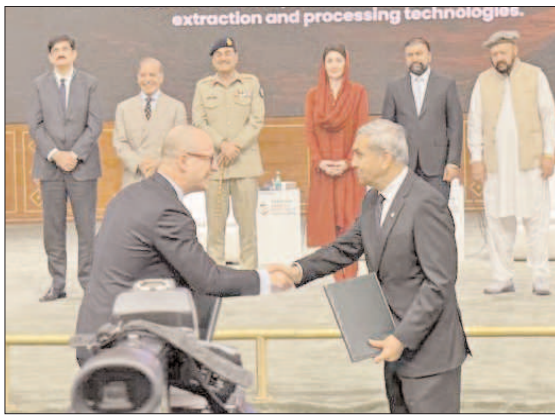
## Boosting mineral exploration PPL partners with Metso Finland

**E.P. Report**

KARACHI: Pakistan Petroleum Limited (PPL) and Metso Corporation, Finland, a global leader in sustainable technologies and services for the minerals processing industry, have entered a strategic collaboration to advance mineral exploration and processing across Pakistan.

The landmark Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was exchanged in the distinguished presence of Prime Minister of Pakistan, Mr. Shahbaz Sharif, and Chief of Army Staff, General Syed Asim Munir between Mr. Imran Abbasy, Managing Director and CEO, PPL, and Director Sales Smelting Business Line at Metso Corporation, Lauri Pesonen, representing Metso Corporation. The MoU was earlier signed during the Pakistan Mineral Investment Forum 2025 held in Islamabad witnessed by senior government officials, diplomats, and industry leaders.

This alliance marks a



significant step towards transforming Pakistan's mineral sector through the deployment of advanced exploration tools, efficient extraction technologies, and integrated value-added processing solutions.

"This collaboration with Metso signals a bold leap toward harnessing Pakistan's untapped mineral wealth using world-class technology and expertise," stated Mr. Imran Abbasy. "Together, we aim to foster sustainable development while maximizing national resource potential."

As a leading energy

company, PPL's diversification into minerals is aligned with its strategic vision to evolve into a holistic energy and resource organization. Partnering with Metso; renowned for its innovation and reliability in mineral processing; reaffirms this commitment to future-ready growth. The MoU sets the stage for joint initiatives in capacity building, technology transfer, and feasibility studies that will drive investment, create employment, and uplift the mineral value chain across Pakistan.

## No deal with govt on cards: Salman Akram

**E.P. Report**

LAHORE: Dispelling the impression that the PTI was going to strike a 'deal' with the establishment, the party's General Secretary Salman Akram Raja said on Saturday there was no such thing. He was speaking to reporters at an anti-terrorism court in Lahore.

When asked that a senior PTI leader, Azam Swati, had talked about former prime minister and the party founder Imran Khan striking a 'deal' with those in the corridors of power, Raja said this was not in his knowledge. "Swati might be making efforts in this direction. But the party is certainly not," he said.

What the PTI wanted, he added, was that there should be a rule of law in the country. "We want free and fair elections in the country. We don't want political workers to be kidnapped. We want that basic human rights must be protected." The PTI's general secretary opined the reason why the government was not allowing the party lead-

ers to meet Imran was because it wanted the situation to remain uncertain.

**PPP misleading public on canals issue:** Opposition Leader in National Assembly and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Omar Ayub has accused the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) of 'deceiving' the people on the issue of canals on Indus River.

Speaking to media, Omar Ayub claimed the PPP submitted a resolution against the canals on Indus River only after the PTI did so. "The PTI submitted its resolution on March 12, 2025," he said while contradicting the Speaker Ayaz Sadiq's statement that the Imran Khan-led party submitted the same a day earlier.

Omar Ayub said that the resolution was submitted again on Thursday but was not allowed on floor of the house. He demanded that the PTI's resolution should be tabled and discussed in the National Assembly. The Green Pakistan Initiative aims to develop six canals to irrigate barren lands, pri-

marily in Punjab. However, the project has faced strong opposition from Sindh, which fears adverse impacts on its water share and ecological balance.

The Sindh Assembly unanimously passed a resolution against the project in March, demanding a halt to construction until all provinces reach a consensus. PTI's resolution calls for an independent audit of the Indus River System Authority's (Irsa) water availability certification and insists on enforcing the 1991 Water Apportionment Accord to protect Sindh's allocated share of 48.76 million acre-feet.

Public hearings and transparent consultations with stakeholders are also demanded to ensure fair decision-making. The resolution has intensified political debates, with the Sindh and Punjab governments clashing over the project's implications. The outcome of this resolution could significantly influence inter-provincial relations and the future of water resource management in Pakistan.

## 57 killed in Darfur attacks

PORT SUDAN (AFP): Paramilitaries killed 57 civilians in an attack on North Darfur's besieged capital El-Fasher and a nearby famine-hit camp, activists said, as the battle to control Sudan's west intensifies.

The Rapid Support Forces (RSF), at war with the army since April 2023, launched a major assault on El-Fasher using heavy artillery, sniper fire and suicide drones from the east and northeast, said the local resistance committee, a volunteer aid group. "By 5:00 p.m. (local time), 32 people had been killed in the city, including four women and 10 children aged between one and five," the group said, adding that at least 17 others were wounded and taken to hospital.

Earlier, RSF fighters attacked Zamzam displacement camp around El-Fasher, killing 25 civilians, including women, children and elderly residents, the local committee said. Zamzam, along with other densely populated camps for the displaced around El-Fasher, has suffered heavily during nearly two years of fighting.

El-Fasher is the only state capital still under army control in Darfur, making it a strategic prize in the RSF's push for full control of the west. Witnesses described seeing RSF combat vehicles entering the Zamzam camp under cover of heavy gunfire.

## US judge rules student Khalil can be deported

JENA, Louisiana (Reuters): A US immigration judge ruled that Palestinian activist Mahmoud Khalil can be deported, allowing President Donald Trump's administration to proceed with its effort to remove the Columbia University student from the United States a month after his arrest in New York City.

The ruling by Judge Jamee Comans of the LaSalle Immigration Court in Louisiana was not a final determination of Khalil's fate. But it represented a significant victory for the Republican president in his efforts to deport foreign pro-Palestinian students who are in the United States legally and, like Khalil, have not been charged with any crime.

Citing the 1952 Immigration and Nationality Act, Trump-appointed US Secretary of State Marco Rubio determined last month that Khalil could harm American foreign policy interests and should be deported for his "otherwise lawful" speech and activism. Comans said that she did not have the authority to overrule a secretary of state. The judge denied a motion by Khalil's lawyers to subpoena Rubio and question him about the "reasonable grounds" he had for his determination

under the 1952 law.

The judge's decision came after a combative 90-minute hearing held in a court located inside a jail complex for immigrants surrounded by double-fenced razor wire run by private government contractors in rural Louisiana. Khalil, a prominent figure in the pro-Palestinian student protest movement that has roiled Columbia's New York City campus, was born in a Palestinian refugee camp in Syria, holds Algerian citizenship and became a US lawful permanent resident last year. Khalil's wife is a US citizen.

For now, Khalil remains in the Louisiana jail where federal authorities transferred him after his March 8 arrest at his Columbia University apartment building some 1,200 miles (1,930 km) away. Comans gave Khalil's lawyers until April 23 to apply for relief before she considers whether to issue a deportation order. An immigration judge can rule that a migrant cannot be deported because of possible persecution in a home country, among other limited grounds. In a separate case in New Jersey, US District Judge Michael Farbiarz has blocked deportation while he considers Khalil's claim that his arrest was made in

violation of the US Constitution's First Amendment protections for freedom of speech.

As Comans adjourned, Khalil leaned forward, asking to address the court. Comans hesitated, then agreed. Khalil quoted her remarks at his hearing on Tuesday that nothing was more important to the court than "due process rights and fundamental fairness."

"Clearly what we witnessed today, neither of these principles were present today or in this whole process," Khalil said. "This is exactly why the Trump administration has sent me to this court, a thousand miles away from my family." The judge said her ruling turned on an undated, two-page letter signed by Rubio and submitted to the court and to Khalil's counsel.

Khalil's lawyers, appearing via a video link, complained they were given less than 48 hours to review Rubio's letter and evidence submitted by the Trump administration to Comans this week. Marc Van Der Hout, Khalil's lead immigration attorney, repeatedly asked for the hearing to be delayed. Comans reprimanded him for what the judge said was straying from the hearing's purpose, twice saying he had "an agenda."