

**Jl announces strike**  
KARACHI (INP): Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) Ameer Hafiz Naeemur Rehman announced country-wide shutter down strike on April 22 to express solidarity with the oppressed people of Palestine Addressing Gaza solidarity march in Karachi, Hafiz Naeem said that countries like South Africa and Ireland are standing in front against the Zionist forces.

# TTP, ISKP operating from Afghanistan: PM

## Asks Afghan govt to rein in terrorist groups involved in attacks inside Pakistan

LONDON (APP): Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif said he always called Afghanistan a brotherly neighbouring country.

“We always have to live like neighbours. It depends on us whether we live as good neighbours or cause conflicts,” he continued.

Shehbaz Sharif said, “Numerous times we gave message to the Afghan interim government that according to the Doha agreement, they will not allow the use of land of Afghanistan for terrorism in any way.”

“But unfortunately, TTP, ISKP and other terrorist organizations operate from there and they have martyred innocent people of Pakistan,” he noted.

The prime minister said the sacrifices rendered by people, armed forces, police and other law enforcement agencies would not go in vain.

“It is my sincere advice to Afghanistan that it should immediately rein in the terrorist organizations and should not allow use of its land by these elements,” he added.

He said, “Today Overseas Convention has started and Alhamdulillah it will be a large historic convention. Overseas Pakistanis are coming to their home Pakistan.”

Overseas Pakistanis work day and night and shine the name of Pakistan and send remittances of billions of dollars every year, he added.

“This year the remittances sent by overseas Pakistanis increased considerably,” he said, adding convention will be a great opportunity to talk to them. He said he would listen closely to the just demands of overseas Pakistanis and would implement them speedily as much as possible.

The Prime Minister further said that Pakistan would benefit from the expertise of Belarus in the agriculture sector by undertaking joint ventures in the country for the agriculture machinery presently being manufactured in Belarus.

Talking to journalists here Sunday, he said his visit to Belarus was beneficial and successful.

He said Allah Almighty had blessed Pakistan with minerals wealth, adding in Belarus, he visited a factory making machinery related to mines and minerals and with the grace of Allah cooperation would also be furthered in this field.

An understanding was reached with Belarus for sending 150,000 skilled Pakistani youth to Belarus and they would be sent purely on merit, he added.

He said Punjab Speed was Pakistan Speed, which had now become Super Pakistan Speed.

“We are serving the nation under the leadership of Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif. God willing, Pakistan, which is progressing and rapidly moving towards prosperity, is our destination,” he added.

“God willing, we will achieve this destination with collective efforts, hard work of day and night and with the prayers of the whole nation,” he remarked.

# Iran says talks with US to focus solely on nuclear issue

TEHRAN (AFP): Iran’s foreign ministry said Sunday that talks with the United States slated for next weekend will remain “indirect” with Omani mediation, and focused solely on the nuclear issue and lifting of sanctions.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and US Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff held talks Saturday in Muscat, marking the highest-level Iran-US nuclear negotiations since the collapse of a 2015 accord.

They agreed to meet again in seven days.

“Negotiations will continue to be indirect. Oman will remain the mediator, but we are discussing the location of future negotiations,” foreign ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei said in an interview with state TV.

He said the talks would only focus on “the nuclear issue and the lifting of sanctions,” and that Iran “will not have any talks with the American side on any other issue.”

Analysts had said the US would push to include on the agenda discussions over Iran’s ballistic missile programme along with Tehran’s support for the “axis of resistance” — a network of militant groups opposed to Israel.

Tehran has, however, maintained it will talk only about its nuclear programme.

Donald Trump in 2018 pulled out of the 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and world powers during his first term as US president.

He reimposed sweeping economic sanctions against Iran, which continued to adhere to the agreement for a year after Washington’s pullout but later began rolling back its own commitments.

Iran has consistently denied seeking to acquire nuclear weapons.

Saturday’s rare negotiations came weeks after Trump sent a letter to Iran’s supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei urging nuclear talks while warning of possible military action if Iran refuses.

Iran and the US separately described Saturday’s discussions as “constructive”.

Iran said the talks were held indirectly with Oman’s foreign minister acting as intermediary.

The negotiators, Araghchi and Witkoff, spoke directly for “a few minutes” after the talks, Tehran’s foreign ministry said.

Another round of talks will be held on Saturday, April 19.

Asked about the talks, Trump told journalists aboard Air Force One: “I think they’re going OK. Nothing matters until you get it done.”

The process took place in a “friendly atmosphere”, Omani Foreign Minister Badr Albusaidi said.

Several Iranian websites that track the unofficial exchange rate reported Sunday a strengthening of the Iranian rial to around 850,000 to the US dollar, down from more than one million in recent days.

“Turning point”

Iran, reeling from Israel’s pummelling of its allies Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza, is seeking relief from wide-ranging sanctions hobbling its economy.

Tehran has agreed to the meetings despite baulking at Trump’s “maximum pressure” campaign of ramping up sanctions and repeated military threats.

On Sunday, Iranian media largely welcomed the rare talks as a “decisive turning point” in relations between the longtime foes.

Iran’s conservative Javan daily praised the US for “not seeking to expand the negotiations to non-nuclear issues”.

The government-sponsored newspaper, Iran, described the discussions as “constructive and respectful,” quoting Araghchi.

Meanwhile, the reformist Shargh newspaper said it was a “decisive turning point” in Iran-US relations.

The hardline Kayhan newspaper, which was largely sceptical in the days leading up to the talks, lamented that Iran does not have a “plan B” while there was “no clear prospect for an agreement with Donald Trump.”

It, however, lauded the fact that the American side did not bring up “the dismantling of nuclear facilities” and “the possibility of a military attack” during the discussions.

Tehran and Washington have had no diplomatic relations since shortly after Iran’s 1979 Islamic Revolution that toppled the Western-backed shah.



GAZA CITY: A view shows a damaged church at a site where medics said two Israeli missiles hit a building inside the Al-Ahli Arab Baptist Hospital, shortly after patients were evacuated following a call from someone who identified himself with Israeli security, in Gaza City on Sunday. — Reuters photo

# Funeral prayer of martyred cops offered

PESHAWAR (APP): The funeral prayer for the martyred Excise police personnel was held at Police Lines Peshawar on Sunday.

The funeral prayer was attended by IGP Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Zulfiqar Hameed, CCPO Qasim Khan, SSP Operations and senior Excise officials.

Police and Excise officials were also present in large numbers to pay their respects to the fallen heroes.

According to the Excise Department, unknown assailants opened fire on the officers in the Nowshera area, resulting in the martyrdom of Excise Constable Mujahid Khan, Excise Constable Iftikhar, and driver Shabbir.

The incident has drawn strong reactions, and the Chief Secretary of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has sought a detailed report on the attack.

# Prof Khurshid Ahmad passes away

## F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Professor Khurshid Ahmad, a towering intellectual, visionary economist, and distinguished Islamic scholar, passed away on Sunday in Leicester, UK. As the Patron-in-Chief of the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), Islamabad, and a pioneering figure in Islamic economics and policy thought, his legacy of purpose-driven scholarship, ideological commitment, and service will continue to inspire generations.

Professor Khurshid Ahmad, born on March 23, 1932, in Delhi, was a passionate advocate for an Islamic worldview rooted in justice, equity, moral integrity, and human dignity.

Widely credited with founding the discipline of Islamic economic jurisprudence, he devoted his life to bridging the gap between faith and policy.

His contributions significantly shaped Pakistan’s intellectual and ideological contours, especially in the fields of education, development, and Islamic thought.

Professor Ahmad’s legacy is deeply institutional. As the patron-in-chief of the IPS, Islamabad, and co-founder of The Islamic Foundation in Leicester, UK, Professor Ahmad established platforms that nurtured independent thought, critical inquiry, and ethical leadership.

**Three terrorists killed**  
PESHAWAR (APP): In a joint operation conducted by the police and a local peace committee in Lakki Marwat, three terrorists were killed. According to police on Sunday, the exchange of fire took place in the forest area of Khankhel Manduzai, located within the jurisdiction of Tajori and Bargai police stations. The armed clash occurred when a group of around 25 terrorists was moving from one location to another.



RAWALPINDI: US Congress delegation called on Chief of Army Staff General Syed Asim Munir.

# US Congressmen COAS discuss regional security

**F.P. Report**

RAWALPINDI: A delegation of the United States Congress, led by Jack Bergman along with Thomas Souzzi and Jonathan Jackson called on Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Syed Asim Munir, NI (M) here Sunday.

Discussions during the meeting encompassed a range of issues of mutual interest, with particular emphasis on regional security and defence cooperation, said an Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) news release. Both sides reaffirmed the importance of sustained engagement based on mutual respect, shared values, and converging strategic interests.

The visiting U.S. lawmakers commended the Pakistan Armed Forces for their pivotal role in combating terrorism and acknowledged Pakistan’s enduring contributions to regional peace and stability.

They also expressed deep appreciation for Pakistan’s resilience and the strategic potential of its people, it further said.

Underscoring their respect for Pakistan’s sovereignty, the U.S. Congressional delegation conveyed a strong commitment to advancing broad-based bilateral cooperation, particularly in the domains of security, trade, investment, and economic development.

General Syed Asim Munir conveyed his appreciation to the delegation for their visit and reiterated Pakistan’s desire to further deepen and diversify its longstanding partnership with the United States in a manner that is mutually beneficial and respectful of each other’s national interests, the press release said.

During the meeting MoUs were also signed for training collaboration in the field of Information Technology.

**US Congressmen call on Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi**

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Interior Mohsin Naqvi held an important meeting with a delegation of U.S. Congressmen. The delegation included Congressmen Jack Bergman, Tom Suozzi, and Jonathan Jackson. Minister of State for Interior Tallal Chaudhry, Acting U.S. Ambassador Natalie Baker, and Federal Interior Secretary Khurram Agha were also present.

During the meeting, detailed discussion was held on bilateral relations and issues of mutual interest. Both sides also exchanged views on enhancing cooperation in the fields of economy, trade, and investment. Discussions were also held on security, counterterrorism, and border security.

Mohsin Naqvi said that strong and sustainable relations with the United States hold a key place in Pakistan’s foreign policy. He said the holding of Pakistan Caucus in the U.S. on April 30 is a welcome development. He emphasized that Pakistan stands as a wall between terrorism and the rest of the world.

He stressed that terrorism is a global challenge, and the international community must extend full cooperation to Pakistan. He emphasized that intelligence and technology sharing in the domain of counterterrorism is of utmost importance.

He further said that Pakistan’s immense sacrifices against terrorism are unmatched in the global context. He said that the visit of U.S. Congressmen will be crucial in highlighting Pakistan’s unprecedented role in the fight against terrorism. The Interior Minister welcomed the U.S. delegation’s participation in the Pakistan Minerals Investment Forum 2025. He added that The government will ensure every possible facility and full protection to the investors.

Minister of State for Interior Talal Chaudhry said that the Counter-Terrorism Dialogue, to be held in Islamabad in June, will play a key role in promoting mutual cooperation in the area of counterterrorism.

The U.S. Congressmen delegation said that there is a need to highlight Pakistan’s role in the war against terrorism.

They further said that the Pakistani community residing in the United States is very talented and hardworking.

# Pakistan flays killing of its nationals in Iran

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Sunday strongly condemned the inhumane and cowardly killing of its nationals in Iran.

In a statement, the Foreign Office Spokesperson said, “We hope for Iranian side’s full cooperation in investigating the matter and in timely repatriation of victims’ remains.”

“Eight Pakistani nationals were tragically killed yesterday in Mehrestan county, Sistan-Baluchistan province, located approximately 230 kilometers from the Pakistan-Iran border. Our Mission has already requested consular access to verify their identities,” he added.

He said the leadership and people of Pakistan were deeply saddened and perturbed over the tragic incident. The Prime Minister had expressed his deep condolences to the bereaved families.

“On the instructions of the Deputy Prime Minister/Foreign Minister, our Embassy in Tehran and our Consulate in Zahidan are in constant touch with the Iranian authorities for a comprehensive investigation to ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice as well as for prompt repatriation of the victims’ remains to Pakistan,” he added.

Further updates will be provided as soon as additional details regarding the identification of dead bodies and the circumstances leading to their tragic deaths become available, he concluded.

Meanwhile, Pakistan’s ambassador to Iran Muhammad Mudassir Tipu in a post on X said that in a despicable act of violence eight Pakistani nationals were killed in Mehrestan. “We are in touch with authorities in Iran to carry out a swift investigation and bring the perpetrators to justice. Iran has assured of its utmost cooperation,” he said.

He said, “Under Honorable PM & DPM’s instructions, their mortal remains will be sent to Pakistan at soonest possible. My deepest condolences to the bereaved families! May departed souls rest in peace.”

**PM expresses grief over killing of eight Pakistanis in Iran**

Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif Sunday expressed deep grief and sorrow over the cruel killing of eight Pakistanis in the area of Mehrestan, Sistan province in Iran.

He expressed grave concern over the killing of Pakistanis on Iranian land. He prayed for the departed souls and the bereaved families.

The prime minister said the menace of terrorism was devastating for all countries in the region.

He called for the implementation of a coordinated strategy of all countries in the region against terrorism.

He said the Iranian government, after immediately arresting the accused, should mete out just punishment to them and bring before the public reasons for this cruel act.

He directed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to contact with the families of the deceased Pakistanis and Pakistan’s embassy in Iran for the safe return of their dead bodies.

# Israeli missiles strike Gaza hospital, forcing evacuation

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza (AP): Israel struck a hospital in northern Gaza early Sunday, forcing patients to evacuate as attacks intensified.

The pre-dawn strike hit Al-Ahli Hospital in Gaza City, after Israel issued an evacuation warning, according to Gaza’s ministry of health. One patient died during the evacuation because medical staff were unable to provide urgent care, it said.

The hospital, run by the Diocese of Jerusalem, was attacked on Palm Sunday, which commemorates Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem.

Hours later, a separate strike on a car in Deir Al-Balah in central Gaza, killed at least seven people — six brothers and their friend — according to staff at the morgue of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital, which received the bodies.

Israel said it struck a command and control center used by Hamas at the hospital to plan and execute attacks against Israeli civilians and soldiers, without providing evidence. It said prior to the strike, steps were taken to mitigate harm, including issuing warnings, and using precise munitions and aerial surveillance.

The strikes came hours after Israel’s defense minister said that military activity would rapidly expand across Gaza and that people would have to evacuate from “fighting zones.” Israel also announced Saturday the completion of the Morag corridor, cutting off the southern city of Rafah from the rest of Gaza, with the military saying it would soon expand “vigorously” in most of the small coastal territory.

Israeli authorities have vowed to pressure Hamas to release the remaining 59 hostages, 24 believed to be alive, and accept proposed new ceasefire terms.

The director of Al-Ahli Hospital, Dr. Fadel Naim, said they were warned of the attack before it was struck. In a post on X, he wrote that the emergency room, pharmacy and surrounding buildings were severely damaged, impacting more than 100 patients and dozens of medical staff.





## PTI's false claims could harm Pakistan's progress: Ikhtiar Wali

ISLAMABAD (APP): Coordinator to the Prime Minister on Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Affairs Ikhtiar Wali Khan on Sunday criticized PTI, saying the nation can not afford their "false narratives and risky experiments" that could harm economic stability and progress.

Talking to PTV news channel, Ikhtiar Wali Khan criticized PTI's misinformation tactics and stated that PTI has been peddling false narratives through social media campaigns, deliberately misleading the nation. However, their deceitful strategies are now being exposed in public, and they will not be given another chance to spread propaganda, he said, adding, the nation is becoming increasingly aware of PTI's misinformation, which will ultimately hold them accountable for their actions, he said.

Wali emphasized that PTI's attempts to manipulate public opinion through lies and misinformation would no longer be tolerated. He expressed concerns that PTI seems to be seeking external assistance, while some PTI supporters believe a potential Trump presidency might help Imran Khan's situation due to their previously cordial relationship. PTI leadership is self-centered, prioritizing their own interests over the nation's well-being, he added.

Ikhtiar Wali praised PML-N, stating that the party is taking wise and informed decisions, steering the country towards progress and development. He highlighted the government's efforts to stabilize the economy, improve infrastructure and enhance the overall quality of life for citizens. The PML-N's policies and initiatives are yielding positive results, putting Pakistan on a path of sustainable growth and prosperity, he expressed.

## PHA cancels musical night for solidarity with Gaza victims

SARGODHA (APP): Parks and Horticulture Authority (PHA) Sargodha has cancelled musical night planned as a part of 7-day Flora Festival. PHA Media Consultant Malik Shafqat Awan said on Sunday that several religious figures in Sargodha had raised strong objections to the inclusion of musical program during the festival's night show.

In response, the PHA decided to limit the Flora Festival to only a flower exhibition, citing the ongoing Israeli atrocities in Gaza as a reason for scaling down the celebrations.

The duration of event has also been reduced from seven days to four, he said.

The flower exhibition, instead of being held at the PHA Head Office, would now take place at Company Bagh from April 16 to 19, he added.

## Saints' shrines teach brotherhood; Governor

RAWALPINDI (APP): Governor Punjab Sardar Saleem Haider Khan visited the famous Astana Aaliya Mohra Sharif shrine and offered special prayers for peace and prosperity of Pakistan. He was welcomed by Pir Dr. Ghulam Mohammad Gohar Nazeer Gohar, the spiritual leader and custodian of the shrine. According to the details, the Governor learned about the shrine's history and its role in promoting peace during the visit. Both leaders prayed together for Pakistan's unity and prosperity. Former Senate Chairman Nayyar Bukhari also joined the visit. "This holy place teaches us brotherhood and harmony," the Governor said. The Governor expressed gratitude for the warm welcome he was accorded on his arrival at the shrine. Before leaving, special prayers were offered for the country's safety and development.

# Peace, interfaith harmony top priority : Minister

LAHORE (APP): Federal Minister for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony Sardar Muhammad Yousaf has said that maintaining peace and harmony across the country remains top priority for the government.

Addressing the Interfaith Harmony Conference at a local hotel here on Sunday, he said efforts were underway to promote interfaith harmony and curb sectarianism, adding that all conspiracies by anti-state elements would be foiled with full force, and the government would not allow any group to spread unrest under the guise of religion.

The interfaith conference was also attended by Minister of State for Interfaith Harmony Kheal Das Kohistani, Punjab Minister for Minorities Affairs Sardar Ramesh Singh Arora, Chairman of the Central Ruet-e-Hilal Committee Syed Abdul Khahir Azad, Pakistan Ulama Council Chairman Allama Tahir Mahmood Ashrafi, Allama Zubair Ahmad Zaeher, Allama Hussain Ahmad Akbar, Allama Nasir Mehmood Madni, Pandit Bhagat Lal,

and Father James Channan, religious leaders and clerics from various faiths.

The religious minister stressed the need for mutual respect and peaceful coexistence among all faiths. "We must embrace our differences and live with love, respect, and unity. The Ministry of Religious Affairs is formulating a strategy aimed at fostering interfaith harmony nationwide," he announced.

He further said that minorities in Pakistan are entitled to full legal rights and protections, adding that the state bears the responsibility of safeguarding their religious freedoms and social welfare. "Our Constitution ensures equal rights for every citizen, regardless of their faith," he noted.

Praising the role of the armed forces, the minister said, "Our security forces are playing a vital role in ensuring national peace and stability. Their sacrifices must never be forgotten. Together, we will defeat every threat to our sovereignty and peace."

Highlighting Pakistan's inclusive approach, he said that non-Muslim religious festivals are officially celebrated in the country. "Just

last month, we celebrated Eid, Holi, Nowruz, all within the same period, reflecting the beauty of our diversity," he said.

Sardar Yousaf reiterated the government's resolve to curb sectarianism and take legal action against any group promoting religious violence. He assured that no compromise would be made on the rule of law and peaceful coexistence. "We will not allow any conspiracy to disturb the peaceful environment of our provinces. A stronger Pakistan will lead to a more prosperous public," he stressed.

The minister also strongly condemned the brutalities committed by Israeli forces in Gaza. "Although global powers express concern, unfortunately, they have failed to bring lasting peace to Gaza, Palestine, or Kashmir," he said.

He lamented that, despite ceasefire agreements, violence in Gaza persists, an ongoing tragedy he described as a stain on the conscience of humanity. He stressed that it is the duty of the United Nations and the Security Council to play an active role in restoring peace wherever injustice prevails.



**KARACHI:** The Federal Minister for National Health Services, Regulation and Coordination Syed Mustaf Kamal talking to media persons at Polio office.

## Karachi environmental crisis PDP Chief urges immediate govt action

KARACHI (PPI): Pasban Democratic Party (PDP) Chairman Altaf Shakoor said on Sunday that the megacity, Karachi, is not only facing the issues of law and order and bad governance but also grave environmental threats which should be given a serious attention by the government.

Highlighting the thinning tree cover as a major concern, Shakoor noted the severe lack of parks and green spaces, with the city's builder mafia occupying them. Despite Karachi's long coastline, he emphasized the absence of provincial and local government plans to develop mangrove forests and beach parks.

Shakoor pointed out the potential for urban

forests along Lyari and Malir rivers, lamenting the government's lack of interest beyond a few announcements.

Shakoor identified the acute shortage of drinking water as another critical issue. Residents are forced to use underground saline water, reducing the city's water table significantly.

He called for the development of lakes, ponds, and dug-wells to harvest rainwater and proposed desalination plants across the city to combat the spread of skin diseases and hepatitis, particularly in slum areas.

Addressing air pollution, Shakoor highlighted the burning of uncollected garbage and emissions from unfit vehicles as major con-

tributors. He also mentioned that large-scale construction activities are worsening air quality by adding dirt particles to the air.

Shakoor urged the government to prioritize Karachi's environmental challenges, ensure effective garbage collection, and address the issue of overflowing gutters. He stressed the need for clean, potable water for citizens and robust measures to control air pollution.

Criticizing the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation's performance despite collecting substantial municipal taxes through electricity bills, Shakoor called for improved governance and resolution of civic and environmental issues in Karachi.

## Pakistan back on track for progress: Rana

LAHORE, (APP): Federal Minister for Public Affairs Rana Mubashir Iqbal has said that the government, under the leadership of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, has provided significant relief to the public in electricity tariff and is preparing to share more positive developments in the near future.

Talking to the media along with MPA Mian Imran Javed and Rana Rashid, here on Sunday, he said that the storm of inflation, which seemed unstoppable, has now been contained due to the government's effective measures. "Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif is currently on an international visit and is expected to return with encouraging news for the nation," he added.

Rana Mubashir Iqbal said that the government is determined to generate employment opportunities and steer Pakistan toward economic revival. "The country was on the verge of collapse, and the public had lost hope. But now, by

the grace of Allah, Pakistan is back on the path of progress," he said.

The public affairs minister praised Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's leadership, calling it exemplary, and said that under his administration, what once seemed impossible has been made possible. He stressed that all scholars, leaders, and citizens must commit themselves to the protection and progress of Pakistan.

The minister praised the unwavering dedication of Pakistan's armed forces, acknowledging their sacrifices in safeguarding the nation. "Our armed forces are the pride of the nation," he said. "Standing in solidarity with them is not only our responsibility but a reflection of our commitment to a secure and prosperous Pakistan."

Rana Mubashir Iqbal also expressed concern over the challenges faced by farmers, particularly in the context of wheat procurement. He emphasized the need for a more

farmer-friendly policy and urged authorities to ensure that flour mill owners are required to purchase wheat directly from growers, enabling fair prices and timely payments. He said that farmers are not receiving fair prices for their wheat.

He warned that if the current crop goes unsold, it could discourage farmers from sowing wheat in the next season, posing a serious risk to food security. He also noted that Punjab's valuable agricultural land is under strain, calling for urgent measures.

"The authorities must ensure that every grain of wheat is purchased at a fair price," he stressed, adding that timely intervention is crucial to avoid long-term setbacks for the farming community. He also called for an immediate and practical policy framework to safeguard farmers' interests and reinvigorate the agricultural sector, which remains the backbone of Pakistan's economy.



**LAHORE:** Federal Minister for Religious Affairs Sardar Muhammad Yousuf, Minister of State Kehildas Kohistani, Allama Tahir Ashrafi, Allama Azad Kabir, Provincial Minister Ramesh Singh, Allama Ghulam Muhammad Akbar, and other dignitaries express solidarity by forming a hand chain during the Interfaith Harmony Conference held at a local hotel. —APP Photo

## Kamal urges parents to get children immunized

KARACHI (APP): The Federal Minister for National Health Services, Regulation and Coordination Syed Mustafa Kamal on Sunday said that the eradication of polio virus from environment was the responsibility of authorities working at grassroot levels and his Ministry issued guidelines and help in prevention methods for the same across the country.

He said that the new phase of anti-polio campaign would commence from April 21 in the country

and he urged the parents to get their children immunized against the polio virus for the healthy and better future of their children.

The Federal Health Minister Syed Mustafa Kamal talking to media persons after chairing a meeting with the officials of anti-polio and two MNAs from Karachi, said that the polio virus did not have any treatment but there were prevention measures to save children from it. He said that currently there were 44000 refusal cases of polio in the

country and out of them 34000 cases were in Karachi. He further said that out of 15000 refusals were being reported from Urdu speaking parents and 10000 from Pashto speaking families in the city.

The Minister said that only District East of Karachi had 27000 refusal cases of polio out of 34000 cases. He mentioned that the samples of polio virus in the environment had been reported from the entire Karachi district.

Kamal said that polio could be prevented through

anti-polio vaccination. Refuting the perception of polio vaccination's side or negative effects even any other rumor, he said that the anti-polio vaccination was totally safe and the parents should get their children vaccinated.

He said that the anti-polio vaccination was purchased by the UNICEF and it handed over by them to the government. The Federal Health Minister said that he was in contact with all Provincial Health Ministers for the effective health related resolutions.

## PPP-N alliance blamed for Pakistan woes

LAHORE (PPI): Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's senior figure, Mussarat Jamshed Cheema, on Sunday attributed the majority of Pakistan's challenges to the enduring partnership between the Pakistan People's Party and the Muslim League (N). She emphasized that this alliance is responsible for 90 percent of the country's issues.

Cheema argued that those in power are at the heart of the nation's problems. She highlighted the irony in the promises made by the current government, suggesting that Imran Khan is the only leader capable of addressing these serious challenges. In her statement, Cheema noted that when leaders express concern over Pakistan's difficulties, the public remains skeptical, often resorting to criticism of long-standing rulers. She posed a direct question to the current leadership about who bears responsibility for the country's deteriorating conditions. Instead of providing answers, she claimed, the government frequently turns to the PECA Act to deflect accountability.

The PTI leader stressed that the problems facing the nation are escalating, not diminishing. She called for bold, visionary decisions to tackle these issues, indicating that the current rulers alone cannot shoulder this responsibility.

## Trailer crushes two youth to death

KARACHI (INP): A trailer crushed two youth to death in the old city area near Boulton Market in the wee hours of Sunday, police said.

Infuriated people tried to beat the trailer driver Abid Ali but the police saved and taken him into custody.

Deceased youth identified as Noor Muhammad and Zahid and were residents of Usmanabad area of Lyari, police said. Police has registered a case of traffic mishap against trailer driver for reckless driving at Meethadar police station.

It is to be mentioned here that 11 heavy vehicles were set ablaze by angry mobs recently after an incident in North Karachi. Later a citizen Adnan was hit to death by a trailer at Vita Chowrangi. He was security supervisor at a private company. Another incident took place at Mansehra Colony in Landhi where a trailer killed a motorbike rider Masood Khan 25. Police arrested trailer driver after the incident.

## Ahsan calls for modern education, healthcare

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Professor Ahsan Iqbal on Sunday said the country's future hinged on equipping marginalized communities with modern education and access to quality healthcare.

Speaking at the first annual "NAROCON-1" conference at Narowal Medical College, he stressed the urgent need to expand both educational and medical infrastructure to address deep-rooted inequalities and drive national progress.

"The foundation of any society's development lies in the empowerment of its most underprivileged through education. A healthy, educated population is the backbone of a prosper-

ous nation," he added.

Sharing the confronted health challenges, he said the country bore one of the world's highest burdens of Hepatitis C and continued to grapple with diseases like diabetes, cancer, polio and a growing incidence of mental health disorders. He labeled these health crises as "major roadblocks" to Pakistan's socioeconomic growth.

To tackle these issues, Ahsan Iqbal mentioned a comprehensive, three-year national healthcare initiative under the "URAN PAKISTAN" program, under which Rs67 billion have been earmarked specifically for combating hepatitis and diabetes.

"The healthcare sector is being overhauled along modern lines," the minister

said, stressing that medical research must take center stage.

He highlighted ongoing efforts to decentralize higher education, adding campuses have been established in historically underserved regions, including Narowal, Noshki, Pishin, Khuzdar, Wadiah, Gwadar, Turbat, FATA, and Sindh.

He criticized those who opposed such expansion into remote areas, saying "Some self-proclaimed intellectuals sit on television and claim that new campuses should only be built in major cities."

He said true progress required by bridging the urban-rural divide, and reaffirmed the government's commitment to human capital development as a cornerstone of national policy.

## DC reviews Lahore development programme

LAHORE (APP): Deputy Commissioner Syed Musa Raza chaired a meeting on Sunday to review the weekly progress of the Lahore Development Programme, emphasizing timely and transparent execution of development projects in line with the vision of Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif.

The meeting, attended by Managing Director

Water and Sanitation Agency (WASA), Chief Officer Metropolitan Corporation Lahore (MCL), Assistant Commissioners, and relevant officials, assessed the ongoing schemes under the city's expansive infrastructure improvement plan.

Under the Lahore Development Programme, construction and rehabilitation of over 6,000 streets

had been targeted. Officials briefed the Deputy Commissioner that all development schemes were being monitored continuously through integrated dashboards to ensure transparency, accountability, and adherence to time-lines.

DC Syed Musa Raza said the development initiatives aim to resolve public grievances and improve civic amenities.



**HYDERABAD:** PPP leaders addressing public meeting at Rawal House Tando Jam.



## Students suffer in Matric Examination Lack of facilities raises concern over govt-run exam centers

Syed Adnan

PESHAWAR: Students across several districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are facing severe difficulties during the ongoing examinations due to the absence of basic facilities in government examination centers. Reports have emerged from Peshawar, Kohat, Karak, Hangu, Nowshera, Bannu, Orakzai, Charsadda, Mardan, Swabi, Khyber,

Upper Dir, Lower Dir, Swat, Malakand, and other areas highlighting these issues.

According to students and parents, many government schools functioning as exam centers lack essential amenities such as electricity, and surveillance cameras.

In several centers, even though cameras and fans are installed, they remain non-functional due to power outages, causing

further discomfort during the hot weather.

Examination staff are also troubled by the lack of facilities. The principal of a well-known school and college stated, "Despite all the challenges, exams are ongoing. While the government's anti-cheating measures are commendable, ensuring proper facilities in examination centers is equally important."

Meanwhile, questions are being raised about the actions of some board inspection teams, which are allegedly targeted only on prominent private schools' halls.

Students, parents, and teachers have collectively urged the provincial government to take immediate steps to improve conditions in examination centers, enabling students to perform without undue stress and anxiety.

## Muqam announces new team of PMLN culture wing

PESHAWAR (APP): Federal Minister Engr Amir Muqam who is also PMLN KP President here Sunday announced names of the new culture wing of the party.

He appointed Bibi Saeeda as President PMLN Cultural

Wing.

Naushaba Bibi has been appointed as Senior Vice President and Hilal alias Sobia Khan as General Secretary.

While congratulating the new office bearers of the

PMLN KP culture wing, Engr Amir Muqam expressed the hope that the new culture team will play key role in promotion of cultural values.

The reorganization of PMLN in Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa for betterment of its organization structure continues in KP.

The new leadership of PMLN cultural wing was announced by Engr Amir Muqam through a notification.

## PCP farewells two specialists for overseas assignments



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A simple but impressive ceremony was held at the Paraplegic Center Peshawar to bid farewell to two distinguished physical rehabilitation professionals embarking on international employment opportunities. Occupational Therapist Maria Gohar is heading to Ireland for a new position, while Speech-Language Pathologist Tariq Farooqi is

beginning a new chapter of his career in Qatar. Both professionals were highly commended for their dedicated services to PCP, and commemorative shields were presented to them by Chairman of the Board of Governors, Mr. Zia-ur-Rehman.

The event was also attended by the Chief Executive of the Center, Dr. Syed Muhammad Ilyas, Director Rehabilitation Dr. Amair Zeb, senior adminis-

trative officers, and other staff members, who extended their best wishes to the departing experts.

Speakers at the ceremony expressed pride in the fact that professionals trained at the Paraplegic Center Peshawar are proving their expertise on a global scale.

However, concerns were also raised over the growing trend of skilled individuals seeking employment abroad due to limited

resources and development opportunities in various sectors, including healthcare, within the country. The Center's administration expressed hope that dedicated and talented professionals like Maria Gohar and Tariq Farooqi will never forget their roots, their identity, or the people they began their careers with—and that they will continue to make Pakistan proud while working overseas.

## Social media: The challenge of diminishing morality

PESHAWAR (APP): "Every era on earth would be worse than the previous era and the best era is in which I am living," were the golden words of our holy Prophet Hazrat Mohammad (Peace Be Upon Him).

So, thereon, races after races and generations after generations, we are seeing ethical deterioration, moral turpitude and sectarian squalor.

This deterioration was gradual for ages since the social media onslaught that validated another saying of the Holy Prophet; "A time will come when your sins committed in solitude would ruin your good deeds on the Day of Judgment."

These assertions can be seen validly applying on present era as unprecedented use of social media, if though transforming global communication scenario through unparalleled connectivity and information sharing, was also rapidly deteriorating our moral values.

Immoral videos, obnoxious stuff and fake news posted on social media had started causing negative effects on the social fabric in countries like ours.

Most of time the people, especially political followers and the youth are seen busy in abusing, mud-slinging and character assassination of rivals on social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter now X, Instagram and TikTok.

"Morality refers to principles that govern human behavior in terms of right and wrong and ethical theories emphasize duty-based morality. But, both of these are chal-

lenged by social media onslaught," said Dr. Jamil Khan, a professor at Peshawar University.

How these platforms work is really thought-provoking. If anybody is seeing any religious post, listening a sermon or recitation, he also finds some semi-nude pictures of white models or celebrities.

This is very lethal for nurturing minds of youth who can be swayed by any such post or video easily and parents and saner segment of every society are extremely worried.

"Besides increasing obscenities and vulgarity; another challenge associated to social media is online anonymity – significantly increasing aggressive behavior in youth," Dr. Jamil said.

If we go beyond moral aspect for a while, excessive scrolling and searching also cost much to our people with even labor class earning Rs 1000 a day is seen massively scrolling.

According to estimates, internet users in Pakistan swelled to a record 111 million in January this year with about 71.90 million people using social media. This tendency is alarming in countries like Pakistan with weaker checks and balances systems.

In our country, around 188.9 million cellular connections (77.8 percent) of total population are active, Facebook users have jumped to record 44.50 million; 71.70 million population use YouTube, 17.30 million Instagram, 54.38 million TikTok and 30.21 million snapchat.

No doubt there is lot of productive information on

these platforms and thousands of our youth study and work online and earn millions of dollars.

But, this ratio is minimal as compared to those fruitlessly scrolling these media platforms.

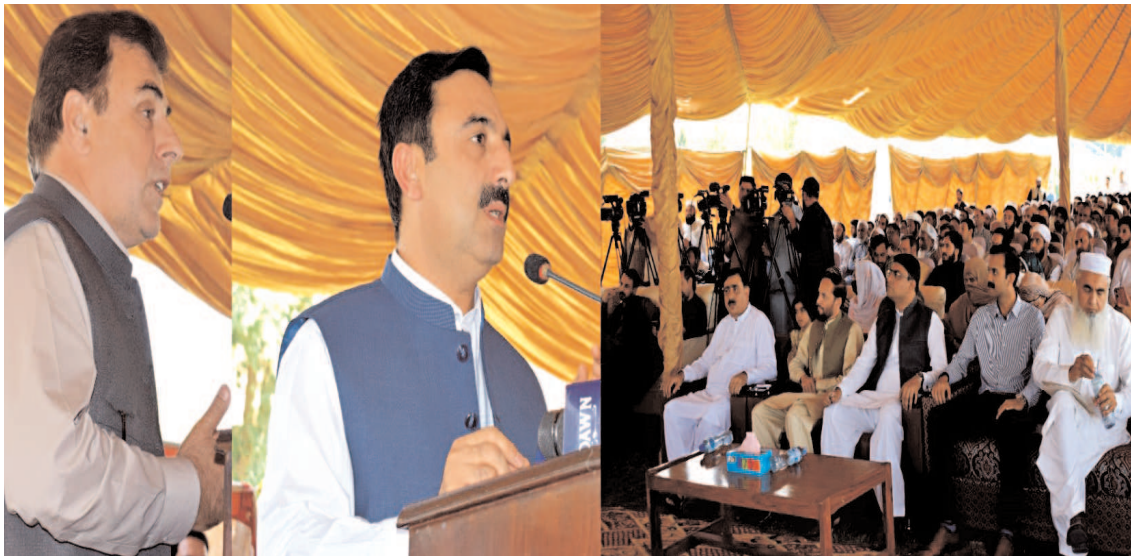
In the modern world these social media tools are also used for narratives building and uprising and Arab spring is a valid example where rulers were overthrown through social media sponsored uprising.

"Intolerance and behavior changes mostly caused by social media invasion emerged as big challenge and necessary laws and regulations are required to protect people especially youth and children from its negative effects," remarked Prof. Dr. Muhammad Ibrahim, former Director Education.

"Physical absence and lack of accountability has encouraged users to act unethically and irrespective of public sentiments and social media continues to become a breeding ground for moral decline," he mentioned.

Therefore, these experts have urged educational institutions to integrate digital ethics and media literacy into their curriculums, teach users about use of social media platforms and interact responsibly and the parents to have strict vigil on their children in use of social media.

Ikhtair Wali, Special Assistant the Prime Minister says the government has introduced amendments in PECA (Prevention of Electronic Cybercrimes Act 2025) to control cyber-crimes, fake news and immoral videos through legal means.



PESHAWAR: Chief Secretary of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Shahab Ali Shah and Chairman, BISE Peshawar Riaz Khan Mehsood addressing a grand coordination meeting of the invigilation staff to stop the cheating in examinations.

## City Traffic Police takes action against 388,585 violators in 2025

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The City Traffic Police took action against 388,586 individuals for violating traffic laws in the first quarter of 2025. According to Chief Traffic Officer (CTO) Haroon Rashid Khan, a significant decrease in traffic accidents has been observed compared to the same period last year. He credited this improvement to better traffic management and stricter enforcement.

During the reporting period, the department's helpline (1915) received 1,220 calls. Of these, 1,110 were complaints that were successfully resolved, while the remaining 110 were general inquiries related to the traffic police's services and operations.

The report highlights that a large number of vio-

lators were fined for various offenses, including not wearing helmets, driving without a license, wrong-way driving, using tinted windows, parking in no-parking zones, and using mobile phones while driving. Other violations included failure to yield, underage driving, signal violations, not wearing seat belts, overloading, and one-wheeling. Action was also taken against individuals operating unregistered vehicles, driving without permits, and encroaching on public roads. Commercial properties misused without proper parking arrangements were also penalized.

The City Traffic Police continued its awareness campaigns across the city, distributing over 12,000 pamphlets and 4,200 booklets containing information about traffic laws. To pro-

mote road safety, 900 helmets were distributed among citizens. Awareness sessions and seminars were also held in 72 educational institutions to educate students on traffic rules and responsible driving.

Efforts to modernize the department are well underway. All traffic police vehicles have been equipped with GPS trackers. Real-time traffic updates and alternative route information are shared with the public through FM radio and social media platforms, which are updated every 15 minutes. The e-challan system is helping track repeat violators efficiently, while live sessions on YouTube feature experts discussing road safety, law, health, and education.

A total of 1,202 citizens have received formal driv-

ing training at traffic schools established according to international standards. Mobile workshop services assisted 820 citizens facing vehicle issues during travel. Meanwhile, the Emergency Response Squad is working daily to ensure smooth traffic flow in the city. To further strengthen monitoring, drones are being used to observe all major traffic points across Peshawar.

CTO Haroon Rashid Khan reaffirmed the department's commitment to making the City Traffic Police a modern and efficient force. He stated that all available resources will continue to be utilized to enforce traffic laws and ensure road safety, with the ultimate goal of turning the department into a role model for the rest of the province.

## KPTMA flays Off-Grid (Captive Power Plants) Levy Ordinance 2025

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Chairman, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Textile Mills Association (KPTMA), Sikandar Kuli Khan Khattak, condemns the Federal Government's recently promulgated Off-Grid (Captive Power Plants) Levy Ordinance 2025 and attributed it a direct assault on the constitutional rights of gas-producing provinces and a death warrant for Pakistan's industrial sector. Under the new Ordinance, captive power producers (CPPs) are slapped with an additional levy of Rs. 791 per MMBTU, inflating the cost of natural gas to Rs. 4,291 per MMBTU with further increases of 10% in July 2025, 15% in February 2026, and 20% in August 2026.

This unprecedented hike is being imposed across the country, including on provinces like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa that are net exporters of natural gas. "This is nothing short of economic tyranny," Mr. Khattak declared. "KP produces gas at around \$4 per MMBTU, yet we are being forced to pay over \$14 to use it. Which is more than the cost of Imported RLNG," he added.

The government's justification that this is an IMF-mandated reform was dismissed outright by the KPTMA Chairman. "Let's be clear: if the

added.

Mr. Khattak criticized the move as a blatant violation of Article 158 of the Constitution, which mandates that provinces producing natural gas must be given priority in meeting their own energy needs. By imposing an indiscriminate levy, the federal government has trampled constitutional guarantees, betrayed the trust of federating units, and exposed its bias against gas-rich but economically underrepresented regions.

"They tried to impose WACOG to neutralize our natural advantage. That failed due to constitutional resistance. Now they've returned through the backdoor with an even worse weapon: this so-called Off-Grid Levy. This time, they are not just equalizing gas prices but penalizing CPPs for using their own resources to generate power. Rather than addressing the overall gas price issue, they've singled out industrial consumers who rely on self-generation as the scapegoats for any deficit or rising costs," he added.

The government's justification that this is an IMF-mandated reform was dismissed outright by the KPTMA Chairman. "Let's be clear: if the

IMF is pushing for measures that destroy Pakistan's productive capacity, then it is our government's duty to resist, not comply blindly. Hiding behind IMF dictates while strangling local industry is an abdication of responsibility," said Mr. Khattak.

He further warned that after decimating the power sector under WAPDA, the government now seems determined to turn the gas sector into a graveyard as well. If captive power producers are forced out of the gas system, who will be left to buy this expensive gas? The government is already charging KP industries the highest rates, and then using our payments to cross-subsidize other sectors and regions.

The textile sector, particularly in KP, is already reeling under the weight of rising input costs, supply chain disruptions, and policy uncertainty. Several mills have shut down in recent months. This new levy threatens to wipe out what remains of the industrial base in the province.

The implications are staggering mass unemployment, particularly among low-skilled workers and women, collapse

of exports, further worsening the balance of payments crisis, deindustrialization of KP, deepening regional economic disparities and fueling discontent and erosion of investor confidence, both domestic and foreign.

KPTMA now urgently appeals to the Federal Government to immediately withdraw the Off-Grid Levy Ordinance 2025. The only remaining advantage that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had in terms of its industrial competitiveness has been nullified.

What, then, is the government planning to do with

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, a province that is already economically disadvantaged, landlocked, distant from major markets, and grappling with the consequences of terrorism? By imposing such burdens on the province's industries, the government risks driving KP's economy into irreversible decline, worsening unemployment, and further marginalizing the province. "The government must reconsider this unfair decision and engage in immediate dialogue with provincial stakeholders to come up with an equitable solution." Mr. Khattak concluded.

## Injured Qari of Pishtakhara firing succumbs to injuries

PESHAWAR (APP): Qari Muhammad Shahid, who was critically injured in a recent target killing incident in Pishtakhara area here, succumbed to his injuries and embraced

martyrdom, police informed on Sunday.

Police said unidentified gunmen had fired at two people after Isha prayer a few days ago, resulting in the martyrdom of Maulana

Ijaz Abid on the spot, while Qari Muhammad Shahid was seriously wounded.

He had been receiving treatment at the hospital for the past four days but

could not survive due to the severity of his injuries.

The incident had sparked strong protests from local residents who demanded immediate arrest of the accused.

## Grand coordination meeting held under chairmanship of CS

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A Grand Coordination Meeting was held under the chairmanship of Chief Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Syed Shahab Ali Shah, at the Peshawar Education Board to ensure transparency in the ongoing matriculation examinations, provide facilities to students, and prevent cheating. The meeting was attended by Commissioner Peshawar Division and Chairman Peshawar Education Board

Riaz Khan Mehsood, Secretary Peshawar Board Mehdi Jan, Additional Secretary of Education Muhammad Shoaib, Controller of Examinations, and examination staff from districts under the Peshawar Board including Peshawar, Charsadda, Upper Chitral, Lower Chitral, the tribal district of Mohmand, and Khyber District.

According to details, participants of the meeting reiterated their commitment to play their full role

in upholding transparency and curbing cheating in matric exams, in line with the provincial government's vision. Addressing the gathering, Chief Secretary Syed Shahab Ali Shah said that due to government efforts, the cheating mafia is being defeated, and the day is not far when it will be completely eradicated from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. He emphasized that deserving students will get their rightful opportunities.

He stated that curbing cheating in exams is only

possible with the cooperation of examination staff. Teachers play the most crucial role in building societies and nations, and real progress is possible through them.

He noted that despite limited facilities in the past, academic performance remained commendable. Work is ongoing to eliminate cheating from matric exams, and the Peshawar Board's efforts in this regard are exemplary, encouraging other boards to follow suit.





## In brief

## Ultrasound machine installed

MULTAN (APP): In a significant step towards modernizing veterinary healthcare, Punjab government has fulfilled another promise made to livestock farmers by equipping the Jalalpur Pirwala Veterinary Hospital with an advanced ultrasound machine. Situated in the confluence of two rivers, the tehsil holds great importance for agriculture and livestock. The installation of ultrasound machine would revolutionize animal healthcare in the region by enabling accurate and early diagnosis of internal diseases, pregnancy detection, and reproductive issues in cattle. Livestock expert Dr Jamshaid Akhtar said the machine would not only help improve treatment outcomes but also reduce mortality and economic losses for farmers. It marks a major leap toward evidence-based veterinary practices in South Punjab. Farmers and local communities have lauded the initiative, calling it a much-needed facility that brings modern diagnostic services closer to their doorsteps.

## AJK to have airport

MUZAFFARABAD (INP): The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz-led federal government has decided to build an airport in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) on the demand of overseas Pakistanis. Building an airport in AJK was a long-standing demand of overseas Pakistanis. In this context, a letter from British Members of Parliament of Kashmiri origin has also surfaced, supporting the demand. British MPs had written to the Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, urging the construction of the airport. In Islamabad, the Airports Authority has published an advertisement to hire a consultancy firm for the project.

12 injured in accident  
Abid Buneri

BUNER: 12 passengers including two kids four women and six male injured when datsun pic up turtled ater hitting a road side safety wall near Shaheeda Sar in Chaghorzai tehsel Buner district on Sunday. The locals rushed to the spot and evacuated the injured and transported to near by RHC Gulbandai Chaghorzai Buner. The locals confirmed the incident occurred due to over speed when the driver lost control over the vehicle while negotiating a sharp turn in speed. They confirmed the vehicle turtled after hitting road side safety otherwise it would has felt into hundred feet deep ravine and there might be casualties. According to rescue 1122 sources, five injured were referred to major hospitals in Mardan and Peshawar from DHQ hospital Daggar while rest of minor injured admitted in lical EHC Gulbandai Chaghorzai Buner. The injured included Yasrullah, Fatima Bibi, Rafiullah, Junaid Khan, Idris Khan, Sardar, Anisur Rahman, Jamalain, Aminur Rahman, Samira Bibi, Ibrahim and unknown women. Among them, Junaid Khan, Idris, Anees Ahmed, Aneesur Rehman, Samira Bibi have been transferred to a major hospital in Mardan, Peshawar due to their critical conditions. The local elders and youths who were present on the spot have described the careless iver speeding behavior of the drivers in Chaghorzai as a very dangerous trend due to which road traffic accidents have become routine in the mountainous ranges of Chaghorzai in which precious human lives are lost and valuable vehicles are destroyed.

## Grang Jirga held for peace, unity, counter-extremism



DERA ISMAIL KHAN (APP): A grand Jirga was held at Chehkan Fort under the leadership of Major General Naiknam Muhammad Baig, General Officer Commanding 40 Division (Al-Burq). The gathering was attended by a large number of prominent religious scholars, spiritual leaders, and tribal elders from Dera Ismail Khan, Lakki Marwat, and Tank. Addressing the Jirga, the GOC spoke in detail about the regional security situa-

tion, the sacrifices of law enforcement agencies in maintaining peace and stability, and the importance of promoting the national narrative.

He emphasized that it is essential for the public, religious leadership, civil institutions, and armed forces to unite and work in harmony in order to overcome the challenges facing the country.

He urged the religious leaders to guide the people in a positive direction and take a firm stand against

extremism on the intellectual front.

He made it clear that no ideology, movement, or personal interest should be placed above national security and collective progress.

The participating scholars and elders appreciated the efforts of the law enforcement agencies and pledged their full support. The various proposals were also presented during the session. The participants expressed their commitment to spreading the message of peace, unity, and harmony within their respective spheres of influence.

In conclusion, it was unanimously decided that every possible effort would be made at the local level to eradicate extremism, restore trust in state institutions, and ensure sustainable peace in the society. At the end, the GOC presented copies of the Holy Quran to all participants as a goodwill gesture.

## KP Law Minister greets DBA Kohat new cabinet



## F.P. Report

KOHAT: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Law and Parliamentary Affairs Aftab Alam Advocate Saturday visited the Kohat Courts to congratulate the newly elected office-bearers of District Bar Association (DBA) Kohat on their brilliant victory and expressed his best wishes.

It may be recalled that in the Annual Elections of the District Bar Association Kohat for the year 2025-26, Insaf

Lawyers Forum (ILF) supported candidate Malik Aman Advocate was elected as President while ILF candidate Muhammad Mudassar Advocate was elected as General Secretary with a thumping majority.

Similarly, the ILF's Farid Bangash and Fehmida Naz were also elected unopposed as Joint Secretary and Finance Secretary respectively.

The Law Minister, while greeting all the successful candidates of ILF Kohat, said that Pakistan

Tehreek-e-Insaf pays tribute to ILF Kohat for its hard work and key success. This success is clear proof that the legal community also stands with Imran Khan's ideology of law and the constitution, he added.

Aftab Alam Advocate assured the newly elected cabinet of the Kohat Bar Association of all possible support from the government and expressed the hope that it will work wholeheartedly for the supremacy of law and the constitution and provision of justice to the people.

## Successful test flight of Drone Sprayer in Karak

## F.P. Report

KARAK: On the special directives of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Agriculture Major (R) Muhammad Sajjad Barakwal, a successful test flight of Drone Sprayer was conducted under the supervision of the District Director Agriculture Karak Dr. Jan Muhammad along-with the Divisional Monitoring Officer Shams Iqbal.

They observed the test flight of the Drone Sprayer at the District Director Agriculture

Office Karak and declared it successful.

Explaining the importance and usefulness of the said modern Drone Sprayer, the District Director Agriculture said that it has the ability to spray a large area in the shortest possible time, which saves water as well as time and the correct use of agricultural chemicals achieves the desired results in the minimum amount.

He added that this is a new innovation in the extension department of the Agriculture

Department, District Karak.

It may be noted that the Minister Agriculture Sajjad Barakwal has specially selected District Director Agriculture Karak Dr. Jan Muhammad for the development and improvement of the agricultural sector in Karak district so that modern techniques and methods can be used in agriculture here and the per acre production of various crops can be increased in the province in general and in the Karak district in particular.

## Early cotton sowing shows promising progress

MULTAN (APP): Punjab's cotton cultivation season for 2025-26 has begun with encouraging signs, particularly in southern parts of the province where early sowing continues gains momentum despite regional variations.

According to Crop Reporting Service early sowing has been completed on 842,000 acres across the province till April 08 that accounts for 84 percent of the set target of one million acres. This year, the provincial agriculture department had earmarked a target of one acre for early sowing, recognizing its pivotal role in improving cotton yields, protecting crops from pests and maximizing profits for farmers.

South Punjab leads in progress with over 85 percent of the intended coverage with its districts like Multan, Bahawalpur and Dera Ghazi Khan showing varying degrees of performance.

Multan stands out with an impressive over 90 percent sowing rate, followed by Bahawalpur at 80 percent and

Dera Ghazi Khan at 75 percent. The strong performance in these districts is attributed to favorable temperatures and better awareness among farmers about benefits of early cultivation.

However, situation in northern districts of the province was a bit sluggish due to varying weather conditions, water availability issues and lesser focus on cotton as a major cash crop.

"The season witnessed a significant increase in early sowing of cotton," said Iftikhar Ali Sahu, Secretary Agriculture Punjab. "Special incentive package announced by Chief Minsiter Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif for early cotton sowing had encouraged farmers."

Sahu said under the Agriculture Department Punjab, a timely awareness campaign was launched across six divisions to promote early sowing, resulting in the completion of sowing on more than 800,000 acre.

"The area brought under early cotton sowing is double

than last year. All farmers engaged in early cotton sowing have been registered and the record of growers has also been validated by third party," he stated.

Sahu said during the campaign the field staff from Agriculture Extension Wing personally engaged 266,000 farmers registering 180,000 farmers out of whom 145,000 practically cultivated early cotton.

He also informed that only triple gene varieties were recommended for early cotton cultivation and keeping in view the prevailing climatic changes, the researchers have been assigned to work on new climate-smart cotton varieties.

"Second phase of cultivation is in progress. Field formations have been directed to accelerate cotton advisory services as this is the most important and crucial phase of cotton cultivation to continue until April 30," he explained. "The third phase will continue from May 1st May up till May 25."

Commenting on early sow-



HYDERABAD: Central President PPP Women Wing, Faryal Talpur, President PPP Sindh Nisar Khuro and other leaders attending public meeting at Rawal House Tando Jam.

KP govt build canals for Karak: Barkwal  
F.P. Report

KARAK: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Agriculture Major (R) Sajjad Barakwal has said that the Mines and Minerals Amendment Act will not be passed on anyone's advice or in a hurry. Detailed briefing will be given to the parliamentarians on Monday in this regard and their viable and useful suggestions will be included. The amendment act will benefit the province by Rs.40 billion. PTI's one-year performance remained excellent. Earlier, the province did not even have the 10 days' salary of employees, but due to the best policy, now the province has 3 months' salary surplus.

While giving briefing at the District Press Club Karak on the one-year performance of the provincial government, Sajjad Barakwal said that revenue from tax and non-tax collection has increased by 50 %, while this year ADP increased by 33 %, for which an additional Rs.30 billion will be received and Rs.30 billion will be released immediately.

The Agriculture Minister further said that Rs.10,000 were given to millions of people in the Ramadan package, while solar systems are being provided through draw in a transparent manner, regardless of political affiliation. In addition, a meeting has been called next week regarding Salt and Gypsum City, in which a detailed review will be conducted. He added as per his commitment, approval of the medical college, upgradation of the hospital, similarly, a canal from the Kurram Tangi Dam and an uplift canal from the Sindh River will be brought, which will bring a green revolution in the area.

The Minister also said that the Kohat division owes Rs.22 billion Royalties in oil and gas against the provincial government, on which it was decided that this year's royalty fund will be released by June 30, while in our calculations, if mark-ups are applied to the fund for last many years, we have an arrears of Rs 96.billion.

## Int'l Mine Action Day commemorated

## F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: The Pakistan Red Crescent Society (PRCS), in collaboration with the local administration, arranged a function at the district assembly hall here the other day to commemorate the International Mine Action Day. The speakers emphasized the urgent need to raise awareness about landmines, unexploded ordnance (UXOs), and other explosive remnants of war, and to promote safe behaviours within vulnerable communities.

The event was attended by school principals, social activists, officials of Rescue 1122 and Civil Defense staff, volunteers, and students from various educational institutions.

Mr. Muhammad Islam, PRCS district secretary

highlighted the significance of International Mine Action Day in fostering a culture of preparedness and community safety. A detailed awareness session was delivered by Mr. Bakht e Rahman, who provided critical information on the risks posed by explosive remnants and the importance of reporting suspicious objects to relevant authorities.

Speakers including Muhammad Saleem, Principal, GHS Balambat, Shafiq ur Rahman, retired Agriculturist, Taj Muhammad from Bomb Ddisposal Unit, social activists Ibrash Pasha and Akbar Khan underscored the deadly risks associated with UXOs and the need for continued public education and vigilance.

A moving testimony was shared by Mr. Javed

Anwar, a survivor of a UXO incident, who recounted his personal experience. He urged the audience, particularly students and youth, never to touch or approach suspicious items and to immediately report such findings to the police or concerned authorities.

The Additional Deputy Commissioner (General) commended the PRCS and emphasized the importance of expanding mine risk education to all government schools, especially in remote areas near the Afghanistan and Bajaur borders. He stressed that widespread awareness is key to preventing future incidents and saving lives.

The ceremony concluded with the distribution of gifts among two UXO victims as a gesture of solidarity and support.

## Kundi attends Khatm-e-Nubuwwat conference

TALAGANG (APP): Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Faisal Karim Kundi, paid a visit to Sughra Sharif in Talagang District on Sunday, where he participated as the chief guest at the grand "International Khatm-e-Nubuwwat Conference" held at the Shah Hamdan Islamic Complex.

The conference was attended by a number of prominent figures including Iranian Ambassador to Pakistan, Dr. Reza Amiri Moghaddam, former Federal Minister for Religious Affairs Hamid Saeed Kazmi, and Khurram Nawaz Gandapur, a senior leader of Tehreek-e-Minhaj-ul-Quran, along with various religious scholars and spiritual leaders.

In his address, Governor Faisal Karim Kundi emphasized that belief in the Finality of Prophethood is a unanimous and fundamental tenet of the Muslim Ummah. "The belief in



Khatm-e-Nubuwwat is the cornerstone of Islam, and without complete faith in it, one cannot be considered a Muslim," he said.

He extended congratulations to Syed Qasim Ali Hamdani, Syed Mubarak Ali Hamdani, and Sahibzada Syed Maqsood Hamdani for organizing the spiritually enriching gathering, saying that such conferences play a vital role in promoting religious awareness and understanding.

Highlighting the importance of the traditional spiritual centers known as khanqahs, Governor Kundi said these institutions are essential for humanitari-

an service and spiritual training.

"In the current times, it is crucial that khanqahs continue to spread the message of peace, love, and tolerance for the reformation of society," he added.

Addressing issues of extremism and terrorism in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, the Governor called on religious scholars and political leaders to come together and play a united role in combating such threats.

Reaffirming the Islamic belief, he declared, "The chain of Prophethood concluded with Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him), and no prophet will come after him." Referring to Pakistan's Constitution of 1973, Governor Kundi praised former Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto for officially declaring Ahmadis as a non-Muslim minority, thereby safeguarding the belief in the Finality of





## Two prison officers stabbed by Manchester bombing plotter stable

LONDON (AP): Two prison officers allegedly stabbed by one of the plotters of a deadly bomb attack at an Ariana Grande concert in Manchester, England, eight years ago are in a stable condition in the hospital, the union representing them said Sunday.

Hashem Abedi, who in August 2020 was convicted of 22 counts of murder and sentenced to at least 55 years in prison for helping plan the 2017 attack, threw hot cooking oil over three

officers on Saturday before stabbing them with "homemade weapons," according to the Prison Officers Association.

Two male officers sustained life-threatening injuries including burns, scalds and stab wounds in the "unprovoked" and "vicious" attack at Frankland prison in the northeast of England, it added.

A female officer was released from the hospital on Saturday.

The union's national

chairman, Mark Fairhurst, said the attack was carried out in a separation center where inmates are allowed to use cooking facilities.

"To allow that type of prisoner to access the kitchen and use of the utensils that can be used as weapons against staff, and can inflict serious harm on staff, that needs to be removed immediately," he told the BBC. "We're now worried about the knock-on effect of this and copycat incidents."

Abedi was convicted of

assisting with the Manchester terror plot, in which his suicide bomber brother Salman Abedi killed 22 people by detonating a bomb hidden in a knapsack as fans were leaving the Grande concert. In addition to those killed, more than 260 people were wounded and hundreds of others were left with psychological injuries.

Counterterrorism officials are leading the investigation into the attack, with assistance from local police.



SUMY, UKRAINE: Rescuers work at the site of Russian ballistic strike next to bodies covered in foil blankets on Sunday in Sumy, Ukraine.

## Hong Kong's last major opposition party moves towards disbanding

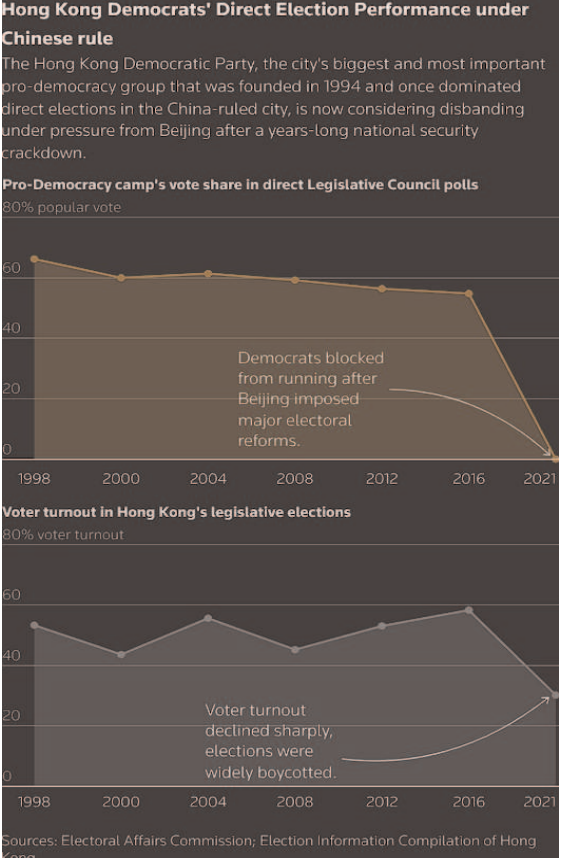
HONG KONG (Reuters): Hong Kong's last remaining major opposition party took a key step towards disbanding itself on Sunday after a special meeting approved arrangements to do so in the face of pressure from China, amid a national security crackdown.

Five senior members of the Democratic Party had earlier told Reuters that Chinese officials or middlemen had warned it in recent months to disband or face serious consequences, including possible arrests.

The party, founded three years before Hong Kong's return to Chinese rule from Britain in 1997, has been the Asian financial hub's flagship opposition, uniting democratic forces to push Beijing on democratic reforms, and to uphold freedoms.

Party head Lo Kin-hei told reporters that 90 percent of 110 members had voted at Sunday's meeting for a three-person committee to start making arrangements for disbandment, including resolving legal and accounting matters.

"I hope Hong Kong's political parties ... will continue to work for the people," Lo said at the party's



headquarters. "We have always hoped to serve the Hong Kong people, and to do things that are good for society." After the panel completed its work, a final vote on dissolution would

be held in coming months, Lo added. Finalisation of the move requires a majority vote of 75 percent.

Lo did not give an exact date for completion of disbandment, but said it could

be as late as next year, adding, "Until the final dissolution, the party will keep on with its usual work."

If the party disbands, it would mark the end of nearly 30 years of opposition party politics in Hong Kong.

At least five Democratic Party members are currently in jail or held in custody under a national security law that was imposed on Hong Kong by China in 2020 in response to mass pro-democracy protests the year before.

Yeung Sum, one of the founders of the Democratic Party and a former chairman, described the party's endorsement of preparations for disbandment as "a pity".

"I believe people in Hong Kong after experiencing democracy, open political system and the rule of law, they won't forget and give it up. The political culture and the fight for democracy will carry on in H.K. in a peaceful ... manner," he said.

China says the security law has brought stability to Hong Kong and rejects claims by some countries such as the United States that it has been used as a tool of repression.

## British parliamentarian refused entry to Hong Kong

HONG KONG (AP): A British member of parliament was refused entry to Hong Kong last week, the first to have received such treatment since the former British colony's return to Chinese rule in 1997.

Wera Hobhouse, a member of the Liberal Democratic Party representing Bath, wrote on social media platform Bluesky: "Authorities gave me no explanation for this cruel and upsetting blow. I hope the Foreign Secretary will recognise that this is an insult to all parliamentarians and seek answers from the Chinese

Ambassador."

Hobhouse said she flew to Hong Kong from the United Kingdom with her husband to visit their newly-born grandchild, whom she was unable to see or hold.

The British Consulate in Hong Kong replied to an Associated Press inquiry, saying it is aware that a U.K. member of parliament was denied entry into Hong Kong on Thursday and it was "raising this urgently" with the city's authorities.

There was no immediate response from authorities in Hong Kong. However, in similar previous cases, they have

said they give no explanations for refusing to allow entry.

Hobhouse is one of more than 40 parliamentarians on the Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China that scrutinizes Beijing's human rights record. Beijing objects viscerally to all such criticism and has rendered the Sino-British Agreement under which Hong Kong was turned over to Chinese rule null and void. It has also slapped travel and financial sanctions on various Hong Kong officials who took part in the 2019 protests.

Since its return to

China after 155 years, Hong Kong has seen diminishing Western-style civil liberties and has lost a high degree of autonomy despite promises by the ruling Communist Party in Beijing to keep the status quo for at least 50 years.

Pro-democracy protests that paralyzed Hong Kong in 2019 led to a crackdown that has all but silenced dissent through restricted elections, media censorship and a China-imposed national security law that saw a slew of opposition politicians jailed. Dozens of civil society groups have closed down.

## As tariffs put trade between China and the US in peril, Chinese businesses ponder the future

BEIJING (AP): When the first two rounds of 10% tariffs hit, Zou Guoqing, a Chinese exporter, groaned but didn't find the barriers insurmountable. He gave up some of his profits and offered his client, a snow-bike factory in Nebraska, price cuts ranging from 5% to 10%. It seemed to work: The factory agreed to a new order of molds and parts.

But when President Donald Trump announced an additional 34% universal tariff on Chinese goods on April 2, Zou, who has been exporting to the United States for more than a decade, was incredulous.

"There's not a thread of feasibility," said Zou, who does business in the eastern Chinese city of Ningbo. "It looks like I would have no choice but give up trading with the U.S."

Then came 50% more from Trump, followed by another increase that pushed the universal tariff on Chinese goods to 145%, and Zou said he now could only hope that Trump and Chinese leader Xi Jinping can communicate. "We are pausing the shipments," he said, "until the leaders talk."

That U.S. tariff and the retaliatory 125% tariff from China are putting businesses that trade between the U.S. and China on edge. They are fretting not only about their next orders but also their viability if there is no quick relief. Experts are worried the decades-long trade ties that have underpinned the relationship between the world's two largest economies could be unraveling.

If the high tariff is sustained for the next six months or longer, "that would actually lead to a real effective decoupling between the American and Chinese economies," said Chen Zhiwu, professor of finance at Hong Kong University Business School.

Josh Lipsky, senior director of the Atlantic Council's

GeoEconomics Center, said the tariff, if kept in place, amounts to "almost a trade embargo," making it impossible for China to export low-value items such as apparel to the U.S. It also would force U.S. businesses to source elsewhere, away from China, if there should be alternatives, he said.

The Trump administration late Friday said it would exclude electronics such as smartphones and laptops from the reciprocal tariffs, which means they won't be subject to the 145% tariffs levied on China. The exemption seemed to reflect Trump's realization that his China tariffs are unlikely to shift more manufacturing of smartphones, computers and other gadgets to the U.S. any time soon.

In China, the central tariff office declared there was "no possibility for market acceptance" of U.S. goods exported to China at the current tariff level.

"Everyone's pretty worried," said Hu Jianlong, founder of Brands Factory, a consultancy that works with Chinese companies trying to break into overseas markets. "At this point in time, there's no good way forward. This situation has not resolved ... there's no final number. And so everyone's still waiting to see how this will develop."

The tariff war has come more than 20 years after China, with the help of the United States, joined the World Trade Organization and began to see its economy soar on luring foreign investments and exporting to the U.S. and other Western markets. By last year, China-U.S. trade was \$582 billion, but tensions have flared over China's widening trade imbalance with the U.S. That led to the first tariff skirmish during the first Trump term.

The trade deficit has since narrowed but stayed stubbornly high, at a time when the U.S. and other

Western markets have also grown concerned about another onslaught of Chinese products such as electric vehicles.

During his term, Democratic President Joe Biden stressed that the U.S. was not trying to decouple from China but to "de-risk." He took the "small-yard, high-fence" approach, under which his administration put up barriers in targeted sectors such as advanced chips, artificial intelligence and quantum computing that have national security implications.

Now, Trump is declaring universal tariffs on Chinese goods but has said he's also willing to talk with Beijing. It remains unclear what the Republican president's goals might be.

"What are they looking for in those negotiations? How much is it possible to reduce these tariffs? What are the other demands apart from China removing its retaliatory tariffs that the United States wants to put forward. We don't know what that would be," said Greta Peisch, who served as the general counsel for the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative in 2021-2024.

The message from China's leadership is loud and clear. It will talk only when the U.S. stops "maximum pressure and capricious and destructive behavior," said Lin Jian, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson.

Li Cheng, professor of political science at the University of Hong Kong, said the Chinese leadership is upset over being singled out by Trump when the U.S. president paused reciprocal tariffs for 90 days for all other countries. Beijing wants to make sure that "Donald Trump not state one thing in the morning and say other things in the evening," Li said, and that Trump's policies on China are not hijacked by his anti-

China, hawkish advisers.

With no leadership-level negotiations in the immediate future, businesses are exploring their options.

Lisa Li, who works in sales for an athletic wear manufacturer in the northern Chinese province of Hebei, said her business was negotiating with clients over whether they could split the increased costs. It's too early to say if her company is to give up on the U.S. market, she said, but it will "definitely expand other avenues for sales," such as in Australia or Europe.

In the eastern Chinese city of Wenzhou, a manufacturing hub, a holiday lights maker was less optimistic. Bo, who shared only his surname out of concern for retaliation, said he could "only give up" if the tariff hikes were here to stay because other markets might not work.

"In the past few years, the European market has been in a slump," Bo said. "So we had wanted to try and develop our business in the United States."

In Hong Kong, Danny Lau, who runs an aluminum-coating factory in the nearby southern Chinese city of Dongguan, said one of his U.S. clients would keep buying from him for an ongoing project but was unsure about the next project. Another client told Lau that the chances are slim to strike a deal when tariffs are so high. Lau has been exploring other markets, but he says it's not easy because some may find his high-quality products too expensive.

At a port in the Chinese city of Shanghai, ships heading to the U.S. had almost vanished by Thursday, the day after Trump's tariff on China took effect, according to a report by the financial news site Caixin. Major shipping lines were drastically cutting back on trans-Pacific routes, the report said.

SEOUL (AFP): Former South Korean president Yoon Suk Yeol will face his first criminal trial on Monday for insurrection after his short-lived imposition of martial law in December, which plunged the democratic country into political turmoil.

Yoon sought to impose military rule on the country when he ordered the suspension of political activity and the censorship of media on December 3. The decree lasted just six hours as it was voted down

by opposition MPs.

The disastrous attempt led to Yoon's impeachment by the National Assembly shortly thereafter, with the Constitutional Court fully stripping him of his presidential duties on April 4.

Although he has lost all presidential privileges, Yoon still faces a criminal trial on insurrection charges, which will kick off Monday.

During a preliminary hearing in February, Yoon's lawyers argued

that his detention had been procedurally flawed, an argument accepted by the court, leading to his release 52 days after his arrest. He was detained in January in a dawn raid after holding out against police and prosecutors for weeks, becoming the first sitting South Korean president to be arrested.

If convicted, Yoon could face life imprisonment or even the death penalty. On Friday, the 64-year-old former leader vacated the presidential

residence and returned to his private home in Seoul, greeting supporters along the way.

"Now, I return to being an ordinary citizen of the Republic of Korea, and I will seek a new path in service of our country and our people," he said in a statement.

With Yoon's removal, South Korea is set to hold a snap election on June 3 to elect his successor. Until then, the country is governed by acting president Han Duck-soo.

## Myanmar marks new year festival mourning quake losses

MANDALAY (AFP): Thousands marked the start of Myanmar's water festival on Sunday in the ruins of last month's earthquake, with the country's most raucous holiday muted by the tragedy of the tremor.

The "Thingyan" festival typically celebrates Myanmar's new year with water-splashing rituals symbolising cleansing and renewal, but the central cities of Mandalay and Sagaing lie devastated from the 7.7-magnitude quake.

Two weeks on from the disaster which killed more than 3,600, hundreds are still living in tent encampments peppered among pancaked apartment blocks, razed tea shops and demolished hotels.

Many still lack working latrines and need to queue for drinking water, and the weather forecast for heavy rains has them fretting over their makeshift homes.

Early on Sunday families were buying clay pots and plant sprigs customarily placed inside homes to welcome the new year — even though some had nowhere to put them.

"Everyone is in trouble this year," said 55-year-old Ma Phyu, camping with nine family members north of Mandalay's quake-damaged Royal Palace.

"I have to prepare the pot with the flowers because it is our tradition. But my heart is heavy."

The children in her family had been ordered not to splash water in the street for fear their neighbours would criticise them for celebrating as the city mourns.

Myanmar's ruling military junta has commanded the five-day festival to have no music or dance.

Since the March 28 quake Mandalay temperatures have soared up to a parching 44 degrees Celsius (111 Fahrenheit) while at night tent-dwellers are needled by mosquitos before rising at dawn to line up for aid.

More than 5,200 build-

ings have been destroyed according to official figures, while more than two million people are in need as a result of the earthquake, the UN says.

It has issued an emergency plea for \$275 million, following US President Donald Trump's evicseration of Washington's aid budget which has already hobbled some UN operations in Myanmar.

The World Food Programme says it is being forced to cut off one million people from vital aid this month because donations have dried up.

Myanmar has been riven by a civil war following a 2021 coup which spurred mass poverty and

displacement even before the quake.

The tremors were felt as far away as Bangkok, where a high-rise under construction collapsed and trapped dozens of workers.

Despite an announced ceasefire, monitors say Myanmar's military has continued air strikes, while the junta has accused anti-coup guerillas and ethnic armed groups of maintaining their offensives.

"At a moment when the sole focus should be on ensuring humanitarian aid gets to disaster zones, the military is instead launching attacks," said UN Human Rights Office spokeswoman Ravina Shamdasani in a statement this week.





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## Iran-US meeting ends on a positive note

IRAN'S Foreign Minister Dr. Seyed Abbas Aragchi and the United States' Presidential envoy Steve Witkoff met indirectly through Oman's Foreign Minister Badr Albusaidi in Muscat on Saturday. The Oman-mediated talks have been described as positive even as they concluded. The two sides have agreed to meet again. It is not clear whether the second time round the two sides would meet face-to-face or continue to talk to each other through the Omani mediator.

The meeting is to be seen as a positive sign because the two sides have used the term themselves, and the fact that they have agreed to meet again. The hardened position that Iran and the United States had adopted made it a difficult proposition.

US President Donald Trump's invitation to Iran for talks was couched in threatening language, which is not the best way of reaching out to each other. Iran had initially rejected the offer of talks because of the belligerent tone of the invitation. The Iranians have also made it clear that their nuclear programme was not intended to make weapons, and there would be no discussion on the issue.

Why then did the US agree to the talks? It seems that Washington feels the tensions in the Middle East, especially in relation to the Houthi rebels in Yemen and the Hezbollah in Lebanon cannot be solved without the help of Iran. The two Shia groups do pose a danger to peaceful resolution of the war in Gaza.

Basically, the US is representing the security interests of Israel. Hezbollah and the Houthis pose a challenge to the security of Israel, and the US wants to safeguard Tel Aviv. And it is also a well-known fact that Iran is supporting the Hamas in Gaza. It is Hamas that is engaged in the war with Israel.

The other unstated factor in the talks is Iran's relations with Syria. Tehran had been supporting the Alawite regime of Bashar al-Assad. After his fall in December last, and takeover by Ahmed al-Sharaa, the leader of the anti-Assad jihadi group, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, which has been dissolved and its men merged with the Syrian army, Iran has kept aloof.

There have been indications that Iran would support pro-Assad forces if they were to make an attempt to return to power. But so far, the pro-Assad groups have failed after the initial attempt. The US is sure to seek Iranian neutrality in Syria. Of course, many of these issues would not be on the public agenda of the talks. The public agenda would contain Iran's nuclear programme, and assurances from Iran that it would not enrich uranium to weapons grade. And the issue on the public agenda would be the easing of American sanctions against Iran, and the de-freezing of Iran funds in the West.

The Iranians' willingness to talk to the US is based on Tehran's need to continue with its nuclear programme without interference from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and to free its trade with the West. The sanctions have been hurting Iranian economy, and Iran would like to get rid of them as soon as they can. The US compulsions to talk to Iran are pretty clear. The US does not want to get entangled in the Middle East on behalf of Israel. Washington wants to smoothen things for Israel. The American goal in the Middle East is to establish friendly links between Iran and Israel. This looks most unlikely at the moment. But that is the ultimate American goal.

To be able to achieve this, Washington will have to make generous concessions to Tehran. The challenge is whether Trump can convince the hawkish Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that making friends with Iran is Israel's best option. But for that to happen, the Palestinian state has to emerge as a pre-condition.

### Important Notice

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## Africa doesn't need aid. It needs control over its critical minerals

Maxwell Gomera

percent annually.

Clearly, Africa's mineral riches represent the greatest economic opportunity of our generation. But instead of positioning ourselves to capture this value, we are debating how to patch the holes left by suspended aid programmes.

Critics will say we lack the infrastructure, expertise, and capital to process these minerals ourselves. They are right – for now. But this is precisely where we should be investing our

linging. We need to build processing facilities, not just extraction sites. We need to establish special economic zones focused on mineral beneficiation, not merely export terminals. We need to invest in research and development facilities that can adapt and improve processing technologies. Most importantly, we need to think and act regionally.

Imagine a Southern African Development Community Battery

business as usual.

The environmental critics will say mining is dirty and destructive. They're not wrong about the risks, but they're wrong about the solution. The answer isn't to leave our minerals in the ground; it's to set our own high standards for sustainable extraction and processing. We can build a mining and processing industry that protects our environment and benefits our communities. We must, because the alternative is watching foreign companies do it their way while we deal with the consequences.

The aid suspension has created human suffering that cannot be ignored. HIV treatment programmes, educational initiatives, and food security projects are all at risk. But if these programmes are essential – and many of them are – why should we depend on the political whims of foreign governments to fund them? Our minerals would pay for these programmes many times over once we capture their full value.

What we need now is political courage and unity of purpose. We need leaders who can look beyond the next election cycle and envision an Africa that finances its own development. We need business leaders who can build processing facilities instead of export terminals. We need educational institutions that train chemical engineers and metallurgists instead of aid programme administrators.

The current crisis must serve as our catalyst for transformation. Every suspended aid dollar should drive us to capture tenfold value from our minerals, and every diplomatic slight should strengthen our resolve to build African solutions. The choice is clear: We can spend the coming decades haggling over aid budgets, or we can finally take control of our destiny through the strategic development of our mineral wealth.

It's time for Africa to transform from the world's raw materials store into its manufacturing powerhouse. By turning our mineral wealth into lasting prosperity, we can make foreign aid what it should have been all along: unnecessary.

**The global battery market alone will reach \$250bn by 2030. The renewable energy sector is growing at breakneck speed, with solar installations increasing 26 percent annually. Clearly, Africa's mineral riches represent the greatest economic opportunity of our generation. But instead of positioning ourselves to capture this value, we are debating how to patch the holes left by suspended aid programmes. Critics will say we lack the infrastructure, expertise, and capital to process these minerals ourselves. They are right – for now. But this is precisely where we should be investing our resources and focusing our political will. The Chinese understood this decades ago, which is why they have poured nearly \$58bn into securing control of critical mineral supply chains across Africa. They saw the future while we were busy filling out aid application forms. The solution is not complicated, though it is challenging.**

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The solution is not complicated, though it is chal-

Materials Initiative, where countries pool resources and expertise to build integrated value chains.

Picture an East African Rare Earth Elements Cooperation Framework that turns our mineral wealth into high-tech manufacturing capabilities. These are not pipe dreams – they are missed opportunities every day we continue

## Safeguarding Saudi Arabia's precious forests

Eduardo Mansur

Kingdom's natural defenses against desertification and land degradation.

Equally significant is the identification of more than 645 sites classified as forest lands, which we are actively protecting and rehabilitating to safeguard genetic diversity and conserve invaluable wildlife habitats.

Alongside these field efforts, the National Forest Inventory of Saudi Arabia represents a pivotal step toward a comprehensive understanding of the Saudi forests. By systematically surveying and classifying forest lands and analyzing their vegetation cover, this project will enable more precise planning and informed decision-making for forest conservation and

sustainable development.

Our strategic forest plan guides these achievements. We act to establish protective boundaries, install educational signage and deploy advanced monitoring systems to prevent illegal logging, wildfires and other environmental threats.

We also have a specific program to involve local communities in the conservation and sustainable management of forests, generating ecosystem services and sustainable non-wood forest products such as honey and aromatic plants.

These integrated measures exemplify the Kingdom's commitment to sustainable forest management, balancing ecological imperatives with socioeco-

nomc needs.

Looking ahead, the National Center for Vegetation Cover Development and Combating Desertification will continue to build on best practices through a multifaceted approach that includes restoring and safeguarding forests in mountainous regions, valleys and mangroves.

By expanding greening efforts, reinforcing forest conservation, involving local communities and harnessing cutting-edge research to monitor ecological health, the General Directorate of Forests at the NCVC reaffirms its dedication to maintaining Saudi Arabia's forests as vital pillars of environmental balance, biodiversity and sustainable development for current and future generations.

## Israel's democratic gatekeepers hit back against Netanyahu's assaults

Yossi Mekelberg

Only in recent years has it been allowed for the full name of the head of Shin Bet, Israel's internal security agency, to be in the public domain while they are still serving. Before this, they were traditionally referred to only by the first letter of their name.

These people operated in the shadows and often inhabited the most shadowy areas of society. They were not widely discussed in the media and simply allowed, for better and worse, to get on with their job.

Not anymore. In the new-reality, upside-down and destructive world of Benjamin Netanyahu's far-right and populist sixth government, Ronen Bar, the current head of Shin Bet, has become a major story in his own right, and not through his own fault.

He is increasingly accused by Netanyahu, and other members of the governing coalition and their allies in the media, of being one of the main culprits responsible for the disastrous security failures of Oct. 7, 2023.

Not only that but he is, incomprehensibly, portrayed as a traitor who deliberately neglected to warn Netanyahu of an imminent Hamas attack, as part of a supposed conspiracy to smear and oust the Israeli prime minister orchestrated by the "deep

prime minister's closest advisors.

Yet Netanyahu's attempt to get rid of the country's democratic gatekeepers by smearing them is a sign of weakness, and probably panic, as the investigations are getting too close for comfort to his inner circle of advisors.

Did the prime minister really think that Bar would go quietly, meekly accepting the allegation that he is someone who cannot be trusted, without exercising his legal rights as an employee? Does Netanyahu, in his growing detachment from reality, already believe that he is omnipotent, invincible and accountable to no one?

The answer, of course, is yes, to both questions. But Netanyahu and those around him — lawyers, political advisors and general panderers — might have underestimated Bar and all those others who have responded by coming to the defense of this fragile Israeli democracy.

In a shocking revelation in his letter of appeal to the court challenging his dismissal, Bar said that the prime minister repeatedly demanded that he inform judges that Netanyahu should not be required to regularly testify during his corruption trial because of security reasons related to the war against Hamas.

If this is true, and there is

**Netanyahu wants to appoint as Bar's replacement someone more "convenient," whose first loyalty is to him, personally, rather than to the country. Someone who will ignore the corrupt deeds and unlawful behavior of politicians, and turn a blind eye to Israeli settler terrorism in the West Bank.**

state," of which Bar, according to this version of events, is a leading member. Needless to say, such claims about the existence of a "deep state" are figments of the political right's imagination.

Bar, unlike Netanyahu, has accepted his personal share of responsibility for the colossal catastrophe of Oct. 7, and has repeatedly stated he will resign from his post before the end of his term, most probably when the war is over and the organization he heads is rehabilitated.

However, Netanyahu wants to appoint as Bar's replacement someone more "convenient," whose first loyalty is to him, personally, rather than to the country. Someone who will ignore the corrupt deeds and unlawful behavior of politicians, and turn a blind eye to Israeli settler terrorism in the West Bank.

Moreover, as was revealed this week in the Supreme Court by the government's own legal representative during deliberations about the dismissal of Bar, Netanyahu was unhappy with the security chief's refusal to deploy the resources of Shin Bet against those who refused to volunteer for army reserve duty in protest against the government's judicial overhaul.

In other words, by the admission of his own legal team, Netanyahu was angry with the internal security services for refusing to act, within a democratic system, against those who had legally expressed views that differed from those of the government. This should be enough to end Netanyahu's political career, never mind his position as leader of the executive branch.

While it is within the power of the government to fire the chief of the internal security service, his position as head of one of Israel's seven senior services means any attempt to remove him must be referred to the Senior Appointments Advisory Committee, which by law has the power to prevent a hiring or a firing if it finds an ulterior motive or conflict of interest.

And if ever there was a situation that loudly cries conflict of interest and foul play, it is the attempts to sack two of the main gatekeepers of Israel's democratic system, Bar and Attorney General Gali Bahrav-Miara, especially during a Shin Bet investigation into several of the

no reason to doubt Bar, then a defendant in a criminal case clearly abused his power to delay giving evidence in court. This explains why Bar has claimed all along that the attempt by the government to dismiss him was "not about distrust but rather an improper perception of personal loyalty replacing loyalty to the public."

It adds to a recent allegation by a former head of Shin Bet, Yoram Cohen, that during his time in charge of the security service he was asked by Netanyahu to "disqualify" a political rival, Naftali Bennett, from his security cabinet by revoking his security clearance, on the grounds of an unspecified "loyalty problem" while Bennett was serving in the army.

The very fact that a prime minister would approach Shin Bet chiefs with such requests is disturbing in the extreme, as is the fact that neither of them spoke up about it earlier.

The response from Netanyahu loyalists, as expected, was to spout a series of half-truths and total lies about Bar, including the debunked claim that he knew in advance of the Oct. 7 massacre and intentionally avoided waking Netanyahu up in the middle of the night to warn him about it. Things got worse during deliberations at the High Court of Justice over the appeals against Bar's dismissal, when supporters of the government, including two members of the Knesset, had to be removed from the court for shouting and screaming abuse, creating an atmosphere of intimidation against those who were appealing, their legal representatives and the judges.

It is frightening to witness how rapidly Israel's democracy is deteriorating. While one can trace more than one reason for what is happening, there is one person who has deliberately, shamelessly and, above all, cynically unleashed these demons of division, incitement and hate against his critics, political opponents and, most recently the gatekeepers of his country's democratic system.

That person is none other than Benjamin Netanyahu. He has done this in an attempt to derail his corruption trial, and to save his own skin and, potentially, the skins of those close to him — and who knows how many more skeletons are hidden in his and his family's closet?



# Germany needs a ‘game-changer’ government

Andrew Hammond

The origin of the phrase “necessity is the mother of invention” is often attributed to the works of the ancient Greek philosopher Plato. However, it has assumed a much more modern relevance in 2025 for Germany. Relatively few observers expected the incoming German chancellor, Friedrich Merz, leader of the right-of-center Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union bloc, to meet his pledge in February that he would finalize a coalition agreement with the left-of-center Social Democrats before Easter.

However, in the midst of much policy turbulence, he announced his new government on Wednesday, more than a week ahead of his deadline, and with a huge in-tray awaiting his attention.

In 2017, it took Angela Merkel more than 170 days to finally agree the previous “grand coalition” between the CDU/CSU and the Social Democrats, so the latest negotiations delivered a deal much more quickly.

The fact that Merz managed to form his coalition on time reflects not only his personal desire to assume power as quickly as possible; the need for expedient compromise was necessitated by a challenging external context, from the ongoing developments in Ukraine to the uncertainty over US President Donald Trump’s tariffs.

On the issue of Ukraine, Merz might be more helpful to Kyiv than his predecessor as chancellor, Olaf Scholz, who was hesitant to supply advanced weaponry that could be used to attack Russian territory. In contrast, Merz conditionally

supports equipping Ukraine with longer-range Taurus missiles. This might prove important in the coming weeks, given the present European engagement with the Trump team in Washington over an eventual “end game” for Ukraine.

Outside of the foreign context, part of the reason for the sense of urgency from Merz has been the rise of the far-right Alternative for Germany party, or AfD, which received backing during the election campaign from the Trump team, including US Vice President J.D. Vance, and

attempt to halt the rise of the AfD. He has already pivoted to the political right on law and order, including a call for tougher immigration policies, including an accelerated process for deportation of noncitizens with criminal records, and efforts to reverse the flows of undocumented migrants. At the same time the AfD surged to claim almost 21 percent of the vote in February, the CDU/CSU only managed to win 28.5 percent. This was its second-worst performance in the post-war era, after the 24.1 percent it received in

growth through tax cuts but Merz hopes to trigger investment-led stimulus that can help make Germany a more attractive business destination.

Following the election, however, the big economic news in Germany was that legislators voted last month to dilute the 2009 constitutional balanced budget amendment (the so-called “debt brake”), a move that could free up more than 1 trillion (\$1.1 trillion) for new German spending over the next decade on defense and infrastructure.

At least 100 billion will

**Immigration policy aside, the key test of Merz’s chancellorship on the domestic policy front will be his efforts to boost the German economy, which shrank for two consecutive years in 2023 and 2024, experiencing a double dose of stagnation for only the third time since the 1950s. Merz champions a reformist policy platform called “Agenda 2030.” It was originally focused around efforts to rejuvenate growth through tax cuts but Merz hopes to trigger investment-led stimulus that can help make Germany a more attractive business destination.**

Tesla CEO Elon Musk, who has been heading Trump’s Department of Government Efficiency initiative.

There was a big turnout for the election in February, with 82.5 percent of eligible voters casting a ballot, the most since German reunification in 1990. The AfD finished a strong second, with about twice the number of votes it secured at the previous election, and the far-right party might not have lost its momentum just yet, especially if the issue of immigration becomes more politically salient.

Merz will therefore be thinking about how best to

2021. To contextualize this, it was significantly less than the 42 percent share the bloc won in 2013 during Merkel’s chancellorship.

Immigration policy aside, the key test of Merz’s chancellorship on the domestic policy front will be his efforts to boost the German economy, which shrank for two consecutive years in 2023 and 2024, experiencing a double dose of stagnation for only the third time since the 1950s.

Merz champions a reformist policy platform called “Agenda 2030.” It was originally focused around efforts to rejuvenate

be spent on a green-transformation fund. Merz has pledged to scale back dependence on Russian gas, and renewables now produce 60 percent of German energy. He has also proposed a reduction of the tax burden on energy by at least 5 cents per kilowatt hour by lowering the electricity tax and grid fees; a lifting of the ban on combustion engines to strengthen Germany’s automobile industry; and an expansion of charging infrastructure for e-mobility.

While the new spending is surely affordable for Berlin, there is potential for significant political back-

lash, especially if inflation is reignited. The AfD opposes the new fiscal plans. Moreover, the Left Party has criticized them too, for different reasons, given the big German military build-up that is on the horizon.

Merz’s focus on Agenda 2030 is timely given the possibility of a tariff war with the US, despite Trump’s U-turn on Wednesday. Moreover, China is an increasingly prominent economic competitor, including in the production of electric vehicles.

Merz has previously warned German companies against any deepening of economic ties with China, including bigger investments in the country. He said: “If you take this risk, do it in such a way that it doesn’t endanger the entire company group if you have to write off this investment from one year to the next. Under no circumstances should you turn to the state, to the federal government of the Federal Republic of Germany, to help you economically in such a situation.”

His comments might signal a big change in policy. Following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, Scholz’s coalition government began to implement a so-called “derisking” strategy as part of broader efforts to reset relations with Beijing. However, many large German firms have yet to fundamentally change their investment strategies in China.

Germany’s domestic and foreign policy state of flux therefore calls for a game-changer government. But it might not become clear for many months whether Merz can deliver on his goals.

# Israel’s war on Palestinian political life in Jerusalem

Daoud Kuttab

that govern UN installations. The UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees denounced the move as a violation of the privileges and immunities it is granted under international law.

Beyond the legal breach, however, the closures directly threaten Palestinian children’s right to education, yet another pillar of communal life that is being targeted under the current escalation.

This is not just about buildings or institutions, it is about the dismantling of an entire social fabric. Civil society organizations, trade unions, educational bodies and religious institutions are the lifeblood of any community. In Jerusalem, their survival is essential not only for daily life, but to maintain a Palestinian presence and identity in a city that continues to face

sures prevent Palestinians in the West Bank and surrounding areas from accessing the holy sites. Men under the age of 55 are barred from the mosque, and even the limited groups who are allowed to enter must not exceed a quota of 10,000 worshippers from outside of Jerusalem. In effect, the faithful are locked out of their own sacred mosque during the holiest days of the year.

These measures are not simply about security, they are about sovereignty, about who belongs in Jerusalem and who does not. By stripping away Palestinian institutions, silencing political voices and preventing cultural and religious gatherings, Israeli authorities are redrawing the city not only physically, but socially and spiritually.

Yet in the face of all this, the resilience of the

**On April 8, Israeli forces and Jerusalem municipality officials entered six UNRWA-run schools in East Jerusalem and issued closure orders effective within 30 days. These schools serve hundreds of Palestinian refugee children and are protected under the legal frameworks that govern UN installations. The UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees denounced the move as a violation of the privileges and immunities it is granted under international law. Beyond the legal breach, however, the closures directly threaten Palestinian children’s right to education, yet another pillar of communal life that is being targeted under the current escalation. This is not just about buildings or institutions, it is about the dismantling of an entire social fabric. Civil society organizations, trade unions, educational bodies and religious institutions are the lifeblood of any community. In Jerusalem, their survival is essential not only for daily life, but to maintain a Palestinian presence and identity in a city that continues to face systematic demographic and political reshaping.**

systematic demographic and political reshaping.

The consequences are becoming more visible year by year. For example, figures published by the Jerusalem Islamic Waqf Department, which is overseen by Jordan, reveal a dramatic decline in the number of worshippers who attended Al-Aqsa Mosque during Ramadan this year.

On the final Friday of the holy month in 2022, 160,000 people worshipped at the mosque. This fell to 130,000 in 2023, and 120,000 in 2024. This year, in Islam’s third-holiest city, a mere 75,000 worshippers attended the final Ramadan Friday prayers at Al-Aqsa. On the 27th night of Ramadan, when worshippers were seeking Laylat Al-Qadr (The Night of Power), which is one of the most important nights in Islam, attendance dropped almost by half from 300,000 in 2022 to just 180,000 in 2025.

This is no coincidence. The decline is directly linked to Israeli-imposed restrictions. Measures such as arbitrary quotas, age limitations and checkpoint clo-

Palestinian community in Jerusalem remains strong. Despite the closures and restrictions, worshippers continue to flock to Al-Aqsa Mosque. Teachers, trade unionists and community organizers persist in their work, often at great personal risk. Their steadfastness is a reminder that no administrative order or military raid can fully erase the connection of a people to their land, their identity and their future.

If Israel truly seeks peace and coexistence, it must begin by recognizing the rights of Palestinians to exist, organize and thrive. That includes respect for international law, the protection of educational and religious institutions, and allowing Palestinians the freedom to engage in normal political and civil life.

The international community, in particular Israel’s allies, must also take note: Silence in the face of these violations is complicity. As Israel continues to claim the mantle of democracy, its actions in East Jerusalem tell another story, one of exclusion, repression and systematic erasure.

# Iraq’s electricity crisis: Turning point or tipping point?

Jessica Obeid

Iraq’s electricity crisis has reached a critical juncture, significantly worsened by growing geopolitical tensions and shifting US policy. For years, the country has relied on Iranian electricity and gas imports to meet about 30 percent of its power supply. This arrangement has been sustained through temporary US sanctions waivers, which have allowed the imports to continue despite the broader sanctions regime. However, these exemptions are now ending. In early March, Washington rescinded Iraq’s waiver to purchase Iranian electricity as part of its policy of “maximum pressure” on Tehran and urged Iraq to reduce its reliance on Iranian energy.

Iraq now faces an urgent challenge: to either develop sustainable domestic solutions or deepen its dependency on diesel generators and Iranian gas imports. The latter approach is risky, as Washington has signaled that the remaining exemptions may be revoked. Acknowledging the need for a long-term solution, Iraq has taken significant steps to address its electricity crisis. Reforms to energy infrastructure and policies will be required to ensure Iraq’s energy future is sustainable and secure; otherwise, it will be increasingly vulnerable to supply disruptions and power shortages.

For decades, Iran has been a lifeline for Iraq’s power sector, which struggles to maintain a stable electricity supply due to

decades of conflict and persistent mismanagement. The available capacity of the national grid is estimated at less than 28 gigawatts, compared to a peak demand of 48 GW. Iranian energy imports play a vital role in bridging this gap; however, Tehran’s frequent cuts to gas supplies — often due to its own domestic shortages or political motivations, particularly following the implementation of US sanctions on Iran in 2018 — have made this lifeline unreliable. With Washington now calling on Baghdad to “eliminate its dependence on Iranian sources of energy,” Iraq will need to find alternatives or risk further deterioration of its already unstable grid.

Recognizing the need for a sustainable solution, Baghdad has taken concrete steps to reduce its dependence on Iranian energy and strengthen its energy security. As a result of its efforts, power generation capacity has expanded by an average of 1 GW to 2 GW annually; however, this remains insufficient to meet rising demand. The key initiatives that the government is currently focused on — expanding domestic gas production and infrastructure, diversifying gas suppliers, deploying renewable energy and connecting to regional power grids — come with significant challenges, ranging from a lack of investment to bureaucratic and political hurdles. Overcoming these will be essential for Iraq to

establish a stable and self-sufficient power sector.

One of Iraq’s most immediate needs lies in increasing domestic gas production and infrastructure. A key inefficiency lies in gas flaring. While the country produces significant amounts of natural gas, much of it is burned off because the country lacks the facilities to process it into fuel for local consumption. Iraq has committed to end this practice by 2028 — a long-term solution that will require substantial investment and political commitment. Successfully harnessing this resource could reduce the country’s reliance on Iranian imports and strengthen its energy security.

Iraq is also moving forward with an offshore natural gas platform and transmission line to fuel power plants in Basra, as well as a new 40 km pipeline to carry gas from the southern oil fields to power stations. However, building infrastructure in Iraq has historically been subject to bureaucratic delays and political roadblocks, making the execution of these projects uncertain.

In the meantime, the country is seeking to diversify its gas supply by importing gas from countries such as Turkmenistan and Türkiye. In October 2024, Iraq signed an agreement with Turkmenistan to supply up to 20 million cubic meters per day of gas, though the gas will be transported via Iranian pipelines. While this is a

step toward diversifying Iraq’s energy sources, it is still dependent on Iran’s infrastructure — a key vulnerability that Iraq must address if it is to ensure energy sovereignty.

Renewable energy also presents a viable long-term alternative. The country has abundant solar resources and has signed contracts with major developers like TotalEnergies to build large-scale solar projects. However, to implement such projects successfully, Iraq will need to invest in upgrades to its grid infrastructure to accommodate intermittently power. Additionally, ensuring the process is efficient will require targeted policy reforms.

Regional integration also offers a vital alternative to Iran’s power supply. In 2024, Iraq started importing electricity from neighboring countries, including Jordan (150 megawatts) and Türkiye (300 MW). A 1,000-MW interconnection with Saudi Arabia is being created, with Iraq expected to start importing electricity from the Gulf by late 2025. Iraq is also working to double its import capacity from Türkiye, which will help reduce its reliance on Iranian imports and provide additional sources of power.

While these initiatives are crucial, they are only part of the solution. The electricity sector’s challenges are not only due to the shortage in gas and power supply, but also elevated subsidies resulting from political dynamics, as well as high

transmission and distribution losses, which are estimated at up to 50 percent. These losses are driven by grid inefficiencies, illegal connections and non-billing practices. Iraq’s ability to build a sustainable power sector ultimately hinges on whether it can implement comprehensive reforms and establish reliable infrastructure that can address these systemic issues.

Iraq’s electricity crisis is not just a technical challenge, it is a reflection of broader geopolitical struggles and internal dynamics. The country’s ongoing dependence on Iran, its internal political divisions and the vested interests that benefit from the status quo all present significant obstacles to achieving energy independence. Iraq’s plans are ambitious, yet the country’s success will depend on its ability to tackle the root causes of its electricity challenges.

This crisis represents both a turning point and a tipping point. The failure to implement reforms and establish a sustainable power sector could push the country deeper into crisis, further eroding trust in the government and worsening its dependence on costly short-term fixes, such as diesel generators or additional Iranian imports.

However, the crisis also presents an opportunity. If Iraq can harness its gas reserves, diversify its energy sources and build stronger regional ties, it could build a more sustainable energy sector for the future.

Abdel Aziz Aluwaisheg

Early next month, the Uzbek city of Samarkand will host the Gulf Cooperation Council-Central Asian Summit, the second such gathering in the space of two years. The Saudi city of Jeddah hosted the first meeting of the heads of state of the 11 participating countries in July 2023.

The two resource-rich regions have been seeking to rebuild their historical economic and cultural ties for some time now. For more than a thousand years, from the 8th to the 19th centuries, they were closely integrated, connected by trade routes and a shared culture. In the 1860s, the region came under Russian and then Soviet rule until 1991, when the Soviet Union dissolved.

Since gaining independence, the five Central Asian

republics — Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, known informally as the C5 — have sought to reestablish themselves as economic hubs and trading partners, as well as reliable sources of energy.

They are landlocked countries, so they need to stay on friendly terms with their neighbors to gain access to the sea and to far-away land-trade routes. During more than 120 years of Russian rule, their economic orientation was toward the north. While maintaining ties with Russia over the past three decades, they have nonetheless managed to stay clear of superpower competition, and this neutrality has served them well.

Americans, Chinese and Russians have coexisted in

the region. They have naturally competed but their local hosts have ensured that the competition remains within acceptable bounds, and the region has benefited from this foreign attention.

While they welcome foreign investments and trade, the five nations jealously guard their newfound independence and cringe at any attempts to control their political or economic decisions.

Recent events, however, are testing Central Asia’s ability to remain neutral. Both sides in the Ukraine war have put pressure on the nations in the region to take sides, and the rivalry between the US and China has made it difficult at times to engage with either of them. This rivalry has now morphed into open economic warfare in the

form of escalating tit-for-tat tariffs.

Some in this region believe the Trump administration’s tariffs have the potential to redraw geopolitical lines, if in fact it goes ahead with them, as seems likely. There was a hopeful sign this week when the administration paused some of the newly announced tariffs for 90 days but the damage is already done and the broader strategic and regional effects might be already in motion.

Central Asian nations have all been hit by the new US tariffs: 27 percent for Kazakhstan and 10 percent for the other four. Deterred from trading with the US, they might turn to China, which has been much more severely affected by the duties. Beijing might find it

ket might become more inviting.

In an attempt to avoid overreliance on a single export market, however, they are seeking to diversify their export destinations, thus reviving older trade routes with the Middle East, including Gulf countries.

GCC member states are natural partners for Central Asian nations because both groups seek profitable engagements but neither has any political ambition to interfere in the internal affairs of the other. The two regions enjoy close relations with global superpowers and share the goal of neutrality. Their partnership is all the stronger because its deep roots lie in a shared culture and values.

Their reengagement with each other is a fairly recent development but it is grow-

ing rapidly. Nearly all GCC states are already investing in Central Asia. Trade between the regions has grown tenfold over the past eight years, although the volumes remain modest.

Since their first summit in Jeddah two years ago, the two groups of countries have been discussing a long list of transportation and connectivity projects that would enable them to trade with each other in more economically beneficial ways.

Iran’s geographical location between the two regions makes it a natural partner in these projects. However, its hostile policies narrow the options. Both the GCC and Central Asian nations are engaging diplomatically with Tehran in an attempt to encourage the regime to emerge from its ideological bubble. If

the Iranians agreed to try a more peaceful approach to regional integration, through trade and diplomacy instead of violence and intimidation, both regions would benefit and so could Iran in the middle.

Such an outcome should not be considered so far-fetched. The two regions, Iran included, were once integrated and thrived together for millennia.

If Iran continues on its current path, there are alternative trade routes. Transportation officials from GCC and Central Asian countries have met a number of times over the past year to evaluate the options.

Either way, the two regions are determined to continue to reengage and the summit in Samarkand next month will reveal some of their options.





# SCCI chief highlights role of SMEs

## F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry president Fazal Moqem Khan said small and medium enterprises (SMEs) have played a pivotal role in the economic development of any country of the world.

SCCI chief pointed out KP potentials, especially mines, mineral and other natural deposits for foreign investment.

He stressed the launch of joint ventures and mutual collaboration to enhance Pak-German bilateral trade and economic relations.

Moqem was speaking to participants of 50 anniversary celebrations of the German Association for

Small and Medium-sized Businesses (BVMW) in German, said in a press release issued here on Sunday.

Former president SCCI Zahidullah Shinwari was also accompanied during the visit to Germany.

The SCCI chief said that Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) play a crucial role in the economy of any country, contributing significantly to employment generation, economic growth, innovation, and social stability.

He maintained SMEs are essential drivers of economic development, job creation, innovation, and social progress. They have a momentous role in the economic development of

the country, he added.

Small businesses can play a key role in shaping the national growth strategy, he said, stressing the need for development and progress of Small Medium Enterprises on priority grounds.

Moqem further opined that improving small and medium enterprises in Pakistan requires a comprehensive approach addressing various aspects ranging from regulatory frameworks to access to finance and technology.

SCCI chief emphasized implementation of structural reforms such as streamlining regulations and taxes for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to promote growth and job cre-

ation.

Earlier, former president SCCI Zahidullah Shinwari also addressed the forum and highlighted the role of SMEs in national economic growth of any country.

He presented various proposals for enhancing collaboration between Pakistan and Germany, especially tapping KP potentials through development of the SMEs sector.

Shinwari said Pakistan is a lucrative destination for foreign investment and stressed the need of fully capitalizing potentials and taking benefits from each other's experiences and advantages to improve the mutual trade and economic trade relations between the two countries.



SIALKOT: A vendor arranging and selling traditional sweet to attract customers.

## FPCCI lauds PM's consultative budget approach

LAHORE (APP): The Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FPCCI) Regional Committee on Food, Convenor Shahid Imran on Sunday welcomed Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's assurance of adopting a consultative approach with all stakeholders in the formulation of upcoming federal budget.

Talking to a delegation of industrialists led by former FPCCI Vice President Mian Zahid Iqbal, Shahid Imran termed the move a crucial step towards ensuring a "level playing field" for traders, businesses, and industries. He emphasized that inclusive policy-making was essential for sustainable economic growth and development.

He highlighted the significance of involving all stakeholders, particularly the private sector, in the budgetary process to effectively address sector-specific challenges and align fiscal strategies with economic realities.

"Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's inclusive approach reflects a commitment to collaborative governance and will help build trust between the government and the business community," he said.

## Malik lauds US for suspending new tariffs

LAHORE (APP): SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry's former President Iftikhar Ali Malik Sunday lauded the US for suspending new tariffs and described it as a timely step toward fostering international trade cooperation.

In a media statement here, he added, this decision also vital for global trade stability as well as enabling businesses to recalibrate strategies and sustain growth in a challenging climate.

The new tariff ratio could have disproportionately affected SAARC nations by disrupting export sectors like textiles and agriculture, he remarked.

Malik underscored the interconnectivity of global markets, asserting that US trade policies profoundly influence emerging economies.

# 3-day Gujranwala Expo-2025 concluded

ISLAMABAD (APP): A three-day Gujranwala Expo 2025 concluded successfully here on Sunday, aiming to bolster local production, promote exports and strengthen the national economy by reducing dependence on imports.

Organized by the Gujranwala Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GCCCI), the expo provided a dynamic platform for industry leaders, entrepreneurs, innovators to connect, showcase top-quality products, and discovers the latest market trends.

During the event, almost 87 industries set up their stalls that featured a wide range of products including home appliances, sanitary ware, edibles, beauty products, cutlery, LED lights, apparel, plastic goods, paints, and various items from the electrical sector.

The event was attended by prominent government representatives, ambassadors, business leaders, traders, and a wide range of visitors.

The exhibition, focused on "Made in Gujranwala" products, was formally inaugurated by Special Assistant to the Prime Minister (SAPM) on

Industries and Production, Haroon Akhtar Khan.

"These products (displayed at the exhibition) will not only meet local needs but will also find markets abroad. I believe our market share will grow significantly," remarked

Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb while speaking at the inaugural session.

He said the expo gave a lot of encouragement that Pakistan has such products that are internationally competitive and could become a global brand as we go forward.

The minister said the country needs to exploit the international export market through competitive productivity, adding that the products showcased at the exhibition should not be used only in Pakistan, but also exported to other countries.

Meanwhile, Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Ahsan Iqbal pledged robust government support for Pakistan's exporters, envisioning a unified business front that could elevate national exports to \$100 billion over the next eight

years.

Praising the GCCCI for organizing the event, he vowed to transform Gujranwala into the country's leading export cluster, citing its legacy of craftsmanship and industrial expertise.

SAPM on Industries and Production Haroon Akhtar praised the city's dynamic entrepreneurial spirit, calling Gujranwala the fastest-growing hub for SMEs in Pakistan.

He said that sectors such as ceramics, sanitary ware, plastics, home appliances, and food and beverages are not only flourishing locally but also gaining recognition on the international stage.

Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Karim Kundi called for empowering key sectors, including business, farming and industry, to drive national progress and lead the country towards economic development.

He praised GCCCI for successfully organizing the Expo being held from April 11-13, 2025, which had brought together industry leaders, businesses, and innovators to showcase local production, craftsmanship, and innovation.

# Investment prospects hampered by structural problems: FRIA

## F.P. Report

LAHORE: The Ferozepur Road Industrial Association (FRIA) has said that the domestic investment at the moment is alarmingly low which has sent a negative signal to the potential foreign investors and now is the time that the federal government should give some patient hearing to the private sector calling.

FRIA chairman Shahbaz Aslam said if the government was seriously desirous of having economic turnaround in the coming years it would have to do two things that are: an immediate freeze on domestic and foreign borrowing and secondly put in place a well-tailored strategy to show-case Pakistan's potentials to the outer world.

He called upon the government to announce clear and robust economic strategies, as the country has stuck in low economic growth situation, where double-digit policy rate for the last few years has diminished capaci-

ty to increase domestic production, and exports, negatively impacting domestic resource mobilization.

Shahbaz Aslam said that the government will have its work sharply cut out as far as the economic challenges are concerned. Coming at the back of fast-unfolding climate change crisis that pushed millions into poverty with little fiscal capacity of government to provide anywhere near close to what was needed in stimulus spending.

Then there is acute debt distress, and seriously high cost of production at the back of global aggregate supply shock, and accentuated by a world of rising conflicts on trade. The FRIA chairman emphasized that such transparency from the government is crucial, as the country has had trouble raising enough money to cover its expenses.

The FRIA chief said that even though Pakistan's economic crisis is a recurring factor in the country's political unrest, it has a history of

ignoring the nation's true issues, which include poor governance, a broken judicial system, outdated laws, complicated tax system, lack of transparency, duplication in the government system, ineffective bureaucracy, improper use of our human, natural and water resources, lack of efficient local government, inadequate data for country's planning, and the consistent flaws in policies in execution by the government departments.

Shahbaz Aslam said that Pakistan's GDP growth rate has always remained below its potential despite efforts to boost economic growth. He said that the development of important sectors and investment prospects was hampered by inadequate revenue collection, structural problems, and governance issues.

He said that due to the low tax-to-GDP ratio, borrowing and outside help are heavily relied upon to close the fiscal imbalance. There is a recurring budget deficit because more than it takes in.

# PIAF for check on high cost of debt servicing to contain budget deficit

## F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Industrial and Traders Association Front (PIAF) has called for keeping check on government expenditure and high cost of debt servicing to contain budget deficit, as the Pakistan's federal budget deficit projection has been revised to high to over Rs5.4 trillion, highlighting the unending fiscal woes that have pushed the country into a debt trap.

The PIAF Chairman Fahimur Rehman Saigol, Senior Vice chairman Nasrullah Mughal and Vice chairman Tahirm Manzoor Chaudhry in a joint statement said that the high cost of doing business has been hurting the economic growth and industry, which faced the brunt of a staggering increase in gas prices.

Fahimur Rehman Saigol said that the failure to reform the tax system is a major factor behind heavy domestic and foreign borrowings by the government.

Expressing serious concern over the high jump in country's budget deficit,

Senior Vice chairman Nasrullah Mughal said the revision has been made in light of agreement with the International Monetary Fund, which exposed the massive underreporting of expenditures at the time of budget presentation by the finance ministry. This is a highly unsustainable level and has already pushed the country into a situation where debt restructuring seems to be the only viable option.

The Vice chairman Tahirm Manzoor Chaudhry maintained that the failure to reform the tax system and increase revenue collection is a major factor behind heavy domestic and foreign borrowings by the government.

He said that the privatization commission of Pakistan is struggling for months to effectively put in place the privatization of loss-making public sector enterprises; notably, the Pakistan Steel Mills and Pakistan International Airlines despite the urgency and concern expressed, time and again, by the IMF.

The decision-making processes are likely to be driven and influenced more by conflicting self-interests of the coalition partners, watering down the key objectives. This is not what the country needs in these unprecedented times of political and economic challenges confronting the nation.

There has been over-emphasis on increasing taxes, which has shifted focus away from growing expenditures that are increasing at a pace of 24% during the current fiscal year despite single-digit inflation. For March, the FBR's target was Rs1.219 trillion. However, despite taking advances and drastically slowing refunds, it could only cross Rs1.1 trillion till Friday evening. The FBR paid Rs34 billion in refunds, down by Rs37 billion, or 52%, compared to March last year.

The PIAF leaders said that the IMF has forced the country to impose new taxes, primarily burdening the salaried class and levying taxes on nearly all consumable goods, including medical tests, stationery, vegetables and children's milk.

For the July-March period, the FBR missed its targets for sales tax, federal excise duty (FED) and customs duty but exceeded the income tax target.

They said that the FBR half-heartedly pursued the Tajir Dost scheme but the IMF clarified that the scheme has remained operational. The IMF has cut the collection estimate of Rs50 billion from the Tajir Dost scheme.

Sales tax collection stood at Rs2.86 trillion, Rs656 billion less than the target of over Rs3.5 trillion. Sales tax remained the most difficult area for the FBR and one of the reasons for the low collection was less-than-estimated growth in large industries.

Pakistan's government liquidity and external vulnerability risks will remain very high until there is clarity on a credible longer-term financing plan.

It said Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves remained very low, sufficient to cover only about six weeks of imports and well below what was required to meet external financing needs for the next three to four years.

# APBF for efforts to enhance tax base as shortfall continues

## F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The All Pakistan Business Forum has recommended the broadening of the tax base through appropriate legislation to ensure that all income earners pay taxes equitably, including agriculture income.

Forum President Syed Maaz Mahmood observed undoubtedly, there is significant progress, both on fiscal and current accounts, showing surpluses and could lead towards a sustainable point.

Referring to the data, he said that the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has reported a revenue shortfall of Rs100 billion for March 2025, as provisional tax collection stood at Rs1,120 billion, falling short of the assigned target of Rs 1,220 billion.

After receiving tax collections from imports and local sources on Saturday, the revenue gap had been reduced but still remained significant, Business

Recorder reported citing a senior FBR official.

For the July-March (2024-25) period, the FBR collected Rs 8,464 billion, missing its target of Rs 9,167 billion, resulting in a cumulative shortfall of Rs 703 billion.

Amid revenue challenges, the government has downwardly revised the FBR's annual tax collection target from Rs 12,913 billion to Rs 12,334 billion for the 2024-25 fiscal year, reflecting adjustments to align with economic realities.

The APBF President said that the culture of amnesty schemes should be eliminated as it discourages the honest taxpayers, besides enacting penalties in the law to punish tax evaders.

"Appropriate laws should be made to enable the government to seize local assets, in equivalent value, or levy appropriate taxes if any person holds any kind of assets outside the country for which source of income could not

be established" he added. He said that export-oriented industries should be facilitated.

"It is a matter of concern that exports are showing a low growth besides the fact that the country has all resources which is not a good omen" he maintained. We have to focus on investing in the energy sector, lowering of tariffs on smuggling-prone items, increasing the share of direct taxes in revenue and lowering the slab of indirect taxes in the forthcoming budget to achieve key economic targets set for the new year. To fill the gap between demand and supply of energy, maximum funds should be allocated for the construction of dams/water reservoirs and tapping of Thar Coal, he added.

The APBF Chairman Ibrahim Qureshi said the Protection of Economic Reforms Act", 1992 should be amended appropriately to curb the practice of remitting undeclared

income through unofficial channels outside Pakistan and the same being brought into Pakistan through banking channels in foreign exchange.

He demanded the government to improve tax structure for developing business and investment. He said that the existing tax structure discourages investment and encourages rent-seeking.

"A better tax system would help to improve the economic growth of the country, but unfortunately, the present tax system promotes rent-seeking while discouraging entrepreneurship as it imposes heavy taxes on business profits of traders" he added.

Maaz Mahmood requested the government to focus on reducing tax rates and expanding the tax base by bringing all exempted sectors into the tax net and suggested that the tax system should be so designed that it should give an attraction to invest in business ventures.

# BMP for encouraging private sector investment and growth

## F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry's Businessmen Panel (BMP) has started consultations on the upcoming budget 2025-26, focusing on issues like boosting trade and industry, reducing the policy interest rate, and lowering GST to stimulate economic growth.

FPCCI former president and Businessmen Panel (BMP) Chairman Mian Anjum Nisar while addressing a pre-budget session organized by the BMP here, said the business representatives has been actively involved in finalizing budget proposals and presenting them to the relevant government departments.

We are advocating for policies that encourage pri-

vate sector investment and growth, including reducing the policy interest rate to single digits.

Anjum Nisar called for a growth-oriented budget 2023-24 for the trade and industry, suggesting the government to make visible reduction in taxes, helping revive the businesses in the country, urging the government to hold thorough consultations with all stakeholders including the business community on the upcoming federal budget.

The Businessmen Panel (BMP) Chairman said that the his group in consultation with business community across Pakistan has compiling budget proposals, which will be sent to the relevant departments and will ask the government to incorporate them in the federal budget as their

implementation would address the key issues of trade and industry, facilitate better growth of business activities, improve tax revenue of government and help in revival of economy.

He stressed the need for reforming and simplifying the taxation system in consultation with the real stakeholders.

Dilating upon the key features of proposals, he said that the impact of political uncertainty has badly affected business and industrial sector and stressed that government should bring down GST and policy interest rate in order to ease the difficulties of business community.

In a joint meeting of various trade and industrial sectors held to review the budget proposals for the upcoming fiscal year, Mian Anjum Nisar appreciated

the government for its commitment of providing tax relief in the budget 2025-26, urging it that the major focus should be on greater relief to especially documented and registered SMEs rather than new taxation measures.

The FPCCI former president said that BMP will send proposals to the relevant departments, urging the authorities concerned to incorporate them in the budget, as their implementation would address the key issues of trade and industry.

The BMP chairman said that the Businessmen Panel has taken all trade and industry associations on board for preparation of proposals for the upcoming budget.

He said that efforts were made to give government a set of suggestions for

upcoming budget to make it business-friendly.

He said the business community understands that government was utilising its abilities to overcome economic challenges but at the same time the private sector considers itself duty-bound to point out the government hitches for speedy economic recovery.

The BMP chairman said that the FBR's reforms initiatives are not bearing fruit, as the revenue collecting agency could increase the number of sales tax return filers mainly due to rise in the type of those filers, who haven't paid any tax, implying that bad governance and weak tax management of the tax department still persist.

He said that the government's new measures seem to be inadequate to convince people to file tax

returns due to arm-twisting by the FBR, creating unnecessary controversy due to continuous raids on business premises.

He asked the government to enhance liaison with the business community with a view to broaden tax base and enhancing tax-to-GDP ratio, as the number of active taxpayers has declined.

He urged the authorities to introduce new tax incentives and extend the period of existing ones for attracting new foreign direct investments in line with the potential of the country. With a view to wipe out corruption there needs to develop local software and Apps with simplified system in Urdu so that interaction of human resource should be reduced, he suggested.

He said that the sustain-

able solution to Pakistan's problems lies in the structural reforms, as we can see very large inefficiencies in tax collection, which needs to be removed. So, the tax compliance must be improved and tax base should be broadened, which cannot be achieved with a single policy change, but by a systemic approach.

He suggested that taxes should be charged one time by any provincial or federal government, as provinces levy same kind of tax which the federal government has already imposed, escalating the cost of production and discouraging the registered manufacturers.

He called for harmonization of Sales Tax and Income Tax laws, getting rid of conflicting provisions, suggesting enhancing tax base by automation.

He urged the government to improve tax structure so that business and investment could flourish in the country, as the existing tax structure discourages investment. He requested the government to focus on reducing tax rates and expanding tax base by bringing all exempted sectors into the tax net.

He said that coordination between the government and the private sector was vital for economic growth, proposing the government to develop policies that could provide environment conducive to business in the country.

He called for strict measures to stop illicit trade, as the smuggling is not only causing massive shortfall in revenue collection but also discouraging the legal businesses and documented economy.





RAWALPINDI: Fakhar Zaman raises his bat as he celebrates scoring half century (50 runs) during the Pakistan Super League (PSL) Twenty20 cricket match between Lahore Qalandars and Quetta Gladiators.

Ennis downs Stanionis to unify welterweight belts

NEW YORK (AFP): Undeaten Jaron Ennis stopped Eimantas Stanionis with a sixth-round technical knockout to successfully unify the IBF and WBA welterweight belts in a bruising world title fight on Saturday.

In an explosive contest in Atlantic City, Ennis prevailed after subjecting Stanionis to a barrage of savage body shots. The 30-year-old Stanionis had started brightly, catching Ennis with two crunching overhand rights in the third round. But Ennis, 27, responded with a dominant fourth round, wobbling Stanionis with his jab while relentlessly targeting the Lithuanian's body.

Stanionis needed to drop down to one knee in the sixth round after being caught with several punishing body shots in quick succession from Ennis. Although he saw out the round and returned to his corner, trainer Marvin Somodio refused to allow him to come out for the seventh. Ennis, who improved to 34-0, with 30 knockouts, said afterward he had been determined to "put on a show" in what was the third defense of his IBF title.

"What's crazy is that I had a dream I was going to stop him just like this and it came true," the American said in his ring interview.

"The biggest part was me having my fun, being myself and having a live body in front of me -- I put on a show, I had my fun and I used my speed, power and defense." Stanionis fell to 15-1 with nine knockouts following the loss.

Japan qualify for BJK Cup finals with win over Canada

PARIS (AFP): Japan became the seventh team to book their place at the Billie Jean King Cup Finals when they came from behind to beat Canada 2-1 in Tokyo on Sunday.

Victory in the doubles put them top of Group A and means they will be heading to Shenzhen in September to join hosts China, defending champions Italy and fellow qualifying group winners Ukraine, Spain, Great Britain and Kazakhstan. The one remaining place will go to either Slovakia or USA, who meet in Bratislava later on Sunday.

Canada and Japan had both blanked Romania 3-0 in their opening matches, setting up the head-to-head finale which was played out in front of a noisy Tokyo crowd. The Canadians made the better start with Victoria Mboko edging Ena Shibahara over three sets, 6-4, 6-7 (8/10), 7-5.

Moyuka Uchijima then levelled the tie when she breezed through the second match against Rebecca Marino and Kayla Cross. The Japanese took the first set 6-3 but the Canadians hit back strongly to lead 5-1 in the second, at which point they wobbled, losing four games in a row. They held their nerve to break again and take the set 7-5 but were immediately in trouble in the decider when Marino was broken.

Zahid Gul's Mastery Propels Noor Zaman to U23 World C'ship

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Zahid Gul's visionary coaching has once again proven its worth as Noor Zaman clinched the U23 World Championship title in a thrilling final today—a monumental achievement for Pakistan's squash community. Under the strategic guidance of Coach Zahid Gul, Noor's journey to the top has been marked by relentless training, unwavering discipline, and a steadfast commitment to excellence.

In a match that showcased exceptional skill and mental fortitude, Noor Zaman overcame formidable opponents to secure the championship—a victory that has sent ripples of pride across the nation. Observers and experts alike have hailed this win as one of the most significant milestones in recent squash history. At the heart of Noor's success is Zahid Gul, whose tailored training programs and strategic insights have refined Noor's strengths and transformed



his raw talent into a formidable competitive edge.

Zahid Gul's coaching philosophy centers on personalized training regimes that not only push athletes to excel physically but also equip them with the mental resilience necessary for high-pressure international contests. His methodical approach—characterized by detailed video analyses, targeted drills, and continuous per-

formance feedback—has been pivotal in preparing Noor for the rigors of world-class competition.

Today's victory stands as a resounding testament to the extraordinary influence and effectiveness of Coach Zahid Gul's mentorship.

The U23 World Championship title is not merely a win; it is an emblem of achievement that underscores the potential of Pakistani squash when nurtured by top-tier coaching. Noor Zaman's triumph, fueled by the steadfast support of Zahid Gul, marks a new chapter in the legacy of the sport in Pakistan—a legacy built on passion, perseverance, and the unwavering pursuit of excellence.

As the nation celebrates this historic victory, the partnership between Noor Zaman and Coach Zahid Gul serves as an inspiring reminder that with the right guidance and dedication, remarkable achievements are well within reach.

Van der Poel wins third Paris-Roubaix in a row



ROUBAIX (Agencies): Mathieu van der Poel won his third consecutive Paris-Roubaix title by besting his great rival Tadej Pogacar.

The pair broke clear together with around 45km remaining of the gruelling, cobbled 259.2km one-day classic to set up a tantalising finale.

However, Pogacar crashed on a tight right-hand bend with 38km to go and could not regain contact with his powerful Dutch opponent, before the Slovenian required a bike change.

Van der Poel also had to change his bike with 15.6km to go, but had built up enough of an advantage to cross the line alone in the Roubaix velodrome.

He is only the third cyclist to win three straight Paris-Roubaix titles after France's Octave Lapize (1909-11) and Italy's Francesco Moser (1978-80).

"It means a lot, it's such a hard race and I was really suffering," said Van der Poel.

"It's too bad that Tadej made this mistake in the corner but then I just had to go for it. It was still quite far to the finish line and it was really hard."

A familiar rivalry but on new terrain

Pogacar, 26, was riding his debut Paris-Roubaix, yet it was no surprise the world champion sparked the decisive move in the race.

The three-time Tour de France winner attacked a group of favourites at the front with 71km to go and only Van der Poel, 30, was able to counter.

The Dutchman stalled their progress to allow Alpecin-Deceuninck team-mate Jasper Philipsen to join before Philipsen slipped back 23km later.

From there it seemed likely to come down to which rider had the most power left, but Van der Poel's superb bike-handling skills and Paris-Roubaix experience proved vital, with Pogacar taking the corner too quickly and sliding into the mud.

While not a serious crash, it was too much of an advantage to cede, even with Van der Poel later suffering a puncture, and the Dutchman crossed the line just before Pogacar entered the velodrome, winning by one minute and 18 seconds.

Denmark's Mads Pedersen won the sprint for third, holding off Belgians Wout van Aert and Florian Vermeersch. Britain's Fred Wright finished ninth.

"We all know what an incredible champion Tadej is - he was in his first Roubaix, it doesn't surprise me but it's also not normal, he's an exceptional talent," added Van der Poel.

"It would have been the two of us going to the

velodome if he didn't make the mistake so I'll guess we'll see him back next year to take his revenge."

Van der Poel now has eight wins across the five oldest and most prestigious 'Monument' races in men's cycling, drawing level again with Pogacar after the Slovenian claimed the Tour of Flanders last week.

Only five riders have won more Monuments: Eddy Merckx (19), Roger de Vlaeminck (11) and Costante Girardengo, Fausto Coppi and Sean Kelly (nine).

Van der Poel and Pogacar have won all three Monuments between them this year, though Pogacar will be heavily favoured in the remaining two - Liege-Bastogne-Liege and Il Lombardia.

Pogacar has two Liege-Bastogne-Liege titles and has won the last four editions of Il Lombardia, with his climbing ability well suited to the hilly terrain of both races.

Paris-Roubaix results  
Mathieu van der Poel (Ned/Alpecin-Deceuninck) 5hrs 31mins 27secs

Tadej Pogacar (Slo/UAE Team Emirates-XRG) +1min 18secs

Mads Pedersen (Den/Lidl-Trek) +2mins 11secs

Wout van Aert (Bel/Team Visma-Lease a Bike) Same time

Florian Vermeersch (Bel/UAE Team Emirates-XRG)

Jonas Rutsch (Ger/Intermarche-Wanty) +3mins 46secs

Stefan Bissegger (Swi/Decathlon AG2R La Mondiale) Same time

Marius Wold (Nor/Uno-X Mobility)

Fred Wright (GB/Bahrain Victorious) +4mins 35secs

Laurenz Rex (Bel/Intermarche-Wanty) +4mins 36secs.

Alcaraz fights back to win Monte Carlo Masters



MONTE CARLO (Agencies): Carlos Alcaraz came from a set down to beat Lorenzo Musetti and win the Monte Carlo Masters for the first time.

The four-time major champion produced some superb shots to overcome the Italian 3-6 6-1 6-0 on the clay. It was a competitive match for a set and a half before Musetti, bidding for the biggest prize of his career, began to struggle with a leg injury.

The success was a sixth ATP Masters 1000 trophy for Alcaraz - his first since Indian Wells last year - and an 18th title overall. It also gives the 21-year-old a confidence boost before he defends his French Open title in May. "It's been a really difficult week with a lot of difficult situations," Alcaraz said.

"I'm really proud of myself how I've dealt with everything. It's been a really difficult month for me on the court and outside. "Coming here and seeing how the whole hard work has paid off, I'm really happy."

Alcaraz, as he has done for most of the week, made a wayward start. An early break lead was cancelled out by Musetti, who reeled off four games in a row as Alcaraz sprayed errors off his forehand. Musetti's accuracy won out over his opponent's pacy hitting, with the Italian clinching the set on an outrageous drop-shot winner from behind the baseline. Alcaraz hit 14 unforced errors in the first set, 11 off the forehand alone, but settled quickly into the second.

A roar of "vamos" greeted a missed Musetti forehand that handed Alcaraz the break lead, with the Spaniard moving around the court with more conviction and asking the crowd for appreciation after hitting a superb backhand winner. He won five games in a row but Musetti had a glimmer of a chance. He created five break-back points as Alcaraz served for the set, but the second seed saved them all, ultimately closing out an eight-minute game to force a deciding third set.

That was barely competitive, though, as Musetti was hindered by a right thigh injury, needing treatment after going 3-0 down, and could barely move.

Alcaraz promptly whizzed through the set, raising his arms in celebration before consoling Musetti. The victory also means Alcaraz will replace Germany's Alexander Zverev as world number two when the rankings are updated on Monday. Later, British pair Julian Cash and Lloyd Glasspool were beaten 1-6 7-6 (10-8) 10-8 in the men's doubles final by home favourite Romain Arneodo and France's Manuel Guinard.

Late Van Dijk header helps Liverpool beat West Ham

LIVERPOOL (AFP): Virgil van Dijk spared Liverpool's blushes with a late winner to beat West Ham 2-1 on Sunday and edge to within six points of the Premier League title.

Andy Robertson's own goal four minutes from time had given the lowly Hammers a deserved equaliser after Luis Diaz put Liverpool in front early on.

Van Dijk, though, swiftly restored the lead to show Liverpool retain the mentality of champions, even if they are running out of steam in the closing stages of the season.

Liverpool's lead stretches to 13 points with six games remaining.

A record-equalling 20th English top-flight title could come as early as next Sunday if Liverpool win at Leicester and Arsenal lose away to Ipswich.

The stage was set before kick-off for Mohamed Salah to be the hero as the Egyptian was given a huge ovation just days after ending speculation over his future by signing a new two-year contract.

Salah started with the intention of making sure he was the focus of attention

as young left-back Ollie Scarles struggled to cope with the Premier League's top scorer.

The 32-year-old has failed to score in seven of his last eight Liverpool games as his sensational early season form has failed off.

But he still managed to set a new Premier League record by registering his 45th goal or assist of the campaign, the most ever in a 38-game season.

Salah outmuscled Scarles on the touchline and sprinted clear before an inch-perfect cross for Diaz allowed the Colombian to tap in for his 15th goal of the season on 18 minutes.

Defeat sees West Ham slip to 17th in the table, but they had a series of chances to take at least a point.

The fatigue that has seen Liverpool struggle in recent times was in evidence again as they had goalkeeper Alisson Becker to thank for moving another three points closer to the title.

Alisson brilliantly tipped Mohammed Kudus' attempted chip onto the bar with the visitors first serious attack.

Jarrod Bowen had West

Ham's best chance to level when he failed to beat Alisson when one-on-one with the Brazilian before he turned away another powerful drive by Kudus.

When West Ham did finally find the net, it was thanks to two of Liverpool's most experienced defenders, Robertson and Van Dijk both went for the same ball and the Scotland captain diverted Aaron Wan-Bissaka's cross into his own net.

The goal suddenly sparked Liverpool into life after a listless second half as Diaz's deflected effort went over the bar.

Van Dijk took just three minutes to make amends for the equaliser as he powered in Alexis Mac Allister's corner.

The Dutchman kissed the badge in celebration in a potential nod to him reportedly being close to following Salah in signing a new contract.

There was still more drama to come as Nicolas Fullkrug hit the bar for West Ham in stoppage time. But Liverpool held out to take another step towards the title in Arne Slot's first season in charge.



Luis Diaz scored his 11th league goal of the season to put Liverpool ahead.

Women's softball event from May 3

ISLAMABAD (APP): The women's softball event of the 35th National Games, will take place from May 3 at the KMC Sports Complex on Kashmir Road. The teams will arrive on May 1, the managers meeting is scheduled for May 2, and the final match will be held on May 7, said a press release.

Teams from Pakistan Army, Wapda, Police, Higher Education Commission, Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan, and Sindh have been invited to participate in the event.

A special meeting regarding the event's organizational affairs was chaired by President of the Softball Federation of Pakistan, Asif Azeem. During the meeting, names for the organizing

and management committee were finalized.

General Secretary of the Federation, Naseem Khan, was appointed as Chairman of the Softball Organizing Committee. President of Sindh Softball Association, Prof. Dr. Farhan Essa, will serve as Deputy Chairman, while SSA Secretary Muhammad Zeeshan Merchant has been named as Organizing Secretary. Ayesha Leena will serve as Event Coordinator, and Tariq Pasha has been appointed Chief Umpire.

Other key appointments include Muhammad Nasir: Venue and Equipment Manager; Faraz Ijaz: Jury and Technical Officials; Ahmed Yar Khan: Security and Protocol; Muhammad Ibrahim: Accommodation and Transport; Murad

Hussain: Safe Sports Coordinator.

On the occasion, Federation President Asif Azeem said all stakeholders including the Sindh Government's Sports Department, and the Sindh Olympic Association are working tirelessly to ensure the successful organization of the 35th National Games in Karachi. Dr Farhan Essa, President of the Sindh Softball Association, said hosting the National Games is an honor for Sindh and through this event, the message of 'healthy athletes, strong Pakistan' will be spread across the country. Providing a safe and ideal environment for female athletes is our top priority, he said.

Peshawar Zalmi announces CLEAR Men as official partner

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Peshawar Zalmi, one of the most iconic franchises in the Pakistan Super League (PSL), proudly announces its partnership with CLEAR Men for PSL 10. Under this collaboration, the CLEAR Men logo will be prominently displayed on the Leading Arm of Peshawar Zalmi's official playing kits, marking the beginning of an exciting association between two dynamic brands.

COO Peshawar Zalmi, Mr. Abbas Layaq and Mr. Javed Jafri Unilever Media Head signed the contract in the presence of Star Zalmi players Tom Kohler-Cadmore, Sufiyan Mugeem, Mohammad Haris, and Max Bryant.

This partnership reflects the shared passion for excellence, entertainment, and Fan engagement that both Peshawar Zalmi and CLEAR Men stand for. With targeted care for men and fan-first experiences, it's all about boosting confidence both on and off the pitch. Together, they're ral-



lying young men across Pakistan to level up their self-care game.

Mr. Javed Afridi, Chairman Peshawar Zalmi, expressed his excitement, stating: "CLEAR Men has always championed confidence that starts from within. Through this collaboration with Peshawar Zalmi, we aim to inspire millions of young fans to not only play strong but feel strong—with CLEAR MEN super charging men's scalps for super performance as their trusted grooming partner."

Mr. Faizan Zaheer Senior Brand Manager expressed his enthusiasm for the partnership, stating:

"At CLEAR MEN, we believe that true performance starts from the scalp. Our mission is to educate men about their unique scalp needs and provide them with solutions that power up their confidence from within. Partnering with a high-performance team like Peshawar Zalmi — one of the most followed franchises in Pakistan — allows us to connect deeply with young Pakistani men through their biggest passion point: cricket."

This collaboration is about sparking a movement towards better scalp care and self-confidence for men across the country."

Beyond the cricket field,

this partnership will focus on fan engagement and digital interaction, ensuring that supporters of Peshawar Zalmi experience the thrill of the game like never before. Peshawar Zalmi and CLEAR Men 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.

CLEAR Men is a globally recognized leader in men's haircare, renowned for its advanced antidandruff solutions and commitment to scalp health. The brand continues to innovate and expand its presence worldwide, empowering men with confidence through effective and refreshing haircare products.





## In brief

### Seven more arrested

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi Police on Sunday arrested seven more suspects with 600 grams ice and over 7 kg charas as they continued their crackdown against drug suppliers. During the crackdown launched on the instructions of City Police Officer Syed Khalid Hamdani in the district, more than 100 drug suppliers had been arrested so far and over 4 kilograms ice, 1.5 kg heroin and about 180 kg charas had been recovered, the police spokesman said. The Chaklala Police nabbed two accused Tanveer Akhtar and Sher Alam, recovering 600 grams ice and 1.48 kg charas from them respectively. Similarly, the Saddar Beroni Police also caught two accused Ghulam Murtaza and Tanveer with 2.2 kg and 1.68 kg charas respectively. Likewise, the Wah Saddar, New Town and Race Course Police recovered 610 grams, 550 grams and 520 grams charas from accused Hamza, Daniel and Shakeel respectively and took them into custody.

### 3 arrested after crossfire

RAWALPINDI (APP): The three-member Koma gang including an injured suspect, wanted in dozens of street crime incidents, was arrested after crossfire with police here in the Ratta Amral late Saturday night. According to the Rawalpindi Police spokesman, the three suspects riding a motorcycle opened fire on a police team which signalled them to stop for checking. In the retaliatory fire by the police, one of the suspects Sohail was injured and arrested along with the gang leader Waqas alias Koma and Imran alias Maro. A stolen motorcycle and money, and weapons were recovered from the suspects. The spokesman claimed that the accused were wanted in dozens of cases of robbery, snatching of valuables including motorcycles and theft registered at Ratta Amral, Bani, New Town and Pirwadhai police stations. City Police Officer Syed Khalid Hamdani appreciated the Ratta Amral Police team for bravely facing and arresting the criminals at the risk of their lives.

### Social media influence

ISLAMABAD (APP): In wake of high influence of social and digital media, a significant change in wedding traditions had been observed in the country. Due to increasing such influence, wedding culture had undergone a significant transformation in recent years with addition of many new trends. Now this simple celebration had evolved into a lavish, week-long extravaganza, complete with multiple events and excessive spending. The rise of new, elaborate traditions such as "Bride-to-Be" parties, Mehndi nights, and Dholki celebrations had contributed to the shift mainly due to having such trends in tv dramas and showbiz personalities in social media. These events, often characterized by lavish food, decorations, and entertainment, have become an integral part of Pakistani wedding culture. According to wedding planners and industry experts, the average cost of a wedding in Pakistan has skyrocketed, with some families spending upwards of Rs five million on a single event. Imtiaz Niazi a wedding planner said the wedding industry in Pakistan has become a multi-billion-rupee market as families willingly spend exorbitant amounts of money to make their wedding celebrations unforgettable not for just family members but for getting popularity and likes in social media apps like Facebook, Instagram and tiktok.

# Convention for overseas Pakistanis aims for solutions

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Overseas Pakistanis Chaudhry Salik Hussain Sunday extended a warm welcome to participants, thanking them for their presence and emphasizing the event's focus on resolving issues faced by overseas Pakistanis.

In an exclusive talk with a private news channel Minister for Overseas expressed admiration for overseas Pakistanis, noting that the event would provide a valuable opportunity to recognize their remarkable services to Pakistan.

He emphasized that overseas Pakistanis are close to the heart of the Pakistani government and assured that every possible step will be taken to address their concerns and provide support.

Hussain highlighted overseas Pakistanis' importance, saying the event aims to appreciate the services of these individuals who significantly contribute to Pakistan's development and economy.

Responding to a query about convention activities, Salik Hussain mentioned that various institutional stalls, including NADRA, FIA, NAB, Passport Office, State Bank and FBR have been set up to provide direct assistance to overseas Pakistanis, as these institutions play a crucial role in handling their affairs.

The convention is progressing successfully, with delegate participants actively cooperating and expressing admiration for the government's efforts, he mentioned.

This cooperation reflects a unified approach towards common objectives, where diverse stakeholders work together seamlessly, he said, adding, effective collaboration, as seen in this event, empowers participants are sharing ideas, concerns and thoughts, fostering connections and driving progress toward shared goals.

He further highlighted that the government has passed a special bill for overseas Pakistanis, now enacted into law in Punjab, providing significant relief through the establishment of special courts that decide cases within 90 days, and offering a video link facility to eliminate the need for physical appearances in court.

## PCCR to tackle out-of-school children crisis

ISLAMABAD (PPI): The Parliamentary Caucus on Child Rights of the National Assembly, led by Convenor Dr. Nikhat Shakeel Khan, organized a critical Consultative Session to confront the pressing issue of Out-of-School Children (OOSC) in Punjab.

The session aimed to uncover the underlying causes of the OOSC problem and develop a tailored strategy to address the unique circumstances of the province.

Dr. Nikhat Khan welcomed a diverse group of participants, including members of the National Assembly, provincial leaders, and civil society representatives. She highlighted the multifaceted challenges contributing to OOSC, such as financial barriers, accessibility issues, and cultural norms.

Syed Ali Qasim Gillani, MNA and Advisory

Council Member of the PCCR, shared successful initiatives from Multan and advocated for their expansion to other districts. He recommended measures including parental counseling, infrastructure development, and the establishment of IT labs to enhance educational opportunities.

MNA Asia Naz Tanoli called for raising the educational qualifications of teachers and promoting awareness through various media channels to address rural education challenges.

She emphasized recognizing and sharing success stories of determined students and parents.

Dr. Shazia Sobia Aslam Soomro stressed the importance of programs teaching children personal safety and collaboration with NGOs to combat street child exploitation. She cited the Sindh Province as a model for

effective interventions.

Ms. Sarah Ahmed, Convenor of the Provincial Caucus for Child Rights in Punjab, discussed partnerships with UNICEF and the Child Protection Bureau to launch campaigns for child welfare. She emphasized vocational training for girls to empower them economically.

Officials from the Education Department of Multan presented data and initiatives aimed at reducing OOSC numbers. Recommendations included enforcing compulsory education laws, increasing early morning schools, and enhancing school infrastructure.

The session concluded with Dr. Nikhat Shakeel Khan honoring MNA Syed Ali Qasim Gillani for his dedication to the cause, marking the session's success with a symbolic group photograph.

## CDA's cleanliness, plantation campaign

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

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

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

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

The official informed that this year, fruit-bearing trees such as loquat, guava, figs, pomegranates, and other fruit plants will be planted. Similarly, indigenous species like mulberry, citrus, maple leaf, and other varieties will also be included in the campaign. Olive, rubber plants, willow, and other varieties are also part of the Spring Tree Plantation Campaign.

He stressed that everyone should join hands and contribute actively to make the plantation campaign a success. Fatima

Rasool, a resident of G-II, highly appreciated CDA's drive which would provide healthy atmosphere to the citizen in the federal capital.

She further said that CDA's always play key role in ensuring the neat and clean ambience which would eliminate several health diseases. She emphasized that everybody should play their role in cleanliness and tree plantation during the spring and said that she had already planted a sapling to play her own part in this campaign.

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

## Junaid advocates blue carbon ecosystems

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs, Muhammad Junaid Anwar Chaudhry has emphasized the pivotal role of blue carbon ecosystems in building a climate-resilient and sustainable maritime sector in the country.

Addressing the urgent need for ecological preservation, he called for the conservation and restoration of essential marine habitats such as mangroves, seagrasses, and salt marshes, said a press release on Sunday.

In a statement on coastal resilience, Junaid Anwar Chaudhry highlighted that blue carbon ecosystems act not only as powerful carbon sinks but also as natural defenses against rising sea levels, coastal erosion, and extreme weather events.

"Blue carbon ecosystems are nature's frontline climate defenders," the minister stated. "They capture carbon, protect coastlines, sustain marine biodi-

versity, and support the livelihoods of coastal communities. They are central to Pakistan's climate strategy and our vision for maritime sustainability."

Blue carbon refers to the carbon captured and stored by marine ecosystems. These ecosystems, particularly mangroves and seagrasses, sequester carbon more efficiently than terrestrial forests and play a key role in climate mitigation.

The federal minister voiced concern over the multiple threats these ecosystems face, including unregulated coastal development, pollution, overfishing, climate change, and unsustainable land use practices. Such pressures degrade vital habitats, reduce their capacity to store carbon, and endanger marine life. He stressed the need for integrated and immediate action to reverse these trends and restore ecological balance.

Highlighting the ecolog-

ical and economic value of Pakistan's marine resources, the minister pointed to the Indus Delta—a globally significant region that hosts one of the largest mangrove forests in the world. This area is critical for stabilizing coastlines, supporting fisheries, and acting as a buffer against storms. Restoration efforts in Sindh and Balochistan are underway to rehabilitate these ecosystems, while also generating green jobs and revitalizing local economies.

"Community involvement is central to our approach," Junaid Chaudhry explained. "We are working hand-in-hand with coastal residents and local fishermen to ensure that conservation and economic development go together. This model not only empowers communities but ensures long-term sustainability." He cited the mangrove restoration program in Keti Bandar as a successful example.



ISLAMABAD: Parliamentary Secretary for Education, Heritage, and Culture, Farah Naz Akbar addressing talking to media at Lok Virsa, Shakar Parian.

## OPF Chairman praises overseas Pakistanis

ISLAMABAD (APP): Overseas Pakistanis Foundation (OPF) Chairman Syed Qamar Raza Sunday praised the government's enthusiastic welcome to overseas Pakistanis attending the convention, terming overseas Pakistanis from all categories as the backbone of Pakistan's economy.

In an exclusive interview with PTV news channel, the OPF Chairman noted that more than 500 have

already reached and around 1,078 overseas Pakistanis from 60 countries are participating in the historic convention, which will provide a unique opportunity for them to connect face-to-face with the Prime Minister and government officials, while talking to them directly about their concerns and issues.

The OPF Chairman further mentioned that the Prime Minister is personally focused on addressing the

issues of overseas Pakistanis. He expressed gratitude to Chairman Senate Yousaf Raza Gillani, the Prime Minister and the President for their efforts in passing a bill that has now become law.

This new law establishes 'Special separate courts' to hear overseas property concerns, featuring online video-linked facilities, providing a more accessible and efficient means of resolving property disputes for overseas Pakistanis, he

mentioned.

The OPF Chairman stated that the speedy court procedures will revive trust among overseas Pakistanis, leading to increased remittances, as they will feel more confident in investing and sending money back home through formal channels. The Chairman also expressed appreciation that despite short notice, overseas Pakistanis are enthusiastically participating in the convention.

## Piyass International knocks door of IHC against Sheesha cafes

ISLAMABAD (APP): Piyass International, a non-profit organization, by taking a landmark step against the drug menace infiltrating youth circles in the guise of modern leisure, has joined hands with the Crime and Investigative Reporters Association (CIRA) to initiate legal proceedings against the alleged drug mafia operating under the cover of Sheesha cafes throughout the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT).

This joint initiative, a petition in Islamabad High Court (IHC), marks a rare and bold civil society action in a bid to bring to justice those believed to be engaged in the open violation of Pakistan's legal and moral codes, particularly targeting the vulnerable youth. The petition has accused the Sheesha cafes of becoming fronts for the distribution of potent narcotics such as ice (crystal meth), marijuana, weed, and cocaine, thereby exacerbating the drug crisis in the federal capital.

The legal motion being submitted in the IHC is anchored on the precedent established in Supreme Court of Pakistan's Sou Motu Case No. 11/2006, in which a ruling dated October 19, 2016, unequivocally banned the operation of Sheesha cafes and underscored the state's responsibility to eliminate drug use in public and private venues. Despite

this clear directive, a recent survey conducted jointly by Piyass International and CIRA reveals that such cafes are not only still functioning but are also flagrantly defying the Supreme Court orders, highlighting the "shocking apathy" on the part of the ICT Administration.

Talking to media, Rana Imran Latif, Chairman of both Piyass International and CIRA, and a seasoned journalist voiced deep concern over the local administration's failure to clamp down on what he called "narcotics trade hidden behind trendy smoke lounges." "These cafes have become hubs for dangerous substances such as flavored tobacco has transformed into a market for narcotics destroying our youth and families alike, he added." Rana Latif said his teams have repeatedly brought this issue to the attention of the concerned departments but no action was taken. "We are now left with no choice but to seek justice through the courts. This is not just a local matter, it's a national emergency that has international implications, he opined"

Rana said Sheesha cafes have been identified in various UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime) reports as potential fronts for illegal drug consumption and distribution. He argued that in countries where gover-

nance gaps exist, such entertainment spaces can morph into drug dens.

The anti-drug campaign, spearheaded by Piyass International and CIRA, has received growing support from civil society, legal experts, and public health professionals. Rana Latif confirmed that an actionable framework has been developed in consultation with various organizations and stakeholders to press forward with legal, social, and media measures against this mafia.

"This is not just a legal petition," Rana said, "it's a societal movement. We will knock every door, from the courts to Parliament etc. We are ready to face any consequence, but we will not allow the future of our nation to be hijacked by drug cartels operating under the mask of Sheesha cafes."

The IHC is expected to take up the matter in the coming days, and the petitioners are hopeful for an early hearing. Meanwhile, Piyass International and CIRA have announced plans to launch a public awareness campaign and documentary series exposing the facts behind the rise of drug-linked Sheesha culture in the federal capital. This legal battle could set a significant precedent for Pakistan's domestic war on drugs, if the courts and law enforcement choose to act decisively.

## Importance of book reading on rise in this digital age

ISLAMABAD (APP): In the modern digital age where mobile phones, e-papers and manuscript on internet or social networking websites are the primary source of information, the importance of books is still on the rise.

The scholars, students and book lovers were still showing keen interest and rushing to book stalls for reading purpose.

Talking to APP, Associate Professor Shah Abdul Latif University Khairpur, Dr Sahib Khan said that developing a strong reading habit involved in creating consistent routines, finding engaging material, and setting achievable goals.

It can be a rewarding process that enhances cognitive skills, reduces stress, and expands knowledge, he added. He stressed that continuously book reading habit would not only give readers immense knowledge but it would teach them how to behave with others in a manner.

He emphasized that in a polarized society, book is a loyal and best friend seems to be failing into obscurity. He urged the students to focus on reading books besides their academic learning and make friendship with books for the sake acquiring information. Mujeeb-ur-Rehman, a student, said that he always enjoys reading books and cannot live without them that's reason he was visiting various libraries to acquire ample knowledge. He said that reading thousands books would tell a reader how to behave and survive in the society.

## ANF unearthed drug trafficking network

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) has unearthed a highly organized drug trafficking network operating through the Online Courier services and arrested five accused involved in the heinous crime, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman on Sunday.

The ANF team arrested an accused Zahid ur Rehman from Nowshera who had booked 11 drug-laden parcels for different cities. The drug-laden parcels were seized on March 25 and 26 and April 7, out of the parcels which were being sent to different cities, 5.7 kg of hashish,

200 grams' ice, 120 ecstasy pills, 150 grams opium, fake currency and a 30 bore pistol were also recovered from Zahidur Rehman's possession.

The ANF, on the information given by the arrested accused Zahidur Rehman about the shipment of drug smuggler Muhammad Younis from Sialkot arrested three accused red-handed near Haji Camp Peshawar besides nabbing the employee of the courier office involved in facilitating the accused.

The ANF recovered two kg of hashish from the possession of the accused, and during the investigation, it

was found that the accused were involved in inter-provincial drug trafficking.

The accused obtained drugs from Bara and other areas and transported them through courier services.

The ANF, while accelerating its crackdown against drug smuggling through online courier networks, urged Courier services to tighten the surveillance of suspicious parcels and cooperate with ANF, as digital drug trafficking networks were a threat to national security. Cases have been registered against the arrested accused under the Narcotics Control Act, and further investigations are underway.

## Cleanliness of cricket stadium during PSL

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi Waste Management Company (RWMC) continuously cleaned the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium during the Pakistan Super League (PSL) cricket matches, which started on April 11. According to the RWMC spokesman, to keep the area neat and clean, the RWMC had deployed additional staff members, including sanitary workers and supervisors, in two shifts at Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium.

Chief Executive Officer of RWMC Rana Sajid Safdar said the areas inside and outside the stadium, including the Double Road and parking areas, were being

cleaned daily while workers performed their duties during the matches till the end of the game. Sajid said that waste bins had been placed from Faizabad to Double Road to ensure cleanliness. Meanwhile, the RWMC's "Suthra Punjab" campaign, launched on the instruction of Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif, was in full swing to keep the division neat and clean. Under the drive, cleanliness of all tehsils and districts' urban and rural areas was being carried out regularly.

At the same time, waste containers were being repaired, and mechanical sweeping of roads, metro bus stations, and washing were

also done. He said that the sanitation staff of RWMC had removed thousands of tons of garbage and rubbish from Rawalpindi City and other tehsils of the district.

He said complaints received on social media platforms were also being addressed, while the cleanliness of metro stations, bus stands, graveyards, and other public places was also being carried out.

He said residents were informed about keeping their surroundings clean through pamphlets, banners, and social media platforms. In case of any complaint, citizens were asked to register their complaints on helpline number 1139.



3 killed, 2 hurt in accidents

MEHTARLAM (Pajhwok): Three people have been killed and two others injured as a result of traffic accidents in Laghman on Sunday. Traffic Director Habibullah said that a collision took place between a motorbike and a rickshaw on the Chinchar bridge in Alingar district, leaving two men dead and two others wounded. Separately, an individual was killed on Sunday when a pick-up truck veered off the road and overturned in the Dagan area of Dawlatshah district.

UN agency issued warning

KABUL (Amu TV): Four out of five residents of Kabul live in informal or substandard housing, according to UN Human Settlements Programme. The agency warned that these communities are particularly vulnerable to the effects of extreme weather and climate-related disasters. On Sunday, agency noted that more than 40% of Afghanistan's urban population resides in the capital, underscoring the scale of the city's housing and infrastructure challenges.

International condemnation:  
Hibatullah defends public executions

KANDAHAR (Amu TV): The Taliban's reclusive leader, Hibatullah Akhundzada, responded defiantly to international criticism over the public execution of four men, stating that his administration would not retreat from the enforcement of these rulings, including capital sentences, under any circumstances.

"We will not abandon the enforcement of these rulings, even if it costs us our lives," Akhundzada said during a religious seminar in Kandahar, referring specifically to the punishment of qisas, or retributive justice. "We will not yield to Western pressure."

The comments came a day after the Taliban executed four individuals in front of large crowds in the provinces of Nimruz, Farah, and Badghis. Eyewitnesses told Amu TV that the men were killed by gunfire in stadiums, with Taliban fighters carrying out the sentences in full public view.

The executions sparked strong condemnation from international human rights organizations and United Nations officials.

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan described the incident as part of a broader pattern of rights violations by the Taliban.

Akhundzada dismissed these criticisms, arguing

that the rulings were consistent with Islamic law. "Just as God has commanded prayer, He has commanded retribution," he said. He also framed support for his leadership as a matter of religious loyalty: "Those who stand with me are standing with God, they are upholding His law."

Taliban have increasingly drawn international scrutiny over their strict interpretation of Islamic law, including corporal and capital punishments carried out without transparent judicial proceedings. Human rights monitors have expressed concern over the lack of due process and the use of public executions as a tool of intimidation.

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Chief Justice of Supreme Court urges reforms

BAGHLAN (BNA): Sheikh Abdul Hakim Haqqani, Chief Justice of Afghanistan's Supreme Court, conducted an on-site assessment of the judicial system and court operations in Badghis province, officials confirmed.

According to the provincial governor's media office, the Chief Justice of Afghanistan's Supreme Court held a high-level meeting with Governor Hafiz Mohammad Amin Jan Omari, the heads of the appellate and military courts, and several local officials to discuss court activities, legal proceedings, and challenges within the province's justice sector.

Judicial leaders briefed the Chief Justice on the current state of legal affairs, court performance, and operational concerns.

During his remarks, Haqqani emphasized the importance of a robust judicial system as a cornerstone of Islamic justice and called for stronger lawful and religious cooperation between government institutions and the judiciary to ensure timely and transparent access to justice for citizens.

He also stressed the need for regular monitoring of prison conditions, swift processing of legal cases, and addressing structural challenges facing the judiciary.

Furthermore, Haqqani urged closer collaboration between local authorities and judicial bodies.

Governor Omari, for his part, expressed full support from the provincial administration for the judiciary's mission, pledging comprehensive cooperation to ensure the fair and transparent application of justice across Badghis.

Aid suspension no impact on Afghanistan: Minister

KABUL (TOLOnews): The deputy minister of public health told TOLOnews that international aid was largely symbolic and its suspension has had no effect on Afghanistan.

Bakht Rahman Sharafat, speaking at the opening of a 20-bed hospital for treating women with drug addiction in Ghazni, stated that the health sector has been strengthened since the Islamic Emirate returned to power.

The deputy minister said: "Foreign aid has had no negative impact on Afghanistan's economy or any sector. Transparency has been established, resources are being managed properly, the people are making efforts, and the available resources are being used efficiently."

Local officials in Ghazni said the hospital was built at a cost of about \$120,000 to treat addicted women.

Zargh Zirk, head of public health in Ghazni, said: "This hospital has 20 beds for addiction treatment, which can be expanded if needed. Patients will be treated for 45 days, and the entire staff consists of women."

The hospital was funded by the United Nations



Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and constructed by a local organization.

Hamidullah Hemat, head of a local NGO in Ghazni, stated: "The hospital's budget was provided by the UNODC through the YHDO organization, with costs reaching up to

\$120,000. This project will be expanded."

According to the Ministry of Public Health, a budget of 7 billion afghani has been approved for building hospitals across all districts of the country, with implementation set to begin soon.

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Hydroelectric dam to be build in Panjshir



PANJSHIR (BNA): A Turkish international company has announced plans to construct a hydroelectric dam in the "Kotal-e Bam-Verdar" area of Paryan district, with an estimated investment of \$20 million.

Saifuddin Laton, spokesperson for the Panjshir governor's office, confirmed the project to Bakhtar News Agency, noting that technical survey work is currently underway.

Once completed, the dam is expected to generate 10 megawatts of electricity, providing power to approximately 10,000 families in the Panjshir region who currently lack access to reliable electricity.

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Garmab and Chinar residents seek basic amenities

TIRINKOT (Pajhwok): Residents of Garmab and Chinar areas, located about 15 kilometres south of the capital of central Uruzgan province, complain about the lack of basic services, including healthcare and education.

The two areas, home to an estimated 15,000 families, reportedly lack schools, health centres and other essential public services.

Wali Mohammad, a resident of the Garmab, alleged the area had been neglected a run of governments over

the decades.

"We have no access to schools, health facilities or other basic services," he grumbled, underlining the need for essential infrastructure.

He called on the interim government and partner organisations for assistance in the provision of elemental facilities to area residents.

Shamsullah Hasani, another local resident, noted some organisations had established temporary education centres and clinics, but they did not meet their long-term needs.

"We have raised our concerns with relevant officials time and again, but no one has responded positively to our pleas," he lamented.

Syed Mohammad, another inhabitant, pointed to the road connecting their area to Tirinkot, the provincial capital. He deplored the road had long been in a state of disrepair. Telecommunication services are inadequate and access to clean drinking water is limited.

He added: "We have been ignored in the distribution of humanitarian aid. We don't have schools, our roads are broken and we are struggling financially."

Meanwhile, local officials acknowledged the

challenges faced by Garmab and Chinar residents, saying efforts were underway to initiate development projects in these areas.

Hafiz Samiullah Akrama, the governor's spokesperson, told Pajhwok Afghan News relevant departments had been instructed to implement certain projects for the neglected communities.

He announced two days ago, construction work began on a retaining wall worth over one million afghanis in Garmab.

Basic services would gradually be provided to all areas that had been deprived for years, the gubernatorial spokesman assured.

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Nearly 500 schools in Balkh and Baghlan provinces without buildings

PUL-I-KHUMRI/MAZAR-I-SHARIF (Pajhwok): Local officials in the northern provinces of Balkh and Baghlan say nearly 500 schools remain without proper buildings, forcing students to study under the open sky in harsh winter and summer.

Balkh Director of Education Mohammad Sharif Usmani told Pajhwok Afghan News there were 600 schools in the

province, where approximately 550,000 students were enrolled.

He said many of the schools either had no buildings at all or operated in structures that were no longer usable. "In Balkh, we have 223 schools that either have no buildings or whose buildings are unfit for use."

Usmani said. "As a result, in some areas we have rented houses for

hosting classes, while in others, students are studying under tents."

Since the formation of the current caretaker government, buildings have been constructed for 12 schools in the province, and 24 others have been repaired or renovated. Efforts are ongoing to construct or repair the remaining schools.

Meanwhile, several students and teachers voiced

concerns about the lack of infrastructure, saying the absence of proper buildings posed significant challenges.

They are urging the government and aid organisations to prioritise the construction of school buildings.

Ghulam Abbas Wahidi, the principal of the Multidisciplinary High School in Balkh, said his school lacks a complete building and appealed to the government and relevant bodies to address the issue.

Similarly, Ahmad Khalid, a sixth-grade student at Imam Fakhruddin Razi School in Chahar Bolak district, said they are studying under tents, which causes numerous difficulties during both summer and winter.

According to the Balkh Education Department, in addition to the 600 general schools, there are also 1,050 religious schools in the province, where over 100,000 students are engaged in religious studies.

Likewise, Maulvi

Mohammad Noor Azizi, Director of the Education Department in Baghlan, revealed 550 schools existed in the province, with nearly 400,000 students – including over 170,000 girls.

"There are 550 active schools across Baghlan," he said. "Last year, buildings were constructed for 20 schools. At present, 331 schools have proper buildings, while the remaining 219 do not."

"We have provided tents through our budget and with financial support from various organisations, but we aim to construct permanent buildings instead of relying on tents."

He said discussions had been held with several organisations to support the school's construction. Efforts are underway to address the lack of standard classrooms.

Meanwhile, Mullah Saber, principal of Bibi Aina High School in the Shihabuddin area of central Pul-i-Khumri, said students had been studying under trees and beside walls for

many years.

"Bibi Aina High School has 1,600 students and requires 24 classrooms, but we have only eight rooms, and they too are substandard," he said. "We have a few tents, but they are worn out. This year, we are constructing basic wooden shelters for students."

According to him, the school has repeatedly requested the Education Department to build a proper building for it. But they were informed there was no budget, and no organisation had yet committed to constructing one.

Shah Mahmood, principal of Hussain Khel High School in Pul-i-Khumri, noted teaching in open spaces was significantly more challenging than in a standard classroom.

"In a proper classroom, students are fully focused on their teacher's lecture," he argued. "But in open areas, they are easily distracted by their surroundings, leading to waste of time and hindering the effective implementation of lesson plans."

Expired and low quality materials destroyed in Logar



LOGAR (BNA): The Logar Industry and Commerce Directorate reported the destruction of eight tons of expired and low-quality food and non-food items in Logar province. Mawlawi Shabir Ahmad Siddiqui, the head of the Industry and Commerce Directorate, stated that the items were collected from various shops in Pul-e-Alam city. Following a thorough inspection by a joint delegation, which included representatives from the Industrial Affairs Directorate, the Commercial Affairs Directorate, and the Consumer Protection Commission, a court order was obtained to incinerate the materials at a designated location. Siddiqui emphasized that efforts to eliminate outdated and substandard goods from the market are ongoing. The initiative aims to safeguard public health and ensure the well-being of citizens in the region.



7 people killed, 10 injured in Afghanistan last week

KABUL (Pajhwok): The UK last week promised efforts to put Afghanistan back on the UN agenda and various sources asked Pakistan to stop deporting Afghan refugees.

Responding to UNAMA's statements, the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan said some intelligence agencies are out to confuse public minds.

**Casualties**

Last week, unidentified gunmen shot dead a person in Uruzgan province and a man was killed in Takhar after a verbal dispute, two people were killed and another was injured in a dispute between two families in Farah, a person died after being beaten in a dispute over children in Kabul, and an old landmine explosion in Maidan Wardak killed a child and injured four others.

Local officials say an armed robber was killed in

a clash with security forces in Herat, and four people were injured in an explosion in a container of old ammunition belonging to the counter-narcotics department of the police headquarters in Kandahar.

In the previous week, five people had been killed and another injured in various incidents in Afghanistan.

Before the regime change in August 2021, hundreds of civilians and members of the warring parties would get killed and injured every week.

**UNAMA's concern and IEA response**

Last week, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) said in a new report that the Islamic Emirate was making more systematic and sustained efforts to implement the Law on Propagation of Virtue and Forbidding Vice than in any

other of its decrees.

"The ruling authorities in Afghanistan are determined to implement their vision of a pure Islamic system throughout the country."

However, in response to the UNAMA report, Saiful Islam Khyber, spokesman for the Ministry of Vice and Virtue Ministry, said that in the past year the ministry resolved 1,133 cases of forced marriages and handed over their Sharia rights to them in addition to implementing decrees in the field of promoting good, preventing evil, eliminating bad customs and other areas.

He added that a number of intelligence agencies were trying to confuse the public mind to achieve their sinister goals, as in the past.

**Efforts to put Afghanistan at top of UN agenda**

Last week, the United Nations Assistance Mission

in Afghanistan (UNAMA) called on donor countries and institutions around the world to continue their vital assistance to the Afghan people.

The request comes ahead of this week's Afghanistan Coordination Group meetings in Istanbul, which will bring together representatives from donor countries, international financial institutions and UNAMA.

Similarly, British Chargé d'Affaires in Kabul, Robert Dixon, met with Acting Minister of Refugees Mawlawi Abdul Kabir and said that his country was trying to put Afghanistan back on the UN agenda.

Dixon said a proposal had been prepared at the UN regarding Afghanistan and it will be shared with officials of the Islamic Emirate in the future.

According to him, the proposal includes strengthening relations with

Afghanistan, strengthening security and other positive points, and he said that the Britain played an important role in preparing this document.

This comes at a time when the UN World Food Program has expressed concern over the US's suspension of aid.

**Afghan refugees expelled from Pakistan**

The government has launched a crackdown on Afghan refugees in Pakistan after the March 31 deadline for them to leave expired, arresting thousands of them in Islamabad and Rawalpindi.

The deadline for Afghan refugees to leave Pakistan expired on March 31.

Pakistani police have also urged people in the Murree area near Islamabad not to engage in any business with Afghan refugees and not to rent out their homes, shops or hotels.

Last week United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees official Arafat Jamal urged Iran and Pakistan to treat Afghan refugees well.

In addition, experts from the organization, including the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Afghanistan, Richard Bennett, have urged Pakistan to stop the forced evictions of Afghan refugees from Islamabad and Rawalpindi.

Last week, Afghanistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Administrative Affairs Maulvi Abdul Salam Hanafi said during a visit to Torkham that Pakistan has started deporting Afghan refugees despite having legal documents to live in Pakistan.

The Ministry of Refugees and Repatriations has also called on Iran and Pakistan to exercise patience and

tolerance towards Afghan refugees, and to respect good neighborliness, Islamic and humanitarian values, and international laws in their treatment of refugees.

The ministry said they expect to end the violence and mistreatment against Afghan refugees and that no one should use refugees as a tool for their political goals.

The Ministry of Refugees and Repatriations said that last week, nearly 400 Afghans were released from Pakistani prisons and returned to the country.

**Afghanistan's relations with neighboring countries**

Last week, Uzbekistan President Shavkat Mirziyoyev said it was important to prevent Afghanistan from being isolated internationally and added he considered compromise and negotiations with the current authorities of the Islamic

Emirate essential.

Mullah Hamdullah Fitrat, Deputy Spokesperson for the Islamic Emirate, welcomed the Uzbek President's remarks and said: "We appreciate and welcome the positive statements of Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev regarding Afghanistan and the country's consistent positive position regarding Afghanistan."

Uzbek Ambassador to Kabul Aibak Usmanov said the current \$1.1 trade volume between Afghanistan and Uzbekistan will increase to \$2 billion next year.

The Iranian Foreign Minister also described relations between Afghanistan and Iran as valuable and said that agreements signed between the two countries, especially the agreement on the gradual return of Afghan refugees from Iran, should be monitored.



# Expats are true ambassadors of Pakistan: Atta

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar Sunday said that it is high time to acknowledge the invaluable contributions of Pakistani expatriates who have not only enhanced the country's prestige at international level, but also played substantial role in bolstering Pakistan's economic development.

Speaking to the media regarding the ongoing three-day Overseas Pakistanis' Convention in Islamabad, the minister praised them as true ambassadors of Pakistan, instrumental in boosting the country's economic

growth.

He extended a warm welcome to the overseas Pakistanis participating in the convention. "The purpose of this convention is to pay homage to the remarkable services of overseas Pakistanis, who are indeed the pride of our nation," the Minister said eulogizing their pivotal role in fortifying Pakistan's economy through billions of dollars in remittances.

Divulging the convention's agenda, Tarar said it would continue for two additional days, featuring high-profile activities and crucial discussions aimed at exploring avenues for enhanced government support and broader recogni-

tion of expatriate achievements across diverse sectors.

Tarar highlighted the commitment of both Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Chief of Army Staff General Asim Munir to the welfare and well-being of the overseas Pakistanis.

"Living and succeeding in a foreign land is no easy feat," Tarar said, commending the diaspora's sacrifices and unwavering dedication to their homeland.

He described the convention as a landmark event, celebrating the diverse professional accomplishments of Pakistanis residing across the globe.

Highlighting Pakistan as a highly attractive investment destination, the minister invited overseas Pakistanis to explore on the burgeoning economic stability and promising opportunities in the country.

He noted the existence of miscreants who are hell bent on propaganda and spreading negativity, particularly during periods of positive national development.

The national economy is all set to take off under the "Uraan Pakistan" initiative, he said while giving credit to the prime minister for taking strategic measures to reinvigorate the economy.



KARACHI: Activists of Jamaat-e-Islami holding Gaza Solidarity March in Karachi against Israel's military aggression against Palestinians

## PPP rejects controversial canal project: Faryal Talpur

Announces April 18 rally to defend Sindh's rights

F.P. Report

KARACHI: President of the People's Party Ladies Wing, Ms. Faryal Talpur, while addressing a gathering at Rawal House, Rahooki, stated that the people of Sindh completely reject the six-canal project, calling it a blatant theft of Sindh's land, crops, and water rights.

She announced that a historic public gathering will be held in Hyderabad on April 18, where people from across Sindh will unite to defend their land and water.

Faryal Talpur emphasized that they have borne the coffins of martyrs, made countless sacrifices, and will continue to struggle till their last breath. President Asif Ali Zardari and Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari have strongly opposed this controversial project both in Parliament and among the public.

She stressed that this is not just an issue for Sindh, but for all of Pakistan.

She further said that Shaheed Ms. Benazir Bhutto always maintained that the PPP, as a symbol of the federation, is a unifying chain of all four provinces. "We will never accept a situation where Sindh's fields are deprived of water and the people of Karachi are left thirsty," she added.

Senior Minister and Provincial Minister for Information, Transport, and Mass Transit, Sharjeel Inam Memon, while addressing the gathering, expressed gratitude to Ms. Faryal Talpur for her presence.

He stated that the canal issue is not merely about agriculture, but a matter of life and death for the 70 million people of Sindh. He emphasized that agriculture is the sole source of livelihood for

rural Sindh, and without water, people will be pushed towards starvation.

Sharjeel Inam Memon firmly declared that the Pakistan People's Party will not allow the construction of the controversial canal under any circumstances. Terming the April 18 gathering as a referendum, he urged the people to participate with their families, wives and children, and to stand in solidarity with Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari and Ms. Faryal Talpur.

Addressing the gathering, PPP Sindh President Nisar Ahmed Khuhro stated that 70 million people cannot be sacrificed for the sake of a canal. He said that lawyers, students, and people from all walks of life across Sindh are actively protesting against this project.

Provincial Irrigation Minister Jam Khan Shoro remarked that the people

of Hyderabad have always stood by the Pakistan People's Party, and this time too, the April 18 rally will be historic. He noted that President Asif Ali Zardari not only opposed the canal project in Parliament but has consistently raised his voice for the rights of Sindh.

On this occasion, PPP's young leader Rawal Sharjeel Memon hosted a reception in honor of the guests.

In his speech, he said that the people's bond with the PPP goes beyond votes-it is a relationship of love. He reaffirmed that the struggle for the people's rights will continue under the leadership of Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari.

The event was attended by various members of the assembly, town chairmen, district and tehsil presidents, and other party officials.

## Ukraine says 32 killed by Russian ballistic missile strike

KYIV (Reuters): Thirty-two people were killed and over 80 others wounded by two Russian ballistic missiles that slammed into the heart of the northern Ukrainian city of Sumy on Sunday morning, Ukrainian officials said.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy condemned the attack - one of the deadliest strikes on Ukraine this year - and called for a tough international reaction against Moscow.

"Only scoundrels can act like this. Taking the lives of ordinary people," Zelenskyy wrote on social media, alongside a chilling video which showed corpses on the ground, a destroyed bus and burnt-out cars in the middle of a city street.

"And this is on a day when people go to church:

Palm Sunday, the feast of the Lord's Entry into Jerusalem," he said.

Interior minister Klymenko said the victims were on the street, in vehicles, public transport and in buildings when the strike hit.

"Deliberate destruction of civilians on an important church feast day," he wrote. Andriy Yermak, Zelenskyy's chief of staff, said the missiles contained cluster munitions.

"The Russians are doing this to kill as many civilians as possible," he said. Reuters was seeking comment from Russian authorities.

Andriy Kovalenko, a security official who runs Ukraine's Centre for Countering Disinformation, noted that the strike came after a visit to Moscow by U.S. envoy

Steve Witkoff. "Russia is building all this so-called diplomacy ... around strikes on civilians," he wrote on Telegram.

Witkoff, U.S. President Donald Trump's special envoy for Ukraine, held talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin on Friday in St. Petersburg on the search for a Ukraine peace deal, as Trump told Russia to "get moving".

In the aftermath of Sunday's strike, Zelenskyy called on the U.S. and Europe to get tough on Russia in response to what he described as terrorism.

"Russia wants exactly this kind of terror and is dragging out this war. Without pressure on the aggressor, peace is impossible. Talks have never stopped ballistic missiles and aerial bombs," he

wrote.

Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and currently holds about 20% of the country's territory in the east and south. Russian forces have been slowly advancing in the east of late, though missile and drone strikes now dominate the war.

Russia's defence ministry said on Saturday that Ukraine had carried out five attacks on Russian energy infrastructure over the previous day in what it called a violation of a U.S.-brokered moratorium on such strikes. Ukraine and Russia agreed to pause strikes on each other's energy facilities last month, but both sides have repeatedly accused each other of breaking the moratorium.

## Xi courts Southeast Asia as Trump tariffs bite

BEIJING (AFP): Chinese President Xi Jinping will kick off a five-day, three-nation Southeast Asia tour on Monday as Beijing seeks to tighten regional trade ties and offset the impact of huge tariffs unleashed by his US counterpart Donald Trump.

Xi will visit Vietnam, Malaysia and Cambodia in his first overseas trip of the year, China's foreign ministry said.

He will meet his three Southeast Asian counterparts on a tour that "bears major importance" for the broader region, ministry spokesman Lin Jian said.

Beijing is trying to present itself as a stable alternative to an erratic Trump, who announced — and then mostly reversed — sweeping tariffs this month that sent global markets into a tailspin. Trump's tariffs "inflict serious harm on developing countries", Chinese Commerce Minister Wang Wentao told World Trade Organization chief Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala in a call on Friday.

The 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was the biggest recipient of Chinese exports last year, data from China's customs authority shows, importing \$586.5 billion in Chinese goods. Vietnam was the biggest ASEAN buyer

with a bill of \$161.9 billion, followed by Malaysia, which imported \$101.5 billion in Chinese goods in 2024.

The manufacturing powerhouse rushed to seek a delay on the 46 percent tariff Trump initially imposed before the US leader granted most countries a 90-day pause.

Trump, however, also hiked a blanket China tariff to 145 percent.

Despite temporary reprieves — which now include an exemption for consumer electronics — Trump's tariffs "instilled major anxiety" in developing Asian nations, said Huang Le Thu, deputy director of the International Crisis Group's Asia Program.

"The tariffs, if really implemented beyond China, will leave economies no choice but drifting away further from the US," she said.

'Bamboo diplomacy' Xi will be in Vietnam on Monday and Tuesday, his first trip there since December 2023.

Vietnam has long pursued a "bamboo diplomacy" approach, striving to stay on good terms with both China and the United States.

It shares US concerns about Beijing's increasing assertiveness in the contested South China Sea but it also has close economic ties with China.

Xi will then visit

Malaysia from Tuesday to Thursday.

Malaysian Communications Minister Fahmi Fadzil said Xi's visit was "part of the government's efforts... to see better trade relations with various countries including China".

Xi will then travel on Thursday to Cambodia, one of China's staunchest allies in Southeast Asia and where Beijing has extended its influence in recent years.

"The Cambodian-Chinese ties have not changed... and we will continue to make it robust," Prime Minister Hun Manet said at the recent inauguration of a Chinese-funded road.

He said Xi's visit would confirm their close relationship and called China "a key partner" in the development of Cambodian infrastructure. Firming up ties with Southeast Asian neighbours could also help offset the impact from a closed United States, the largest single recipient of Chinese goods last year.

Beijing "wants to use this time to show it's the opposite to the coercive and self-interested US," the ICG's Le Thu said.

"China has been a dominant and resident power centre in the region, and there will only be stronger pull," she said.

## Syrian President heads to UAE

CAIRO (Arab News): Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa will travel to the United Arab Emirates for his second visit to a Gulf state as president on Sunday, Syria's official news agency reported.

He will be accompanied by foreign minister Assad al-Shibani, who visited the UAE earlier this year.

They are expected to discuss issues of mutual interest, the SANA state news agency reported.

Sharaa visited Saudi Arabia in February on his first foreign trip since assuming the presidency in January.

His visit to the UAE comes as the new Syrian leadership attempts to strengthen ties with Arab and Western leaders following the fall of Bashar al-Assad in December at the hands of Sharaa's Sunni Islamist group, Hayat Tahrir al-Sham.

## UK minister eyes closer EU ties

LONDON (Reuters): British finance minister Rachel Reeves wrote in a column for the Observer due to be published on Sunday that she wants to achieve "an ambitious new relationship" with the European Union while still negotiating a trade deal with the United States.

In a separate article from Reeves' column on Saturday, the Observer said the finance minister wrote that tariffs introduced by US President Donald Trump will have a "profound" effect on Britain and world economies.

Reeves will say that she is "under no illusion about the difficulties that lie ahead," according to the Observer.

"The Labour party is an internationalist party. We understand the benefits of free and fair trade and collaboration. Now is not the time to turn our backs on the world."

The finance minister plans to advocate for a "more balanced global economic and trading system" at the upcoming International Monetary Fund meeting later this month.

Britain's economy returned to growth in February with its fastest expansion in 11 months, beating economists' expectations and placing it on a slightly firmer footing as it braces for the impact of the tariffs.

Meanwhile, Pamela Coke-Hamilton, the director of the United Nations trade agency, said on Friday that tariffs and countermeasures could have a "catastrophic" impact on developing countries, hitting even harder than foreign aid cuts.

Meanwhile, Britain said on Sunday it will expand financing support for exporters by 20 billion pounds (\$26 billion), including those affected by U.S. tariffs, in an effort to give them stability and certainty in what it described as a new era of global trade.

The tariffs, introduced by U.S. President Donald Trump, have deepened uncertainty for UK businesses about their exposure to the new trade regime.

## Pakistani comedy icon Javed Kodu passes away

ISLAMABAD (APP): Renowned Pakistani stage and television actor Javed Kodu, widely recognized for his comedic talent and distinctive short stature has passed away on wee hours of Sunday after a long battle with illness.

The veteran performer, who dedicated more than four decades to the entertainment industry, leaves behind a legacy of laughter, resilience, and heart-felt performances, media channels reported.

Born with dwarfism, Javed Kodu faced numerous societal and professional challenges throughout his life. Despite being subjected to mockery and discrimination both off and on stage, he rose above the odds to become one of Pakistan's most beloved theater personalities.



Javed Kodu Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday expressed his grief over the demise of famous television and theatre actor and comedian Javed Kodu.

The prime minister prayed for the high ranks of the departed soul in Jannah and for the bereaved family to bear the loss with equanimity, PM Office Media Wing said in a press release.

The prime minister said that late Kodu, with a dwarf height, had risen to prominence owing to his talented acting and his death had created a vacuum in the media industry which could never be filled.

He also shared his sympathies with the bereaved family in this hour of grief.

His stage name "Kodu" was affectionately given to him by the legendary comedian Akhtar Hussain Albela.

Kodu began his acting journey in 1981 with the play Sode Baaz and went on to star in over 150 Punjabi and Urdu films and countless stage productions.

His most memorable television work includes the drama Ashiyana, which is fondly remembered by fans to this day.

PM grieved over death of famous comedian

## Israeli missiles strike Gaza hospital

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The health ministry said the strike destroyed the ward for outpatients and laboratories and damaged the emergency ward.

Medical facilities often come under fire in wars, but combatants usually depict such incidents as accidental or exceptional, since hospitals enjoy special protection under international law. In its 18-month campaign in Gaza, Israel has stood out by carrying out an open campaign on hospitals, besieging and raiding them, some

several times, as well as hitting multiple others in strikes while accusing Hamas of using them as cover for its fighters.

Last month Israel struck Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis city, the largest in southern Gaza, killing two people and wounding others and causing a large fire, the territory's health ministry said. The facility was overwhelmed with dead and wounded when Israel ended the ceasefire with a surprise wave of airstrikes.

The war started after

Hamas killed 1,200 people during its Oct. 7, 2023, attack, mostly civilians, and took 250 people captive, many of whom were eventually freed in cease-fire deals.

More than 50,000 Palestinians in Gaza have so far been killed in Israel's retaliatory offensive, according to the health ministry there, which does not differentiate between combatants and civilians in its count but says more than half of the dead are women and children.

