

PPP's Saba declared winner  
F.P. Report

KARACHI: A Spokesman for the Provincial Election Commission of Sindh has said that Pakistan People's Party (PPP) candidate Saba Talpur is officially declared winner for NA-213 Umerkot by-election. He said that NA-213 Umerkot by-election official results as per Form 47 has been released by a Returning Officer.

Head constable killed  
F.P. Report

D I KHAN: A police head constable was killed as unknown miscreants ambushed a police party within limits of Chaudwan police station here on Friday. According to police, some unknown miscreants who had already taken positions opened indiscriminate fire on Chawadan police station's personnel when they were passing by Musazai Adda.



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# PM calls for strong efforts to cut debts

## F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Friday called upon the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) officers to work with unwavering commitment and full dedication to help Pakistan becoming a debt-free country. He was speaking at a ceremony in Islamabad where he launched a new Performance Management System for FBR officers. "If we want to move away from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), we must work hard to increase our revenues," the prime minister said.

He said the FBR revenues witnessed an increase of 27%, for which the entire FBR team deserved appreciation. However, he said this was a long journey and more work was needed to plug the loopholes in the system. The prime minister commended the efforts of the finance minister, the secretary finance, Chairman FBR and the entire team for launching such an effective performance system.

He also announced to replicate this system in other government institutions to promote the culture of penalty and reward aimed at improving the performance of the institutions. During his visit to the FBR, the prime minister was briefed on PRAL (Pakistan Revenue Automation Limited), digital invoicing, and the newly launched Performance Management System.

He also visited the newly established delivery unit of FBR and interacted with officers. The prime minister was informed that a data-driven decision-making system was being introduced at the FBR. This includes data collection from NADRA, banking institutions, and other sectors regarding payments and asset purchases. In order to align FBR with international standards and expand the tax base, the Board is taking steps toward implementing a modern and automated system.

In line with the prime minister's vision for reforms and digitization of the FBR, the entire value chain is being digitized. Furthermore, preparations

for launching the digital invoicing system have been completed and it will be officially rolled out soon. It was also shared during the briefing that tax return forms for the current fiscal year had been further simplified. Under the new system, more than 35 additional companies have been brought into the tax net.

To improve the performance of FBR officers and promote a system of accountability and reward, the prime minister also launched a fully automated and digital system for evaluating officer performance. Through this system, officers will be eligible for financial incentives and promotions based on their performance. The prime minister also visited the newly established FBR delivery unit, where he met with officers and reviewed the system. He praised the setup saying that the officers working in the Unit were a valuable national asset. He expressed hope that they will play a key role in modernizing Pakistan's tax system and boosting national revenue.

**Fight against terrorism to continue; enemies afraid of country's economic successes:** Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Friday reiterated his government's resolve to continue the fight against terrorism, saying that the enemies of Pakistan were afraid of its economic successes.

"Our Jihad to uproot terrorism from the country will continue. We will inflict such a crushing defeat on terrorists that they won't dare look at Pakistan with ill intent again," the prime minister said, chairing a high-level meeting on law and order here. Appreciating the efforts and decisive actions by all institutions and provinces against terrorism, he assured the federal government's full cooperation in enhancing the capacity of all provinces for the purpose.

He called for setting aside all differences and working together to eliminate terrorism and lauded the security forces personnel and officers confronting terrorists and sacrificing their lives. Prime Minister Shehbaz instructed all the institutions to intensify their

efforts against smuggling and tighten the noose around the human trafficking networks to bring the traffickers to justice.

He directed the early completion of Safe City projects in major cities and appreciated the joint efforts by federal and provincial governments to promote a counter-terrorism narrative. During the briefing to the prime minister, the relevant authorities stated that a National and Provincial Intelligence Fusion and Threat Assessment Center has been established under NACTA.

It was told that the Safe City project was operational in ten cities of Punjab. The projects are also being implemented in Karachi, Hyderabad, Sukkur, Larkana, Mirpurkhas, and Nawabshah. The same has been approved for Peshawar and would be extended to Dera Ismail Khan, Bannu, and Lakki Marwat in the next phase. The participants of the meeting were told that Gwadar Safe City project would be completed soon and similar projects would be implemented in all major cities along National Highways N-25 and N-40. The Digital enforcement stations are being established on various highways and bridges to curb smuggling. Federal and provincial governments are taking action to remove all illegal constructions around major urban centers and a crackdown is underway against begging mafias nationwide, and measures are being taken to restrict their overseas travel.

It was told that a Forensic Science Agency had been established in Islamabad, and the Punjab Forensic Science Agency was being further upgraded. The meeting was attended by federal ministers Azam Nazeer Tarar, Mohsin Raza Naqvi, Ahad Khan Cheema, and Attaullah Tarar, Advisor to PM Rana Sanaullah, Minister of State Talal Chaudhry, KP CM's Adviser Barrister Saif, GB Interior Minister Shamsul Haq Lone, AJK Interior Minister Col (Retd) Waqar Noon, chief secretaries and inspectors general of police from all provinces, GB, AJK and Islamabad, besides Chief Commissioner Islamabad.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif addressing the launching ceremony of performance management system of FBR.

## No one will be allowed to stay sans visa after 30th

### F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Minister of State for Interior Talal Chaudhry said that the deadline for the deportation of undocumented foreign nationals would not be extended.

Addressing a press conference in Islamabad on Friday, he categorically said that no one would be allowed to stay in Pakistan without a valid visa after April 30. "We have hosted our Afghan brothers with open hearts for 40 years. There is no country in the world where people can reside without a visa," he added.

He warned that legal action would be taken against those renting out property to undocumented residents. "We have communicated clear instructions to all provinces, if anyone gives a shop, house, or any kind of space to an illegal foreigner, they will be held accountable under the law," he said.

According to Talal Chaudhry, as many as 84,869 Afghan nationals have returned to their country since April 1. He clarified that the repatriation process is being carried out in a lawful and well-organized manner. He added that the foreign ministry is in continuous contact with the Afghan government in this regard. A Pakistani delegation, led by Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar, is also set to visit Afghanistan.

## Dy PM, SCO GS exchange

### views

### F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Deputy Prime Minister (PM) and Foreign Minister, Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar, on Friday received the Secretary General of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Nurlan Yermekbayev, who is on an official visit to Pakistan.

Ishaq Dar congratulated Mr Yermekbayev on commencement of his responsibilities as the new Secretary General of SCO. He assured him of Pakistan's full support for the SCO Secretariat. The Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister underlined Pakistan's close historical ties with SCO member States and reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to uphold the Shanghai spirit.

He appreciated the potential of SCO as forum for promoting regional peace and security as well as a tool to achieve enhanced economic development within the region.

# J&K int'l recognized disputed territory: FO

## F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Jammu and Kashmir was an internationally recognized disputed territory whose final status was to be determined in accordance with the relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions and aspirations of the Kashmiri people, the Foreign Office Spokesperson said on Friday.

Speaking during the weekly press briefing here, he said, "We wish to set the record straight regarding remarks made by the Spokesperson of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs regarding Jammu and Kashmir, yesterday, India's arbitrary designation of the Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir as its so-called Union Territory is null and void, ipso facto." "Rather than making baseless claims, India should vacate the large territories of Jammu and Kashmir under its forcible occupation for the last 77 years," he continued.

He said that at the invitation of Acting Afghan Foreign Minister, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar will lead a high-level delegation to Kabul on Saturday. During the day-long visit, he will call on the Afghan Acting Prime Minister besides meeting the Afghan Acting Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs, and holding delegation-level talks with the Acting Foreign Minister.

The talks will cover the entire agenda of the Pak-Afghan relationship, focusing on ways and means to deepen cooperation in all areas of mutual interests, including security, trade, connectivity, and people-to-people ties. The Deputy Prime Minister's visit is a reflection of Pakistan's commitment to enhance sustained engagement with the brotherly country of Afghanistan.

He said, "Pakistan strongly condemns the bombing of the Baptist Hospital in Gaza by Israeli occupation forces. This attack, part of a pattern of targeting medical facilities, constitutes a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law. That it occurred on Palm Sunday, a sacred occasion for Christians, underscores Israel's blatant disregard for religious

sanctity and civilian lives."

Pakistan demanded an immediate end to Israel's ongoing atrocities, which had resulted in the indiscriminate killing of innocent and unarmed Palestinians, including women and children, and the systematic destruction of civilian infrastructure, he added.

"Israel's relentless assaults have crippled Gaza's healthcare system, depriving critically ill patients of vital medical care. Coupled with the blockade on humanitarian aid, these actions reflect a deliberate strategy to prolong suffering and entrench conflict. Pakistan calls for an immediate halt to the hostilities by Israeli occupying forces and reiterates its support for the two-State solution, with a viable, independent and sovereign State of Palestine on pre-June 1967 borders with Al Quds Al Sharif as its capital," he continued. He said Pakistan urged the international community to take decisive action to hold Israel accountable and protect Palestinian civilians from further violence.

He said Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), will undertake an official visit to Pakistan from 20-21 April 2025. The high-level visit reflected the deep-rooted, fraternal relations between Pakistan and the UAE, and underscored the two countries' shared commitment to strengthening bilateral cooperation across all areas of mutual interest, he remarked.

The Spokesperson said that at the invitation of the Deputy Prime Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Rwanda, Ambassador Olivier J. P Nduhungirwe will be visiting Pakistan from 21-22 April 2025. During the visit, Foreign Minister Nduhungirwe will be holding talks with the Deputy Prime Minister.

Apart from calling on the Prime Minister and the Chairman Senate, the Foreign Minister of Rwanda will also have meetings with some key Federal Ministers. Foreign Minister Nduhungirwe will also officially inaugurate the High Commission of the Republic of Rwanda in Islamabad, he added.

# Four militants killed in Swat operation

## F.P. Report

MINGORA: Security Forces and Law Enforcement Agencies conducted a joint intelligence based operation in Swat District on reported presence of Khwarij.

During the conduct of operation, own troops effectively engaged khwarij location, resultantly four khwarij were sent to hell. Weapons and ammunition were also recovered from the killed khwarij, who remained actively involved in numerous terrorist activities in the area.

Sanitization operation is being conducted to eliminate any other Kharji found in the area, as the Security Forces in coordination with Law Enforcement Agencies of Pakistan are determined to wipe out the menace of terrorism from the country.

Prime Minister

Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Friday hailed the professionalism, bravery, and dedication of Pakistan's security forces following a successful intelligence-based operation in Swat that resulted in the elimination of four Fitna al-Khawarij.

The Prime Minister commended the professional capabilities of the officers and personnel of the security forces and the LEAs for the successful operation against Fitna al-Khawarij in Swat district. "The entire nation, including me, stands by the unwavering resolve of the Pakistani armed forces to protect our beloved homeland," PM Shehbaz said.

President Asif Ali Zardari

and Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Friday hailed the professionalism, bravery, and dedication of Pakistan's security forces following a successful intelligence-based operation in Swat that resulted in the elimination of four Fitna al-Khawarij.

In separate statements, the president and prime minister commended the officers and personnel of the security forces and law enforcement agencies for their courageous action. President Asif Ali Zardari commended the forces for their swift and strategic response. He emphasized the importance of intelligence-based operations and acknowledged the determination of Pakistan's security agencies in dismantling the terrorist network.

## Tree catches fire after lightning strike

### Anees Takar

MARDAN: A tree located within the premises of the Type-D Hospital in Rustam Mardan, caught fire after being struck by lightning. Rescue 1122's firefighting team responded promptly and successfully extinguished the flames. No casualties reported in the incident, says rescue officials.

According to Rescue 1122, the firefighting unit rushed to the scene immediately upon receiving the alert and managed to control the fire within a short span of time. Fortunately, no casualties were reported. The Medical Superintendent and local elders praised the swift and effective action of the rescue team and appreciated their dedicated service.

Meanwhile, due to recent heavy rains and the risk of potential weather-related emergencies, Rescue 1122 Director General Shah Fahad has instructed all eight Rescue 1122 stations in Mardan to remain on high alert. District Rescue Officer Syed Shoaib Mansoor confirmed that the rescue staff is fully prepared to respond to emergencies and provide timely assistance to citizens.

The public has been advised to avoid trees, signboards, electrical wires, poles, and mud-built houses during the rain to prevent accidents. Furthermore, citizens are urged to drive slowly and cautiously, as wet roads increase the risk of traffic accidents.

## PPP's reservations over canals project

# Bilawal warns of quitting coalition

## F.P. Report

HYDERABAD: Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal-Bhutto Zardari has warned that his party would part ways with the ruling coalition led by the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) if the federal government failed to address its serious reservations over the controversial canals project.

"The federal government must immediately roll back its controversial canal project, otherwise the PPP cannot work with you [Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz]," the PPP chief said while addressing a public gathering in Hyderabad.

Addressing the public gathering today, Bilawal pointed out that his party was the only political force to have opposed these projects from day one, asking the government to abandon the canal project as he would not "leave the nation's side". He noted that the projects are being imposed from Islamabad, adding that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif was "still unwilling to budge, and we are not ready to step back either".

"If the choice is between Shehbaz Sharif and the people, the decision is not difficult," he warned. He noted that the

nation is burning in the fire of terrorism, and "you [federal government] sparked a debate that pits brother against brother." "Those sitting in Islamabad are blind and deaf — unwilling to see or hear the voices of the provinces. We are opposing these projects on the basis of principles because the federation is under threat.

"What's the reason behind your stubbornness. We want Pakistan to develop and federation is strengthened but we cannot back off from our principles," he added. Bilawal emphasised that the PPP's vision is for equal economic development across all four provinces and a reduction in inflation. "We reject your ministries; we do not want them, we want respect. You will have to accept our demands."

Lashing out at the PML-N, Bilawal said, "These so-called 'lions' are sucking the blood of the people. Every PML-N project is against farmers." He cited the wheat scandal as an example of the government's exploitation of farmers and said that new tax measures were now threatening the already burdened agricultural sector. "They've decided to unleash a storm of taxes on agriculture.

Where will the farmers of Punjab and Sindh go?" he asked.

"The economic murder of the agriculture sector is complete," Bilawal declared. He criticised the government's plan to irrigate deserts, saying, "Now they claim they will green the deserts — but we won't compromise on the Indus." "You should use technology to develop Cholistan and Tharparkar," he advised the government. "We have faced water shortages in Punjab and Sindh for 25 years. The crisis is real and ongoing," he said.

Calling for an end to the economic victimisation of farmers, Bilawal said, "If the government withdraws the controversial projects, we are ready to sit down and plan the development of agriculture together." The PPP chairman warned the federal government against any misconceptions regarding his stance, asserting, "I neither possess Form 47 nor a certificate of being selected. What I have is the support of the people." "We are political people; we are not out for personal gain. We are not campaigning for ministries or the prime ministership," he said, adding: "We have taken to the streets to save the Indus River — and to protect the federation.

# 74 killed, 171 injured in deadliest US attack on Yemen

SANAA (AFP): US strikes on a Yemeni fuel port killed at least 74 people, Houthi rebels said on Friday, in the deadliest attack of Washington's 15-month campaign against the group. The strikes on Ras Issa aimed at cutting off supplies and funds for the rebels that control large swathes of the Arabian Peninsula's poorest country, the United States military said.

Images broadcast by a Houthi-run television station showed large blazes lighting up the night sky, following the latest in an intensified barrage of attacks under US President Donald Trump. Houthi health ministry spokesman Anees Alasbahi said rescuers were still searching for victims at the fuel terminal on the Red Sea, sug-

gesting the number of dead could rise. "The death toll ... has risen to 74 martyrs and 171 wounded in a non-fatal count," he said. AFP was not able to verify the figures independently. The Houthis later announced missile attacks on Israel and two US aircraft carriers. Israel's military earlier on Friday said it had intercepted a missile launched from Yemen.

Protesters chanting "Death to America! Death to Israel!" gathered in cities around the country, including one major demonstration in the capital Sanaa on Friday. "The American military build-up and continued aggression against our country will only lead to more counter-attacks and attack operations, clashes and confrontations," Houthi military

spokesman Yahya Saree told the crowd in Sanaa.

The strikes on Thursday came just before the US resumes negotiations with Iran over its nuclear programme in Rome on Saturday, following warnings that Tehran is getting closer to building an atomic weapon. "The military actions in Yemen are clearly sending a signal to Tehran," Mohammed Albasha, a US-based consultant, told AFP.

The US military has hammered the Houthis with near-daily air strikes for the past month in a bid to stamp out their attacks on shipping in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. Claiming solidarity with Palestinians, the rebels began attacking the key maritime routes and Israeli territory after the

Gaza conflict began in October 2023. They paused their attacks during a recent two-month ceasefire. In a statement, United States Central Command (Centcom) said: "US forces took action to eliminate this source of fuel for the Iran-backed Houthi terrorists and deprive them of illegal revenue that has funded Houthi efforts to terrorise the entire region for over 10 years."

The US strikes began in January 2024 but have resumed and multiplied under Trump, starting with an offensive that killed 53 people on March 15. Footage broadcast early Friday by Al-Masirah showed a fireball igniting off the coast as thick columns of smoke rose above what appeared to be an ongoing blaze. The

Houthi TV station later screened interviews with survivors lying on stretchers, including one man with burns on his arms. "We ran away. The strikes came one after the other, then everything was on fire," one man who said he worked at the port told Al-Masirah. Israel carried out air strikes on Ras Issa and elsewhere in Yemen in January, describing the targets as military infrastructure. Similar Israeli strikes that also included Ras Issa took place in September.

Iran called the latest US strikes "barbaric", while Hamas denounced them as "blatant aggression". The US bombing campaign intensified last month following Houthi threats to resume attacks on international shipping in protest at Israel's blocking of

aid to the Gaza Strip. "The message today is unmistakable: the US is targeting not only Houthi military assets and personnel, but also their economic infrastructure," Albasha said.

Houthi attacks on the Red Sea shipping route, which normally carries about 12 per cent of global trade, have forced many companies into costly detours around the tip of southern Africa. Separately, US State Department spokeswoman Tammy Bruce accused the Chinese satellite firm Chang Guang Satellite Technology Company of "directly supporting" Houthi attacks on "US interests". Bruce did not initially provide details, but later referred to "a Chinese company providing satellite imagery to the Houthis".





## New canals in Punjab

# PPP HR Cell proposes four points solution

### F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: "The building of six new canals in the Punjab disregarding the vital interest of the lower riparian Sindh and destroying its agriculture and farmers is a case of elite capture of state resources rather than disharmony between provinces".

This has been stated by former Senator Farhatullah Babar, president of the human rights cell of the PPP at a press conference in the PPP central secretariat in Islamabad. He was accompanied by other members of the Cell including GS Maliaka Raza, vice president Zulqarnain Ashghar and Samina Salam.

He said that river Indus, the lifeline of Pakistan, was already threatened by the fast melting of glaciers of Hindukush-Himalaya range, drastically reduced rainfall, the exploding population, the absence of a national water management policy and the vagaries of climate disaster. The availability of freshwater per capita has reduced from 5000 cubic meters at the time of independence to

less than 1000 cubic metres per capita at present rendering Pakistan one of the water stressed countries in the world, he said.

With overall water scarcity the building of new canals in the Punjab threatening Sindh is thoughtless, irresponsible and detrimental to the federation and must be shelved, he said.

Babar demanded that the federal government come out clean in Council of Common Interest (CCI) and remove confusion caused by different federal ministers having differing briefs; some saying that the project has not yet started while some others claiming that it is an old project for which IRSa has already issued a water availability certificate.

He said that the IRSa which it is claimed to have issued the certificate did not have its federal member from the lower riparian province Sindh and was not a legal body. Playing up a non-certificate by a non-legal body is befiling the public.

He said that recently the federal government said that only 8.2 million acres in

Sindh was cultivable as against 18 million acres non-cultivable. Punjab has some 30 million acres of cultivable land. Why are the 18 million uncultivated lands of Sindh being ignored, he asked?

He also questioned corporate farming. First, it was touted as 'cooperative farming' as if it was a land development project for the benefit of peasants who could not afford modern farming techniques. Then it was changed to 'corporate farming'—the very word smacking of bourgeoisie capitalism and elite capture at the expense of social equitability and justice.

Babar said that land development projects touted as solutions to problems of local people end up by pushing the local people out of their ancestral lands and their only source of livelihood. The practice of apportioning state lands like a melon at the expense of the common man must end.

He said that the deprived and starved farmers of Sindh will have nowhere to go but to urban areas creating huge socio economic and law and order problems.

In reply to a question that President Zardari has put his signatures to the project he said that the constitution does not require presidential approval to developmental projects. He said that president Zardari had already warned in his address to the parliament and Bilawal Bhutto Zardari had also denounced it very forcefully.

He said that water is life and thus was a most fundamental human right issue..

Babar also proposed declaring a national drought emergency, a shift from huge infrastructural development projects to water conservation and improved water management, sound population policies and an end to the culture of elite capture.

In reply to a question about the FIA enquiry against him he said that the FIA had declared him an accused on the basis of a citizen's complaint and it was not proper for him to respond to it publicly. Let the private citizens' allegations if there indeed was such a complaint play out its normal course in a legal manner, he said.



LAHORE: Christian community gather to attend the Good Friday the holy eve with devotion and prayers at Don Bosco Church. —APP Photo

## Reduction in electricity prices insufficient

KARACHI (PPI): Pasban Democratic Party (PDP) Karachi President Abdul Hakim Qauid said on Friday that the minor reduction in electricity prices is insufficient and further reduction is necessary.

He mentioned in a statement that just as electricity prices have been increased in recent years, similar reductions were also essential. Qauid suggested that electricity bills should be charged at a maximum of six or seven rupees per unit.

He further commented that the people of Karachi are not ATM machines from which institutions can withdraw money at will.

He urged the government to provide genuine relief to the public by significantly reducing electricity tariffs. He mentioned that in the current situation, where inflation is rising, a reduction of six to seven rupees in electricity prices is inadequate. The PDP leader pointed out that people are selling their household items to pay electricity bills and advocated for the elimination of unnecessary taxes to reduce the per-unit price.

He suggested that new nuclear power plants should be established to produce cheap electricity, as electricity is a basic necessity for the public.

Qauid emphasized the need to eliminate fixed charges and unjust slabs from electricity bills and to implement a simple and fair slab system. He made these remarks during protests held in North Karachi and New Karachi.

## Easter greetings from the PPP Minority Wing

KARACHI (PPI): The leadership of the Pakistan People's Party Minority Wing Karachi extended Easter greetings to the Christian community, reiterating their commitment to promoting love, tolerance, brotherhood, and national harmony.

According to a statement from the PPP, Mushtaq Matto, President of the Minority Wing Karachi Division, said that Easter reminds us of the sacrifice, victory, and new life of Jesus Christ. He prayed for God's blessings to be bestowed upon the homes of the Christian community and that the People's Party would continue its support for minority rights.

MPA and Parliamentary Secretary for Minority Affairs Sindh Assembly, Roma Mushtaq Matto, described Easter as a message of hope, life, and salvation, and extended greetings to the Christian community of Sindh. She stated that the people's party would continue to take practical steps for the constitutional rights of minorities.

Senior Vice President Salamat Noor Khan described Easter as a symbol of renewed faith and spiritual victory, and prayed for the day to bring joy, peace, and love to everyone. Javed Bhatti also extended greetings to the Christian nation with a message of hope and joy.

The leadership of the People's Party Minority Wing Karachi pledged to continue their efforts for interfaith tolerance, equal rights, and the protection of minorities.

# 40,000 IT Jobs to open for Pakistanis in US: Tessori

KARACHI (PPI) Sindh Governor Kamran Khan Tessori announced a significant milestone in international employment opportunities, revealing that a Memorandum of Understanding has been signed between the Governor Initiatives and the Cyber Range Solutions.

This agreement aims to create 40,000 jobs for Pakistanis in the United States, fulfilling the requirements of artificial intelligence. Successful candidates can expect salaries ranging from \$90,000 to \$130,000, with the company covering initial expenses for students.

During a press conference at the Governor House, alongside Federal Minister for Education Dr. Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui, Governor Tessori elaborated that the company will offer a six-month free course followed by a test. Those who pass the test will secure employment opportunities. Students participating in IT courses under the Governor Initiatives are required to pass the test and obtain certification.

The Governor expressed satisfaction by stating that their efforts are finally bearing fruit, with courses set to commence next week.

He congratulated the students, remarking on the growth from a seed planted a year ago to a fruitful tree today. Out of 550,000 students who took the IT course test, 50,000 qualified and have been engaged in advanced IT courses for the past 11 months.

The Governor emphasized the need for a major change in the education curriculum, noting that Pakistan lags four to five years behind the world in educational matters. He mentioned that, after 77 years, campuses of top universities are being established in the province.

## Robbery gang busted in Karachi

ISLAMABAD (APP): Police arrested a three-member dacoit gang comprising two brothers and their brother-in-law during an encounter in the Kati Pahari area in Karachi. According to SSP Central Zeeshan Shafiq, the suspect were all from the same family, are linked to several cases of street crime, robbery, and motorcycle theft across Karachi, reported a private news channel.

Police said that the suspects, 25-year-old Muhammad Usman, his brother Muhammad Aziz (sons of Muhammad Ishaq), and their brother-in-law Khuram Hussain were injured and arrested in a shootout with Shahrah-e-Noor Jahan police in North Nazimabad Block Q. During interrogation, they also confessed to a targeted killing in Tando Adam, where they were sent by a relative to murder another family member.

After committing the murder, they looted Rs. 4.7 million and shot the victim in the face while smothering him with a pillow. The suspects had rented a car from Karachi's Defence area for the Tando Adam operation and later hid the stolen money in Hyderabad. Police say the gang was wanted in multiple cases and further investigations are underway.

## Vaccination process of intending Hujjaj to start next week

KARACHI (APP): Federal Minister for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony, Sardar Muhammad Yousuf, informed that vaccination process of intending Hujjaj would start next week and various centers have been established in major cities of the country for the purpose including Karachi, Hyderabad and Sukkur in Sindh.

While addressing intending pilgrims and talking to media persons during visit of Bait-ul-Hajaj Karachi, he informed that training process of the intending pilgrims was in final stages that was carried out in phased manner across the country to equip them with basic knowledge about the entire process of Hajj including Arkan-e-Hajj (obligatory acts of Hajj) as well as legal or formal requirements, use of Nusuk and other relevant matters.

Sardar Yousuf said that more than 110,000 intending pilgrims would travel to holy lands for performing Hajj 2025. Among them, 89,000 pilgrims will travel under the government scheme while 23,000 pilgrims will make their journey through private Hajj operator scheme, he told. Sardar Yousuf informed that over 21,000 Pakistanis would fly from Karachi airport that has been embedded in the Route to Makkah initiative of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia allowing hassle free immigration process at Saudi airports. The Road to Makkah facility is currently available in two cities of the country—Islamabad and Karachi and the government was striving for expansion of the facility to Lahore, Quetta, Peshawar and other major cities of Pakistan, he added.

The federal minister said Saudi government has further improved the overall Hajj arrangements and also introduced NUSUK and other new initiatives while the government of Pakistan made the best arrangements as well to facilitate the pilgrims this year which included quality residence near

the Haramain Sharifain, round the clock transport, air conditioned tents and other facilities. For the convenience of Hujjaj e-Karam, quality residential facilities have been arranged at the minimum possible distance in the Markazia area of Madina Munawara and Batha Quraish, Azizia and other central areas of Makkah Mukarama, he said and added that staff of the ministry and Muavneen would be available for assistance of Hujjaj Karam there.

Under the guidance of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, the Ministry is making all out efforts to ensure maxim facilitation of Hujjaj so that they could perform Hajj—one of the essential religious obligations in Islam—with comfort and peace of mind, he stated. He assured every possible facilitation and assistance to the intending Hujjaj and requested them to pray for peace, progress, stability and prosperity of the country and particularly for gallant sons of the nation who sacrificed their lives in defense of the motherland. Responding to a query about the issue of private Hajj tour operators, the federal minister informed that due to non compliance of Saudi Hajj policies over 300,000 intending Hujjaj from different countries including Pakistan were facing problems. The government has taken the issue with the Saudi Hajj ministry and 10,000 cases from Pakistan got clearance, he informed and added that some Hajj tour operators failed to fulfill the requirement and commitments with Saudi authorities and business partners within the committed time despite repeated directives by the religious affairs ministry. It is regrettable that a significant portion of Pakistan's quota could not be availed due to negligence of tour operators, he said and stressed on stringent action against the persons or companies found negligent, he added.

# Remembering Professor Khurshid Ahmad's impact on Islamic economics

### F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Professor Khurshid Ahmad, a distinguished scholar, Islamic economist, reformer, and statesman, consistently sought to build bridges among people of diverse ideological backgrounds. This commitment to inclusivity is evident in the wide spectrum of individuals influenced by his ideas, his body of work, and the institutions he founded.

Speakers observed this at a condolence reference held at the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS), Islamabad, to honor the life, work, and enduring legacy of Prof Khurshid Ahmad, also the founding chairman of IPS, who passed away on April 13. The event brought together a diverse gathering of policymakers, scholars, students, colleagues, and admirers. Speakers remembered Prof Khurshid as a trailblazer who championed Islamic economics, founded transformative institutions, and helped shape intellectual discourse in Pakistan and beyond.

Mushahid Hussain Syed, former senator, fondly recalled that Prof Khurshid had a remarkable ability to connect with people, embracing individuals regardless of background or age. He rose above party lines and always spoke from the heart—as a Muslim and a Pakistani. He underscored the enduring relevance of his values, vision, scholarship, and devotion as a statesman,



having served in the Senate for nearly 22 years.

Adding to this, Farhatullah Babar and Javed Jabbar, veteran parliamentarians, cherished Prof Khurshid's wisdom, diligence, and commitment to the common good, which characterized his role in the Parliament.

Ahmer Bilal Soofi, renowned lawyer and former federal minister, commented that his intellectual presence extended beyond the Senate, impacting global debates and movements across Muslim and non-Muslim lands. His body of work is a lasting legacy and will continue to inspire future generations.

Emphasizing the lasting impact of Prof Khurshid's intellectual contributions, Dr Qibla Ayaz, member Shariat Appellate Bench, Supreme Court of Pakistan, described him as a scholar of future studies who accurately anticipated the trajectories of Islam, Pakistan, and the Muslim Ummah. It was this vision, he said, that led Prof Khurshid to estab-

lish enduring institutions, ensuring that his ideas continue to live on.

Echoing these sentiments, Dr Shireen Mazari, former minister, noted that Prof Khurshid Ahmad considered the establishment of IPS as an independent think tank among his most enduring legacies. Under his leadership, IPS became a vibrant hub for intellectual discourse, particularly on Kashmir, on which the institute produced some of the most comprehensive research unmatched by any other Pakistani think tank.

Maulana Zahid-ur-Rashidi, a religious scholar and editor of Al-Sharia, said Prof Khurshid dedicated his life to advancing education, enriching intellectual discourse, and contributing meaningfully to the national landscape. His contribution to the movement to eliminate interest-based financial systems demonstrated wisdom, profound insight, and technical acumen.

Dr Anis Ahmad, vice

chancellor, Riphah International University and brother of Prof Khurshid, said Prof Khurshid actively promoted the political, economic, and social thought of Maulana Maududi with deep dedication and clarity. The organizations he founded continue to carry out scholarly work, highlighting the solutions that Islam offers in the realms of politics, economics, and society.

Haris Ahmad, the son of Prof Khurshid, reflected that his father had a deep love for Islam and Pakistan, and in service of both, he was always willing to collaborate with people from diverse backgrounds.

In closing remarks, Khalid Rahman, chairman IPS, reflected on his long association with Prof Khurshid, describing him as a personification of timeless values that serve as guiding principles for future generations. He highlighted that Prof Khurshid lived a life driven by purpose and vision, beyond the pursuit of wealth, power, or status, dedicated wholly to Islam and Pakistan. Known for his steadfastness, he often said, "There are no vacations in Islam," reflecting his lifelong commitment to his vision.

On the occasion, a video clip of Prof Khurshid was played in which he reflected on his life's journey and aspirations. Participants were also introduced to a chatbot being developed at IPS to answer queries based on curated content from Prof Khurshid's works.

## یوسفزئی نریوالہ جرگہ

### عبدالستار خان یوسفزئی

### صدر یوسفزئی نریوالہ جرگہ سینڈ

#### عبدالستار خان یوسفزئی کو یوسفزئی نریوالہ جرگہ سندھ کا صدر منتخب ہونے پر دل کی گہرائیوں سے مبارکباد پیش کرتے ہیں

## اشتہار نیلامی دکانات تحصیل میونسپل ایڈمنسٹریشن مانسہرہ

تحصیل میونسپل ایڈمنسٹریشن منسہرہ، جرنل بس سینڈ مانسہرہ کی ایک عدد دکان و نجائیز کردہ میونسپل بازار واقع نزد مرکز کی قیادت چوک بیرو روڈ مانسہرہ فرسٹ اور سینڈ فلور کی 20 عدد دکانات و میونسپل بازار عقب میں دو عدد دکانات اور شہر بازار کمری روڈ کی فرسٹ فلور پر 18 عدد دکانات کو چوکی (پریمیم) نام قابل واکسی میں نجایہ روڈ میں شیلڈل کے مطابق نیلامی کرنا چاہتی ہے

نمبر	تفصیل دکانات	دکان نمبر	مراکزی بولی	ماہور گریڈ	مزمزینات / کال / بیانات
1	جرنل بس سینڈ مانسہرہ 01 عدد دکان (مظروفین / سیکٹر) فرسٹ فلور	227	2,50,000/-	3860/-	1,00,000/-
2	میونسپل بازار بیرو روڈ مانسہرہ 10 عدد دکانات سینڈ فلور	18-09	8,00,000/-	6000/-	1,00,000/-
3	میونسپل بازار بیرو روڈ 10 عدد دکانات سینڈ فلور	28-19	5,00,000/-	5000/-	1,00,000/-
4	میونسپل بازار بیرو روڈ کے عقب میں 1 عدد دکان	29	16,00,000/-	5000/-	1,00,000/-
5	میونسپل بازار بیرو روڈ کے عقب میں 1 عدد دکان	30	15,00,000/-	3500/-	1,00,000/-

شہر بازار 18 عدد دکانات کی پریمیم اور گریڈ فٹ کے حساب سے نیلام کی جائیں گی جس کی تفصیل ذیل ہے

نمبر	تفصیل دکانات	مراکزی بولی	ماہور گریڈ	مزمزینات / کال / بیانات
18	شہر بازار	1620	14	1,00,000/-

آن لائن نیلامی کا شیڈول

تاریخ	آن لائن بولی شروع ہونے کی تاریخ
12-05-2025	آن لائن بولی شروع ہونے کی تاریخ
18-05-2025	آن لائن بولی شروع ہونے کی تاریخ

آن لائن بولی ویب پورٹل: [eprocity.lcbpk.gov.pk](http://eprocity.lcbpk.gov.pk)

اگر کسی وجہ سے آن لائن نظام e-Auction کے ذریعے بولی نہ ہو تو درج ذیل شیڈول کے مطابق کھلی بولی میونسپل بازار، TMA، مانسہرہ میں درج ذیل تاریخوں پر پیش کی جائے گی:

نمبر	تفصیل دکانات	مراکزی بولی	ماہور گریڈ	مزمزینات / کال / بیانات
1	جرنل بس سینڈ مانسہرہ 01 عدد دکان (مظروفین / سیکٹر) فرسٹ فلور	227	2,50,000/-	3860/-
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1۔ دکانات کو کلکٹریٹس بورڈ پشاور کی جانب سے جاری شدہ / احکامات بذریعہ نجی نمبری KC-112021-AOI/LCB/6 مورخہ 27/12/2021 کی روشنی میں جاری کردہ آن لائن نظام بولی کی نیلامی کی جائے گی۔

2۔ بولی میں حصہ لینے کے خواہشمند پاکستانی شناختی کارڈ کے حامل حضرات تجویز دار مائی ایم اے مانسہرہ کی ریگولیشن برائے سے حاصل کر کے اس میں دکان نمبر اور اپنے مکمل کو انک درج کر کے سہرا زریعہ نامور سے چیک ڈرافٹ / کال / بیانات بنام تحصیل میونسپل ایڈمنسٹریشن مانسہرہ بمقام میونسپل بازار کی کارڈ کی بولی سے ایک نمونہ منسلک کر کے گاہ کو پہنچانے پر آنے والے بولی دہندگان کے علاوہ باقی تمام بولی دہندگان کو ان کے کال / بیانات نیلامی کا مکمل مکمل ہونے کے بعد واپس کر دیے جائیں گے۔ ایسے افراد جو کسی دوسرے شخص کی جگہ بولی کے عمل میں شرکت کرنا چاہتے ہیں وہ اخباری لیٹر ساتھ لائیں اور مزید یکے پر پیمنٹ کا قائل وادی ہوگا بولی میں حصہ لینے والے حضرات صرف اسی دکان کی بولی میں حصہ لے سکتے ہیں جس کے لئے فارم پر کیا ہوگا۔ اگر کوئی ایک سے زیادہ دکانات میں دلچسپی رکھتا ہو تو بولی کے عمل میں حصہ لینا چاہتا ہو تو دکان کے لئے علیحدہ علیحدہ دکان فارم دکان / بیانات منسلک کر کے گاہ کو پہنچانے پر آنے والے بولی دہندگان میں سے کسی ایک کو بولی کے عمل میں حصہ لینا چاہتا ہو تو بولی دہندگان کو ان کے کال / بیانات نیلامی کا 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# Governor calls for urgent meeting of stakeholders

PESHAWAR (APP): The Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Karim Kundi on Friday called for an urgent meeting of all stakeholders to develop a clear and people-friendly strategy regarding the Mines and Minerals Act.

He emphasized that all political parties must be taken into confidence and political differences set aside for the greater good of the province.

The Governor said this while speaking to a delegation from the Minerals Association Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, led by Afsar Muhammad, during a meeting at Governor House Peshawar. The delegation briefed the Governor about their concerns over the Mines and Minerals Act, saying that the legislation is not beneficial for the province and could worsen the situation in an already troubled region.

The delegation men-

tioned that despite assurances from the Chief Minister during a previous meeting, no concrete steps had been taken, leaving them disappointed.

Governor Kundi pointed out that following the 18th Constitutional Amendment, the Mines and Minerals Bill is a provincial matter. He criticized the provincial government for not safeguarding the interests of the people, citing the Farmers' Bill as another example where public welfare was ignored.

Highlighting the demand for Buner marble in Madinah Munawwarah, the Governor stressed that security and other ongoing challenges are obstructing the province's development.

He urged the Chief Minister to summon a joint meeting of parliamentary leaders from all political parties and officials from the law department to finalize a comprehensive and

non-confrontational plan, which should then be presented at the relevant forum in Islamabad.

Governor Kundi said that Parliamentary leader of PPP in KP Assembly Ahmad Karim Kundi has also highlighted the bill in a press conference, and also assured the delegation that he would personally forward their concerns to the concerned authorities.

Meanwhile, Governor Faisal Karim Kundi has emphasized the importance of trusting and guiding the youth towards a positive direction.

Speaking to a delegation led by Youth Organization Pakistan President Ejaz Khan at Governor House, he stressed that combating negative propaganda is crucial and requires unity between the state and the people.

Governor Kundi highlighted the need for the positive use of social media,

urging that criticism must be constructive and prioritize national interest.

He warned against the rising negative perception of state institutions, stressing that Pakistan must counter external and internal threats with resilience.

He said the rich cultural heritage and tourism potential of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, saying that the province's soft image must be promoted from within rather than expecting outside help.

Governor Kundi also reaffirmed his support for youth engagement and empowerment, mentioning that the doors of the Governor House are always open for the youth.

Delegation members appreciated the Governor's commitment and assured him of their full support in improving provincial conditions and promoting youth and women empowerment.



PESHAWAR: Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Karim Kundi offering fatiha for departed soul of deceased sister of Press Reporter to Governor Asmat Shah Garwaki (APP) at Governor's House.

## Governor condoles with Asmat

PESHAWAR (APP): The Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Karim Kundi on Friday offered his condolences to Press Reporter to Governor, Asmat Shah Garwaki (APP), at Governor's House over the demise of his young sister.

The Governor prayed Almighty Allah to rest the departed soul in eternal peace and grant courage to bereaved family members to bear this irreparable loss with fortitude.

## Information desk to be set up for tourists

PESHAWAR (APP): The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Culture and Tourism Authority (KPCTA) Director General Tashfeen Haider on Friday said that an information desk would be established at the Bacha Khan International Airport to facilitate both domestic and international tourists.

"The desk would provide tourists arriving with essential information and services regarding the province's tourist destinations," he said while speaking at the closing ceremony of the two-day training workshop for the tourism stakeholders held at the Nishtar Hall, Peshawar.

He said that training in management information systems and digital marketing for tourism stakeholders and youth was the need of the hour in this age of information technology. He said that training was arranged to provide stakeholders guidance on business management information systems including issuance and renewal of online licenses for hotels, restaurants, rent-a-car services and travel agencies.

KPCTA Director Admin and Finance Umar Arshad Khan, Manager Regulation Zeeshan Majeed, Deputy Manager Licensing Afrasiyab Khattak and Deputy Manager Hotel and Restaurants Shahid Raza were also present in the closing ceremony.

## Bushra defends M.Phil thesis

PESHAWAR: Bushra Usman, a student of the Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences at Abasen University Peshawar, has successfully completed her M.Phil thesis.

Her research paper was supervised by Dr. Fazal Rabbi (Associate Professor and Head of Department), while Dr. Amir Zeb (Assistant Professor) served as co-supervisor. The title of Bushra Usman's thesis was: "In Silico Pharmacokinetic Profile and Pharmacological Mechanism of Fosgonolide A and Fosgonolide B".

The defense ceremony featured Dr. Haji Bahadur, Associate Professor from Khyber Medical University Peshawar, as the external examiner, who thoroughly reviewed the thesis.

The thesis explored the pharmacokinetic profile and pharmacological mechanism of Fosgonolide A and Fosgonolide B using in silico methods.

Successful completion of Bushra M.Phil thesis is a testament to her hard work. University's faculty members and research scholars attended the ceremony.

# PBA directs to remove Israeli products within three days

**Humayun Khan**

PESHAWAR: The Peshawar District Bar has followed the Peshawar High Court Bar in announcing a boycott of Israeli products. The Bar association has directed all general stores within the premises of the Peshawar Bar and Judicial Complex to remove Israeli products within three days, on Friday.

The Peshawar District Bar has decided to impose a complete ban on the sale and purchase of Israeli products within its premises.

All general stores have been directed to remove Israeli products from their shelves within three days.

Shopkeepers who fail to comply with the directive will face penalties, including fines and cancellation of their lease agreements.

The decision was made during a cabinet meeting held under the chairmanship of Peshawar Bar President Qaiser Zaman Advocate. The meeting was attended by General Secretary Zahidullah Zahid Advocate and other office bearers.

The Peshawar Bar Association's decision reflects its solidarity with the Palestinian cause and its commitment to supporting the rights of the Palestinian people.

# RTI key for transparency

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: Right to Information (RTI) contributes to a more inclusive and democratic society by ensuring that all citizens have access to information.

It empowers the marginalized groups to participate more actively in the governance and policy debates.

RTI also creates a sense of equal-citizenship among citizens, as it sensitizes the stakeholders to ensure merit in public affairs.

This was stated by Syed Saadat Jehan, Deputy Director Communication, KP Information Commission (KPIC), while sharing his views in the "Capacity Building Session on SRHR and Protection Mechanism for Marginalised Communities", arranged by a civil society organization Da Hawwa Lur, here at Peshawar on Friday. Representatives of National Commission for Human Rights, Police, Civil Society Organizations, and Human Rights Activists were among the participants of the session.

# Ismail Shakir defends M.Phil thesis



**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: A scholar of Master of Philosophy (M.Phil) in Political Science Ismail Shakir has successfully defended his thesis titled "The Role of Private Television in the Development of Political Culture in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa" from Abbases University, Peshawar.

The scholar has completed his thesis under the supervision of Dr. Naveed Hassan Syed. The thesis was evaluated by Dr. Zia ur Rehman, and Ismail Shakir's successful defense marks a significant milestone in his academic journey.

As a young journalist and scholar, Ismail Shakir's research contributes to a better understanding of the role of media in shaping political culture. The achievement is a testament to his hard work and dedication to his field. His research has the potential to inform policy decisions and contribute to the development of a more informed and engaged citizenry.

# Anti-polio drive inaugurated

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: Advisor to the Chief Minister on Health, Ehtesham Ali; Provincial Minister for Public Health Engineering, Pakhtoon Yar Khan; and Chief Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Shahab Ali Shah, jointly inaugurated the province-wide anti-polio campaign by administering polio drops to children at Police Services Hospital, Peshawar.

The campaign, set to begin officially on April 21, will span five days and aims to vaccinate over 6.537 million children under the age of five across the province. For the smooth execution of the drive, 35,460 trained polio workers' teams have been formed, while around 50,000 security personnel will be deployed to ensure the safety of teams.

Speaking at the launch event, the province's top political and administrative leadership reaffirmed their strong commitment to eradicating the poliovirus from the region. They emphasized that the government would continue conducting anti-polio campaigns regularly to ensure that every child is protected from this crippling disease.

Health Advisor Ehtesham Ali highlighted the role of the government machinery, health department, and law enforcement agencies in the collective effort to eliminate polio. Stressing the significance of vaccination, he said that the Health Department is enhancing the immunization system to protect children from polio and 12 other preventable diseases.

He urged parents and all segments of society to cooperate fully with frontline health workers who visit homes during the campaign and to ensure that their children receive polio drops for a healthy future.

Chief Secretary Shahab Ali Shah, in his remarks, emphasized the government's proactive measures to overcome challenges and ensure that every child under five receives polio drops to prevent lifelong disability. He called on the media to play a vital role in raising awareness at the community level about the importance of polio vaccination and other immunization programs.

Praising the relentless efforts and sacrifices of frontline health workers and security personnel, Shahab Ali Shah referred to them as national heroes. "The consistent, well-organized, and successful campaigns in the province would not have been possible without their dedication," he stated.

When asked about the security situation, the Chief Secretary assured that all necessary steps are being taken to safeguard polio teams during the campaign, adding that around 50,000 personnel would be deployed across the province for this purpose.

In response to a question regarding the recent spike in polio cases, Health Advisor Ehtesham Ali acknowledged the challenges but reaffirmed the government's resolve to curb the spread and achieve complete eradication.

# Proposed legislation aim at depriving KP of its mineral resources: Sherpao



**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: Qaumi Watan Party (QWP) Chairman Aftab Ahmad Khan Sherpao on Friday said his party would resist with full force besides moving the court of law if the proposed Mines and Minerals Bill 2025 was passed.

Speaking at a press conference here, he said that the proposed legislation was aimed at depriving Khyber Pakhtunkhwa of its mineral resources. He said that besides moving the court, his party would stage protests and raise voice at all forums if the proposed Mines and Minerals Bill was enacted.

Aftab Sherpao said that some elements were out to capture the resources of

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, adding that the QWP would go to any extent to protest against the passage of this controversial legislation.

He maintained that even the leaders of the ruling Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) had started criticizing the proposed bill. He condemned the bid by some PTI circles to link the passage of the proposed bill to the release of PTI founder. The QWP leader said the PTI government should focus on improving the poor law and order and protect the interests of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

He said the law and order had worsened to the extend in the southern belt that even the government officials had restricted their movement, which was a

charge-sheet against the PTI government. He said that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was facing worst kind of terrorism where two to three acts of subversion were taking place on a daily basis.

Aftab Sherpao said that the provincial government could not resolve the issue of the Kurram unrest over the last seven months. He said that major roads leading to Kurram district were still closed and this had created the shortage of food, medicines, and fuel.

Criticizing the federal government for raising the petroleum levy, he said that the rulers should have passed on the relief to the people, who were already facing skyrocketing inflation.

Aftab Sherpao slammed

the federal government's announcement that the funds from the POL prices would be saved to build roads in Balochistan, saying that the uplift work was carried out under the Public Sector Development Programme. He said that the proceeds from the petroleum levy did not go to federal divisible pool rather it went to the treasury.

Commenting on the return of the Afghan families, he said that Pakistan, Afghanistan and the UNHCR should hold a tripartite meeting to come up with a mechanism for the smooth and respectful repatriation of the Afghan refugees.

He said the federal and provincial governments were spending millions of rupees on useless advertisements, adding that this practice should be stopped. He said that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was also not getting its due share of water under the Water Apportionment Accord 1991.

About the recent increase in remittances, the QWP said that most of the money had been sent by the Pakhtuns working in the Gulf States, which negated Imran Khan's claim of stopping remittances and it served as vote of no confidence against him.

# Sayed Salar elected president as of KP Lacrosse Association



**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: Sayed Salar Jehan Bacha has been unanimously elected as the new President of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Lacrosse Association while Sayed Diya-ul-Mulk has been elected as the Senior Vice President. The General Council meeting of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Lacrosse Association was held at the Peshawar Sports

Complex with participation from district representatives across the province.

Addressing the meeting newly elected President Sayed Salar Bacha announced that the National Lacrosse Championship will be held in Peshawar next month featuring players from all over the country. Prior to the national event both male and female lacrosse competitions will be organized at divisional

headquarters and provincial levels to select the best team to represent Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

He further stated that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is renowned worldwide for its talented athletes. The youth of this province have made a mark not only in education and other sectors but also in sports. Equal opportunities will be provided to both boys and girls of Peshawar and the province

to participate in lacrosse. He emphasized that it is his primary duty to work in collaboration with the Sports Department for the development of sports and athletes.

On this occasion Pakistan Lacrosse Federation General Secretary Taifoor Zareen said that Lacrosse is an American sport and Canada's national game. He added that the upcoming National Championship will be used to select players for the national team which aims to participate in the 2028 Olympics with the goal of bringing medals to the country.

He also highlighted that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa organized two national championships multiple training camps and refereeing courses this year with large participation from male and female players.

At the end of the meeting the newly elected President distributed certificates among coaches and players who successfully completed the refereeing course.

The defense ceremony featured Dr. Haji Bahadur, Associate Professor from Khyber Medical University Peshawar, as the external examiner, who thoroughly reviewed the thesis.

The thesis explored the pharmacokinetic profile and pharmacological mechanism of Fosgonolide A and Fosgonolide B using in silico methods.

Successful completion of Bushra M.Phil thesis is a testament to her hard work. University's faculty members and research scholars attended the ceremony.

# KMU to hosts seminar on World TB Day

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: A seminar on World TB Day will be held at Khyber Medical University, Peshawar, on April 21.

According to Dr. Mudassir Shahzad, Project Director of the Provincial TB Control Program, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the seminar will take place on April 21 at 10:00 am in the auditorium hall of Khyber Medical University.

Dr. Mudassir Shahzad, Project Director of the Provincial TB Control Program also highlighted that TB diagnosis and treatment facilities are available in all district headquarters hospitals and teshil headquarters hospitals in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The Provincial TB Control Program has established TB centers in all district headquarters hospitals and teshil headquarters hospitals, staffed by specialist doctors and laboratory technicians.

A state-of-the-art laboratory with international standards and comprehensive medical facilities is also available at the TB headquarters.

The seminar aims to raise awareness about TB, promote early detection and







## In brief

### Special sessions arranged F.P. Report

KOHAT: On the special directions of the Commissioner Kohat Division Syed Motasim Billah Shah, the Deputy Commissioners of all the 5 Districts of Kohat Division i.e. Kohat, Hangu, Kurram, Orakzai and Karak, held special sessions for Imams/Ulema of their respective districts regarding polio eradication, in which pediatricians also participated. Pediatricians gave a detailed briefing to the Imams/Ulema about the implications of polio disease as well as the benefits of the Polio Vaccine. They told that polio is fetal disease that permanently disables a person, so it is very important to give 2 drops to their children in every campaign to save them from permanent disability. They further told, Polio has been eradicated from the entire world except Pakistan and Afghanistan. They said that Imams/Ulema can play a key role in the complete eradication of polio. Imams/Ulema were appealed to play their effective role in Friday sermons in dispelling the negative perception of polio vaccine among the public and convincing parents to give polio drops to their children. The Imams/Ulema assured their full cooperation on this occasion and said, indeed, polio is a contagious disease and its eradication is very crucial.

### Kuli Katcheri arranged F.P. Report

TAKHTBHAI: Additional Assistant Commissioner (AAC) Takhtbhai Fazal-ur-Rehman Khan organized kuli kachery at Shergarh RHC. On the special instructions of DC Mardan, Additional Assistant Commissioner organized Kuli Kachery in Shergarh area for quick resolution of public issues and promotion of effective communication. A large number of dignitaries, social leaders and the public attended the event. The citizens raised various public issues, which were listened to carefully by the concerned officers and assured of immediate action. Officers from the Health Department, TMA, WAPDA, NHA and police, along with other relevant agencies were present in kuli kachery. The detailed proceedings of the meeting and the progress report on the complaints will be sent to the relevant forums soon.

### Female teacher forcibly removed F.P. Report

LARKANA: The headmistress of the girls' primary school Larkana forcibly removed the female teachers from the school. As a result, five senior lady teachers of the school, Munwar Sultana, Rani Khatun, Hidayat Khatun, Gulnaz and Naheed Khatun, carried out the task of cleaning the school. The political and social circles of Larkana against such an aggressive action of the influential headmistress of the school called it a violation of human rights and said that legal action should be taken against the involved headmistress and she should be severely punished so that the human rights can be lifted by the government claiming democracy.

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

MARDAN: District Health Hospital (DHO) Mardan DHO, Dr. Shoaib and District Coordinator Public Health Dr. Rubina Riaz, a one -day free medical camp was organized in Darul Aman Mardan in which all women were inspected.

# NCHD and Hazara University join hands

## F.P. Report

MANSEHRA: The National Commission for Human Development (NCHD) and Hazara University, Mansehra, have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) aimed at promoting literacy



through the Each One Teaches One initiative. The signing ceremony took place at Hazara University, where Vice Chancellor Dr. Mohsin nawaz and NCHD Deputy Director Mr. Faisal Hussain Khan formally

signed the agreement. The event was attended by the Director ORIC Dr. Masroor Ahmad, HOD Education Dr. Javed, Deputy Registrar Dr. Zubair Alam and officials from NCHD Mansehra.

This collaboration is part of the national Education

Emergency declared by the Prime Minister of Pakistan to enhance literacy by mobilizing university students to teach at least one illiterate person in their community. Speaking at the occa-

sion, Vice Chancellor Dr. Mohsin Nawaz lauded NCHD's grassroots efforts in promoting education and expressed a strong commitment to further strengthening collaboration. He emphasized the importance of identifying additional areas of mutual interest to better serve local communities.

Under the agreement, NCHD will provide technical assistance, including teaching and learning materials, and will encourage student participation in the initiative. Upon successful completion of the literacy course, both students and learners will be awarded certificates by NCHD. It was also agreed that NCHD will conduct an orientation session for faculty members and students within the coming days to formally launch the initiative on campus.

# Deadline set for equipping and operationalizing TMC

## F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: A subcommittee of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly's Standing Committee on Health has set May 15 as the deadline for the complete delivery and activation of medical equipment at the yet-to-be-functional Timergara Medical College (TMC) in Lower Dir.

The decision was taken during a meeting of the KP Subcommittee No. 2, held at the college here the other day, with MPA Ubaid-ur-Rehman in the chair. The meeting aimed to physically verify the status of equipment procured for the institution.

A four-member oversight committee, led by the Deputy Commissioner of Lower Dir, was constituted to ensure compliance with the decision. The committee comprises the DC, the college principal, the Medical Superintendent of Timergara Hospital, and a representative of Khyber Medical University (KMU), Mohammad Tayyab. It has been tasked with ensuring the timely

delivery of all pending equipment and the operationalization of existing machinery within one month.

The meeting was attended by Special Assistant to the Chief Minister on Population Welfare MPA Malik Liaqat Ali Khan, Special Assistant on Prisons MPA Humayun Khan, MPAs Zar Alam Khan, Ms Sobia Shahid, MPA Shafullah Khan, Director General Health Services Dr Mohammad Saleem, committee secretary Inamullah Khan, assistant secretary Malik Hassan Zaib, and other relevant officials.

The committee members were briefed in detail on the status of missing or non-functional equipment and were told that procurement was near completion. However, they expressed strong dismay over the delay in making the college operational despite substantial progress.

KMU representative Mohammad Tayyab informed the committee that 90 per cent of the col-

lege's development work had been completed, with only minor tasks pending. He said the institution could become functional within two months if the requirements set by the Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PMDC) were fully met. "Out of the 1,000 marks required for recognition, the college already has 600 marks. The PMDC's three key requirements include proper infrastructure, qualified faculty, and the availability of biomedical equipment", Mr Tayyab added..

According to PMDC regulations, a medical college must secure 1,000 points to be recognized, of which 600 have already been fulfilled. The three primary conditions include availability of infrastructure, qualified faculty, and biomedical equipment. The committee members stressed that the concerned departments must take full responsibility for ensuring that the college becomes functional within the given timeframe, without any further delays.

# Khyber mines owners disapprove Mines, Minerals Bill

## F.P. Report

BARA: The Mines Owners Association, Khyber on Friday rejected the proposed Mines and Minerals Bill 2025 and declared it a deliberate effort by the Federal and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa governments to take hold of natural resources in the merged tribal districts.

Led by the Association head Asghar Afridi, a number of the members of the organization while carrying banners and placards inscribed with statements against the Bill took out a protest rally at Khyber Chawk, Bara Bazaar on Friday morning. The marchers chanted slogans against the Bill and called it a seizure on their minerals.

Speaking to the rally and addressing a press conference in local press club Asghar Afridi, General Secretary Advocate Sameen Jan, Vice-President Malik Gulzar Afridi, Deputy Finance Secretary Hashmat Khan and others termed the Bill as an attack on provincial autonomy and was equivalent economic killing of Pakhtun community.

Minerals had always remained a provincial subject after the 18th Amendment and involvement of the Federal government undermined the rights of the provinces, they regretted. They accused the government of drafting the bill secretly and without consultation with the tribal stakeholders' like to deprive

the three decades' militancy hit tribal of earning three times meal for their families.

Our forefathers protected the minerals for hundreds years and now the grasping policy of the Federal and provincial government is unacceptable, they remarked. They maintained, we endorse all decisions of the provincial organization of Mines protection business and stand firm for the fight for our rights. The protestors demanded the immediate withdrawal of what they said anti-local trading and cruel Mines and Minerals Bill 2025 and threatened that if their demands were not met then they would extend their protest across the province.



TANK: Officials of District Election Commissioner, Tank, conducting inclusive awareness program for people with disabilities.

## Deadly pest destroys potato field F.P. Report

WANA: A deadly pest attack has struck potato fields, devastating crops worth millions of rupees and plunging local farmers into deep distress. The outbreak has exposed the chronic lack of agricultural infrastructure in the region and triggered urgent calls for government intervention.

This season, potato cultivation was carried out extensively in Wana, with many farmers investing heavily in hopes of a strong yield. However, their hopes were dashed when an aggressive pest infestation began attacking the crops, particularly targeting the roots, causing widespread damage and fears of a complete loss.

Local farmers Faqir Muhammad and Badshah Din Wazir, speaking to media representatives, said the outbreak is unlike anything they've witnessed in recent years. "The pest has invaded fields across the area and is destroying our crops from the roots. If the government doesn't act now, we will lose everything," warned Faqir Muhammad.

The farmers are also expressing growing frustration over the absence of basic agricultural support in the region. There is no functional agricultural laboratory in Lower South Waziristan to identify and treat plant diseases, nor are there trained agronomists or agricultural extension workers to assist farmers with preventive and remedial measures.

"This is not the first time our crops have been hit," said Badshah Din Wazir. "Every year, different diseases harm our produce, and we suffer massive financial losses. But we are left on our own, without any scientific guidance or government-backed support."

Farmers in the region, already grappling with economic hardship, say such outbreaks not only threaten their livelihoods but also the broader agricultural sustainability of the area, which relies heavily on seasonal crops like potatoes, tomatoes, and wheat.

# Bannu Varsity VC praises Kalam Bibi

## F.P. Report

BANNU: Vice Chancellor Kalam Bibi International Women's Institute, Bannu, Professor Dr. Aurangzeb Khan has said that Kalam Bibi was a courageous woman who, through her son, took revolutionary steps in every field of life, including educational and training institutions for women in the region.

Kalam Bibi was not only an ordinary woman but also struggled hard for the rights and resolution of problems and issues of women in Bannu and adjacent areas and through her son Akram Khan Durrani, she resolved the deprivations here by revolutionizing higher edu-

cation in the region. Kalam Bibi's peaceful educational struggle will always be a part of the history here.

**Women's rights seminar held:** A one-day seminar on women's rights and development was organized by Kalam Bibi International Women's Institute and the Directorate of Elementary and Secondary Education Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The seminar was attended by professors, assistant professors, female students and administration officials of the Directorate and Kalam Bibi. During this, detailed discussions were held on the rights and problems of women in education and a question and

answer session was held.

Addressing the seminar organized on this occasion, Vice Chancellor Professor Dr. Aurangzeb Khan, Madam Uma Leila, Madam Ayesha Aurangzeb, Madam Sabila Nazpir Fahad Ali Shah, Campus Coordinator Madam Nilo Far Aman, Registrar Engineer Tanveer-ul-Haq, Director Finance Engineer Dr. Rehan Ali, Dr. Nasir Gul and others said that providing women's rights and the best opportunities for higher education for women is the need of the hour. Along with the education of the future generations of an educated woman, it also has a positive impact on the society.

# Maximum enrollment stressed for prosperous nation

## F.P. Report

SHANGLA: Deputy District Education Officer (DDEO) Shangla, Saeed Hussain, emphasized the importance of education in achieving success and progress. He stated that no nation can reach its destination without educational development. Hussain made these remarks while addressing a program held at Shatut Middle School Rania to bid farewell to the school's Headmaster, Aurangzeb, who recently retired.

DDEO Saeed Hussain paid a glowing tribute to Aurangzeb's services as a teacher and administrator in the education department. He said that Aurangzeb's contributions would always be remembered and cherished. Hussain emphasized that only nations that excel in education can progress and succeed in the modern world.

Saeed Hussain expressed his vision for Shangla, stating that by enrolling more children in schools, the district could become a model educational district. He emphasized that this would be crucial in shaping the future of the region.

The program was attended by Assistant District Officer (ADO) Waheed Murad, Superintendent

Education Shangla Sher Malik, Parent-Teacher Council Chairman, and other officials, local dignitaries, and school teachers. During the program, other teachers also paid tribute to Aurangzeb's dedication and service.

**Preparation completed for anti-polio vaccination:** The preparations for the upcoming polio campaign, scheduled to start on April 21, have been completed in Shangla district. A total of 985 teams, including 917 mobile teams, 38 fixed teams, 24 transit teams, and 6 roaming teams, will participate in the campaign, aiming to immunize 189,000 children under the age of five against polio.

A meeting was held recently in Shangla to review the preparations for the polio campaign, attended by Deputy Commissioner Shangla, District Police Officer, District Health Officer, and representatives from the Health Department, Education Department, and WHO. The meeting reviewed the preparations in detail and expressed satisfaction with the pre-campaign preparations.

Meanwhile, District Health Officer (DHO) Shangla, Dr. Nazir Muhammad Khan, has

emphasized that polio is a dangerous disease and its eradication is impossible without public cooperation. He urged the people of Shangla to support the health department by getting their children under five vaccinated with polio drops, ultimately helping to eliminate the disease from the area.

**Businessmen faces severe electricity crisis:** The business community in Shangla is facing immense difficulties due to prolonged and frequent electricity outages. The situation is affecting businesses that rely heavily on electricity, rendering machinery useless. Merchants in Alpura, the main town of Shangla, have been protesting against these outages for over a year, with power supply being cut off for an hour every hour, often extending to three to four hours.

Renowned Educator Retired: Aurangzeb, a respected Headmaster at Government Middle School Shah Tut Randal, has retired after dedicating 60 years to education. Hailing from Shangla' central market, Bele Baba, Aurangzeb has mentored hundreds of students throughout his illustrious career, serving as a teacher in various government schools.

# Massive financial irregularities uncovered in Auqaf land leasing

## F.P. Report

HAFIZABAD: A major revelation has come to light exposing large-scale financial irregularities in the leasing of over 500 acres of agricultural land owned by the Auqaf Department in various villages of Hafizabad. The land is reportedly being leased out at throwaway prices, resulting in a loss of millions of rupees annually to the government treasury.

According to reliable sources, the Auqaf Department holds extensive tracts of agricultural land in villages including Hanjranwanwala, Bucha Kuhna, Bucha Nau, Jorianwala, and several others. Instead of leasing this land through a transparent and competitive public auction process, it is being allotted to selected individuals through a controversial and opaque "pool" system. This system, allegedly run in collusion with certain Auqaf Department officials and Patwaris (land record officers), enables the land to be leased at a nominal rate of just Rs. 10,000 per acre annually.

In stark contrast, the prevailing market rate for leasing agricultural land in these villages is approximately Rs. 150,000 per acre. This stark difference suggests that the government is

being deprived of substantial potential revenue. Experts estimate that had the land been auctioned publicly, it could have generated tens of millions of rupees in annual revenue for the state exchequer.

Sources claim that a powerful and well-connected group often referred to as a "land mafia" has maintained control over the leasing process for years. This group reportedly ensures it secures the lease of Auqaf land year after year, paying only a fraction of the market value while depriving the government and the public of rightful earnings from these valuable public assets.

Despite the gravity of the situation, officials from within the Auqaf Department appear dismissive of the concerns. A Patwari associated with the department, when approached for comments, stated that the current leasing method is based on an old and longstanding procedure. He claimed that the department is merely following established practices that have been in place for years.

However, legal experts and civil society activists argue that the continuation of outdated and non-transparent practices cannot justify the apparent misappropriation of public assets. They are calling for a thorough investiga-

tion into the matter, as well as immediate reforms in the leasing procedures of the Auqaf Department to ensure transparency, accountability, and optimal utilization of public resources.

The situation has sparked growing public outrage and demands for action from higher authorities, including the Punjab government and anti-corruption agencies. If the allegations are confirmed, it may lead to a broader inquiry into similar practices in other districts and departments. This unfolding scandal underscores the urgent need for institutional reforms to curb financial mismanagement and to protect the interests of the state and its citizens.

**One dead, two seriously injured on M2:** In a tragic road accident on the M-2 Motorway near Pindi Bhattian, a speeding car plunged into a roadside ditch after a sudden tire burst, resulting in the death of one woman and leaving two others critically injured.

According to rescue officials and motorway police, the incident occurred when the vehicle, traveling at high speed, suffered a tire blowout, causing the driver to lose control. The car veered off the road and fell into a deep ditch alongside the motorway.

The accident claimed the life of Khalida Ashraf, who died on the spot due to the impact. Two other occupants of the car, the driver, identified as Simran, and the deceased's daughter, Sanam Anwar sustained serious injuries. Rescue-1122 arrived promptly at the scene and shifted both injured women to Tehsil Headquarters Hospital, Pindi Bhattian, for immediate medical attention. Due to the severity of their injuries, both patients were later referred to Allied Hospital, Faisalabad, where they remain in critical condition under intensive care.

**Police Crack Down on Farmers' Protest:** In a dramatic turn of events at Fawara Chowk, police dismantled a protest camp organized by farmer organizations under the auspices of Jamat-e-Islami, triggering widespread condemnation and a strong backlash from the protesting leadership. The protest, which was aimed at drawing attention to the government's failure to announce the support price for wheat and initiate official procurement, escalated after the police forcibly dispersed a subsequent rally, arresting four activists and key leaders.

According to detailed reports, the farmer organizations had, under the leadership of Jamat-e-

Islami and the Kisan Board Pakistan, planned a peaceful sit-in at Fawara Chowk to pressure the government into declaring the support price for wheat—a crucial issue affecting thousands of cultivators across the region. The protest was led by prominent figures, including Chaudhry Amanullah Chatha, the Central Vice President of the Kisan Board Pakistan, and Malik Shoukat Ali Phularwan, the District Head of Jamat-e-Islami.

However, in the early hours of the morning, police launched a preemptive operation, dismantling the protest camp and surrounding the district office of Jamat-e-Islami. Despite police presence and attempts to block them, the farmers, backed by local legal representatives from the District Bar Association, regrouped and marched towards Fawara Chowk in defiance of official restrictions.

As the demonstrators reached Fawara Chowk, the police resorted to force, including baton charges and physical dispersal, to break up the crowd. In the process, four farmers and protest leaders were arrested, prompting an outcry from protest organizers and their supporters.

In a joint press conference

following the crackdown, Ch. Amanullah Chatha and Malik Shoukat Ali Phularwan strongly condemned the police action, terming it a "blatant use of state oppression against peaceful protesters." They emphasized that the protest was entirely peaceful and organized within democratic rights but was met with "state brutality and violence."

"This is not just a crackdown on farmers," said Amanullah Chatha. "It is a crackdown on justice, on truth, and on the rightful demands of the nation's food producers. Using force against peaceful demonstrators is an act of tyranny."

Phularwan added, "We were merely demanding what is our constitutional and economic right. The government's silence on the wheat support price has already put thousands of farmers in distress. Instead of responding with policy, they've responded with batons."

The leadership of Jamat-e-Islami and Kisan Board has demanded: Immediate release of the arrested workers and leaders. Legal action against police officials responsible for the excessive use of force. A clear and fair announcement of the support price for wheat, followed by immediate procurement mechanisms.





## IMF warns of economic slowdown

WASHINGTON (Reuters): Rising trade tensions and sweeping shifts in the global trading system will trigger downward revisions of the IMF's economic forecasts but no global recession is expected, the lender's managing director said.

Kristalina Georgieva said countries' economies were being tested by a reboot of the global trading system — sparked in recent months by US tariffs and retaliation by China and the EU — that had unleashed "off the charts" uncertainty in trade policy and extreme volatility in financial markets. "Disruptions entail costs ... our new growth projections will include notable markdowns but not recession," she said in prepared remarks, adding the outlook would also include higher inflation forecasts for some countries.

"To quote from the 'Wizard of Oz,' we're not in Kansas anymore," Georgieva told IMF staff and reporters at the IMF headquarters in Washington ahead of the spring meetings of the IMF and World Bank next week. Elevated uncertainty also raised the risk of financial market stress, Georgieva said, noting that recent movements in US Treasury yield curves should be taken as a warning. "Everyone suffers if financial conditions worsen," she said.

US President Donald Trump has upended the global trading system with a tsunami of new tariffs, including a 10 percent US

duty on goods from all countries and higher rates for some, although those have been paused for 90 days to allow negotiations. China, the EU and other countries have announced retaliatory measures. The IIMF in January forecast global growth of 3.3 percent in 2025 and 3.3 percent in 2026. It will release an updated World Economic Outlook on Tuesday.

Georgieva, speaking at IMF headquarters in Washington ahead of the spring meetings of the IMF and World Bank next week, gave no details about the expected revisions, but warned that prolonged uncertainty would be costly and said the consequences of the trade reboot would be "significant." Georgieva said trade tensions had been bubbling for some time, but were now boiling over, and urged countries to respond wisely to the "sudden and sweeping shifts" seen in tariffs, driving the US effective tariff rate to levels last seen several lifetimes ago and resulting in response by other countries.

"As the giants face off, smaller countries are caught in the cross currents," Georgieva said. China, the EU and the US were the world's three largest importers, which meant big spillovers for smaller countries that were more exposed to tighter financial conditions, she said. Rising tariffs hit growth upfront, she said, noting that past evidence

showed that higher tariff rates were paid by importers through lower profits and consumers through higher costs.

In big economies, they could also create incentives for new inward investment, creating new jobs, but this took time. "Protectionism erodes productivity over the long run, especially in smaller economies," she said, warning that moves to shield industry from competition also undercut entrepreneurship and hurt innovation.

Georgieva urge countries to continue economic and financial reforms while maintaining agile and credible monetary policy, as well as strong financial market regulation and supervision. Emerging market economies should preserve their exchange rate flexibility, and donor countries should better protect aid flows to vulnerable low-income countries, she added.

Georgieva also called for cooperation in an increasingly multi-polar world, and urged the largest economies to reach a trade settlement that preserved openness and restarted a global trend toward lower tariff rates and reduced non-tariff barriers. "We need a more resilient world economy, not a drift to division," she said. "All countries, large and small alike, can and should play their part to strengthen the global economy in an era of more frequent and severe shocks."

## Mexico not to renew ties with Ecuador

MEXICO CITY (Reuters): Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum said that Mexico would not renew diplomatic relations with Ecuador as long as Ecuadorean President Daniel Noboa remains in office. The rift is a result of Ecuador's raid on the Mexican embassy in Quito in April of 2024, after which Mexico recalled its diplomats from the South American country.

Former Ecuadorean Vice President Jorge Glas, accused of graft, had been living in the Mexican embassy since December of 2023 and received diplomatic asylum shortly before Ecuadorean police stormed the embassy and took him into custody. Ecuador at the time contended the asylum offer was illegal, because under international law, people facing charges should not be granted asylum. Incumbent Noboa won a presidential runoff by a wider-than-expected margin on April 13. Sheinbaum had publicly backed Noboa's opponent Luisa Gnzalez, who called for a recount. Her request was denied by election monitors.

## Ukraine, US make progress on deal

KYIV (Reuters): Ukraine and the United States have made "substantial progress" in their talks on a minerals deal and will sign a memorandum in the near future, First Deputy Prime Minister Yulia Svyrydenko said. US President Donald Trump is seeking a bilateral minerals deal as part of his push to end Ukraine's war against the Russian invasion. Trump also sees it as a way to recover billions of dollars the US has spent on military assistance to Ukraine. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has said that Ukraine would not recognise past US military aid as loans.

"Our technical teams have worked very thoroughly together on the agreement, and there is significant progress. Our legal staff has adjusted several items within the draft agreement," Svyrydenko said in a social media post on X. Svyrydenko said the work on the deal would continue and that both sides agreed to sign a memorandum in the near term as the first stage to record the progress.

Deputy Ukrainian Economy Minister Taras Kachka told national television that talks were advancing and that it was likely a provisional document, or memorandum, could be signed very soon. "A final document won't be signed this week. There is a lot of work to be done because the ideas included in the agreement by the US side need to be developed further," Kachka said. The United States has reduced its cost estimate for the assistance provided to Ukraine since Russia's invasion in 2022 to about \$100 billion from \$300 billion, Bloomberg News reported, citing people familiar with the matter.



GAZA STRIP: A child looking on at the site of an Israeli attack on a tent camp sheltering displaced people, in Khan Younis.

## Haiti in 'free fall' as violence escalates, rights group warns

PORT-AU-PRINCE: The security situation in Haiti is in "free fall", Human Rights Watch (HRW) has warned, as armed groups continue to unleash deadly violence in the capital and other areas across the Caribbean nation.

In a statement, HRW said criminal gangs have escalated their attacks in Port-au-Prince since late last year, and only 10 percent of the city remains under government control. "Haiti's security situation is in a free fall and Haitians are suffering horrific abuses," said Nathalie Cotrino, the rights group's senior Americas researcher.

The country has reeled from years of violence as powerful armed groups, often with ties to the country's political and business leaders, have vied for influence and control of territory. But the situation worsened dramatically after the July 2021 assassination of Haitian President Jovenel Moise, which created a power vacuum. In 2024, the gangs launched attacks on prisons and other state institutions across Port-au-Prince, fuelling a renewed political crisis.

The campaign of violence led to the resignation of Haiti's unelected prime minister, the creation of a transitional presidential council, and the deployment of a United Nations-backed, multinational police mission.

That Kenya-led police force — formally known as the Multinational Security Support Mission (MSS) — has failed to take control back from the gangs, however. Observers say the mission has been underfunded and ill-equipped.

Recently, so-called "self-defence" groups have formed in response to the armed gangs, leading to more deadly violence. Protests have also broken out in Port-au-Prince against the country's transitional presidential council, which has been unable to restore security. On April 7, the authorities declared a new, one-month state of emergency amid the violence. "Declaring emergencies without equipping police with necessary resources, like effective armored vehicles, will not solve the insecurity crisis," the National Human Rights Defense Network, a leading Haitian rights group, said in a recent report.

"The absence of state response has turned the police into firefighters—constantly reacting without strategic direction—while towns fall one after another," the group said. According to UN figures, at least 1,518 people were killed and another 572 were injured between January 1 and March 27 in gang attacks, security force operations, and acts of violence committed by the "self-defence" groups and others.

Speaking to HRW, an aid worker

in Haiti said people "no longer have a safe place" to go. "Women ... seeking help have not only lost loved ones, but have also been raped, displaced and left on the streets, starving and struggling to survive. We don't know how much longer they can endure such suffering," the aid worker said. "All [victims] ask is for the violence to stop. With no support from the police or government, they feel abandoned. They ask, 'Why is no one helping us? Why do Haitian lives not matter if we are human too?'"

The UN also says more than 1 million Haitians have been displaced by the violence, while half of the country — some 5.5 million people — face acute food insecurity. In early April, Save the Children reported that more than 40,000 children were among those displaced in the first three months of 2025.

"Children in Haiti are trapped in a nightmare," the group's Haiti country director, Chantal Sylvie Imbeault, said in a statement. "They are living in deadly areas controlled by armed groups, being robbed of a normal childhood, and at constant risk of recruitment—while humanitarian aid struggles to reach them," she said. "As displacement continues to soar, shelters are becoming completely overcrowded, leaving children vulnerable to disease, exploitation, and sexual violence." — Aljazeera

## China wants partnership with EU to counter US 'abuse'

MADRID (Reuters): China wants to deal with the European Union as a partner instead of a rival, its ambassador to Spain said, amid shifting geopolitics and Washington's new trade policy which he described as unilateral economic abuse.

Yao Jing told Reuters the EU's 2019 strategy that defined China as its "partner for cooperation, economic competitor and systemic rival" made little sense as both championed open markets and rules-based trade. "We should put our focus on partnership. China will never be a threat or any kind of enemy to the EU," Yao said, praising the bloc's multilateral approach to foreign affairs, as opposed to President Donald Trump's isolationist agenda.

Last week, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez met with President Xi Jinping in Beijing. The visit was widely seen as a bid to forge closer economic and political ties between China and Europe amid the fallout from Trump's tariffs. Just before Sanchez's trip, US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent warned that moving closer to the Asian country would be "cutting your own throat", a comment dismissed by Madrid.

Yao said he was shocked by Bessent's remarks, adding that the US "in fact cuts everyone's throats" with its unilateral tariffs. "And this is why China is firmly against this kind of economic abuse by the United States," he said. Yao said Europe should drop its export controls on certain high-tech products, including semiconductors, as well as tariffs on Chinese electric vehicles (EVs) and limitations for Chinese companies such as Huawei or ZTE to access Europe's 5G network. Beijing, in its turn, has been opening up sectors such as telecommunications, banking or manufacturing for foreign investment, he said.

Yao said the EU's trade deficit with China, of around \$345 billion last year, could not disappear overnight due to structural issues, but expected gradual progress. "We've made it very clear that China will open its door with the passage of time, and this door will never be closed. We're ready to open our market to other EU members, like we just did with Spain," he said. The two countries agreed to allow Chinese market access to Spanish pork stomach - a product widely consumed in China but not previously authorised.

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## Child among three killed in attack on Ukraine

KYIV: A large-scale Russian drone attack in the southeastern Ukrainian city of Dnipro has killed three people, including a young girl, according to the regional governor, hours before officials from the United States, Europe and Ukraine gather in Paris to discuss the conflict.

Dnipropetrovsk Governor Serhiy Lysak said the attacks that also injured tens of people came, triggering multiple fires and damaging a dozen apartment buildings. A student residence, an educational institution and a food processing plant were also damaged, Dnipro Mayor Borys Filatov added.

Photos posted online showed raging fires, burned-out vehicles and buildings with shattered windows and scorched facades, as emergency crews worked through the night. Sixteen of the injured are in hospital, one of them in critical condition, according to Lysak.

"This is the latest in a series of strikes that have continued to hit civilian

areas," Al Jazeera's Zein Basravi reported from Kyiv. Elsewhere, a separate Russian missile attack wounded two people in the northeastern town of Izyum, regional governor Oleh Synyehubov reported. Meanwhile, Russia claimed to have shot down 71 Ukrainian drones overnight, most targeting the Kursk region. Russian officials also claimed Kyiv waged a drone attack on the town of Shuya, east of Moscow, causing no casualties. The attacks come as the war grinds into its 38th month, despite efforts by US President Donald Trump to broker a ceasefire, including by demanding concessions from Kyiv and making diplomatic overtures to Russia that have angered Ukraine.

Later, two senior Trump administration officials — Secretary of State Marco Rubio and special envoy Steve Witkoff — are due to meet in Paris with French President Emmanuel Macron and top European diplomats for talks on Ukraine. Ukraine's foreign

and defence ministers are among those in the city to participate in talks, according to Andriy Yermak, head of Ukraine's presidential office.

Ukrainians remain sceptical that the US diplomatic push would "work out in their favour", but officials are still hoping for an about-face from Washington, Basravi said. So far, Moscow has rejected a joint US-Ukrainian proposal for a full and unconditional ceasefire, insisting that key details remain unresolved, while continuing to bomb its neighbour.

A Russian ballistic missile attack in the heart of the northeastern city of Sumy on Sunday was one of the deadliest of the war, killing 36 people, including two children, and injuring 119 as people gathered to celebrate Palm Sunday. The attack, according to Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski, showed Russian President Vladimir Putin was "mocking" the US's "goodwill". — Aljazeera

## 50 years after fall of Phnom Penh, history weighs on Cambodian politics

PHNOM PENH: Fifty years after the fall of Phnom Penh to the Khmer Rouge rebel army, the events of April 17, 1975 continue to cast a long shadow over Cambodia and its political system. Emerging from the bloodshed and chaos of the spreading war in neighbouring Vietnam, Pol Pot's radical peasant movement rose up and defeated the United States-backed regime of General Lon Nol.

The war culminated five decades ago, with Pol Pot's forces sweeping into Cambodia's capital and ordering the city's more than two million people into the countryside with little more than the belongings they could carry. With Cambodia's urban centres abandoned, the Khmer Rouge embarked on rebuilding the country from "Year Zero", transforming it into an agrarian, classless society.

In less than four years under Pol Pot's rule, between 1.5 and three million people were dead. They would also almost wipe out Cambodia's rich cultural history and religion. Many Cambodians were brutally killed in the Khmer Rouge's "killing fields", but far more died of starvation, disease and exhaustion labouring on collective farms to build the Communist regime's rural utopia.

In late December 1978, Vietnam invaded alongside Cambodian defectors, toppling the Khmer Rouge from power on January 7, 1979. It is from this point onwards that popular knowledge of Cambodia's contemporary tragic history typically ends, picking up in the mid-2000s with the start of the United Nations-backed war crimes tribunal in Phnom Penh, where former regime leaders were put on trial. For many Cambodians, how-

ever, rather than being relegated to history books, the 1975 fall of Phnom Penh and the toppling of the Khmer Rouge in 1979 remain alive and well, embedded in the Cambodian political system.

That tumultuous Khmer Rouge period is still used to justify the long-running rule of the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) under varying forms since 1979, and the personal rule of CPP leader Hun Sen and his family since 1985, according to analysts. It was the now ageing senior leadership of the CPP who joined with Vietnamese forces to oust Pol Pot in 1979. While memories of those times are fading, the CPP's grip on power is as firm as ever in the decades since the late 1970s.

The ruling CPP see "themselves as the saviour and the guardian of the country", said Aun Chhengpor, a policy researcher at the Future Forum think tank in Phnom Penh. "It explains the making of a political system as it is today," he said, noting that the CPP has long done what it required to "ensure that they are still there at the helm ... at any cost". Most Cambodians have now accepted a system where peace and stability matter above all else.

"There seems to be an unwritten social contract between the ruling establishment and the population that, as long as the CPP provides relative peace and a stable economy, the population will leave governance and politics to the CPP," Aun Chhengpor said. "The bigger picture is how the CPP perceives itself and its historic role in modern Cambodia. It's not that different from how the palace-military establishment in Thailand or

the Communist Party in Vietnam see their roles in their respective countries," he said.

The CPP headed a Vietnamese-backed regime for a decade, from 1979 to 1989, bringing relative order back to Cambodia after the Khmer Rouge, even as fighting persisted in many parts of the country as Pol Pot's fighters tried to reassert control. With support dwindling from the Soviet Union in the last days of the Cold War and an economically and militarily exhausted Vietnam withdrawing from Cambodia, Hun Sen, by then the leader of the country, agreed to hold elections as part of a settlement to end his country's civil war. From 1991 to 1993, Cambodia was administered by the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC). The Cambodian monarchy was formally re-established, and elections were held for the first time in decades in 1993. The last Khmer Rouge soldiers surrendered in 1999, symbolically closing a chapter on one of the 20th century's bloodiest conflicts. Despite a bumpy road forward, there were initial hopes for Cambodian democracy.

The royalist National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful and Cooperative Cambodia Party — better known by its acronym FUNCINPEC — won the UN-administered elections in 1993. Faced with defeat, the CPP refused to cede power. The late King Norodom Sihanouk stepped in to broker an agreement between both sides that preserved the hard-won peace and made the election a relative success. The international community breathed a sigh of relief as the UNTAC mission in Cambodia had been the largest and costliest at

that time for the world body, and UN member states were desperate to declare their investment in nation rebuilding a success. Ruling jointly under a power-sharing agreement with CPP and FUNCINPEC co-prime ministers, the unsteady alliance of former enemies held for four years until ending in a swift and bloody coup by Hun Sen in 1997.

Mu Sochua, an exiled opposition leader who now heads the nonprofit Khmer Movement for Democracy, told Al Jazeera that the CPP's resistance to a democratic transfer of power in 1993 continues to reverberate throughout Cambodia today. "The failure of the transfer of power in 1993 and the deal the King made at the time ... was a bad deal. And the UN went along because the UN wanted to close shop," she told Al Jazeera from the US, where she lives in exile after being forced to flee the CPP's intensifying authoritarianism at home.

"The transitional period, the transfer of power ... which was the will of the people, never happened," Mu Sochua said. Following the coup in 1997, the CPP did not come close to losing power again until 2013, when they were challenged by the widely popular Cambodian National Rescue Party (CNRP). By the time of the next general election in 2018, the CNRP was banned from politics by the country's less-than-independent courts, and many of the opposition leaders were forced to flee the country or ended up in prison on politically motivated charges.

Unhindered by a viable political challenger, Hun Sen's CPP went on to win all seats in the 2018 national election, and all but five of the 125

parliamentary seats contested during the last general election in 2023. The CPP has also firmly aligned with China, and the country's once vibrant free press has been shut down, and civil society organisations cowed into silence.

After nothing up 38 years in power, Hun Sen stepped aside as prime minister in 2023 to make way for his son Hun Manet — a sign that the CPP-led political machine has eyes on dynastic, multi-generational rule. But new challenges have emerged in Cambodia's post-war decades of relative prosperity, huge inequality and de facto one-party rule. Cambodia's booming microcredit industry was intended to help lift Cambodians out of poverty, but the industry has instead burdened families with high levels of personal debt. One estimate put the figure at more than \$16bn in a country with a population of just 17.4 million and a gross domestic product (GDP) of \$42bn in 2023, according to World Bank estimates. Hun Manet's cabinet is shifting towards "performance-based legitimacy" because they lack the "political capital" once bestowed by the public on those who liberated the country from the Khmer Rouge.

"The proportion of the population that remembers the Khmer Rouge, or that has usable memories of that period, is shrinking year by year," said Sebastian Strangio, author of Hun Sen's Cambodia. "I don't think [the CPP's legacy] is sufficient for the majority of the population born since the end of the Cold War," Strangio told Al Jazeera.

Now, there even appears to be room for a limited amount of popular

opposition, analyst Aun Chhengpor said. In January, Cambodian farmers blockaded a main highway to protest against the low prices of their goods, suggesting there may be "some space" in the political system for localized dissent on community-based issues, he said.

"[It] will be an uphill struggle for the fractured political opposition to thrive — not to mention to organise among themselves and, let alone, have the hope of winning a general election," Aun Chhengpor said. "However, there are indications that the CPP still somehow believes in the multiparty system and limited democracy in the way that they can have a say on when and how much democracy," he added.

Speaking in exile from the US, Mu Sochua had a dimmer view of Cambodia's situation. The same month as the farmer protests in Cambodia, a former Cambodian opposition member of parliament was shot dead in broad daylight on a street in Thailand's capital, Bangkok.

The brazen assassination of Lim Kimya, 74, a dual Cambodian-French citizen, recalled memories of the chaotic political violence of the 1990s and early 2000s in Cambodia. Peace and stability, Mu Sochua said, exist only on the surface in Cambodia, where still waters run deep. "If politics and the space for people to engage in politics is non-existent, what dominates then is not peace," she said. "It's still the feeling of war, of insecurity, of the lack of freedom," she told Al Jazeera. "After the war, 50 years later, at least there is no bloodshed, but that alone does not mean there is peace." — Aljazeera



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## Hello to tariffs will mean goodbye, dollar profits

**A**PRIL Fool's Day was on 1 April, but the next day, US President Trump unleashed Liberation Day, imposing tariff rates of 10 per cent on UK, Australia and Singapore, 20 per cent on EU and 54 per cent on China. Market analysts called it obliteration day, since the US stock market fell 4 per cent the next day, wiping \$9 trillion of global stock market capitalization in the next two working days. JPMorgan estimated that the tariff rate level was upped to roughly 22 per cent, higher than the infamous Smoot-Hawley tariffs that sparked the 1930s Great Recession. This is equivalent to a 2.4 per cent tax increase on Americans, the largest hike since 1968, lifting the chances of recession this year from 40 to 60 per cent. How significant is Liberation Day on the global economy, the dollar and global markets? JPMorgan economists estimated that a 20 per cent increase in US tariffs, including retaliation from China and the Euro area may reduce US GDP by 2 percentage points and global GDP, including EU and China, by 1 percentage point.

That would put the US into recession territory, Europe to zero or negative growth, and Emerging Market and Developing Economies (EMDEs) to just over 3 per cent growth, the slowest for years except for the 2020 pandemic shock. Fast-growing economies like Bangladesh and Vietnam would be hit badly as tariff increases for them are at 37 and 46 per cent respectively. US Council of Economic Advisers Chairman, Stephen Miran, laid out three key tariff objectives on the future of global trade and dollar: a negotiating tool, tax revenue source and a wall to protect onshoring of US manufacturing. Miran understood that US soft power is not just on its military might but also the hegemonic power of the dollar. As the world's reserve currency, accounting for just under 60 per cent of international payments and official reserves respectively, the real carrot in using the dollar lies in its higher rate of return, superior liquidity and as a haven or low risk currency standard.

Although the United States has huge external debt, most of it is denominated in US dollars, which means that she can repay debt by simply printing more dollars. Dollar holders are compensated by higher returns, with a 9-10 per cent average annual return on USD assets based on a 60 equity/40 bonds portfolio ratio over the last two decades. This has consistently outperformed Euro asset portfolio return of 4-5 per cent per annum and 2-3 per cent on Yen portfolio. Given the fact that US dollar liquidity is excellent or superior to Euro or Yen interbank market liquidity, having the largest military power reinforces US dollar hegemony over rivals such as the Euro, Yen or Chinese RMB.

Nevertheless, the true determinants of US dollar superiority over other reserve assets are higher equity returns from tech company growth, superior bond yields, and moderate inflation relative to low inflation in the Eurozone and deflation in Japan. In the last 10 years, US stock market annual returns have been between 9-10 per cent (double equity returns in RMB stock markets), mainly because US companies have consistently outperformed in earnings, technology and innovation, enjoying currency stability and fewer systemic risks. However, all these may change with the President Trump's seismic policy changes in his second term.

As Trump escalated tariffs on China to 104 per cent and China matched with 84 per cent on US imports, the markets saw with huge uncertainty, with economists like Paul Krugman arguing that inflation will spike, which would keep interest rates higher in an independent Fed policy stance. US Treasury 10-year bonds spiked back to 4.5 per cent on April 9, which former US Treasury Secretary Larry Summers attributed to "a generalized aversion to US assets in global financial markets." Higher US dollar interest rates would increase the fiscal debt interest burden, already \$881 billion in 2024, higher than defense expenditure. Higher inflation and domestic interest rates would also slow down the US economy further, which would in turn weigh down on the stock market.

The pause in tariff hikes for everyone except China saw the Dow Jones soaring once again, so it's clear that all this was really pointed at China. Nevertheless, if trade with China as the second largest economy is hurt, so will US corporate profits. Much of the high returns on US stock market have relied on the Magnificent Seven tech companies (Apple, Microsoft, Alphabet/Google, Amazon, Nvidia, Meta/Facebook, and Tesla), many of which have enjoyed Chinabased revenues from either imports or direct sales to China. Apple has 18-20 per cent of total revenue from China, relying on Chinese assembly of iPhones. Nvidia has 20-25 per cent revenue from China, particularly from sales of downgraded chips.

Tesla has 22-25 per cent revenue from China with half of global output manufactured in China. Whilst the others have less Chinese exposure, almost all have huge exposure to global markets. Apple's non-US revenue is 66 per cent, Microsoft 50 per cent, Alphabet 54 per cent, Amazon 40 per cent, Nvidia 60 per cent, Meta 55 per cent and Tesla 55 per cent. In short, tariffs will hurt the global economy, which hurts Magnificent 7 revenue and profits, which in turn will hurt the stock market, damaging the dollar. How will it all play out? No one seriously knows for sure. The Singapore Prime Minister boldly summed up by saying "the era of rules-based globalization and free trade is over." The war of elephants has begun, and the grass will be trampled.

Having weaponized the dollar, with rumoured threats of either escrow or tax on dollar holdings, investors will seek to hedge, hence the elevated price of gold. Too strong a dollar hurts US exports, encouraging imports. Tariffs increase the cost of imports, but exporting countries can devalue to offset that somewhat. Hence, the US must escalate threats to avoid "currency manipulation". Going forward, if there are only sticks and no carrots in holding or trading in dollars, and returns in US dollar assets decline as corporate profits are hit, the risks of another financial crash are growing. Hello tariffs, goodbye dollar profits.

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## Grading Trump's Ukraine war deal-making by 'art of the deal' standards

Alexander J. Motyl

**HOW** does President Trump's deal-making record with respect to the Russo-Ukrainian War stack up against that of Vladimir Putin and Volodymyr Zelensky? One way to answer this question is to use Trump's own criteria, as listed in the second chapter ("Trump Cards: The Elements of the Deal") of his ghostwritten 1987 bestseller, "The Art of the Deal." Trump lists 11 elements, most of which are strikingly banal.

"Think big" is his first piece of obvious advice. "I like thinking big," he writes. "I always have. To me it's very simple: if you're going to be thinking anyway, you might as well think big." Ending the war in 24 hours was thinking big. Focusing on a ceasefire that Putin openly rejects is not. In contrast to Trump, Putin and Zelensky both want to win. That's thinking big. Give each of them a point, and zero to the small-thinking Trump. The second element of the deal: "Protect the downside and the upside will take care of itself." According to Trump, "I always go into the deal anticipating the worst. If you plan for the worst - if you can live with the worst - the good will always take care of itself."

Unfortunately, Trump embarked on negotiations with Putin and Zelensky anticipating the best - a quick agreement. Putin and Zelensky knew it would be a slog and were prepared for it. They get a point apiece; Trump gets nothing. "Maximize the options" is Trump's third piece of advice. "I never get too attached to one deal or one approach," he writes. "I keep a lot of balls in the air, because most deals fall out, no matter how promising they seem at first."

To the contrary, Trump appears wedded to courting Putin, regardless of the Russian autocrat's war crimes and unwillingness to close a deal, and to dissing Zelensky, regardless of the Ukrainian president's willingness to compromise. Yet again, the sly Putin, who speaks out of both sides of his mouth, gets a point, as does Zelensky. Trump gets

nothing. Number four is "Know your market," of which Trump writes: "I like to think that I have that instinct. That's why I don't hire a lot of number-crunchers, and I don't trust fancy marketing surveys. I do my own surveys and draw my own conclusions."

Indeed, Trump does, and his ignorance of Russia and Ukraine is shockingly obvi-

ous.

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ous. Both Zelensky and Putin know what the war is about. They get a point, whereas Trump scores zero. Number five is "Use your leverage." "The worst thing you can possibly do in a deal is seem desperate to make it," he writes. "That makes the other guy smell blood, and then you're

dead."

No comment is necessary. A point to Putin, and none to Trump or Zelensky. Number six, "Enhance your location," is irrelevant, except to real-estate dealmakers. But number seven is relevant: "Get the word out."

status with number eight, "Fight back." "In most cases I'm very easy to get along with," he writes. "I'm very good to people who are good to me. But when people treat me badly or unfairly or try to take advantage of me, my general attitude, all my life, has been to fight back very hard." Trump has thus far refused to fight Putin, while continuing to fight Zelensky, even though he hasn't treated the US president badly or unfairly. So give Putin a point, and Trump and Zelensky nothing.

Number nine is hilarious: "Deliver the goods: You can't con people, at least not for long. You can create excitement, you can do wonderful promotion and get all kinds of press, and you can throw in a little hyperbole. But if you don't deliver the goods, people will eventually catch on."

Thus far, Trump has delivered nothing regarding the war. Neither has Putin. In contrast, Zelensky has delivered Ukraine's survival. He gets one point, while Trump and Putin get zero.

Number 10 is "Contain the costs. I believe in spending what you have to," he writes. "But I also believe in not spending more than you should."

Trump's advice is either screamingly obvious or nonsensical. No one gets any points. The last element of the deal is downright obscene at a time of war. "Have fun: Money was never a big motivation for me, except as a way to keep score. The real excitement is playing the game."

Aside from the fact that money is a huge motivation for Trump, he's obviously having a ball as Ukrainians and Russians die. Both Putin and Zelensky know that war is no game. They get no points, while America's merry-maker-in-chief gets one. The final tally? Putin seven, Zelensky six and Trump two. The master dealmaker appears to have forgotten how to make a deal, and the prospects for a ceasefire or peace between Russia and Ukraine are accordingly slim. And they will remain slim as long as Trump remains content with being a loser.

move US strategic elites to recognize the value of a sovereign Taiwan, despite ongoing debates; [6] and that there is robust bipartisan support for Taiwan in Congress.

Second, Taiwan is already in the process of upgrading its own defense capabilities, with a 2025 draft budget [7] allocating about 2.5% of GDP and a target of 3%. This expansion has robust popular support, [8] although it remains contentious between Taiwan's executive and opposition-controlled parliament. And it comes on top of other initiatives [9] to strengthen resilience against Chinese "gray zone" and influence operations.

Third, Taiwan has in recent years benefited from more international attention to its situation. The EU, Japan, [10] South Korea [11] and ASEAN [12] have publicly stated their concern about maintaining a peaceful status quo in the Taiwan Strait. While they are not military actors who could

replace the US as a balancer, they are economic heavyweights and can provide deterrence through a sanctions threat.

Future US support for Taiwan will undoubtedly depend on its China policy, which has not yet been settled. But on this issue, the "America First" agenda has a distinctly hawkish attitude, making it seem unlikely that Trump would just cede a major victory to Beijing by abandoning Taiwan. While there is a danger that the island could be sold out as part of a "grand bargain" between the great powers, akin to what appears to be happening to Ukraine, Taiwan has its own agency and is doing what it can to prevent such an outcome. Its approach can also serve as inspiration for other US allies fearing abandonment: building up independent capacities and diversifying partnerships are good guidelines in an increasingly uncertain world.

AA

## Can US pry Russia away from China?

Danila Galperovich

**WESTERN** politicians have repeatedly called on China to limit or cease tacit support for Russia's bloody war against Ukraine. In response, China's leadership insists it is committed to peace and respect for the territorial integrity of other nations.

But unlike most United Nations member states, China has never condemned Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and their military-diplomatic partnership - from joint bomber flights near the US state of Alaska to votes in the UN Security Council - has only helped the Kremlin overcome its international isolation.

While President Donald Trump has said he has good personal relations with both Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping, there is a consensus among experts in Washington that the China-Russia partnership poses a threat to US interests, and that while Trump's predecessor, Joe Biden, tried to establish a strategic dialogue with China, the Trump team appears to be prioritizing normalized ties with Russia while punishing China over trade.

As the White House talks about the possibility of restoring economic cooperation with Russia, some of its officials are hinting at lifting or reducing the sanctions Washington has imposed on Moscow in recent years. Charles Hecker, an expert on Western-Russian economic ties and risks, and author of the book *Zero Sum: The Arc of International Business in Russia*, says some Western companies will quickly return to Russia if sanctions are lifted, particularly those involved in energy, metals and minerals.

"There's only so much oil in Norway, and there's only so much oil in Canada; the rest of it is in some countries that have a very high-risk environment," Hecker told VOA's Russian Service. "And so, these kinds of companies are accustomed to business in these sorts of places, and they have the internal structures to help protect them. You know, there are energy companies doing business in Iraq right now. And I don't want to compare Russia and Iraq, but they are high-risk environments." Still, Hecker cautions, their return to doing business in Russia wouldn't signal an overall US-Russian rapprochement - let alone a fracturing of Sino-Russian relations. "I think it will be very difficult for the West to pull Russia away from China," he said.

"Allowing Western companies back into Russia doesn't necessarily change President Putin's hostility towards the West. President Putin remains antagonistic towards a Western-dominated political and economic system, and he has said over and over again that he wants to create an alternative political and economic environment - an alternative to the West."

"Part of that alternative includes China," he added. "You have never heard President Putin say anything ideologically against China. And the two are now important energy partners." US-based FilterLabs analyzes public sentiment in regions where polling is problematic. According to a recently published assessment of popular attitudes expressed on Russian and Chinese social media networks, Sino-

Russian relations are "full of underlying tensions, mistrust, and diverging interests."

One of the report's authors, Vasily Gatov, told VOA its research found that "the Chinese and Russian populations are far from happy with this alliance of their authorities." "China does not perceive Russia as a reliable, safe and equal partner," he said. "Russia annexed the Amur Region from China; Russia adopted a completely colonial policy towards China during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Therefore, in my opinion, it is entirely possible to consider historical frictions as a vulnerability."

A media analyst at the University of Southern California's Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism, Gatov also noted that, despite the Kremlin's expectations, China's economic presence inside Russia today remains "several times smaller" than that of either Europe or the US before Russia invaded Ukraine. Thus, while Russian and China have overlapping interests, they are not "marching in lock-step." "They are very different, they have very different geopolitical focuses, very different political philosophies," he said. Other experts, however, question the Filterlabs findings, warning that random Russian and Chinese opinions online are of limited value, especially as those casting the insights aren't likely to influence policy.

"People who have the time and desire to comment on things on social media do not have much influence on how state policy is conducted," Alexander Gabuev, director of the Berlin-based Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center, told VOA. "And these people certainly do not have much influence on whether China transfers components for Russia's weapons or takes certain military technologies from it, since the people who comment on this simply do not have real knowledge of what is actually happening." Gabuev added that "the Chinese leadership has reasons to think that they have something to take from Russia in terms of military technology," suggesting that China is extremely interested in gaining Russian experience in countering Western weapons during Russia's war in Ukraine.

One critical question about whether Washington's improved ties with Russia will loosen the Sino-Russian pact, say some analysts, is how Trump perceives China. Ali Wyne, senior research and advocacy advisor on the US and China at the International Crisis Group, describes Trump as an anomaly for US policy.

"Widespread bipartisan agreement in Congress and from one administration to the next [is] that China is America's foremost strategic competitor," he said. But "President Trump, in many ways, is the most prominent dissenter from this alleged China consensus." "He doesn't view President Xi [Jinping] in adversarial terms," Wyne said. "He actually calls President Xi a 'dear friend' of his. And he believes that his personal rapport with President Xi will be the decisive dynamic in setting - or resetting - the US-China relationship over the next four years."

VOA



# How the battles Trump loves to wage explain his presidency

Stephen Collinson

**TO understand Donald Trump's second term, just look at the fights he picks. The president and his top officials spent this week escalating confrontations over mass deportations, elite universities and transgender athletes on emerging fronts of his "common sense revolution." Each is obviously an attempt to please the loyal MAGA political base and other elements of the coalition on which Trump anchored his two election wins.**

Trump's team may also be trying to change the subject from his trade war chaos and his stalled Ukraine peace effort. But the idea that he's engaged in an endless cycle of distraction to hide his failures became a cliché in his first term. In his second, it's a lazy critique that fails to encapsulate his often-fateful acts of far greater substance aimed at transforming American life and the world. The administration fought on multiple fronts on Wednesday. It sued Maine for refusing to apply its transgender high school athlete ban. Top officials furiously worked to discredit an undocumented migrant mistakenly sent, without due process, to an El Salvadorian mega-prison who embodies their ruthless immigration policy. And they doubled down on an attempt to shape the policies, faculty, and student body at Harvard University as part of a crackdown on a bastion of liberal power.

The controversies share some common traits that offer insight into Trump's leadership. They demonstrate the president's attempt to apply vast presidential power, often based on questionable constitutional grounds. All are likely to feature protracted legal battles that could ultimately test whether the country will tip into a constitutional crisis if the White House ignores judges' rulings. Almost every showdown reflects the essential dynamics driving Trump's character and politics: He chooses fights that demonstrate his strength over potentially weaker opponents. And his team adopts the relentless win-lose mindset that has defined Trump's life as a real estate baron, reality star and president.

There's always an element of "owning the libs" about Trump's approach in the choreographing of battles designed to crush progressive sensitivities. Often, they leave his opponents forced to defend unpopular institutions or constituencies that offer few political payoffs - like undocumented migrants - leading to hours of mockery on conservative media. But the administration's plans aren't just tactical. There's also philosophical strategy at work. While the president sometimes seems uninterested in policy, some of his most influential second-term operatives are deeply ideological. Beyond Trump's craving for disruption, there's a coherent effort to

destroy the pillars of the liberal establishment, to turn back civil rights and progressive liberal social victories, and even to reverse demographic change with immigration policy.

And these fights also show that three months in, Trump's sweeping claims of presidential authority risk taking the country down an authoritarian slope. There was a whiff of totalitarianism in the air this week when Trump played along with El Salvador's self-styled "world's coolest dictator" in the Oval Office. And a wrecking-ball president unleashing economic upheaval and carving even deeper national divides is posing a critical political question: Is this what voters thought they were getting or wanted from an election in which the country's main concern seemed to be lowering prices after a punishing surge of inflation?

Kilmar Armando Abrego Garcia has the misfortune of becoming a human pawn in a titanic political clash that those waging it cannot afford to lose. The sheet metal worker and undocumented migrant is incarcerated in a notorious mega-prison in El Salvador after being expelled in defiance of a judge's order that he not be deported to his native country. At first, the administration admitted in court that it made an administrative error. But it is now misrepresenting a Supreme Court ruling that it must "facilitate" Garcia's return amid a brewing constitutional showdown.

Immigration was foundational for Trump's political career. He'd barely descended the golden escalator in his New York skyscraper in 2015 to launch his campaign when he began slandering Mexican immigrants. In his 2024 presidential bid, he falsely claimed foreign nations were emptying prisons and asylums to create an alien "invasion" of the US to exploit the Biden administration's failure to initially recognize and address surges of undocumented migrants. Trump's demagoguery on migration has often worked. It animated nativist elements of his party and built a coalition that led to his GOP domination. And in a CNN/SSRS poll last month, 51% approved of his handling of immigration. It was the only one of a suite of issues in which he had majority support.

That strength explains why Trump often returns to this magic formula when he's facing heavy political weather. And it explains the politics of the White House's refusal to back down on Abrego Garcia. Attorney General Pam Bondi warned on Wednesday that he's "not coming back to our country." Officials accuse Abrego Garcia of being a terrorist, an MS-13 gang member and a threat to the safety of Americans, although he has no criminal convictions and they haven't produced public evi-

dence of their claims.

On Wednesday, White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt highlighted a protection order obtained by Abrego Garcia's wife in 2021 after he allegedly assaulted her. She cranked up the political histrionics, accusing Democrats of rushing to defend "an illegal criminal, foreign terrorist, gang member, but also an apparent woman beater." She added, "Nothing will change the fact that Abrego Garcia will never be a Maryland father; he will never live in the United States of America again." Garcia Abrego's wife, Jennifer Vasquez Sura, told CNN in a statement that she hadn't pursued the matter in court, that they were able to work through their difficulties and that their marriage "only grew stronger."

This all reflected a potentially defining moment for Trump's immigration policy. To bend would provoke questions about whether some of the other hundreds of migrants sent to El Salvador were also denied due process because of flimsy evidence that they are gang members. It could potentially undermine public support for Trump on a rare issue where he polls well. Abrego Garcia's return could also lessen the culture of fear the administration has been creating with detentions and deportations designed to vastly slow arrivals at the border. And perhaps most importantly, a climbdown could puncture the conceit that the courts lack authority to constrain or compel the president's behavior.

At the same time, however, the plight of Abrego Garcia also risks become a broader political issue around perceived White House cruelty that could begin to erode Trump's relatively strong ratings on immigration. Bondi, a star of the MAGA movement, also led another key administration push Wednesday, suing Maine over its refusal to comply with Trump's ban on transgender athletes in high school sports. The lawsuit alleges the state is violating Title IX, the law that prohibits sex-based discrimination at schools that receive federal aid. A clash is now set between presidential authority and state power. Maine says Trump's order conflicts with its own Human Rights Act.

The lawsuit could be a harbinger of similar efforts by Trump to use presidential power to enforce social policy in other states. This is another fight the White House loves. The president raised the issue in his meeting with El Salvador's President Nayib Bukele on Monday. "We have people that fight to the death because they think men should be able to play in women's sports. And some of those sports, it wouldn't matter much, but it still matters, but some of them are very dangerous for women," he

said. On the campaign trail, Trump frequently mocked trans athletes and bemoaned what conservatives say is the destruction of girls' sports, despite instances of transgender athletes competing in women's competitions being relatively rare.

Trump is tapping into an issue that is perceived as a moral outrage in his own coalition, including among evangelicals and social conservatives. He's also making a mainstream play with a crossover issue for some more moderate voters, like the suburban independents who helped him win all seven swing states in November. When Trump argues that he's voicing "common sense," he's pitching suburban moms and dads worried about potential lost opportunities for their daughters if transgender athletes somehow come to dominate women's sports. And by initiating classic backlash politics, he's tapping into perceptions that progressives have gone far too far on social issues - in a way that has alienated some voters.

But as with immigration, Trump's approach victimizes individuals, creates a culture of fear among a marginalized community and raises the question of whether a president has the personal power to dictate the scope of individual rights. The standoff with elite US universities is another classic example of Trumpism in action.

He's targeting institutions that conservatives believe are dominated by progressive extremists. Top colleges are also a source of the expertise and intellectual pursuits to which Trumpism is a reaction. And the clash raises suspicions of presidential overreach. The populist commander-in-chief seems delighted that Harvard - perhaps the nation's greatest citadel of elitism - fought back, unlike some other top schools that fueled his power grab by bending to his wishes.

"Harvard has been hiring almost all woke, Radical Left, idiots and 'birdbrains' who are only capable of teaching FAILURE to students and so-called 'future leaders,'" Trump wrote on Truth Social on Wednesday, encapsulating his political incentives in a dispute in which he's threatening to cancel the university's tax exemption. But there's also a deeply ideological goal underpinning the attack on higher education. The White House is using anti-Israel protests that saw antisemitic incidents on some campuses to crack down on university administrators. But the president is also pursuing policies that could deliver for ideological conservatives, who have spent years pushing back on affirmative action policies and efforts to diversify faculty and student populations in the wake of the civil rights movement.

CNN

# Germany's defense awakening: Perspectives of Bundeswehr

Ulrich Schlie

of military procurement, the question of adapting general staff training and a common understanding of the robust rules of engagement in the national parliaments.

Even the Bundeswehr is not yet fully prepared for a corresponding European leadership role. Symptomatic of the deficits is the agonizingly slow debate on a European drone that has been going on for 10 years, also due to the involvement of the German Bundestag (lower house of parliament) at the request of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) parliamentary group. The troubled development of the A400M and the controversial decision to purchase the F-35 without a coherent strategic vision illustrate further systemic flaws. With US President Donald Trump's recent political resurgence, even this acquisition is under renewed scrutiny before the aircraft have arrived.

Even during the coalition negotiations, it is foreseeable that the two coal-

bat platforms, a technology-driven defense strategy that invests in combat drones so that precise enemy platforms and systems can be eliminated; the networking of artificial intelligence, sensors and the consistent use of satellite communication and satellite reconnaissance in combat and counter-combat; the strengthening of cyber capabilities, as well as a reassessment of maritime warfare; the increase in the number of supply and command ships. The Bundeswehr has a lot of catching up to do, especially in air and naval warfare.

When the North Atlantic Alliance defines the requirements for the NATO planning process in summer 2025, this will require a further increase in the need to adapt the armed forces' capabilities. France, with 17% of defense imports from the US, is far ahead of the EU median of 70%, but this is the direction we are heading in. The abolition of the civilian clause, which provides for a strict separation of civilian and military research, is

***These contradictions mean that it would be logical not only to withdraw the suspension of conscription for basic military service, but also to justify general compulsory service for men and women in connection with the possible revitalization of general compulsory military service. However, this would require a two-thirds majority in both the Bundestag and the Bundesrat (upper house of the parliament). In the current political constellation, this seems unlikely.***

tion partners will be divided on the issue of the form of defense. The SPD insists on the model presented by Pistorius of compulsory military service based on the principle of voluntariness. The CDU/CSU in particular has spoken out in favor of reviving general conscription. Compulsory military service was not abolished in 2010, but only the call-up for basic military service was suspended.

This was in line with the understanding at the time that a changing security policy situation would allow the suspension to be canceled at any time with a simple legal regulation (consent law). The current global political turmoil, in particular the real threat posed by Putin's Russia and the foreseeable problems of zones of differing security that will arise in a post-Ukraine war scenario, suggest that this moment has now arrived.

For a very long time, the CDU (unlike its little sister, the CSU) has been very cautious about the unpopular issue of compulsory military service. Instead, the proposal of general compulsory service was repeatedly taken up in resolutions and election programmes. These contradictions mean that it would be logical not only to withdraw the suspension of conscription for basic military service, but also to justify general compulsory service for men and women in connection with the possible revitalization of general compulsory military service. However, this would require a two-thirds majority in both the Bundestag and the Bundesrat (upper house of the parliament). In the current political constellation, this seems unlikely. If the new government opts for the model of compulsory military service favored by Acting Defense Minister Pistorius, it can also be assumed in all likelihood that the Federal Constitutional Court in Karlsruhe would overturn this solution, which conflicts with the provisions of the Basic Law. The Bundeswehr's future capabilities must be defined through a binding strategic analysis, aligned with NATO and EU requirements. This assessment must take into account not only the prevailing threat from Russia but also the need for readiness across multiple scenarios. But this cannot be the only yardstick. Defense must always be geared towards multiple scenarios and multiple threats at the same time. In the battle of connected weapons, the following are particularly called for: a significant increase in com-

one of the obvious consequences. The aim must be to catch up as quickly as possible with the military utilization of the OneWeb civilian satellite constellation in aerospace, i.e. with launchers and mini-missiles, and for example with a comprehensive control and steering situation on the ground. The geostationary communications satellites that are already being built today can certainly stand comparison. Of course, the difficulties with IRIS-T epitomize the problems of European coordination, just as the problems with Future Combat Air System (FCAS) also have to do with national sensitivities. In most areas, Europe has so far been too fragmented as a global competitor. The planned space joint venture between Leonardo and Thales could offer a perspective here.

Germany's stagnation in security policy is largely due to entrenched departmentalism and poor coordination between the Federal Foreign Office and the Defense Ministry, which is often treated as merely an implementation agency. This Federal Government is unlikely to come up with the big idea of a National Security Council, at best an upgrading of the existing Federal Security Council. The power-conscious smaller partner, the SPD, is primarily concerned with scoring points in the tug of war within the future coalition and is successfully negating the will of the electorate actual size ratio.

German society has had a difficult relationship with the military for decades. The reasons for this go way back to the early days of the Federal Republic and have a lot to do with the legacy of the National Socialist era and the misuse of the military. The attractiveness of the armed forces also has a lot to do with how the service is recognized by the state and society. Here, too, policymakers in Germany still face a major task. In the more than 30 years since reunification, the Germans have cultivated a political culture that favors compromises, half solutions and postponed fundamental issues. The strategic situation in 2025 does not allow this practice to continue. Germany must change its political culture and rethink its business model if it wants to continue to play a leading role in the world of globalization. The success of the next federal government-under Chancellor Friedrich Merz- will largely depend on how it redefines the Bundeswehr's role within European, transatlantic, and global frameworks.

# Why you should visit Japan's small but mighty 'little Kyoto'

Tom Schiller

**IN Ozu, you can stay at a hotel dispersed across an ancient castle, samurai residences and old merchant homes, while supporting the town's award-winning model of sustainable tourism. I arrived at Ozu via a narrow pass winding through the mountains of western Shikoku, the smallest of Japan's four main islands.**

As I descended into a basin formed by a horseshoe bend of the Hiji River, Ozu Castle appeared: a four-tiered, timber-clad fortress dating to the 14th Century perched atop a central hill. Nestled protectively behind it, hugging the riverbank, lay the ancient town. The scene's allure was heightened by a gentle mist rising from the river that swirled around the snow-dusted mountains. I'd previously visited Ozu in 2018, making a quick stop to see its castle while on a trip further south. At that time many of the old town's buildings were neglected, some were abandoned, with a few even demolished. The city was fairly deserted and, after a quick stroll around, I continued on my way.

However, on my latest trip in February 2024, I was amazed by Ozu's remarkable transformation. The old town was bustling with life and the plaza in front of Ozu Machi-no-Eki Asamoya, which serves as a tourist information centre and local crafts and food emporium, resembled a lively village square, with local families mingling among the visitors. Heading to my hotel, I passed a row of elegant samurai residences with large gardens. One housed Shun, a restaurant serving Ozu's specialty of imotaki, a traditional stew of chicken, taro and other vegetables, where a queue stretched out for lunch. On the opposite side of the street, in traditional castle town configuration, were merchants' establishments; their storehouses newly plastered and white-washed and now home to cafes, bars and a local history museum. Often referred to as a "little Kyoto" thanks to a similar historical appeal, Ozu was once the capital of the old Iyo feudal domain (much of present-day Ehime prefecture) from 1617 to 1868, and its merchants became wealthy from the production and trade of wax, silk, paper and timber. However, Ozu's economic decline over the past century, like many river towns world-

wide, led to decaying heritage sites and the exodus of residents to major cities.

In order to preserve the medieval townscape and revitalise the local economy, in 2019, Ozu embarked on an ambitious plan centred on sustainable tourism, swiftly working to conserve and convert its heritage structures into attractive accommodations and new businesses. The goal was to restore Ozu as the cultural heart of the region and attract both tourists and residents. And it has been an amazing success story. In 2023, Ozu was named one of the Top 100 Sustainable Tourism Destinations by Green Destinations, an international official certification body and non-profit organisation. That same year, it was awarded first place in the Culture and Tradition category of Green Destinations' Story Awards, recognised for how it has breathed new life into the town by repurposing its cultural assets. Ozu is now leading the way in Japan's ambitions to be one of the most sustainable travel destinations in the world.

I was staying at Nipponia Ozu Castle Town Hotel, which is the centrepiece of the town's revitalisation. It's a "scattered hotel", an innovative public-private partnership between the Ozu City government and community stakeholders, where the hotel's central services and rooms are spread out across various buildings and locations within the town rather than being centralised in a single site. When it opened in 2020, it offered visitors the first chance in Japan to sleep overnight in a castle. Guests can also stay in 31 rooms within 26 other meticulously restored buildings dispersed across the small city. By integrating guests into the community, the hotel provides them with a unique opportunity to experience the city while preserving Ozu's historic townscape and the integrity of its way of life.

"Ozu's transformation is a miracle" given how quickly, thoroughly and successfully it happened, said hotel manager Yuki Inao, noting that the castle was nearly fully booked in 2023, the year Japan lifted its travel restrictions post-pandemic. A stay at Ozu Castle is an elaborate affair. The experience begins after 17:00 when the castle museum closes. Guests arrive

wearing kimono or samurai armour, entering the castle on horseback escorted by a retinue of samurai retainers who are local actors. Following a performance of traditional arts such as gagaku court music or Shinto kagura dance, dinner is served in the Koran Turret, where Ozu's former lords - 13 generations of the Kato family - sipped sake while viewing the Moon. Afterwards, guests sleep in the keep, a unique two-storey timber-latticed open well within the main castle tower. Breakfast is served the next morning in Garyu Sanso, an exquisite teahouse built by a wealthy merchant in the 1920s on the castle's pleasure garden overlooking the river.

At ¥1,320,000 (around £7,000) per night for two guests, Ozu Castle stays are not for everyone. However, I appreciated the town's gesture of handing over the keys to its castle to guests as symbolic of its welcoming stance toward all visitors, and my stay was an equally authentic and indulgent experience. Almost all the hotel's "rooms" are suites occupying entire houses tucked into the old town from one end of its roughly 1.5km length to the other. They range from the mansion where the Kato family lived after Japan's feudal system was abolished to homes with secluded courtyard gardens and private teahouses, as well as townhouses in the bustling town centre.

Throughout the weekend, I was fully immersed in Ozu's atmosphere the moment I stepped out of my rooms. To get to the hotel's reception, I walked across a narrow cobblestone street, past an imposing earthen-walled storehouse - now transformed into another of the hotel's suites - into the grand hall of a 400-year-old mansion once owned by a wealthy wax merchant. A brief walk from there up a stone-paved street led me to breakfast - a tray of seasonal delicacies - in one of the hotel's restaurants, a former ryotei (traditional Japanese restaurant). Dinner was served in a gracious old mansion located at the foot of the castle at the opposite end of the old town, a leisurely 15-minute stroll away.

As I toured the town, I was impressed to find Unagi no Nedoko's trendy, traditionally made monpe farmers pants and hanten jackets at its first store located outside of its Fukuoka City base. The

smart, stylish ambience of Ozu's new businesses aligned perfectly with the town's restored identity as the cultural hub of the region. "When I asked Inao what she attributed Ozu's successful transformation to, she answered that 'it's the way the city government, hotel and community are working closely together, collaboratively.'" "We are a family," she said.

This welcoming community spirit is also attracting a stream of new residents, according to Yosuke Inoue of Kita's strategic planning department. He left a position at a Tokyo-based company to become the 18th generation of his family to reside in the town. But he takes pride in the fact that more than half of the new residents are not returnees like himself but people new to Ozu. The new residents I met during my stay - hotel staff, city employees and shop owners - eagerly shared their reasons for choosing Ozu as their home. Their responses were remarkably consistent: an appreciation for the town's rich historical significance, the vibrant energy and collaborative spirit, and the serene, natural surroundings. The latter sentiment resonated with me. As an avid ramblar, the winding roads that led out of the town into the surrounding hills, where I found ancient Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines ringing the city, enriched my experience.

On my final evening, I returned to the hotel's Le Un restaurant, located at the base of the castle, where each dish of the seven-course meal was a delicious reminder of Ozu's ability to harmoniously blend the old with the new, such as the tai meishi, a regional specialty featuring delicate slices of red sea bream served over rice. Departing from the tradition of serving it with raw egg yolk and a splash of soy sauce, this version was layered with sabayon and bathed in foam infused with Kajita Shoten's premium soy sauce - a sophisticated reinterpretation of a timeless classic. Looking onto a view of the castle illuminated at night, I recalled Inoue's explanation of the town's slogan "Shiroshita no Machibito". He described it as meaning "the person expected and waited for under the castle", emphasising that it embodies Ozu's invitation to travellers to visit and become honorary citizens. As I strolled back to my rooms, I felt as if I belonged there.

BBC





# Dairy association team meets Federal Minister

## F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: A high-level delegation of the Pakistan Dairy Association (PDA) met with the Federal Minister for Planning, Development & Special Initiatives, Professor Ahsan Iqbal, to discuss the current challenges specifically after the imposition of 18% sales tax on packaged milk facing the dairy industry and the need for sustainable reforms to unlock its full potential.

The delegation included Kashan Hasan, Managing Director FrieslandCampina Engro Pakistan and Vice Chairman of PDA; Dr. Shehzad Amin, CEO PDA; Dr. Muhammad Nasir from FCEPL; Aatekah Mir from Nestlé Pakistan and Noor Aftab from Tetra Pak. During the meeting, the PDA presented its position

on the impact of the unprecedented 18% sales tax on packaged milk, and its ripple effects on farmers, consumers, and the formal dairy value chain.

The PDA emphasized that this tax has not only made safe and nutritious packaged milk unaffordable for millions of households, but also triggered a decline in milk procurement from farmers by nearly 20%, leading to widespread disruptions across the sector. With over 40,000 farmers displaced and 500+ milk collection centers shut down, the Association reiterated that the current tax policy undermines formalization, weakens investment in safety and quality, and erodes public trust in the sector.

In response, Minister Ahsan Iqbal expressed his

full support for the Association's position, acknowledging the adverse effects of the current taxation regime. He affirmed the importance of dairy as a key pillar of food security, economic growth, and export potential, and endorsed the need for a long-term dairy policy to ensure sectoral resilience, consumer health, and farmer sustainability.

He encouraged the PDA to collaborate with his Ministry to co-develop a roadmap for dairy formalization and growth. Specifically, he highlighted the School Milk Program as a strategic intervention to improve child nutrition, school attendance, and cognitive development, while simultaneously generating demand for safe, nutritious milk.

Minister Iqbal emphasized the Ministry's commitment to working closely with PDA on dairy sector reforms, including the development of the milk value chain, and long-term sustainable policies that enable rather than hinder progress. He noted, "With the right incentives, Pakistan's dairy sector can be put on path to formalization, thereby leading to improved nutrition, and export competitiveness."

The Pakistan Dairy Association welcomed the Minister's strong endorsement and reiterated its commitment to supporting the Government in shaping inclusive, data-driven policy solutions, inline with global best practices that benefit consumers, farmers, industry, and the national economy.



ISLAMABAD: A high-level delegation of Pakistan Dairy Association meeting with Federal Minister for Planning, Development & Special Initiatives Professor Ahsan Iqbal.

**Proposed average prescribed price Rs2,485.72 F.P. Report**

LAHORE: The proposed average prescribed price for FY 2025-26 is Rs2,485.72 per MMBTU. Approximately 51% of the increase is attributable to the diversion of costly Regasified Liquefied Natural Gas (RLNG) to system gas consumers. This diversion has primarily resulted from reduction in power off-take of committed RLNG volumes. Decline in consumption by Captive Power Plants (CPPs), has also led to increased diversion since CPPs are being shifted to Power Grid under the Policy to enhance Power Capacity Utilisation.

A further 39% of the increase arises from the accrual of LPS against gas creditors (circular debt) which OGRA has historically disallowed for inclusion in the prescribed price. It is highlighted that operating cost is only around 4-6% of the Total Revenue Requirements of the Company. The remaining minimal portion of price escalation consists of operating expenses, addition of essential assets, and depreciation-all of which are critical for sustaining operational viability and ensuring the continuous and reliable supply of gas.

## Delegaton of cement industry meets Karim

### F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A high-level delegation representing major investors in the cement industry met with the Special Assistant to the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for Industries, Abdul Karim Tordher, here at Civil Secretariat, in Peshawar on Friday.

The delegation was led by Azam Farooq, Chief Executive Officer of Cherat Cement and included senior management officials from Bestway Cement Limited, Cherat Cement and Lakki Cement.

On this occasion, Secretary of Industries, Commerce and Technical Education Department, Aamir Afaq, Deputy Secretary Finance Saeed Ahmad, Director Licensing Minerals Department Hayat ur Rehman, Manager of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Board of Investment and Trade Fahad Arbab and other relevant officials were also present on the occasion.

The delegation discussed various matters and challenges faced by the cement industry in the province, sharing key suggestions for the sector's growth and sustainability.

Provision of provincially generated power for local

industrial use was brought under discussion, while the cement industrial representatives expressed interest in further exploring this potential solution.

The industry representatives also raised some concerns related to the Department of Forests and Environment which hurdles impeding investment. They requested the government to create an enabling environment for investors by addressing these barriers.

Further discussions were held on matters of taxation and infrastructure, where the delegation emphasized that the cement industry is one of the largest contributors to investment and tax revenue in the province. They urged the government to consider their proposals to ensure the continued growth of this vital sector.

While addressing the delegation, Abdul Karim Tordher acknowledged the cement industry as a cornerstone of economic development in KP. He informed the participants that the Chief Minister has constituted a committee for possible solution concerning environmental and forestry issues affecting the cement sector.

He assured the delegation that the government is

committed to resolving their issues and further encouraged industry representatives to invest in the transmission infrastructure necessary to deliver low-cost, locally produced power to their industries.

The Special Assistant also noted that under the chairmanship of the Advisor to the Chief Minister for Finance, another dedicated committee has been formed to ensure the availability of affordable energy to industries, including representation from the Department of Energy and Power.

Commending the cement sector for continuing its operations despite several regional challenges, Karim Tordher reaffirmed the provincial government's commitment to facilitating ease of doing business and enhancing industrial value addition.

He stressed the need for practical steps toward promoting industrialization and assured full support from the government.

Similarly, In recognition of his contributions, Azam Farooq, CEO of Cherat Cement, was honoured with a commemorative shield by the Special Assistant at the conclusion of the meeting.

## Significant surge in IIAP's cargo F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Islamabad International Airport (IIAP) has reported a significant increase in cargo throughput charges during March 2025, reaching a record Rs. 72.3 million - the highest since November 2021, when Rs. 49 million were collected.

This upward trend is attributed to the initiation of dedicated import cargo operations by M/s SF Cargo, utilizing B757-200 aircraft under flight numbers 03-233/234 on the Urumqi-Islamabad-Urumqi (URC-ISB-URC) route.

The cargo service commenced with approximately 22,775 kg of cargo per flight and is currently operating twice weekly, on Tuesdays and Fridays, with arrivals scheduled around 11:30 a.m. The airline plans to expand this frequency to four weekly flights in the near future.

## Stock market sees modest gains amid mixed trading

KARACHI (PPI): The Karachi Stock Exchange witnessed a modest uptick today as the KSE100 index rose by 414.45 points, closing at 117,315.59, marking a 0.35% increase from the previous session. Meanwhile, the KSE30 index climbed 183.72 points to settle at 36,116.37, reflecting a 0.51% gain.

In the ready market, 189 companies ended in positive territory, while 197 experienced losses, with 60 remaining unchanged, out of a total of 446 companies traded. The future market reflected a similar pattern with 132 gainers and 172 decliners among 309 companies.

The market turnover showed a notable increase, with 425,121,963 shares traded in the regular market, up from 408,066,790 in the previous session. The traded value also saw a rise, reaching 34,495,851,806 from 32,127,330,034.

Among the top performers,

Sui South Gas led with a turnover of 38,238,255 shares, closing at 42.47. Pak Int. Bulk followed closely with 30,965,499 shares traded, ending at 10.61. K-Electric Ltd. also saw significant activity with 22,907,790 shares, closing at 4.53.

Despite the mixed results across companies, the overall market capitalization increased to 14,345,594,759,361, up from 14,292,864,285,708, indicating a positive sentiment among investors.

**Currencies show slight increase in exchange rates**

The foreign exchange market has witnessed a slight increase in the buying and selling rates of several major currencies as of April 18, 2025. The US Dollar, Euro, and British Pound have all experienced minor upticks compared to the previous day.

According to the latest data, the US Dollar saw its buying rate rise from 280.33

to 280.40, while the selling rate increased from 282.17 to 282.30. The Euro's buying rate moved from 317.57 to 317.78, and its selling rate went from 320.71 to 320.98. Meanwhile, the British Pound's buying rate increased from 369.89 to 370.95, with the selling rate rising from 373.50 to 374.74.

The exchange rates for the Japanese Yen, UAE Dirham, and Saudi Riyal remained largely stable, with only minimal changes observed. The interbank rates for the US Dollar also showed a slight increase, moving from 280.61 to 280.71 in the buying rate and from 280.81 to 280.91 in the selling rate.

These adjustments reflect the ongoing dynamics in the foreign exchange market, where fluctuations are often influenced by a variety of factors, including economic indicators and global market trends.

## Prices for Naan, Chapati roti in Karachi reduced

KARACHI (INP): The Commissioner of Karachi has reduced the prices for Naan and Chapati roti in the Karachi Division, effective immediately.

Hassan Naqvi, the Commissioner, stated that the price of a 100-gram chapati has been set at Rs10 per piece.

According to the new notification, the rates for tandoori naan have been fixed as follows – Rs15 for a 120-gram naan, Rs17 for a 140-150 gram naan and Rs22 for a 180-gram naan.

The notification, issued under the authority of the Sindh Essential Commodities Price Control

and Prevention of Profiteering and Hoarding Act, 2005 (Amended in 2008), reads: "In exercise of the powers vested under section 7 of the said Act, I, Syed Hassan Naqvi, Commissioner Karachi Division/Controller General of Prices & Supplies, Karachi, hereby

notify the price of Naan & Chapati in the local limits of Karachi Division."

The Commissioner has warned that strict action will be taken against any violators of the newly fixed prices. He also directed tandoor owners to prominently display the updated price list at their business place.

## Goods transporters' strike enters its third day

KARACHI (INP): The strike of goods transporters on Friday entered its third day at Karachi ports against Sindh government's crackdown on vehicles lacking fitness certificates, ARY News reported.

Transporters have parked their vehicles at warehouses and truck stands across Karachi, disrupting the entire supply chain of imported goods.

## SBP hold financial literacy walks in 16 cities



### F.P. Report

KARACHI: SBP in collaboration with commercial banks, educational institutions and other partner institutions organised financial literacy walks in

16 major cities of Pakistan.

In the walk, thousands of people from all segments of society actively participated. The purpose of the Walk was to promote financial literacy among women, youth and kids through

awareness.

Executive Director, Syed Samar Husnain and Managing Director SBP BSC Maraj Mehmood addressed the participants of the Walk held at Karachi University.

## Lucky Cement organizes heart screening camp

### F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Lucky Cement successfully concluded a heart screening camp from April 15 to 17, 2025, for the residents of the communities surrounding its Pezu Plant. Conducted in partnership with Tabba Heart Institute, a renowned name in cardiac care, the camp offered vital heart health services as part of the Company's ongoing commitment to preventive healthcare.

The camp witnessed an overwhelming response from the local population,

with over 600 individuals screened during the three-day initiative. Among the total beneficiaries, more than 130 echocardiograms (echos) and nearly 180 electrocardiograms (ECGs) were conducted, along with routine cholesterol screening, blood pressure monitoring, and consultations with experienced cardiologists.

This impactful initiative is a reflection of Lucky Cement's dedication to creating healthier communities and ensuring access to quality medical services in underserved areas. By col-

laborating with top-tier healthcare institutions such as Tabba Heart Institute, Lucky Cement continues to play an active role in improving lives and enabling early detection of serious health conditions.

The camp was met with widespread appreciation from local residents, many of whom were able to receive specialized cardiac consultations for the very first time. Lucky Cement remains committed to supporting meaningful healthcare programs that drive long-term community well-being.

## Pakistan's global ranking upgrade welcome: Mian Zahid Hussain

### F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Chairman of National Business Group Pakistan, the President of the Pakistan Businessmen and Intellectuals Forum, the President of All Karachi Industrial Alliance, the Chairman of the FPCCI Advisory Board, and the President and former provincial minister, Mian Zahid Hussain stated on Friday that the leadership of the Pakistan Army is in sincere and capable hands, ensuring that terrorism will not flourish in the country under any circumstances.

He stated that the hope of improving the situation by adopting a softer approach to terrorists in the past has proven to be incorrect. Mian Zahid Hussain stated that linking the establishment of the

Taliban government to the end of terrorism in Pakistan was a significant miscalculation.

Talking to the business community, the veteran business leader said that terrorism has increased instead of ending, for which Pakistan is paying a heavy price.

The business leader said that a handful of terrorists cannot shake the resolve of Army Chief Syed Asim Munir and his team, nor can they decide the fate of the country, and that now the people's tolerance has reached its limit.

Mian Zahid Hussain said that in his address to overseas Pakistanis, Army Chief Syed Asim Munir made it clear to the terrorists and their supporters that as long as the brave people of Pakistan stand with the army, it can face

any challenge.

He said that whoever stands in the way of Pakistan's development will be dealt with the help of the people.

Mian Zahid Hussain said that the Army Chief has rightly said that even ten generations of terrorists together cannot harm this country. The Army Chief is determined to uproot the scourge of terrorism and make Pakistan a peaceful and developed country in which the entire nation is with him. He noted that General Syed Asim Munir called

Balochistan Pakistan's destiny and pride while termed Kashmir as Pakistan's jugular vein without any hesitation.

Mian Zahid Hussain said that the Army Chief and the government are trying to improve the country's economy in addition to

dealing with internal and external threats. This has led international organisations to regain confidence in Pakistan and improve its global ranking.

He said that Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif and his team are rapidly improving the country's economy, and it will not take long for its economic recovery and development to be thoroughly prosperous.

At a time when the government is pursuing an agenda of economic recovery and development, is active in the sectors of agriculture, industry and trade, information technology, and minerals, and is implementing trade agreements with various countries, some elements are trying to spread chaos in the country, which must be dealt with firmly, he demanded.

## Tanzeem Tajiran KP organizes rally against Israel

### F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A protest rally was organized under the leadership of Malik Mehr Elahi, president of Tanzeem Tajiran Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, to condemn Israel. The rally was joined by Haji Waheed, Shakeel Ahmed Saraf, Shehzad Ahmed Siddiqui, Aslam Parvez, Nasiruddin, Haji Basheer, Zafar Khattak, Khalid Gul Mohmand, Ameen Hussain Babar, Ghulam Bilal Javid, Ameer Nawaz, Habibullah Zahid, Salahuddin, Malik Meraj, Mujeeb-ur-Rehman, and other trader leaders, as well as leaders of various political parties, civil society members, presidents and office-bearers of different markets, and a large number of members of the business community.

Participants expressed strong solidarity with the Muslims of Palestine and



Gaza and condemned the brutal actions of Israel.

They announced a practical boycott of Israeli products. Addressing the rally, the speakers demanded that the government immediately impose a ban on trade with Israeli products and convene a joint meeting of all Muslim heads of state and military

leadership to take decisive steps against Israel's anti-Islam agenda.

They also called upon Pakistan's Army Chief General Hafiz Asim Munir to utilize his military capabilities and rise as a true soldier of Islam by raising the banner of jihad. The time has come, they declared, for a practical

jihad against the enemies of Islam.

The rally participants carried banners and placards against Israel and in support of the boycott of Israeli products. They passionately chanted slogans of "Allahu Akbar" and formally announced a nationwide shutter-down strike on the 26th.

### Court Notice

In the court of Sultan Hussain Additional District judge II, Azafi district Qazi Swat. Case# 144/13. Institution 11/12/2024. Next Hearing date 12/05/2025. Umar Bahadar vs. Umar Badshah etc. Notice to: (3) Aqal Mand. (4) Dolat Mand sons Mian karim dad (late). (5) Umar bacha s/o Ajar mian. (12) Mian Syed karim s/o Talay zar r/o ghakhay sir islam pur. (15) jan zada (16) Azeem Khan. (17) Shahi Rawan. (18) Bahadar Syed. (19) Asghar sons Mian Bahadar jan r/o islam pur. (30) Labour Mian s/o Dilbar Mian (Late). (31) Raham dil bacha. (32) Sardar Ali. (33) Akbar Ali sons Shah Badshah. (34) Muhammad sherin. (35) Aqal sharin. (37) Mian zarin. (38) Jan zarin. (39) Mir Zarin sons saif gul (late). (41) Iqbal Hussain (42) shaheen sons Batar Mian r/o islam pur Tehsil Babozai District swat. Presently Abroad. Whereas the above named defendant cannot be served in ordinary manner it is therefore proclaimed or through duly authorized agent or pleader in the court on 12/05/2025. at 8.00 am. Ex-parte proceeding will be initiated against you.





In brief

Thompson dies at 36

DUBAI (Agencies): Former Rochdale midfielder Joe Thompson has died aged 36 after a long battle with cancer, the English fifth tier club said on Friday. Rochdale said Thompson died peacefully at home with his family by his side. He was diagnosed with stage four lymphoma for a third time in April last year, five years after retiring from professional football. Lymphoma, a form of blood cancer, had reached his lungs after he overcame the illness twice during his playing days. The Bath-born player began and ended his career at Rochdale, making three separate spells at the club. "We first knew Joe primarily as a talented footballer, but we would soon grow to adore his loving, infectious personality," Rochdale said in a statement. "He faced every battle head-on, both on and off the pitch. His journey and indomitable spirit have been an inspiration for everyone who has been touched by his story. "Our thoughts are with Joe's family and friends at this incredibly sad time." Thompson came through Manchester United's academy, having joined it at the age of nine, before playing for Rochdale, Tranmere Rovers and Carlisle United. "A man who epitomised our club's values ... A warm personality who had a deep connection with our club from a young age, our thoughts are with Joe's family and friends at this difficult time," Manchester United said in a statement.

Ashab annexes St. Louis Open title

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan's Ashab Irfan delivered a phenomenal performance, securing the \$15,000 St. Louis Open 2025 title, according to information received here on Friday. "We are grateful to Allah for his continued success and dedication to representing Pakistan, bringing immense joy to his supporters and Pakistan Squash Federation," his coach Jahanzeb Masood said in a statement. "As his coach, I can attest to his tireless work ethic and perseverance during training sessions. I extend my appreciation to his family and supporters for their unwavering belief in him. "Additionally, I thank Houston Squash Club, Kanso Sports North America and Alpha Bravo Construction for their sponsorship, which has been instrumental in his success," he said. "Following this victory, Ashab's ranking will significantly improve from 66 to 57. We look forward to his continued progress and remain committed to supporting him," he added.

Morocco ex-football club chair denies seizing villa

CASABLANCA (AFP): The former president of Morocco's most successful football club maintained in court Friday that he legally acquired a villa he is accused of seizing from a convicted Malian drug trafficker dubbed the "Escobar of the Sahara." Said Naciri, who was chairman of Casablanca club Wydad AC and president of the city's prefectural council, is being tried alongside the head of a regional council in eastern Morocco, Abdennabi Bioui, in a vast drug trafficking case related to the jailed kingpin. Both defendants — former officials of the Authenticity and Modernity Party (PAM), a member of the country's ruling coalition — have been in custody since the end of 2023, and face charges of "possession, marketing, and export of drugs," as well as corruption and related offenses.

Karachi Kings thrash Quetta Gladiators by 56 runs

KARACHI (Monitoring Desk): Karachi Kings scored their second victory of the Pakistan Super League (PSL) 10 after beating Quetta Gladiators by 56 runs at the National Bank Cricket Stadium on Friday. After putting 175 on the scoreboard, Kings restricted Quetta Gladiators to 119/9 in 20 in overs. Gladiators skipper Saud Shakeel remained the top run-getter for his side with an unbeaten 33 off 40 balls. The left-handed batter, however, could not get any support from other batters as seven of them were dismissed without reaching double-digit scores. Quetta Gladiators pacer

Mohammad Amir remained the second-highest run-getter for his side, having scored a quick 16-ball 30. For the Kings, Hasan Ali picked up three wickets, while Mohammad Nabi and Abbas Afridi took two wickets each. Aamer Jamal and Mir Hamza chipped in with one wicket each. Earlier, James Vince scored 70 to lift Karachi Kings to 175 for seven against Quetta Gladiators in the eighth match of PSL 10. After opting to bat first, the Kings began strongly as their opening pair gave them a 60-run stand in the first powerplay of their third game in the PSL 10.



KARACHI: Hasan Ali celebrates a wicket with Mohammad Nabi.

The opening stand ended when their skipper, David Warner, was dismissed after scoring 31 off 20 balls, with the scoreboard showing 60/1 in 5.4 overs. The right-handed batter took 47 balls for his 70, which featured six fours and one six. James Vince then took charge of the inning and was involved in a couple of partnerships to help his side post 175 on the scoreboard in their 20 overs. The right-handed batter took 47 balls for his 70, which featured six fours and one six.

ICC Women's Cricket WC 2025 Pakistan's all matches to be played at neutral venues instead of India

LAHORE: (Monitoring Desk): After Pakistan qualified for the ICC Women's World Cup 2025, scheduled to be held in India. The mathes of Pakistan green shirts would be l be conducted under a hybrid model due to logistical challenges faced by India. Although India will host the 2025 World Cup, Pakistan will play all of its matches at a neutral venue. The arrangement was finalized during discussions surrounding the 2025 Champions Trophy, after India refused to travel to Pakistan citing security concerns.

Consequently, Pakistan chose Dubai as the neutral venue for the event. In the match played yesterday at Gaddafi Stadium, Pakistan won the toss and opted to bat first. Posting a total of 205 runs in the allotted 50 overs, the team then bowled out Thailand for just 118 runs in 34. 4 overs. With this 67-run victory, Pakistan secured their fourth consecutive win in the World Cup Qualifiers. During the same discussions, the ICC, board of Control for cricket in India (BCCI), and Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB)

mutually agreed that all India-Pakistan matches across ICC events until 2027 would be played at neutral venues. The includes the ICC Women's World Cup 2025 (India), ICC T20 World Cup 2026 (India/Sri Lanka), and the ICC Women's T20 World Cup 2028 (Pakistan). Additionally, if Pakistan qualifies for the semifinals or finals of the 2025 Women's World Cup, those matches will also be held outside India. The highly anticipated India-Pakistan match will likewise be played at a neutral venue.

Pakistan's Squash stars shine at Australian Junior Open

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan's rising squash stars have once again demonstrated the country's legacy in the sport, delivering a spectacular performance at the 2025 Australian Junior Open by winning an impressive four gold medals and one silver — a clear signal that Pakistan's squash dominance is far from fading. According to information made available here by Pakistan Squash Federation, young athletes from across Pakistan stepped onto the international court with confidence and skill, outplaying their global counterparts in a tournament that saw fierce competition and high-stakes matches.

Ahmad Ali Naz dazzled in the U11 Boys category, showing skill well beyond his years. Azan Ali Khan proved unstoppable in the U17 Boys division, displaying tactical brilliance. Mahnoor Ali took home gold in the U13 Girls, marking herself as a future champion. Mehwish Ali, with her powerful gameplay, conquered the U17 Girls field. Adding to Pakistan's medal haul, Sehrish Ali earned a well-fought silver medal in the U15 Girls category, further showcasing the depth of talent emerging from the country.

Flick demands answers from La Liga for 'joke' schedule

MADRID (AFP): Barcelona coach Hansi Flick on Friday demanded to meet with La Liga officials over what he called a "joke" schedule, saying Spanish football was failing to take care of players. The Catalan giants' La Liga game at Real Valladolid on Saturday, May 3 will kick off at 9:00 pm (1900 GMT) after being moved from an afternoon start on Sunday, May 4. That rescheduling still gives them less than three days to prepare for the pivotal Champions League semi-final return leg at Inter Milan on May 6. "I want to see this guy who's responsible for that. For me it's a joke," Flick told a news conference on Friday. "It's unbelievable and we have no time to rest... the guys who are responsible for that, I want to discuss with them, because they have no idea how it is." The Champions League is one of three tournaments Barcelona are competing in, exacerbating challenges relating to fixture congestion that Flick is familiar with after a trophy-laden spell at Bayern Munich. But the German manager said the situation facing his team before a huge European match left him "speechless." "I never had this before. Every league protects their clubs when they play in the Champions league, especially in the semi-final," he said. "Bundesliga, Premier League take care about the clubs. But here not. It's just let them play." Flick was speaking before Barcelona hosted Celta Vigo on Saturday with the chance to extend their lead over Real Madrid to seven points at the top of La Liga.

Alcaraz beats De Minaur to reach semis in Barcelona

BARCELONA (Agencies): Top seed Carlos Alcaraz went through to the Barcelona Open semi-finals with a straight-set win over Alex de Minaur. Spaniard Alcaraz needed just one hour and 40 minutes to beat Australian fifth seed De Minaur 7-5 6-3. The world number two will now play France's Arthur Fils after his quarter-final opponent Stefanos Tsitsipas retired hurt in just the third game of their match. Alcaraz beat 20-year-old world number 14 Fils in three sets on his way to winning in Monte Carlo last week. Defending champion Casper Ruud went out thanks to a straight-set defeat by Denmark's Holger Rune. Alcaraz twice fell a break down in the first set against De Minaur before recovering and making the decisive break in the 12th game. The 21-year-old was more dominant with his serve in the second set and made the only break in the



sixth game. "I started quite badly with the serve, I was struggling a little bit mentally with it," said Alcaraz. "It was just the first few games with my serve, then I think I improved a lot. I calmed myself down and started to think positively again. Alex started strong, playing aggressively, and the first set was really tight. "I'm really glad I managed to win the first set and in the second I played some great tennis, so really happy." Four-time runner-up Tsitipas looked uncom-

fortable from the off against Fils and left for an off-court assessment at the end of the second game. He returned but could only manage five more points and retired while 0-2 30-40 down. World number 13 Rune broke defending champion and second seed Ruud twice in each set to secure a 6-4 6-2 win. Sixth seed Rune will play Karen Khachanov in the semi-finals after the Russian beat Spain's Alejandro Davidovich Fokina 6-4 7-5.

Evenepoel wins on return from serious injury

OVERIJSE (Agencies): Double Olympic champion Remco Evenepoel won on his return to action after suffering multiple bone fractures in a serious crash last year. Four months after sustaining rib, shoulder blade and hand fractures during the accident in training, the Belgian outprinted compatriot Wout van Aert to win the Brabantse Pijl, held on the roads in the area he grew up in. The 25-year-old also suffered lung contusions, a dislocated right clavicle and several torn ligaments after colliding with the open door of a postal vehicle. Speaking on Thursday before the race, Evenepoel said his injuries "would have ended my career if I had been a tennis or basketball player". The Soudal-Quick Step rider and Visma-Lease A Bike's Van Aert attacked with just under a third of the race to go, and were soon joined by 22-year-old



British rider Joe Blackmore. Israel-Premier Tech rider Blackmore was dropped as Evenpoel attacked on the penultimate climb, while Portugal's Antonio Morgado won the bunch sprint to take third. "I'm surprising myself. I was very fresh," said Evenepoel. "I'm especially satisfied with my sprint. Lately, I've been working a lot on my explosiveness, and it paid off." It is Evenepoel's first win since securing the sec-

ond of his world time trial titles at the World Championships in Zurich in September 2024. The Belgian hopes to compete in the three Ardennes classics and the Tour de Romandie in preparation for this year's Tour de France. Evenepoel won gold in the Olympic time trial and the road race at the Paris Games last summer. He also finished third overall in the Tour de France, winning the stage-seven individual time trial.

Burnley beat Watford to edge closer to promotion

LONDON (Agencies): Burnley came from a goal down to win at nine-man Watford and take a big step towards sealing automatic promotion back to the Premier League. Strikes either side of half-time from striker Zian Flemming and captain Josh Brownhill saw Burnley recover after Mamadou Dombia gave Watford an early lead. Victory sent Scott Parker's Burnley side three points clear at the top of the Championship, before Leeds United's trip to Oxford United tonight, and equalled the club's record unbeaten league run of 30 games. The Claret's are just the second team in Championship history to go 30 consecutive, non play-off games without losing after Reading. And Burnley can now rubber stamp their top-flight return as early as Monday when they host third-placed Sheffield United.



Mid-table Watford, who dropped a place to 12th following this defeat, ended the game with nine men after they had both their captain Moussa Sissoko and then Edo Kayembe sent off. Watford started positively and were rewarded in the eighth minute when Dombia headed in Rocco Vata's left-wing cross, ending Burnley's hopes of claiming an English record-equalling 30th clean sheet of the season at Vicarage Road. Flemming passed up two chances to level for Burnley, and Parker's men were fortunate not to fall a further goal behind midway through the half. After more good work down Watford's left, Caleb Wiley crossed for Kayembe but he could not keep his header down, instead directing the ball

over. Burnley dominated possession after that without overly troubling Watford goalkeeper Egil Selvik until a frantic finish to the first half. Firstly, Burnley goalkeeper James Trafford produced a stunning flying save to fingertip Kayembe's drive on to the crossbar. While Trafford was still celebrating his save, the first of his three standout stops during the game, Connor Roberts' cross to the far post was knocked back into the middle by Hannibal Mejbri and Brownhill headed the visitors in front. Watford then suffered a double blow to their hopes of staging a recovery of their own when Sissoko and then Kayembe were dismissed, both after being shown two yellow cards in quick succession. With their two-man advantage, Burnley were the most likely next scorers and Brownhill was denied a second by Selvik. But they also had to remain alert at the death and needed a last-ditch CJ Egan-Riley tackle on Vakoun Bayo, and another big Trafford save to keep out Ryan Andrews' effort to preserve their lead. Watford head coach Tom Cleverley speaking to BBC Radio 3CR: "Barring an amazing saved by [James] Trafford [from Edo Kayembe], we would have gone in 2-0 at half-time and really in control of the game. "In that 20-second period where he's made an absolute worldie and they've gone down the other end, scored a real goal of quality, and the game is then 1-1. "That's what sides at the top of the league do. They really ride out the storms, capitalise on the waves, and they've done that well today. "For a team who is, we have to say, mid-table now, I thought that the guys looked motivated, full of life, quality and [that was] one of our best performances of the first half against the league leaders. "Unfortunately, through fault of our own, we've not seen the same level of football match in the second half, just because of the numerical disadvantage. We shot ourselves in the foot today. I've not got any complaints about the red cards. It's something we need to learn from."

Gasly heads Norris in Saudi first practice



RIYADH (Agencies): Alpine's Pierre Gasly set the pace ahead of McLaren's Lando Norris in first practice at the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix. Gasly completed his performance run on soft tyres later than the usual front-runners, benefitting from more track grip, as he pipped Norris by 0.007 seconds. Norris, leading the championship from teammate Oscar Piastri by three points after four races, was 0.063secs quicker than Ferrari's Charles Leclerc. Piastri was fourth, 0.095secs off Norris, ahead of Williams' Alex Albon and Mercedes' George Russell.

The second Williams of Carlos Sainz, Ferrari's Lewis Hamilton and Red Bull's Max Verstappen and Yuki Tsunoda completed the top 10. Verstappen's struggles with getting a satisfactory balance out of the Red Bull continued — he complained of understeer in the early part of the session, and then said the car was "very loose, especially in the high speed" in the closing stages. When it was suggested to him by engineer Giampiero Lambiase that he try backing off on entry to the long, banked Turn 13 left-hander for a faster exit, he replied: "I can't. Imagine have no balance, basically."

There were no major incidents, although Piastri was one of several drivers to lightly brush the wall around the high-speed, high-risk Jeddah street circuit, and Norris one of a number to lock up at either the first or last corners as they got to grips with the dusty track in the early stages of the weekend. Gasly's pace is not an indication that Alpine will be competing at the front this weekend. Practice sessions are notoriously unreliable indicators of form because fuel loads and car specifications are not revealed by the teams and can have a significant impact on lap time.





## In brief

### Woman among 8 drug suppliers held

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi Police on Friday continued operations against drug suppliers and arrested eight accused including a woman with over 9.5 kilograms of charas. According to the police spokesman, the Rawat Police nabbed four accused Waseem, Sikandar, Shahbaz and Muhammad Hayat recovering 1.68 kg, 1.26 kg, 700 grams and 530 grams respectively of the contraband item. Similarly, the R A Bazar Police recovered 2.2 kg charas from accused Arzoo Yousaf, while the Wah Saddar Police held accused Asif with 1.4 kg of the commodity. Likewise, the Bani and City Police caught accused Yasir and Adnan with 1.242 kg and 720 grams charas respectively. Meanwhile, the Ganjmandi and Pirwadhai Police recovered a 30-bore with ammunition each from accused Siddique and Zameer respectively.

### IRSA releases 98,200 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Friday released 98,200 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 145,900 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, the water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1422.47 feet which was 20.47 feet higher than dead level of 1402.00 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 44,500 cusecs and 20,000 cusecs respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1114.20 feet, which was 64.20 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 48,200 cusecs and 25,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 60,200, 34,000, 29,000 and 6,600 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 29,900 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 16,800 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.

### RDA seals housing scheme head office

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi Development Authority (RDA), Enforcement Squad, in collaboration with the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) administration, had sealed the head office of the University Town Housing Scheme located in G-11 Markaz, Islamabad. The RDA spokesman informed that acting on the directives of the Director General of RDA Kinza Murtaza, the sealing operation was carried out considering the multiple violations of Punjab Development Private Housing Schemes Rules, 2021, including unlawful sale of plots, illegal development activities, fraudulent practices, deceptive marketing, multiple complaints by allottees through various forums such as Ombudsman Punjab, CM Portal and PM Portal. The DG RDA, Kinza Murtaza, emphasised that RDA was committed to ensuring that all housing schemes comply with the laws to protect the public's interests and uphold the city's development standards. "We will not tolerate any violations that compromise the safety and well-being of residents or the integrity of urban development," The operation was led by Director MP&TE Muhammad Tahir Meo, Deputy Director Planning Samiullah Niazi, Deputy Director Admn Iftikhar Ali, Assistant Director Planning Ali Raza, concerned Magistrate Islamabad Ghulam Murtaza and others concerned.



ISLAMABAD: A meeting was held under the chairmanship of the Federal Minister for Law and Justice with officials from NADRA and representatives of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab Bar Councils. —APP Photo

## Pakistan, Iran vow to boost cooperation in Science and Technology

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Pakistan, Dr. Reza Amiri Moghadam in a meeting with the Federal Minister for Science and Technology, Khalid Hussain Magsi on Thursday discussed new avenues of bilateral cooperation.

The ambassador was accompanied by the Iran's Deputy Minister for Science, Research and Technology, Dr. Abolfaz Bahe Di during the meeting. The meeting focused on enhancing partnerships in science, technology, and education, with both sides expressing a firm commitment to deepen academic

and scientific ties.

Khalid Magsi emphasized the significant potential for collaboration between the two neighboring countries, proposing the launch of joint projects of mutual interest.

Highlighting the importance of academic linkages, both parties agreed to promote university-to-university cooperation, joint research initiatives, and student exchange programs to build stronger connections between educational institutions in Pakistan and Iran.

In addition to scientific collaboration, the meeting also touched upon the facilitation of cross-border

trade and regional security concerns. Khalid Magsi stated that improved trade relations would spur economic growth and contribute to lasting regional stability.

He also underscored the need for joint efforts in advanced technologies and innovation.

The Iranian delegation appreciated Pakistan's progress in science and technology and expressed readiness to expand cooperation further. Both countries reaffirmed their resolve to work closely for the advancement of education, research, and economic prosperity across the region.

### ANF recovers 685 kg of drugs

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF), conducting seven operations across the country, recovered as many as 685 kg of drugs worth more than Rs 170 million and arrested 12 suspects, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman on Friday.

He informed that 800 grams of ice were recovered from an accused, including a woman, near a university area in Sambrial, Sialkot. The accused confessed to selling drugs to students of educational institutions. In another operation, 510 grams of ice were recovered from a parcel being sent to Australia from a courier office in Lahore.

Similarly, 612 kg of opium was recovered from secret compartments of a vehicle near Saranan Bazaar, Pishin, and the accused was arrested.

As much as 54 kg of hashish was recovered from two vehicles near the bus terminal in Sohrab Goth, Karachi, and two suspects were arrested on the spot. The ANF arrested an accused and recovered 9.6 kg of heroin hidden in an AC unit at the South Asian Port Terminal, Karachi.

As much as 8 kg of hashish was recovered from four women near the City Bypass, Sukkur. A total of 100 grams of intoxicating pills were recovered from an accused rounded up near Haji Camp Peshawar. Cases have been registered against the arrested accused under the Narcotics Control Act, and further investigations are underway.

### DC chairs Emergency Board meeting

RAWALPINDI (APP): Deputy Commissioner Agha Zaheer Abbas Shirazi Friday chaired a meeting of the District Emergency Board at the Divisional Forest Office in Jhika Gali, Murree.

The meeting reviewed key issues, including identifying black spots to reduce road accidents, cracking down on illegal petrol and gas filling stations, incidents of cylinder explosions, repairing open manholes, dog bite cases, and the Punjab government's air ambulance service.

The meeting also discussed measures to handle forest fires during the summer season, flooding in streams due to heavy rains, and drowning incidents during extreme heat. Deputy Commissioner directed relevant departments to complete all arrangements, including the summer season plan, on time.

Secretary District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) Engineer Kamran Rashid presented a detailed briefing on disaster management plans and safety measures. The meeting urged citizens to use emergency helpline numbers—1122, Rescue Control Room (051-9330016, 051-9330025), and District Administration Control (051-9269016, 051-9269018) for assistance.

The meeting was attended by the Divisional Forest Officer Murree, District Emergency Officer, Traffic Police Incharge, Health Department officials, civil defense representatives, and heads of various departments, including Water Supply, Wildlife, WAPDA, Sui Gas, Waste Management, and NHA.

## Pak-GCC Anti-Narcotics delegations meet Mohsin Naqvi

ISLAMABAD (APP): Heads of delegation of the Pak-GCC Anti-Narcotics Conference called on Federal Minister for Interior and Narcotics Control Mohsin Naqvi in Islamabad.

The delegation included UAE's DG Anti-Narcotics Department of Brigadier Saeed Abdullah Alsuwaidi, Qatar's DG Anti-Narcotics Department Colonel Rashid Saree Rashid Al Kaabi, Saudi Arabia's DG Narcotics Control Major General Saad bin Saud Al-Ajmi, Oman's DG for Combating Narcotics Brigadier Mohammed Saleh Ali Rashid Al Gheilani, Bahrain's Director Anti-Narcotics Department Lieutenant Colonel Mohammed Khalid Al Bunainain, Kuwait's Director Operations Colonel Naseer Bader Ajman and GCC, CICC Director Brigadier Eisa Saeed Al Kuwari. Minister of State for Interior Talal Chaudhry, Secretary Muhammad Khurram Agha and Director General Anti-Narcotics Force Major General Abdul Moeed were

also present on the occasion.

Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi thanked the delegations of UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain and Oman for participating in the Pak-GCC Conference. On this occasion, Director General Anti-Narcotics Force Major General Abdul Moeed briefed regarding the recommendations of the Pak-GCC Conference. Federal Minister for Interior and Narcotics Control Mohsin Naqvi congratulated the delegations of ANF Pakistan and Gulf Cooperation Council on the successful conference and appreciated their full cooperation.

All of the delegates reiterated their full cooperation with the Government of Pakistan in the fight against narcotics. During the meeting, it was decided to hold a meeting of the Anti-Narcotics Ministers of Pak-GCC countries by the end of this year. Mohsin Naqvi said that major decisions will be taken in this meeting to combat narcotics.

He said that as a result of

the recommendations of the conference regarding the fight against narcotics, mutual cooperation will be further strengthened. He added that these recommendations will help in formulating an effective strategy, as we can eradicate the scourge of narcotics from the society with collective efforts.

Mohsin Naqvi welcomed all the delegates and underscored that all the GCC countries are very respectful to us. He highlighted that Pakistan has made its Anti-narcotics Force more effective and strong. He further said that we have conducted joint operations in the past as well and will continue to cooperate in the future also.

Minister of State Talal Chaudhry said that the use of technology to combat the menace of drugs is the need of the hour. All the delegates appreciated the steps taken by Pakistan in the fight against narcotics. They said that the conference provided an effective opportunity to enhance mutual cooperation in the fight against this scourge.

## Egypt to extend support in fight against Hepatitis

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Health Mustafa Kamal and the Egyptian Ambassador on Friday discussed boosting technical collaboration and medical tourism.

Egyptian health experts will visit Pakistan, extending support in the fight against Hepatitis C.

In a significant development aimed at boosting regional health cooperation, Pakistan and Egypt have agreed to enhance bilateral collaboration in the health sector, with a specific focus on eliminating Hepatitis C.

The understanding was reached during a meeting between Federal Minister for Health Mustafa Kamal and the Ambassador of Egypt to Pakistan, Dr. Ihab Mohamed Abdelhamid.

The meeting underscored a mutual commitment to pursue joint strategies and

knowledge exchange to tackle key health challenges affecting both nations. A core highlight of the discussions was the proposal for joint initiatives to eradicate Hepatitis C.

The two sides explored the possibility of launching collaborative programs that draw on Egypt's successful experience in controlling and significantly reducing Hepatitis C prevalence in recent years.

The meeting also touched upon expanding technical cooperation and promoting medical tourism between the two countries. Both emphasized the value of sharing expertise, training health professionals, and improving healthcare systems through coordinated efforts.

As part of this enhanced collaboration, a delegation of Egyptian health experts is expected to visit Pakistan in

the coming months. The delegation will provide technical assistance and share best practices to support Pakistan's ongoing efforts to combat Hepatitis C and strengthen healthcare delivery.

Federal Health Minister Mustafa Kamal welcomed the growing partnership and expressed optimism that this collaboration would yield tangible benefits for both countries.

"Egypt's successful public health interventions, particularly in Hepatitis C control, offer valuable lessons. We look forward to working closely with our Egyptian counterparts to replicate similar success in Pakistan," he stated.

The Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations, and Coordination will oversee the development of a roadmap to implement the agreed areas of cooperation.

## Police hold open courts to address public concerns

ISLAMABAD (PPI):

Senior police officials, including SP Soan zone Pari Gul Tareen and SP Rural zone Kazim Naqvi, today organized open courts across Islamabad to engage with citizens and address their concerns. The initiative saw officers from the Islamabad Police, including all SDPOs and SHOs, facilitating these sessions in various masjids to provide immediate assistance.

During these open courts, residents voiced their issues and shared their suggestions for improvements. Officers took immediate steps by instructing relevant staff to resolve the presented issues and guaranteed the implementation

of the suggestions.

The officers, addressing the attendees, mentioned that these open courts align with the directives from Inspector General of Police Islamabad, Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi. The goal is to promptly tackle public complaints and regional matters. They highlighted the importance of maintaining direct communication with citizens to address their problems efficiently.

Assurances were given that the police are dedicated to ensuring safety and prioritizing the resolution of raised concerns. It was also noted that the improved policing strategy has led to a notable decrease in crime rates in the city, though

efforts to further improve the situation continue.

For effective action against land grabbing, criminal activities, and drug trafficking, public cooperation is deemed essential. The police emphasized the need for community support to clamp down on these issues and encouraged citizens to report any suspicious activities to their local police stations for swift action.

Participants of the open courts appreciated the initiative and extended their gratitude to the IGP Islamabad and the involved officers for their proactive approach in engaging with the community and addressing public concerns.



ISLAMABAD: A stunning view of the hand-shaped model encircling a tree along Srinagar Highway, constructed by the Capital Development Authority (CDA) to enhance the beauty of the Federal Capital. —APP Photo

## AIOU launches Russian Language Course

ISLAMABAD (APP): Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU), in partnership with the Center for International Cooperation, Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation, and the Russian Embassy in Islamabad, has officially launched a Russian Language Course for beginners at its main campus in Islamabad.

The initiative has received an enthusiastic response, with over 350 applications submitted by individuals from a wide range of backgrounds—including aspiring students planning to study in Russia, business professionals, politicians, journalists, homemakers, IT experts, and more. After a rigorous selection process, 60 candidates were enrolled in the inaugural three-month, face-to-face course.

The course is being led by Ms. Ekaterina Andriets, a seasoned instructor nominated by the Russian Ministry of Education. She brings extensive experience in teaching Russian language and culture and is guiding students through the AI-level curriculum. Classes are held three times a week, with each session lasting three hours.

A formal inaugural cere-

mony was held at AIOU to mark the launch of the program. The event was graced by Ms. Alina Kolesnikova and Mr. Philip Smolyakov, diplomats from the Russian Embassy in Islamabad, as Guests of Honor, while Prof. Dr. Syed Amir Shah, Director Administration & Coordination at AIOU, served as the Chief Guest.

In her address, Ms. Alina Kolesnikova highlighted the deepening friendship between Pakistan and Russia, emphasizing the growing engagement in political, trade, educational, and cultural spheres. She reaffirmed the Russian Embassy's commitment to supporting AIOU not only in language instruction but also in organizing cultural initiatives, including film screenings, poetry sessions, literary circles, and sports events.

Mr. Philip Smolyakov, delivering an impressive portion of his speech in Urdu, expressed his personal dedication to strengthening Pakistan-Russia ties. He assured the audience of the Embassy's full support for initiatives that enhance bilateral cooperation.

Prof. Dr. Syed Amir Shah, in his remarks, shared a personal connection to the program, revealing that he

was a participant in AIOU's first Russian language course held in 2023. Delivering parts of his speech in Russian and English, he praised Vice Chancellor Prof. Dr. Nasir Mahmood for his vision and leadership in expanding international collaborations.

Dr. Shah also noted that AIOU has already established partnerships with several Russian universities and aims to broaden its Russian language and cultural offerings in the future. Dr. Zahid Majeed, Director of International Collaboration & Exchange at AIOU, provided a comprehensive overview of the university's growing ties with the Russian Ministry of Education. He recalled the establishment of the Russian Language and Culture Center at AIOU in 2023, inaugurated by the Russian Ambassador to Pakistan.

Looking ahead, Dr. Majeed shared that, under the guidance of the Vice Chancellor, AIOU is preparing to launch faculty and student exchange programs, joint research initiatives, and professional forums to foster dialogue and collaboration between Pakistani and Russian professionals and entrepreneurs.



#### 4 killed in traffic accident

MAIDAN WARDAK (Khaama Press): A traffic accident in Maidan Wardak claimed four lives, including Takhar's Taliban police spokesperson, highlighting ongoing road safety concerns. Following a traffic incident, Zabihullah Hakimi, the spokesperson for the Taliban police command in Takhar province, was killed along with three others. The accident occurred on late Thursday night, on the Kabul-Kandahar highway in Sayedabad district.

## The Frontier Post

Shawwal 20, 1446 — Saturday, April 19, 2025

#### IE distributes 80m Afs in aid

JALALABAD (TOLOnews: Around 9,000 Afghan families deported from Pakistan have received a total of 80 million afghani in cash assistance. Mohammad Akbar, a representative of the financial committee of the temporary refugee camp in Torkham, said: "So far, the financial committee has distributed 80 million afghani in cash aid to around 9,000 returning families. Our aid is transparently reaching all families, and God willing, this support will continue until the last migrant is helped."

Asia is comparable to a living body composed of soil and water. The heart that beats inside the body is Afghanistan. The destruction of Afghanistan would be the destruction of Asia. And in its progress and prosperity lies the well-being of Asia. - Allama Iqbal

# Over 5,000 Afghan migrants deported

KABUL (TOLOnews): The High Commission for Addressing Migrants' Issues has reported that more than 5,000 Afghan migrants were deported from Pakistan in the past day.

According to the commission's data, approximately 3,500 of these individuals entered Afghanistan through the Torkham border crossing.

The head of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), who visited Torkham to assess the situation of the deported migrants, assured that necessary services would be provided to those affected.

Nazar Nazari, a refugee rights activist, stated: "UNHCR plays a vital role in supporting refugees and

internally displaced persons. The first step must be to provide increased aid and facilities such as shelter, healthcare, and emergency assistance, while also ensuring access to educational opportunities."

Elsewhere, the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation announced that Norway has also criticized for the deportation of Afghan migrants and reaffirmed its commitment to continue supporting them.

Abdulmutalib Haqqani, the ministry's spokesperson, said that the Chargé d'Affaires of Norway's Embassy for Afghanistan emphasized the importance of bilateral relations during a meeting with the acting minister.

Haqqani said: "Mawlawi Abdul Kabir described the forced deportation of Afghan migrants as a violation of all principles and called for international assistance to find a permanent solution for migration issues in Afghanistan. He noted that the Islamic Emirate is working on a permanent housing plan for the migrants and requires the support of humanitarian organizations in this regard."

Meanwhile, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) reported that nearly 60,000 Afghan migrants entered the country through the Torkham and Spin Boldak crossings during the first two weeks of the current month.

## Qatar builds housing project for returnees

PAKTIA (TOLOnews): A housing complex costing \$800,000 USD is being constructed by Qatar in Gardez city, the capital of Paktia province, for newly returned Afghan migrants.

According to officials, in addition to the construction of a school, mosque, and religious seminary, all basic living facilities will be provided within the complex. Habibullah Shaheedzada, Director of Refugees and Repatriation in Paktia, said: "The one hundred houses being built by Qatar will include all essential facilities: a school, madrasa, mosque, several shops, and a safe drinking water supply network that will be connected to each individual home. Other vital services for daily life have also been considered."

Meanwhile, several recently returned migrants have called on the interim government and aid organizations to provide housing and job opportunities.

Rahim Gul, deported from Pakistan, said: "We thank Qatar for helping with housing. Other countries and organizations should also support returning migrants in terms of shelter and other needs, because we left all our possessions behind and have come back empty-handed."

Abdulwahid, also deported from Pakistan, said: "My request to the government is to assist me in building the house for which I have already drawn up a plan. These two tents were provided with help from the locals. This is the land of my ancestors—I'm happy to be back. We won't starve, because we have our people and our community here." According to official data, since the beginning of the second phase of Pakistan's forced deportation campaign, nearly 300 Afghan families have returned to Paktia province.

## Kazakhstan sends aid to Afghanistan

KABUL (Amu TV): Kazakhstan has sent a convoy of 36 trucks loaded with humanitarian aid to Afghanistan, Kazakhstan media reported, in a continued show of support for the Afghan people.

The convoy, carrying 2,200 tons of supplies, entered Afghanistan through the Hairatan border crossing in Balkh Province. The shipment includes vegetable oil, wheat flour, rice, groats, tents, and blankets.

Kazakhstan has also announced plans to send a separate shipment of essential medical equipment to Afghanistan by air in the near future. Kazakhstan's chargé d'affaires in Kabul emphasized his country's commitment to humanitarian assistance and reiterated Kazakhstan's dedication to strengthening friendly and economic ties with Afghanistan.

# Putin adopt right policy on Afghanistan: Mujahid

KABUL (Pajhwok): The Islamic Emirate is hopeful political and economic relations between Afghanistan and Russia will expand after Moscow removed the name 'Taliban' from its list of banned groups.

Speaking to Russia's TASS news agency, Islamic Emirate spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said that the removal of the Taliban from Russian's banned groups was an important step as it would pave the way for full diplomatic and economic relations with the country.

The Russia supreme court on Thursday suspended the ban on the Taliban, which Russia had designated for more than two decades as a terrorist organization, in a move that paves the way for Moscow to normalise ties with the leadership of Afghanistan.

No country currently recognises the new government in Kabul that seized power in August 2021 as US-led forces staged a chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan after 20 years of war.



But Russia has been gradually building ties with the movement, which President Vladimir Putin said last year was now an ally in fighting terrorism.

Mujahid added: "We consider this step very important, and in the future, Afghanistan and Russia will definitely establish good relations in the economic and diplomatic fields."

He added that Russian

President Vladimir Putin had adopted the right policy towards Afghanistan.

To a question about the Islamic Emirate delegation's visit to Russia, he said that no decision had been made in this regard so far.

A large-scale Russia-Afghanistan forum will take place on the sidelines of the KazanForum event in the Russian city of Kazan in May.

TASS news agency quoted, Zamir Kabulov, the foreign minister's advisor and special presidential envoy for Afghanistan, as pointing out that the Russian Supreme Court's move to suspend a ban on the 'Taliban movement' removed a major legal obstacle to the development of political, economic and other official relations with Afghanistan's new authorities.

# Iran hands over 199 prisoners via Nimroz



KABUL (Pajhwok): Iranian authorities handed over 199 Afghan prisoners to Islamic Emirate officials in Nimroz province.

A statement from the Nimroz provincial press office said these 199 Afghan prisoners had been imprisoned in Iran for various crimes and they were handed over to the Islamic

Emirate authorities at the Silk Bridge gate last evening.

The statement quoted Mohammad Yousef Mistry, head of the Islamic Emirate's Prisons Reform Department, as saying that the released prisoners were among 484 Afghan prisoners previously discussed with the Iranian

side.

He said that 211 of them were handed last month and were being transferred to their provinces where they would serve the remaining jail terms.

The statement said the Afghan side also handed over two Iranian prisoners to the Iranian authorities as a goodwill gesture.

# AJC calls for release of detained journalist

KABUL (Khaama Press): The Afghanistan Journalists Center has demanded the immediate release of journalist Sayed Rashid Kashifi, detained by intelligence forces in Kabul.

The Afghanistan Journalists Center has expressed deep concern over the arrest of freelance journalist Sayed Rashid Kashifi in Kabul and has called for his immediate release from Taliban custody.

According to a statement released on Thursday, April 17, the center reported that Kashifi was arrested three days ago by Taliban intelligence forces in Kabul, allegedly due to his cooperation with exiled media outlets.

The statement also revealed that Taliban intelligence had confiscated Kashifi's mobile phone nearly a month prior to his arrest, indicating that he may have been under surveillance for some time.

The Afghanistan Journalists Center emphasized that at least nine journalists and media workers are currently detained by the Taliban, highlighting a continuing pattern of repression against media professionals.

Among those detained, six individuals have been sentenced to prison terms ranging from seven months to three years, raising alarms over due process and freedom of the press in

the country.

Since their return to power, the Taliban have systematically cracked down on media freedom in Afghanistan—shutting down outlets, silencing dissenting voices, and subjecting journalists to arrests, intimidation, and even torture.

The ongoing suppression of journalists by the Taliban not only threatens the safety of individual reporters but also undermines the public's access to truthful and timely information.

International human rights groups and press freedom advocates continue to call for urgent action and accountability.

# In Afghanistan's pistachio hills, families find a fleeting taste of freedom



BADGHIS (Amu TV): Along winding dirt roads and over rugged hills, Afghans are making their way to Pesta Leq, a remote stretch of pistachio-covered land outside the provincial capital of Qala-e-Naw, in search of something rare: a few hours of relief.

The arrival of spring has turned this corner of Badghis Province into a patchwork of green hills and blossoming trees, drawing families hoping to escape the hardships that weigh on daily life under Taliban rule. In the rolling landscape, tents are pitched, grills are lit, and laughter echoes faintly across the wide-open fields.

Visitors are calling for greater investment in the area — amenities like drinking water, basic rest facilities and recreational services — to better accommodate the growing number of people seeking rest in nature. "People come here from all parts of Afghanistan, not just Herat or Nimruz," said Feraidoun, a visitor from Herat. "Everyone is looking for a little peace."

Pesta Leq offers more than a change of scenery. In a country battered by drought, economic collapse and social restrictions, the hills have become a fragile sanctuary. Local

vendors have set up temporary stalls selling tea, kebabs and snacks, carving out modest livelihoods amid the tents and tourists.

But the pressures are visible. Years of drought and the shifting climate have thinned the pastures and strained the livestock herders who rely on the land.

"This year is harder than the last," said Abdullah, a local resident. "There's no water, no grass. Life is getting tougher."

Covering more than 28,000 hectares, Pesta Leq's pistachio forests are among the few remaining natural treasures of Badghis Province. Yet locals say the increasing social restrictions — particularly the Taliban's crackdowns on public gatherings and women's freedoms — have cast a shadow even over places of leisure.

Still, on weekends, the hills come alive with small bursts of celebration: children running barefoot through the grass, men smoking over barbecue fires, and women chatting quietly under makeshift awnings.

For many Afghans, the brief gatherings at Pesta Leq are less about leisure than about survival — finding, even for a short time, a space where life feels a little freer, a little lighter.

# Orthopaedic ward opens in Logar provincial hospital

PUL-I-ALAM (Pajhwok): A special orthopaedic ward has been opened in the provincial hospital of central Logar province with the support of the Academy of Medical Sciences of the Ministry of Defense.

At a ceremony in this regard organized by the Public Health Department of Logar, Brigadier General Abdul Wali Ahmadzai, Deputy Director of Health Services at the Ministry of National Defense, said that a bone disease treatment center has been opened for the first time in Logar Naib Aminullah Khan Logari Hospital with the support of the Academy of Medical Sciences of the Ministry of National Defense.

He said free services would be provided to the public in the ward within the framework of the Ministry of Public Health.

He also said the 400-bed hospital was provided advanced equipment, specialized departments, especially in the treatment of bone diseases during the past three years.



On the other hand, Hafiz Saeedur Rahman Qaderi, the Director of Public Health of Logar, said that the orthopaedic ward's opening was a great achievement for Logar health workers.

He said currently, basic health services in all areas of the province had increased from 67 centers to 117 centers.

Qaderi added that this year, buildings for five health centers will be constructed and significant progress will be made in the health sector.

Academy of Medical Sciences chief Dr. Ismail Wardak said all services and treatment were provided free of charge to patients with broken bones in twenty sign departments

throughout the country, including Logar.

He further said a patient with a broken bone could return to his normal life within 24 hours.

The development comes a time when residents of a number of remote districts of Logar province are demanding more health centers and female doctors in their areas.

# Reconstruction of schools demanded

K A N D A H A R (TOLOnews): A number of students in Maiwand district of Kandahar are calling for the reconstruction of school buildings and the improvement of their educational conditions.

They say that due to past conflicts, many school structures have been damaged and are in serious need of rebuilding.

Sediqullah, a student, said: "We request the Islamic Emirate to give

special attention to Maiwand district, as it has been heavily affected and its people are facing economic hardships. Schools and higher education centers should be constructed here."

Yar Mohammad, another student, told TOLOnews: "Some schools here have been destroyed, and the buildings of several others remain incomplete. They should be rebuilt fundamentally so students can

learn in a proper environment."

Currently, 20 general education schools and 100 religious madrasas are operational in Maiwand district.

Local officials say efforts are ongoing to activate more schools and reconstruct those that have been damaged.

Bismillah, Deputy District Chief of Maiwand in Kandahar, said: "Alhamdulillah, since the

Islamic Emirate came to power, twenty schools have been inaugurated in Maiwand district of Kandahar, and educational activities are ongoing. Additionally, one hundred religious madrasas are currently active in the district. However, this number of religious and modern schools does not meet the needs of the district. We have submitted proposals for the construction of more schools."



# CASS hosts seminar on grey zone threats

F.P. Report

LAHORE: The Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies (CASS), Lahore, hosted a seminar titled "Shadow Wars: Grey Zone Threats and Pakistan's Evolving Security Dilemmas" on 17th April 2025. The seminar explored the evolving contours of grey zone warfare and its implications for Pakistan's national security.

Dr Bilal Ghazanfar, delivered the introductory remarks, underscored the urgency of understanding grey zone threats that exploit ambiguity and asymmetry to undermine national security. He highlighted the need for an integrated, anticipatory framework to safeguard Pakistan's strategic interests across multiple domains.

Dr Zafar Nawaz Jaspal, Dean of Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, delivered a keynote address on "The Evolving Landscape of Grey Zone Warfare: Strategic Challenges for Pakistan and Frontline Technologies". He noted that the future strategic landscape will increasingly be defined by grey areas that are neither war nor peace. He added that the concept of grey zone warfare has not germinated from a particular event, but rather evolves as a cyclical and cognitive process shaped by the specific environments. Dr Aneel Salman, OGDCL Economic Security Chair at the Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI), delivered a talk on "Economic Warfare in the Grey Zone".



He argued that 21st-century wars will not be won with missiles, but with markets, as balance sheets increasingly define the battlefield. He observed that economic warfare has gone grey: invisible, deniable, low-cost, and high-impact. Highlighting regional dynamics, he noted that South Asia is a high-friction zone where economic tools are the preferred weapons of influence. Turning to Pakistan's strategy to counter grey zone tactics, he emphasised that it must be flexible, multi-vector, and well-informed. Syed Muhammad Ali, Chairman of the PEMRA Council of Complaints, Islamabad, delivered a talk on "Cyber and Information Warfare: Securing Digital Frontiers". He noted that kinetic operations cannot achieve desired objectives without addressing the soft tactical requisites of information warfare. He added that most states are struggling to maintain a monopoly over the narrative and are therefore vulnerable to threats emanating from the information and cyber domains.

In his concluding remarks, Air Marshal Asim Suleiman (Retd), President of CASS Lahore, highlighted the evolving nature of

modern warfare, characterised by the employment of grey zone strategies that exploit political, economic, and technological vulnerabilities without provoking overt conflict. He emphasised that in an increasingly complex global security environment, Pakistan must remain vigilant, proactive, and strategically adaptive. He stressed that securing the future in the long term will require economic resilience, effective governance, and progress in technology. The interactive session prompted valuable discussions.

The speakers emphasised that policy-making must be accompanied by effective implementation. They underscored the importance of education as a key sector requiring sustained government attention, not only to counter the effects of grey zone threats, but also to foster national social cohesion and enhance Pakistan's soft image.

The event was widely attended by academia, students, intellectuals and domain experts. CASS is an independent think tank that continues to arrange academic events for academia and practitioners interested in National Security in its wider context.

## PHC prioritizes public facilitation

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: The Peshawar High Court (PHC) has taken a significant step towards enhancing the facilities for lawyers and litigants by launching a Lawyers Welfare Composition and Photostate Center and the official website of the Peshawar High Court Bar Association, on Friday.

The Acting Chief Justice SM Atique Shah, inaugurated the facilities while Registrar Admin Mumrez Khan Khalil, judicial officers, and office bearers of the PHC Bar Association, including President Fida Gul and Secretary General Ijaz Ali Shah were also present in the ceremony.

PHC Acting Chief Justice SM Atique Shah emphasized that providing the best facilities to lawyers and litigants is a top priority. He praised the PHC Bar Association's cabinet for constructing the center in a short span of time.

The center aims to provide a range of services, including composition and photocopying facilities, to lawyers and litigants. The official website of the PHC Bar Association will also serve as a valuable resource for members and the general public.

The Acting Chief Justice visited various bar rooms and reviewed the development work, reiterating the court's commitment to providing a better environment for lawyers and litigants. The launch of the Lawyers Welfare Center and official website is a significant step towards improving the overall functioning of the PHC and enhancing the experience of lawyers and litigants.

## SC adjourns hearing of civilians' mly trial case

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Khawaja Haris, counsel for the Ministry of Defence, on Friday said that the court-martial had been recognized by the constitution.

During the hearing of intra-court appeals filed against declaring the trials of civilians in military courts null and void, he said that the court-martial not only took place during war but also in peace. A seven-member bench of the constitutional bench of the Supreme Court (SC), headed by Justice Aminuddin Khan, heard the petitions.

Justice Musarrat Hilali opined that the martial law collided with the constitution. "The constitution of 1973 is quite comprehensive," she added. Haris said it would be wrong to say that an individual undergoing a military trial was not given the right to defend himself.

However, he added, initially, there was no concept of an 'appeal' in a military trial. Justice Hassan Azhar Rizvi remarked that the fact that over 13 military installations were attacked on May 9 was a security failure. He asked Haris, "How it was decided that a particular case would be sent to a military court and the other to an anti-terrorism court (ATC)." The defence ministry's lawyer replied that it was decided on the basis of nature of the offences committed on that day. Later, the court's hearing was adjourned until April 28.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Court of Pakistan on Friday clubbed May 9 cases of PTI founder Imran Khan and Omar Sarfaraz Cheema, says in media reports. A bench, led by CJP Justice Yahya Afridi, heard the case of Cheema's alleged involvement in May 9 violence. The chief justice said this case would be heard with that of Imran Khan next week.

The CJP said the court wanted to ensure uniformity in physical remand cases. He said the cases of Imran Khan and Omar Sarfaraz Cheema were of similar nature. Cheema's counsel said police arrested his client first and then registered a case against him.

The Punjab government lawyer said the court had not given even a day's physical remand of Cheema. He said a weapon had to be recovered from him. The court attached the case with that of Imran Khan and adjourned the hearing till April 24.



PESHAWAR: Afghans waiting for crossing border along with their belongings at transit point on Torkham border. At least 42,048 people repatriated to Afghanistan so far as per KP Home Department statement.

# Iran has 'doubts' about US intentions ahead of nuclear talks

TEHRAN: Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has cast doubt over the intentions of the United States a day before a second round of nuclear talks is set to take place with Washington.

The new round will come a week after the two countries held their highest-level negotiations since US President Donald Trump unilaterally abandoned a 2015 landmark nuclear deal three years later. Iran has since abandoned all limits on its nuclear programme, and enriches uranium to up to 60 percent purity – near weapons-grade levels of 90 percent. "Although we have serious doubts about the intentions and motivations of the American side, in any case, we will participate in tomorrow's negotiations," Araghchi said on Friday during a news conference in Moscow with his Russian counterpart, Sergey Lavrov.

Araghchi will set off on Saturday for Rome for a new round of Omani-mediated talks with US Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff. "We are fully prepared to pursue a peaceful resolution for Iran's peaceful nuclear programme," Araghchi said.

Lavrov said Moscow was ready "to play any role that will be useful from Iran's point of view and that will be acceptable to the United States". Russia, which commands the world's largest confirmed arsenal of nuclear weapons, has deepened its military ties with Iran since it launched its offensive on Ukraine in February 2022, and has played a role in Iran's nuclear negotiations in the past as a veto-wielding United Nations Security Council member.

Western countries, including the US, have long accused Iran of seeking to acquire nuclear weapons – an

allegation Tehran has consistently denied, insisting that its programme is for peaceful civilian purposes. Al Jazeera's Tohid Asadi, reporting from Tehran, said there is "a cloud of mistrust in the air" despite statements made by Araghchi.

"With the talks ahead, there is a perception among Iranians that there is this mistrust that exists pertaining to the United States, but going back to the statement that were heard today ... we saw a mix of doubt and hope at the same time," Asadi said. "Iran is saying it is not interested in putting other issues ... [such as] nuclear capabilities ... on the table of negotiations," he added.

US President Donald Trump has threatened to attack Iran if it does not agree to a deal with the US. On Tuesday, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps said the country's military capabilities were off limits in the discussions.

The official IRNA news agency reported Iran's regional influence and its missile capabilities, long criticised by Western governments, were among its "red lines" in the talks. On Wednesday, the Iranian foreign minister said Iran's enrichment of uranium was not up for discussion, after Witkoff called for it to end.

"If there is similar willingness on the other side, and they refrain from making unreasonable and unrealistic demands, I believe reaching an agreement is likely," Araghchi said during Friday's news conference. Lavrov emphasised that any potential agreement should only pertain to the nuclear issue. "This is a fundamental point that must be taken into account by those who try to burden the negotiations with non-nuclear issues and thus create a very risky situation," he

said. Iran told the US during last week's talks it was ready to accept some limits on its uranium enrichment, but needed watertight guarantees Trump would not again ditch the pact, an Iranian official told the Reuters news agency on Friday, speaking on condition of anonymity. The official said Tehran's red lines "mandated by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei" could not be compromised in the talks, adding that those red lines meant Iran would never agree to dismantle its centrifuges for enriching uranium, halt enrichment altogether, or reduce the amount of enriched uranium it stores to a level below the level it agreed in the 2015 deal.

It would also not negotiate over its missile programme, which Tehran views as outside the scope of any nuclear deal, Reuters reported. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said earlier on Friday that the US administration is looking for a peaceful solution with Iran but will never tolerate the country developing a nuclear weapon.

Rubio met with British, French and German officials in Paris and pressed them to maintain sanctions against Iran instead of allowing them to run out. Israel also reiterated its unwavering commitment to preventing Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons, saying it had a "clear course of action" to prevent this. "Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and I, along with all relevant bodies, are committed to leading a clear course of action that will prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons," Defence Minister Israel Katz said on Friday. — Aljazeera

# Two killed in Russian attacks on Ukraine's Kharkiv, Sumy

KYIV: A Russian missile strike has killed one person in the northeastern Ukrainian city of Kharkiv, with a separate drone attack killing another person in the nearby city of Sumy. At least five children were among dozens of people injured in Friday morning's attack on Kharkiv that damaged 15 residential buildings, a business and an educational facility, according to Kharkiv Mayor Ihor Terekhov and emergency services.

In Sumy, a drone hit a bakery producing Easter cakes, killing at least one and injuring another person. Reporting from Kyiv, Al Jazeera's Zein Basravi said Russia also targeted Lviv, Dnipro, Mykolaiv and Kyiv. "We saw multiple missile, drone, artillery, and rocket attacks in cities across the country around 5am local time when curfews come to a close and people begin their daily lives," he said.

"[In Kharkiv], civilian infrastructure was damaged, one person was killed, and 74 were injured. Of the 74, five were children aged 3, 4, 14, 16, and a 17-year-old boy. There was damage to dozens of apartments and vehicles," Basravi reported. "In Dnipro, no reports of dead or injured yet, but we do know it was a missile attack that hit an area with businesses, including a gym, hotel, and an office block, causing quite a lot of damage."

He said Ukrainian air defences were reported to have shot down three cruise missiles and nearly two dozen drones. Despite the latest attacks, according to Secretary of State Marco Rubio, US President Donald Trump is prepared to abandon efforts to negotiate peace between Russia and Ukraine unless concrete progress is seen within days. Speaking in Paris following

discussions with European and Ukrainian officials, Rubio signalled a looming cut-off point for the White House's involvement in the stalled peace initiative.

"We're not going to continue with this endeavour for weeks and months on end. So we need to determine very quickly now, and I'm talking about a matter of days, whether or not this is doable in the next few weeks," Rubio told reporters. "The president feels very strongly about that. He has dedicated a lot of time and energy to this ... this is important, but there are a lot of other really important things going on that deserve just as much, if not more attention."

No official responses came from Paris, London, Berlin, Kyiv or Moscow regarding Rubio's remarks. The comments, however, coincided with signals that Washington may be making some headway in talks with Kyiv. On Thursday, President Trump said he expected to finalise a deal with Ukraine next week that would allow the United States access to the country's mineral resources—a sign that, despite political friction, economic cooperation remains a key incentive in the relationship. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on Thursday that although Russia had seemingly scaled back its targeting of energy infrastructure, the overall volume of missile and drone attacks remained unchanged. It is striking Ukraine's civilian sites instead, he added. Meanwhile, Moscow warned of potential escalation if Germany proceeds with plans to send Taurus long-range missiles to Ukraine.

Speaking at the United Nations on Thursday, Russia's ambassador Vassily Nebenzia declared that such a move would mark Germany's direct

entry into the war. "These countries are waging a war against Russia using their proxy forces," he said. "Delivering Taurus missiles would be another step toward escalation."

With a range of more than 500 kilometres (310 miles), the Taurus missile system is designed to penetrate fortified positions, making it a potentially game-changing addition to Ukraine's arsenal. Nebenzia also accused Kyiv of ignoring the partial ceasefire agreement reached in mid-March during a phone call between Russian President Vladimir Putin and President Trump.

He claimed Russia had honoured the accord while Ukraine had carried out more than 120 attacks, including on Russian power infrastructure. "Ukraine did not apply the partial ceasefire regarding energy infrastructure. Therefore, talking about a ceasefire is unrealistic at this point," he said. Adding further tension, Zelenskyy accused China for the first time of providing weapons to Russia. Speaking in Kyiv, he alleged that Beijing was supplying artillery and manufacturing arms within Russian territory.

"We finally have information that China is supplying weapons to the Russian Federation," he said, without specifying whether he meant shells, launchers, or both. Beijing on Friday denied giving any party in the Ukraine war lethal weapons. China has long maintained it is not a party to the conflict. Just last week, its Ministry of Foreign Affairs said it supported a peaceful resolution and rejected any claims of direct involvement. Zelenskyy's remarks also follow the capture of two Chinese nationals fighting for Russia, further straining already fraught relations between Kyiv and Beijing. — Aljazeera

# Hajj 2025: Pakistan issues key directives for private operators

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan government Friday issued key directives for the private operators for Hajj 2025. A total of 23,620 Pakistani pilgrims will perform Hajj 2025 under the private scheme. According to details, the Ministry of Religious Affairs has issued guidelines regarding the Private Hajj Scheme 2025, urging all approved Hajj operators to ensure visa issuance by April 18.

The ministry has asked the private operators to immediately submit copies of service agreements as per the

newly allocated quota. The ministry further announced that the updated list of authorized operators has been published on the official website and the Pak Hajj mobile app.

Pilgrims can check the status of their applications and the services being offered through these platforms. Private pilgrims are strongly advised to use the Pak Hajj 2025 mobile app for real-time updates and service tracking to ensure a smooth and transparent experience. Meanwhile, around 67,000 Pakistani pilgrims have been deprived of performing Hajj 2025 due to delays in agreements and payments

to the Saudi government, according to Hajj organisers. The main reason for the rejection of these applications was the failure to make timely bookings and payments to the Saudi authorities.

Saudi Arabia had allocated a quota of 179,210 pilgrims for Pakistan this year, which included 89,605 spots each for the government and private tour organisers. However, only 14,000 applications were accepted under the private scheme. The organisers claimed they had made bookings for the 67,000 pilgrims and sent SAR 7 million to Saudi Arabia for these pilgrims.