

India releases water F.P. Report

LAHORE: India is continuing to deploy its cheap tactics against Pakistan and in the latest episode it released water into River Jhelum on Saturday without giving any prior information. This water aggression caused a severe flood in the river that originates from Anantnag district of Occupied Kashmir and entered Chakothi from Uri.



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Pahalgam incident

Pakistan calls for neutral probe into attack

PM says respond with full might if any attempt disrupts waterflow

F.P. Report

KAKUL: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Saturday while reiterating Pakistan's strong condemnation of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, said that Pakistan as a responsible country was open to participate 'in any neutral, transparent and credible investigation' into Pahalgam incident.

He said contrary to it on the Eastern border, their neighbour continued a pattern of exploitation and levelling of baseless allegations and false accusations without credible investigation or verifiable evidences in the recent tragedy of Pahalgam which was 'yet another example of this perpetual blame game which must come to a grinding halt.'

Addressing a passing out parade of Pakistan Military Academy cadets, the prime minister said that water had been a vital national interest of Pakistan and lifeline for its 240 million people and "Let there be no doubt at all that its availability would be safeguarded at all costs and circumstances." In an apparent reference to India's announcement of suspending the Indus Waters Treaty, the prime minister said "Any attempt to stop, reduce and divert the flow of water belonging to Pakistan under the Indus Waters Treaty will be responded to with full force and might and no one should remain under any kind of false impression and confusion."

The prime minister said that their valiant armed forces were fully capable and prepared to defending country's territorial integrity and sovereignty against any misadventure as clearly demonstrated by its measured and

resolute response to the Indian reckless incursion in February 2019, therefore nobody should make any mistake about it. He said that this nation of 240 million people stood united by and behind their brave armed forces and committed to safeguarding every inch of their motherland. Let this message be loud and clear for all and sundry.

The ceremony was attended by Chief of Army Staff General Syed Asif Munir, military leadership, members of the diplomatic corps and parents of the cadets. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif reiterated "Peace is our preference but it must not be construed as our weakness. We will and shall never compromise on the dignity and security of our beloved Pakistan."

He said Pakistan would continue its unwavering commitment to playing a responsible and constructive role at the global stage for peace and security as it believed in the unity of the human race. The prime minister said founder, Quaid e Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah had rightly declared Kashmir as a jugular vein of Pakistan. He said the globally recognized dispute remained unresolved despite multiple UN resolutions and reaffirmed Pakistan's continuing support to the Kashmiris' right to self-determination till they achieved it after great struggle and sacrifices.

The prime minister said Afghanistan was their neighbouring country and 'it is our earnest desire to live in peace with them in all times to come but unfortunately, despite their best and sincere efforts, terrorist activities continued to emanate from Afghan territory.' The deputy prime minister had recently visit-

Iranian leader phones Premier

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has said that the use of water as a weapon is unacceptable and Pakistan would defend its right at all costs. During a telephone conversation with Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian on Saturday, the premier reaffirmed that Pakistan condemns terrorism in all its forms and manifestations.

He said Pakistan has no linkage, either direct or indirect, with the Pahalgam attack. He said, in fact, Pakistan has itself been one of the biggest victims of terrorism over the last two decades, in which it lost thousands of lives and billions of dollars. He added Pakistan is ready for a neutral investigation into the Pahalgam incident. Sharing Pakistan's position on India's provocative actions following the Pahalgam incident, the Prime Minister said Pakistan desires peace in the region and would welcome if Iran also wants to play a role in this regard. On Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir, the prime minister emphasised that Pakistan would always stand shoulder to shoulder with the Kashmiri people and it would continue to support them in their just struggle for their right to self-determination as enshrined in various UN resolutions.

ed Kabul and shared their efforts for better relations and understanding with the brotherly and neighbourly country Afghanistan, he said, adding, however, they also delivered a clear and loud message to the interim Afghan government, that while they desired peaceful neighbourly relations with Kabul, this could not happen so long as Afghan soil was being used by Fitna al Khwarij to attack Pakistanis and kill innocent people in Pakistan.

The prime minister said India's systematic prosecuting of its minorities, particularly of Muslims and Sikhs, had become more pervasive over the years. India should take complete responsibility under international obligations to secure the rights of its oppressed minorities, he stressed. He said Pakistan on the other hand always condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations.

"As world's frontline state against terrorism, Pakistan endured immense losses of 90,000 human casualties and economic losses beyond imagination exceeding over 600 billion \$dollars," he added. He said who understood this excruciating pain better than Pakistanis that had given more sacrifices to counter terrorism and which country had suffered more than Pakistan!

The prime minister said it was the more powerful commitment that they would not tolerate any kind of terrorism in any hue and colour and had demonstrated it beyond any doubt. After a period of economic stagnation, he said Pakistan was taking bold strides towards economic recovery, though it was a long journey full of challenges but with your prayers and with the help of Allah Almighty, they would negotiate their way forward with a sense of commitment.



ABBOTTABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif addressing the passing out ceremony of 151st Long Course held at PMA Kakul.

COAS warns India of any aggression

F.P. Report

KAKUL: Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Asim Munir has strongly responded to Indian threats and water aggression, asserting that Pakistan knows how to defend its homeland.

Speaking at a passing-out parade ceremony, he emphasized that the Two-Nation Theory remains the foundational principle of Pakistan's existence and there is no room for doubt among Pakistanis regarding it.

Addressing the cadets, General Munir said, "We Muslims are fundamentally different from Hindus in

every aspect of life our religion, customs, traditions, thoughts, and aspirations are distinct." He highlighted the immense sacrifices made by Pakistan's forefathers to create a separate homeland and underlined that the Two-Nation Theory is based on the recognition that Muslims and Hindus are two separate nations.

"Our ancestors rendered unmatched sacrifices for the creation of Pakistan. Their unwavering struggle led to the establishment of a new homeland," he said. "The Two-Nation Theory has always been the bedrock of Pakistan's existence, and no Pakistani har-

bors even the slightest doubt about it."

General Munir also criticized the Indian media and social media platforms, accusing them of distorting historical facts with false propaganda. "Indian media, especially the so-called 'Modi media', is attempting to conceal facts through lies and propaganda."

However, no amount of distortion can alter history," he stated. "Their efforts to undermine the Two-Nation Theory are futile. The founding father of Pakistan, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, articulated the Two-Nation Theory in clear and unequivocal terms."

15 terrorists killed, two soldiers martyrd

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: The Security Forces killed 15 Khwarij terrorists in three separate engagements in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa while two soldiers embraced martyrdom during the intense fire exchange.

"An intelligence based operation was conducted by the Security Forces in Karak District on reported presence of Khwarij. During the conduct of operation, own troops effectively engaged the Khwarij location, and resultantly eight Khwarij were sent to hell," said a news release issued by Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) here.

In another operation conducted in North Waziristan District, four Khwarij were killed by the security forces. However, during the intense fire exchange, two brave sons of soil, Lance Naik Usman Mohmand (age: 28 years, resident of District Charsadda) and Sepoy Imran Khan (age: 26 years, resident of District Kurram) having fought gallantly, paid the ultimate sacrifice and embraced shahadat, it further said.

In another encounter that took place in general area Gomal Zam, South Waziristan District, own troops successfully neutralized three Khwarij. Weapons and ammunition were also recovered from the killed Khwarij, who remained actively involved in numerous terrorist activities. "Sanitization operations are being conducted to eliminate any other Kharij found in the area, as the security forces of Pakistan are determined to wipe out the menace of terrorism and such sacrifices of our brave soldiers further strengthen our resolve," the press release.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif Friday commended the security forces for eliminating six Khawarij during an operation in Bannu.

He appreciated the professional capabilities of personnel of security forces. He said the government would continue to foil the heinous designs of the terrorists, who were the enemies of humanity.

Naqvi demands impartial investigation into incident

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Federal Interior Minister Syed Mohsin Naqvi Saturday firmly rejected any Pakistan involvement in the recent incident in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK), asserting that Pakistan had no connection to the matter.

Addressing a press conference at the FIA Regional Office here, he demanded an impartial investigation into the Pahalgam incident and called on the international organisations to take responsibility. "Now, the ball is in the court of international organisations," he said. The interior minister stated that while Pakistan was exercising restraint in the current situation, it would not compromise on its sovereignty. "Pakistan is progressing, and such incidents are not in our favour," he said, warning that if

India took any aggressive action, Pakistan's 240 million people would stand united against it.

He highlighted evidence of India's involvement in terrorist activities in Pakistan, particularly in Balochistan and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa. He said that Pakistani intelligence agencies had seized seven improvised explosive devices (IEDs) over the past three days from various cities, thwarting India's alleged plan to create chaos in Pakistan through bomb blasts.

"We had weakened terrorists in KP and Balochistan," the minister noted, adding that India was displeased with Pakistan's success in dismantling terrorist networks. He also accused a foreign country of giving instructions to the banned organisation Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA). Criticising the handling of

the Pahalgam incident, Naqvi pointed out that the FIR (First Information Report) was registered just 10 minutes after the attack. "There can be no bigger drama than this," he remarked, questioning the credibility of such a rapid legal response.

The minister also referenced India's admission of involvement in acts of terrorism against Sikhs in Canada, arguing that India's track record undermined its credibility. Reaffirming Pakistan's stance, Naqvi stated that Pakistan strongly opposes all forms of terrorism and reiterated the country's commitment to an impartial inquiry into the Pahalgam and Jaffar Express incidents. He concluded by emphasising that Kashmir remains a disputed territory and its resolution must be achieved according to the United Nations resolutions.

6 including lady constable killed

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Saturday brought a wave of violence, as two separate firing incidents resulted in tragic deaths of six people, including a woman serving as a police constable, police confirmed.

The first incident unfolded within jurisdiction of Shahpur police station, where unknown assailants opened fire on a vehicle. The occupant, a woman identified as a constable serving in Parang tehsil of Charsadda district, was killed in attack.

Later, a bloody shootout at Jameel Chowk in Hazarkhwani resulted in deaths of five individuals. Initial reports suggest a long-standing feud fueled the violence between rival groups. Police swiftly responded to scenes, securing the areas and transporting deceased to hospital for postmortem examinations.

Investigations are underway in respective police stations as authorities work to piece together the events and apprehend those responsible.

Pakistan offers attractive opportunities

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar said on Saturday that there were good opportunities related to crypto currency in Pakistan.

Talking on the occasion of signing of agreements between Pakistan Crypto Council and World Liberty Financial here, Tarar said that a crypto council has been established in Pakistan. "Pakistan has made progress related to crypto in a very short time", Attaullah Tarar said.

The minister remarked that there were attractive investment opportunities in various sectors in Pakistan. Chief Executive Officer of Pakistan Crypto Council Bilal Bin Saeed and Co-Chairman of World Liberty Financial Zack Witkoff also talked to media. Bilal Bin Saeed welcomed Co-Chairman of World Liberty Financial Zack Witkoff in Pakistan.

Five killed, 700 injured in Iran port explosion

TEHRAN (Reuters/AFP): A massive explosion was reported at the Shahid Rajaei Port in southern Iran, local media reported on Saturday, leaving five people dead and over 700 injured. "Unfortunately, at least five deaths have been confirmed by rescuers," the head of the Red Crescent Society's Relief and Rescue Organisation, Babak Mahmoudi, told state TV.

State television, citing emergency services, reported that "700 people have been injured as hundreds have been transferred to nearby medical centres" in the southern province of Hormozgan, where the Shahid Rajaei port is located. The explosion was reported at around 12:30am local time (2100GMT/2am PKT) on Saturday.

Earlier, it was reported that at least 281 people were injured after a large explosion rocked Shahid Rajaei port in the southern Iranian city of Bandar Abbas on Saturday, state media reported. The blast occurred as Iran began a third round of nuclear talks with the

PM grieved at explosion at Iran's Shahid Rajaei Port

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Saturday expressed deep sorrow over the losses caused by the explosion at Shahid Rajaei Port in the Iranian city of Bandar Abbas. In a message of condolence, he extended heartfelt sympathies to the Iranian government and the people of Iran. He also offered prayers for swift recovery of those injured in the tragic incident. "In this hour of grief and sorrow, we stand firmly with the Iranian government and the brotherly people of Iran," the PM stated. The PM reaffirmed Pakistan's solidarity with Iran during this difficult time.

United States in Oman, although the cause of the explosion was not immediately clear.

"The source of this incident was the explosion of several containers stored in the Shahid Rajaei Port wharf area. We are currently evacuating and transferring the injured to medical centres," a local crisis management official told state TV. Citing the spokesperson for first responders, state TV reported that at least 281 people had been injured. It was not yet clear whether there were any

fatalities. The semi-official Tasnim news agency posted footage of injured men lying on the road being tended to amid scenes of confusion. Efforts were ongoing to extinguish a significant fire, with the port's customs saying that trucks were being evacuated from the area and that the container yard where the explosion occurred likely contained "dangerous goods and chemicals." State TV said "negligence in handling flammable materials was a contributing factor" in the explosion.

9 terrorists killed in Pishin F.P. Report

QUETTA: The Counter Terrorism Department killed nine terrorists in Pishin, Balochistan. According to CTD spokesperson, the operation was conducted in Khanai Baba area of Pishin, where nine militants were gunned down. A huge cache of arms were also recovered from the terrorists who were involved in carrying out militancy in the province.



KARACHI: Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah meets Punjab Governor Sardar Saleem Haider at CM House. —APP Photo

KP governor stresses unity against terrorism

LAHORE (APP): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Governor Faisal Karim Kundi has emphasized that the nation stands firmly alongside its armed forces in facing current security challenges, particularly cross-border terrorism. Talking to the media here on Saturday, he warned that any aggression from India would be met with a “crushing response,” as it was in the past.

Highlighting the recent terrorism incidents in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, Governor Kundi said that the situation is evident to all. He said that Pakistan’s people, its state institutions, and its armed forces stand united in defense of the nation.

“Historically, whenever India has violated our borders, it has received a firm and resolute response,” he stated. “Our forces remain fully capable of defending Pakistan’s sovereignty with strength and determination.”

The Governor reminded the nation of the strategic strength given to Pakistan by former Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who laid the foundation for Pakistan’s nuclear capability. He noted that today, Pakistan is stronger and safer, with its nuclear assets in secure hands.

Referring to the current regional tensions, he said, “Afghan soil is unfortunately being used against Pakistan, China, and the CPEC project, with India playing a major role behind the scenes. Around 70 percent of terrorist activities inside Pakistan are traced back to Afghanistan.”

The Governor welcomed the recent visit to Afghanistan by the Deputy Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister, describing it as an important step towards regional dialogue. He emphasized, however, that the inclusion of representatives from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and

Balochistan, provinces most directly affected by cross-border dynamics, would have further strengthened the engagement. Involving stakeholders from these regions could have added valuable perspective to the discussions, he noted. He also encouraged the federal leadership to brief Parliament and the public on the key outcomes of the visit, underscoring the importance of transparency and national consensus in matters of foreign policy. He added that historically, visits to Afghanistan have sometimes had negative outcomes for Pakistan, and therefore transparency with the public is crucial. He urged that the Parliament and both provincial assemblies be fully taken into confidence regarding any agreements or understandings reached.

Governor Faisal Karim Kundi expressed serious concern over India’s alleged involvement in activities aimed at destabilizing Pakistan. He underscored the need for an impartial international inquiry to investigate these concerns, expressing confidence that such an investigation would reveal the extent of external interference. He reiterated Pakistan’s commitment to pursuing regional stability through transparency and adherence to international norms.

The Governor said that Pakistan’s armed forces, air force and navy are fully prepared to defend the country’s sovereignty with even greater strength than demonstrated in 2019. There should be no doubt, Pakistan is committed to safeguarding its territorial integrity and will respond decisively to any provocation, he affirmed.

To a question about India’s statements regarding the revocation of water treaties, Governor Faisal Karim Kundi termed such remarks as “irresponsible”

and “unrealistic.” He emphasized that international agreements cannot be altered unilaterally and reaffirmed Pakistan’s firm commitment to safeguarding its water rights through diplomacy and adherence to international law. He assured that Pakistan remains fully capable of protecting its national interests at every forum.

Governor Kundi also lamented the stalled construction of the Arbab Niaz Stadium in Peshawar, stating that despite being promised since 2017, the project remains incomplete. “Peshawar Zalmi has produced top players from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, yet we have not been able to host matches at home,” he said, appealing for urgent action to complete the stadium for the youth of the province. The Governor expressed deep concern over the deteriorating law and order situation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, urging the provincial government to prioritize public safety and governance. “The people’s foremost demand is for peace,” he said. While development and dialogue are crucial, meaningful progress cannot be achieved without security and stability. He pointed to the prolonged closure of a vital 25-kilometer road as an example of administrative challenges, and noted with concern the growing allegations of corruption, including irregularities in public hiring, mismanagement of funds, and unexplained accumulation of assets by certain officials.

Governor Faisal Karim Kundi emphasized that Pakistan’s resilience, the unity of its people, and the strength of its national institutions are the foundations that will enable the country to successfully overcome both internal and external challenges.

Fire erupts at shopping centre

KARACHI (DNA): Water and Sewerage Corporation has declared emergency at the NIPA Water Hydrant after a fire broke out in a shopping centre in Sadar area of the Metropolis here late Friday night.

The fire brigade and Rescue 1122 have been called for help, while Water Corporation put the required staff on alert to cope with the situation.

According to a spokesperson for the Water Corporation, water tankers were dispatched to the scene soon after receiving information regarding the fire incident. He said that the focal person to MD for Hydrant Cell is personally supervising the situation.

The spokesperson said that a continuous water supply is being provided to the fire brigade to extinguish the fire. The Water Corporation is fully supporting the fire brigade in the firefighting operation. The spokesperson said that water tankers will be provided until the fire is brought under control.

Sindh declares May 01 as public holiday

KARACHI (DNA): The Sindh government has declared May 01, which is falling on Thursday, as the public holiday throughout the province on the occasion of ‘Labour Day’ for all government offices, autonomous bodies, semi-autonomous bodies, corporations and local councils under the administrative control of the Sindh government except essential services.

PR reclaims 168 acres of land

LAHORE (APP):The Pakistan Railways successfully reclaimed 168.25 acres of land through extensive anti-encroachment operations across the country on the special instructions of Minister for Railways Muhammad Hanif Abbasi. According to the PR spokesperson on Saturday, the operations were conducted between April 1 and April 25, 2025, with the Karachi Division recording the largest recovery of 147.94 acres. The Sukkur Division followed, where 9.28 acres of land were retrieved.

Furthermore, 4.49 acres were reclaimed in the Multan Division, 3.53 acres in the Lahore Division, and 1.42 acres in the Rawalpindi Division. Additional recoveries included 1.09 acres from the Peshawar Division, 0.48 acres from the Quetta Division, and 0.01 acre from the Mughalpora Division.

The reclaimed land comprises a mix of commercial, residential, and agricultural properties. The spokesperson stated that the department has intensified its anti-encroachment efforts to ensure the complete elimination of illegal occupations on government land. These actions are part of broader efforts to strengthen Pakistan Railways’ assets and improve its operational efficiency.

PFA cracks down on counterfeit cold drinks

LAHORE (APP): The Punjab Food Authority (PFA) food safety teams conducted an operation and uncovered a facility involved in production of counterfeit cold drinks imitating popular brands.

During the raid, 200 litres of fake beverage mixture, banned colours, harmful chemicals, filling machines, gas cylinders, compressors, labels, empty bottles, and caps were seized. A case was registered against the operators, and a fine of Rs. 100,000 was imposed.

The facility was found using unauthorised formulas and banned substances under extremely unhygienic conditions. Inspectors observed insect infestation, foul odors, and a complete lack of essential documentation during the inspection. PFA Director General Asim Javed said that counterfeit cold drinks bearing the labels of well-known brands were being manufactured to deceive consumers. He warned that the consumption of such hazardous products could lead to kidney diseases.

CM reviews progress on Air Punjab, bullet train projects

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif, chairing a special meeting here on Saturday, reviewed progress on two historic initiatives, Pakistan’s first provincial airline, and the country’s first bullet train project.

During the briefing, the chief minister gave formal approval for the launch of Air Punjab, Pakistan’s first provincial airline, and granted in-principle approval to commence work on the Lahore-Rawalpindi bullet train project.

She ordered for immediate leasing of four Airbus aircraft for Air Punjab and emphasized that the airline will initially operate domestic flights within Pakistan. Following a successful first year, Air Punjab will expand to offer international services.

The CM instructed the authorities concerned to procure the latest aircraft and ensure that Air Punjab sets new benchmarks in service quality, aspiring to become the leading airline in the country.

In the same meeting, CM Maryam Nawaz was given a comprehensive briefing on the Lahore-Rawalpindi bullet train project. Officials informed the CM that the journey between Lahore and Rawalpindi would be reduced to approximately two-and-a-half hours. She reviewed various options for executing the project in collabor-

ation with Pakistan Railways and assigned Senior Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb to lead coordination efforts. The chief minister also noted that a public-private partnership model was under consideration for the bullet train venture.

Additionally, she directed the relevant departments to expedite preparations for launching the bullet train and sought proposals for high-speed train services on six additional routes across Punjab.

These routes include:
I. Lahore–Shahdara–Narowal
II. Lahore–Rawind–Kasur–Pakpattan–Lodhran
III. Sheikhupura–Jaranwala–Shorkot
IV. Shorkot–Jhang–Sargodha
V. Lala Musa–Sargodha via Mandi Bahauddin and Malikwal
VI. Faisalabad–Chak Jhumra–Shaheenabad

The CM also reviewed progress on mass transit initiatives, including the Lahore Yellow Line and the Gujranwala Mass Transit Line. She set deadlines of 30 May 2025 for completing the feasibility study of the Jinnah Terminal Thokar Niaz Baig to Harbanspura Yellow Line project, and 15 June 2025 for the Gujranwala Mass Transit Line study. The CM received a detailed briefing on the upcoming e-taxi project, aimed at modernizing urban transport systems in Punjab.

Marri condemns Modi govt's provocative actions

KARACHI (APP): Pakistan Peoples Party parliamentarians (PPPP) central spokesperson and Member of the National Assembly, Shazia Atta Marri, once again condemned the Modi government’s provocative actions under the pretext of the Pahalgam incident.

She warned that India must not be mistaken into thinking its aggression will go unanswered; Pakistan is fully capable of giving a fitting response.

Addressing a press conference at the Bilawal House Media Cell here Saturday, Shazia Marri endorsed Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari’s strong statement, calling it a true reflection of the emotions of every Pakistani.

Bilawal had earlier warned the Modi government that “the River Indus belongs to us and either our waters will flow through it

— or their blood.” Shazia Marri emphasized that Chairman Bilawal’s remarks were accurate, adding that Narendra Modi was attempting to cover up his government’s failures by exploiting the Pahalgam incident. She criticized Modi’s immediate and baseless accusations against Pakistan without any investigation and condemned the provocative announcements made thereafter.

She said Modi’s suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty is a cruel and condemnable move, warning that India’s reckless actions will have consequences. Marri highlighted that Pakistan is a sovereign and responsible nuclear state, and advised Modi to audit his 700,000-strong army stationed in Occupied Kashmir rather than leveling baseless accusations against Pakistan.

Marri further stated that

Pakistan has itself suffered greatly from terrorism, losing over 90,000 lives including police personnel, security forces, and civilians in the fight against terror.

She also criticized the Indian media for acting as a propaganda tool for the Modi government rather than practicing responsible journalism during their coverage of the Pahalgam incident.

Speaking further, the PPP spokesperson stressed that any decision on projects must be taken with mutual consent in the Council of Common Interests (CCI) meetings, as required by the Constitution.

Shazia Marri pointed out that the Constitution mandates the CCI to meet every 90 days. Marri concluded by saying that the PPP respects all voices protesting on the canal issue and believes that every concern raised is worthy of attention and respect.

601 temporary structures removed

LAHORE (APP): The Lahore district administration, under the leadership of Deputy Commissioner Syed Musa Raza, intensified its anti-encroachment campaign across the city, and demolished 601 temporary and 57 permanent illegal structures. According to a spokesperson, the large-scale operation, carried out with the support of the Metropolitan Corporation Lahore (MCL), cleared encroachments from eight major areas of the city. Authorities seized 24 truckloads of goods during the operation, aiming to restore access to broader roads and improve urban mobility for citizens.

Encroachments were eliminated from Data Town, Mozang Road, and Ganga Ram areas. Similar clean-up drives were completed in Lytton Road, Shahdara, and Begum Kot, while illegal setups on Windala Road, Township, and Gulshan Ravi were also dismantled.

In residential areas, 10 nomadic settlements were relocated, and 14 stray cattle were captured. Multiple warning notices were issued to violators, and four First Information Reports (FIRs) were lodged against individuals responsible for serious breaches.

Metropolitan Officer Regulation (Headquarters) Kashif Jaleel visited Township Market to inspect the operation firsthand. Chief Officer Metropolitan Corporation Shahid Abbas Kathia also personally supervised the enforcement activities. Deputy Commissioner Syed Musa Raza said the operation had not only removed obstacles from public spaces but also greatly enhanced the city’s visual appeal. He reiterated that, following Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif’s directives, Lahore will be transformed into an encroachment-free city.

Nazir visits NAB bureau, reviews major operations

LAHORE (APP): National Accountability Bureau (NAB) Chairman Lieutenant General (ret’d) Nazir Ahmad conducted a visit to NAB Lahore offices, where he reviewed the bureau’s ongoing operations and overall performance.

During comprehensive briefings by Director General NAB Lahore Muhammad Athram Dar and investigation teams, the chairman assessed the progress in major corruption cases. He praised NAB Lahore’s pivotal role in national accountability efforts and reaffirmed his commitment to strengthening the Bureau through policy reforms, transparency, and modernization.

NAB Director General Operations Amjad Majeed Aulakh also attended the briefing from NAB Headquarters. Addressing the session, NAB Chairman emphasized that NAB Lahore plays a pivotal role in the organization’s overall performance. He highlighted that from NAB’s inception till 2022, the Bureau successfully recovered Rs.

790 billion in corruption cases. However, over the last two years alone, NAB has achieved a record-breaking recovery of Rs. 5.4 trillion, made possible through recent policy reforms and the tireless efforts of NAB officials.

During his visit, NAB Chairman handed over a cheque worth Rs. 35 million to a representative of the Punjab government. He noted that the recent policy reforms introduced at NAB have been positively received by the bureaucracy, which has helped eliminate the culture of delays in official file processing due to fear. He emphasized the promotion of a paper-free culture within the institution, saying that digital transformation will significantly enhance efficiency and accelerate case progress.

NAB Chairman also received an in-depth briefing regarding the merger of Lake View Meadows with State Life Cooperative Housing Society (Phase 2) and personally visited the project

site to review progress. Officials of Lake View Meadows provided a detailed overview of ongoing developments.

The chairman announced that, under the supervision of NAB Lahore, 7,650 affectees of State Life Cooperative Housing Society (Phase 2) will be allotted developed plots worth Rs. 77 billion. He underlined that completing the merger and development process swiftly and transparently remains NAB’s top priority. He further assured that all stages, including formal approvals from relevant institutions and timely development work, will be closely monitored. He reaffirmed the organization’s commitment to maximizing output in the minimum possible time, ensuring full implementation of this objective.

The chairman also praised DG NAB Lahore, Muhammad Athram Dar, and the entire NAB Lahore Bureau for their outstanding performance and dedication.

Crackdown on traffic violations continues

KARACHI (PPI): During the crackdown against traffic violations launched on April 9, 24,771 motorcycles were impounded for not wearing helmets and other traffic violations.

These figures were revealed during a presentation to Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah, here on Saturday. According to the report, actions were taken against various violations from April 9 to 26.

The Chief Minister was informed that the action

was taken against 1,903 vehicles for using fancy number plates and tinted windows, while 406 heavy and light vehicles were seized for lawbreaking.

The traffic police recommended the cancellation of registration for 25 large and small vehicles due to lack of fitness. Furthermore, the temporary cancellation of registration for 380 vehicles was proposed.

The Chief Minister instructed the IG Police to show no leniency towards

lawbreakers. He appealed to citizens to respect traffic laws to ensure their safety and that of others.

The report also highlighted irregularities by Qingqi and motorcycle rickshaw drivers. A total of 116 FIRs were filed for driving on prohibited roads, wrong driving, and other offenses, and 267 drivers were arrested.

Further action was taken against 27 vehicles for illegal installation of LPG and CNG, and a total of 3,804 fine tickets were issued.



KARACHI: A view of shops closed due to Jamaat-e-Islami called a strike to protest against Israeli aggression and show their support to the war torn people of Gaza.

GOVERNMENT OF KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA
COMMUNICATION & WORKS DEPARTMENT
NOTICE INVITING E-BIDDING
(Single Stage Two Envelope E-Bidding System)

The Executive Engineer Building Division Swabi, C&W Department Govt. of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa invites sealed E-Bidding Online Tender from the eligible Firms/Contractors in accordance with KPPRA procurement Rules 2014, amended up to 10-05-2022 on single stage two envelope procedure for the following works:

S. No.	Name of Work	Required category of PEC	Tender Fee	Bid Security	Period of completion	Last date and time of submission of E-Bids	Date and time of opening of Technical Proposal	Date of opening of financial bids
1	Establishment of Recreational Facilities at Kundal Dam Swabi	C-5 & Above with relevant codes of CE-10, EE-11	0.03% of E/Cost	02% of E/Cost + S/Duty	As per work order	15-05-2025 12:00 PM	15-05-2025 12:30 PM	After approval of technical bid from the competent authority

1. Bid Solicitation Documents and Instructions to Bidders can be obtained from the office on any working day or can be downloaded from C&W website (www.cwd.gkp.pk) before the submission of date/time. Bids submitted without documents will not be processed.

2. All bidders are required to be registered with the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Revenue Authority under the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Finance Act, 2013 (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Act No. XXI of 2013).

3. The bidder should submit their E-bids as per KPPRA Notification No. S.R.O(14)/Vol:1-24/2021-22 dated: 10-05-2022.

4. Original Copies of Call Deposit for Bid Security and Tender Fee should be enclosed in the Technical Proposal and shall reach to the Office before closing date/time.

5. Legible Scanned copy of bid Security shall be submitted electronically along with the bid on E-bidding system.

6. All bidders are required that bid security shall be kept sealed in Financial Proposal. In addition, keep an affidavit in the technical proposal stating that a bid security in percentage without indicating the figure.

7. Criteria for the work can be obtained from office of the undersigned during office hours on cash payment (@ Rs.3000/-) (Non-Refundable) up to 12-05-2025.

8. Venue of bids opening is office of the Executive Engineer C&W Building Division Swabi.

EXECUTIVE ENGINEER
C&W BUILDING DIVISION SWABI
PH: 0938-920029, E-mail: cwd.swabi@gmail.com

INF(P)1612/25

India can't unilaterally suspend Indus Water Treaty, says Sherpao

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Quami Watan Party (QWP) Chairman Aftab Ahmad Khan Sherpao on Saturday said that India cannot unilaterally suspend the Indus Water Treaty with Pakistan in the wake of the Pahalgam attack.

A press release said that he made these remarks while speaking at a meeting of QWP Lower Dir office-bearers at Watan Kor here.

Aftab Sherpao said that India made baseless allegations against Pakistan in the wake of the Pahalgam attack. He said India was trying to divert attention from its security failure in the aftermath of the

Pahalgam attack by suspending the Indus Water Treaty. He said Pakistan was capable of giving a befitting reply to India in case of any misadventure. "India cannot put pressure on Pakistan by taking such extreme steps and blaming Pakistan without any proof," he said, adding that the entire nation stood by the armed forces to defend the motherland.

Commenting on the proposed Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Mines and Minerals Bill 2025, Aftab Sherpao said that some elements were out to capture the resources of the province, adding that QWP would go to any extent to protest against the passage of this

controversial legislation. He said that this controversial bill was against the spirit of the constitution and the 18th Amendment. He said that the Centre had no right to control the resources of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Criticizing the leadership of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), he said that they were only interested in securing the release of Imran Khan from jail. However, he maintained that the PTI should follow due legal process instead of indulging in protests and wasting the provincial resources on staging political rallies.

He said that law and order had deteriorated to the extent in the southern

districts that even the government employees could not travel freely.

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.



PESHAWAR: Chairman Quami Watan Party Aftab Ahmad Khan Sherpao speaking during party cabinet meeting.

KP govt approves Mohmand HPP tunnel

PESHAWAR (APP): Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ali Ameen Gandapur has sanctioned construction of a tunnel and associated infrastructure at Mohmand Hydropower Project.

In a press statement issued here Saturday, the project would be completed within Rs 2.3 billion. The initiatives aimed to supply 300 million gallons per day (MGD) or 470 cuses of clean drinking water to residents of Peshawar.

The proposal has been forwarded by Public Health Engineering. The project would be completed under non-ADP schemes while availability of funds would be allocated by supplementary grant, the statement concluded.

Light rain predicted

PESHAWAR (APP): The meteorological department on Saturday predicted partly cloudy weather in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa with light rain and wind at isolated places in upper parts of the province.

The weather conditions are attributed to continental air prevailing in most parts of the country. The day temperature would likely to remain 4 to 6 degree Celsius above normal in KP and Gilgit-Baltistan during next five days.

India's allegation described as baseless

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Senior Leader Pakistan Peoples Party, Dr. Arbab Alamgir Khan while rejecting the immediate accusations levelled by India against Pakistan, has described them as baseless, fabricated, and driven by malice.

In a press statement issued here on Saturday, Arbab Alamgir stated that India's knee-jerk response to blame Pakistan without evidence is indicative of a pre-planned narrative aimed at maligning Pakistan's image on the international stage.

The PPP leader strongly condemned the tragic incident that took place in Pahalgam, Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu &

Kashmir (IIOJK).

He expressed profound sorrow and grief over the loss of innocent lives and extended heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families. He further stated that this incident appears to be part of a broader conspiracy by the Indian government to divert attention from the gross human rights violations and systemic oppression in IIOJK.

Arbab Alamgir pointed out that the presence of over 800,000 Indian troops in the region raises serious questions about India's internal security management.

He highlighted that the occurrence of such an attack under heavy military surveillance is, in fact, a reflection of India's own

failure.

Moreover, he condemned the Indian government's decision to suspend the Indus Waters Treaty in the aftermath of the incident, calling it a highly irresponsible and provocative move.

He asserted that India is attempting to sabotage the Indus Waters Treaty through vile propaganda and unilateral actions.

However, he reaffirmed that such baseless allegations and unilateral steps cannot undermine or nullify an international agreement.

He described the Pahalgam incident as a calculated move by the Indian government, characterizing it as a false flag operation designed to serve a political agenda.

Peshawar High Court acquits alleged murderer in lawyer killing

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: Th Peshawar High Court has acquitted the accused nephew, Jaber, in the murder case of senior lawyer and member of the Bar Council, Razaullah. The court's decision overturned the death sentence and fine imposed on alleged murderer.

According to prosecution Jaber was accused of shooting his uncle, Razaullah, on November 16, 2022, over a property

dispute. Razaullah died a few days later after implicating Jaber in his dying declaration.

The trial court had sentenced Jaber to death on June 29, 2024, after finding him guilty of the crime.

The appellant lawyer, Shabir Hussain Gaggiani advocate argued that the investigation was flawed, and the prosecution's evidence was insufficient. He pointed out that Razaullah had been shot eight times, making it unlikely that he

could have given a dying declaration.

The lawyer highlighted several issues with the investigation, including the lack of signatures and timestamps on the police report and the failure to obtain CCTV footage from the area.

PHC divisional bench comprising Justices Sahibzada Asadullah and Farah Jamshaid, accepted Jaber's appeal and acquitted him of the charges.

The court found that the

prosecution's evidence was insufficient and that the trial court had overlooked several important legal points in convicting Jaber.

The court noted that the dying declaration was not supported by other evidence and that the doctor's certificate was not properly signed.

The court was informed that Razaullah was involved in other disputes, which could have been a motive for someone else to commit the crime.

Journalist become victim of hacker gang

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A group of blackmailers has become active in Peshawar and other parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, hacking mobile phones and WhatsApp accounts to extort money from citizens while currently Daily Ausaf and ABN News Bureau Chief becomes a victim in this regard.

The blackmailers hack into mobile phones and WhatsApp accounts, gaining access to contact num-

bers and personal information. They send messages to contacts, often claiming to be a courier service or a familiar person, and ask for money or sensitive information.

A person received a phone call from a number claiming to be from a courier service (TCS), asking for delivery address and WhatsApp number. The caller's WhatsApp account was hacked, and the hacker sent messages to contacts, including "how are you" and other innocuous mes-

sages, to create confusion.

The citizens are being extorted for money, with the blackmailers threatening to share compromising videos or photos if demands are not met.

The victims are subjected to mental harassment, anxiety, and stress due to the threat of being blackmailed.

Despite the increasing number of incidents, government agencies have failed to effectively track and take action against these blackmailers. There is

a need for government agencies to take concrete measures to ensure citizens' security and protect their personal data.

The citizens need to take precautions to secure their mobile phones and WhatsApp accounts, such as using strong passwords and being cautious of suspicious links or messages.

People should be aware of these tactics and avoid responding to suspicious messages or calls, and instead report them to the authorities.

Tanzeem Tajiran setup central protest camp

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Under the auspices of the Tanzeem Tajiran Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, a central protest camp was established at Rampura Gate, Peshawar, in support of a shutdown strike against Israeli oppression and brutality and to express solidarity with the oppressed Muslims of Palestine. Led by Tanzeem Tajiran President Malik Mehr Elahi, a large number of market presidents and members of the business community from Peshawar participated in the protest camp. President of Peshawar Chamber, Shakeel Ahmed Saraf, also strongly condemned the aggression of Israel and India in his speech.

Pakistan Business

Forum, Pakistan People's Trade Wing, various trade associations, political and social figures, and Tehreek leaders attended the camp, fully supporting the shutdown strike and pledging to support any future course of action.

During their speeches, participants demanded that the government of Pakistan and the Pakistan Army impose a complete ban on the import of Israeli products and companies. They stated that the time had come to give a fitting response to the terrorism and malicious intentions of Israel and India. Pakistan's business community stands shoulder to shoulder with its armed forces and is ready to make any sacrifice, whether of life or wealth.

The traders, expressing intense anger against Israel, India, and anti-Islamic forces, raised chants of "Allahu Akbar" and slogans of "Death to Israel" and "Death to India," echoing through the atmosphere. Protesters held banners and Palestinian flags in their hands as a symbol of love for Palestine and set the Israeli flag on fire.

The business community further stated that now all Islamic states must unite and raise the banner of Jihad against anti-Islamic forces.

They added that the history written with the blood of the oppressed martyrs of Palestine and Gaza would not go in vain, and one day, all Muslims would offer prayers of gratitude at Masjid Al-Aqsa.

PESHAWAR (APP): Former diplomats and International Relations experts here Saturday reaffirmed that the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) was a historic water-sharing accord between Pakistan and India and cannot be unilaterally suspended or revoked by either party.

The experts that IWT is an international binding agreement on both countries brokered and guaranteed by the World Bank.

Signed in 1960, the IWT allocates the waters of the six rivers of the Indus basin between the two neighbours countries.

Under the landmark treaty, India controls the eastern rivers of Ravi, Beas, and Sutlej while Pakistan has rights over the western rivers of Indus, Jhelum, and Chenab.

"IWT is a historic treaty signed by Pakistan and India and was guaranteed by the World Bank. There is no provision in IWT for its unilateral suspension of termination," said Manzoorul Haq, former ambassador, in an interview with APP.

"India has no authority to terminate or suspend the IWT on its own. Any such illegal move would not only be a breach of international law but could also damage India's global credibility and even be interpreted as an act of aggression against Pakistan."

Manzoorul Haq emphasized that the treaty's

resilience through multiple conflicts including three wars between the two nuclear armed neighbours is a testament to its robustness and international legitimacy.

"Despite geopolitical tensions between the two countries, the IWT has remained intact, making it one of the world's most enduring examples of transboundary water cooperation," he said.

However, Manzoorul Haq criticized India's construction of several dams and hydroelectric projects on the western rivers in IIOJK, which he said had negatively affected Pakistan's water flow and violated the spirit of the treaty.

Professor Dr. Adnan Sarwar Khan, former Chairman of the International Relations Department at the University of Peshawar, highlighted the treaty's historical and legal significance, saying "The IWT emerged out of necessity after the Partition of British India in 1947, when disputes over water rights escalated due to the geographical division of river headworks," he said.

"The World Bank mediated negotiations between the two countries, culminating in this landmark treaty, which continues to provide a legal framework for water security for millions of people."

He said the Indus is not just a river, it is an identity.

An identity of millions of people whose lifeline depends on its flow and consumption. The river predates the formation of both states and has historic value.

He said this helps in sustaining agriculture, livelihood, and ecosystems in Pakistan and India.

Dr. Sarwar added that any unilateral withdrawal or suspension of treaty would trigger international arbitration and possibly a diplomatic backlash. "This isn't just a bilateral issue; it's a matter of international law," he stressed.

Dr Sarwar fears that new dams in Kashmir especially on western rivers will give India strategic control during conflict or drought, affecting Pakistan's agriculture and water security.

Experts agreed that the treaty is a rare success story in regional cooperation and remains critical to maintaining peace and stability in South Asia and it should not be politicized.

They warned that unilateral suspension of the treaty by India could be construed as an act of war against Pakistan and in such negative situations its repercussions may go beyond borders. They said that negative policies of the fascist Modi Govt has put peace of South Asia at stake and another war between nuclear armed countries could bring disastrous for south Asia.



PESHAWAR: Barrister Asif Saeed is casting his vote in the Peshawar High Court Bar Association elections 2025.

Analyzing the Pahalgam attack and its strategic implications



Izmi Herlani

In recent weeks, the Indo-Pakistani relationship has once again been thrust into the spotlight following the Pahalgam attack, which many analysts and observers have labeled a false flag operation. This incident appears to follow a troubling pattern, reminiscent of previous strategies employed to malign Pakistan. Not only

does this current situation highlight the delicate geopolitical environment of South Asia, but it also raises important questions about the motives behind such orchestrations.

The strategic objectives of the Pahalgam attack seem multifaceted, but a primary aim appears to be upholding the declining popularity of the current BJP government in India. With mounting pressure from various segments of the Indian society regarding economic issues and handling of internal disputes, the BJP could be seeking to re-establish a narrative through an external enemy. By invoking nationalist sentiments, the fascist government aims rally support and deflect attention from domestic turmoil.

Another important con-

text for this standoff is the international scrutiny faced by India concerning Human Rights violations in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK). The ongoing plight of the Kashmiri people has drawn international condemnation and the Pahalgam incident serves as a distraction from these human rights issues. By alleging Pakistan's involvement in such attacks, India aims to divert global attention and regain the upper hand in the court of public opinion.

Moreover, the purported objectives of this irrational plot could also include seeking leverage from the Trump administration regarding trade tariffs and create economic pressure on Pakistan. The geopolitical dynamics have shifted significantly in recent

years, and any incident that portrays Pakistan negatively could be used to enhance India's negotiating position with respect to US policy initiatives. India's historical efforts to paint itself as a victim in the regional geopolitical arena allow it to seek favorable outcomes in trade discussions while simultaneously strangling Pakistan economically by stopping the flow of rivers.

At this juncture, it is imperative to recognize the role of the Pakistan Armed Forces, specifically the Pakistan Air Force (PAF), which has a longstanding history of defending the motherland. The brave Shaheens of the PAF have demonstrated unwavering commitment, pledging to protect Pakistan at all costs. The spirit of dedication among the armed forces

runs deep, and the rich legacy of sacrifice and valor continues to inspire future generations. PAF's operational readiness has been the hallmark of the force which was exhibited in 1965 & 1971 wars and once again came to the fore in February 2019, when India launched a unilateral irrational aggressive military campaign across the LoC. Responding to this unprovoked aggression, PAF displayed remarkable professionalism and heroism, executing precise strikes, downing IAF fighter jets and effectively safeguarding national sovereignty. The outcome of this confrontation demonstrated PAF's capability to respond strongly to acts of aggression, a message that resonates with its adversaries even today.

In light of the current

standoff, PAF remains prepared and vigilant, equipped with advanced training and operational strategies. The commitment to excellence, combined with the brave resolve of the personnel, ensures that if war is imposed on Pakistan, Pakistan Air Force will once again rise to the occasion, defending the homeland with extreme prowess. Further evidence of the PAF's strong position lies in its recent military acquisitions and indigenous efforts. Under the current leadership, there has been a significant push towards modernizing the Air Force, with notable advancements reflected in cutting-edge technologies and indigenized production capabilities. Projects such as the JF-17 Thunder program, the leaps in space,

cyber, artificial intelligence and unmanned aerial systems domains have significantly enhanced Pakistan's air defence capabilities, putting the PAF steps ahead of its adversary in terms of operational effectiveness. The PAF's narrative is not one of mere preparedness; it is backed by tangible accomplishments that affirm its superior capability and capacity. There is a collective resolve among military leaders and personnel that any foolish act of aggression will be met with full force. The message is clear: not only can Pakistan defend itself, but it also has the ability to counteract any threats that may threaten its sovereignty.

The standoff between India and Pakistan, exacerbated by the Pahalgam attack, underscores a com-

plex web of strategic objectives and historical context. While India may attempt to leverage this incident for political gains, the international community must remain vigilant and discerning about the implications of such actions, especially regarding human rights concerns in the region. Pakistan Armed Force stands resolute, armed with a legacy of patriotism and unparalleled professionalism, ready to defend the nation against any aggression. It is imperative that Pakistan continues to strengthen its defence capabilities while also advocating for peace and stability in South Asia. The sacrifices of our brave Shaheens have paved the way for a robust defence posture that will ensure Pakistan remains secure in the face of adversity.



In brief

JI holds strike against Israel F.P. Report

WANA: In response to a nationwide strike call by Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan Ameer Hafiz Naeem-ur-Rehman, party workers and supporters staged a protest rally in Wana Bazaar to express solidarity with the besieged people of Gaza. The rally, led by Asadullah Bheer, Ameer of Jamaat-e-Islami South Waziristan Lower, drew a large number of participants who waved Palestinian flags and chanted slogans against Israeli occupation and global silence over human rights violations in Gaza. Addressing the gathering, Bheer stated that over 60,000 Palestinians have been martyred by Israeli forces, yet international human rights organizations remain indifferent. He called on the Muslim Ummah to move beyond symbolic condemnation and take practical steps in support of the oppressed Palestinians. The rally also echoed support for the people of Afghanistan, FATA, and Balochistan. Bheer affirmed that Jamaat-e-Islami has always stood—and will continue to stand—with these regions in their struggle for justice and rights.

Labourer demand action F.P. Report

LARKANA: Aftab Ahmed Kalhoro, a resident of Darwesh Wahan locality in Larkana city, protested in front of the Press Club along with his children and said that there is a method of draining dirty water from the back of my house, which is causing damage to my house due to lack of cleaning. For this, I also complained to the neighbors, and influential people targeted me. When I went to the police station, I was threatened by the influential people present there. He demanded that the DIG Police Larkana investigate the matter and do justice to the workers, otherwise I will take very difficult steps, the responsibility of which will be on the Sindh government. Meanwhile, unrest broke out in Larkana district. Unknown armed men robbed five lakh rupees in cash from a Benazir Income Support Program stipend distributor and fled, according to details, three unidentified criminals riding a motorcycle on the Larkana-Mohenjo Daro road near village Haider Brohi, Taluka Bakrani Police Station, at gunpoint, took Wahid Bakhsh alias Naeem unnar a device holder of BISP Dokri Center, hostage and robbed him of four hundred and eighty thousand rupees. However, the Bakrani police did not reach the scene of the incident even after receiving timely information. The device holder, who was affected by the incident,

Arora on minorities' rights F.P. Report

KHANEWAL: Provincial Minister for Minorities Affairs and Human Rights Sardar Ramesh Singh Arora said on Saturday that the provincial government was committed to safeguarding rights of minorities across the province. He was addressing a public gathering organised in connection with Easter Mission Party at Village 133/16-L here. He expressed solidarity with the Christian community during the joyous occasion of Easter, highlighting the government's dedication to inclusivity and mutual respect. "Pakistan was a beautiful bouquet of diverse religions and cultures," said Arora, reaffirming that the PML-N government had consistently worked to protect the rights of minorities.

Pro-Palestine rally held in Bara

F.P. Report

LANDI KOTAL: Tens of thousands, Bara filled the streets on Saturday to denounce Israeli atrocities in Gaza and voice solidarity with innocent Palestinian people. Organized by Anjuman-e-Tajeran, Bara Bazaar, the participants including traders, students and members of civil society while waving Palestinian flags took out the rally till Khyber Chawk.

The crowd holding banners reading "Down with Israel" "stop bombing Gaza" and "Gaza genocide etc. and chanted Labbaik ya Gaza. Labbaik ya Gaza etc. Addressing on the occasion President Anjuman-e-

Tajeran, Bara Said Ayaz Wazir and others called Israel a terrorist state and accused America and the several European countries of supporting Israel war crimes.

They expressed their displeasure over the silent attitude of Muslim countries especially the Arab countries pertaining Palestinian atrocities and said after Gaza they would be its next target. We stand side by side with our Palestinian brothers in their struggle for liberty from militant Israel, they remarked.

The speakers called for immediate ceasefire in Gaza and urgent humanitarian assistance to ensure

safety and protection of Palestinians. They asked to boycott Israel made commodities to make it economically weakened and prefer to utilize the country's made goods.

At the end an effigy of the Israeli Prime Minister was set on fire and dispersed peacefully. Aas per media reports since October 2023 when Israel waged war against Gaza nearly 51000 Palestinians most of them are women and children have been martyred. Meanwhile, like elsewhere in the country, on call of Jamaat-e-Islami shutter down strike was observed in Khyber on Saturday in solidarity with Palestinians.

Awards among school students distributed

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: Annual Prizes Distribution Ceremony of Higher Secondary School of the University of Malakand was held today at Convocation Hall, University of Malakand with Vice Chancellor Prof. Dr. Rashid Ahmad in the chair. The students presented various items including Hammd, Naat, National Songs, Speeches and various performances which were applauded by the audience.

The ceremony was attended by faculty members, administrative staff, parents of the students and alumni of the school. During the ceremony awards were distributed

among the students in the categories of best performances in academics, discipline, conduct, academic growth, attendance and cleanliness.

Moreover, the teachers were also awarded for their best performance in teaching, administrative support, training of the students, maintaining discipline and overall upholding of the academic standards of the school. While addressing the audience, principle of the school Mrs. Basharat Shah presented the school performance in academics and extra curricular activities. She applauded the support of the university administration and praised the teachers for their commitment and devotion.

Vice Chancellor while addressing the ceremony upheld that the academic community of Pakistan stands in full support of the nation in these hard times. He denounced the blame game from Indian side and termed the Pahalgam shooting incident as security breach, internal failure of the Indian forces and called the Indian government for behaving like a mature state in the comity of nations.

He was of the opinion that no stone will be left unturned for bringing the school to one of the best schools of the region. He extended his full support to the school administration and teaching staff.

Traders observe strike against Israeli brutalities in Gaza

F.P. Report

ATTOCK: In line with other parts of the country follow by the appeal of the Central Traders Association of Pakistan and the Ameer of Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan, Hafiz Naeem ur Rehman, a strike was observed in all six tehsils of Attock, similar to other districts of Pakistan, in protest against Israeli atrocities in Gaza and to express solidarity with the Palestinians. Markets, shopping centers, vegetable and fruit markets, and other business hubs remained closed.

Traders expressed complete solidarity, and citizens largely avoided traveling from villages to the cities, resulting in minimal public transport operations. Strikes were held in Attock, Hazro, Hassan Abdal, Fateh Jang, Pindi Gheb, Jand, Kamra, Khaur, and other areas to show solidarity with the Palestinians. At the district headquarters in Attock, a strike rally was organized at Fawara Chowk under the auspices

of the Traders Association and Jamaat-e-Islami. A large number of traders, Jamaat-e-Islami leaders and workers, civil society members, and officials from various religious organizations participated.

Addressing the rally, District President of the Traders Association Kashif Ilyas, District President of the Sarafa Association Haji Iftikhar Ahmed Saraf, Private School System Leader Nadeem Anjum Abbasi, former Municipal Councillor Shahab Rafiq Malik, Deputy Secretary-General Ziauddin Niazi, Maulana Ilyas Angvi, and District General Secretary of Ulema Council Qari Anwar Shakir said that they stand in full solidarity with the Palestinians. They emphasized the need to continue the boycott of Israeli products and demanded that the government officially announce jihad. The speakers remarked that so-called superpowers have always faced humiliation, and that the people had donated bil-

lions of rupees earned through hard work to relief organizations. They noted that Jamaat-e-Islami and Alkhidmat Foundation alone delivered over 9 billion rupees of aid to Gaza.

Polio eradication drive reviewed F.P. Report

HYDERABAD: Divisional Commissioner Bilal Ahmed Memon chairs a high-level meeting on Saturday at his office to review the ongoing polio eradication campaign in Hyderabad Division.

Commissioner Memon emphasized the need for sustained efforts to eliminate polio, directing special attention to border areas and under-performing districts. He also instructed officials to take corrective measures to improve coverage and tackle issues proactively.



BARA: Tribesmen holding a rally to show solidarity with Palestinian people. — F.P. photo

AKMCC holds medical camp at Matiari hospital F.P. Report

MATIARI: The Aga Khan Maternal and Child Care Centre (AKMCCC), Hyderabad, in collaboration with Matiari Health Services Hospital, successfully organised a one-day Health Camp, on Saturday. The camp focused on preventive care and early diagnosis of various health conditions. 450+ patients benefited from this one-day camp.

The event provided a wide range of essential health services to the community. A team of experts from AKMCCC provided consultations and services across multiple specialties, including Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Skin Diseases, Eye Diseases, Bone and Joint Diseases, Child Health, Diabetes, Blood Pressure, Thyroid and Heart Diseases. In addition to the consultations, the camp facilitated access to diagnostic services at a reduced cost. Participants benefited from a 50% discount on sugar tests, ultrasounds, and X-rays. ECG services were also available to camp participants at a subsidised cost.

The camp aimed to address the diverse health needs of the community by providing specialised medical care and promoting health awareness. Participants received personalised consultations and were guided on lifestyle changes, treatment options, and follow-up care for better health. The initiative also helped raise awareness of common, yet often overlooked health issues, and offered an opportunity for expert guidance to manage them effectively.

"We are immensely grateful to Matiari Health Services Hospital for their collaboration and support in making this health camp a success. Such partnerships are vital in extending quality healthcare services to a wider population and improving community health," said Dr. Syed Mairajuddin Shah, Chief Operating Officer, Off-Campus Hospitals at the Aga Khan University Hospital, Pakistan.

Solidarity with Palestinians Traders observe shutter down strike

Syed Waliullah Shah

NOWSHERA: A shutter-down strike was observed across Nowshera in solidarity with the Palestinian people, protesting against Israeli aggression. The strike was called by the Nowshera Traders Association, with participation from various political parties, including Jamaat-e-Islami, Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam, and Pakistan Peoples Party, on Saturday.

According to details, shops and markets remained closed across Nowshera Cantonment, with traders and citizens participating in the strike. A rally was held in support of the Palestinian people, where protesters chanted slogans against Israel and

Indian rulers. Israeli and Indian flags were also burned during the rally.

The leaders and workers from Jamaat-e-Islami, Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam, and Pakistan Peoples Party participated in the strike, showing solidarity with the Palestinian people.

The speakers, including Khalid Khan Afridi, President of Nowshera Traders Association, Idris Khattak, President of PPP Nowshera, and Haji Inayat ur Rehman, Ameer of Jamaat-e-Islami Nowshera, condemned Israeli atrocities and called for unity among Muslim countries to support Palestine.

The speakers demanded that Israeli forces stop their atrocities against Palestinians and urged

Muslim countries to take concrete actions to support Palestine. They emphasized the need for unity among Muslim countries, including Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, to counter the threats posed by Israel and other hostile forces.

Support for Palestine: The strike and rally sent a strong message of support for the Palestinian people and conveyed that the people of Pakistan, including traders and political parties, stand united with them in their struggle for justice and freedom.

The event demonstrated the solidarity of the people of Nowshera with the Palestinian cause and their determination to stand against injustice and oppression.

PTI workers convention held

F.P. Report

BUNER: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Buner workers convention at Gudar Ground Malakpur in which party's provincial president Junaid Akbar, Minister Fakhar Jahan, Chairman DDAC Abdul Kabir, former Minister Riaz, and provincial general secretary Ali Asghar Khan addressed the participants.

Tehsil Gadezai /Salarzi Nazim Sher Alam Khan, Tehsil Daggar Nazim Haji Rozi Khan, former candidate for National Assembly Kamran Khan, PTI Central Chairman MNA Barrister Gohar Khan's brother Azmat Khan addressed the gathering. The convention was attended by leaders from across the district and party tigers from constituency PK-25 in large numbers. At the arrival to convention, Junaid Akbar Khan and other leaders, the Tigers showered rose petals and expressed their love

Buner. The convention was attended by leaders from across the district and party tigers from constituency PK-25 in large numbers. At the arrival to the convention the Tigers showered rose petals and expressed their love with leaders. On this occasion, the workers and ISF activists raised slogans in support of the founder of PTI, prisoner number 804.

Junaid Akbar Khan focused his speech PTI founding chairman release and continuing the struggle for Khan's release and making every sacrifice in this path. He also took a pledge from the participants of the convention that if the Tigers raise their hands, they are ready to make every sacrifice for Khan's release. Everyone stood up and raised their hands. He gave a clear message that although the country is going through a bad time and India is pursuing a policy of aggression.

Notorious drug peddler arrested

F.P. Report

JAMRUD: Jamrud police on Saturday arrested a notorious drug peddler and seized a substantial quantity of narcotics. Talking to journalists, District Police Officer (DPO) Rai Mazhar Iqbal said that the police team executed a targeted raid in Wazirhand area, leading to arrest of a drug-peddler identified as Asad. The successful operation also resulted in recovery of a significant cache of illicit substances, including 4 kilograms of heroin, 3 kilograms of highly potent ice drug (crystal methamphetamine), and 3 kilograms of hashish.

DPO Iqbal revealed that Asad had been a long-sought-after figure by police and had been evading capture. Commending dedication and effectiveness of police jawans, DPO expressed confidence that their ongoing efforts would soon realize district's goal of becoming free from scourge of all types of drugs.

Rs4.65m welfare grants distributed among govt employees

F.P. Report

HAFIZABAD: Deputy Commissioner has disbursed welfare checks amounting to Rs. 4.654 million under various categories, including educational scholarships, marriage grants, funeral expenses, and monthly financial assistance, for the benefit of government employees and their families.

In a recent initiative to support the welfare of both serving and retired government personnel, the Deputy Commissioner approved and issued financial aid for a total of 177 cases through the Benevolent Fund Board Hafizabad. The disbursement included: Rs. 692,076/- for 13 cases of monthly grants, Rs. 1.7 million and five hundred rupees for marriage grants, Rs. 1.242 million and five hundred rupees for 36 cases of funeral expenses, Rs. 1.015 million for 97 cases of educational scholarships for employees' children.

Deputy Commissioner Abdul Razzaq reiterated the district administration's commitment to safeguarding the rights of government employees and ensuring timely financial support for their essential needs. He emphasized that all applications received by the Benevolent Fund Board would be handled on a priority basis, with no tolerance for delays in the processing and issuance of cheques.

"This financial assistance is not a favor but a rightful entitlement of the employees and their families," he stated. "Our goal is

to expedite the resolution of all pending cases and provide immediate relief by issuing aid checks without unnecessary delays."

The Deputy Commissioner assured that the district administration remains steadfast in its efforts to facilitate and prioritize the welfare of government employees, acknowledging their valuable services to the nation.

Residents protest against substandard sewerage infrastructure: Residents of Kashmir Nagar and adjacent localities staged a protest on Alipur Road, voicing strong opposition to the installation of substandard manholes as part of the ongoing sewerage system upgrade. The demonstrators expressed deep frustration over what they described as years of neglect and poor planning that have turned their neighborhoods into breeding grounds for disease and filth.

The protesters gathered near the construction site to demand immediate rectification of the faulty infrastructure. They alleged that the newly installed manholes are dangerously flawed, narrow at the top and open at the bottom, making them not only ineffective but hazardous.

"The entire area has been suffering from a collapsed sewerage system for years. Whenever it rains, sewage overflows into our streets and homes," said a local resident, adding, "Now, even with the construction on Alipur Road underway, the manholes are being built in such a

way that no sanitary worker can even enter them for maintenance."

According to the protesters, the manholes should have an opening of at least 22 inches at the top to allow for proper cleaning and maintenance. However, the current design is far too restrictive, raising concerns about future blockages and the potential collapse of the entire drainage system. The residents fear that unless the issue is addressed immediately, the newly installed infrastructure will replicate the failures of the past rather than resolving them.

Unidentified armed men snatch motorcycle from student: In a brazen act of street crime, two unidentified armed assailants robbed a local student of his applied-for (unregistered) motorcycle at gunpoint and fled the scene, sparking concerns about public safety in the area.

According to police sources, the incident took place on Jaganwala Road near Gala Samoran Wala. Muzammil Aziz, son of Muhammad Tariq Nazir, resident of Master Nazir Wali Gali, Kaskoki By-pass, was visiting a friend, Ahmad Mustafa, accompanied by his brother. They were standing outside in the street when the assailants suddenly appeared.

Eyewitness accounts suggest the armed men, whose identities remain unknown, threatened the victims with weapons and forcibly took possession of the motorcycle, which had recently been applied for and was not yet

officially registered. The robbers fled the scene immediately, leaving the victims unharmed but shaken.

Local police have registered a case and initiated an investigation. However, as of the time of reporting, no arrests have been made and the suspects remain at large. The incident has raised alarm among residents, who are urging DPO Hafizabad to tighten security and accelerate efforts to apprehend the culprits. With street crimes reportedly on the rise in certain areas of Hafizabad, local citizens are calling for increased patrolling and surveillance to restore a sense of safety.

ASJ grants bail to two minor brothers in murder case: Additional Sessions Judge Khalid (ASJ) Hafizabad Saleem Sohail granted bail to two minor brothers booked in FIR No. 308/2025, registered under Section 302 of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC), pertaining to the murder of a minor boy, Ubaidullah aged 12 years.

Two minor brothers, Ihtisham and Ahmed, sons of Shahzad, residents of Qila Ramkor were implicated in the jurisdiction of Police Station Saddar Hafizabad. Ehtisham, aged 9, had filed for pre-arrest bail, while Ahmed, whose age also falls within the definition of a minor, had sought post-arrest bail. Both applications were accepted by the court.

Representing the accused, the counsels Sarfraz Arshad Ayaz Cheema and Moazzam Hayat Bhoon argued that the Juvenile

Justice System Act, 2018, read with relevant provisions of the Pakistan Penal Code, clearly indicates that minors lack the legal and cognitive capacity to fully comprehend the nature and consequences of criminal acts.

They further asserted that prolonged detention of minors, especially before conviction, is inconsistent with both constitutional protections and international human rights conventions to which Pakistan is a signatory.

The defense maintained that bail, in such instances, is not merely a procedural concession but a fundamental right, aimed at ensuring that juvenile suspects are not subjected to unnecessary psychological trauma and stigmatization, particularly during formative years.

Accepting the legal arguments, the court approved bail for both minors upon furnishing surety bonds of Rs. 100,000 each. It is pertinent to note that the pre-arrest bail of their father Shahzad, had already been granted in the same case at an earlier stage.

DC inspects progress on bypass railway line flyover and Hafizabad-Sheikhupura Road Projects: Deputy Commissioner Hafizabad paid a detailed visit to the under-construction Bypass Railway Line Flyover and the Hafizabad-Sheikhupura Road development projects to review the pace and quality of ongoing construction work. Accompanied by Deputy Director Development Tasawar Abbas and officials from the

Highways Department, the Deputy Commissioner conducted a thorough inspection of the mega infrastructure initiatives aimed at enhancing regional connectivity and public convenience.

During his visit to the site of the flyover, a critical infrastructure project designed to ease traffic congestion and improve transportation efficiency, the Deputy Commissioner assessed the progress of construction work and examined the quality of materials being used. Expressing firm resolve to ensure the timely and quality completion of the project, DC issued strict directives to the concerned departments.

Later, DC Abdul Razzaq proceeded to inspect the Hafizabad-Sheikhupura Road project. He reviewed the quality and pace of work on the site, reiterating his earlier message about maintaining high construction standards. "The road should be completed swiftly, but never at the cost of quality," he said. He directed the officials to monitor every phase of the project closely, ensuring the use of approved, high-grade materials to provide durable and reliable road infrastructure to the public.

It is pertinent to mention that both infrastructure projects are part of the district administration's ongoing efforts to promote regional development, facilitate smoother travel, and uplift the quality of public service delivery through modernized road networks.



Crimea is a focus of discussions to end Ukraine war

MOSCOW (AP): Russia's illegal seizure of Crimea from Ukraine 11 years ago was quick and bloodless. But Kyiv - and most of the world - never recognized Moscow's annexation of the strategic peninsula, which is now a major focus of US-led efforts to end Russia's war in Ukraine.

US President Donald Trump lashed out at Ukraine's president, accusing Volodymyr Zelenskyy of prolonging the "killing field" after he insisted he would not give up any Ukrainian territory, including Crimea, to Russia as part of a potential peace plan. "There is nothing to talk about. It is our land, the land of the Ukrainian people," he said. Trump called Zelenskyy's pushback "very harmful" to talks. "Nobody is asking Zelenskyy to recognize Crimea as Russian Territory but, if he wants Crimea, why didn't they fight for it eleven years ago when it was handed over to Russia without a shot being fired?" he wrote on social media. During Trump's first term, the US said it would never recognize Crimea as Russian.

In 2013-14, a massive popular uprising gripped Ukraine for weeks, eventually forcing pro-Moscow President Victor Yanukovich from office. With Ukraine engulfed in turmoil, Russian President Vladimir Putin pounced, sending troops to overrun Crimea, a diamond-shaped peninsula in the Black Sea that Russia has long coveted. The armed troops appeared in Crimea in uniforms without insignia, and Putin soon called a vote on joining Russia that Ukraine and the West dismissed as illegal.

Russia's relations with the West plummeted to new lows. The United States, the European Union and other

countries imposed sanctions on Moscow and its officials.

Moscow's illegal annexation of Crimea on March 18, 2014, was only recognized internationally by countries such as North Korea and Sudan. In Russia, it touched off a wave of patriotism, and "Krym nash!" - "Crimea is ours!" - became a rallying cry. The move sent Putin's popularity soaring. His approval rating, which had declined to 65% in January 2014, shot to 86% in June, according to the Levada Center, an independent Russian pollster.

Putin has called Crimea "a sacred place," and has prosecuted those who publicly argue it is part of Ukraine - particularly Crimean Tatars, who strongly opposed the annexation. Weeks after the annexation, fighting broke out in eastern Ukraine between pro-Kremlin militias and Kyiv's forces. Moscow threw its weight behind the insurgents, even though the Kremlin denied supporting them with troops and weapons. There was abundant evidence to the contrary, including a Dutch court's finding that a Russia-supplied air defense system shot down a Malaysia Airlines passenger jet over eastern Ukraine in July 2014, killing all 298 people aboard.

Russian hard-liners later criticized Putin for failing to capture all of Ukraine that year, arguing it was easily possible at a time when the government in Kyiv was in disarray and its military in shambles. The fighting in eastern Ukraine continued, on and off, until February 2022, when Putin launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Crimea's unique location makes it a strategically important asset, and Russia has spent centuries fighting

for it. The peninsula was home to Turkic-speaking Tatars when the Russian empire first annexed it in the 18th century. It briefly regained independence two centuries later before being swallowed by the Soviet Union.

Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev transferred Crimea from Russia to Ukraine in 1954, when both were part of the USSR, to commemorate the 300th anniversary of the unification of Moscow and Kyiv. In 1991, when the Soviet Union collapsed, the peninsula became part of newly independent Ukraine. Russia kept a foot in the door, however: Its Black Sea Fleet had a base in the city of Sevastopol, and Crimea - as part of Ukraine - continued to host it.

By the time Russia annexed it in 2014, it had been a part of Ukraine for 60 years and had become part of the country's identity. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has vowed to retake it and said that Russia "won't be able to steal" the peninsula. For either side, possession of Crimea is key to control over activities in the Black Sea - a critical corridor for the world's grain, among other goods.

Ahead of its full-scale invasion, Moscow deployed troops and weapons to Crimea, allowing Russian forces to quickly seize large parts of southern Ukraine in the first weeks of the war. A top Russian military official later said that securing a land corridor from Russia to Crimea by holding the occupied parts of Ukraine's Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions was among the key goals of what the Kremlin insisted on calling its "special military operation" in Ukraine.

Student kills classmate in France knife attack

PARIS (AFP): A student killed one student and wounded three others in a stabbing spree at a private high school in northwestern France before being arrested, a police source said. France has in recent years been shaken by a series of school incidents involving attacks on teachers as well as schoolchildren by their peers. In the latest case of teenage violence, the assailant attacked fellow students with a knife at the Notre-Dame de Toutes-Aides secondary school in the city of Nantes at around 12:30 pm (1030 GMT), before being overpowered by teachers. French Education Minister Elisabeth Borne said she and Interior Minister Bruno Retailleau were headed to the scene.

"A knife attack took place at lunchtime today at a private school in Nantes," she posted on X. "I am travelling to the scene with @BrunoRetailleau to express my solidarity with the victims and my support for the educational community," she added. The school administration sent a message to the families of the some 2,000 students who attend the school, informing them of the incident. Students had been immediately confined inside the school, the statement added. "In coordination with the authorities present, we are organising the gradual release of students from 3:30 pm onwards in accordance with a strict protocol," the message said.

Concerned parents gathered outside of the school, which had already been cordoned off by police who, with French soldiers, were guarding the site. Ludivine, 48, said she had learned that the attack had happened in her daughter's class. "As an anxious mother who doesn't let her out alone, I never thought anything would happen to her at her school," she said.

AFP spoke with one student who gave her initial account of what happened. "I was in the cafeteria with my friends and we were told that a high school pupil had stabbed students in several classrooms," she said, without giving her name. "We were told not to leave the cafeteria for about 20 minutes and then we were confined to a gym." She added the assailant "was known to be depressed, he said he loved Hitler". Borne in February said police would start random searches for knives and other weapons concealed in bags at and around schools in a bid to deal with an increase in violent attacks.

'Kyiv talks should have no preconditions'

PRETORIA (Reuters): South African President Cyril Ramaphosa said during a visit by Volodymyr Zelenskyy that peace talks between Kyiv and Moscow should start without preconditions such as Ukraine ceding land to Russia. US President Donald Trump criticised the Ukrainian president this week for refusing to recognise Russia's occupation of Crimea as part of a US peace deal to end the war in Ukraine.

South Africa seeks to project itself as non-aligned on the Ukraine war but has good relations with Russia, with both countries belonging to the BRICS group of emerging economies that seeks to challenge the Western-dominated economic order.

Asked whether Ukraine may have to cede any territory to Russia as part of peace talks, Ramaphosa said that issue "should be talked about at the negotiating table". "I shared our own South African experience with (Zelenskyy) and said that the negotiations that brought an end to the nightmare of apartheid were held on a no-precondition basis," Ramaphosa told a press conference with the Ukrainian president.

Zelenskyy arrived in South Africa overnight as Russia pounded Ukraine's capital Kyiv with missiles and drones, killing at least eight people. He cut short his visit, his first to an African country, to return home following the attack.



KYIV: Rescue workers clear the rubble from a house heavily damaged after a Russian strike in a residential neighbourhood in capital of Ukraine.

Trump seeks 'fair deal' with China but pathway unclear

WASHINGTON (AFP): US President Donald Trump played up prospects of a "fair deal" on trade with China, but his top officials offered few details of how Washington might de-escalate its damaging tariff war with Beijing. Trump told reporters his country would have a "fair deal with China," adding that "everything's active" when asked if Washington was talking to Beijing.

But how soon the tariffs can be lowered "depends on them," Trump said, referring to Beijing, even as he maintained that he gets along "very well" with Chinese President Xi Jinping and hopes they can reach an agreement. Trade tensions between the world's two biggest economies have soared as Trump ramped up levies on imports from China this year, imposing an additional 145 percent tariff on many products over practices Washington has deemed unfair, and other issues.

Beijing in turn has countered with new 125 percent tariffs on US goods. Despite signals that Washington is looking towards a fair agreement, the state of discussions remains murky. Asked if there is direct US contact with China on trade, Trump said: "Every day." But earlier, US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent told reporters that the two countries are "not yet" talking when it comes to lowering tariffs.

"I think both sides are waiting to speak to the other," he said at an event on the sidelines of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank's spring meetings in Washington. He added that there is no unilateral offer from Trump to slash duties on Chinese goods. Bessent said the staggeringly high tariffs both countries have imposed on each other's goods have to come down before negotiations can occur.

"I don't think either side believes that the current tariff levels are sustainable, so I would not be surprised if they went down in a mutual way," he added on the sidelines of an Institute of International Finance forum. "This is the equivalent of an embargo, and a break between the two countries in trade does not suit anyone's interest," Bessent said, stressing that "de-escalation by both sides is possible." But he had no time-frame on how soon bilateral talks could take place.

"It's both a blessing and a curse that the strongest relationship is at the very top," Bessent said, referring to Trump's ties with Chinese counterpart Xi. But with "any de-escalation, the talks would not begin at the very top." Joseph Grieco, professor of political science at Duke University, told AFP that Trump may continue to chase China for a deal "to keep the financial markets off his back."

"I worry Trump will eventually

offer President Xi a favorable deal, one that doesn't address the serious economic problems the US actually has with China," he said. While Trump has swiftly rolled out sharp tariffs on different countries and sectors, he has also been quick to introduce certain exemptions -- most recently some temporary reprieve for tech products like smartphones and chipmaking tools. And he could widen the carveouts, the Financial Times reported, saying Trump could exempt car parts from some tariffs on Chinese imports -- alongside those on steel and aluminum.

Trump said he was not considering changes to US auto tariffs but noted that levies on Canada could rise in terms of cars. Separately, Bessent said he did not have a stance on whether the president had the authority to fire Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell if he wanted to.

He suggested Trump's previous comment that the "termination" of Powell could not come fast enough might also refer to the end of the Fed chief's term. Earlier, Bessent said in a speech that Beijing's export-reliant economic model is "unsustainable" and "not only harming China but the entire world." He stressed US concerns around trade imbalances that the Trump administration says it hopes to address through sweeping tariffs.

Ex-US Rep. George Santos faces sentencing for fraud

NEW YORK (AP): Disgraced former US Rep. George Santos, who lied about his life story and defrauded donors, faces sentencing in federal court. The New York Republican, who served in Congress for barely a year before being ousted in 2023 by his House colleagues, pleaded guilty last summer to federal wire fraud and aggravated identity theft.

He admitted to deceiving donors and stealing the identities of nearly a dozen people, including his family members, to fund his winning campaign. As part of a plea deal, Santos has agreed to pay roughly \$580,000 in penalties in addition to prison time. The 36-year-old told The Associated Press he's resigned to his fate.

"I'm doing as well as any human being would be

doing given the circumstances," Santos wrote in a text message. "I will be in court tomorrow, ready to face the music." Prosecutors are seeking seven years in federal prison for Santos, arguing in recent court filings that he "remains unrepentant" and has not shown genuine remorse, despite what he claims.

They cite recent comments Santos has made on social media in which he casts himself as a victim of prosecutorial overreach. In a letter to the court this week, Santos stressed that he remains "profoundly sorry" for his crimes but objects to the sentence being sought, which he said is overly harsh. Santos' lawyers have called for a two-year prison stint, which is the mandatory minimum sen-

tence for aggravated identity theft. They argue such a penalty is comparable to sentences handed to former US Rep. Jesse Jackson Jr. and other political figures convicted of similar financial crimes.

Santos was elected in 2022, flipping a wealthy district representing parts of Queens and Long Island for the GOP. Soon after, it was revealed that the political unknown had fabricated much of his life story, painting himself as a successful business owner who worked at prestigious Wall Street firms and held a valuable real estate portfolio. In reality, Santos was struggling financially and even faced eviction. The revelations led to congressional and criminal inquiries into how he had funded his campaign.

As his sentencing

approached, Santos was reflective in social media posts, thanking his supporters and detractors alike. "I learned that no matter left, right or, center we are all humans and for the most part Americans (LOL) and we have one super power that I cherish and that is compassion," he wrote on the social platform X. "To the trolls... well you guys are an impactful part of how people shape themselves, and y'all made me much stronger and made my skin thicker!" He also made one final plug for his Cameo account, where he records personalized video messages for \$100. "Think ahead and of any celebration or event coming up later this year. Book them today," Santos wrote, ending the post with a series of heart emojis.

US says no warrant was needed to arrest Columbia student activist

NEWARK, N.J. (AP): New documents entered in a New Jersey court show that the federal government defended its warrantless arrest of Columbia University student activist Mahmoud Khalil by saying agents feared he'd flee because he said he would leave the scene.

The documents were entered into the court record to defend against efforts by lawyers to win freedom for Khalil, who has been held in a detention center in Jena, Louisiana, for six weeks. In a document filed in Newark federal court, a lawyer for the Department of Homeland Security wrote that agents conducting surveillance of Khalil on March 8 were notified that he could be removed from the country because his presence or activities would have serious adverse foreign policy consequences for the United States.

As Khalil walked on a sidewalk with his wife, a Homeland Security

agent approached and identified himself, according to the court filing. After his wife went to retrieve documents showing Khalil had lawful residence status, the agent asked him to cooperate while they tried to verify his identity, but Khalil "stated that he would not cooperate and that he was going to leave the scene," the lawyer wrote.

The Homeland Security supervisory agent at that point "believed there was a flight risk and arrest was necessary," he said. In a release, the American Civil Liberties Union contested the account, saying the claim he was about to flee was false and belied by video taken of the arrest by Khalil's wife, along with previous accounts of the arrest.

Marc Van Der Hout, a lawyer for Khalil, said in the release that agents told Khalil when he was taken into custody that they had an arrest warrant, and his lawyers only learned this week with the new govern-

ment filing that there was none. "The government's admission is astounding, and it is completely outrageous that they tried to assert to the immigration judge - and the world - in their initial filing of the arrest report that there was an arrest warrant when there was none. This is egregious conduct by DHS that should require, under the law, termination of these proceedings, and we hope that the immigration court will so rule," he said.

Amy Greer, a lawyer who was on the phone with Khalil and the arresting agent on the night of the arrest, said Khalil remained calm that evening and complied with orders even as agents failed to show an arrest warrant. "Today, we now know why they never showed Mahmoud that warrant - they didn't have one. This is clearly yet another desperate attempt by the Trump administration to justify its unlawful arrest and detention of human rights defender

Mahmoud Khalil, who is now, by the government's own tacit admission, a political prisoner of the United States," Greer said.

Khalil is a legal permanent US resident and graduate student who served as spokesperson for campus activists last year during large demonstrations at Columbia against Israel's treatment of Palestinians and the war in Gaza. He was detained by federal agents in the lobby of his Manhattan apartment on March 8, the first arrest in President Donald Trump's crackdown on pro-Palestinian activists.

The Trump administration has not accused Khalil of criminal conduct, but has argued he should be expelled from the country for his beliefs. An immigration judge in Louisiana ruled earlier this month that the government's assertion that Khalil's presence in the US posed "potentially serious foreign policy consequences" satisfied requirements for deportation.

Russian court jails former general who flayed top brass

MOSCOW (Reuters): A former Russian commander who criticised Moscow's military leadership in Ukraine was sentenced to five years in prison after a military court found him guilty of large-scale fraud, Russian news agencies reported.

Ivan Popov, a former major general who led Russia's 58th army and who fought in Chechnya and later commanded Russian units in southern Ukraine, was found guilty of stealing more than 130 million roubles (\$1.56 million) of metal products intended for building fortifications along the Ukrainian frontline. Popov's lawyer told the RIA news agency he would appeal the verdict. Popov was quoted by the Kommersant newspaper last month as complaining about his "unjustified prosecution."

The former military man

was tried alongside a businessman, Sergei Moiseyev. Another suspected accomplice, Lieutenant General Oleg Tsokov, was killed in Ukraine in 2023. Several top defence ministry officials have faced criminal charges as part of a sweeping anti-corruption probe that has shaken up the Russian military establishment over the past year, but Popov and his supporters say his case was different and that he was being punished for speaking out.

Following a failed mutiny in June 2023 by Wagner mercenaries against Russia's defence establishment, Popov's concerns about how Moscow was waging its war in Ukraine were made public in a voice message which was released by a Russian lawmaker that July. In it, he was heard complaining about the deaths of Russian soldiers from Ukrainian artillery, alleging that the

Russian army lacked proper weapons and reconnaissance capabilities to spot enemy artillery.

"There was a tough situation with the senior bosses in which it was necessary either to keep quiet and be a coward or to say it the way it is," Popov said in the voice message. Popov said he was dismissed shortly afterwards. Upon his arrest in May 2024, popular Russian military bloggers spoke out in his defence, casting him as a talented general who had been punished for speaking truth to power. As his trial neared its end last month, Popov penned an open letter to President Vladimir Putin asking to be sent to the front in exchange for the Kremlin leader quashing his criminal case. Baza, a Telegram channel close to Russia's security services, said Popov had repeated his plea.

Florida Senate's Democratic leader says state party is dead

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP): The top Democrat in Florida's Senate is leaving his party, declaring that "the Democratic Party in Florida is dead." Senate Minority Leader Jason Pizzo's announcement on the Senate floor that he's changing his registration to no party affiliation is the latest blow to a party that has struggled to define itself after a series of crushing electoral losses in recent years.

Pizzo called modern partisanship "a mess" and said "constituents are craving practical leaders, not political hacks." Once the country's premier swing state, Florida's presidential elections used to be decided by the narrowest of margins. But the state has increasingly slipped out of Democrats' grasp, and the GOP has made significant in-roads in formerly Democratic strongholds like Miami-Dade County. Registered Republicans outnumber registered Democrats by more than 1.2 million voters.

Pizzo is on a shortlist of rumored gubernatorial can-

didates for 2026 Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis is term-limited. "I think stripping myself of the title of a party designation allows me to run free and clear, clean and transparent, and help many more," Pizzo said.

Nikki Fried, the chair of Florida's Democratic Party, called Pizzo "ineffective and unpopular" in a statement after his announcement. "Jason's failure to build support within our party for a gubernatorial run has led to this final embarrassing temper tantrum. I'd be lying if I said I'm sad to see him go, but I wish him the best of luck in the political wilderness he's created for himself," Fried said. "The Florida Democratic Party is more united without him." Pizzo, a former prosecutor who represents parts of Miami-Dade and Broward Counties in South Florida, is known as a polished debater willing to openly critique both parties, his leadership role notwithstanding.

His Democratic colleagues in the Senate told reporters they were taken

aback by his announcement, though they said it's not out of character for the "independent thinker." "We're currently in a re-focusing phase," Democratic state Sen. Shevrin Jones said of his party. "I wouldn't say we are dead. I will say that the Democrats have a lot of work to do. And I won't sit here and sugarcoat that at all." While Democrats were surprised by the announcement, the office of Florida's Republican Senate President Ben Albritton was notified.

In January, Pizzo told The Associated Press that he would not consider running for governor as an independent and that he welcomed the "challenge" of working within the Democratic Party. A string of Florida lawmakers have left the Democratic Party in recent months, including state Reps. Susan Valdes and Hillary Cassel, who both joined the GOP. As a member of her new party, Valdes ascended to the top of the House dais, dressed in red, to preside over a floor session.

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Rehmat Shah Afridi (Late)

Founder

Bilal Shah Afridi

Chief Executive

Jalil Afridi

Managing Editor

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Peshawar Office: 0300- 9009001

Peshawar Fax: 091-5703687, Post Box No. 573

E-mail: fppeshawar@thefrontierpost.com

Lahore Office: 0335-4026284

Email: fplahore@thefrontierpost.com

Islamabad Office: 0321-5066253

Email: mahmoodafridi@thefrontierpost.com

Karachi Office: 021-32213411, 0300-8340907

Email: fpkarachi@thefrontierpost.com

*USA and Canada Toll Free Number 1-800-5905747

Team Trump's appeasement

SECRETARY of State Marco Rubio and Special Envoy Steve Witkoff opted out of the London peace talks Wednesday with Ukraine, the United Kingdom, France and Germany. They are taking their ball and going back to Washington. Rubio's decision was triggered when Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky rejected the Trump administration's proposal to recognize Crimea as Russian territory in violation of international law. But it was not just Zelensky. European Union High Representative Kaja Kallas also said Europe will never recognize the Russian-occupied Crimea peninsula as legally Russian. Team Trump is making good on its petulant threat to "walk away from efforts to broker a Russia-Ukraine peace deal unless there are clear signs of progress."

The situation in Ukraine remains critical and the future uncertain, thanks to Team Trump's US-first approach to the ceasefire. Walking away permanently is not an option. It would create the same risk of starting World War III as the White House has accused Ukraine of creating. As we cautioned last week, Trump won't force Russia to stop attacking; rather, he is trying to leverage Ukraine and its European supporters to give up on resisting. Monday's attack on Odesa should be proof enough. Russian President Vladimir Putin resorted to his familiar tactic of striking civilian targets. At least three civilians were injured in a massive attack that struck a "residential building in a densely populated urban area, civilian infrastructure and an educational facility." On Monday Putin acknowledged authorizing strikes on civilian targets in Sumy on Palm Sunday, which killed 35, two of whom were children, and wounded more than 120. Without providing any proof, he proclaimed that the site was being used by the Ukrainian military, stating "Strikes on civilian objects are carried out if they are used by the Kyiv military." He added, "These are the people we consider criminals who should receive a well-deserved retribution for what they have done in the border region..." They got this retribution. This was done precisely to punish them."

Despite his dubious gesture to engage in direct negotiations with Ukraine and offer to halt his full-scale invasion of Ukraine along the current front line, Putin's actions answer Rubio's question from April 4 as to whether or not "Russia is serious about peace." It is not, of course. The latest concessions offered to Russia for a ceasefire being forced upon Ukraine for approval were: "Washington recognizing Moscow's 2014 annexation of Crimea and barring Ukraine from NATO." Two red-line issues for Zelensky.

Ukraine's deputy prime minister Yulia Svyrydenko said that Ukraine is ready to negotiate with the US, but is "not willing to surrender," which is basically what the Trump administration's seven-point plan calls for. According to The Telegraph, the plan provided no clear security guarantees for Ukraine and provided formal recognition of Russian sovereignty over Crimea by the US. Furthermore, it implied de facto recognition of the other four partially occupied territories - Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia. It also mandated that Ukraine abandon its pursuit of NATO membership and requires the transfer of control of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant to the US. Ukraine would also have to sign the minerals deal allowing US companies access to the country's natural resources.

The final point raises the alarming possibility of a new relationship between the US and Russia, saying that "all US sanctions would be lifted, and the two countries could begin to co-operate on energy." The same Russia Team Trump is warning Europe to up its GDP defense spending to defend against. Team Trump has practically given Putin everything it has demanded short of the keys to Kyiv - though the conditions are certainly set for that to happen in the next five to ten years. As Witkoff stated last week, "a possibility to reshape the Russian-US relationship through some very compelling commercial opportunities that I think give real stability to the region too. Partnerships create stability."

What does Ukraine get in return? It can join the European Union, regain "unhindered access to the mouth of the Dniipro river," and have Russian troops withdraw from a second area of the Kherson province. European countries could deploy an assurance force to deter Putin from invading again. But such deterrence seems unlikely without US support. This plan does not hold Russia accountable. It ignores war crimes prosecutions, restitution for damages, the return of prisoners of war and kidnapped children.

This is a losing hand. Ukraine would be the bill payer, as would security for Europe's NATO members, virtually ensuring an arms race in preparation for what many believe would be a Russian assault on NATO. Strategically, surrendering Crimea back to Russian authority not only cedes control of the entire Black Sea region back to Russia but potentially allows Russia to shut down the Port of Odesa for commercial trade, further threatening their security. As retired US Army Lt. Gen. Ben Hodges has stated repeatedly over for three years, Crimea is decisive terrain. Why would the US or NATO ever provide Russia that advantage?

The Danish Defense Intelligence Service believes Russia could be ready to wage a "large-scale war" in Europe within five years. According to a jointly produced assessment by the Federal Intelligence Service and the Bundeswehr, German security officials believe the Kremlin "is laying the groundwork for a potential large-scale conventional war with NATO by the end of the decade." Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski has warned that "Russia could be ready to attack Europe by the end of the decade if Ukraine is forced to surrender."

It does not matter if the Trump administration "is tired of the war," as retired US Army Lt. Gen. Keith Kellogg stated last weekend. What has become inconvenient for the US is a matter of survival for Ukraine - and security for NATO's European members. No one is more tired of the war than Ukraine - its Soldiers, citizens and leaders. Yet they continue to fight because they simply refuse to be subjugated again by Russia. The cost to the US has been measured in dollars, in Ukraine the cost is measured in lives. As we recently urged, Trump needs to adopt a new approach to Russia. Rubio, Witkoff, and Kellogg are pursuing a ceasefire under unrealistic terms. Until US negotiators address Ukraine's requirements - Team Trump's peace process is dead on arrival. Tragically, however, as evinced by Trump's Truth Social post blaming Zelensky, he is instead doubling down.

Important Notice

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Lebanon's strong civil society model should be preserved

Nadim Shehadi

THIS time it is not our fault. We cannot take the blame for Donald Trump's funding freeze or EU aid cuts. But these will affect Lebanon more than other countries because of the strength of the non-governmental organizations sector and its dependence on aid. It is chaotic out there in the NGO and civil society world - many risk closure and were not even aware that their grants were originally part of a chain of US Agency for International Development subcontracts. Thousands of lives will be affected and it seems to have happened almost overnight, with little warning.

It is not ideal, but the Lebanese have long since had no choice but to learn how to manage with a weak, absent, hijacked or paralyzed state, especially since the civil war. They have done so through civil society, communal and nongovernmental bodies, and the private sector. It has worked for them because it builds on existing traditions and age-old associations. While it is crucial to restore a functioning state, it is even more urgent to rescue society's homegrown institutions. It is not a zero-sum game between the state and civil society - they have learned to work together.

To illustrate this, consider the aftermath of the Beirut Port blast of August 2020. The government was in complete paralysis and had actually just resigned, while the banking sector was in collapse mode after the state declared its bankruptcy and defaulted on loan payments. Major hospitals were partly destroyed by the blast and were overwhelmed with casualties. Someday, an admirable story will be told of how society mobilized to help clear up and rebuild and rehouse, feed and care for itself, while no politician even dared show up to face the angry crowds.

Lebanon mostly skipped the 20th century, which in other countries of the region was characterized by secular nationalism and strong states. Its politics are a continuation of the Ottoman Empire's system of millets, which was based on recognized semi-autonomous religious communities. This was how the empire managed its diversi-

ty, by allowing each community to manage its own affairs, such as education, personal status laws and other services. Lebanese communities had their own schools, hospitals and tribunals and a model gradually evolved in which NGOs worked in partnership with the ministries but sometimes competed with state institutions.

The system has many

that this intangible outcome was more important to him than the aid itself and that it created a culture of humanity.

Smaller NGOs like Skoun Lebanese Addictions Center are in danger of closing down because of both the banking crisis and the international funding crisis. If Skoun were to close, it would mean the loss of 22 years of

But this started to reverse after 2015, with another increase in military spending and decrease in aid. There may be some benefits from a reset triggered by the USAID freeze and the European squeeze. The sector, as it grew, became too bureaucratized and inefficient, if not with a certain degree of corruption.

critics, especially when communal services are also tied to politicians who use them for votes and clientelism. Defenders of the system argue that religious institutions and even sectarian parties have direct and easier access to recipients and are mostly open to everybody, rather than exclusively being for their constituents. The system can become more equitable with proper state regulation.

Over time, large secular NGOs like arcenciel, which helps people with disabilities, created a model to mitigate some of the disadvantages. This formula is based on the principles of rights and access, with the state playing the role of regulator and consumers having a choice of which supplier to go to. This also creates healthy competition that improves quality. The model has even been copied and used by donors in places like Palestine, Algeria and Mozambique.

Pierre Issa, the co-founder of arcenciel, explained to me that the name, which is French for rainbow, is written all in lower case because its members do not use capital letters as a sign of humility. Activists of his generation were influenced by Bishop Gregoire Haddad, who once explained to me that social work should be promoted in order to create a responsible society. He said

another increase in military spending and decrease in aid.

There may be some benefits from a reset triggered by the USAID freeze and the European squeeze. The sector, as it grew, became too bureaucratized and inefficient, if not with a certain degree of corruption. One extreme example is where layer upon layer of subcontracting meant that less than 10 percent of the original funding reached actual beneficiaries.

The USAID slogan of "From the American People" had less to do with the American people and more to do with its bureaucrats and taxes. Government aid, which distributes compulsory taxes, also decreases the social responsibility and empathy element that is achieved through voluntary charitable donations. An example of this came in the aftermath of the First World War, when Near East Relief was created to help Armenian and Greek refugees from Turkiye. It raised \$110 million, equivalent to \$1.25 billion today, from some half a million small donations, all organized by volunteers in the days of snail mail. That was real aid from the American people and the voluntary element was as valuable in terms of international goodwill as the material aid itself.

Lebanon is unique in the region for having independent institutions that collaborate efficiently with ministries. It is also almost unique globally for having maintained a strong civil society despite the post-Second World War trend of greater dependence on the role of the state. In fact, that system of state provision has proven to be unsustainable, as the new generation pays far more in taxes for far fewer services.

We are hopefully entering a new era in the region with less conflict, but a great deal of work is also needed to repair the damage in Syria, Lebanon, Gaza, Iraq and Yemen. This should not all be done by governments and state institutions. The Lebanese model of collaboration between state and society helps with the healing of both physical and psychological wounds and it should be preserved. It is proof that wars and hardship can bring out the best in people, as well as the worst.

Trump's peace offer on Ukraine

Nick Paton Walsh

IMPOSING a deadline on a negotiation for a deal you desperately want is a risky tactic if your only move is to walk away. President Donald Trump has threatened just this, and emphasized on Wednesday it is proving easier to make a deal with Russia than Ukraine. Yet that seems a perilous misreading of his own predicament. It is easier for Trump to pressure Kyiv, yes, because they are dependent on US aid and intelligence for their mere survival. But that does not mean Russia is more amenable to a deal. In fact, they are palpably dragging their feet.

This is where the gulf between a life in business deals and one steeped in geopolitical negotiation yawns desperately. Now, Trump is not in the world of real estate - he is not trying to get Putin to buy something. Trump is pushing hard and fast for the Kremlin to agree to terms to end the war that Putin has clearly divined will improve, not worsen, over time.

Trump applied pressure to Putin briefly on Thursday, posting "Vladimir: STOP!", after Russian missiles targeted Kyiv, killing at least 12 people. But even the scolding used a friendly lexicon, and seemed as upset at the timing of the Russian attack as its casualties. Russian President Vladimir Putin has publicly rebuffed the US and Ukraine's now 44-day old offer of a 30-day, unconditional ceasefire. Instead, the Kremlin unilaterally declared a truce for Easter that lasted 30 hours and that Ukraine claimed they violated about 5,000 times. Both sides have accused the other of breaching an energy and infrastructure truce for March and April.

This dabbling with ceasefires has left a huge question mark over whether diplomatic agreements will be honoured, or can deliver. Ukraine's allies point to the Easter truce - unilateral, brief, sudden - as proof the Kremlin think ceasefires are for re-equipping, and negotiation is what happens when you are bidding time so you can later pursue your military goals. The larger problem with Trump's proposed deal is it is not publicly known what he expects Moscow to cede. A lasting pause in the fighting does seem, on the evidence of the past month, to be a stretch. A wider US-Russia détente may be desired by the White House. But without an enduring settlement for Ukraine, this would result in a long-term fissure in the Transatlantic alliance and even NATO. That would likely spook many establishment Republicans, countless Americans, damage the dollar, and US economic and geopolitical standing. These are real costs that would outweigh the gain of a likely brief make-up with the Kremlin.

Trump's second problem is it is also unclear - in public so far - what he expects President Zelensky to cede. He told Zelensky in his post on Wednesday to "GET IT DONE", but it is unclear what the IT is. Trump was specific he was not demanding Kyiv recognise Russia-annexed Crimea as part of Russia, as has been reported (Ukraine's constitution prohibits such an act, as it also demands Ukraine move to become part of NATO - an ambition Trump

may also ask it to abandon.)

The proposed Trump deal, it seems, may ask Ukraine to accept a freezing of the frontlines, and perhaps American recognition of Crimea as Russian. But both concessions are of limited utility. Crimea is a peninsula, linked to Russian-occupied parts of Ukraine yet separated from Russia bar a precarious bridge. European and Ukrainian sanctions would continue to isolate Crimea after any peace deal, and both Europe and Kyiv have made it clear they won't accept its recognition as part of Russia - the altering of land borders by force. With this, Trump is offering Putin a frail fig leaf of respectability. But that is not, in of itself, surely enough?

So what of deal that freezes the frontlines? This may also not be in Moscow's interests. Putin's recent bid to drag out the diplomatic process suggests the Kremlin thinks its best battlefield days may lie ahead of it. The oil price may continue to drop, and Moscow may feel manpower crunches ahead. Yet these problems are minor compared to Kyiv's recruitment issues and the likely dent in its funding when Biden-era cash runs out next year. The Kremlin's other vague red lines, voiced by various officials, will be as disruptive to a longer peace. They don't want European troops acting as a peacekeeping or reassurance force on Ukrainian soil - an idea quite advanced in its planning, that echoes the early version of a peace plan proffered by US envoy Keith Kellogg when he was a private citizen. They are against continued foreign aid to - and intelligence sharing with - Ukraine. Russia wants sanctions lifted up front, ideally. None of this is compatible with wider security concerns on the continent, and will force the Europeans, and Ukraine, to go it alone. That too does not bring a peace deal.

The overriding problem is Putin thinks time is on his side and Trump has repeatedly said the clock is ticking. These two contrasting positions will not yield a lasting deal. The Kremlin has perhaps wisely ascertained it can, over months, hive off tiny concessions from the White House, and slowly build a geopolitical picture that is more in its favour. Consider the first 90 days of Trump's presidency and how far the world has already changed in Moscow's favour. At each crunch point, Moscow also sees Trump turn on Zelensky. The Kremlin see little or no consequences for it breaching the energy - or its own unilateral - ceasefire. It sees a vividly impatient US president, whose team are often loose with the facts, and whose key envoy, Steve Witkoff, struggled to name the regions of Ukraine under occupation in a recent interview with Tucker Carlson. All are also only partially under Russian occupation.

The longer Moscow talks, the better the deal seems to get. The longer it fights, the better the battlefield will likely also get. There is every incentive for the Kremlin to keep diplomacy alive, even to sign on to an early, chaotic deal it may later renege on. But there is no reason to believe it wants talks that actually resolve the war, or fighting to stop either.

CNN

Why South Africa, Ukraine are wooing each other

Farouk Chothia

UKRAINE'S President Volodymyr Zelensky is on a historic visit to South Africa, signalling a dramatic improvement in the once-strained relations between the two nations. The visit marks a diplomatic breakthrough for the Ukrainian leader in his efforts to counter Russia's strong - and growing - influence in Africa.

"I'm sure that Russia will be annoyed by the visit, but I don't think it can do much about it," said Steven Gruz of the South African Institute of International Relations think-tank. Apart from a brief stopover in Cape Verde in 2023 while flying to Argentina, this is Zelensky's first visit to Africa since he became Ukraine's president in 2019.

Ukraine grasped the diplomatic significance of African states, when many of them - including regional powerhouse South Africa - refused to condemn

Russia's full-scale invasion of its territory in 2022. "Ukraine neglected the continent in terms of foreign policy, but it has changed that over the last three years, doubling its embassies from 10 to 20," Mr Gruz told the BBC.

"But it's in a very crowded space - Russia, China, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates are all trying to increase their influence in Africa," Zelensky's visit to South Africa at this point is especially significant, as Ukraine's relationship with the US - its main weapons supplier - has soured since US President Donald Trump took office in January.

He has paused military aid, denounced Zelensky as a "dictator", and has accused Ukraine of being responsible for the war. "Ukraine needs every bit of legitimacy it can get internationally - not just in Europe. Wars aren't only won in the battlefield, but

also in courts of public opinion around the world," said Prof Siphamandla Zondi, a political analyst at the University of Johannesburg.

For South Africa's President Cyril Ramaphosa, the visit is equally significant, as his country, too, is under intense pressure from the Trump administration. "The US has turned diplomacy on its head," Mr Gudz said, adding: "Everyone is looking for new friends." Ramaphosa sees Zelensky's visit as an attempt to boost his credentials as a peacemaker, saying their talks will focus on efforts to find "a path to peace".

The South African leader added that he and Putin had held a phone conversation ahead of Zelensky's visit. "We both affirmed the strong bilateral relations between our respective countries," Ramaphosa said in a post on X.

"We further committed to working together towards a peaceful resolution of the Russia-Ukraine conflict," he added. Ramaphosa first tried to assume the role of peacemaker in 2023 when he led a delegation of African leaders to both Kyiv and Moscow in an attempt to mediate an end to the conflict. The initiative came as South Africa faced a backlash from then-US President Joe Biden's administration, which questioned its professed neutrality in the conflict after it held a naval exercise with Russia and China.

Relations worsened after Washington's then-ambassador to Pretoria accused South Africa of supplying arms and ammunition to Russia. Ramaphosa later appointed a judge-led inquiry to investigate the allegation. It found no evidence to back up the ambassador's claim, but relations

between South Africa and the Biden administration remained strained. South Africa's ties with Russia have not been a sore point for Trump, as he too gets along with Putin and has been pushing Zelensky to make a deal with the Russian leader.

However, Trump's relationship with South Africa has reached rock bottom over its genocide case against Israel at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and for what he calls the "unjust and immoral practices" against the white-minority Afrikaner community - an allegation Ramaphosa's government denies. Prof Zondi said South Africa would have to ensure that Ramaphosa's talks with Zelensky did not hurt its attempts to mend relations with the Trump administration.

"South Africa will want to explain that it is adding to the efforts to build peace, and its role is not in compe-

tion with that of [the] US," he added. The analyst said he also expected Ramaphosa to focus on strengthening trade ties with Ukraine, as South Africa's economy was in crisis, with low growth and high unemployment.

"Any volume of trade, no matter how small, is critical for South Africa," he said, adding that strong relations between the two nations could also benefit Ukraine in its efforts to extend its influence on the continent. "South Africa could be Ukraine's gateway to Africa because of its ports and financial systems," Prof Zondi said. If this happens, it would mark a new chapter in Ukraine-Africa relations, though not necessarily at the expense of Russia. "Both Russia and Ukraine are the biggest exporters of cereals to Africa. Africa needs both. It cannot be expected to choose sides," the analyst said.

BBC

Russians use Tarot cards to predict peace in Ukraine

“THE King of Wands often represents our president, Vladimir Vladimirovich,” says Ksenia, a Russian tarot reader, as she points to the last card in her spread. She is interpreting the outcome of potential peace talks between the Kremlin and Washington over the war in Ukraine. Thirteen cards lie before her, each telling part of the story.

The King of Wands is a card of leadership and confidence - but in this reading, Ksenia has also drawn a card with the opposite meaning: the Devil card. “There will be a lot of manipulation on both sides in this matter,” she warns, pointing to the Devil card. “There’s a lot of devilish energy in this. I’m just telling it like it is.” Since the inauguration of US President Donald Trump, who vows to broker a deal to end the war in Ukraine, videos with tarot predictions have proliferated on Russian social media.

Tarot readers speculate on when the war will end, the future of Ukraine and Russia after a ceasefire, and even President Vladimir Putin’s mental state. “You’re right. America will never accept Ukraine’s defeat. And it will always seek to gain an advantage,” writes Lyudmila, one of Ksenia’s followers, in the comments.

Ksenia links the warnings in her reading to Trump’s duplicitous nature. “He can show us one thing, but in fact, something completely different is happening. There’s a reason the Moon and the Devil come up for me,” Ksenia explains. In tarot, the Moon is a card of illusion and ambiguity.

Another type of tarot reading focuses on Ukraine’s territorial integrity, as well as the political fate of Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelensky. Tarot reader Yekaterina

holds cards symbolizing death and concessions. She asks whether Russia’s borders will change as a result of a peace agreement.

“Russia will potentially step away from the territories it’s currently holding,” she explains as she examines the cards. A bit later, she adds: “But everything that’s already part of Russia legally - that will stay.” Yekaterina has been reading tarot for over three years. When she first started, she posted videos about psychology and relationships. But since early 2022, she has turned to asking the cards about Russia’s fate, Putin’s future and the end of the war in Ukraine.

In her most popular video, Yekaterina asks whether the Ukrainian city of Dnipro will become part of Russia. Looking at cards depicting a wasp’s nest and the ancient Greek goddess Demeter, she concludes: “The city has strong protection. Even getting close to it will be difficult.” Yekaterina declined to speak to The Moscow Times.

“The questions are too provocative given the current political climate and restrictions on freedom of speech,” she said in a voice message on Telegram. Psychologist Veronika Neifakh said that the popularity of practices like tarot is connected to the broader human need to regain a sense of control in times of uncertainty and crises.

“Uncertainty can be even more frightening than knowing something bad has already happened,” Neifakh told The Moscow Times. “When trying to cope with the unknown, we seek any form of certainty - that’s when magical thinking kicks in. We start believing in things that once seemed completely

impossible. This is often seen in people who are in despair, especially those who have lost loved ones,” she said.

During the first year of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, demand for online tarot and magic schools grew nearly twentyfold. Amid this surge in interest, one Russian esoteric practitioner launched an online course titled “Wartime Tarot Reader,” which promises to teach participants how to answer questions about mobilization, war and emigration using tarot cards. “Unfortunately, in 2022, tarot readers have to respond to their clients’ panic and fears almost daily,” the course founder wrote.

Sales of tarot cards in Russia have increased sevenfold in the past four years. By 2023, the market for esoteric services reached nearly 2.8 trillion rubles (approximately \$24.8 million). Fortune-tellers are consulted for more than just political predictions; the wives of missing soldiers often contact them when searching for their husbands.

“My friend suggested I go to a psychic. I was desperate, so I did. I’m clinging to any chance I have. For me, it’s important to keep searching and to believe - because I won’t get any real answers from anyone,” wrote Lyudmila, the wife of a Russian soldier, in a social media post. Around 80% of tarot card buyers in Russia are women, but men also turn to the cards with questions about the war and negotiations.

One male tarot card reader, Dementiy, asks about a phone call between Putin and Trump. He wants to uncover the two leaders’ hidden motives. “Putin is looking to the future, trying to lay out a strategic

course, to impose his own rules of the game,” he says, pointing to the Chariot and Knight of Swords - both considered positive cards in tarot.

The US position, by contrast, evokes skepticism. “There’s deception here, cunning moves, manipulation,” he said, pointing to the reversed Five of Pentacles, a card often associated with rejection or negative change. At the end of his reading, Dementiy concludes: “There was a chance for an agreement, but it was either missed or ignored. In reality, they were secretly negotiating about money and the global order.” Before asking viewers to subscribe to his channel, he adds that the current talks are “just a formality for the media.”

Dementiy, who discovered tarot after receiving a tarot deck as a gift, is not interested in personal questions. “I used to be into marketing and had a bunch of different businesses. Then I realized you can gain followers quickly with this,” he told The Moscow Times. Today, Dementiy has 17,000 subscribers on YouTube.

“My geopolitical readings come true because I understand how politics works,” he said. “The cards often surprise me - their answers don’t always match my own opinions.” Still, not everything has been revealed. The cards have never shown him the exact date of when Russia’s “special military operation” will end, he said. “At first, I thought it could be calculated. But with time, I realized that dates can’t be predicted. The war could end in 30 minutes, or it could go on for another 20 years,” he said. Dementiy’s most popular video, recorded two years ago, predicted peace in July 2023. It now has nearly 500,000 views.

Trump’s ‘instinctual’ diplomacy

Guildenstern: "There! How was that?" Rosencrantz: "Clever!" G: "Natural?" R: "Instinctive." [1]

NOW we know definitively -- because he told us so himself -- what drives US President Donald Trump's decision-making: instinct [2]. That Trump had no long-term plan or strategy behind his decisions had long been clear to most observers, but some commentators, both pro- and anti-Trump, had tried to find other explanations for his inconsistent, contradictory, even illogical decisions.

Hopefully, Trump's own admission will help everyone digest the situation's reality and move on to the more essential issue, which is dealing with the chaos that Trump's blustery, haphazard waffling creates.

One of Trump's few consistent diplomatic themes is his love-hate focus on China, which he also displayed during his first term. Most of the time he threatens Beijing, but then he throws in positive comments from time-to-time [3]. The contrast between Trump's aggressively anti-China stance and his relatively friendly relations with Moscow led to claims that Trump is attempting a "reverse Nixon," i.e. a tactical shift, the opposite of Former US President Richard Nixon's approach to China in the early 1970s. Nixon aimed to draw China away from the USSR and towards the US during the Cold War.

However, Nixon, and his National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger, had a known long-term strategy and developed tactics aimed at bringing about that strategy's success. Trump has not revealed any similar strategy or vision, and his statements and actions do not match what one would expect from a statesperson who had worked out such a strategy. Similarly, some observers have suggested that Trump utilizes the "mad man" approach, another technique attributed to Nixon. But Nixon used that tactic only for a handful of specific situations; Trump's general behavior is erratic and was so during his first term.

In the end, the problem with divining whether a statesperson uses unpredictability as a tactic is that it verges on conspiracy theory territory: any such inconsistent or irrational decision-making could be rationalized, ex post facto, as purposeful by claiming the "mad man" tactic.

Ultimately, Occam's Razor [4] is the best tool

Adam McConnel

with which to approach President Trump's policy preferences because we have had plenty of time to gauge his behavior. In addition to more than four years as President, Trump had public prominence as a New York socialite and television personality for the 30 years before he took office in 2017. If Trump had devised a doctrine to guide his approach to international relations, we would know what it is. For example, Trump has obsessed over tariffs since the 1980s [5], so it is not a surprise that tariffs have been a constant feature of his Presidential terms.

But no foreign policy doctrine that would imply, even demand, a consistency in behavior and decision-making is evident from President Trump's preferences. Instead, Trump clearly acts on impulses that are generally self-serving [6]. Subsequently, foreign affairs become, for Trump, a calculation that is far more about his personal gain than any other contributing factor. US interests impinge on his decisions only in terms of Trump's assumed voting base; anti-China and pro-Israel stances have dominated his foreign policy decisions because he determined that those subjects will win him the public support that he desires. Little-to-no ethical or ideological foundations exist for his decisions in regard to international relations.

Again, tariffs provide the instructive example. Usually, tariffs are a technique employed by industrializing economies to protect domestic industries broadly while they develop competitiveness, or by industrialized economies to protect certain narrow sectors or products, often for political reasons.

Trump, however, brandishes tariffs as a threat or a bargaining position, so any foreign country and any imported goods are potentially his target. He proceeds according to his own calculation of whether he can gain fast concessions from his target, and what the immediate results are. Trump has already threatened or even applied massive tariffs several times, only to lessen or retract them hours later after concessions from the opposite side.

The most recent episode, culminating last week in his sudden reversal of the global tariffs he had enacted only days earlier, was precipitated by Wall Street's panicked sell-off. Trump may have overplayed his tariffs this time because bond markets continue to indicate long-

term turbulence [8]. Stronger actors also retaliated with their own tariffs on US goods, as China did and as the EU was preparing to do.

The broader question is why Trump feels the need to wield tariffs like a scythe, slashing through the global economy like Alexander taking a sword to the Gordian Knot. As mentioned above, Trump has promoted tariffs since the 1980s as a policy tool, and ranted about how other countries were "ripping off" the US.

The reality is that the US benefitted massively from the global free trade regimes established in the 80 years since WWII. Most Americans enjoy living standards unprecedented in human history, and part of the reason is the liberal global order, which enabled much of the globe's wealth to flow into the US. American officials understood that rising life standards abroad would create a more prosperous, more peaceful, and safer world, which was clearly to America's advantage [9]. In other words, the US did not construct the global finance and trade system out of purely altruistic motives, or out of naivete.

Trump apparently never grasped that other countries prospering from free trade was actually a sign that the global system worked as envisioned, and that the US was a direct beneficiary even if it was not immediately obvious. His mind seems dominated by zero-sum calculations; if another country profits, then, by definition, it means that the US loses and is treated unfairly in that particular bilateral relationship. He cannot see the forest because of an excessive focus on a certain tree. Thus, tariffs became his answer.

Trump's meandering speech patterns and frustrated attempts to understand that larger machinery around him remind one of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. They are the doomed courtiers of Shakespeare's Hamlet, whom Tom Stoppard turned into tragicomic symbols of the modern condition in his brilliant black comedy, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead. Like Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Trump has only instinct and others' words to help him comprehend the ongoing drama that he finds himself swept up in. So his policy decisions are instinctual, but we all hope that he will listen more to others' instructive words during the coming four years.

War with Iran isn’t an option - Trump must make a deal

AS President Trump renews talks with Iran over its nuclear program, confusion has emerged over what kind of deal the administration wants. The president's special envoy to the Middle East, Steve Witkoff, has given mixed messages on how hardline the US negotiating position will be, stating in an April 14 interview with Fox News's Sean Hannity that capping Iran's uranium enrichment to 3.67 percent was an option (90 percent is required for a nuclear weapon).

Yet the following day, Witkoff announced on X that "Iran must stop and eliminate its nuclear enrichment and weaponization program." Which position the administration takes may determine whether the talks succeed or fail. Hawks are salivating at the prospects of the latter. One reason the failure of these talks seems not to bother the foreign policy hawks in Washington is because they believe there is a relatively easy and low-cost alternative to forestall Iran's nuclear ambitions: bombing. In January, South Carolina Sen. Lindsey Graham dismissed the idea of restraining Iran through diplomacy, giving it a "one in trillion chance" of succeeding. Military action, he said, had a "90 percent chance."

Arkansas Sen. Tom Cotton recently downplayed concerns over the risks of a conflict as "hysteria." Even Pennsylvania's Democratic Sen. John Fetterman said he would support a bombing campaign against Iran. All of these statements share a common thread

- the assumption that striking Iran to stop its nuclear program is a viable option. But it isn't.

The presupposition that the US, with its imposing military power, can easily pummel a middling state like Iran is an understandable one. In many respects it is true. Iran's military relies on outdated equip-

Scott Strgacich

ment - especially its air force, which operates many Cold War-era US aircraft, the replacement parts for which are obviously not forthcoming from their country of origin. Against the power of the US military, one could reasonably conclude Iran has no chance. However, the victory Trump would be pursuing in such a war would be strategic, not just operational. An Iranian battlefield defeat means nothing unless its nuclear program is permanently dismantled. Is that possible to do from the air? Likely not, and most policymakers don't seem to appreciate what this would involve.

Iran's nuclear program relies on a variety of facilities scattered across a country with a land area of 640,000 square miles. A US or joint US-Israeli campaign would require nationwide, sustained and round-the-clock sorties to hit not only nuclear sites but first air defense systems, radar installa-

such targets. It could require several sorties to disable just one site. The priority targets for such a campaign would likely be the Fordow and Natanz enrichment facilities and the Isfahan reactor, all located within the heart of Iran's air defense coverage.

Even if these sites and their accompanying defenses are neutralized, that isn't the end of the matter. The likelihood of Iran rushing to rebuild and weaponize its nuclear program if attacked is high. A sustained air campaign would likely be required to keep Iran's nuclear program down, with periodic bombing whenever sites are reconstituted. The impermanence of this solution could naturally lead some to conclude that only a US ground presence will do the job. Such an effort would be titanic in a country almost thrice as populous as 2003 Iraq, with one estimate putting the necessary US force to occupy the country at 1.6 million - nearly triple that at the height of the Vietnam War.

Attempts to launch a limited war to neuter Iran's nuclear program could easily morph into a quagmire that would overshadow Iraq, which is why the president's apparent skepticism of the idea is a positive sign. Still, Trump and his Cabinet should understand how catastrophic the military option is. A deal is the best alternative, but even muddling around in the uncertain status quo is infinitely preferable to inflicting on Americans another disastrous war in the Gulf. When it comes to war with Iran, the cure would be worse than the disease.

The presupposition that the US, with its imposing military power, can easily pummel a middling state like Iran is an understandable one. In many respects it is true. Iran's military relies on outdated equipment - especially its air force, which operates many Cold War-era US aircraft, the replacement parts for which are obviously not forthcoming from their country of origin.

Can Hezbollah be persuaded to peacefully disarm?

WILL Hezbollah agree to peacefully disarm through dialogue is the main question everyone is asking in Lebanon. President Joseph Aoun last week reaffirmed his desire to disarm Hezbollah this year. Understandably, his preferred option is to go through this process via a national dialogue. This situation cannot be isolated from the broader shifts in the region. The bigger dialogue is now taking place between Iran and the US. This places the next steps for the Lebanese state in a quandary. There is no doubt that the final decision on Hezbollah's disarmament will be taken in Tehran, as the group is an Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps tool of terror.

This was confirmed when the Iranian ambassador to Lebanon took to X last week to describe the planned disarmament, among other criticisms, as "a clear conspiracy against nations." It is a positive step that the Iranian ambassador was reportedly summoned over his remarks, as they represented a blatant interference in state affairs. Yet, what is Hezbollah today besides an interference tool in Lebanon?

It is a good sign of the will of the Lebanese state that it is striving for its sovereignty. This would not have been possible only a year ago. The reality is that Hezbollah has been reduced to rubble by Israel's military campaign. And with the political change in Syria, the Iranian proxy has lost the logistics

support from Iran that was essential to its operations. This is a huge difference that has helped the Lebanese state to enhance its sovereign voice. But this does not mean Hezbollah no longer has the capacity and power to destroy Lebanon or target its opponents in the country. If the regime in Tehran were to push Hezbollah into a confrontation, it would have a single outcome: Hezbollah's defeat and Tehran's humiliation. Tehran knows it, Hezbollah knows it. And the Iranian ambassador's posts on X underline this weakness. Simply because, in the past, the Lebanese president would have been summoned by a low-level intelligence officer to keep quiet about disarmament. Regardless, the Iranian regime has an opportunity to allow not only Lebanon to flourish, but also its own country and the region. Hezbollah's disarmament should be an important point in the dialogue with the US over the Iranian nuclear file, as it is a similar tool.

But I would call on the people of Lebanon to show stronger support for this disarmament. It is important to show that, beyond any regional agreement, it is the will of the people that the state has a monopoly on weapons. Aoun is remaining cautious in his approach as he understands very well that Hezbollah remains a military power that can be dangerous for the future of Lebanon. This is why there needs to be popular support for this historical transformation.

Khaled Abou Zahr

Hezbollah's disarmament could be the starting point for a new Lebanon. The starting point for a real and sustainable reconstruction. The starting point of a Lebanese renaissance. It offers a historic opportunity that cannot and should not be missed. This is why the Lebanese need to rally and push for this transformation, regardless of the outcome of the broader regional dialogues.

In this context, it is also important to build solid trust with the Shiite community and repeat until we lose our voices that Hezbollah should not represent them. Just as any armed militia never protected any community. The people must find ways to engage and convey this solidarity among all Lebanese communities. This would also offer much-needed support for the president's initiative. Any popular support should convey that disarming Hezbollah is not an action against the Shiite community, but salvation for all Lebanese. We also need hope and wishful thinking. It is important to convey that, just as it was proven that Hezbollah is an artificial power annihilated by Israel in a split second, it is also an artificial protector, just like the regime in Tehran. Not a single community in Lebanon should need protection from a foreign power - protection should be guaranteed. Rights and duties should be the same for all. I also believe, and I indeed keep losing my voice on this, that federalism is the best way forward. But for now, we need

greater trust among communities and this should also be reflected within social media exchanges. Paid voices should be silenced on both sides.

The solution proposed for Hezbollah members is to join the Lebanese army, but not as a separate unit. This would only take place after a peaceful agreement to disarm, which is not yet guaranteed. But if this were to happen, there would have to be a serious vetting process and those who are ideologically loyal to the regime in Tehran or who have committed terror crimes should be excluded from joining the Lebanese army. After all its actions, Hezbollah also should not be allowed to participate in any elections. Loyalty should be exclusive to Lebanon and the Lebanese Armed Forces. I believe Lebanon can learn from other countries that have gone through the same process. A change in how Tehran deals with Lebanon and its neighbors will also be crucial. Respecting a pledge of noninterference, abandoning any foreign military disruption and opting exclusively for state-to-state collaboration would be the silver bullet. This is what the US administration should aim for in its dialogue. Putting an end to the offensive activities of the Iranian regime is as important as the nuclear issue, if not more so. This would align with the aspirations of the region and the Lebanese people, for once converging regional goals with domestic ones.

Arab News

Abducted Ukrainian children

IMAGINE being a child watching in terror as your country is invaded, seeing bombs obliterate your town and wondering if your father fighting on the frontlines is even still alive. Then imagine being kidnapped by that invading army, taken to a hostile country where you are not allowed to speak your own language and told every day that your parents have abandoned you and your country soon will be wiped off the map.

For the approximately 20,000 Ukrainian children kidnapped by Russian forces, this nightmare is their reality. As the United States continues talks with Moscow and Kyiv to end the war in Ukraine, negotiators must prioritize the return of these innocent lives. While Russia's kidnapping and deportation of Ukrainian children has been occurring ever since Russia illegally annexed Crimea in May 2014, the numbers of these missing children have grown dramatically following the full-scale invasion in 2022. Notwithstanding Russia's claims that these are "evacuations" for "humanitarian reasons," Moscow's actual intent behind the abductions is as clear as it is sinister - to erase Ukrainian identity.

Oleksandra Matviichuk, a famous Ukrainian human rights lawyer and winner of the 2022 Nobel Peace Prize, asserts that reprogramming children to "reject their native language and culture is a genocidal tactic aimed at erasing a people by destroying its future." And that is exactly what Russia is attempting to do by sending the kidnapped Ukrainian children to "re-education" camps, where Russian operatives attempt to brainwash the children into forgetting or giving up their Ukrainian roots. One teenager who

Alexis Mrachek

was abducted and later returned to Ukraine recalled being forced to sing the Russian anthem every morning or be confined in a small cell. His captors repeatedly told him that Ukraine would soon cease to exist and replaced his Ukrainian birth certificate with a Russian version. In some instances, older Ukrainian children at the camps have been forced to undergo Russian military training so they can later "be sent to fight against fellow Ukrainians." Russia has also put numerous Ukrainian children up for foster care or adoption on a Russian federal adoption website.

According to the Dutch government, which has been working to identify the missing children and return them to Ukraine, Russia is utilizing Crimea as a "hub" for the illegal movement of Ukrainian citizens, including children. Once the children are abducted from the occupied regions, they are taken to Crimea, then often deported to Russia. Last December, Ukraine demanded that Russia terminate its colossal kidnapping campaign, but so far Moscow has not complied and instead denies any forcible transfer of Ukrainian children.

Ukraine needs help from allied nations to place pressure on the Russian regime, and the US is the best candidate to do this. Fortunately, the US government made one step in the right direction when it restored the database of a project at Yale University that had been tracking Russia's systematic deportations and adoptions of Ukrainian children. The project contributed to several criminal cases, including the International Criminal Court's indictment of Russian President

Vladimir Putin. And according to the Yale Daily News, the evidence compiled by the Yale Humanitarian Lab researchers "could lead to additional charges against Russian President Vladimir Putin; Maria Lvova-Belova, presidential commissioner for children's rights; and other officials involved."

While the project will not be restored at Yale because of the nearly complete halt to foreign aid, the data will be transferred to other parties, likely the International Criminal Court and Europol. This data is vital for achieving the return of all Russia-abducted Ukrainian children and prosecuting those involved in this war crime, so it is essential for the administration to ensure it is safely transferred to another entity. To pursue complete justice, the United States needs to ensure the prosecution of those involved in these war crimes and demand the return of all deported Ukrainian children to their families. One prosecution-related step the US could take would be to sanction the individuals who have been behind the abductions.

Ensuring the safe return of these kidnapped children is one of the few issues related to Ukraine that still enjoys bipartisan support. Both US parties must continue to put aside other differences for the sake of saving these innocent Ukrainian children from Russian hands. These children cannot be forgotten, especially as the war might be drawing to a close. If the return of all Ukrainian children is not included in the final deal garnered between Russia and Ukraine, then their return would likely never occur. Their return must be the priority of every lawmaker and politician involved in the negotiations.

The Hill

Governor updates foreign investors on Pak’s improving macroeconomic outlook

E.P. Report

KARACHI: Governor of the State Bank of Pakistan, Jameel Ahmad, reaffirmed Pakistan's improving macroeconomic stability and outlook during high-level meetings with senior executives from global financial and investment institutions, including JP Morgan, Standard Chartered, Deutsche, Jefferies, and major credit rating agencies. These engagements took place on the sidelines of the IMF-World Bank Spring Meetings in Washington, D.C.

Governor Ahmad briefed participants on the tangible progress Pakistan has made in stabilizing its economy. He highlighted that a prudent monetary policy, combined with sustained fiscal consolidation efforts, has led to macroeconomic sta-

bility in the country.

Ahmad highlighted that headline inflation has declined sharply over the past two years, reaching a multi-decade low of 0.7 percent in March 2025. Moreover, core inflation has also come down significantly from above 22 percent to a single-digit and is expected to moderate further in the coming months. Going forward, headline inflation is expected to stabilize within its target range of 5 to 7 percent, he viewed.

Regarding the external account, the Governor informed that Pakistan's FX buffers have registered a substantial qualitative as well as quantitative improvement. SBP's FX reserves have more than tripled since bottoming out in February 2023, whereas its forward liabilities have

also reduced significantly.

Mr. Ahmad highlighted that unlike previous episodes of reserve build-up, the ongoing rise in external buffers is not due to any further accumulation of external debt. In fact, Pakistan's public sector external debt, both in absolute terms and as a percent of GDP, has declined since June 2022. The Governor emphasized that this improvement reflects SBP's policy focus on building the economy's resilience against external shocks, including the ongoing trade-related global uncertainty. He explained that SBP has been able to build these FX buffers through FX purchases amidst a surplus in the external current account. He also shared that SBP is targeting to increase FX reserves to \$14 billion by June 2025.

Governor SBP highlighted that as the economic conditions have stabilized, Pakistan's GDP growth is gradually recovering and expected to be around 3 percent during FY25. He pointed out that the improvements in the country's economy have also been recognized by international credit ratings agencies.

Governor SBP shared that the focus of policy-makers has remained to preserve the macroeconomic stability and undertaking structural reforms across different sectors of the economy. Mr. Ahmad expressed his confidence that with continued progress on the reform agenda, Pakistan will be able to achieve sustainable economic growth and socioeconomic uplift for its people.

Traders observe shutdown in solidarity with Palestine

LAHORE (INP): Traders across Pakistan observed a complete shutdown on Saturday as a show of solidarity with Palestinians facing Israeli aggression in Gaza, according to Kashif Chaudhry, President of the Central Organization of

Traders Pakistan.

During a press conference in Lahore, Chaudhry confirmed that businesses remained closed "from Khyber to Karachi," with complete shutdowns reported in Punjab province including Gujranwala,

Gujarat, and Multan. Similar closures were observed across Sindh province, including Karachi and Hyderabad, as well as throughout Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Quetta.

"All of Pakistan is expressing solidarity with

the people of Palestine," Chaudhry stated, calling on the Pakistani government to impose restrictions on Israeli imports and ban the production and sale of Israeli products within the country.

Chaudhry also used the occasion to promote broader economic reforms, urging the introduction of Pakistani brands and calling for reduced electricity and gas costs for industry to boost domestic production.

Traders observed shutter-down strike in solidarity with Palestinians

RAWALPINDI (APP): The business community has registered a strong protest in solidarity with Palestinian people, through observing a shutter down strike across the city on Saturday.

Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RCCI) had called the traders for the strike, which remained successful. Besides traders, privately run schools and colleges also remained closed on Saturday.

On the other side, the acting President RCCI, Khalid

Farooq Qazi and Group Leader Sohail Altaf have said that the shutter-down strike call, in solidarity with the Palestinian people, was a resounding success.

In a joint statement after a review meeting which was held at the Chamber house on Saturday, both the leaders emphasized that supporting the oppressed Palestinians is a moral obligation and the need of the hour. They reaffirmed that the people of Pakistan, especially the business community, have a deep-rooted bond and unwaver-

ing support for the Palestinian cause.

"The RCCI leadership strongly condemned the ongoing Israeli brutality in Gaza", they said.

Vice President Fahad Barlas, Former Presidents Najam Rehan and Saqib Rafiq, Secretary Gymkhana Syed Rizwan Mashadi, Former SVP Asim Mahmood Malik, Former Secretary Gymkhana Faisal Aziz Bhatti, EC Member Bilal Maqbool, and other distinguished RCCI members were also present on the occasion.

Addressing fellow traders, Chaudhry made an emotional appeal: "The martyrs of Gaza have opened new business opportunities for you," suggesting that the boycott of Israeli products could create space for Pakistani businesses to grow.

The nationwide shutdown represents one of the largest coordinated business protests in recent Pakistani history, reflecting the strong sentiments across the country regarding the ongoing situation in Gaza.

UEA to offer admissions to high-quality Pakistani students

E.P. Report

LAHORE: The University of East Anglia (UEA), UK, plans to offer admissions to high-quality students from Pakistan across various academic disciplines in the coming year. This was announced by Professor Stephen Maguire, Pro Vice-Chancellor and International Head of UEA, during the UEA Agent Conference 2025 held in Lahore.

He also highlighted that UEA is currently ranked 21st among UK universities, making it a highly attractive destination for ambitious students aiming for academic excellence.

Professor Maguire stated

that the primary purpose of their visit to Pakistan is to raise awareness about scholarship opportunities available to Pakistani students. He emphasized that UEA is offering scholarships worth up to £10,000 to support talented students in pursuing higher education in the UK.

Accompanying the UEA delegation were distinguished academic leaders, including Professor Aamir Sharif and Professor Stephen Lecoq, representing the university's top departments such as the Business School and Computer Sciences. Their presence aimed to guide prospective students on the

admission process and share insights into their respective faculties' performance and offerings.

Speaking at the event, Syed Nooh, Head of Global Market Development at UEA, explained that these scholarships range from £6,000 to £10,000, depending on the academic performance and the selected field of study. He added that the scholarships are specifically designed keeping in mind the growing interest of Pakistani students in UK education.

Introducing the university, the UEA team shared that the University of East Anglia is a public sector university located in Norwich

Town, UK, and spans over 350 acres of campus.

Concluding the event, Syed Abir, Recruitment Manager for Pakistan, UEA, expressed gratitude to all participants. He acknowledged the presence of top 10 overseas education consultants from across Pakistan, including Paragon Overseas Education, for their active participation. He expressed hope that these partnerships will play a key role in guiding Pakistani students toward a brighter academic future.

UEA's administration is fully committed to welcoming Pakistani students and contributing positively to their educational journeys.

Reeves suggests UK trade with EU more important than US

PUBLIC NOTICE

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LONDON (BBC News): The UK's trade relationship with the EU is arguably "more important" than the one it has with the US, the chancellor has told the BBC.

Rachel Reeves suggested that moving closer to the EU on trade was a bigger priority, despite her current focus on talks with the US.

After her meeting with US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent on Friday, Reeves tweeted that both the UK and US want a deal that is "in both our national interests".

Earlier this week, she signalled the UK could lower tariffs on US car imports from their current 10% to 2.5% as part of a wider deal.

The UK is preparing for a summit with the EU in May in an attempt to "reset" the relationship between the two.

"I understand why there's so much focus on our trading relationship with the US but actually our trading relationship with Europe is

arguably even more important, because they're our nearest neighbours and trading partners," she told the BBC.

"Obviously I've been meeting Scott Bessent this week whilst I'm in Washington, but I've also this week met the French, the German, the Spanish, the Polish, the Swedish, the Finnish finance ministers - because it is so important that we rebuild those trading relationships with our nearest neighbours in Europe, and we're going to do that in a way that is good for British jobs and British consumers."

A Downing Street spokesman said the chancellor's remarks had been "a statement of fact that the EU is our largest trading partner".

The spokesman also highlighted comments that Sir Keir Starmer has made previously where he had said it was a "false choice between the EU and the

US".

Reeves said this week that the government is working "flat out" to secure a trade deal with the US.

She has said she wants to see "free and fair" trade, and wants to deepen the relationship between the US and UK in areas such as technology.

Conservative shadow business secretary Andrew Griffith told Sky News that his party would "absolutely be seeking to prioritise" a deal with the US over the EU.

Griffith argued that the UK already had a tariff-free deal on goods with the EU, therefore the "next best choice if you want to grow the economy after the chancellor's crashed it would be to get a deal with the US".

Liberal Democrat Treasury spokesperson Daisy Cooper MP said: "The chancellor is absolutely right that our trading relationship with Europe is more important, but the

government's approach so far shows there are little more than empty words.

"This government has bent over backwards to appease Donald Trump but barely lifted a finger to unleash growth by boosting trade with Europe."

"We're all grappling with tariffs"

Regarding the situation with the US, Reeves said she "understands what President [Donald] Trump wants to address" with his tariffs, ahead of talks with her US counterpart in Washington.

Reeves said there were similarities with the way both the US and UK governments had come to power off the back of voter frustration with the economy.

"We're all grappling with this issue of tariffs but I think that there is an understanding why President Trump wants to address some of the global imbalances there are in the system," she said.

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Iran to sign \$4 billion oilfields deal with Russia

MOSCOW (Al Jazeera): Iran will sign a \$4bn energy agreement with Russian companies, Iranian Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad has announced, as the two nations seek to bolster ties while trying to cope with punishing Western economic sanctions.

Paknejad said the deal aims to develop seven Iranian oilfields in cooperation with Russian firms.

From military cooperation to energy, banking and agriculture, Tehran and Moscow have been engaged in deeper ties since the start of the military conflict in Ukraine, signing a strategic partnership treaty in January.

Deal is seen as another step in their bid to remove barriers in all spheres of

their cooperation.

The deal also comes as Iran seeks to build momentum for nuclear negotiations with the United States that resume in Oman on Saturday, following consultations with its allies in Moscow and Beijing earlier this week.

Paknejad met with Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak, Putin's point man on relations with the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

The meeting took place as several members of OPEC+, the group comprising OPEC and its allies led by Russia, suggested that the group increase oil output in June for a second consecutive month.

The proposed increase



LAHORE: Special Assistant to Prime Minister, Ministry of Industries & Production, Haroon Akhtar Khan inaugurating ground-breaking ceremony of Pak Suzuki Bio-fuel Plant at Manga Mandi.

Business community stands firm with Army

LAHORE (APP): Pakistan Business Forum (PBF) Saturday expressed the resolve that the entire business community of the country is standing firm with Pakistan Armed Forces.

PBF President Khawaja Mehboob-ur-Rehman, in a media statement issued here, said that India must now get ready to face the reality, adding that India is habitual of pointing fingers at Pakistan just to hide its failure and shortcomings. But this obsolete approach is no longer workable and acceptable to the world community, he remarked.

Pak Suzuki committed to Carbon emissions reduction

E.P. Report

LAHORE: Pak Suzuki, the No. 1 automobile company in Pakistan, embarking on its vision is committed to Carbon emissions reduction to empower Pakistani lives with clean, green, environment friendly, affordable biofuel for automobiles.

With same vision, Pak Suzuki plan is to set up state of the art Biogas plant at its establishment situated at Manga Mandi which is just within 40 kms from Lahore.

This plant will be a model plant and act as catalyst for attracting private investment in Biofuel technology for clean, green, affordable fuel for transportation compared to Petrol; creating a sustainable mobility revolution.

This development marks a significant milestone in Pak Suzuki's resolve to contribute to the Pakistan Environmental goals through reduction in Carbon emissions in line with Suzuki Motor Corporation, Japan Environmental vision.

The ground-breaking ceremony of plant held on Saturday, performed by the Special Assistant to the Prime Minister (SAPM), Ministry of Industries & Production, Haroon Akhtar Khan.

Honorable SAPM highlighted that the Biogas technology has great potential for Pakistan's Carbon emission reduction goals as well as Petrol import savings for automobile fuel and industrial consumption. He congratulated Pak Suzuki management for taking

the First mover advantage in Biogas technology in automobile sector.

MD and CEO Pak Suzuki Hiroshi Kawamura expressed his gratitude to the honorable SAPM for his vision and support to Pak Suzuki initiative and emphasized that this project will not only serve as a harbinger for the Socio-Economic development of Pakistan through providing clean environment and employment generation; but will also result in huge Petrol import Savings for automobile transportation for the country.

Kawamura emphasized; What is needed is Government policy framework which will propel private sector investment to provide affordable clean green fuel for automobiles.

Huge funds allocated to promote ginger cultivation

FAISALABAD (APP): The government has allocated huge funds to boost ginger cultivation, said Dr. Abid Mahmood, chairman of Punjab Agricultural Research Board (PARB).

Addressing a one-day training seminar at Ayub Agricultural Research Institute (AARI) Faisalabad, he said that cultivation of summer vegetables like ginger in open fields is no longer feasible due to harsh summer weather in Punjab.

However, tunnel farming would help the farmers to cater to rising demand for ginger and other vegetables while achieving higher yields per acre, he added.

He also highlighted the importance of tunnel farming and said that ginger and other vegetables could be cultivated easily in tunnels due to rapid change in climate conditions.

The government would also provide subsidies of billions of rupees to the farmers to support vegetable cultivation under tunnels and the growers should avail from this opportunity at maximum extent to increase their income and play role in national food security, he added.

The seminar brought together a distinguished panel of experts including

Dr. Javed Ahmed Chief Scientist Wheat Department, Dr. Muhammad Iqbal Principal Scientist Vegetables Department, Deputy Director Agricultural Information Department Faisalabad Muhammad Ishaq Lashari, Ginger Expert Muhammad Aamir Latif and former directors Dr. Makhdoom Hussain and Najeeb Ullah in addition to progressive farmers and representatives of private seed companies.

During the session, Najeeb Ullah highlighted the widespread use of ginger in Pakistani cuisine as a spice as well as its applications in pickles, syrups and traditional medicine due to its medicinal properties.

Dr. Muhammad Iqbal pointed out that Pakistan heavily relies on ginger imports, which depletes valuable foreign exchange.

He urged the private companies to take a leading role in promoting ginger cultivation similar to the potato industry.

He explained that ginger is typically planted between late February and mid-March. He said that intense hot and dry winds during May and June in Punjab can severely damage ginger crops. Hence, the farmers should adopt necessary pro-

ductive measures to save their ginger crops during hot summer, he added.

Muhammad Aamir Latif said that moderate and humid climates are ideal for ginger growth. In this connection, tunnel farming is imperative due to challenging environment in Punjab, he added. He also thanked the agri scientists for advancements in tissue culture technology and said that ginger plants are now being provided to the farmers at affordable rates.

He said that research efforts have improved production techniques and the farmers should initially cultivate ginger on a small scale to gain experience and develop their own seed stock. Agricultural scientists from the Vegetable Department at AARI led by Muhammad Aamir have successfully propagated ginger plants through tissue culture.

Progressive farmers from the Pothohar region shared their success stories and revealed that yields of 1.5 to 2 kilograms per plant are achievable if the ginger growers act upon the recommendation of agriculture experts. Later, shields were also distributed among the guests while the certificates provided to the participants.



In brief

Pakistan's outstanding performance in Baseball

THAILAND (PPI): The Pakistan national women's baseball team secured a place in the medal round of the Fourth Asia Cup Women's Baseball Qualifiers 2025 by defeating Iran and Sri Lanka. On the second day of the ongoing tournament in Thailand, Pakistan defeated Iran by 17 runs to 2. Despite visa issues, the team displayed exceptional determination. Syed Fakhar Ali Shah, Secretary General of the Pakistan Federation Baseball, stated, "This is our first victory, and we will give our best in the next match as well." Pakistan achieved a 10-5 victory against Sri Lanka in the second match. On this success, President of Pakistan Federation Baseball Shaukat Javed, Chairperson of the Women's Wing Sadia Alvi, Secretary Ayesha Aram, and others congratulated the team. With this success, Pakistan has aimed to reach the semi-finals. Special congratulations were extended to team leader Syed Fakhar Ali Shah, team officials, coaches, and players.

Pakistan triumphs at Golf C'ship

KARACHI (Monitoring Desk): Pakistan's golfers have once again brought pride to the nation with an exceptional performance at the 38th Bangladesh Amateur Golf Championship held in Dhaka. The Pakistan Ladies' Team, comprising Parkha Ijaz and Aania Farooq Syed, secured first position in the team event, defeating Bangladesh A Team by just one stroke in a closely contested game. In the individual women's category, Aania Farooq Syed clinched first place, while Parkha Ijaz secured second position, maintaining their dominance throughout the competition. Their consistent performances not only led Pakistan to victory in the team event but also showcased individual brilliance on the international stage. In the men's individual category, Pakistan's Numan Ilyas earned second place, further highlighting the country's growing strength in amateur golf. The golfers' impressive achievements reflect the hard work, skill, and dedication of Pakistan's players, setting a new benchmark for future international competitions.

McIlroy and Lowry stay six off Zurich Classic pace
NEW ORLEANS (Agencies): Defending champions Rory McIlroy and Shane Lowry remained six off the pace at the halfway stage of the Zurich Classic after dropping three late shots in New Orleans. The Irish duo, aiming to become the first players to successfully defend the title, started the day six adrift following their eight-under-par fourball round of 64 on Thursday. They looked set to be closer to the leaders after playing their opening 12 holes on Friday in six under par under the four-somes format but their late stumbles included bogeys at their final two holes as they signed for a 69. US rookies Kevin Vele and Isaiiah Salinda retained their lead after also carding a 69. "We were six under through 12 and cruising and then a bit of a bad finish but I didn't feel like we played that badly to have the finish that we did," said McIlroy, competing in his first event since completing the career Grand Slam by winning the Masters two weeks ago. "A couple of loose shots here and there."



LAHORE: Kamran Ghulam gave Multan Sultans a late lift off.

Afridi slams India's baseless allegations over Pahalgam attack

KARACHI (Monitoring Desk): Pakistan cricket team's former captain, Shahid Afridi, has voiced concern over India's premature and unsubstantiated accusations against Pakistan following the recent Pahalgam attack in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK). Speaking to the media in Dubai, Afridi criticised New Delhi for blaming Pakistan without any evidence, calling the act both "unfortunate and unjustified." He said India was too quick to hold Pakistan responsible for the incident, which resulted in the loss of lives in the occupied territory. Afridi further expressed sorrow over the loss of human lives in Kashmir and condemned the increasing wave of terrorist attacks within Pakistan.

He called for diplomacy to be the path forward between the two nuclear-armed neighbours, stating, "Dialogue is the only solution to our issues; conflict brings no benefit." Emphasising the need to keep sports separate from political tensions, the former skipper urged both nations to ensure cricket is not dragged into geopolitical disputes. Pakistan-India tensions on rise Tensions are running high between nuclear-armed neighbours after Tuesday's deadly gun attack in the Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir's (IIOJK) Pahalgam area killed at least 27 tourists, pushing bilateral ties to a new low in nearly two decades. A day after the attack,

New Delhi suspended a water-sharing treaty, announced the closure of the main land border crossing with Pakistan, downgraded diplomatic ties, and withdrew visas for Pakistanis. In response, Islamabad ordered the expulsion of Indian diplomats and military advisers, cancelling visas for Indian nationals, except Sikh pilgrims — and closing the main border crossing from its side. Pakistan also warned any attempt by India to stop the supply of water from the Indus River would be an "act of war". Kashmir has been divided between India and Pakistan since its independence in 1947. India still has not fulfilled its promise of holding a UN-mandated plebiscite.

O'Sullivan dominating last-16 match against Pang

SHEFFIELD (Agencies): Ronnie O'Sullivan built a 6-2 lead against China's Pang Junxu as he dominated the first session of their last-16 match at the World Snooker Championship. O'Sullivan, 49, is aiming to become the first man in the modern era to win the event eight times and he remained on course to do so after pouncing on repeated mistakes from qualifier Pang, who is ranked 27th in the world. The match resumes at 14:30 BST on Sunday with O'Sullivan comfortably ahead. He will win with a session to spare in the unlikely event he claims seven of Sunday's eight scheduled frames.

O'Sullivan had won the closing five frames in his 10-4 success over Ali Carter in round one and raced into a 4-0 lead against Pang, aided by breaks of 58, 91, 50 and 63. Pang made a 119 break in frame five, but that was his only run above 50. He had a chance to end only two frames behind, but another miss in frame eight helped O'Sullivan inch a step closer to the winning target in the best-of-25-frame match. Williams, 50, becomes oldest quarter-finalist since 2010. Three-time world champion Mark Williams became the second man to move into the quarter-finals as he battled past Iran's Hossein Vafaei, earning a 13-10 win. Wales' Williams turned 50 in March and he becomes the oldest player to reach the last eight at the Crucible since six-time winner Steve Davis did so in 2010 at the age of 52. Williams held a 9-7 advantage after the second session on Friday and he took two of the first three frames on Saturday. Qualifier Vafaei made breaks of 74 and 72 to narrow the gap to 11-10, but Williams was not to be denied and pressed on towards the winning post, fashioning a stylish 115 to seal his victory. Englishman Chris Wakelin became the first man through to the last eight when he defeated Northern Ireland's Mark Allen on Friday. Higgins and Xiao set for late-night finish The second-round match between John Higgins and Xiao Guodong will go to a late-night finish, with the Scot 12-11 in front and needing one more frame to reach the quarter-finals. Only seven of the scheduled nine frames could be completed in Saturday's opening session. With the afternoon session scheduled to begin at 14:30 BST, Higgins and Xiao were hauled off shortly before 14:15. Higgins squandered a glorious chance to wrap up victory as he led 53-33 in the 23rd frame but missed a black off the spot before Xiao kept his tournament hopes alive. They will resume on the first available table after Saturday's scheduled evening matches. The match was tied at 8-8 when they resumed in the morning, and Xiao, ranked 14th in the world, made a break of 76 to move 9-8 ahead. Four-time world champion Higgins responded by taking the next two frames to nudge in front at 10-9.

Ipswich relegated as Newcastle, Chelsea boost top five bids

LONDON (AFP): Ipswich were relegated from the Premier League after slumping to a 3-0 defeat against Newcastle, while Chelsea kept alive their hopes of a top five finish with a 1-0 win over Everton on Saturday. Emblematic of the self-inflicted wounds that hampered Ipswich this season, Kieran McKenna's side had Ben Johnson sent off in the 37th minute for two bookings in quick succession at St James' Park. Newcastle's Alexander Isak converted a penalty after Jacob Murphy was fouled by Julio Enciso in first half stoppage-time. Dan Burn's 56th-minute header doubled Newcastle's lead and William Osula's 80th-minute goal left Ipswich with no chance of beating the drop. Third-bottom Ipswich are 15 points behind fourth-bottom West Ham with four games left, ensuring their first season in the top-flight for 22 years will end with an immediate return to the Championship. Out of their depth among the Premier League elite, Ipswich have won just four of their 34 league games. Their relegation alongside Southampton and Leicester, who were both already condemned to the drop, means all three promoted sides will be back in the second tier next season. Ipswich's fairytale rise to the Premier League had captured the hearts of football romantics after their successive promotions from League One and the Championship. McKenna, 38, had earned plaudits for Ipswich's attacking style during their surge up the divisions after his appointment in 2021. But the former Manchester United assistant coach was unable to preserve Ipswich's top-flight status. Newcastle climb to third place as the League Cup winners eye Champions League qualification. Enzo Maresca saluted Chelsea's "nasty" performance after a gritty success that kept them in the hunt for a Champions League berth. Nicolas Jackson struck for the first time since December to seal a vital victory at Stamford Bridge. The Senegal striker's first-half blast from 20 yards moved Chelsea into fifth place with four games left. 'We were nasty' Chelsea's third win in their last five league matches eased the pressure on Blues boss Maresca, who has come under fire for his team's cautious tactics during their slump in the second half of the season. "First half we controlled the game, we dominated, created chances and didn't concede nothing. Then second half we dropped a little bit," he said. "We were strong, nasty enough when we needed to be like that. Overall I think we deserved to win and we are happy." Ryan Sessegnon struck in stoppage-time as Fulham won 2-1 at Southampton to stop the hosts moving past the record-low Premier League points total set by Derby. Jack Stephens' 14th-minute opener had Southampton on course for a

first home league victory since November, but Emile Smith Rowe levelled for Fulham after 72 minutes. A draw would have helped Southampton move onto 12 points and avoid Derby's unwanted lowest-ever Premier League points total of 11 from the 2007-08 season, only for Sessegnon to net in the final seconds. Brighton reignited their European push by piling more misery on former manager Graham Potter with a dramatic 3-2 victory over West Ham at the Amex Stadium. Potter, who left Albion to join Chelsea in 2022, saw Mohammed Kudus and Tomas Soucek put the Hammers ahead after Yasin Ayari's opener for Brighton. But Kaoru Mitoma headed the Seagulls level in the 89th minute before Carlos Baleba sensationally curled home from distance in stoppage-time. Brighton ended a five-match winless run, while West Ham's dismal streak extended to a seventh game without victory. Potter has taken just 13 points from 14 games since replacing the sacked Julen Lopetegui in January. Wolves claimed a club record-equalling sixth successive top-flight win as they put relegated Leicester to the sword with a 3-0 victory at Molineux. Matheus Cunha, Jorgen Strand Larsen and Rodrigo Gomes scored for Wolves, who last won six in a row in the top-flight in 1970, while second-bottom Leicester's winless run stretched to 11 matches.



LONDON: Jordan Pickford of Everton jumps for the ball during the Premier League match between Chelsea FC and Everton FC.

Marquez claims Spanish MotoGP sprint victory

JEREZ DE LA FRONTERA (AFP): Marc Marquez secured his fifth consecutive sprint victory at the Spanish Grand Prix in Jerez on Saturday to expand his lead at the top of the MotoGP standings. The six-time premier class world champion took 12 points on his factory Ducati to reach 135 in total, ahead of his brother Alex Marquez, who came in second, 1.001sec behind, and is also second overall, 20 points behind the leader. Francesco Bagnaia, third overall, also finished third in the sprint to reach 104 points. French rider Fabio Quartararo started in pole position after setting a Jerez course record on his Yamaha earlier in qualifying but he fell on turn six of the second lap, allowing Marc Marquez to claim the lead, which he held on to. "Today it wasn't easy because of these very high temperatures," said Marc Marquez under the sizzling Andalusian sun. "I struggled a bit at the end but I was controlling (it)." Marc Marquez, is undefeated in the sprint races this season after winning just one last season, the former Honda rider looking ever more comfortable on his factory Ducati. He opened up a 1.4 second gap on Alex Marquez, in second at the halfway point, with the top six all riding Ducatis in the sprint -- Maverick Vinales came in seventh on his KTM. Alex Marquez started the race fourth, but was able to edge ahead of

Bagnaia right at the start and moved up to second when Quartararo lost the front and crashed out. Quartararo held off Marc Marquez at the start of the sprint and despite his early exit was pleased with his day's work. "It was very good for me on a mental level, and after that I was pushing the limit a lot... when Marc came alongside me, my bike moved a lot and I could not stop it," said the Frenchman. "It would have been better to finish differently -- but we can be happy." Reigning MotoGP world champion Jorge Martin was not involved as he recovers from various injuries after a brutal crash in the previous race in Qatar, and he stands virtually no chance of defending his title.



Djokovic crashes to nervous Arnaldi in Madrid opener



MADRID (AFP): Novak Djokovic's bid for a 100th career title was spoiled by Italian Matteo Arnaldi, who beat the Serb 6-3, 6-4 in the Madrid Open second round on Saturday. The fourth-seeded Djokovic suffered a second consecutive opening defeat, he also exited in his opener against Alejandro Tabilo in Monte Carlo two weeks ago. Arnaldi, ranked 44th in the world, recorded just the second top-five win of his career and scribbled 'OMG' on the camera lens after his landmark victory. "At the start I was just trying to not s*** in my pants, to be honest," said the 24-year-old Arnaldi. The athletic Arnaldi squandered a 2-0 lead early in the contest but pounced again in the eighth game, breaking the Djokovic serve. The Italian wrapped up the opening set in 48 minutes. Djokovic, a three-time champion in Madrid, fired 20 unforced errors in the first frame and finished the contest with a total of 32. "He's my idol, he's always been. I was just glad that I could play him because I never played him, I just practised once with him. So playing him on a stage like this was already a victory for me," said Arnaldi, who showcased an entertaining brand of all-court tennis. "But, you know, he is not at his best right now, so I came on court to try to play my best tennis and win. It happened. So

right now, I don't even know what to say." Elsewhere, Lorenzo Musetti, playing his first match since reaching the biggest final of his career in Monte Carlo, moved past Argentina's Tomas Etcheverry 7-6 (7/3), 6-2 to book a third-round meeting with Stefanos Tsitsipas. The talented Italian is on the cusp of making his top-10 debut, having entered the tournament at a career-high number 11. Musetti admitted he is doing his best not to check the ATP live rankings website until he officially joins the top-10 club. "This week, I don't want to look," said the 23-year-old, who moved up to number nine in the live rankings on Saturday. Reigning Australian Open champion Madison Keys was broken when serving for her third-round victory at 5-4 in the second set against Anna Kalinskaya, but recovered to complete a 7-5, 7-6 (7/3) in one hour and 48 minutes. The fifth-seeded Keys lost to Kalinskaya earlier this month in Charleston. "I knew I had to raise my level after getting a bit of spanking last time," said Keys. A semi-finalist in Madrid 12 months ago, Keys awaits her compatriot Emma Navarro or Croatia's Donna Vekic in the round of 16. American fourth seed Coco Gauff eased past compatriot Ann Li 6-2, 6-3 to set up a last-16 clash with Swiss Olympic gold medallist Belinda Bencic. Seventh-seeded teenager Mirra Andreeva continued her impressive form at WTA 1000 tournaments this season by storming into the fourth round with a 7-5, 6-3 performance against Polish 27th-seed Magdalena Frech. The 17-year-old Russian, who won back-to-back titles in Dubai and Indian Wells, will take on Ukrainian qualifier Yulia Starodubtseva for a shot at reaching a second consecutive Madrid quarter-final.

PSL: Pakistan cancels visas of Indian broadcasters

LAHORE (Monitoring Desk): Amid escalating tensions between Pakistan and India, the Pakistani government has revoked the visas of Indian broadcasters associated with the Pakistan Super League (PSL) Season 10, ordering their immediate expulsion from the country. Following government instructions, 23 Indian crew members working with the PSL broadcast company were deported under the supervision of Lahore police and sent back to India via the Wagah Border.

Sources confirmed that the decision was made swiftly to ensure the protection of Pakistan's sovereignty and national dignity, especially in contrast India's aggressive and hostile actions in recent days. According to the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB), the move will not affect the broadcast of PSL 10 matches. The board has already arranged alternative broadcasters who would continue coverage of the remaining matches as per the original schedule, ensuring no disruption

for cricket fans. PCB emphasised that all matches and their live telecasts would proceed smoothly and without interruption, providing complete entertainment for viewers. Officials added that this action sent a clear message to India that Pakistan would not compromise on its sovereignty and would always prioritise national interests. Initially, about 23 Indian technical and production staff were part of the PSL broadcasting team, performing various critical functions before their departure.



In brief

PAC, Gandhara Resource Center sign MoU

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Punjab Arts Council (PAC) Rawalpindi and the Center for Culture & Development (C2D), Gandhara Resource Center Pakistan signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) today in a ceremony held in Rawalpindi, marking a significant step toward preserving and promoting Pakistan's cultural heritage. According to the details, under the MoU, both the institutions will organize joint initiatives, including workshops, seminars, art exhibitions, cultural festivals, and research programs to encourage public participation, particularly among youth. The agreement aims to strengthen collaboration to promote arts, culture, research, and training, with a focus on preserving Pakistan's diverse traditions, supporting artists, and enhancing cultural engagement. Speaking at the event, Sajjad Hussain, Director PAC underlined the importance of the partnerships in reviving Pakistan's artistic legacy. He termed the MoU a major step in promoting cultural exchange and providing opportunities for emerging artists. Sarah Mahmood, Director of Gandhara Resource Center Pakistan, highlighted the role of joint efforts in cultural preservation. "The shared resources would help create meaningful programs celebrating heritage while contributing to socio-economic growth", she said. She further highlighted that the partnership would also focus on research projects related to the Gandhara civilization and other historical themes.

IRSA releases 118,500 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Saturday released 118,500 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 129,400 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, the water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1431.43 feet which was 29.43 feet higher than dead level of 1402.00 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 39,100 cusecs and 43,300 cusecs respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1129.60 feet, which was 79.60 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 47,100 cusecs and 32,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 62,700, 44,300, 34,800 and 7,400 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 22,400 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 12,500 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.

Bike lifters gangs busted

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawal Division Police in operations against bike lifters on Sunday busted two gangs of seven accused and recovered 14 stolen motorcycles from their possession. According to the police spokesman, the Ratta Amral Police recovered 10 stolen motorcycles from the gang of four accused Shahzeb, Rehman Taj, Afzal and Mansoor. Similarly, the Waris Khan Police nabbed the gang comprising three accused Saqib, Usman and Abdul Samad, recovering four stolen motorcycles from them. Meanwhile, Superintendent of Police Rawal Muhammad Haseeb Raja appreciated the Ratta Amral and Waris Khan Police teams for busting the bike lifters gangs and directed them to prepare challans against them with solid evidence to get them punished from court.

Larger-sized India suffers from insecurity syndrome: Ahsan

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Professor Ahsan Iqbal on Saturday said that India, despite being nearly seven times larger than Pakistan, continued to suffer from an insecurity syndrome, often shifting blame onto its neighbour for its own security shortcomings. "Despite being seven times larger in size, possessing an expansive landmass, and having centuries of statehood experience, India continues to suffer from an insecurity syndrome — in sharp contrast to Pakistan, which, with only 77 years of statehood

and a comparatively smaller geography and population, demonstrates greater composure and maturity," the minister said in a press statement. Referring to the tragic Jafarabad Express terrorist attack, Ahsan Iqbal noted that Pakistan responded in a responsible and mature manner by acknowledging internal security lapses and committing to addressing them, even while credible evidence pointed towards foreign involvement. Conversely, he observed that India's reaction to the Pahalgam tragedy was impulsive and reactive — rather than acknowledging its own

security shortcomings, it hastily shifted blame onto Pakistan without any substantiated evidence. Ahsan Iqbal further emphasized that since 1993, no political leader in Pakistan has resorted to exploiting anti-India sentiment for electoral purposes. While in stark contrast, in India, invoking the "Pakistan card" and stirring anti-Pakistan sentiments remains a recurrent feature of pre-election political campaigns. He described the irresponsible conduct of the Indian government and media as a striking irony, remarking, "What an irony!"

Minister launches complaint cell to ensure transparency in maritime sector

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs, Muhammad Junaid Anwar Chaudhry, on Saturday launched a complaint cell aimed at key component of the upcoming comprehensive reforms agenda in maritime sector for promoting transparency and ensuring faster delivery of public services. In line with the vision of Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, Junaid Anwar Chaudhry launched the complaint cell, which is a new platform dedicated to receiving public grievances and suggestions related to maritime affairs, said a press release.

At the inauguration of complaint cell, the minister stated that the launch

reflects the vision of the prime minister, who has emphasized the importance of open communication between government institutions and the public. He said, "This complaint cell demonstrates the government's commitment to good governance and public service, acting as a bridge between the ministry and all stakeholders, including citizens, seafarers, port users, and investors."

Through the minister's complaint cell, individuals can now lodge complaints, highlight issues, or offer constructive suggestions regarding maritime operations, port management, shipping policies, and other areas falling under the ministry's jurisdiction. The

feedback collected will help in policy refinement, service improvement, and quick resolution of legitimate concerns.

Junaid Chaudhry said this initiative is aimed at promoting transparency, accountability, and greater stakeholder engagement in maritime governance.

The complaint cell will be available online through the ministry's official website and accessible via email and phone. A dedicated team will ensure timely responses and effective follow-ups.

The federal minister noted this step marks a significant milestone in the ministry's efforts to modernize and make the country's maritime sector more efficient, people-centric, and responsive.



ISLAMABAD: Federal minister for railways Muhammad Hanif Abbasi in an important meeting along with senior minister from Punjab, Maryam Aurangzeb.

Bajwa directs WASA to complete monsoon preparations

RAWALPINDI (APP): Punjab's Parliamentary Secretary Housing, Urban Development and Public Health Engineering Department Sultan Bajwa on the special instructions of Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz visited the WASA Rawalpindi to review preparations for the monsoon season.

During a meeting with Water and Sanitation Agency (WASA) Rawalpindi Muhammad Saleem Ashraf, Bajwa directed that preparations for the monsoon season should be completed on an emergency basis.

He said obstacles to the flow of water in drains and drains across the city should be removed so that any kind of flood situation could be dealt with during the rains. All institutions would have to work together in that regard.

He urged the relevant institutions to take steps to prevent encroachments on drains and dumping of building materials.

Earlier, the WASA MD, in his briefing on the monsoon preparations, informed the parliamentary secretary that the Agency had completed 80 percent of the cleaning of sewer lines like every

year, while the remaining work would be completed before May 15.

The machinery used for drainage from low-lying areas during the rains had also been repaired, while all jetting, suction and dewatering machines were in working condition, he added.

Saleem Ashraf further said funds had been sought from the Punjab Government for cleaning of the Leh Nullah and 15 major drains of the city.

He said WASA was trying to provide basic facilities like clean drinking water and sewage to the citizens of Rawalpindi. He said several steps were being taken to further strengthen the active role of WASA.

Professional engineers had been hired through the Punjab Public Source, who were playing their role for the betterment of the institution, he added. The WASA MD said they had tightened the noose around defaulters and for the first time in Agency's history, more than Rs 2 billion had been recovered lessening the financial problems.

As regards the water situation, the MD said that the water requirements had

increased with the onset of summer. Currently WASA was supplying 51 million gallons of water against the demand of 70 million gallons per day from three sources, including Rawal Dam, Khanpur Dam and tube-wells.

He said to meet the shortage, WASA was working on mega projects, including under DREAMS which 12 million gallons of water would be obtained from Chahan Dam, an additional five million gallons from Rawal Dam, and eight million gallons from Khanpur Dam. The completion of the projects would help in removing the water shortage.

Moreover, he said, work was being started on the feasibility project of Daduchha Dam, while its construction work was also in full swing. The dam would be able to provide 35 million gallons of water per day.

Parliamentary Secretary Bajwa appreciated the efforts of WASA Rawalpindi and said that according to the vision of the Chief Minister of Punjab, providing water and sewerage facilities to every citizen was the top priority and all resources should be utilized for that.



RAWALPINDI: Pakistani Roman Catholic Christians and clergymen gather during the solemn mass for the soul of the deceased Pope Francis at Saint Joseph Cathedral Church in Rawalpindi. —APP Photo

QAU crowned Pakistan's top university

ISLAMABAD (APP): Quaid-i-Azam University (QAU) has once again solidified its standing as Pakistan's premier institution, earning the distinction of being ranked #1 in the country and securing an impressive 137th position in Asia in the Times Higher Education (THE) Asia University Rankings 2025. According to QAU, this latest achievement continues QAU's tradition of excellence, with the university consistently recognized as Pakistan's best by all major global ranking agencies. Adding to its list of accolades, QAU was ranked 315th globally in the QS World University Rankings 2025, 86th in the QS Asia University Rankings 2025, and an outstanding 58th for Citations per Faculty — a testament to the impactful research produced by its scholars.

The success of QAU is a collective triumph, made possible by the relentless dedication of its brilliant faculty, committed staff, talented students, and accomplished alumni. Together, they have propelled QAU to new heights, reinforcing the university's reputation as a beacon of knowledge, innovation, and academic excellence, an official of the university told APP.

He said that despite facing significant financial constraints and budgetary challenges, QAU continues to shine brightly on the global academic stage. However, to sustain and build upon this legacy of excellence, urgent and sustained government support is essential. Investing in institutions like QAU is an investment in Pakistan's future — one that promises continued innovation, discovery, and global recognition. He also congratulated the entire QAU family on this remarkable milestone.

CDA chairman inspects Park Enclave

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chairman Capital Development Authority (CDA) Muhammad Ali Randhawa conducted a surprise visit to Park Enclave I, II, and III on Saturday to review ongoing development projects. Senior CDA officials, including members of administration, finance and planning, accompanied him. During the inspection, Randhawa assessed road infrastructure, water supply, sewerage systems, and beautification efforts.

He directed immediate upgrading the main gate, road networks, parks and street lighting to enhance the area's aesthetics. "Park Enclave is a landmark project and all resources will be utilized to ensure its success," he stated. The chairman also ordered the removal of encroachments and illegal constructions, emphasizing strict legal action. Residents appreciated his visit, with Randhawa pledging regular follow-ups to address issues. Officials briefed him on progress, noting that 75% of plots in Phase II have been allotted, while electrical work in Phase III is nearing completion. Tenders for streetlights will soon be advertised. Randhawa instructed the Finance Wing to release funds promptly and prioritized boundary wall construction in Phase III.

Railway stations' upgradation key to boost PR's revenue: Kayani

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister of State for Railways Bilal Azhar Kayani Saturday said that the upgradation of small railway stations across all divisions and districts to enhance passenger convenience would significantly increase Pakistan Railways' revenue.

Speaking at a ceremony in Sohawa, Jehlum, Bilal Kayani said that upgrading local stations would reduce the need for passengers to travel long distances to major cities like Karachi, Lahore and Peshawar.

The minister announced that on May 10, formal inauguration ceremonies would be held for the addition of stops at Jehlum and Sohawa stations for the Rehman Baba Express and

Awam Express trains to facilitate the locals.

He said that initially, Rehman Baba Express would stop at Jehlum and Awam Express at Sohawa on a three-month trial basis.

Bilal Kayani stressed that if these stations fail to generate sufficient revenue during the trial period, the stops would be discontinued, in accordance with merit-based assessments.

Commenting on recent developments involving India, Bilal Kayani sent a clear message from the soil of Jehlum — known for its martyrs and veterans — saying, "Last time, we only served Abhinandan tea; this time, we are ready to serve tea to all of India."

The minister con-

demned India's recent unilateral actions, particularly the suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty despite World Bank guarantees, calling them illegal and a violation of international laws.

He highlighted that India's continued Illegal Occupation of Jammu and Kashmir remains unrecognized globally.

Bilal Kayani also pointed to credible evidence linking India to the killings of several individuals in countries like Canada and the United States. He accused India of supporting terrorism within Pakistan, emphasizing that these actions demonstrate India's blatant disregard for international laws and its role in promoting global terrorism.

Closing ceremony of Ghazi Week ICT Police salutes bravery of ghazis

ISLAMABAD (APP): The closing ceremony of 'Ghazi Week' was held at the Rescue-15 field office on Saturday to honour the sacrifices and bravery of Islamabad Police Ghazis.

A police spokesman told APP that the event was attended by Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Muhammad Jawad Tariq as the chief guest, alongside other senior police officers and Ghazis who have been injured in the line of duty.

DIG Tariq paid tribute to the police officers who displayed exceptional courage, selflessness and dedication while carrying out their duties. He emphasized that the Ghazis of

Islamabad Police, though injured, have continued to serve the nation with unwavering commitment, showing no concern for their own safety.

"The Ghazis of Islamabad Police are not only brave but are a precious asset to the nation," said DIG Tariq. "They have written remarkable tales of heroism, which will be forever remembered in our history. The families of these heroes also deserve deep respect, as their sacrifices contribute to the safety and security of the nation," he added.

DIG Tariq also acknowledged the parents of the Ghazis, recognizing the

role they played in raising such courageous officers. "The entire Islamabad Police force salutes these brave souls, whose courage and dedication serve as an inspiration for future generations," he stated.

The ceremony underscored the significance of 'Ghazi Week,' not only as a tribute to the fallen and injured officers but also as an opportunity to inspire the younger generation of law enforcement officers. Police officials expressed that such events will continue to be held to honour the legacy of the Ghazis, ensuring that their sacrifices are never forgotten.

PDMA DG warns of sudden temperature rise

ISLAMABAD (APP): Director General (DG) PDMA Punjab Irfan Ali Khatia Saturday stressed the need for massive forestation efforts to combat the severe impacts of climate change and urged citizens to take immediate precautions as temperatures are expected to rise suddenly by 5 to 7 degrees till May 1.

While in exclusive conversation with a private news channel, he said the Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD) fore-

cast hot and dry weather across most parts of the country over the next 24 hours, with southern regions expected to experience very hot conditions. He stated that on the directions of the Chief Minister of Punjab, the PDMA has issued an advisory and alert for the Cholistan community, ensuring availability of water resources and funds.

He elaborated that a comprehensive coordination effort is underway, involving multiple depart-

ments to effectively tackle the impending heatwave and its potential consequences, ensuring a unified and robust response to the situation. He added that Met office has also issued a heatwave alert forecasting soaring temperatures across the country from April 26 to 30 due to a high-pressure system in the upper atmosphere. Authorities had advised relevant departments and the public to remain vigilant and take necessary precautions.



ISLAMABAD: A vendor prepares currency note garland for sale at Aabpara market. —APP Photo

Uplift projects launched

KABUL (Pajhwok): The Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development has launched 69 development projects worth 86 million afghanis in the Wazikhsa district of southeastern Paktika province. According to a statement from the ministry, the projects include the construction of a small dam, rural roads, bridges, culverts, retaining walls, and irrigation canals. These initiatives aim to tackle key infrastructure challenges in the district.

The Frontier Post

Shawwal 28, 1446 — Sunday, April 27, 2025

100 Afghans freed from jails

KABUL (Pajhwok): Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR) says 98 more Afghan citizens have returned to their homeland after being released from prisons in Pakistan. The ministry citing border officials in Kandahar's Spin Boldak town wrote on X the 98 Afghans, who spent one to four days in jails, had been arrested in various parts of Pakistan. After receiving humanitarian assistance, the returnees were transported to their respective native areas, the ministry added.

Gold price surges in Afghanistan amid global trade tensions

KABUL (TOLONews): Amid escalating trade tensions between China and the United States, the price of gold has seen a significant increase both in global markets and in Afghanistan.

Several residents of Kabul, who were purchasing gold for celebratory events, said that due to economic hardships, they can no longer afford to buy gold.

They express hope that gold prices will drop in the country's markets.

Mohammad Kabir, a Kabul resident, told TOLONews: "I came to the market yesterday because we have a wedding and needed gold. Compared to a few days ago, prices have risen sharply. My financial situation, and that of the people is weak, and buying gold has become very difficult."

Faisal, another Kabul resident, said: "Gold has become more expensive, and people cannot afford to buy it. I hope prices will drop so that people can afford purchases."

Gold sellers also report a decline in sales due to the rising prices in Afghanistan's markets.

"There are general problems. Previously, customers would come, and if they wanted a locket, it would cost around 200,000 afghani, but today, 200,000 afghani is worth much less. That's why our sales have dropped," said Hashmatullah, a gold seller in Kabul. The Kabul Goldsmiths' Union attributes the rise in gold prices to various political and economic factors globally, including the economic tensions between China and the US. They say that the price

of gold has increased by \$50 per gram compared to last year.

Mohammad Bashir Ehsanzada, head of the Kabul Goldsmiths' Union, told TOLONews: "The only solution is for political tensions in the region and the world to end. Recently increased tariffs have also had an impact. When the world becomes stable, gold prices will decrease. Right now, everyone is turning to gold trading because gold remains stable while physical currency has lost its value."

According to information from the Kabul Goldsmiths' Union, currently, 18-karat gold is sold at 6,300 Afghani per gram, 21-karat gold at 7,300 Afghani per gram in Kabul markets, and on the global market, one gram of gold has reached 107 US dollars.

IEA makes shuffling in ministries, departments

KABUL (Pajhwok): New appointments have been made in some ministries, departments and provinces, Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan said on Saturday.

On his X platform, Deputy Spokesman for IEA Hamdullah Fetrat wrote these reshufflings were made based on order from the Amir Ul-Momineen.

He said Mullah Sher Mohammad Sharif, former director general of the Ministry of Interior's Border Police, has been appointed as Zabol governor, Mullah Hizbullah Afghan, the Zabol former governor, has been appointed as the director general of the Ministry of Interior's Border Police, Mullah Jan Mohammad Hamza, the Takhar former police chief, has been appointed as the director of the Kabul province's Department of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock, and Mullah Saifullah, the former head of the Sar-e-Pul intelligence forces, has been appointed as the commissioner of Hairatan Port in Balkh.

Maulvi Obaidullah, the former director of AILD in Kabul, has been appointed as the head of the PVPE Department in Balkh, and Maulvi Hussainullah Zahid, the former commissioner of Hairatan Port, has been appointed as the district governor of Aqcha in Jawzjan province.

Malaria progress at risk: WHO

KABUL (Khaama Press): The World Health Organization (WHO) highlighted significant efforts to combat malaria in Afghanistan, emphasizing the need for continued investment and action.

The WHO marked World Malaria Day, acknowledging Afghanistan's significant efforts to reduce the disease. However, it warned that these gains are under threat.

In its message, the WHO emphasized its commitment to combating malaria in Afghanistan through an equitable approach. It aims to provide healthcare services to vulnerable groups, particularly migrants, pregnant women, and children.

The organization stressed the importance of investing in the eradication of malaria in Afghanistan, calling for increased resources and focus on effective tools to combat the disease.

Edwin Ceniza Salvador, the WHO representative in Afghanistan, highlighted the country's efforts in reducing malaria but noted that these achievements are at risk. He called for renewed investment in effective tools and a collective approach to tackling the disease. Salvador also stressed the urgency of the situation, urging immediate action to permanently eliminate malaria in Afghanistan.

The WHO's call to action underscores the need for sustained commitment and investment in malaria control efforts. With a renewed focus and collective efforts, Afghanistan can overcome the threat of malaria and protect its vulnerable populations.

ANDMA addresses climate change challenges

KABUL (BNA): Mullah Nooruddin Turabi, the Head of Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA), held a meeting with Ms. Khairiatu Watson, Climate Change Advisor at the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), to discuss the pressing impacts of climate change on the country.

During the meeting, Mullah Nooruddin Turabi highlighted that Afghanistan has been consistently affected by various natural disasters, including floods, droughts, and earthquakes, which have significantly disrupted the lives of its citizens. He underscored the importance of establishing effective preparedness measures to mitigate the risks associated with these disasters.

Mullah Turabi emphasized



sized the need for support from wealthier nations and global organizations to assist vulnerable countries facing economic challenges due to climate change. "Fundamental actions must be taken to address these

issues," he stated. Ms. Khairiatu Watson echoed Turabi's concerns, reiterating that Afghanistan is one of the countries most severely impacted by climate change and requires urgent attention and assistance.

She assured that UNAMA is committed to continuing its partnership with the ANDMA to facilitate swift actions and develop sustainable solutions to address the challenges posed by natural disasters.

United States aid cuts force IRC to halt services in Afghanistan

KABUL (Pajhwok): A sharp cut in US aid has forced the International Rescue Committee (IRC) to halt several life-saving programmes in Afghanistan, leaving hundreds of thousands without access to vital services.

In a recent report, the IRC said that aid cuts have forced the organisation to suspend critical programmes that provide healthcare, vaccinations, treatment for malnutrition, clean water, and protection services.

As a result, over 700,000 people, including refugees

and displaced families, will lose access to essential humanitarian services from IRC programming alone. Life-saving treatment for more than 15,000 young children suffering from malnutrition has been disrupted.

The IRC reported that around 23 million Afghans are currently in need of humanitarian assistance, and the cuts in aid have placed this support at serious risk.

The organisation noted that the reduction in funding has had a severe impact on the most vulnerable

groups, particularly women and children.

The IRC, which has been providing vital support to Afghans since the 1980s, warned that its programmes are now under threat. Without providing specific details, the organisation said it had been forced to suspend some critical services in Afghanistan due to the decreased US funding.

Nevertheless, the IRC emphasised that it remains committed to continuing its support for the Afghan population.

Earlier, the UN

Secretary-General also expressed concern over the suspension of US foreign aid and urged Washington to maintain its humanitarian assistance to the world's most vulnerable communities, who heavily rely on such support.

Following his inauguration, US President Donald Trump issued an executive order suspending the funding and activities of international organisations for 90 days. This move led to the immediate halt of several US-funded projects — not just in Afghanistan, but in multiple countries.

Deputy PM inaugurates settlement for immigrants

MAIMANA (BNA): Mawlawi Abdul Salam Hanifi, Deputy Prime Minister for Administrative Affairs, inaugurated a residential complex for returning migrants, who have been deported from other countries, in the Dawlatabad district of Faryab province. According to a statement

releases from Prime Minister Office, this residential complex, which spans 4,000 jerbis of land, has been surveyed and designed by engineers from the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing and is equipped with all urban facilities.

During the ceremony, Mawlawi Abdul Salam

Hanifi stated that the leadership of the Islamic Emirate is making efforts to provide peace and services for returning migrants.

He further mentioned that twelve committees have been established to provide services to migrants, with six committees responsible for urgent

services such as providing water, food, housing, and transporting migrants to their designated areas. The other committees focus on issues such as education and permanent settlement.

At the end of the ceremony, residential land forms were distributed to some of the migrants.

Azan Usmani-led delegation to attend Iran trade expo

KABUL (Pajhwok): An Afghan delegation, led by Deputy Minister of Energy and Water Maulvi Sadr Azam Usmani, has travelled to Iran to attend the 7th International Export Capabilities Exhibition.

According to a statement from the Ministry of Energy and Water (MoEW), the exhibition will be held from April 28 to May 2 and annually attracts senior officials and business representatives from over 100 countries.

This year, Afghanistan's delegation will explore Iran's agricultural and livestock products, observe new industrial technologies, and engage in discus-



sions with Afghan traders based in Iran.

The visit also aims to promote investment in Afghanistan, attract foreign investors, and boost growth

in the agriculture and livestock sectors.

Maulvi Sadr Azam Usmani expressed optimism that, given Afghanistan's vast agricultural

potential, the visit would help strengthen trade ties with Iran and expand economic cooperation through increased agricultural exports and imports.

Administrative town's construction started

BADAKHSHAN (TOLONews): The Special Brigade of Panjshir has announced the beginning of the construction of an administrative town in the Kuran wa Munjan district of Badakhshan province.

The head of the engineering department of the Special Brigade stated that the administrative town will be three kilometers long and 30 meters wide, and it will include buildings for 29 government offices, a market, and a medical center.

Naqibullah Forqani, head of the engineering department of the Special Brigade, told TOLONews: "A town is being built that will be three kilometers in

length and 30 meters in width. All government offices of Kuran wa Munjan will be relocated here. Moreover, many people will find employment, providing them with a way to earn a living."

Several government employees and residents of Kuran wa Munjan district say that due to the lack of government buildings and a market, they face many challenges, and they hope this project will help address some of these difficulties.

Zafaruddin Ahmadi, the district governor of Kuran wa Munjan, said: "Except for the district police command, no government department has its own

building in Kuran wa Munjan. Once these buildings are completed, it will create a lot of convenience for the people."

Abdul Aleem, a resident of Kuran wa Munjan district, stated: "If this town is built, it will benefit all the people of the district. God willing, and if peace prevails, this project will serve everyone's interests."

Kuran wa Munjan is one of the remote districts of Badakhshan, and is home to the world-famous lapis lazuli mine. However, residents of the district say that in past governments, there was no serious attention paid to implementing development projects or addressing their challenges.

Betrothed before birth, her choice never counted

BAMYAN CITY (Pajhwok): In remote mountains of central Bamyan province, a mother recounts the heart-breaking tale of her daughter, whose fate was sealed even before birth by a family promise — a primitive tradition still practised in parts of Afghanistan.

In the heart of the Bamyan mountains, behind the cracked mud walls of a modest home in the village of Zargaran, a woman carries a sorrowful tale — a story shaped by a tradition still practised in parts of Afghanistan, where the fate of girls is sealed by a "bet" made even before they are born.

Frustration writ large on her visage, Maryam, in her fifties, spoke about a time when she carried not only a child, but also a predetermined destiny in her womb.

She sobbed out the grisly tale of her daughter, whose future was decided before her birth through a bet made by her father.

"Years ago, when I was just a few months along," she recounted, "my husband told a relative if a daughter is born to anyone, she would be given in marriage to the other's son."

Back then, Maryam prayed for giving birth to a boy — not out of gender preference, but to escape the fate that awaited the unborn baby.

When a daughter was born, instead of congratulating the couple, villagers mockingly referred to the newborn as 'so-and-so's bride'. Ever since her birth, the nameless infant became a victim of her father's wager.

A wailing Maryam

lamented: "My husband's bet wasn't a joke — it became a reality. The baby I was carrying turned out to be a girl. Neither I nor my daughter agreed to this."

"Whenever we objected, we faced violence. In the end, I had no choice but to marry her off to the son of the man who had made that deal with my spouse," Maryam's daughter married 15 years ago, before she had even turned 20. She was not showered with rose petals; silence and despair. Today, she is a mother of several children, enduring an excruciating life.

Asked about her daughter's married life, Maryam replied: "Her in-laws are poor. My daughter always says something that breaks my heart: Some people live life, others just endure it. My daughter is simply sur-

living."

Her voice trembling from years of pain, Maryam urged families not to sacrifice their daughters at the altar of harmful traditions: "What happened to me must not happen to others. Marriage should be based on the free will of both the girl and the boy. Neither God nor the Prophet has endorsed this tradition. My message to all families is: Never force anyone into marriage, because Islam requires the consent of both parties."

Not an isolated case
Zahra Hussaini, a Bamyan-based social activist who has witnessed similar incidents, confirmed bets were still placed on the gender of unborn children and promises of marriage before birth in some parts of the

province. These arrangements often occur among families with close ties.

She mentioned a case from a few years ago in Yakawlang District No. 1, where a girl, deeply unhappy with the arrangement, repeatedly voiced her objections.

Still, the families insisted on proceeding with the marriage, citing one common justification: "A promise is a promise — it cannot be broken."

Despite the girl's consistent refusal and expressions of distress, her concerns were ignored. Intense pressure from family led her to attempt suicide multiple times. Yet the families remained adamant: "Our promise stands, and we will not risk our family's honour by breaking it."

Another resident,

Alidad, recalled a similar case from years ago in the Qarghanto area of Bamyan. In that incident, when a girl reached puberty, she rejected her planned marriage, which was ultimately cancelled.

What scholars and psychologists say

Niamatullah Sadiqi, a religious scholar, insisted betting on unborn children was in direct contradiction with Islamic teachings. Such customs, he says, have no place in Islam.

"In Islam," he said, "both parties must be of legal age and express their free and full consent. If a marriage is against the will of either party, it is not valid under Islamic law." Psychologist Mohammad Zahir Ehsas endorsed every individual's right to life and to freely

choose a spouse, according to international law, human rights principles and Islamic values.

He slammed such practices as flagrant violations of human dignity, with severe psychological and social consequences. "These customs cause women to feel weak, helpless and powerless. Many withdraw from society altogether."

In his view, such traditions lead to a rise in forced marriages, psychological disorders, depression, even suicide — consequences that demand urgent intervention.

Govt response to forced marriage

Mahmood-ul-Hasan Mansouri, head of the Department for the Promotion of Virtue, Prevention of Vice and Complaint Hearing in Bamyan, confirmed forced marriages

and bettings of unborn children were illegal and entailed prosecution.

He cited a decree from the leader of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA), criminalizing forced marriages and violence. "No one has the right to deprive women of their lawful rights."

Mansouri noted nearly 50 cases of violence against women were recorded by his department last year, and all were addressed accordingly.

He underlined the importance of awareness campaigns to minimise unnecessary wedding expenses and eliminate unwholesome practices.

"Any case of violence against women brought to our notice will be taken seriously and dealt with on priority," he concluded.

Pakistani, Indian citizens return back

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Pakistani and Indian citizens returning back to their countries after escalation of tensions between neighboring countries in the aftermath of Pahalgam killings in the Indian Occupied Kashmir.

Pakistan's 188 citizens have returned home from India via the Wagah border crossing in Lahore. Meanwhile, 309 Indian nationals also repatriated to their country. Moreover, 23 Indian nationals working as part of the Pakistan Super League (PSL) Season 10 broadcast crew have been repatriated to India, media reported quoting police.

According to police spokesperson, the group was escorted to the Wagah border crossing in Lahore and sent back to India, following directives from the Pakistani government. The decision to expel the Indian crew comes in the wake of an attack in Pahalgam, Indian-Illegally Occupied Kashmir, which killed 26 tourists.

It is pertinent to mention here that India's foreign ministry on Wednesday announced that the Attari and Wagah borders will be closed. Pakistani nationals will no longer be able to travel to India under the SAARC visa exemption scheme. In a tit for tat move, Pakistan decided that it will close down the Wagah Border

Post, with immediate effect. All cross-border transit from India through this route shall be suspended, without exception. Those who have crossed with valid endorsements may return through that route immediately but not later than 30 April 2025.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Narendra Modi government, which has gone hysterical after the Pahalgam attack, has stooped so low that it has now even stopped 60 Indian women, married to Pakistani men, who were on a visit to India to meet their families and friends, from leaving the country.

It reports in media that Indian government has not let these women and their children cross the Wagha border crossing despite the fact that they have long-term visas for Pakistan. These women and their children have been stuck in Amritsar for the last two days as they have not been even allowed to leave the city.

Tensions have heightened between the two neighbouring countries following the deaths of 26 tourists, almost all of them from India, except one who belonged to Nepal, at the hands of gunmen at Pahalgam a few days ago. The gunmen had hardly finished their job when the Indian government and the country's media started holding Pakistan responsible for the killings, giving credence to

Pakistan's claims that the attack on the tourists was masterminded by India.

Moreover, in a befitting response, Pakistan on Saturday deported 23 Indian nationals who were associated with the on-going HBL Pakistan Super League (PSL)-10 broadcasting company with immediate effect.

According to sources, all these Indian nationals left Pakistan via Wagah border. The Indian staff stationed in Multan were expected to leave Pakistan by today. The remaining Indian personnel were also expected to depart from the country soon.

Sources indicated that the Indian staff had been engaged as freelancers within the broadcasting company. Sources confirmed that the departure of the Indian workers would not impact the PSL. The broadcasting company responsible for PSL coverage was identified as a Pakistani entity. Sources revealed that replacement staff were immediately available to take over the departed roles. Sources from the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) clarified that the board had no involvement in the decision. PCB sources confirmed that the directive issued by the Ministry of Interior and the Pakistan government would also apply to the Pakistan Super League.



QUETTA: A view of closed shops during strike called by business associations to show solidarity with Palestinian people.

China to train two Pakistanis for space missions

ISLAMABAD: China will select and train two astronauts from Pakistan for upcoming space missions, according to an announcement made by the China Manned Space Agency (CMSA), according to China Economic Net.

One of the selected candidates is expected to serve as a payload specialist aboard a future mission to China's space station. During a press briefing held in Jiuquan, Gansu, China, CMSA spokesperson Lin Xiqiang stated that the chosen Pakistani astronaut will carry out scientific experiments designed by Pakistan, in addition to performing standard duties as a crew member while in orbit.

Lin noted that the selection process commenced after a bilateral agreement on cooperation was signed between the two countries in late February. The astronaut selection consists of three stages: an initial screening in Pakistan, followed by secondary and final rounds of evaluation conducted in China, Lin explained.

He also mentioned that China is currently in talks with several other countries about involving foreign astronauts in future missions to its space station. — Agencies

Gaza rescuers say Israeli strikes kill 17

GAZA (AFP): Gaza's civil defense agency said Israeli strikes on Saturday killed at least 17 people across the territory, while more trapped under the rubble after a family home was hit. Israel resumed its military campaign in the Gaza Strip on March 18, ending a two-month truce that had largely halted the fighting.

"Israeli air strikes in several areas killed 17 people since dawn," civil defense official Mohammed Al-Mughayyir told AFP. A strike on the house of Al-Khour family in Gaza City's Sabra neighborhood killed 10 people, Mughayyir said, with witnesses reporting an estimated 20 victims trapped beneath the rubble. Mahmud Bassal, spokesman for the civil defense agency, had earlier said that about 30 people were missing under the rubble.

Umm Walid Al-Khour, who survived the attack, said that "everyone was sleeping with their children" when the strike hit. "The house collapsed on top of us," she told AFP. "Those who survived cried for help but nobody came... Most of the deceased were children."

AFP footage showed rescuers searching under the rubble as a wounded man was pulled out from the debris. Elsewhere in the city, three people were killed in Israeli shelling of a house in the Al-Shati refugee camp, Mughayyir said. More strikes across the Gaza Strip killed four others. There was no immediate comment from the Israeli military.

Hamas is open to an agreement to end the war in Gaza that would see all hostages released and secure a five-year truce, an official said Saturday ahead of talks with mediators. A Hamas delegation was in Cairo to discuss with Egyptian mediators ways out of the 18-month war, as on the ground rescuers said an Israeli strike on a family home in Gaza City killed at least 10 people and left more feared buried under the rubble. The Hamas official, speaking to AFP on condition of anonymity, said the Palestinian militant group "is ready for an exchange of prisoners in a single batch and a truce for five years."

Pakistan's Hajj flight operation to begin from 29th

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Ministry of Religious Affairs and Inter-faith Harmony has confirmed that all arrangements for the 2025 Hajj operation have been completed, with the first flight under the government scheme set to depart on April 29 and the last flight scheduled for May 31.

A total of 342 flights will transport pilgrims from Pakistan, with 89,000 set to travel to Madina and Makkah, the ministry said in a statement on Saturday. The Hajj flight operation will span 33 days. Pilgrims will primarily be flown to Madina during the first 15 days. On the opening day of the operation, six flights are scheduled to depart for Saudi Arabia.

Two flights will leave from Lahore, while one flight each will operate from Islamabad, Karachi, Quetta, and Multan. The

first flight, operated by Pakistan International Airlines (PIA), will depart Islamabad at 4:45am, carrying 393 pilgrims. A private airline's flight from Lahore, with 150 pilgrims, will take off at 8:30am, followed by a PIA flight from Quetta at 9:30am carrying another 150 pilgrims. From Multan, a PIA flight with 393 pilgrims is scheduled for 8:15pm.

Karachi's private airline flight, carrying 285 pilgrims, will depart at 9:30pm, while another flight from Lahore, with 329 pilgrims onboard, will leave at 10:15pm. Last week, the ministry announced that a total of 23,620 pilgrims from Pakistan will be able to perform Hajj in 2025 under the Private Hajj Scheme. According to the ministry's spokesperson, Muhammad Umar Butt, the updated list of approved service providers for Hajj 2025 has

been uploaded on the ministry's official website and the Pak Hajj mobile application.

He informed that all pilgrims who have booked their Hajj arrangements through registered service providers are advised to verify the status of their applications and contracts by visiting the ministry's portal at <https://pvt-inquiry.hajjinfo.org/>. Pilgrims are also encouraged to use the Pak Hajj 2025 mobile app for further updates and information, he added. Umar Butt said all approved Hajj Group Organisers (HGOs) and service providers have been instructed to issue updated Hajj contracts (Hajj forms) to pilgrims by the allocated Hajj quota for 2025. Butt said they must also ensure the issuance of Hajj visas by April 18, 2025, in compliance with the guidelines provided by the Ministry of Hajj and Umrah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.



QUETTA: A view of rush of Afghan citizens in Afghan Consulate for getting visa.

Trump and Zelenskiy meet one-on-one

VATICAN CITY (Reuters): US President Donald Trump and Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelenskiy, in Rome for the funeral of Pope Francis, met one-on-one in a marble-lined Vatican basilica on Saturday to try to revive faltering efforts to end Russia's war with Ukraine.

Zelenskiy said the meeting could prove historic if it delivers the kind of peace he is hoping for, and a White House spokesman called it "very productive". The two leaders, leaning in close to each other with no aides around them while seated in St Peter's Basilica, spoke for about 15 minutes, according to Zelenskiy's office, which also released photographs of the meeting.

The meeting at the Vatican, their first since an angry encounter in the Oval Office in Washington in February, comes at a critical time in negotiations aimed at bringing an end to fighting between Ukraine and Russia. In a post on social media platform Telegram, Zelenskiy wrote: "Good meeting. One-on-one, we managed to discuss a lot. We hope for a result from all the things that were spoken about."

He said those topics included: "The protection of the lives of our people. A complete and unconditional ceasefire. A reliable and

lasting peace that will prevent a recurrence of war." Zelenskiy added: "It was a very symbolic meeting that has the potential to become historic if we achieve joint results. Thank you, President Donald Trump!" Steven Cheung, White House communications director, said the two leaders had met privately and had "a very productive discussion. More details about the meeting will follow".

In one photograph released by Zelenskiy's office, the Ukrainian and US leaders sat opposite each other in a hall of the basilica, around two feet apart, and were leaning in towards each other in conversation. No aides could be seen in the image. In a second photograph, from the same location, Zelenskiy, Trump, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer and French President Emmanuel Macron were shown standing in a tight huddle. Macron had his hand on Zelenskiy's shoulder.

After Trump and Zelenskiy met in the basilica, the two men joined other world leaders outside in Saint Peter's Square at the funeral service for Pope Francis, who made the pursuit of peace, including in Ukraine, a motif of his papacy. Italian Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re, who gave the sermon at the

funeral service, recalled how Pope Francis did not stop raising his voice to call for negotiations to end conflicts. "War always leaves the world worse than it was before: it is always a painful and tragic defeat for everyone," the cardinal said.

Russia says it has fully retaken Kursk, but Ukraine says fighting continues: Russia said its forces have completely recaptured the embattled Kursk region, eight months after Ukraine's military stormed into the Russian territory in a surprise counteroffensive, but Ukrainian officials quickly rejected the claim. Russia's military Chief of Staff Valery Gerasimov made the declaration during a video conference with President Vladimir Putin Saturday, saying Russian troops had "liberated" the last village in Kursk under Ukrainian control: Gornal. "The Kyiv regime's adventure has completely failed," Putin told Gerasimov.

Ukraine's military immediately disputed the claim, saying its soldiers are still operating in parts of Kursk. "Statements by the enemy leadership about the 'defeat' of the Ukrainian troops are nothing more than propaganda tricks," said Ukraine's chief of staff in a post on Telegram.

PPP not to allow canal project: Bilawal

F.P. Report

SUKKUR: Chairman Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has said that just as the PPP did not allow a controversial canal project to move forward without the consensus of all federating units, the people of all four provinces will stand united and give a resounding response to Modi's aggression on the Indus River, thwarting any such attempts. Strongly condemning India's unilateral decision to suspend the Indus Waters Treaty, Chairman issued a stern warning to New Delhi, declaring: "The Indus River is ours and will remain ours — either our water will flow through it, or their blood."

According to a press release issued by the Media Cell Bilawal House, Chairman PPP, while addressing a massive public gathering in Sukkur, congratulated the people and said that it is the success of their peaceful struggle that the federal government has decided that no canal will be constructed from the Indus River without consensus in the Council of Common Interests (CCI). He further said that an agreement has been reached between the PPP and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), bearing the signatures of leaders from both parties. It is now the official policy of the Government of Pakistan that no new canals will be built without the mutual consent of all provinces. He paid tribute to the workers of his party for their struggle against the controversial canal project on the Indus River, saying that this would not have been possible had the Jiyalas not taken to the field. "I had promised that we would protect Sindh — and today, Sindh has been safeguarded from these threats. This is your victory," he added.

Bilawal, while shedding light on his recent meeting with the Prime Minister and the matters agreed upon during the discussion, pointed out that it had been decided that the federal government would present the said project before the CCI. He pointed out that the CCI comprises representatives from the federation as well as all provinces, and prior to this agreement, decisions regarding the construction of new canals could have been taken based on majority votes, even without the consent of the people. "But we are grateful to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, who listened to your (the people's) concerns, and now the majority parties in the Council — the PML-N and the PPP — have agreed that no new canal will be constructed without your consent," he said, adding that the

joint declaration states that the federal government has agreed to immediately convene a meeting of the CCI, and any project lacking consensus will be referred back to the concerned ministries.

Chairman PPP said that no canals will be constructed without consensus among all provinces. He emphasized that the agreement made with him, endorsed by the Prime Minister and the federal government, once again clearly affirms that all provinces have rightful claims over water, and that both the 1991 Water Accord and the 2018 Water Policy are based on mutual consensus.

Addressing the nation, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari said that the River Indus is once again under attack — this time by India. He said that a terrorist incident took place in Indian Illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK), which New Delhi falsely blamed on Pakistan. He reiterated that Pakistan strongly condemns terrorism, being the country most affected by it. He said that in an attempt to hide his own failures, Modi leveled false accusations against Pakistan regarding the incident in IIOJK, and subsequently announced the unilateral suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty.

Chairman PPP said that just as his party raised its voice for the River Indus in the streets and cities across the country and convinced the federal government not to proceed with new canals, "we will now struggle once again." He added, "The people of Pakistan are brave — we will stand up to India with full force, and our armed forces will give a befitting response at the borders." He further said that it is unacceptable for India to simply decide one day that it no longer recognizes the Indus Waters Treaty and expect that to become reality. Such a decision will neither be accepted at the international level nor by the people of Pakistan.

Bilawal urged the nation to unite in this difficult time and give a befitting-response to India, which currently has its eyes set maliciously on the River Indus. He said that the struggle to protect the river will continue until India withdraws its unilateral decision. He affirmed that the PPP stands with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on the issue of India. He also announced that the PPP will hold a grand public gathering in Mirpurkhas on May 1. Prior to his address, PPP Sindh President Nisar Ahmed Khuhro, Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah, former Chief Minister Syed Qaim Ali Shah, and other party leaders also addressed the gathering.

Pope Francis laid to rest

VATICAN CITY (Reuters): Presidents, royalty and a multitude of simple mourners bade farewell to Pope Francis on Saturday at his funeral, where a cardinal said the pontiff's legacy of caring for migrants, the downtrodden and the environment must not die with him. On one side of Francis' coffin in the vast St. Peter's Square sat US President Donald Trump, who had clashed with the pope on those issues.

"Rich in human warmth and deeply sensitive to today's challenges, Pope Francis truly shared the anxieties, sufferings and hopes of this time," said Italian Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re, who presided over the funeral Mass. The Argentine pope, who had reigned for 12 years, died at the age of 88 on Monday after suffering a stroke.

The crowd, who crammed the square and the roads around, broke into applause when Re spoke of Francis' care for immigrants, his constant pleas for peace, the need for negotiations to end wars and the importance of the climate. They clapped loudly again at the end of the service when the ushers picked up the casket and tilted it slightly so more people could see, the church bells tolling in the background. The coffin was placed on an open-topped popemobile and driven through the heart of Rome to St. Mary Major Basilica, with thousands of people lining the route.

Francis, who shunned much of the pomp and privilege of the papacy during his 12-year reign, had asked to be buried there rather than in the crypt of St. Peter's, which is the traditional resting place for popes. "Thank you, thank you, thank you," one



woman in the crowd shouted. Aerial views of the Vatican during the funeral showed a patchwork of colours - black from the dark garb of the world's leaders, red from the vestments of some 250 cardinals, the purple worn by some of the 400 bishops and the white worn by 4,000 attending priests.

Choirs sang Latin hymns and prayers were recited in various languages, including Italian, Spanish, Chinese, Portuguese and Arabic, reflecting the global reach of the 1.4-billion-member Roman Catholic Church. The Vatican estimated more than 250,000 people attended the ceremony, which lasted two hours.

Among the heads of state who flew into Rome were the presidents of the United States, Ukraine Argentina, France, Gabon, Germany, the Philippines and Poland, together with the prime ministers of Britain and New Zealand, and many royals, including the king and queen of Spain. Francis' death ushered in a meticulously planned period of transition, marked by ancient ritual, pomp and mourning. Over the past three days, around 250,000 people filed past his body, laid out before the altar of the cavernous basilica.

The faithful hurried to the Vatican from the early hours while many camped out to try to secure spots at the

front of the crowd. "When I arrived at the square, tears of sadness and also joy came over me. I think I truly realised that Pope Francis had left us, and at the same time, there is joy for all he has done for the Church," said a French pilgrim, Aurelie Andre.

Francis, the first non-European pope for almost 13 centuries, battled to reshape the Roman Catholic Church, siding with the poor and marginalised, while challenging wealthy nations to help migrants and reverse climate change. "Francis left everyone a wonderful testimony of humanity, of a holy life and of universal fatherhood," said a formal summary of his papacy, written in Latin, and placed next to his body.

Traditionalists pushed back at his efforts to make the Church more transparent, while his pleas for an end to conflict, divisions and rampant capitalism often fell on deaf ears. The pope carried his desire for greater simplicity in the papacy into his funeral, having rewritten the elaborate, book-long funeral rites used previously. He also opted to forego a centuries-old practice of burying popes in three interlocking caskets made of cypress, lead and oak. Instead, he was placed in a single, zinc-lined wooden coffin, which was sealed closed overnight.