

Four terrorists killed
F.P. Report
QUETTA: The security forces killed four terrorists of a banned outfit in an intelligence-based operation carried out in Musakhel area of Balochistan on Wednesday. The operation was carried out following a tip-off, during which an exchange of fire took place. The suspects were reportedly attempting to plant a bomb on a highway in the Rarasham area.

Pakistan always desires peace in region

PM says Islamabad not to allow Indus Waters Treaty violation

LACHIN (APP): Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday reiterated that Pakistan always wanted peace in the region and was willing to discuss all the bilateral issues with India on the negotiation table if India showed sincerity of purpose and cooperation.

Addressing the second Trilateral Summit in Lachin city of Azerbaijan, the prime minister referred to the recent aggression of India and said that with Allah Almighty's infinite blessings and kindness, with the support of people of Pakistan, and friendly countries, and resolute response of the armed forces, they emerged victorious.

In his speech, telecast live on national Tv channels, the prime minister further said that Pakistan wanted peace in the region and that required talks on the table to discuss the issues that needed urgent attention and amicable solution like the issue of Kashmir which should be resolved according to the UNSC resolutions

and as per aspiration of the people of Kashmir.

The prime minister said unfortunately, India tried to weaponize the Indus Waters Treaty which was a lifeline for the 240 million population of Pakistan that used the water for agriculture, drinking and other purposes. "It is most unfortunate that India tried to threaten to stop the flow of water into Pakistan. This is not possible, this is never possible and will not be possible Insha'Allah. We are making proper arrangements to ensure that India never ever does it," he emphatically maintained.

Prime Minister said if India wanted to talk on countering terrorism with sincerity of purpose, Pakistan would be willing to talk to them on this issue as well. "We are the biggest victim of terrorism around the globe and lost 90,000 valuable lives and suffered 150 billion dollars worth of economic losses over the last many decades. There can be no bigger manifestation of our commitment and

intention to beat this menace for all times to come," he added.

If India showed serious and honest cooperation, he said Pakistan would be willing to discuss all the issues, including promotion of trade with India, on the negotiation table. The prime minister also appreciated the role of Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir who he said led the armed forces of Pakistan to fight with great bravery and the highest level of professional acumen while the entire nation was standing behind them.

The prime minister said that during the conflict with India, he found the Field Marshal as 'God-fearing, fearless, firm with iron resolve, patience and fortitude to face that aggression.' He reiterated that during the recent conflict, India failed to bring out any credible evidences against Pakistan and rejected their sincere offer for a neutral and transparent investigation into so-called Pahalagam incident by any international body.

The prime minister said that during

Azerbaijani announces \$2b investment in Pakistan

LACHIN: Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev has announced a \$2 billion investment in Pakistan during a trilateral summit held in Lachin with Pakistan and Turkey. Addressing the meeting, President Aliyev highlighted the deep historical and cultural ties among the three nations, stating that they are moving forward together to achieve shared goals. President Aliyev said Azerbaijan is reviewing investment projects in Pakistan and emphasised the importance of strengthening partnerships in defence and other sectors with Pakistan and Turkey. He recalled the support both countries extended during the 2020 war, adding that defense cooperation among the three nations holds great potential and is key to regional stability. He also expressed interest in collaborating in tourism. Commenting on regional tensions, President Aliyev noted that the Pakistan-India conflict is deeply concerning and stressed that disputes should be resolved peacefully. He reaffirmed Azerbaijan's full solidarity with Pakistan during recent escalations with India. Speaking at the summit, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan congratulated Azerbaijan on its Independence Day and expressed hope for a new era of development in its liberated territories. He said the second trilateral meeting reflects mutual respect and trust among Turkey, Pakistan, and Azerbaijan, and called for stronger strategic ties. Erdogan welcomed the recent ceasefire between Pakistan and India and praised the wise leadership of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif in diffusing tensions. He also condemned the brutal killing of children in Gaza and vowed to stand against those destroying peace in the region. He stated that the region is of strategic importance and urged all three nations to collaborate to achieve common objectives. — Agencies

their previous trilateral format, the three countries held very fruitful discussions on the issues of mutual interests and hoped that their session in Lachin city would take their cooperation to new heights, consonance with the wishes and desires of the people

of three countries. He said that it would be no surprise to anyone that Pakistan, Turkey and Azerbaijan were bound together with historical, cultural and spiritual ties spanning over centuries.

This historic friendship was

strengthened with the passage of time and they stood together with each other whether it was Nagorno-Karabakh, Northern Cyprus and Kashmir issues, he opined.

(Continued on Back Page)



LACHIN: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif addressing Pakistan-Turkiye-Azerbaijan Trilateral meeting.

‘Marka-e-Haq’ elevates Pakistan’s global standing: Tarar

LACHIN (APP): Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar on Wednesday said that the Marka-e-Haq (the battle for truth) has significantly raised Pakistan's international standing by validating its position to the world during a recent stand-off with India.

Speaking to the media in Lachin, Azerbaijan, the minister said the world completely acknowledged Pakistan's stance as true, giving its credit to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar, who had enhanced Pakistan's diplomatic outreach significantly. He noted that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Chief of Army Staff Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir are currently on a working visit to Azerbaijan. "Before that we were in Turkiye and Iran to highlight Pakistan's pivotal role in ensuring regional peace and security," he added. On the other hand, the Indian Prime Minister-a defeated and failed politician, is in deep panic, churning out nothing but lies to save his sinking politics. "Today, we are present in Lachin city for trilateral dialogues with Turkiye and Azerbaijan," he noted.

The minister said Pakistan has strategic relations with both countries, and this trilateral dialogue signifies that all three nations and their leaderships are on the same page. To

a query, he said the prime minister and the President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev had decided the previous day to exchange delegations to boost trade and investment relations. He added that the President of Azerbaijan had expressed keen interest to elevate bilateral relations to new heights. "Today, we are celebrating Youm-e-Takbeer, while Azerbaijan is celebrating Republic Day," he said recalling the celebrations in Azerbaijan following Pakistan's victory against India. He acknowledged the strong sentiment in Azerbaijan for Pakistan, expressing gratitude to the people of Azerbaijan for celebrating Pakistan's victory.

Tarar said the prime minister, during his meeting with the President of Azerbaijan, had personally conveyed deep gratitude for the leadership and people of Azerbaijan's support during difficult times. Meanwhile, federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar said that Youm-e-Takbir was a day of renewing the pledge that Pakistan would give a befitting reply to any aggression and will never compromise on the country's security and sovereignty. Congratulating the nation on Youm-e-Takbir, Tarar said, in a statement, that May 28, 1998, was an important milestone in the history of Pakistan.

"On that day, the nation, under the

leadership of Nawaz Sharif, conducted six successful nuclear explosions in response to India's five nuclear explosions, making the country's defense invincible," the minister remarked. He further said that Youm-e-Takbir was not only a manifestation of the determination and independence of Pakistan's scientific, military and political leadership, but this day was also a symbol of the fact that whenever the motherland faced a challenge, the nation stood together to give a befitting reply to the enemy.

"Today, Pakistan has once again proven that we can go to any extent to defend the country", he added. During the recent Indo-Pak stand off, he said under the leadership of Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, Pakistan ruined the enemy's nefarious designs. In 1998, under the leadership of Nawaz Sharif, Pakistan carried out six nuclear explosions in response to India's five nuclear explosions, he said. Now, under the leadership of PM Shehbaz Sharif, Pakistan has successfully shot down six Indian warplanes including Rafale aircraft.

He opined that this victory was part of the continuity that began in 1998 and continued with full force even today. Stating that Pakistan's defense was in strong hands, Attaullah Tarar said the nation had full confidence in its armed forces, scientists and political leadership.

PM pays tributes to leaders, scientists

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday joined the nation in celebrating Youm-e-Takbeer by paying tributes to the former prime ministers, scientists, engineers and valiant armed forces who made the country's defence invincible.

On X handle, the prime minister said "As the nation celebrates Youm-e-Takbeer, we thank Allah Almighty for His countless blessings and for granting us yet another glorious victory in the face of recent Indian aggression." Twenty-seven years ago, on this historic day, he said then prime minister Mian Nawaz Sharif made Pakistan's defence invincible with his bold and courageous decision in 1998 to go ahead with a peaceful nuclear test, in the face of strong opposition from many powerful countries. Thus this historic decision gave Pakistan the status of a nuclear power.

"I join the nation in paying tribute to Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto for his visionary leadership. We also honour our brilliant scientists and engineers who turned the vision and aspirations of the entire nation into reality," he added. The prime minister further said that they commended their valiant armed forces for their unwavering resolve and determination to defend the nation's frontiers against all external and internal threats. "In the same spirit of unity and resolve, we pledge to build Pakistan into a strong economic power that would become the envy of the world. InshaAllah!" the prime minister further posted.

Cop martyred, another hurt in gun battle

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: A police officer of Islamabad's Crime Investigation Agency (CIA) embraced martyrdom while another sustained serious injuries during an exchange of fire with dacoits near the Faizabad Metro Bus Station on Wednesday, according to a spokesperson for Islamabad Police.

The CIA team had launched a raid to apprehend the criminals when they came under indiscriminate gunfire from all directions. The attackers opened intense fire, triggering a fierce gun battle. Despite the sudden assault, the police team responded with bravery and resisted the armed suspects.

As a result of the firing, Assistant Sub-Inspector (ASI) Sudheer Ahmed Abbasi was martyred in the line of duty, while Constable Jaffar Jahangir was critically injured. He is currently under treatment, and his condition is being closely monitored. Following the incident, heavy contingents of police cordoned off the area, and a district-wide search operation was launched.

Weaponisation of water against global norms: FO

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Foreign Office said on Wednesday that Modi's remarks about weaponising water go against international principles.

"Those who seek global respect should first hold themselves accountable before threatening others," the FO spokesperson said. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi continues to make inflammatory statements, not only using hateful language against Pakistan but also threatening to weaponise the Indus Waters Treaty.

In response to Modi's statement, Pakistan said Narendra Modi had once again adopted a provocative narrative. "Talking about using water as a weapon is a violation of international principles.

Such actions highlight the contradictions in India's behaviour and its global ambitions," the FO said.

The spokesperson said those who seek international respect should first introspect instead of threatening others. India, he said, was involved in killings abroad, interfered in internal affairs of other countries, and occupied foreign territories and people. He added that India's record in the occupied Jammu and Kashmir was one of the systematic oppressions. Now, India is trying to portray itself as a victim.

Followers of the BJP have normalised violence and promoted hate campaigns. Currently, supporters of the Indian government have targeted religious minorities. The spokesperson said politics

based on inflaming national sentiments might earn temporary applause but causes irreversible damage to long-term peace and stability.

Indian youth should reject the politics of fear and move towards a future based on dignity, reason, and regional cooperation. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, while addressing an election campaign in Gandhinagar, said that under the Indus Waters Treaty, India had so far "suspended" Pakistan's share of water and had not yet taken any concrete action - yet Pakistan is already "sweating." Modi added, "We haven't even done much yet, just opened a few gates, started some cleaning - and Pakistan has already gone into a panic."

Nuclear power to ensure peace: President

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: President, Asif Ali Zardari emphasised that becoming a nuclear power was not merely a demonstration of the country's technological advancement—it was a calculated decision to ensure peace through strength, to maintain the strategic balance in South Asia, and to protect the nation against any external aggression.

In his message on the occasion of Youm-e-Takbeer (28th May), the president said Pakistan's nuclear capability amid current evolving regional security situation, continued to serve as a credible minimum deterrent that guarantees our peace and ensures that no one could undermine the country's sovereignty and national security.

President Zardari said, "On this momentous occasion of Youm-e-Takbeer, I extend my heartfelt felicitations to the entire nation. Today, we observe the 27th anniversary of Youm-e-Takbeer – a day when we demonstrated our nuclear capabilities and established strategic deterrence. This day serves as a reminder of our commitment to safeguarding the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of our beloved country."

The president underscored that the nation on this day pay rich tribute to the scientists, engineers, and civil and military leadership, whose dedication and commitment made this achievement possible. "We also pay tribute to Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who laid the foundation of Pakistan's nuclear programme, which made the country's defence impregnable. We also

acknowledge the role of Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto, whose stewardship further advanced and strengthened our nuclear programme," he said.

President Zardari underlined that Pakistan does not seek conflict and is committed to the principles of peaceful coexistence and respect for international law. In the face of recent unprovoked Indian aggression, he said Pakistan demonstrated its strategic patience and commitment to peace. He said, "Our calibrated response, under Operation Bunyan-um-Marsoos, was measured and effective, which forced the enemy to cease its hostile actions."

The president urged the nation to renew its pledge while commemorating Youm-e-Takbeer, to uphold and safeguard the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country.

Three died in KP's rain-related incidents

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) has issued a report detailing the impact of recent rain, strong winds, and hailstorms across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Punjab.

According to the report, three people lost their lives, and nine others were injured due to the severe weather conditions. The report confirmed that two of the three individuals killed in KP were women. The incidents occurred in multiple districts, including Swabi, Peshawar, Shangla, Swat, and Haripur.

In Peshawar, the PDMA reported that 16 houses sustained partial damage due to the heavy rainfall and strong winds, further compounding the challenges faced by residents in the affected areas.

Gen Asim holds talks with Azerbaijan’s defence chief

RAWALPINDI (APP): Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir, NI (M), Chief of Army Staff (COAS), met with Colonel General Hasanov Zakir Asgar Oglu, Minister of Defence, Azerbaijan, in Lachin, Azerbaijan.

According to Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), during the meeting, the two leaders discussed matters of mutual interest, regional security dynamics, and ways to further enhance defence cooperation between Pakistan and Azerbaijan. The COAS appreciated the strong bilateral relations between the two countries and emphasized Pakistan's commitment to strengthening defence ties with Azerbaijan.

Armed Forces, COAS, Services Chief felicitate nation on Youm-e-Takbeer: The Armed Forces of Pakistan, along

with the Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee and Services Chiefs, have extended heartfelt felicitations to the people of Pakistan on the 27th anniversary of Youm-e-Takbeer.

According to a statement of ISPR, Youm-e-Takbeer commemorates the momentous occasion in 1998 when Pakistan emerged as a nuclear power, restoring the strategic balance in South Asia and asserting its sovereign right to self-defence.

The statement said this historic achievement epitomizes the nation's resolve, unity, and unwavering pursuit of a dignified and peaceful existence. "Youm-e-Takbeer" is being celebrated with patriotic zeal today (Wednesday) in remembrance of nuclear tests conducted by Pakistan on this day in 1998. Today (Wednesday) is a public

holiday.

On this day, Pakistan became the seventh nuclear power of the world and the first Muslim state having the nuclear arsenal in its defence stockpile. The team of Pakistan's scientists led by founder of Pakistan's nuclear programme, Dr Abdul Qadeer Khan, and Dr Samar Mubarakmand carried out nuclear tests in the RasKoh Hills in the Chaghai District of Balochistan.

These tests demonstrated the resolve of the nation to safeguard Pakistan's territorial integrity, independence and sovereignty. The historic statement of former Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto that they would starve, but transform the country into a nuclear power, led to achievement of this milestone. Armed Forces, COAS, Services Chief felicitate nation on Youm-e-Takbeer.



KARACHI: Sindh Governor Kamran Tessori speaks at a ceremony at the Governor House to mark Youm-e-Takbeer. —APP Photo

Child dies after falling into open sewage drain

LAHORE (APP): A 10-year-old boy died after falling into an open sewage drain in the Chungi Dogaj area near Shaheed Garrison on Wednesday, according to Rescue 1122 officials.

Emergency services were alerted after a caller reported that a child had accidentally fallen into a drain estimated to be 40 to 50 feet deep. Rescue 1122 teams, including divers and ambulances, were immediately dispatched to the scene.

A search and rescue operation was promptly launched by the underwater diving unit. The child was eventually recovered, but was found dead, officials said.

The body was shifted to CMH for medico-legal formalities. The deceased was identified as Sahel, aged 10. Authorities have yet to confirm how the boy came to fall into the drain. Further investigation is underway.

Ceremony held at PSCA to mark Youm-e-Takbeer

LAHORE (APP): The Punjab Safe Cities Authority (PSCA) on Wednesday held a special event to commemorate Youm-e-Takbeer, celebrating Pakistan's 27 years as a nuclear power.

According to PSCA spokesperson, the national flag and a special video were displayed on the digital wall at the Safe Cities headquarters. Safe City officials and staff paid tribute to Pakistan's national leadership and the Armed Forces for their historic achievement of making Pakistan a nuclear power.

PSCA MD Ahsan Younas said that "Today is a day of national pride, sovereignty and impenetrable defense." This year, Youm-e-Takbeer was being celebrated with joy and pride over the victory in the war imposed by India, the MD added. The PSCA remains committed to enhancing security in collaboration with the police and law enforcement agencies, Younas emphasized.

Youm-e-Takbeer a symbol of national pride, unity, strength: CM

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Chief Minister (CM) Maryam Nawaz Sharif on Wednesday extended heartfelt congratulations to the people of Pakistan and the Muslim Ummah on the occasion of Youm-e-Takbeer, calling it a day of pride, power and unwavering national resolve.

In her message she said, "Youm-e-Takbeer is not just a date on the calendar, it is a powerful reminder of Pakistan's historic decision to become a nuclear power, a decision that continues to inspire pride and confidence in the nation."

"Twenty-seven years have passed, yet the people of Pakistan continue to hold their heads high and they will continue to do so," she added.

"This is the day when Pakistan's leadership, under Prime Minister

Muhammad Nawaz Sharif, chose national interest and public aspiration over global pressure."

CM said that "Pakistan's nuclear capability is not only a strategic asset for the country but a symbol of strength and pride for the entire Muslim world."

"By the grace of Almighty Allah, Pakistan earned the historic distinction of becoming the first Muslim nuclear power," she said.

The CM emphasized that "the enemy no longer dares to cast an evil eye on our land, because of the bold and visionary decision taken on May 28, 1998. The foundation for the victory on May 10 was laid on May 28. Our nuclear program remains a key pillar of Pakistan's defense strategy."

The CM Maryam

Nawaz also praised the leadership of Muhammad Nawaz Sharif saying that the nation remains indebted to him for his brave and historic decision.

CM said, "Every time Pakistan has delivered a strong and clear response to its enemies, it has been under the leadership of the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N)."

The CM reaffirmed that "Pakistan's nuclear capability is not a threat to anyone but a guarantee of peace and security."

"Our tests were a message to the world: Pakistan wants peace but stands fully prepared to defend itself."

She urged the nation to honor the spirit of Youm-e-Takbeer with renewed unity and commitment to safeguarding the country's sovereignty, independence and progress.

Governor marks Youm-e-Takbeer, reaffirms national unity

KARACHI (APP): A special ceremony commemorating Youm-e-Takbeer was held at the Governor House Karachi on Wednesday, where Governor Sindh Kamran Khan Tessori paid tribute to Pakistan's nuclear achievements and reaffirmed the nation's strength, unity, and sovereignty.

Speaking at the event, Governor Kamran Khan Tessori described May 28 as a symbol of national pride, resolve, and dignity. He said the nuclear tests conducted on this day in 1998 marked a turning point in the country's history, ensuring Pakistan's security and asserting its sovereignty. He likened the recent military response on May 10 to a revival of the same spirit, saying the enemy's arrogance was once again

humbled.

Referring to the escalation of tensions earlier this month, the Governor emphasized that any challenge to Pakistan in the month of May is met with the unwavering will of its people. He praised the leadership of Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir, crediting him with reigniting national morale through his professional command and vision.

Governor Sindh also paid homage to the scientists and leaders who played a key role in making Pakistan a nuclear power, calling their contributions a source of national pride. Expressing optimism about the country's future, he said Pakistan is on the path to economic growth and the world will soon witness its progress on the global stage.

Condemning the recent terrorist attack in Khuzdar, the Governor said such cowardly acts cannot shake the resolve of the Pakistani nation. He emphasized that unity and sacrifice are the country's greatest strengths, and that the enemies of Pakistan have seen a united nation standing firm in the face of adversity.

In a message directed to the youth, Governor Kamran Khan Tessori reminded them of their identity as citizens of a sovereign and powerful state. He also reassured that all minority communities in Pakistan enjoy full freedom and protection under the law.

The ceremony was attended by distinguished guests from various fields, reflecting the nation's collective pride in its history and resilience.

Pakistan committed to peace but will respond to any aggression: NA Speaker

LAHORE (APP): National Assembly (NA) Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq has said that Pakistan remains a peace-loving nation but will give a forceful response to any act of aggression.

He was addressing a ceremony held here to mark Youm-e-Takbeer on Wednesday, the anniversary of Pakistan's nuclear tests conducted on May 28, 1998.

Speaking on the occasion, the Speaker paid tribute to former prime minister Nawaz Sharif for making the bold decision to conduct nuclear tests, asserting that this move secured Pakistan's defense and transformed the regional balance of power. "If Nawaz Sharif had not carried out the nuclear tests on May 28, the regional scenario would have been very different today," he said and added, "This day is a symbol of national pride and a reminder of our sovereignty."

The Speaker said that modern warfare has evolved

beyond conventional methods, referring to recent Indian hostilities including attacks on Pakistan's strategic installations like the Neelum-Jhelum Hydropower Project. "Modi has spared no opportunity to provoke Pakistan, but our armed forces responded with strength and resolve. The nation stands proud of their courage," he added.

Sardar Ayaz Sadiq expressed deep respect for the soldiers who risked their lives to defend the homeland. "May Allah Almighty protect the brave young men who stood firm and took bullets for this nation," he said.

While emphasizing that Pakistan does not seek conflict, he warned that any future aggression would be met with a decisive and befitting response. "Pakistan will not initiate war. But if war is imposed on us, we will retaliate with full force," he declared.

Commenting on recent Indian accusations of cross-border involvement in an attack, he said Pakistan had immediately called for an impartial investigation by a neutral country, which exposed the baselessness of the allegations. "It was a failed conspiracy that backfired. Pakistan's principled and transparent stance was acknowledged globally," he said. "We offered an independent inquiry, our intentions were clear, and our hands were clean," he added.

The Speaker noted that Pakistan's armed forces not only defended the country but also defeated the enemy's designs. He reiterated Pakistan's commitment to peace and diplomacy, particularly in resolving the Kashmir dispute, and expressed concern over the civilian toll caused by regional tensions. "We don't want war. Pakistan wants to move forward towards a peaceful resolution of the Kashmir

issue," he said. "Today, the Kashmir issue has once again been brought into international focus," he added.

Sardar Ayaz Sadiq drew attention to the situation in Balochistan, emphasizing that the people and the armed forces of Pakistan stand united in confronting subversive elements. He strongly condemned a handful of individuals who are acting on foreign directives and receiving funding from India to destabilize the region.

Reflecting on his own political journey, he recalled campaigning in difficult conditions and said it had only strengthened his resolve to serve the public. He also praised Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif for her tireless work. "Despite the challenges, our Chief Minister is working day and night for the welfare of the people. Her leadership is focused on public service and progress."

Marriyum issues key statement on Youm-e-Takbeer

LAHORE (APP): Senior Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb on Wednesday issued a statement commemorating Youm-e-Takbeer, marking 27 years since Pakistan conducted its nuclear tests on May 28, 1998. Marriyum Aurangzeb said that "Alhamdulillah, Pakistan has completed 27 years as a nuclear state."

Paying tribute to former Prime Minister (PM) Nawaz Sharif, the minister said he demonstrated "courage, resolve and steadfastness" by going ahead with the nuclear tests in the face of "threats, pressure, temptations and sanctions."

She described the nuclear capability as a vital deterrent, aimed at safeguarding the country and its future generations, while neutralizing the "malicious intentions of the enemy."

Marriyum also extended her respects to the scientists, engineers and all individuals involved in developing Pakistan's nuclear program, calling them the true architects of the nation's strategic defense.

Police arrests 23,701 individuals in 2025

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Police on Wednesday ramped up its anti-narcotics operations under the provincial government's 'Drug-Free Punjab' campaign, with tens of thousands of raids conducted across the province this year. According to the Punjab Police spokesperson, a total of 43,693 raids were carried out on suspected drug dens since the beginning of the year, leading to the arrest of 23,701 individuals allegedly involved in the sale and distribution of narcotics. Criminal cases have been registered against all suspects, he added.

Significant quantities of drugs were recovered during these operations, including 14,521kg of hashish, 1,120kg of heroin, 645kg of crystal methamphetamine (ice), 2,119kg of opium and over 353,000 litres of liquor. In the past 24 hours alone, police conducted 210 raids, arresting 113 suspects and recovering 44kg of hashish, 8kg of ice, 1kg of heroin and 1,490 litres of liquor. Inspector General (IG) of Punjab Police Dr. Usman Anwar has directed all units to further intensify special operations against drug traffickers.

Sindh committed to women's health: CM Murad

KARACHI (APP): On the occasion of the International Day of Action for Women's Health, Chief Minister Sindh Syed Murad Ali Shah reaffirmed the government's commitment to improving women's health across the province.

In his message on Wednesday, the Chief Minister stated, "This day serves as a reminder to highlight the health challenges women face and to encourage effective and sustained action to address them. A healthy woman is the foundation of a healthy society."

Murad Ali Shah empha-

sized that the Sindh government has launched multiple programmes aimed at enhancing women's health. "A comprehensive maternal and child health programme is underway across the province to safeguard the lives of mothers and newborns by providing them with essential healthcare services," he said.

The CM highlighted that 23,185 Lady Health Workers have been deployed throughout Sindh to deliver healthcare services directly to women at their doorsteps. He also pointed out the success of the "National Health

Support Programme," which is being implemented with the support of the World Bank. "This programme primarily focuses on improving care for pregnant women, mothers, and newborns to ensure better health outcomes."

"The efforts of the Sindh government are proving to be a milestone in the journey towards safeguarding women's health, security, and well-being," the Chief Minister concluded, reiterating his government's resolve to continue prioritizing women's health and empowerment for a stronger, healthier society.

Sharmila urges for national solidarity, dialogue on 'Youm-e-Takbeer'

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Leader Sharmila Farooqi Wednesday congratulated the nation on Youm-e-Takbeer, highlighting the significance of democratic principles, national unity and constructive dialogue in overcoming the challenges we face, both domestically and internationally.

In an exclusive conversation with a local news channel, PPP leader Sharmila Farooqi urged for national solidarity and dialogue on the occasion of Youm-e-Takbeer, emphasizing that by putting aside differences and working towards a common goal, Pakistan can overcome its

challenges and build a stronger future.

"We stand united with our armed forces to protect our motherland from any internal or external threat," she stressed. "She expressed gratitude to the armed forces and past heroes for their determination and bravery in protecting the nation."

Responding to a query about PPP and PTI clash in KPK, Sharmila Farooqi strongly condemned the actions of Ali Amin Gandapur, particularly the steps taken against individuals participating in peaceful protests in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

She emphasized that

restricting people's right to peaceful assembly and protest is unacceptable and goes against democratic principles. The PPP leader expressed concern over the lack of work and initiatives that address the genuine grievances of the people, which often leads to such protests.

She reiterated the importance of respecting citizens' rights and engaging in constructive dialogue to resolve issues. The PPP believes in the power of democracy and the sacrifices of our martyrs. We urge PTI to show maturity and prioritize the public interest by uniting for the greater good of our nation.

PFA cracks down on renowned restaurants in Lahore

LAHORE (APP): The Punjab Food Authority (PFA) teams on Wednesday carried out inspection operations in Johar Town and Gulberg-II, leading to the closure of two well-known restaurants over serious hygiene and safety violations.

PFA Director General Asim Javed told media that a popular eatery in Johar Town was sealed for using repeatedly heated oil for frying, a practice deemed hazardous to health.

In a separate action, a restaurant in Gulberg-II was shut down due to the use of expired food items. The inspection teams con-

fiscated and safely discarded expired pickles, a large quantity of substandard oil and banned Chinese salt (monosodium glutamate), Asim Javed reported.

He further stated that the food handlers at both establishments lacked complete medical records and were without the mandatory training certifications. "Used oil was being reused for frying, while expired and prohibited ingredients were found in the kitchens," he noted. The inspection teams also observed unsanitary kitchen conditions, including unclean freezers, a foul-smelling environment and poor cleanliness standards.

In addition, non-food grade material was being used to brush oil on naan and food items were found uncovered and exposed.

Moreover, the premises lacked adequate pest control measures in line with regulatory requirements, the DG added.

"The noose is tightening around those who endanger public health by using substandard ingredients and there is zero tolerance for unhygienic and unsafe food practices," said Asim Javed. The DG urged citizens to promptly report any food-related complaints by calling the PFA helpline at 1223.

Mubashir marks Youm-e-Takbeer, lauds nuclear pioneers

LAHORE (APP): The Federal Minister for Public Affairs, Rana Mubashir Iqbal on Wednesday congratulated the nation on the occasion of Youm-e-Takbeer, paying tribute to Pakistan's nuclear scientists, armed forces and political leadership for their roles in making the country a nuclear power.

Speaking at a ceremony held at his Dera in Khayaban-i-Ameen, the minister said May 28 marks a defining moment in Pakistan's history, symbolizing strength, national unity and deterrence. He stated, "I once again extend congratulations to the entire Pakistani nation on this proud day."

He said the day commemorates Pakistan's emergence as the seventh nuclear power in the world and the first among the Muslim countries, highlighting that "Mian Nawaz Sharif made Pakistan's defense invincible on May 28, 1998."

Rana Iqbal also paid tribute to the scientists who led the efforts. "We congratulate all scientists, especially Dr Abdul Qadeer Khan and Dr Samar Mubarakmand for their unmatched service to the nation."

He recalled that Nawaz Sharif refused a \$5 billion offer from global powers and instead upheld the national interest by going ahead with the

nuclear tests. "This was not just a military decision but a symbol of sovereignty," he remarked. After the nuclear tests, minister noted, Nawaz Sharif received a historic welcome in Saudi Arabia, demonstrating strong support from the Muslim world. "Pakistan's image today is exemplary around the world," he said.

Minister Rana Mubashir Iqbal stated, "On this occasion, we salute the Pakistan Armed Forces (PFA) who stand guard at our borders. This day will forever be remembered in the history of Pakistan." He said the JF-17 Thunder production plant was established in Pakistan, a move that strengthened the country's aerospace and military capabilities. "Thanks to the JF-17 Thunder, Pakistan's forces forced India to rethink its strategies during Operation Bunyad-e-Marsous," he said.

The federal minister stated, "We tell our enemies today: choose peace or be prepared for a response stronger than your provocations. We will respond to bricks with stones if needed." He accused Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi of playing a role in regional instability. "Behind every major incident of terrorism, there is the hand of Modi," he said.

He also alleged Modi's involve-

ment in the killing of a Canadian Sikh leader, adding that "no democracy in the world permits the shedding of innocent blood." Rana Mubashir also referenced the Pahalgam incident, saying that "Pakistan called for an investigation and countries like the UK and Bangladesh stood with us. Even Modi's opposition in India has raised questions about his role in such events." He emphasized Pakistan's diplomatic approach, saying the country's foreign policy consistently promotes peace, and reaffirmed that "there will be no compromise on the defense of Pakistan."

Speaking about national unity, he said, "The blood of our martyrs will never go in vain. The entire nation today stands like a wall of steel with our armed forces." He thanked all political parties for showing unity, particularly on sensitive national security issues, including the response to the Pahalgam incident.

The minister concluded by reiterating the importance of Youm-e-Takbeer as a symbol of strength, resilience and unity. MPA Imran Javed and party workers were also present at the ceremony. The event ended with the traditional cake-cutting to mark the national day.

Rally staged in Karachi to mark Youm-e-Takbeer

KARACHI (PPI): Mayor Karachi Barrister Murtaza Wahab today emphasized the historical significance of May 28, marking it as a pivotal day in Pakistan's history.

Celebrated as Youm-e-Takbeer, this day commemorates Pakistan's emergence as a nuclear power, fulfilling the vision of Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto of making the nation's defense unassailable. The mayor paid tribute to all contributors to this achievement, highlighting the resolute message it sends to any adversaries.

Speaking to the media at a rally at Frere Hall, Wahab underscored the determination and unity symbolized by Youm-e-Takbeer. The event was attended by Deputy Mayor Karachi Salman Abdullah Murad, Municipal Commissioner Afzal Zaidi, among other dignitaries and citizens. The mayor reiterated that the day is a reminder of Pakistan's readiness to defend itself, reflecting national sovereignty and pride.

He pointed out that Pakistan's status as the seventh nuclear power glob-

ally, and the first in the Muslim world, is a testament to the country's perseverance. The role of Pakistani scientists was acknowledged as a source of national pride, evoking patriotism and unity. Wahab expressed gratitude to all who contributed to this milestone and stressed the importance of national unity and sacrifice.

Further, the mayor reflected on the steadfastness of the Pakistani armed forces in the face of threats, asserting that the country remains unafraid of aggression.

Kundi highlights investment potential in mining, green energy sectors

PESHAWAR (APP): Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Faisal Karim Kundi on Wednesday emphasized the vast potential for investment in the mining sector of KP and Balochistan, saying that Pakistan's rich reserves of natural resources including oil and gas can play a vital role in strengthening the national economy.

He expressed these views during a meeting with a delegation at the Governor House Peshawar. The delegation included Trade Commissioner at the Canadian High Commission, Zohaib Ahmad Khan, U.S. based Pakistani engineer, Zeeshan Shahid, and renowned religious and social figure, Ehtesham.

The meeting focused on investment opportunities in various energy sectors, particularly green energy, mining, and oil.

The Governor highlighted the abundance of

untapped natural resources in the country that, if harnessed effectively, could help overcome the ongoing energy crisis.

He said that the mountainous and mineral-rich regions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa contain valuable deposits of metals and minerals, the exploration and development of which could generate significant employment opportunities for the local population.

Governor Kundi also stressed the urgent need for investment in green energy, saying that environment-friendly energy sources could not only meet the country's growing energy demands but also help reduce environmental pollution.

The meeting also included discussions on expanding scholarship opportunities abroad for students from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and providing continued support to flood-affected communi-

ties across the province.

Meanwhile, the delegation from Lahore Grammar School (LGS) Peshawar Campus, led by Hadia Afzal, met with the Governor Faisal Karim Kundi, to discuss key issues related to education, women's empowerment, and youth engagement in the province.

The delegation included senior faculty members Asim Shafiq, Muhammad Shakeel, and Zarak Khan.

During the meeting, various proposals were discussed to promote education, encourage youth participation in constructive activities, and empower women through academic initiatives.

The delegation also shared suggestions for providing scholarships to talented students across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and explored ways to further support educational development in the province.

Governor Faisal Karim Kundi reiterated his com-

mitment to providing educational, training, and mentorship opportunities to the younger generation, emphasizing that this remains one of his top priorities.

He welcomed the contribution of private educational institutions in enhancing the educational landscape and stressed the importance of keeping youth engaged in positive and productive pursuits.

Highlighting the crucial role of education in women's empowerment, the Governor said that an educated and empowered female population is a hallmark of a progressive society. He added that educational institutions have a vital role to play in achieving this goal.

The delegation assured the Governor of LGS's continued commitment to promoting education, supporting social development, and engaging youth through meaningful initiatives.



PESHAWAR: Federal Minister for Kashmir Affairs, Gilgit Baltistan and SAFRON Engr Amir Muqam along with others cutting cake to celebrate Youm-e-Takbeer at PML-N provincial secretariat.

AI a key to redress off-grid solar power with national grid

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A prominent lawyer and IT graduate Sardar Waqar advocate suggested that Pakistan, particularly Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), needs to explore the evolving landscape of energy consumption in our country. I want to highlight the exciting possibilities of establishing data centers, especially given the growing trend of off-grid solar power in homes. Many citizens are generating excess megawatts that currently go to waste, particularly with WAPDA lacking a mechanism to utilize this surplus.

These data centers could be instrumental in enhancing our infrastructure, particularly in the realm of artificial intelligence. By providing the necessary computational power, we can support AI-driven initiatives for local needs, such as NADRA, banks, and financial institutions. This would not only improve efficiency but also position us as a competitive player in the global market by serving international clients.

To realize this vision, collaboration is essential. PTCL and WAPDA must work together to create a framework that allows for the integration of renewable energy sources into the grid. Additionally, private telecom companies need to play a crucial role in facilitating connectivity and infrastructure support for these data centers.

Our investors and regulators must adapt to these modern needs and technologies to ensure we don't miss out on this opportunity. Let's come together to explore how we can turn this vision into reality and pave the way for a more sustainable future.

Zero tolerance policy against harassment Decisive action taken at Khyber Medical University

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has taken yet another effective and decisive step under its zero tolerance policy against harassment in educational institutions. A recent harassment case at Khyber Medical University (KMU), Peshawar, has been addressed with complete transparency, integrity, and professionalism.

Provincial Minister for Higher Education, Archives, and Libraries, Meena Khan Afridi praised the KMU administration in a message on X (formerly Twitter) and emphasized that there is absolutely no room for leniency or negligence in harassment cases within the province's academic institutions.

He stated that on May 18, 2025, a complaint regarding an incident of harassment in the examination hall was received by the Vice Chancellor of KMU. He further wrote that from May 19 to 23, an inquiry committee formed by the university conducted a thorough and impartial investigation.

He further added that on May 26, a Grade-18 officer with 17 years of service was dismissed from employment after being found guilty. The main accused student was permanently expelled from the university and barred from future enrollment in any academic program. Other students involved were given minor penalties in accordance with university regulations.

Meena Khan Afridi lauded the KMU team for their strict adherence to the zero tolerance policy, safeguarding the university's integrity and ensuring a secure academic environment for all students. He reaffirmed his commitment to continue taking effective measures to make all educational institutions across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa free from harassment.

Khyber Medical University (KMU), Peshawar, has once again reaffirmed its steadfast commitment to fostering a safe, respectful, and accountable academic environment by taking prompt and decisive action in response to a recent case of harassment.

This decisive response is consistent with KMU's ongoing enforcement of its zero-tolerance policy against harassment. Over the past two years, the university has taken firm action—ranging from major to minor penalties—against perpetrators of harassment. KMU remains resolute in its mission to ensure a dignified and secure space for all students, faculty, and staff.

Committee formed for university ranking in KP

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Higher Education Department of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has constituted a five-member committee to develop a comprehensive university ranking system for the province's public and private universities, based on national and international standards.

According to an official statement issued by the department, the ranking committee will collect relevant data from universities, analyze and evaluate it, and compile a ranking of all public and private universities in the province. The final report will be submitted to the provincial government.

Provincial Minister for Higher Education, Archives, and Libraries, Mr. Meena Khan Afridi, termed this initiative a revolutionary step in the field of higher education. He stated that swift and effective measures are being taken to improve the quality of higher education across the province.

He added that the introduction of a ranking system will promote a healthy competitive environment among universities, while also enhancing standards in research, teaching, faculty performance, and institutional management.

The minister further emphasized that the ranking process will be transparent, merit-based, and aligned with modern standards, helping Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's universities gain better recognition at the national and international levels.

Reaffirming the government's commitment, Meena Khan Afridi stated that Chief Minister and Chancellor of the universities, Mr. Ali Amin Gandapur, has entrusted him with the task of bringing sustainable and positive reforms in higher education, and the department is fulfilling this responsibility with utmost seriousness and integrity.

Hamza Foundation begins free of cost Iron chetation medicine



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Hamza Foundation Welfare Thalassemia Center and Blood Transfusion Services Peshawar KP has started free of cost Iron chelation Medicine (Tab Deferasirox 100 mg / 500 mg) on daily basis to most deserving and Mustahqueen e Zakat Thalassemia Major patients.

Iron chelation is the process of removing excess iron from the body

also Improves cardiac function particularly important in patients with transfusion-dependent, Thalassemia Major where iron overload can cause heart failure.

Chelation has been shown to reverse early cardiac dysfunction.

Iron chelation also Improves quality of life and life survival. In simple words, iron chelation medicine are so much important for Thalassemia kids as blood transfusion is important for the life survival of a patient i.e iron chelation medicine increase the life of a Thalassemia major patient .

It is worth mentioning that the management, patients and parents of Hamza Foundation are very much thankful to the Honourabl Minister Zakat and Social welfare, Mr. Sayed Qasim Ali Shah , Mr. Imtiaz Khan Provincial Chairman, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Zakat and ushar Council, Worthy Members Provincial Zakat Council and all officials of Zakat Department for their help and support for the ailing humanity and for saving precious lives of the poor patients of Hamza Foundation.

Granfather's Day at The Peshawar Millennium School observed

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A vibrant and colorful event was organized at The Peshawar Millennium School Charsadda on the occasion of Grandfather's Day. A large number of grandparents - including grandfathers, grandmothers, participated in the event. The students gave impressive performances through tableaux and skits, earning great applause from the audience.

Principal Nusrat Nazir of The Peshawar Millennium School Charsadda addressed the gathering and highlighted the importance of Grandfather's Day. She stated that the school has a strong reputation in the field of education, consistently securing top positions, including among the Top Three and Top Twenty in the Peshawar Board every year. She presented a shield to the chief guest, Director Neelam Azam, while both she and the principal distributed gifts among the attending grandfathers.

Addressing the event, Neelam Azam, Director of Research and Professional Development, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, paid tribute to the school management for organizing such a graceful and meaningful event in this dignified district of Hashtnagar. She praised the beautiful performances by the students and said that they were truly commendable.

She remarked, "Today we are paying tribute to those noble individuals who not only raised their own children but also played a vital role in nurturing future generations. This dignified ceremony brought back many childhood memories for them."

She emphasized that education is the need of the hour, especially for girls, as educated daughters become the backbone of their families. She added that a nation's progress depends not only on modern education, research, and technology but also on staying connected to its values, traditions, and the life experiences of elders - whose wisdom helps guide future generations.

"This day reminds us to keep our connection with our elders alive, to spend time with them, and to include them as active participants in social life," she said.

In conclusion, she congratulated the school administration, teachers, and students for celebrating this day with such love, respect, and sincerity. She noted that such events strengthen the social fabric of society and reconnect the new generation with their roots.

Youm-e-Takbeer celebrated in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

PESHAWAR (APP): The people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Thursday celebrated Youm-e-Takbeer with patriotic fervor, marking the 27th anniversary of Pakistan's successful nuclear tests conducted in Chagai, Balochistan on May 28, 1998.

Citizens from all walks of life ranging from Chitral to Dera Ismail Khan and Kohistan to Khyber along with government officials, civil society members, students, and political activists participated in rallies, seminars, walks, and speech competitions to honour this pivotal day in Pakistan's history.

On this day in 1998, Pakistan had successfully responded to a series of Indian nuclear tests by detonating six nuclear devices, becoming the seventh nuclear power in the world and the first in the Muslim Ummah.

He said former Prime Minister Muhammad Nawaz Sharif has set aside international pressure and conducted six nuclear tests against five by India.

Engr Amir Muqam said that Pakistan will continue moral, diplomatic and political support of Kashmiris.

Addressing a public gathering in connection with the day at Nowshera, PMLN Nowshera District President Hamza Khan said Pakistan's nuclear tests have restored regional deterrence and significantly elevated our country's international stature.

"It was a moment of great pride for the entire nation and the Muslim world as 27 years ago on this historic day Pakistan joined the prestigious club of nuclear states," he remarked," adding former PM Nawaz Sharif's decision of going for the tests have proved correct today after India's unprovoked attacks in Pakistan on May 7, 2025.

He noted that India's aggressive policies, including the illegal occupation of Jammu and Kashmir in 1947, four wars, and more recent hostilities such as the Balakot air strike and attacks inside Pakistan and Azad Kashmir in May 2025, compelled Pakistan to strengthen its defense.

"India's hegemonic ambitions left Pakistan with no choice but to respond decisively in 1998," he said, adding that Pakistan's military strength has consistently foiled hostile designs of the enemy.

Ikhtiar Wali Khan, the Prime Minister's Coordinator on Information and KP Affairs, emphasized former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's leadership in resisting international pressure to proceed with the nuclear tests. "Had Pakistan not responded on May 28, it would have remained vulnerable to regional threats," he said.

He lauded the success of recent operations of Iron Wall and Marak-e-Haq, in which Pakistani forces proved their advanced operational capabilities, including downing multiple Indian warplanes.

Showing its superiority against India during operation Iron Wall, Pakistani forces have shutdown six IAF warplanes including Rafale jets besides destroyed bases and military infrastructure of the enemy.

The Speakers said Pakistan and India should come to the negotiating table and resolve the issue of Jammu and Kashmir for durable peace in the region.

They said that Pakistan had lost about 90,000 people in the war against terrorism, besides enduring economic losses worth \$150 billion and time has come to inform the world community about Pakistan's sacrifices in war against terrorism.

The day was also celebrated in erstwhile Fata where rallies and walks held in all tribal districts.

Youm-e-Takbeer remains a symbol of Pakistan's unwavering commitment to its sovereignty and the unity of its people in the face of adversity.



KP govt announces to present budget on June 13

PESHAWAR (INP): The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government on Wednesday announced the date for presenting the budget for the upcoming fiscal year.

According to the report, the budget for the fiscal year 2025-26 will be presented on June 13, and the session of the provincial assembly for the budget presentation will be held at 3 PM.

The Finance Department has sent a letter regarding the budget to the Secretary of Law and the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly Secretariat.

Sources indicate that the total volume of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's budget for the next fiscal year is expected to be around Rs. 2,000 billion, while Rs. 450 to 500 billion may be allocated for development projects.

It is worth noting that the total volume of the current fiscal year's budget is Rs. 1,751 billion, with the Annual Development Programme (ADP) amounting to Rs. 420 billion.

For the upcoming fiscal year, the provincial government is preparing to present a surplus budget of Rs. 180 billion.



In brief

CPEC security to be ensured F.P. Report

D I KHAN: Dera police and Motorway have decided to set up a joint unit to ensure security and safety of passengers travelling on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) Motorway. The decision to this effect was taken in a meeting held here with Regional Police Officer Dera range Syed Ashfaq Anwar. According to RPO's spokesman, the meeting was convened on the special directives of the Inspector General of Police, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Zulfiqar Hameed and was attended by District Police Officer (DPO) Dera, Sahibzada Sajjad Ahmed, SP Motorway Police Atique-ur-Rehman, SP Paharpur, and SDPOs from the Paharpur Circle, along with other senior officers. During the meeting, RPO Dera emphasized that it was a top priority of the police to ensure the security of the CPEC motorway and the safety of its travelers. He was of the view that all available resources should be utilized to fulfill the responsibility. As part of efforts, it was decided that a joint unit comprising motorway and district police would be formed to effectively respond to any emergency situation in a timely manner. Moreover, repair work would be initiated on the fencing along both sides of the motorway to prevent potential accidents and improve overall security. The participants reiterated to make the CPEC Motorway fully secure and ensure uninterrupted traffic flow at all times.

UAJK observes Youm-e-Takbeer F.P. Report

MUZAFFARABAD: The University of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (UAJK) commemorated Youm-e-Takbeer with great zeal and patriotic fervor at the Education Hall, Chella Campus on Wednesday. The day-long celebration, held to mark the anniversary of Pakistan's historic nuclear tests on May 28, 1998, featured a range of intellectually stimulating and culturally enriching activities. Students from University of Azad Jammu and Kashmir, University of Kotli, Mirpur University of Science and Technology, Women University Bagh, University of Poonch and University of Bhimber participated in various inter-university competitions, including English and Urdu declamation contests, essay writing, painting, documentaries, and sports events. In the English declamation contest, Aiman Raffaqat from the Department of English, UAJK, secured first position and was awarded a laptop. Kaynat Minhas from the Law Department, University of Kotli, claimed the second spot with a cash prize of Rs. 5,000, while Isma Ibrar from the Urdu Department, UAJK, earned third place.

Monitoring drive concluded F.P. Report

QUETTA: Under the special directives of Balochistan's Minister for Health, Bakhth Muhammad Kakar, the Health Department has successfully concluded a comprehensive health facility monitoring campaign across the province from May 12 to May 22. As part of this initiative, selected officials from the Health Department were divided into six groups and dispatched to all districts of Balochistan. Their mission was to conduct detailed inspections of various health centers at the district level.

KKKUK marks Youm-e-Takbeer with awareness walk



F.P. Report

KARAK: Khushal Khan Khattak University Karak (KKKUK) today observed Youm-e-Takbeer by organizing an Awareness Walk on campus. The event, held upon the directives of the Vice Chancellor, Prof Dr Tahir Khalily, commemorated the anniversary of Pakistan's historic nuclear tests and formed part of nationwide observances of this significant day in the nation's history.

The Awareness Walk saw participation from university faculty, staff, and students, reflecting a collective spirit of national pride and remembrance.

In his message on the occasion, Prof Dr Tahir Khalily, Vice Chancellor KKKUK, emphasized the

university's dedication to national progress. "We are committed to fostering an environment that nurtures innovation, scientific inquiry, and a deep sense of patriotism," he stated. "The awareness walk organized today is part of our efforts to educate and inspire our students about the critical importance of science and technology in national development. Let us use this occasion to reaffirm our commitment to the principles of peace, security, and progress. The spirit of Youm-e-Takbeer encourages us to continue striving for excellence in our respective fields, contributing to the growth and prosperity of our beloved nation."

Earlier in his message, Registrar Dr

Ghani ur Rehman, shedding light on the historical context of Youm-e-Takbeer. He discussed the significance of nuclear deterrence for Pakistan's national security and lauded the scientific achievements that made the nuclear tests possible.

Dr Shad Muhammad Provost and Dr Hassan Ahmad Shah, In-Charge of the Debating Society and the event organizer, extended their gratitude to the Vice Chancellor and all participants for their active involvement in the awareness walk, making the commemoration a success. The event served as a poignant reminder of Pakistan's technological advancements and its commitment to maintaining regional peace and stability.

One booked for illegal excavation

Shafi Ullah

MINGORA: In a significant crackdown on cultural heritage looting, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Archaeology Department, in collaboration with local police, has registered FIR against an individual accused of illegal excavation and trading of valuable artifacts in Khwazakshela, on Wednesday.

The accused, identified as Ibrahim Shah, was allegedly conducting clandestine digs at various archaeological sites in the region, with videos of these activities surfacing on social media platforms, including TikTok. These videos prompted swift action from the authorities.

According to sources, the Archaeology Department's investigation confirmed that Ibrahim Shah was involved in systematic looting, prompting the department to seek legal recourse. Police have launched a manhunt for the suspect, while his shop in the area has been sealed as part of the ongoing investigation.

Dr. Abdul Samad, Director General of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Archaeology Department, emphasized the department's commitment to safeguarding the region's rich cultural heritage. "We will not tolerate any attempts to damage archaeological sites or steal valuable artifacts," he stated. "Protecting these irreplaceable treasures is a priority for us."

Nawazuddin, In-charge of the Swat Museum, added that the department's action was a direct response to the suspect's social media activities, which highlighted the illegal excavation.

"Such actions undermine our efforts to preserve our history and culture," he noted.

The case underscores the growing concern over the looting of cultural artifacts in Pakistan's archaeological-rich regions. Authorities are working to apprehend the suspect and prevent further damage to the region's historical sites. The incident has sparked renewed calls for stricter enforcement of laws protecting cultural heritage and for greater awareness about the importance of preserving historical artifacts.

This crackdown is seen as a significant step in the fight against cultural heritage looting, and locals have welcomed the move, expressing hope that it will deter future attempts to exploit the region's archaeological wealth.

Yaum-e-Takbeer observed in Hafizabad

F.P. Report

HAFIZABAD: The district administration of Hafizabad organized a grand ceremony at the District Complex on the occasion of Yaum-e-Takbeer, commemorating Pakistan's historic nuclear tests conducted on May 28, 1998. The event was marked by a flag-hoisting ceremony led by Deputy Commissioner Abdul Razzaq.

Prominent attendees included Pakistan Muslim League-N leader Ch. Tahawur Hussain Tarar, Additional Deputy Commissioner (General & Finance) Hamid Nasir Goraya, Assistant Commissioner Salman Akbar, CEO Education Muhammad Akram Ashraf, as well as officials from the district administration, police, Rescue 1122, and other departments. People from various walks of life also participated in the event. The police presented a formal guard of honor during the ceremony.

Speaking on the occasion, Deputy Commissioner Abdul Razzaq and PML-N leader Ch. Tahawur Hussain Tarar highlighted the significance of Yaum-e-Takbeer, stating that Pakistan holds the distinct honor of being the first Muslim nuclear power. They emphasized that this achievement is not only a source of pride for the Pakistani nation but also for the entire Muslim Ummah.

"The successful nuclear tests in 1998, under the leadership of the government, armed forces, and our brilliant scientists, demonstrated to the world that Pakistan's defense is invincible," they remarked. They

further asserted that Pakistan's nuclear capability ensures a robust and effective deterrence against any hostile intentions.

Unknown robbers opened firing on religious scholar: In a shocking incident near Chatha Daad village, two unidentified armed assailants opened fire on renowned Sunni Islamic scholar Allama Pir Syed Burhan Haider Naqvi during a robbery attempt. The attackers made off with over one lakh rupees and a mobile phone, while local police reportedly failed to respond in time.

According to details, Syed Burhan Haider Naqvi, who also serves as the Khateeb of Moti Masjid at Fawara Chowk, Hafizabad, was on his way to purchase a sacrificial animal ahead of Eid, accompanied by his close friend Qari Sheeraz Nizami. The incident occurred along a canal track near Chatha Daad where two masked men on a motorcycle intercepted them at gunpoint. When Qari Sheeraz resisted the robbery attempt, the assailants opened fire. Fortunately, both victims narrowly escaped serious injury. The robbers then forcibly seized a significant amount of cash and a mobile phone before fleeing the scene.

APGPWA condemns imposition of tax on pensioners: The All Punjab Government Pensioners Welfare Association has strongly condemned the Federal Government's reported intention to impose income tax on pensioners in the upcoming June budget, calling it a cruel move against the country's elderly retired employees.

In a joint statement issued to the press, the association's Central President Sanaullah Khokhar, Patron-in-Chief Prof. Ch. Salahuddin, and Secretary General Prof. Muhammad Bashir Sial denounced the proposal, terming it a mockery of the helplessness of senior citizens who have served the nation with dedication.

"In developed nations, pensioners are granted additional relief and benefits every year through the national budget, while in Pakistan, they are treated as a burden," the statement read. Prolonged power outage, which rendered essential hospital services disrupted amid scorching heat and suffocating humidity. The hospital's backup generators also failed to operate, further worsening the situation.

Eyewitnesses reported that several patients were seen gasping for breath, while many others lay helpless in the sweltering wards. Attendants, visibly distressed, voiced strong protest against the hospital administration and district authorities, accusing them of negligence and mismanagement.

Traffic police issue 46,400 challans: In a revealing development from one of Punjab's smaller districts, the Hafizabad Traffic Police issued a staggering 46,400 challans during the current year, amassing over Rs. 41.3 million in fines for various traffic violations.

May 28, observes in Landi Kotal F.P. Report

LANDI KOTAL: Locals celebrated Youm-e-Takbeer to mark the historic day of May 28, 1998 when Pakistan became nuclear power after atomic tests, conducted in the hills of Chagai, Balochistan.

It is to be mentioned here that Pakistan joined as the seventh nuclear nation in the world and the first Muslim state to have a nuclear arsenal. A rally was organized in tehsil compound that was attended by members of civil society besides officials of local administration, Tehsil Municipal Authority, Public Health, police officials and others.

Addressing on the occasion, speakers said that twenty seven years ago, a team of scientists led by Abdul Qadeer Khan had carried out nuclear tests in the hills of Chagai, Balochistan upon the decision of that time federal government in response to India nuclear tests and made the Pakistan defense invincible. Paying rich tribute to the engineer of the Pakistan nuclear program, Dr Abdul Qadeer Khan they said that the renowned and the patriotic Pakistani scientist made impossible possible.

Pakistan nuclear program is for peaceful purposes but in case of any aggression our armed force is capable enough to give a befitting response. The participants while holding national flags chanted slogans like "Long Live Pakistan," "Long Live Pak armed force", offered prayers for the solidarity and prosperity of the country and dispersed. Prior to it, like other parts of the country, the day was a public holiday in Landi Kotal.

Developmental projects inaugurated F.P. Report

BANNU: Several uplift projects were inaugurated at the medical college in Bannu. The college's dean and chief executive Prof Dr Sanaullah Dawar along with faculty members opened the newly completed projects including car parking facility, guest house, common room at the academic block and a basketball court.

Other developmental schemes which were inaugurated included a portion of road at the main entrance of college and installation of barrier gates. The college's vice dean Prof Dr Muhammad Sajjad, Prof Dr Zakia Khan, Prof Dr Abdul Ghafoor Khan Dawar, Prof Dr Muhammad Nadeem, Prof Dr Attaullah, Prof Dr Asadullah, Prof Dr Muhammad Shoaib, Prof Dr Abdul Razzaq, Prof Dr Muhammad Daraz Khan, Prof Dr Muhammad Ashraf, Prof Dr Naveed Pervez, Prof Dr Haris Hameed, Prof Dr Samiul Haq, heads of departments and employees were also present on the occasion.

Dr Sanaullah said that the uplift projects were aimed for the betterment of students and faculty members and those would also help to further improve the educational environment. He said that the common room would enable female staffers and guests to take rest and carry out other tasks in a peaceful atmosphere.

"The basketball court has been established under promotion of sports initiative to provide the students with an opportunity to focus on their mental and physical health", he maintained. The chief executive of the college said that the installation of barrier gates at the three entrance points of the academic block would improve security of offices, laboratories and other installations.

Youm-e-Takbir celebrated F.P. Report

BUNER: Buner Press Club celebrated Youm-e-Takbir celebrated while district police officer Saud Khan participated, on Wednesday.

The public servants and journalists jointly celebrated the joy of Pakistan becoming a nuclear power. On this occasion, information was shared regarding Youm-e-Takbir 28th May, 1998 and joint prayers were offered for Pakistan's integrity, stability, security, progress, prosperity and peace.

Youm-e-Takbir celebrated in Kohat

F.P. Report

KOHAT: Like other parts of the country, "Youm-e-Takbir" was also celebrated with national zeal and fervor in the entire Kohat Division. The main function of the day was held at the Divisional Headquarters, Kohat, in which Commissioner Kohat Division Syed Motasim Billah Shah was the chief guest, while Deputy Commissioner Kohat Abdul Akram Chitrali was the guest of honor.

The function beside the Heads of the district administration, police and line departments, was also attended by the school children, teachers and people of different schools of thought in large numbers. The ceremony was started with the recitation of the Holy Quran and the hoisting of the flag.

Meanwhile, "Youm-e-Takbir" ceremonies were also held in all the district headquarters of the Kohat Division under the supervision of the respective Deputy Commissioners, in which government officers and the common people participated in large numbers.

Commissioner Kohat Division in his speech said that 27 years ago, on this day, i.e. on May 28, 1998, Pakistan carried out 5 successful nuclear Tests in Chaghi area of Balochistan in response to India's nuclear explosion, destroying the expansionist and negative intentions of the cunning enemy India and becoming a superpower in the region. He said that Pakistan is the only Islamic country in the world that

has emerged as the first Islamic nuclear power and has made the country's defense invincible by conducting nuclear tests.

Motasim Billah said that India's nuclear explosions had badly disrupted the balance of power in the region. However, May 28 is a memorable day which we are celebrating with pride as "Youm Takbir". He said that it is necessary that we explain to our new generation the history, geographical features and geographical and ideological importance of Pakistan and inculcate in them a sense of patriotism. He said, if we succeed in it, no power in the world can dare to harm our unity and solidarity nor incite sentiments against Pakistan.

Commissioner Kohat said that in the thoughts of Quaid-e-Azam, we do not find a single word about personal interests, color, race, religion or class system, but he always talked about organization, firm belief and faith. If we follow the thoughts of Quaid-e-Azam, then no one can stop Pakistan from moving ahead.

On this occasion, he paid rich tribute to the unity and solidarity of the entire nation and the political and military leadership in the Bonyan Al-Marsoos operation. He also saluted the guardians of the homeland on the occasion of "Youm Takbir".

Later, Commissioner Kohat along with the Deputy Commissioner, also attended a ceremony organized by the United Foundation Kohat on the occasion of "Youm-e-Takbir" and celebrated the day with the children of

Thalassemia.

Later, a walk was also held in which the Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner, children and members of the civil society participated. Special Duaa was also offered for the integrity and solidarity of the country.

Performance of polio teams monitored: Commissioner Kohat Division Syed Motasim Billah Shah, has along with the Deputy Commissioner Kohat, despite a public holiday on Wednesday, monitored the performance of polio teams during the campaign. He went door to door in the posh area of KDA in Kohat and inquired about the performance of polio teams. He also checked the fingerprinting of children who were vaccinated with polio drops beside the homes wall chalking. He also met the parents of the children and discussed with them the effectiveness and importance of polio.

Commissioner Kohat said that polio campaign is a national cause and cooperation in it is the basic responsibility of every member of the society. He added that the eradication of polio from Pakistan is very crucial because polio has been eradicated from the entire world and this virus is present only in Pakistan and Afghanistan. God forbid, if we do not control the Polio in time, we may face international travel restrictions, he maintained. Therefore, making Pakistan a polio-free country is in the interest of all of us and we should cooperate in this regard, he concluded.

KUST holds seminar on mental health

Sahibzada Afridi

KOHAT: The Department of Psychology at Kohat University of Science and Technology (KUST), in collaboration with the Office of Research, Innovation, and Commercialization (ORIC), organized a one-day seminar to highlight the importance of mental health.

The event witnessed the participation of a large number of students, faculty members, and psychologists. Dr. Ambreen Khizar, Head of the Psychology Department and Associate Professor, along with Dr. Saadia Zia, Assistant Professor at the University of Southern Punjab, Multan, graced the seminar as guest speakers. They

delivered insightful lectures on contemporary psychological trends and

At the conclusion of the event, Pro Vice-Chancellor Professor Dr. Muhammad



strategies to attain mental peace in today's fast-paced life.

Speaking at the occasion, ORIC Director Nadir Sarfraz emphasized that such events play a vital role in promoting an academic and research-oriented environment. He congratulated the chief organizer, Ms. Sadaf Iqbal, Clinical Psychologist and Lecturer, and her team for their dedication and the successful organization of the seminar.

Naseeruddin distributed certificates and shields among the guest speakers, organizers, and participants.

Vice-Chancellor of KUST, Professor Dr. Syed Zafar Ilyas, in a meeting at his office, appreciated the efforts of the Psychology Department and ORIC for organizing the successful seminar. He also expressed his interest in future collaborative research projects with the University of Southern Punjab, Multan.

APCA announces strike on June 3

F.P. Report

LARKANA: Due to the non-acceptance of the demands of the clerks, the All Pakistan Clerks Association (APCA) launched a protest at the Sindh district headquarters in Larkana. APCA took out rallies from different areas of Larkana city and held a protest demonstration at Jinnah Bagh Chowk.

The demonstrators held banners and placards and shouted slogans demanding that the legitimate demands of the clerks be accepted. On this occasion, APCA Pakistan leaders President Rafiq Ahmed Jatoti, Muhammad Bux Kumbher, Zamir Hussain Chandio and other protested against media persons and said that

the salaries of the employees should be increased by 100 percent in the next budget. If legitimate demands such as timely promotion of all employees to their previous grade and recruitment of grades 1 to 4 under the supervision of the relevant officers of the institution are not accepted, a series of protests will be launched by completely locking down offices in Sindh on June 3.

Director Ombudsman Larkana visits schools: Last day, to see the performance of teachers and the quality of education among students in various schools of Larkana city, Regional Director Provincial Ombudsman Larkana Ali Akbar Jagirani visited Government Boys Higher Secondary School

Sheikh Zaid Larkana, Government Boys High School Walid Larkana and Government Girls Higher Secondary School Munawarabad Larkana.

On this occasion, the construction work of the building of Government Girls Higher Secondary School Munawarabad was in progress and no student was present in the school while the school was closed. On this, the Regional Director directed the District Education Officer to ensure the attendance of the students by making arrangement to continue the educational process at another place. He instructed the Education Works Department to complete the construction work of the school soon.

KWH observes Youm-e-Takbeer

F.P. Report

TAXILA: Kurram Welfare Home (KWH) in collaboration with the Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF) organized a vibrant and patriotic event in connection with Youm-e-Takbeer at a government school in Taxila. The event aimed to instill national pride, civic awareness, and the historical importance of Youm-e-Takbeer among school students.

The ceremony witnessed enthusiastic participation from students, teachers, local dignitaries, and parents.

The school atmosphere was infused with patriotic fervor as the campus was adorned with national colors, and expressions of love for Pakistan echoed throughout the venue.

The chief guests of the event were former Member of the Provincial Assembly (MPA) Mr. Umar Farooq and Mr. Haris Shinwari,

Director Coordination at Kurram Welfare Home. Both delivered insightful speeches on the national significance of Youm-e-Takbeer.

Umar Farooq emphasized the historical importance of the day, stating, May 28th marks a monumental milestone in Pakistan's history—the day our nation emerged as a nuclear power, affirming our sovereignty and strength on the global stage.



GAZA STRIP: A child cradles a bottle of cooking oil outside an aid distribution site in Rafah.

Ambassador Faisal visits WAM Headquarters

F.P. Report

ABU DHABI: Pakistan's Ambassador to the United Arab Emirates, H.E. Faisal Niaz Tirmizi, was warmly received by H.E. Mohamed Al Hammadi, Director-General of the Emirates News Agency (WAM), during a visit to WAM Headquarters in Abu Dhabi.

During the visit, both sides engaged in a productive meeting focused on strengthening bilateral cooperation, particularly in the field of news and content sharing. The discussion took place within the framework of the existing



Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between WAM and the Associated Press of Pakistan (APP).

The two officials also exchanged views on promoting the rich cultural

heritage and tourism potential of Pakistan and the UAE, with a view to fostering deeper people-to-people connections. Senior officials from both sides were present during the meeting.

Russia chides Merz over remarks

MOSCOW (Reuters): Russia said that remarks by German Chancellor Friedrich Merz about long-range Ukrainian strikes into Russia with European weapons suggested that a decision allowing such attacks had been made long ago but kept secret.

Merz said there were no longer any range restrictions on the weapons supplied to Ukraine by Britain, France, Germany and the United States, and that Ukraine could now do "long range fire". But Merz's remarks were unclear as he also said that Ukraine had been unable to do that until some time ago.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said the remarks indicated the calibre of people who had risen to power in leading European countries. "He (Merz) said yesterday with such pretentiousness that from now on and forever there are no restrictions on the range of strikes," Lavrov told reporters at a meeting in Moscow with Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan.

Lavrov said other German officials appeared to have contradicted the chancellor and that such contradictory signals suggested to Moscow that European powers had long ago decided to allow Ukraine to make long-range strikes deep into Russia with European missiles but that the decision "was kept secret". Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that recent statements by European leaders on the issue had prompted confusion but that if long-range missile fires had been permitted, then it would amount to an "escalation". Putin said last year that Russia could deploy conventional missiles within striking distance of the United States and its European allies if they allowed Ukraine to strike deeper into Russia with long-range Western weapons.

New identity of Pakistani cinema

Mahira Khan debuts in a Pashtun role in 'Love Guru'

Asif Ali Yousafzai

DUBAI: For decades, Pakistan's drama industry has mesmerized audiences across the world with its compelling stories, emotions, and artistic finesse. Dramas such as Humsafar, Mere Paas Tum Ho, Zindagi Gulzar Hai, and Pyare Afzal have not only gained popularity in Pakistan but also in the Middle East, Europe, Africa, and other regions. These productions gave international recognition to artists like Humayun Saeed and Mahira Khan.

While the drama industry thrived, Pakistan's film industry faced persistent challenges - including technical deficiencies, limited budgets, and a shortage of cinemas. However, this landscape is now evolving. With a renewed spirit and global vision, Pakistani cinema is re-emerging - and Love Guru stands as a shining example of this transformation.

Love Guru: Grabbing Global Attention Ahead of Eid al-Adha Release

This romantic comedy brings Humayun Saeed and Mahira Khan back together on-screen after nearly a decade. The film's trailer received widespread acclaim upon its release, with screenings at New York's Times Square, London, and PSL events in Lahore, instantly capturing international attention.

Spectacular Promotion and Diplomatic Support in Dubai

As part of the film's promotional campaign, the cast visited Dubai, where the Pakistani Consulate hosted a formal dinner in their honor. Ambassador Faisal Niaz Tirmizi and



Consul General Hussain Muhammad presented honorary shields to Humayun Saeed and Mahira Khan.

Speaking at the event, Ambassador Tirmizi highlighted the importance of cultural diplomacy. He stressed that Pakistani dramas and films should be dubbed into Arabic, Turkish, Persian, and European languages so the world can better understand Pakistan's art and storytelling.

Mahira Khan's Pashtun Role: A Unique Artistic Experience

In Love Guru, Mahira Khan plays the role of a woman from a Pashtun family for the first time in her career - marking a unique and bold venture into uncharted territory. Audiences are intrigued to see how she embodies the character and delivers a performance in Pashto dialect.

Mahira remarked, "Art has no borders. It deserves to be appreciated around the world. I'm glad to have the opportunity to portray a character

from a different culture and language."

A Tribute to the Pashtun Community

The film features the Pashto track "Sada Ashna" song by emerging artists "Jaam Boys," along with a traditional Punjabi folk song by Arif Lohar. For the approximately 1.08 million Pashtun Pakistanis and 300,000 Afghans (majority Pashtun) living in Dubai, this inclusion is seen as a positive sign that Pakistani cinema is embracing ethnic diversity.

We extend special thanks to Humayun Saeed for ensuring that a Pashto song was included in the film. The movie is directed by Nadeem Baig, whose vision has brought this cultural fusion to the screen.

New Directions, New Thinking

Ambassador Tirmizi cited Turkey as an example of how national cinema can find global success. He noted that, with proper platforms, multilingual accessibility, and cultural integration, Pakistani films too can make their mark in international markets.

Love Guru is not just a film - it's a message that Pakistani cinema is now ready to take its place on the world stage.

With Mahira Khan's portrayal of a Pashtun woman, the film's global promotion, and diplomatic endorsement, Love Guru is opening a promising new chapter for the Pakistani film industry. Now the question remains - will Mahira Khan's "Pashtun persona" and Humayun Saeed's "guru style" win the hearts of the audience?

ASEAN opens summit with Persian Gulf nations and China

KUALA LUMPUR (AP): A regional association of Southeast Asian nations held a summit with China and six Persian Gulf countries in efforts to expand economic engagement and bolster resilience amid global trade volatility due to US tariff hikes.

Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, in his opening remarks, said the inaugural summit in Malaysia's capital Kuala Lumpur would open up a new chapter of cooperation. The 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the Gulf Cooperation Council and China have a combined GDP of nearly \$25 trillion and a market of over 2 billion people, offering vast opportunities to promote cross-regional investment, he said.

"I am confident that ASEAN, the GCC, and China can draw upon our unique attributes and shape a future that is more connected, more resilient, and more prosperous," he told the summit, attended by Chinese Premier Li Qiang. Li said the three-way cooperation would benefit all sides, contributing to economic development and peace in the region. China is ASEAN's top trading partner, and has sought to present itself as a reliable ally to the region amid its rivalry with the US. The GCC supplies over a third of China's crude oil imports.

"China will join ASEAN and the GCC in forging synergies that multiply," he said. Malaysia is the current chair of ASEAN, which also includes Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. Anwar told a separate ASEAN-GCC forum that partner-

ship between the two blocs would be key to navigating an increasingly complex global economy. He later said the two sides planned to launch talks to establish a free trade area.

Kuwait's Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khalid Al Sabah said the two blocs, which held their first summit in Riyadh in 2023, would build on their momentum to deepen cooperation and "improve our ability to face crisis." He said the GCC is ASEAN's seventh-largest trade partner, with total trade reaching \$130.7 billion in 2023. The GCC comprises the oil-producing nations of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Anwar said last week the GCC already has strong links with the US and "wants to be close to China too."

ASEAN has maintained a policy of neutrality, engaging both Beijing and the United States, but US President Donald Trump's threats of sweeping tariffs came as a blow. Six of the bloc's members were among the worst hit, with tariffs between 32% and 49%. Trump announced a 90-day pause on tariffs in April for most of the world, and this month struck a similar deal with key rival China, easing trade war tensions. ASEAN is seeking a summit with Trump on the tariffs, while moving to expand trade ties with China and others.

Brunei's Sultan Hassanalkhalid, one of the world's wealthiest men and longest-reigning current monarch, was missing from the three-party summit after he was hospitalized for fatigue. He attended ASEAN summits and the ASEAN-GCC meeting. "He is feeling a little tired, so he's just resting" at the National Heart Institute, Anwar told

reporters.

The sultan's office also issued a statement saying the monarch will rest at the heart institute for "several days" following advice from Malaysian medical experts. It said he was "in good health" but didn't elaborate. Anwar told a news conference at the end of the summit that ASEAN wasn't pivoting towards China but that it works with both Beijing and Washington because it makes economic sense. "I don't think (ASEAN) is tilting in any way," he said.

Collins Chong Yew Keat, a foreign affairs, strategy and security analyst with Universiti Malaya, said the ASEAN-GCC-China summit underscored Beijing's efforts to strengthen support during its trade battle with the US. He noted it came on the heels of Trump's recent charm offensive in Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. While relying on US defense support, ASEAN is increasing reliance and partnership with China and other US rivals, Chong said. The bloc has failed to take strong action against Beijing's aggression in the disputed South China Sea, he said. ASEAN members Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia and Brunei have overlapping claims with China, which asserts sovereignty over almost the entire South China Sea.

"If this continues under the current Trump administration, it will create further room for Washington to distance itself from the region, which will spell disaster and create an even deeper Chinese presence," he said. ____ This story has been corrected to show that combined ASEAN-GCC-China GDP is nearly \$25 trillion, not \$25 billion.

More than 200 Ukrainian POWs have died in Russian prisons

KYIV, Ukraine (AP): "Everything will be all right," Ukrainian soldier Serhii Hryhoriev said this so often during brief phone calls from the front that his wife and two daughters took it to heart. His younger daughter, Oksana, tattooed the phrase on her wrist as a talisman.

Even after Hryhoriev was captured by the Russian army in 2022, his anxious family clung to the belief that he would ultimately be OK. After all, Russia is bound by international law to protect prisoners of war. When Hryhoriev finally came home, though, it was in a body bag.

A Russian death certificate said the 59-year-old died of a stroke. But a Ukrainian autopsy and a former POW who was detained with him told a different story about how he died — one of violence and medical neglect at the hands of his captors. Hryhoriev is one of more than 200 Ukrainian POWs who have died while imprisoned since Russia's full-scale invasion three years ago. Abuse inside Russian prisons was likely a contributing factor in many of these deaths, according to officials from human rights groups, the UN, the Ukrainian government and a Ukrainian medical examiner who has performed dozens of POW autopsies.

The officials say the prison death toll adds to evidence that Russia is systematically brutalizing captured soldiers. They say forensic discrepancies like Hryhoriev's, and the repatriation of bodies that are mutilated and decomposed, point to an effort to cover up alleged torture, starvation and poor health care at dozens of prisons and detention centers across Russia and occupied Ukraine. Russian authorities did not respond to requests for comment. They have previously accused Ukraine of mistreating Russian POWs — allegations the UN has partially backed up, though it says Ukraine's violations are far less common and severe

than what Russia is accused of.

Hryhoriev joined the Ukrainian army in 2019 after he lost his job as an office worker at a high school. When the war began three years later, he was stationed with other soldiers in Mariupol, an industrial port city that was the site of a fierce battle — and far from his home in the central Poltava region. On April 10, 2022, Hryhoriev called his family to reassure them that "everything will be all right." That was the last time they ever spoke to him.

Two days later, a relative of a soldier in Hryhoriev's unit called to say the men had been captured. After Mariupol fell to Russia, more than 2,000 soldiers defending the city became Russian prisoners. Soon his family got a call from the International Committee of the Red Cross, which confirmed he was alive and officially registered as a POW, guaranteeing his protection under the Geneva Conventions. "We were told: 'that means everything is fine ... Russia has to return him,'" Hryhoriev's wife, Halyna, recalled.

In August 2022, she received a letter from him, that addressed her by a nickname. "My dear Halochka," he wrote. "I am alive and well. Everything will be all right." Desperate for more information, his daughter Oksana, 31, sourced Russian social media accounts, where videos of Ukrainian POWs regularly appeared. Eventually, she saw him in one — looking gaunt and missing teeth. His gray hair was cropped very short, framing gentle features now partially covered by a beard.

In the video, likely shot under duress, Hryhoriev said to the camera: "I'm alive and well." "But if you looked at him, you could see that wasn't true," Oksana said. The truth was dismal, said Oleksii Honcharov, a 48-year-old Ukrainian POW who was detained with him. Honcharov lived in the same prison barracks as Hryhoriev

starting in the fall of 2022. Over a period of months, he witnessed Hryhoriev absorb the same severe punishment as every other POW at the Kamensk-Shakhtinsky Correctional Colony in southwest Russia.

"Everyone got hit — no exceptions," said Honcharov, who was repatriated to Ukraine in February as part of a prisoner swap. "Some more, some less, but we all took it." Honcharov endured months of chest pain while in captivity. Even then, the beatings never stopped, he said, and sometimes they began after his pleas for medical care, which were ignored.

"Toward the end, I could barely walk," said Honcharov, who was diagnosed with tuberculosis once back in Ukraine — an increasingly common ailment among returning POWs. A 2024 UN report found that 95% of released Ukrainian POWs had endured "systematic" torture. Prisoners described beatings, electric shocks, suffocation, sexual violence, prolonged stress positions, mock executions, and sleep deprivation.

"This conduct could not be more unlawful," said Danielle Bell, the UN's top human rights monitor in Ukraine. The report also said some Russian POWs were mistreated by Ukrainian forces during their initial capture — including beatings, threats and electric shocks. But the abuse stopped once Russian POWs were moved to official Ukrainian detention centers, the report said. Hryhoriev was physically strong and often outlasted younger prisoners during forced exercises, Honcharov recalled. But over time, he began showing signs of physical decline: dizziness, fatigue and, eventually, an inability to walk without help.

Yet despite his worsening condition, prison officials provided only minimal health care, Honcharov said. In a bright, sterile room with the sour-sweet smell

of human decomposition, Inna Padei performs autopsies on Ukrainian soldiers repatriated by Russia, as well as civilians exhumed from mass graves. Hundreds of bodies zipped up in black plastic bags have been delivered in refrigerated trucks to the morgue where she works in Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine. Those who died in battle are still wearing military fatigues and often have obvious external wounds. The bodies of former POWs are dressed in prison uniforms and are often mutilated and decomposed.

It is the job of Padei and other forensic experts to piece together how soldiers like Hryhoriev died. These reports are often the only reliable information the soldiers' families get — and they will be used by Ukraine, along with testimony from former POWs, to bring war crimes charges against Russia at the International Criminal Court. The body of a former POW recently examined by Padei had an almond-sized fracture on the right side of its skull. That suggested the soldier was struck by a blunt object — a blow potentially strong enough to have killed him instantly, or shortly after, she said.

"These injuries may not always be the direct cause of death," Padei said, "but they clearly indicate the use of force and torture against the service-men." Earlier this year, Amnesty International documented widespread torture of Ukrainian POWs in Russia. Its report was especially critical of Russia's secrecy regarding the whereabouts and condition of POWs, saying it refused to grant rights groups or health workers access to its prisons, leaving families in the dark for months or years about their loved ones. Of the more than 5,000 POWs Russia has repatriated to Ukraine, at least 206 died in captivity, including more than 50 when an explosion ripped through a Russian-controlled prison barracks,

according to the Ukrainian government. An additional 245 Ukrainian POWs were killed by Russian soldiers on the battlefield, according to Ukrainian prosecutors.

The toll of dead POWs is expected to rise as more bodies are returned and identified, but forensic experts face significant challenges in determining causes of death. In some cases, internal organs are missing. Other times, it appears as if bruises or injuries have been hidden or removed. Ukrainian officials believe the mutilation of bodies is an effort by Russia to conceal the true causes of death. Extreme decomposition is another obstacle, officials say.

"They hold the bodies until they reach a state where nothing can be determined," said Petro Yatsenko, a spokesperson for the Ukrainian government agency in charge of POW affairs. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has said the prompt exchange of POWs must be part of any ceasefire agreement, along with the return of thousands of Ukrainian civilians, including children forcibly deported to Russia. A major prisoner exchange between Russia and Ukraine took place over the weekend. The Associated Press interviewed relatives of 21 Ukrainian POWs who died in captivity. Autopsies performed in Ukraine found that five of these POWs died of heart failure, including soldiers who were 22, 39 and 43. Four others died from tuberculosis or pneumonia, and three others perished, respectively, from an infection, asphyxia and a blunt force head wound.

Padei said cases like these — and others she has seen — are red flags, suggesting that physical abuse and untreated injuries and illness likely contributed to many soldiers' deaths. "Under normal or humane conditions, these would not have been fatal," Padei

said. In one autopsy report, coroners said an individual had been electrocuted and beaten just days before dying of heart failure and extreme emaciation. Other autopsies noted that bodies showed signs of gangrene or untreated infections.

"Everything the returned prisoners describe ... we see the same on the bodies," Padei said. Months into Hryhoriev's detention at the Kamensk-Shakhtinsky prison — and after his daughter saw him in the Russian army's social media video — his health deteriorated significantly, according to Honcharov. But instead of being sent to a hospital, Hryhoriev was moved to a tiny cell that was isolated from other prisoners. Another Ukrainian captive, a paramedic, was assigned to stay with him.

"It was damp, cold, with no lighting at all," recalled Honcharov. He died in that cell about a month later, Honcharov said. It was May 20, 2023, according to his Russian death certificate. The Hryhoriev family didn't learn he had died until more than six months later, when a former POW reached out. Then, in March 2024, police in central Ukraine called: A body had arrived with a Russian death certificate bearing Hryhoriev's name. A DNA test confirmed it was him. An autopsy performed in Ukraine disputed Russia's claim that Hryhoriev died of a stroke. It said he bled to death after blunt trauma to his abdomen that also damaged his spleen.

Hryhoriev's body was handed over to the family last June, and soon after he was buried in his hometown of Pryiatyn. To honor him, Hryhoriev's wife and older daughter, Yana, followed Oksana's lead and tattooed their wrists with the optimistic expression he had drilled into them. "Now we have an angel in the sky watching over us," Halyna said. "We believe everything will be all right."

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EU should realize it can't appease US

THE latest transatlantic trade storm, which started with US President Donald Trump threatening to impose 50 percent tariff on European Union exports on June 1, has subsided for now following a call between Trump and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. But the uncertainty over the relationship is far from over.

European Commissioner for Trade Maros Sefcovic wrote on X late on Monday night that he had good discussions with US Secretary of Commerce Howard Lutnick and US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer, saying the European Commission remains fully committed to constructive and focused efforts at reaching an EU-US deal.

European Commission spokeswoman Paula Pinho said on Monday that Trump and Von der Leyen agreed to "fast-track the trade negotiations and to stay in close contact", clearly referring to Trump's complaints that the US-EU talks are "going nowhere".

The commission and many EU member states have preferred a negotiated settlement during Trump's 90-day pause which expires on July 9. But they have also vowed to defend the EU's interests if negotiations fail. The commission has prepared countermeasures to hit 95 billion euros (\$108 billion) worth of US exports. It will come on top of the EU's tariffs on 21 billion euros of US exports in retaliation for US tariffs on steel and aluminum, which the EU paused for 90 days unilaterally.

The transatlantic trade tensions could not have come at a worse time. The EU has been trying to revamp and revive its economy following the Mario Draghi report on EU competitiveness last fall. The report, by the former European central bank chief and economist, revealed many problems in the bloc's economy, especially in technology, in comparison with the US and China. The EU and the US had the same size of GDP in 2008, but the US' GDP now is 50 percent larger.

The trade tensions came amid the Russia-Ukraine conflict, which still shows no sure sign of ending despite many mediation efforts. Brussels' anxiety of losing full US support for Ukraine has weighed heavily on its trade negotiations with Washington.

Worst of all, Brussels seems to have no idea of what the US exactly wants from the trade talks. The EU has offered zero-for-zero tariff on industrial goods, which was quickly turned down by Trump. The EU has even offered to buy more US energy, weapons and tech, but it still has not been able to satisfy the US.

The EU has so far stood firm, not compromising on rules in agricultural goods and digital services, the major sources of complaints of the US. This is largely because it is politically difficult for the EU, which has witnessed widespread farmers' protests in the past year, plus its 27 member states have different interests.

The uncertainty over the transatlantic trade relations and beyond has caused huge anxiety in the business community, which finds it difficult to make investment and trade decisions.

European trade experts, including former European trade commissioner Cecilia Malmstrom, have called on the EU to diversify its trade portfolio and rethink its economic relationship with the US. There have been talks about the EU applying to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, which China has also applied to join. There has also been talk of tapping trade and investment potential with China, including loosening some restrictive measures that target Chinese businesses.

Of course, there are also EU politicians trying to please some US hawks on China in order for the US to spare the EU in the trade war. But such a move would seriously damage the EU's reputation across the world for a long time to come.

It's good to learn that China's Minister of Commerce Wang Wentao and his EU counterpart Sefcovic will meet in Paris in early June on the sidelines of a World Trade Organization ministerial meeting.

China and the EU, which play vital roles in the global economy and trade, should shoulder the responsibility of upholding the multilateral global trading rules and norms and set a good example by expanding their cooperation.

That would be beneficial for the EU and the world, and also good for its trade talks with the US.

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Allies of convenience: Unveiling troubling ties between FAK and RAW

Nabiha Nur

IN the wake of India's strategic failures and military setbacks against Pakistan, it now appears to be adopting a new and troubling policy by providing support to radical militant proxies aiming to destabilize Pakistan from within. This alarming shift has become even more evident as TTP Chief Noor Wali Mehsud publicly seeks assistance and justification for alliances with Hindu nationalists, exposing the extent of foreign influence and the complex, shifting realities shaping militant strategies today.

In a recently circulated video message, Noor Wali Mehsud did not merely hint at collaboration with non-Muslim powers but openly advocated for it. He went as far as to label potential alliances with "Hindu disbelievers" as a legitimate component of their so-called "Jihad." The video has since drawn widespread condemnation, sparking intense debate and outrage across diverse segments of society. Moreover, the statement has reignited longstanding concerns regarding the ideological deviance of the Khawarij.

In Surah Al-Ma'idah, Allah commands:

"O you who believe! Do not take the Jews and Christians as allies. They are [in fact] allies of one another. And whoever is an ally to them among you - then indeed, he is [one] of them. Indeed, Allah does not guide the wrongdoing people." (Surah Al-Ma'idah, 5:51)

This verse clearly warns against political and mili-

tary allegiances with those who oppose Islamic values. Yet Noor Wali and his followers continue to manipulate these teachings in order to justify receiving support, including funds and arms, from opposing factions.

The notion that Afghanistan could benefit from a relationship with India, as claimed by Noor Wali, is being viewed not as strategic insight but as proof of foreign influence within the Khawarijeen. Many in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa believe this to be evidence that these militant groups are operating under foreign agendas, particularly those of hostile powers.

Reports suggest that Noor Wali has been exploring strategic partnerships beyond traditional alliances. It is no coincidence that these ideological shifts within FAK coincide with alleged covert support from India's Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), aiming to destabilize Pakistan's internal security. A study by former CIA targeting officer Sarah Adams has made notable claims regarding India's alleged involvement in supporting terrorism within Pakistan. According to Adams, Indian intelligence agencies have allegedly provided financial support, reportedly amounting to \$10 million, to Taliban in order to fund militant activities and promote destabilizing agendas against Pakistan. She claims that these funds were routed through India's Ministry of Defense

and used to support the personal security of Taliban Supreme Leader Mullah Hibatullah Akhundzada. According to her, this strategy represents a shift in India's approach, moving from traditional diplomacy to more covert operations aimed at destabilizing Pakistan internally.

The duplicity of such groups is no longer hidden. While they parade themselves as defenders of Islam, their backroom dealings with hostile states for financial and strategic support lay bare their hypocrisy. These alliances are not forged out of necessity but convenience, and they serve to advance agendas that are neither Islamic nor just. It is this deception, cloaked in religious language, that has become the most dangerous weapon in their arsenal.

The Prophet ﷺ warned: "The worst of creatures in the sight of Allah on the Day of Resurrection will be the double-faced person who comes with one face and speaks with another." (Sahih al-Bukhari)

The modern-day militants who negotiate with hostile adversaries and justify atrocities under the guise of jihad exhibit the same duplicity and deviation. Many religious scholars have condemned the statement made by Mufti Noor Wali regarding seeking aid from non-Muslims, declaring it un-Islamic and contrary to the principles of Shariah. Among them is Professor Dr. Qibla Ayaz, member of the Shariat Appellate Court and for-

mer Chairman of the Islamic Ideology Council, who emphasized that such remarks have no foundation in Islam. He firmly stated that the context in which Noor Wali justified alliances with disbelievers distorts the core teachings of Islam and reflects a dangerous ideological deviation.

The people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are now calling for clarity and decisive action against those who distort religion for political maneuvering. Many fear that silence or inaction will only embolden extremist factions, deepen sectarian divides, and fuel cycles of violence that put innocent lives at risk. Locals are urging the security forces to intensify and strengthen their operations against these Khawarijeen. The call is not only for military action but also for coordinated efforts to counter the ideological distortions that fuel these groups.

The grief of families devastated by FAK's actions is now compounded by outrage and disbelief. As the group embraces alliances with India, it trivializes the sacrifices made by countless civilians and soldiers alike.

Noor Wali Mehsud's controversial endorsement of ties with India has done more than ignite political controversy; it has laid bare the ideological contradictions within the Khawarij-inspired militant movements. Far from being protectors of faith, they are now increasingly seen as instruments of foreign agendas, willing to sacrifice religious authenticity and national integrity for survival.

AI sparking a global health revolution

Roland Eils and Gu Lei

IMAGINE a world where diseases are spotted before they strike, health is monitored by a digital guardian and treatments are perfectly tailored. This is no longer a distant dream but an emerging reality supercharged by artificial intelligence, big data and digital health. These technologies are rewriting global public health, offering a more reliable way to better predict illnesses, closely monitor people's well-being, treat them with pinpoint accuracy, and make healthcare fairer and faster. To achieve this, we need a strong, equitable worldwide healthcare system.

Think of AI and big data as health super-sleuths. They sift through mountains of health data, spotting patterns humans might miss, making disease prediction sharper. The large language model of DeepSeek shows promise in understanding medical conversations and helping doctors read scans for early signs of trouble, which means quicker help and access to fairer medical knowhow.

AI analysis of electronic health records can flag risks which can lead to hundreds of diseases later in life and years before the onset of the disease. This is vital for spotting individuals vulnerable to diseases during health scares. A simple, cheap AI-read eye scan could soon predict the risks for many conditions including type 2 diabetes, making large-scale, cost-

effective early disease detection feasible.

AI-powered wearables and health apps are becoming personal health coaches, tracking body signals, lifestyle and the environment to warn of risks and offer tailored advice. AI analysis of our unique chemical signature readily obtained from a single blood draw can predict multi-disease risk and track health in detail. This proactive approach is key to chronic disease control and boosting health literacy.

AI also personalizes treatment. By crunching patient data and medical studies, AI can help understand diseases, find new drug targets and predict treatment responses. It can spot patient subgroups who will respond best to specific therapies and help expedite the discovery of new medicines and testing methods, making access to life-saving drugs faster.

AI, big data and digital health technologies are transforming healthcare, making it more efficient, accessible and equitable. By automating administrative tasks, optimizing hospital work-flows, and supporting faster, more accurate diagnoses, AI reduces the burden on medical workers and shortens patients' wait time.

Advanced large language models such as DeepSeek can provide expert-level medical support for remote and underserved regions, helping bridge the gap in

access to quality medical care.

These innovations play a vital role in addressing global healthcare disparities. Low-cost AI-powered health apps and virtual consultations extend high-quality medical services to communities with limited resources. When trained on diverse medical data, AI systems offer accurate predictions for a wide range of population groups, including those historically under-represented. Affordable diagnostic tools, such as AI-analyzed retinal scans and chemical signature tests, further democratize access to vital health information, paving the way for more inclusive and proactive healthcare worldwide.

While the promise of AI in healthcare is immense, ensuring its safe, ethical and equitable use requires thoughtful regulation. Regulations for AI in healthcare markedly differs across the European Union, the United States and China. The EU leads with its comprehensive AI Act, classifying health-related AI as high-risk, and requiring strict oversight and compliance. Its General Data Protection Regulation enforces rigorous data privacy, emphasizing individual rights and explicit consent.

The US lacks a unified AI law, relying on the FDA for case-by-case regulation for AI in healthcare, and the Health Insurance Portability and

Accountability Act for data privacy, which is less stringent than the EU's GDPR.

China, on the other hand, has adopted a strategic, State-guided approach, embedding AI governance within broader national frameworks. While it has no stand-alone AI law, it issues detailed ethical guidelines and uses the Personal Information Protection Law to regulate health data, emphasizing consent and data localization.

These different models — the EU's rights-based, the US' innovation-driven, and China's State-coordinated — reflect distinct policy priorities and cultural values shaping the global landscape of AI in healthcare.

Given China's rapid pace of AI innovation and strong State coordination, the country is well positioned to accelerate the use of AI-driven healthcare solutions from urban centers to remote rural areas.

In doing so, China can serve as a global role model by demonstrating how digital health technologies can promote equity and transform public health at scale.

We are entering a new era of data-driven, AI-enabled public health. To seize the opportunities offered by this advancement, we need global cooperation, interdisciplinary research and shared ethical principles. By embracing these technologies responsibly and inclusively, we can build a smarter, fairer and healthier world for all.

More than trade on the agenda at GCC-ASEAN-China summit

Dr. Abdel Aziz Aluwaisheg

KUALA LUMPUR — On Tuesday hosted a historic trilateral summit between China, the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Chinese Premier Li Qiang and heads of state and government from the GCC and ASEAN states gathered, for the first time, to establish a new platform for cooperation. The political gathering is being followed by two days of economic summitry, in which business leaders are discussing trade and investment opportunities. If the recommendations adopted at the summit are fully implemented, there will be important strategic repercussions, with China playing a greater geopolitical role.

Judging by the wide-ranging discussions taking place over several days and the lengthy statement issued after Tuesday's summit, the ambitions of the new gathering are quite high, especially for the first meeting of such a diverse group. It is, of course, the height of irony that China, the US' chief rival and adversary, is joining two blocs considered to be close American partners.

The new grouping is a colossus and China is the superpower in this constellation. The combined populations of the 18 countries at the meeting exceeds 2 billion, or 25 percent of humanity. Their aggregated gross domestic product is more than \$24 trillion, close to 23 percent of the global economy. The potential for economies of scale and synergies between the countries is enormous.

Some of that potential has already been realized. For example, China and ASEAN are the leading trading partners for each other. They signed a free trade agreement in 2002 and have recently wrapped up negotiations to update that deal. Last year, China-ASEAN two-way trade was worth close to \$1 trillion, accounting for about 29 percent of ASEAN's total trade. Similarly, China is the GCC's top trading partner, accounting for more than 20 percent of GCC trade. It is the destination of more than 25 percent of GCC petrochemical exports.

Trade, or the need to adapt to the US trade war, may have been the trigger for some participants to come to these events. They aim to coordinate a response to new American tariffs, which have affected all the countries in attendance, and explore how to mitigate their effects by increasing access to new markets.

The new policy of economic nationalism adopted by the Trump administration is making it difficult to continue to trade with the US, as this grouping's products become less competitive due to high import tariffs. By expanding trade through this trilateral setup, they hope to expand in other markets.

There are other objectives. One is to restore some certainty to world markets, which have been jittery since the US imposed its new tariffs. The global economic outlook is being revised downward as well, with many organizations predicting slower growth in the coming years. For GCC countries, this is bad news, because their products thrive when the global economy is growing and suffer during recessions or slowdowns.

Another objective is to restore faith in the multilateral system.

While the US has expressed skepticism about the World Trade Organization and the global trading system generally, Tuesday's summit sought to rebuild trust. Using reassuring language, it stressed the need to "strengthen confidence in the rules-based multilateral trading system with the World Trade Organization at its core to protect businesses, con-

sumers worldwide and the livelihoods of people in our regions." It also reaffirmed "the central and indispensable role of the World Trade Organization at the core of the rules-based multilateral trading system, which provides a predictable, transparent, nondiscriminatory and open global trading system."

But the gathering is not only about economic cooperation. It is more strategic. The nine-page joint statement issued at the end of Tuesday's meeting covered a wide range of topics, including international and regional issues, proposals for three-way ASEAN-China-GCC energy security cooperation, fighting terrorism and coordinating foreign policy. For example, the summit adopted a fairly detailed and proactive set of recommendations on Gaza and the two-state solution.

It is, of course, ironic that the US, which has played a singular role since the Second World War in advocating free trade and building the UN, the World Trade Organization and other fixtures of multilateralism, is now abandoning that system.

On the other hand, developing countries, which in the past had their doubts, are now championing free trade.

While the US is retreating from multilateralism, China appears to be embracing it. The Kuala Lumpur meeting stressed that idea more than once through the final communique and interventions by heads of state and government. They also sent thinly veiled messages to rogue states and countries flouting international law and norms.

The summit urged the promotion of "peace, security, stability and prosperity" through "mutual respect" and "adherence to international law, including the UN Charter," which means "good neighborliness" and respect for the independence, sovereignty, equality and territorial integrity of other states, as well as noninterference in their internal affairs.

It also called for "refraining from the use of force, or the threat of use of force, and the settlement of differences or disputes by peaceful means." These words and phrases were meant to address conflicts and disputes around the world by advocating a rules-based system centered on the UN.

Another historical irony is that it was the US that pushed for the establishment of ASEAN in 1967 to help stop the spread of communism, which had taken hold in China, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. The organization played a critical role in containing the spread of communism and Chinese influence and deepened the US' presence in Southeast Asia. Today, however, ASEAN includes communist governments among its member states. And although the bloc was meant to check China's growing influence, they have now become each other's top trading partner.

Although the three groups (the GCC, ASEAN and China) are equal in the new trilateral setup, China is effectively the senior partner because of its population, GDP, military power and permanent membership in the UN Security Council.

While the new grouping will bring China closer to the ASEAN and GCC, two blocs that are very close to the US, it would be a mistake to think that Beijing will "replace" the US as a security partner. What the ASEAN and GCC are doing is diversifying their strategic partnerships, while maintaining their close security partnership with the US. This diversification means that China may play a greater role in the security and stability of both the Gulf and Southeast Asia.

Gaza’s aid system isn’t broken. It’s working exactly as designed

ON May 27, thousands of Palestinians surged towards an aid distribution site in Rafah – desperate for food after months of starvation – only to be met with gunfire from panicked private security contractors. What the world witnessed at the Tal as-Sultan aid site was not a tragedy, but a revelation: The final, violent unmasking of the illusion that humanitarian aid exists to serve humanity rather than empire.

Marketed by Israel and the United States as a model of dignity and neutrality, the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation’s new distribution hub disintegrated into chaos within hours of opening. But this was no accident. It was the logical endpoint of a system not designed to nourish the hungry, but to control and contain them.

As starving people in Gaza – made to wait for hours under the scorching sun, tightly confined in metal lanes to receive a small box of food – eventually began to press forward in desperation, chaos broke out. Security personnel – employed by a US-backed contractor – opened fire in a failed attempt to prevent a stampede. Soon, Israeli helicopters were deployed to evacuate American staff and began firing warning shots over the crowd. The much-advertised aid site collapsed completely after only a few hours in operation.

The Gaza Humanitarian Foundation had promised something revolutionary with this initiative: Aid free from the corruption of Hamas, the bureaucracy of the UN, the messiness of Palestinian civil society. What it delivered instead was the purest distillation of colonial humanitarianism – aid as an instrument of control, dehumanisation, and humiliation, dispensed by armed contractors under the watchful eye of the occupying military.

The problem with the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation’s failed initiative was not only the dehumanising and dangerous way in which it attempted to deliver aid at gunpoint. The aid itself was humiliating in both quality and quantity.

What people were given was not enough to survive on, let alone to restore any sense of human dignity. The boxes handed out contained just enough calories to prevent immediate death – a calculated cruelty designed to keep people alive on quarter-full stomachs while their bodies slowly consume

themselves. No vegetables for nutrition. No seeds for planting. No tools for rebuilding. Just processed food, engineered to maintain a population in permanent crisis, forever dependent on the mercy of their destroyers.

Photos from the distribution centre – showing desperate human beings visibly worn down by hunger, disease, and relentless war, corralled into metal lanes like livestock, waiting for scraps as they stared down the barrel of a gun – drew comparisons with well-

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This was, of course, a damning example of bureaucratic understatement.

What he meant – though he could not say it outright – was that the entire enterprise was a lie.

An aid initiative to help an occupied and besieged population can never be neutral when it coordinates with the occupying army. It cannot be impartial when it excludes the occupied from decision-making. It cannot be independent when its security

Ahmad Ibsais

depends on the very military that engineered the famine it is trying to address.

Tuesday’s choreographed humiliation was months in the making. Of 91 attempts the UN made to deliver aid to besieged North Gaza between October 6 and November 25, 82 were denied and 9 were impeded. Michael Fakhri, the UN special rapporteur on the right to food, accused Israel of conducting a “starvation campaign” against Palestinians in Gaza as early as September 2024.

whole. They grew their own food, built their own homes, educated their own children.

The Nakba did not merely displace 750,000 Palestinians – it engineered a transformation from self-sufficiency to dependency. By 1950, former farmers were lining up for UNRWA rations, their olive groves now feeding someone else’s children. This was not an unfortunate side effect of war but a deliberate strategy: To break Palestinian capacity for independence and replace it with a perma-

would truly help them. They know that a dignified life cannot be sustained with food packages distributed in concentration camp-like facilities. Karamah – the Arabic word for dignity that encompasses honour, respect, and agency – cannot be air-dropped or handed out at checkpoints where people wait in metal lanes like cattle.

Of course, Palestinians already possess Karamah – it lives in their steadfast refusal to disappear, in their insistence on remaining human despite every effort to reduce them to mere recipients

nent need for charity. Charity, unlike rights, can be withdrawn. Charity, unlike justice, comes with conditions.

The United States, UNRWA’s largest donor, simultaneously provides most of the weapons destroying Gaza. This is not a contradiction – it is the logic of colonial humanitarianism. Fund the violence that creates the need, then fund the aid that manages the consequences. Keep people alive, but never allow them to live. Provide charity, but never justice. Deliver aid, but never freedom.

The Gaza Humanitarian Foundation – and the tragic spectacle it created on Tuesday – was the perfection of this system of colonial humanitarianism. Aid delivered by private contractors, coordinated with occupying forces, distributed in militarised zones designed to bypass every institution Palestinians have built to serve themselves. It was humanitarianism as counterinsurgency, charity as colonial control – and when its obscene operation predictably collapsed, Palestinians were blamed for their desperation.

Palestinians have long known that no Israeli or US-backed aid initiative

of charity meant to keep them barely alive.

What they need is true humanitarian aid – aid that provides not just calories, but a chance at a future.

True humanitarian aid would dismantle the siege, not manage its consequences. It would prosecute war criminals, not feed their victims with just enough to die slowly. It would restore Palestinian land, not try to compensate for its theft with boxes of processed food handed out in cages.

Until the international community understands this simple truth, Israel and its allies will continue to dress instruments of domination as relief. And we will continue to witness tragic scenes like the one in Rafah yesterday, for years to come.

What happened in Rafah was not a failure of aid. It was the success of a system designed to dehumanise, control, and erase. Palestinians do not need more bandages from the same hands that wield the knife. They need justice. They need freedom. They need the world to stop mistaking the machinery of oppression for humanitarian relief – and start seeing Palestinian liberation as the only path to dignity, peace, and life.

Trump’s new agenda leaves Israel marginalized

Yossi Mekelberg

record on human rights regarding the Palestinians on either side of the Green Line, which no longer qualifies it for special treatment as a democracy.

Even Trump’s decision not to have a stopover in Israel on his first visit abroad – and one to the Middle East at that – was a clear and painful reminder to Tel Aviv that, at least under its current government, it is quickly being relegated in importance by the US. And more concerning for Israel, America is fast becoming an obstacle to what it is trying to accomplish.

The American president is still broadcasting mixed messages about the future of Gaza and the sooner he abandons his idea of pushing the Palestinian population out of the Strip, the better. Nevertheless, Trump seemed to be receptive to the unified warnings he heard during his visit to the Gulf, which called for prioritizing an end to the suffering of the

Much of the focus for Trump reflected his transactional approach to foreign politics, agreeing major long-term economic deals that also reflected a commitment to the security and stability of the countries he visited. However, there was clear departure from the past when it came to the overall approach of dealing with this region, and probably others too. Trump’s declaration that the world’s most powerful superpower will refrain from “giving you lectures on how to live” and from interventionism was met with a mixture of approval and a sigh of relief, but this also has implications for Israel. For Israel, this sends a different and worrying message, beyond the fact that Trump and his administration are reportedly growing weary of the way Israel is conducting the war in Gaza. One of the pillars of the close alliance between the US and Israel – even when the US’ hardcore interests have dictated otherwise – emanated from them sharing democratic values.

people of Gaza.

The writing for Israel was already on the wall before Trump arrived in Riyadh: Netanyahu no longer calls the shots in Washington. When he visited the White House last month, he sat next to the president as the cameras rolled and Trump revealed, for the first time, that the US was engaged in “direct talks” with Iran over its nuclear program. In diplomatic terms, this was a public slap in the face for Netanyahu, who vehemently opposes diplomacy with Tehran as a tool to prevent it from acquiring nuclear weapon capability. Israel’s leader favors a tightening of the sanctions on Iran or, preferably, a joint US-Israeli military operation to destroy its nuclear program.

It was not only America’s direct negotiations with Iran that caused displeasure to Netanyahu and his far-right government, but also its talks with Hamas over a ceasefire and the release of the remaining hostages. For better or for worse, Trump and many of his advisers have not arrived in politics the conventional way and they do not abide by diplomatic conventions, traditions or history.

A case in point is

Trump’s surprise meeting with the interim president of Syria, Ahmad Al-Sharaa, along with the decision to remove the sanctions imposed on the country. At a time when Israel’s dealings with the new Syria are solely through occupation and military force, Washington is prepared to strengthen Al-Sharaa’s position as a potentially moderate and stabilizing figure. And one would not be surprised if Washington’s next step was to demand that Israel refrain from flexing its military muscles with its northeastern neighbor.

Despite the inherent contradictions in Trump’s attitude to Gaza, he seems increasingly upset by the images of civilian suffering. Trump is looking for quick solutions, including in Gaza, instead of the open-ended war – with its horrific consequences for innocent people of all ages – that the Netanyahu government is conducting.

It goes against how Trump sees conflicts. Maybe simplistically, for

him all wars and conflicts are resolvable and it is those leaders who do not understand the art of the deal and fail to recognize that this can bring wars to an end who frustrate him. And gradually, in the case of Gaza, the intransigence of Netanyahu is seen as an obstacle to reaching a ceasefire and as harmful to regional stability; hence, it also harms American interests.

Whether Trump did threaten to abandon Israel should the war not be “wrapped up,” as has been reported, is not clear, but the gist is that he is losing patience with Netanyahu. The latter must make a choice: continue to cave in to the hell-bent pursuit of mass war crimes by the ultranationalist religious zealots in his coalition – and as a consequence further jeopardize relations with Washington and other countries – or do what his own countrymen and the international community demand of him: bring the war in Gaza to an end.

If Netanyahu’s choice is to continue the war in Gaza for his own political ends, and by that to further damage relations with Washington, it will be yet another reason why Israelis must be the ones to democratically bring an end to his time in office.

The cost of conscience: I lost friends for defending Palestinians

I have written a lot about the heart-piercing trials and tragedies of Palestinians for a long time.

I have treated every word of every column that has appeared on this page, devoted to Palestine’s precarious fate and the indefatigable souls who refuse to abandon it, as an obligation and a duty.

It is the obligation and duty of writers – who are privileged to reach so many people in so many places – to expose injustice and give pointed expression to gratuitous suffering.

I have made it plain throughout: Here I stand. Not because I am the all-knowing arbiter of right from wrong – any honest writer is aware of how exhausting and foolish that can be – but because I am obliged to tell the truth clearly and, if need be, repeatedly.

I consider ending what has happened and continues to happen to Palestinians to be the moral imperative of this awful, disfiguring hour. It requires a response since silence often translates – consciously or by neglect – into consent and complicity.

Each of us who shares this sense of obligation and duty responds in our own way.

Some make speeches in parliaments. Some lock arms in demonstrations. Some go to Gaza and the occupied West Bank to ease, as best they can, the pervasive misery and despair.

I write. Writing in defence of Palestinians – of their humanity, dignity, and rights – is not meant, nor can it be dismissed, as a polemical provocation.

For me, it is an act of conscience.

I do not write to mollify. I refuse to qualify what has happened and is happening to Palestinians as “complex” to provide readers with a convenient and comfortable ethical exit ramp.

Occupation is not complex. Oppression is not complex. Apartheid is not complex. Genocide is not complex. It is cruel. It is wrong. It must yield to decency.

Writing about Palestinians in this blunt, uncompromising way invites all sorts of replies from all sorts of quarters.

Some readers praise your “courage”. Some thank you for “speaking” for them, for not flinch-

ing, for naming names. Some readers urge you to continue to write, despite the risks and recriminations.

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Andrew Mitrovica

pleasure of valued friendships. I suppose I am not alone on this sad score.

Students, teachers, academics, artists, and so many others have been exiled, charged, or even jailed for refusing to ignore or sanitise the horror we see day after dreadful day. In this context, my travails, while stinging and disconcerting, are modest in comparison. Departed friends, however dear, are, it seems, the price for candour that unsettles. Those friendships, built over decades through sometimes

happy, sometimes sad experiences and shared confidences, have evaporated in an instant.

I understood that this rupture could happen. I did not fear it. I accepted it.

Yet, when it did happen, it pricked. It was abrupt. Phone calls went to voice mail. Emails went unanswered. Inevitably, the absence and quiet grew until they became an unmistakable verdict. So, I did not ask for explanations. That would, I reasoned, be futile. A door had been slammed shut and bolted. Friends I admired and

respected. Friends I laughed with, trusted, whose counsel I sought and who sought mine.

Gone. I wish them and their loved ones well. I will miss their wise ear and, from time to time, their helping hand.

Some of them are Jewish, some are not. I do not begrudge their choice. They have exercised their prerogative to decide who can and cannot be called a friend. I once met their litmus test – the one we all have. Now, I have failed it. I know that some of my former friends have deep ties to Israel. Some have family who live there. Some may be

grieving, too, worried over what comes next.

I do not ignore their fear or uncertainty. I do not deny their right to safety.

This is where, I suspect, we confront the unspoken cause of the irreversible divide.

Israel’s security cannot be achieved at the expense of Palestine’s freedom and sovereignty. That is not peace, let alone the elusive “co-existence”. It is domination – brutal and unforgiving.

This kind of loss, profound and lasting, gives way to clarity born from rejection. It sharpens your appreciation of loyalty and authenticity in relationships.

Perhaps the people I thought I knew, I did not know at all. And perhaps the people who thought they knew me, did not know me at all.

There is a reckoning under way. Like most reckonings, big or small, near or distant, it can be messy and painful.

We are trying to navigate a pitiless world that, on the disagreeable whole, punishes dissent and rewards compliance.

To those friends who have opted for distance, I say this: I am convinced

that you believe what you’re doing is right and just. So am I.

I write not to wound. I write to insist.

I insist that Palestinian lives matter.

I insist that Palestinians cannot be erased by edict, force, and intimidation.

I insist that mourning should not be a daily ritual for any people.

I insist that justice cannot be selective and humanity must be universal.

I insist that Palestinian children rediscover the fullness of life beyond occupation, terror, and grief.

I insist that Palestinian children, like our children, have the chance, again, to play, to learn, and to thrive.

I insist that the killing lust that has gripped a nation like a fever that will not break, has to be broken.

Too much damage has been done.

Can we agree on that? When I have stopped writing, the account will show that in this obscene moment of slaughter and starvation, I was not among the silent.

It will find me – for better or worse – on the record.

Minister highlights Pakistan’s trade potential

OSAKA, Japan (APP): Federal Minister for Commerce Jam Kamal Khan on Wednesday highlighted the country’s trade potential and innovative use of natural resources particularly pink salt during a press conference at Expo 2025 Osaka.

The minister underscored Pakistan’s commitment to global trade innovation, sustainability, and cultural diplomacy, said a news release.

Jam Kamal emphasized the significance of the Pakistan Pavilion, themed “Universe in a Grain of Salt,” as a symbol of the country’s rich natural resources and cultural depth and invited the global community to experience and visit the pavilion.

The minister lauded the Japan Association’s pivotal support in facilitating the construction and success of the Pakistan Pavilion.

“The Association’s cooperation has helped us translate our vision into a living space of reflection and cultural connection. The response from visitors has been overwhelming,” he noted.

The minister stressed there is vast potential for value addition in products exported by Pakistan. He further elaborated on Pakistan’s broader trade strengths, particularly textiles, and new growing sectors such as leather, surgical equipment, and sports goods.

He also underscored Pakistan’s agricultural potential, especially in rice exports, and highlighted the nation’s skilled youth and ICT workforce as a growing asset for international markets.

The minister appreciated the Pakistan Pavilion’s unique design—featuring salt flooring, a healing garden, sculptures, and interactive exhibits—mirrors Expo’s core theme “Designing Future Society for Our Lives” and sub-theme “Saving Lives” by showcasing the healing and sustainable potential of natural elements like pink rock salt.

“Pink salt is more than a product—it’s an experience and a representation of our natural wealth,” said the minister. “We are working to enhance its global presence through innovation and sustainable applications.”

The minister invited members of the Japan Association and global visitors to participate in Pakistan’s upcoming National Day celebrations on August 14, 2025, and upcoming events such as food tastings and trade showcases.

This Expo is not just a display of nations—it’s a dialogue of ideas, cultures, and futures, he remarked.

The event was attended by over 43 national and international media houses.

The event followed a day of high-level meetings and pavilion visits, including engagements with the Japan Association for the 2025 World Exposition and tours of leading national pavilions.

Earlier in the day, the minister began his engagements with a formal meeting with representatives of the Japan Association. Which was followed by the Visit of the Pakistan Pavilion and various other pavilions including the Japan Pavilion, Tajikistan, Palestine, UK, China, UAE, Qatar, France, the United States, Azerbaijan, Türkiye, and Saudi Arabia.

Each visit offered opportunities for cultural exchange and discussions around trade and sustainability.



OSAKA: Federal Minister for Commerce Jam Kamal Khan addresses a packed press conference at Expo 2025 Osaka, engaging with over 43 national and international media outlets.

Asian stocks track WS rally as trade fears ease

HONG KONG (AFP/APP): Asian equities rose Wednesday following a Wall Street rally as traders cheered forecast-beating US consumer confidence data and a drop in bond yields, with eyes now on a key sale of Japanese debt.

New York investors returned to their desks after a long weekend break in a good mood after Donald Trump delayed until July the 50 percent tariffs he announced out of the blue on Friday, sparking a market rout.

The US president’s announcement Sunday soothed worries about a fresh flare-up in his trade war that has rattled global sentiment, fanned uncertainty and led some to question their confidence in the world’s biggest economy.

Buying was also boosted by Trump’s post on social media saying progress with Brussels was being made.

“I have just been informed that the E.U. has called to quickly establish meeting dates,” he said on his Truth Social platform.

“This is a positive event, and I hope that they will, FINALLY, like my same demand to China, open up the European Nations for Trade with the United States of America.”

Markets also cheered data showing a bigger-than-expected jump in US consumer confidence thanks to a slight easing of trade tensions, particularly with China. The lift in the Conference Board’s index was the first improvement after five months of decline and dragged it up from lows last seen at the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the report did warn that tariffs remained a key concern.

Hong Kong, Shanghai, Sydney, Seoul, Singapore, Taipei, Manila and Jakarta all rose. Wellington was in the red even after New Zealand’s central bank cut interest rates for the sixth meeting in a row. Tokyo was also on the front foot as investors eye the crucial sale of Japanese 40-year government bonds, after an auction of 20-year notes this month saw the worst take-up in more than a decade.

Youm-e-Takbeer: A symbol of national sovereignty: Haroon

ISLAMABAD (APP): Special Assistant to the Prime Minister (SAPM) on Industries and Production Haroon Akhtar Khan on Wednesday described Youm-e-Takbeer as a historic symbol of Pakistan’s national sovereignty and unity.

“May 28 is a testament to Pakistan’s nuclear capability and our unwavering resolve to protect our sovereignty,” he said in a news release.

Haroon noted, “This day marks the moment when Pakistan emerged as the first Islamic nuclear power,

securing an unshakable defense for the nation.”

He emphasized the nation’s pride in its scientists and leadership, adding, “The entire country salutes the brilliance and commitment of our scientists and the vision of our national leadership. Our defense is now impregnable.”

SAPM Haroon further highlighted the day as a reflection of national dignity and collective resolve. “Youm-e-Takbeer is not only a day of strategic strength but a celebration of our national unity and

resilience,” he added.

He said that a developed, self-reliant Pakistan is the ultimate tribute to the sacrifices of our martyrs and the dreams of our scientists.

“Under the Prime Minister Shehbaz Shareef’s leadership, our next milestone is achieving economic sovereignty,” he affirmed.

“Faith in Allah and national unity have always guided us to success,” Haroon said, concluding, “May 28 reminds us that with determination and unity, there is nothing Pakistan cannot achieve.”

PAFLA, Innovista forge partnership to empower over 50,000 freelancers

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Pakistan Freelancers Association (PAFLA), the national-level representative body of freelancers, and Innovista, a National Initiative of SIFC for collaborative workspaces and innovative platforms, have announced a strategic partnership aimed at creating transformative opportunities, including capacity building and business collaboration more than 50,000 freelancers every year across Pakistan.

This landmark collaboration is set to reshape the freelance ecosystem through capacity building, digital infrastructure, and policy advocacy—paving the way for freelancers to play an even more critical role in the national economy.

Chairman PAFLA Ibrahim Amin and CEO Innovista Hisham Sarwar signed the MOA in Islamabad to launch collaborative events and impactful initiatives aimed at empowering youth across Pakistan through freelancing and digital skills.

“Freelancers are no longer just a side segment of the workforce—they are front and center in Pakistan’s digital economy with more than \$500 million contribution to bring in foreign exchange in Pakistan,” said Ibrahim Amin, Chairman of PAFLA.

This partnership with Innovista aligns perfectly with the mission to empower freelancers, advocate for policy reforms, and ensure their contributions are formally recognized in Pakistan’s economic framework, he said and added. Freelancers are helping bridge foreign exchange gaps and creating self-sufficiency across sectors, as they deserve infrastructure and recognition at par with traditional sectors.”

Pakistan has emerged as

one of the top five countries contributing to the international gig workforce with strength of around 2.37 million and increasing across the country, he further said.

The PAFLA has registered more than 0.1 million freelancers as members community with its significant representation across the country. The association was taken organized 35 seminars and 25 training sessions, including with Google Inc.

CEO Innovista Hasham Sarwar said that the PAFLA-Innovista partnership is focused on providing training, technology access, financial literacy, and global client connectivity to unlock the full potential of Pakistan’s freelancers, aiming to enhance employability and position Pakistan on a global stage.

Through this partnership, Innovista will deploy its digital tools, learning modules, and community engagement resources to create an inclusive environment for Pakistani freelancers—especially women and youth in underserved regions, he said and added. By partnering with PAFLA, we are building a robust landscape where freelancers can thrive, earn sustainably, and become engines of Pakistan’s economic future. We’re focusing on skilling, scaling, and supporting freelancers so they not only earn a living but also uplift their communities.

Key initiatives under the PAFLA-Innovista partnership, including the launch of nationwide freelancers’ training bootcamps, access to co-working and co-learning space at Innovista, creating awareness campaigns on freelancing rights, taxation, and global platforms, and onboarding of the freelancers at Innovista etc.

PBF urges tax relief for farmers in upcoming federal budget

ISLAMABAD (PPI): The Pakistan Business Forum (PBF) has called on the federal government to provide targeted relief to the agricultural sector in the upcoming budget, urging reductions in taxes and production costs to support struggling farmers and promote sustainable growth.

In a meeting with Federal Minister for National Food Security Rana Tanveer Hussain here on Wednesday, a high-level PBF delegation led by Chief Organizer Chaudhry Ahmad Jawad presented several key proposals aimed at revitalizing agriculture, particularly the cotton sector.

The delegation included

PBF Senior Vice President Amna Awan, Chairman South Punjab Talat Suhail, Chairman Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ashfaq Paracha, and Deputy Secretary General Zafar Iqbal.

Jawad emphasized the need to eliminate the 18% General Sales Tax (GST) on locally produced cotton and called for a reduction in customs duties on imported cotton ginning machinery.

“The federal government still holds the authority to reduce the cost of production for farmers. Sustainable GDP growth is not possible without government support for agriculture,” he asserted.

He further advocated for tax relief on fertilizers to

ease the burden on cultivators, urging the government to take “concrete steps” to lower cultivation costs.

Minister Rana Tanveer Hussain expressed support for many of the forum’s concerns, stating that the Ministry of National Food Security is already working to abolish the 18% GST on local cotton, including lint and cottonseed.

He also said efforts are underway to resolve outstanding Cotton Cess liabilities to ensure the Central Cotton Committee remains financially stable.

“We are also considering restricting tax-free yarn and fabric imports under the Export Facilitation Scheme (EFS) to better support

local cotton,” the minister added.

He revealed that the government aims to produce 10 million cotton bales this year and assured the delegation that measures are being considered to provide relief to farmers in the federal budget.

The PBF also pushed for the implementation of new research and seed varieties developed by the Pakistan Agricultural Research Council (PARC) at the district level.

“At present, we are unaware of the latest research being conducted in Islamabad. The Ministry should work with provincial governments to bridge this gap,” Jawad said.

Key pillars of national security highlighted by operation Bunyan Marsoos



Abdul Basit Alvi

Operation Bunyan Marsoos was a resounding success, with our army accomplishing all objectives and decisively defeating the enemy. The operation also sent a clear message to adversaries that we will not compromise on our national defense. The world has recognized Pakistan’s remarkable success in overcoming its enemies during this operation. It is essential to emphasize the key pillars of our national security that this successful operation highlighted.

The first and foremost pillar of our success was the unity and patriotism of the nation. A strong and secure nation is built on two essential elements—unity and patriotism. While

advanced weaponry, trained forces, and strategic partnerships form the tangible components of defense, it is the unity of the people and their deep love for the homeland—patriotism—that provides the invisible yet powerful force that sustains a nation’s sovereignty. Even the most formidable military infrastructure can falter in the absence of unity and patriotism, which are crucial for withstanding both internal and external threats.

Equally important is the role of nuclear deterrence in national defense. Since the emergence of nuclear weapons in the mid-20th century, the concept of deterring adversaries through the possession of nuclear arms has become a fundamental aspect of military doctrine for major powers. Nuclear deterrence is a strategic policy that uses the threat of nuclear retaliation to prevent enemy aggression. Although controversial, it has been crucial in maintaining relative peace among nuclear-armed states and continues to influence global geopolitical dynamics. Understanding its significance is key to understand-

ing how modern nations protect their sovereignty in an increasingly unstable world.

Regarding Pakistan, since its establishment in 1947, the country has faced ongoing security challenges due to its geographical vulnerabilities, complex regional dynamics, and historical rivalries, particularly with its eastern neighbor, India. In this context, nuclear deterrence has become the cornerstone of Pakistan’s defense strategy. It is not just a military tool but a fundamental component of Pakistan’s strategic doctrine, ensuring the protection of its sovereignty, territorial integrity, and regional stability. The significance of nuclear deterrence for Pakistan must be understood within the framework of its security needs, strategic limitations, and the regional power imbalance it faces. The core motivation behind Pakistan’s nuclear program has always been security and survival in a hostile environment. Following India’s nuclear test in 1974 (Smiling Buddha), Pakistan was forced to reconsider its security strategy. The conventional military disparity

between India and Pakistan, coupled with unresolved political issues like Kashmir, made the development of a nuclear deterrent a vital necessity for Islamabad. Unlike India, whose nuclear ambitions were partly driven by status and technological advancement, Pakistan’s nuclear aspirations were driven by compulsion, not choice. It was a defensive response to India’s growing military strength, ensuring that no adversary would consider aggression without facing severe retaliation.

In this context, the role of the Pakistan Army becomes even more pivotal. A strong and capable Pakistan Army not only protects national sovereignty and territorial integrity but also serves as a key pillar of internal stability, a deterrent against external threats, and a support force during emergencies and natural disasters. One of the Army’s primary duties is safeguarding the nation’s borders against external threats. With borders shared with India, Afghanistan, Iran, and China, and the Line of Control (LoC) in Kashmir historically being a hotspot

for military conflict, particularly with India, a formidable Pakistan Army is essential as the first line of defense against any border incursions. Over the years, the Army has played a decisive role in defending the country during wars—particularly in 1948, 1965, and 1971—as well as in numerous skirmishes and crises. Its constant vigilance, readiness, and strategic deployment along border regions are vital to maintaining the inviolability of Pakistan’s territorial integrity. In a region where nuclear capabilities and conventional military strength play a crucial role in preserving peace, the Pakistan Army plays a key role in strategic deterrence.

Among the most significant and enduring partnerships in the region is the relationship between Pakistan and China, often described as “higher than the mountains, deeper than the oceans, and sweeter than honey.” This longstanding friendship, which has lasted over seven decades, is rooted in mutual respect and shared interests, evolving into a comprehensive strategic partnership, particularly in

defense and security. China’s support in enhancing Pakistan’s defense capabilities, along with the broader significance of the Pak-China alliance, plays a crucial role in ensuring Pakistan’s national defense and long-term strategic stability. A key aspect of China’s support to Pakistan is its contribution to defense production and military technology transfer. Since the 1960s, China has consistently supplied Pakistan with advanced weaponry, training, and infrastructure development. Over the years, this collaboration has expanded significantly, resulting in joint ventures to develop cutting-edge military equipment. A notable example of this partnership is the JF-17 Thunder, a versatile combat aircraft co-developed by the Pakistan Aeronautical Complex (PAC) and China’s Chengdu Aircraft Industry Group. The JF-17 Thunder has become a cornerstone of the Pakistan Air Force (PAF), allowing it to maintain air superiority in a cost-effective manner. In addition to this, China has supplied Pakistan with a wide range of defense equipment, including tanks

(such as the jointly developed Al-Khalid), air defense systems, naval vessels, submarines, and ballistic missile technology. These advancements have not only strengthened Pakistan’s conventional defense capabilities but also bolstered its deterrence posture in a region marked by volatility. China’s assistance in helping Pakistan establish and modernize its military-industrial infrastructure, including missile production and aircraft maintenance facilities, has significantly decreased Pakistan’s reliance on Western sources.

The successful and significant Operation Bunyan Marsoos, when viewed through both strategic and symbolic lenses, highlights the integrated strength of Pakistan’s national security framework.

The operation emphasizes how the unity of the nation, nuclear deterrence, the professionalism and resolve of the Pakistan Army, and the unwavering defense support from China work together to form the cornerstone of Pakistan’s defense and stability. Each element reinforces the others, creating a resilient

structure capable of countering both conventional and unconventional threats.

As regional dynamics evolve and global security challenges become more intricate, it is crucial for Pakistan to continue strengthening these foundational pillars. Enhancing national unity through inclusive governance, maintaining a credible nuclear deterrent, modernizing the military, and deepening strategic alliances with partners like China are not just strategic decisions—they are vital imperatives. Operation Bunyan Marsoos serves as a poignant reminder that true security can only be achieved when military strength, technological progress, public unity, and international cooperation align in both purpose and action. As long as these critical elements remain robust and coordinated, Pakistan will stand firm in defending its sovereignty and ensuring a peaceful, prosperous future. The entire nation recognizes the importance of these key pillars in our National Defense and looks forward to reinforcing them for the greater good of Pakistan.



In brief

BCB delegation accorded warm welcome

LAHORE (APP): The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) delegation was accorded a warm welcome upon arrival at the Gaddafi stadium to watch the three-match T20I opener between Pakistan and Bangladesh here on Wednesday night. The delegation headed by the BCB Cricket Operations Head Nazmul Abedeen Fahim, Advisors and others. Chairman Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) Mohsin Naqvi welcomed the delegation to the PCB Headquarters, adding it gave him immense pleasure to welcome Bangladeshi brothers to the city of Lahore. He expressed the hope that the visiting BCB officials will enjoy the hospitality of Lahore besides watching cricket. A large number of cricket fans and journalists are also visiting Lahore to watch cricket.

Rathore wins Gold for Pakistan

LAHORE (Monitoring Desk): Pakistan's 65-year-old Maqsood Amjad Rathore won a gold medal in the 96kg weight category, bringing international glory to the country in the senior division. Competing in the 96 kg category, Rathore delivered a strong performance by lifting a total of 125 kilograms, which earned him the top podium spot in his category. His lifts included 55 kilograms in the snatch and 70 kilograms in the clean and jerk, showcasing remarkable strength and technique at his age. Held in Doha, Qatar, the ongoing Asian Masters Championship has attracted veteran lifters from across the continent. A total of 10 Pakistani athletes are participating in the championship, which continues until May 31. The event provides a platform for seasoned lifters to demonstrate their enduring fitness and passion for the sport.

Starting strokes removed at Tour C'ship

A T L A N T A (Agencies): The PGA Tour has scrapped starting strokes at the season-ending Tour Championship. Since 2019 the format allowed the player with the most FedExCup points to start the tournament on 10 under par. But in a change for this year's event, all 30 players will tee off at East Lake Golf Club in Atlanta on level par. The FedExCup is a season-long points competition which culminates with the play-offs - three tournaments that end with the Tour Championship. It provides players with a ranking, which under the previous format would mean they started the final event with a scoring advantage, depending on their position. The player in second would start on eight under, third on seven under, fourth on six under and fifth on five under. The remaining 25 players would be split into groups of five and given their starting score based off their rank. PGA Tour commissioner Jay Monahan said in a statement, "external "The Player Advisory Council led a thorough process to respond to what our fans are asking for: the most competitive golf in the world, played for the highest stakes, in the most straightforward and engaging format." Other changes include a new course set-up "to encourage more risk/reward moments", and the PGA Tour said it was "studying the qualification system" for the future.

Hasan Ali's five-wicket haul seals win for Pakistan against Bangladesh

LAHORE (Monitoring Desk): Hasan Ali bagged his career best T20I figures to propel Pakistan to a 37-run win over visitors Bangladesh in the first T20I of the three-match series here at the Gaddafi Stadium, Lahore on Wednesday night. Pakistan defended their 201-run total dismissing Bangladesh for 19.2 overs as Hasan just took 20 balls to register his maiden five-for in T20Is and 11th in Pakistan colours across formats. 30-year-old Hasan set the tone for the successful defence by drawing the first blood in the second over. Opening batter Tanzid Hasan (31, 17b, 2x4s, 3x6s) then fought back with a flurry of boundaries but Hasan castled him at the end of the fourth over with 37 runs on the board. Towhid Hridoy (17, 22b, 1x4) and skipper Litton Das – also the top scorer for Bangladesh with a 30-ball 48 inclusive of one four and three sixes, then stitched a 63-run stand steering Bangladesh to 75-2 at the halfway mark and 92-2 at the end of the subsequent over.

Shadab Khan struck in the 12th over to break the partnership, while Khushdil trapped Towhid leg-before an over later. With Bangladesh 107-4 at the start of 14th over and the required run rate mounting Salman Ali Agha eked out Shamim Hossain, while Shadab got rid of Rishad Hossain in the 16th over further deepening the trouble for the visitors. Hasan returned in the 18th over to strike twice taking his tally of wickets to four before removing Shoriful Islam in the 20th over to bring his five-for. Hasan, who took the field for Pakistan in a T20I for the first time since May 2024, gave away 30 runs. Bangladesh lost their last seven wickets for a mere 64 runs in last 7.2 overs. Shadab returned figures of 4-0-26-2, while Khushdil, Salman and Faheem picked up one wicket each. Earlier, Pakistan had romped to 201-7 in 20 overs – their 3rd score of 200 or more in last seven T20Is, courtesy a fighting half-century from skipper Salman, while Hasan Nawaz and

Shadab too chipped in with blazing forties. After opening batter Fakhar Zaman and Saim Ayub fell within the first eight balls of the innings, Salman joined forces with Mohammad Haris (31, 18b, 4x4s, 1x6) to raise a 31-ball 48 for the third wicket as Pakistan finished the Powerplay with 52-2. Following Haris' departure in the seventh over, Hasan Nawaz walked in to bat at no.5, while Salman brought up his third T20I half-century off 29 balls at the end of 10th over before falling to Hasan Mahmud for a 34-ball 56 in 12th. Hasan's (2x4s, 4x6s) 22-ball stay at the crease came to halt as Rishad dismissed him for 44 after getting hit for a six and two fours on the first three balls of the 14th over. With Bangladesh giving away just 11 runs off the next two overs, Khushdil fell on the first ball of the 17th over. Shadab, who hit a brisk 25-ball 48 at no.6, struck five fours and three sixes to give Pakistan's innings an impetus as they collected 43 runs off the last three overs.



LAHORE: Hasan Ali made early breakthroughs for Pakistan, Pakistan vs Bangladesh 1st T20.

National Ranking Tennis C'ships kicks off

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 1st Emerging Pakistan National Ranking Tennis Championships 2025 kicked off here at the PTF Tennis Complex on Wednesday. More than 200 entries in seven different categories including men's singles, men's doubles, ladies singles, boys 18&under, boys 14&under, and boys 12&under, are participating in the event from across Pakistan. Top players including Aqeel Khan, Shahzad Khan, Yousaf Khalil, Muzammil Murtaza, Barkatullah, Abdullah Adnan, Ahmad Nael Qureshi, Abubakar Talha, Asad Zaman, Salar Khan, Abdul Basit, Yahya Ikram, Haziq Asim, Zohaib Afzal Malik, Junaid Khan, Razik Sultan, Ushan Suhail, Meheq Khokhar, Zunaisha Noor, Lalrukha Sajid, and Mahrukh Sajid will also be in action in the event. The event is sponsored by Emerging Pakistan and State Life

Insurance Corporation, the championships aim to promote tennis excellence in the country. Aisam-ul-Haq Qureshi, President-PTF, wished the participants the best of luck and thanked Honorable Federal Minister for Commerce, Jam Kamal Khan, for his personal interest in making it possible to conduct the event. He also expressed gratitude to the sponsors. "The President PTF said, "The championships were initially planned to be held in Quetta, Balochistan, as the Balochistan Open National Ranking Tennis Tournaments, but due to the non-availability of proper infrastructure to hold such a mega event. The Honorable Minister was gracious enough to agree to our proposal to shift the venue from Quetta to Islamabad. Mr. Jam Kamal Khan, the Honorable Minister, also registered our request for the upgradation of the infrastructure for tennis

at Quetta." Col. (R) Zia-ud-din Tufail, Secretary-General PTF, also wished all participants success and thanked the sponsors for their support. He also extended his gratitude to the Minister for initiating the process of conducting such a high-profile event. Mens Singles Qualifying 2nd Round: Bilal Asim beat Wakeel Mauz 8-0; Muhammad Ali beat Ubaida Bin Ilyas 8-2; Yahya Ikram beat Waleed Anwar 8-2; Azeem Khan beat M.Umer 8-1; Saqib Ali beat Abdaar Ali 8-5; Syed Hamza Hussain beat Zahed 8-0; Abdul Basit beat Roohan Noori 8-0; Zohaib Afzal Malik beat Rayyan Khan 8-4; M.Talha beat Haziq Areejo 8-2; Ali Zain beat Mustansir Ali 8-3; Jabir Ali beat Ikramullah 8-1; Saifullah Khan beat M.Uzair. The final round of the qualifying matches will be played on Thursday. The main draw matches will start on Friday.

Swiatek outclasses Raducanu at French Open

PARIS (AFP): Reigning French Open champion Iga Swiatek gave an "inspired" display of clay-court tennis against outclassed former US Open winner Emma Raducanu to book her ticket to the third round of Roland Garros on Wednesday. Poland's Swiatek swept to a 6-1, 6-2 win in 79 minutes on Court Philippe Chatrier where she has lifted the trophy four times -- including for the last three editions. "Honestly, I just love playing here. This place inspires me and that makes me work harder," she enthused. For 22-year-old Raducanu it was her first time on the main court at Roland Garros and she could not pull off the hoped-for upset. "It's a surrounding that she's obviously very comfortable with and she's played in it a lot of times," said Raducanu. "I think that did emphasise me feeling a bit uncomfortable." By contrast, Swiatek was in her element as she continues her bid to become the first woman to win four consecutive French Open titles since Suzanne Lenglen 102 years ago. "From the beginning, I knew what I wanted to do, so I just did it," said the Pole. "I had a good time on the court, and I felt the game pretty well, so I just went for it," continued Swiatek, who wrapped up victory on her second match point. After early exits in Stuttgart, Madrid and



Rome, Swiatek had looked to have lost her feet on clay, slipping to fifth in the world rankings. But Wednesday's dominant performance now brings the 23-year-old's tally to 23 wins in a row at Roland Garros. 'Positive kick' Swiatek got her first break after 21 minutes in to take a 3-1 lead. She held and broke Raducanu a second time before serving out the first set -- with her first ace of the match. The punishment continued in the second set with Swiatek collecting another pair of breaks. Raducanu, looking to reach the third round for the first time, lost her fifth straight meeting against a former major champion. Swiatek has now beaten the 2021 US Open champion five times in five tries and has yet to drop a set. The Polish player is now 37-2 at Roland Garros, with her 37 victories in Paris the most among current players. "For sure coming here to Roland Garros, I feel like I

like this place, you know. I always played well here. It gives you some positive kick." But she warned against excessive expectations as she next plays Romanian world number 60 Jaqueline Cristian, who rallied past Czech qualifier Sara Bejlek 1-6, 6-3, 6-3. "I played two good matches, but I can't expect that, you know, it's all going to be easy now," smiled Swiatek. "So I hope you guys don't do that, as well. Because you always need to be, like, on your toes and ready for what life brings you. "And sometimes, yeah, as I said, one day it's going to be good, one day it's not going to be so easy." Meanwhile Raducanu now turns her focus to the grass court season. "It was pretty tight and then as it went on she grew confident and I felt a bit exposed. "It's very difficult to stay with her as she grows in confidence. It just shows the distance I have to improve."

Giro leader Del Toro hits back with stage 17 triumph



BORMIO (AFP): Overall leader Isaac del Toro bounced back from the disappointment of seeing his advantage slashed by storming to a brilliant victory on stage 17 of the Giro d'Italia on Wednesday. The Mexican saw his lead cut from 1min 20sec to just 26 seconds in stage 16, but attacked on the Le Motte climb before powering away from Romain Bardet and Richard Carapaz in the final two kilometres. Del Toro celebrated his maiden Grand Tour stage victory with a bow and is

now 41 seconds ahead of Ecuadoran rider Carapaz overall, with Simon Yates 10 seconds further back. It was a spectacular response from Team UAE's Del Toro, who timed his surge to victory to perfection at the end of a mountainous 155km ride to Bormio in the Alps. "It's incredible, everybody wants this and today I realised I will never give up," he said. "I will always stay one step in front, and I will always try... I don't have anything to lose and today wasn't easier than yesterday but for sure I

had a better mentality." The 21-year-old finished three seconds clear of Frenchman Bardet and six seconds ahead of pink-jersey rival Carapaz to extend his general classification lead. Yates, who started the day in second overall, was cut adrift by Del Toro's attack, which only Carapaz could initially follow, and crossed the finish line nine seconds behind. It was heartbreak for Bardet, who will retire in two weeks' time, as he came up just short in his

Pakistan hockey captain urges relocation of 2025 Asia Cup from India

LAHORE (Monitoring Desk): Pakistan men's hockey team captain Imad Shakeel Butt has called for the relocation of the 2025 Men's Hockey Asia Cup, currently scheduled to be held in India, citing rising political tensions between two nuclear rivals that could threaten Pakistan's participation. Speaking to media on Wednesday, Butt said that the Asia Cup is crucial for us as it's a World Cup qualifying event. Given the current political situation between Pakistan and India, we believe the venue should be reconsidered," Butt stated. The 12th edition of the Men's Hockey Asia Cup is slated to take place in Rajgir, India, from August 27 to September 7, 2025, under the auspices of the Asian Hockey Federation (AHF). However, uncertainty looms over Pakistan's participation in the tournament. The issue has intensified in the wake of the Pahalgam incident, which has reportedly resulted in visa denials for the Pakistani squad, putting their participation in jeopardy. Neither the Indian government nor the AHF has issued an official statement on the matter. Meanwhile, the Pakistan team is focusing on its preparations for the upcoming FIH Nations Cup. A strong showing could earn them promotion to the prestigious Pro League. "Our focus will be sharp from the first match. The players are motivated, and we aim to deliver positive results," Butt said.

latest bid to complete a hat-trick of stage wins on every Grand Tour. "As is often the case at the Giro, this is my fourth second place in four participations," said the 34-year-old, who led on his own until being caught by Del Toro and Carapaz. "I did my best. It's definitely a shame because I had everything in place to win, but you can't control the behavior of the other teams. I'm proud of this last appearance in a Grand Tour." Thursday's 18th stage is a hilly 144km route from Morbegno to Cesano Maderno in Lombardy. A second-half goal from Myanmar winger Maung Maung Lwin was enough to give a South East Asia XI victory in front of an official attendance of 72,550 at the Bukit Jalil Stadium, triggering boos from a substantial portion at the final whistle from fans who had paid up to £260 to watch United on their first visit to Malaysia since 2009. "I always feel guilty for the performance of the team since the first game I was here," said Amorim. "The boos maybe is something we need because every game we lost in the Premier League the fans were always there. I felt when we finished every time the supporters were with us. Let's see for next season."

Man Utd booed off after defeat in Malaysia



KUALA LUMPUR (Agencies): Manchester United head coach Ruben Amorim believes it will do his players good to leave Kuala Lumpur with the sound of boos ringing in their ears after a 1-0 loss to ASEAN All-Stars. After ending a desperate Premier League campaign with a victory over Aston Villa on Sunday, the club flew 6,600 miles to Malaysia only to find there was no respite from their troubles. Less than 24 hours after Wolves striker Matheus Cunha was cleared to have a medical before completing a £62.5m move to Old Trafford, United's old goalscoring failings struck again in the first match of the post-season tour to Asia. In temperatures of more than 30 degrees and high humidity, Amorim's side failed to take a succession of chances despite regular substitutions which meant they ended up using 25 outfield players. A second-half goal from Myanmar winger Maung Maung Lwin was enough to give a South East Asia XI victory in front of an official attendance of 72,550 at the Bukit Jalil Stadium, triggering boos from a substantial portion at the final whistle from fans who had paid up to £260 to watch United on their first visit to Malaysia since 2009. "I always feel guilty for the performance of the team since the first game I was here," said Amorim. "The boos maybe is something we need because every game we lost in the Premier League the fans were always there. I felt when we finished every time the supporters were with us. Let's see for next season."

media) to talk about. I won't confirm anything. I have no news. "We will see, but there will be some changes." United finished 15th in the Premier League, on 42 points - accepted to be the club's worst campaign since the 1973-74 relegation season. They also lost the Europa League final to Tottenham 1-0 in Bilbao to miss out on a place in next season's Champions League. It is thought the trip will generate about \$10m (£7.8m) for the club, but comes at the end of a season where United have played 60 games in all competitions. United expect Delap decision next week, Fernandes travels with squad to Hong Kong While Amorim refused to offer any insight into the Cunha situation, United's rebuilding is gathering speed. Veteran back-up goalkeeper Tom Heaton, 39, is set to sign a one-year contract extension, while United expect to discover next week whether they have been successful in their attempts to bring Ipswich striker Liam Delap to the club. Delap is available for £30m following Ipswich's relegation to the Championship, and there has been a huge amount of interest in him. However, United feel Delap's decision will be between them and Chelsea, and that the player wants his future resolving before this summer's European Under-21 Championships. England U21 boss Lee Carsley is due to name his squad on 6 June for the tournament, which begins in Slovakia five days later. There is still no word on whether skipper Bruno Fernandes might be tempted by a big-money offer from Saudi Arabia, but he is travelling to Hong Kong

with the rest of the squad for the final leg of United's Asia trip on Friday. Winger Alejandro Garnacho will also be on the plane even though he has been told he can find a new club. Speaking to United's own media before the defeat, chief executive Omar Berrada said the club had a vision for what they wanted to achieve. "I can't talk about specifics but I can say that we have been planning for many months now and we were ready for all the different scenarios," he said. "Now we know what we need to do, we have a very clear idea of where we need to invest in the squad to improve. "Now it is a question of executing that plan and doing it in a way that is prudent but is with ambition at the same time." The future of striker Rasmus Hojlund will be a talking point if Delap does join Cunha in joining United. Hojlund scored four goals in 32 Premier League appearances this season and Amorim is left hoping the summer triggers some kind of transformation in the Dane's form. "Sometimes you go to holiday, then you arrive [back] on the first day, start a new season and even the environment in training ground can help all these players have more confidence," he said. "We do have a lack of goals. We will try to assess that and be prepared." There are still around 10,000 tickets left for Friday's game at the 40,000-capacity Hong Kong stadium. Asked why, having seen what they had just witnessed, why local fans should pay to watch United, Amorim drew on his experiences as a Benfica-supporting youngster in Portugal. "If you can afford it – and that is the important thing - then you support your club," he said. "I had my club as a young kid and no matter what the situation, I was there. "It was difficult supporting Benfica in the 1990s as they struggled a lot. But I never stopped going. "These people believe in Manchester United no matter what the context."



In brief

ANF recovers 57 kg drugs

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF), conducting five operations across the country, recovered as many as 57.1 kilograms of drugs worth more than Rs 41.3 million and arrested four suspects, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman on Wednesday. He informed that 2.4 kg of hashish was recovered from the possession of a suspect near the Government College, Manshera. The arrested suspect confessed to selling drugs to students of educational institutions. In another operation, 14.4 kg of hashish was recovered from the secret compartments of a vehicle near Shah Maqsood Interchange, Hazara Motorway, Haripur and two suspects were arrested. As much as 3.3 kg of hashish was recovered from the bag of the accused near Manga Pul, Murred, District Narowal. Similarly, 28 kg of heroin hidden in bushes for smuggling was recovered in a deserted area of Vindar, District Hub. As many as 9 kg of hashish hidden for smuggling were recovered in an uninhabited area of Jiwani, Gwadar district. Cases have been registered against the arrested suspects under the Narcotics Control Act, and further investigations are underway.

Police recovered stolen school books

RAWALPINDI (APP): In a major breakthrough, Police have arrested two suspects involved in stealing more than 9,600 books from the Education Department office in Rawalpindi. Police recovered 9,600 books, worth millions of rupees, which were printed by the Punjab government for primary school students. According to police spokesman, the stolen books have to be distributed free of cost to students in government schools. The theft came to light when the administration noticed the missing stock. City Police Officer (CPO) Syed Khalid Mehmood Hamdani has taken immediate notice and order through investigation. Using both modern technology and human intelligence, the City Police tracked down the suspects and recovered all the stolen books. The other accomplices who helped or supported the accused will also be arrested soon. The suspects will be presented in court with solid evidence, spokesman added.

RWMC launches 'Zero Waste Operation'

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi Waste Management Company (RWMC) has formally launched the 'Zero Waste Operation' across the division in preparation for Eid-ul-Azha. As part of the Suthra Punjab Programme of Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz, the Company staff ensured exceptional cleanliness arrangements even on Wednesday despite being a holiday on account of Youm-e-Takbeer, an RWMC spokesman said. Following the directions of RWMC Chief Executive Officer Rana Sajid Safdar, he said, a grand cleanliness operation was underway in all tehseils of the Rawalpindi Division. "The operation not only includes comprehensive cleaning of city streets, highways, markets, and residential areas but also involves round-the-clock sanitation and waste clearance in all designated cattle markets," the spokesman added. In view of the approaching Eid-ul-Azha, he said, RWMC teams were carrying out daily waste lifting, manual sweeping, lime spreading, and immediate disposal of animal waste in all cattle markets as part of a well-coordinated strategy to ensure a clean, safe, and hygienic environment for the public.



ISLAMABAD: Amir Jamaat e Islami, Hafiz Naeem ur Rehman along with others talking media at the grave of Dr. Abdul Qadeer Khan to pay him tribute on Youm-E-Takbeer at H-8 graveyard. —APP Photo

Naqvi's message: Nation proud of its nuclear strength

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi gave a special message on Youm-e-Takbeer, congratulating the nation on the historic day when Pakistan became a nuclear power. He said that May 28, 1998, is a proud and unforgettable day for every Pakistani. On this day, Pakistan responded to India's five nuclear tests with six nuclear explosions, showing the world that the country is ready to defend itself at any cost. "By conducting nuclear tests, Pakistan proved it can respond strongly to any

threat," Naqvi said. He praised Pakistani scientists, the armed forces, and national leadership for their role in making the country's defense unbeatable. The Minister said that despite international pressure, sanctions, and threats, Pakistan went ahead with the nuclear tests in 1998. "This was a great example of courage, unity, and national pride," he said. Naqvi added that Youm-e-Takbeer is not just a date, but a reminder of Pakistan's strength, independence, and the unity of its people. He said the mountains of Chagai still stand as proof

of Pakistan's firm decision to protect its sovereignty. Speaking about current regional tensions, Naqvi said that Pakistan continues to show restraint in the face of India's aggressive actions. "The lesson of May 10 will not be forgotten by the enemy," he said, adding that Pakistan's defense capability is invincible. "Pakistan wants peace but will never compromise on its independence," the Interior Minister said. He ended his message by paying tribute to all those who contributed to making Pakistan a responsible nuclear power.

Youm-e-Takbeer" day celebrated

F. P Report

TAXILA: In collaboration with the Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF), Kurram Welfare Home (KWH) organized a vibrant and patriotic event in connection with Youm-e-Takbeer at a government school in Taxila. The event aimed to instill national pride, civic awareness, and the historical importance of Youm-e-Takbeer among school students. Students, teachers, local dignitaries, and PARENTS took part in this event. The school atmosphere was infused with patriotic fervor as the campus was adorned with national colors, and expressions of love for Pakistan echoed throughout the venue. The chief guests of the event were former Member of the Provincial Assembly (MPA) Umar Farooq and Mr. Haris Shinwari, Director Coordination at Kurram Welfare Home. Both delivered insightful speeches on the national significance of Youm-e-Takbeer. Mr. Umar Farooq emphasized the historical importance of the day, stating: "May 28th marks a monumental mile-

stone in Pakistan's history—the day our nation emerged as a nuclear power, affirming our sovereignty and strength on the global stage. It is vital that our youth recognize the sacrifices behind this achievement and contribute positively to Pakistan's future through education and unity." Haris Shinwari highlighted the role of youth in national development, saying: "Youm-e-Takbeer is not just a celebration of defense, but a reminder of our collective strength and resilience. Today's students are tomorrow's leaders, and it is our responsibility to inspire them with the values of patriotism, integrity, and service." The event featured patriotic songs, speeches, and skits performed by the students. Additionally, a painting exhibition showcased creative artwork by students around themes such as peace, national solidarity, development, and the significance of Youm-e-Takbeer. At the conclusion of the program, students who demonstrated outstanding performances were awarded certificates of appreciation and prizes, encouraging them to remain active participants in civic and national activities.

Sovereignty to be protected at all costs; Barrister Danyal

RAWALPINDI (APP): Federal Parliamentary Secretary for Information and Broadcasting Barrister Danyal Chaudhry said that sovereignty of Pakistan would be protected at all costs. He said this during a ceremony to mark Youm e Takbeer, joined by Federal Railways Minister Hanif Abbasi, Senior Provincial Minister Mariam Aurangzeb, MNAs Malik Ibrar Ahmad and Tahira Aurangzeb, and other dignitaries at the central event in Rawalpindi. Addressing the ceremony, Barrister Chaudhry said Pakistan's nuclear capability is a strategic

shield for Pakistan. "The explosions of May 28, 1998 were not merely physical detonations, but the thunderous voice of a nation declaring its inviolable right to self-defense," he said. The parliamentary secretary paid special tribute to Pakistan's armed forces saying "our soldiers stand guard at the borders motivated by the spirit of Kalma-e-Shahadat, not worldly rewards". Highlighting the government's commitment in combating challenging difficulties, he said the previous government's failures "When some sought to push Pakistan to the brink of default within 48 hours, our lead-

ership stabilized an economy buckling under debt." He said that just as the 1998 decision preserved our sovereignty, today we will similarly protect Pakistan's interests against all pressures. The event concluded with participants reaffirming Pakistan's nuclear deterrent as the ultimate guarantor of national security, with speakers emphasizing that the country's strategic capabilities remain central to regional stability. Observers noted the unusually strong turnout of both federal and provincial leaders, interpreting it as a display of institutional unity on matters of national defense.

Mushaal Mullick commemorates Youm-e-Takbir

ISLAMABAD (APP): Peace and Culture Organization Chairperson Mushaal Hussein Mullick and wife of jailed Kashmiri Hurriyat leader Muhammad Yasin Malik, has hailed Youm-e-Takbir as a day of Pakistan's greatness, self-reliance, and defense sovereignty.

In a statement, Mushaal said that May 28, 1998, marked a historic milestone when Pakistan defended its freedom and dignity. Mushaal attributed Pakistan's nuclear capability to its invincible defense force, saying it has given Pakistanis and Kashmiris courage and confidence. She praised the Pakistani forces, describing them as a 'steel wall' against enemies. Initiatives like Bunyan-al-Marsoos, she added, are a continuation of the ideology of Youm-e-Takbir.

Despite India's provocations, Mushaal emphasized that Pakistan has always preferred peace. She clarified that Pakistan's desire for peace is not a sign of weakness but a reflection of a civilized state. As a responsible nuclear power, Pakistan has maintained balance in the region, she said. Mushaal said, no force can bend a united nation with sincere leadership. The green crescent flag, she noted, continues to announce Pakistan's sovereignty to the world, symbolizing the nation's strength and resilience.

03 stolen motorcycles recovered

RAWALPINDI (APP): Police have arrested motorcycle lifter and recovered 03 stolen motorcycles from his possession during crackdown here on Wednesday. According to police spokesman, R.A Bazzar Police while taking action held motorcycle thief. Police have registered a case against him and further investigation was in progress.

German envoy, Senator Shahzad discuss regional security

ISLAMABAD (PPI): Visiting German Federal Foreign Office delegate Tobias Krause met with Senator Dr Shahzad Waseem here at his residence on Wednesday to discuss regional developments, bilateral cooperation, and strategic partnerships between Pakistan and Germany. According to a press release, the meeting reflected a continued commitment to strengthening diplomatic ties and fostering dialogue on issues of mutual interest. Senator Waseem highlighted Pakistan's swift and effective response to

recent Indian aggression, emphasizing that the country had reaffirmed its conventional deterrence while demonstrating advancements in modern warfare and system integration. He noted that Pakistan's narrative, based on truth, was gaining increased acknowledgment within the international community. He also described the sustained global attention to the Jammu and Kashmir dispute as a key diplomatic success for Pakistan. During the meeting, the two sides also discussed outcomes of the recent trilateral talks in Beijing between the foreign minis-

ters of Pakistan, Afghanistan, and China. Senator Waseem welcomed the decision to extend the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to Afghanistan, calling it a "strategic milestone" with the potential to stabilize the region, boost connectivity, drive economic development, and strengthen collective efforts against terrorism. The meeting concluded with both representatives reaffirming their commitment to enhancing bilateral relations and promoting peace and development across the region.

Azerbaijan's National Day observed at Islamabad



F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD : Ambassador of Azerbaijan Khazar Farhadov, invited Sardar Waqar Shahzad advocate to a reception celebrating Azerbaijan's National Day.

The event was held at the Mövenpick Hotel Centaurus in Islamabad and was attended by high-

profile dignitaries, including ambassadors, government officials, the Governor of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, political leaders, and business community members.

The reception was a celebration of Azerbaijan's rich culture and heritage, and Sardar Waqar Shahzad Gujjar's presence underscored the strong ties

between Pakistan and Azerbaijan. The event provided a platform for distinguished guests to engage in meaningful discussions and strengthen bilateral relations.

Sardar Waqar Shahzad expressed his gratitude to the Ambassador for the honor and privilege of being part of this significant occasion.

Pakistan's nuclear capability, cornerstone of its national security: Lt Gen Kidwai

ISLAMABAD (APP): As part of the commemoration of Youm-e-Takbeer, the Arms Control and Disarmament Centre (ACDC) at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) on Wednesday hosted a seminar titled "The Future of Deterrence and Emerging Challenges". Lt General (R) Khalid Ahmed Kidwai, NI(M), HI, HI(M), Advisor National Command Authority (NCA), and former DG SPD, was the chief guest. Distinguished speakers included: Amb. Zamir Akram, Advisor SPD; Air Commodore (R) Khalid Banuri, Senior Advisor Training Rejuvenation and Jinnah Centre for Character and Leadership (JCCL), AHQ Islamabad; and Dr Salma Malik, Associate Professor, Department of Defence and Strategic Studies, QAU, said a press release. In his keynote address, Lt General (R) Khalid Ahmed Kidwai underscored the emergence of a "new normal" in South Asia's strategic environment following the recent intense escalation-cum-retaliation mini war between India and Pakistan. He highlighted that the four-day conflict, lasting only 87 hours, was a profound test of both conventional and nuclear deterrence, as well as the integration of modern technologies in warfare. While commemorating the 27th anniversary of Pakistan's nuclear tests, Lt Gen. Kidwai reaffirmed that Pakistan's nuclear capability remains the cornerstone of its national security, ensuring strategic stability and restoring balance in South Asia. He emphasized that the defining feature of

the new strategic reality is the reversal of air superiority in the region. The Pakistan Air Force's (PAF) decisive performance, leveraging advanced Chinese technology and using integrated multi-domain tactics, has established Pakistan as the dominant air power in South Asia. This shift validates Pakistan's conventional deterrence as an effective complement to its robust nuclear arsenal. He outlined the key tenets of the 'new normal': Air superiority has shifted decisively to Pakistan, with the Pakistan Air Force now the dominant air power in South Asia; Pakistan's battle-tested conventional deterrent, especially its Air Force, has assumed a leading role in regional deterrence; Pakistan's credible nuclear deterrence will continue to constrain and limit India's political and operational choices, thereby maintaining strategic stability; any Indian aggression will be met with a 'notch-up response' as Field Marshal Asim Munir has promised, a 'Quid Pro Quo Plus', as Pakistan's retaliation will always be a calibrated and escalated response; India's pattern of seeking ceasefires following Pakistan's intense retaliation has become an established norm; and international diplomatic interventions will persist in managing crises to prevent escalation beyond defined limits. Additionally, Pakistan reserves the right to reciprocate any terror attack with conventional responses against pre-determined adversaries, reflecting a reciprocal logic to India's declared doctrines. He further

outlined that Pakistan's nuclear weapons program had continued to serve as a robust deterrent and the guarantor of peace and stability in South Asia. Over the last six years, India's Hindutva-driven BJP government had twice tested nuclear-armed Pakistan's political will, strategic resolve, and military capability first by striking mainland Pakistan in February 2019, and again in Azad Kashmir in May 2025. On both occasions, India emerged second best. These confrontations reaffirmed the credibility of Pakistan's deterrent posture both conventional and nuclear and demonstrated that any Indian aggression would be met with a stronger-than-proportional response. He concluded by stressing Pakistan's steadfast resolve to safeguard its sovereignty and regional peace in an environment shaped by emerging threats and technological advancements, marking a strategic shift that firmly favors Pakistan's security interests in South Asia. He also underlined that India and Pakistan should seize the opening provided by President Trump's diplomatic initiative by taking the path of dialogue and addressing the conflicts plaguing South Asia. In his remarks, DG ISSI Ambassador Sohail Mahmood emphasized the enduring significance of Youm-e-Takbeer as a landmark in South Asia's strategic history. He recalled Pakistan's decisive response to India's nuclear provocations in 1998, which reestablished deterrence and restored strategic balance in the region.

He noted that Pakistan's nuclear journey was not a choice but a necessity driven by existential security imperatives. He highlighted Pakistan's responsible conduct as a nuclear state over the past 27 years, and stressed five key elements of national policy: a credible and operationalized deterrent; an impeccable nuclear safety and security regime; a growing record of peaceful nuclear applications; responsible international conduct; and consistent nuclear diplomacy to combat discrimination and misperception. He cautioned that the regional security environment is increasingly volatile due to disruptive technologies, and India's destabilizing posture, including MIRVs, sea-based deterrents, and counterforce strategies. He also referred to India's post-Pahalgam misadventure, and lauded Pakistan's calibrated response, while warning about New Delhi's strategic recklessness, driven by Hindutva ideology and electoral calculation. He reaffirmed that Pakistan's Full Spectrum Deterrence under Credible Minimum Deterrence ensures that no space exists for aggression below the nuclear threshold. He concluded by reiterating that deterrence is not about fear it is about stability, responsibility, and peace through strength and emphasized that Pakistan remains fully committed to its strategic posture, with clarity, restraint, and resolve to safeguard its sovereignty and regional stability. Earlier, in his introductory remarks, Malik Qasim Mustafa, Director ACDC ISSI, welcomed

the participants and emphasized the significance of Youm-e-Takbeer in safeguarding Pakistan's sovereignty and restoring strategic balance in South Asia. He noted that India's shift towards warfighting doctrines, rapid missile modernization, and pursuit of disruptive technologies such as hypersonics, AI, and space weaponization pose grave challenges to deterrence stability. He reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to responsible deterrence, strategic restraint, and the pursuit of regional peace. Amb. Zamir Akram discussed "Emerging Challenges and Regional Deterrence," emphasizing the transformation of South Asia's strategic landscape post-nuclearization. He highlighted India's increasingly aggressive posture, including false flag operations and hybrid warfare tactics involving proxies like the BLA. He analyzed Pakistan's calibrated and robust military response, particularly following India's 2025 misadventure, which resulted in the downing of several Indian aircraft and exposed the vulnerability of its advanced air defence systems. He emphasized that while nuclear deterrence prevents full-scale war, India's coercive strategies continue to undermine strategic stability in the region. He concluded that India's strategic autonomy has weakened, while Pakistan's resilience and strategic partnership with China remain critical for regional stability. Air Commodore Khalid Banuri delivered an insightful discussion on "Emerging Technologies and the Changing Nature of Warfare." He exam-

ined the evolving role of Artificial Intelligence, cyber and electronic warfare, hypersonic systems, and space-based capabilities, highlighting their implications for speed, precision, and asymmetry in conflict. He emphasized the ethical, regulatory, and strategic challenges posed by these technologies, including the credibility gap and cognitive influence operations. Stressing the need for adaptation, innovation, and preparedness, he concluded that change remains the only constant in warfare, and future militaries must remain agile across both kinetic and non-kinetic domains. Dr Salma Malik presented an in-depth analysis on "The Shifting Sands of Global Deterrence: Technological Race and Strategic Stability," examining how advancements in Artificial Intelligence, hypersonic missile systems and emerging military technologies are transforming global deterrence dynamics. She underscored the blurred boundaries between kinetic and non-kinetic warfare, emphasizing India's strategic shift post-2019 and its irresponsible posturing. She highlighted Pakistan's measured restraint, and argued for proactive diplomatic engagement, particularly on Kashmir and regional stability. She also called for advocating multilateral dialogue and strategic lawfare to counter escalating asymmetries and normative erosion. The seminar concluded with a comprehensive Q&A session and Chairman BOG Ambassador Khalid Mahmood distributed souvenirs to the chief guest.

2 killed, 4 hurt in accident

KABUL (Pajhwok): At least two people have been killed and four others wounded as a result of a traffic accident in the Gilan district of Ghazni. A Saracha-type vehicle veered off the road and overturned on the Kabul-Kandahar highway in Pashkandi area. A statement from the police headquarters said two people lost their lives and four others were wounded in the incident. It added the injured were evacuated to the provincial hospital for medical treatment.

Gharwal attends forum

KABUL (Pajhwok): The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) says the Chargé d'Affaires of the Afghan Embassy in Moscow Jamal Nasir Gharwal has participated in the 13th Moscow International Security Forum of Senior Officials. In a statement, the MoFA said that Gharwal delivered a speech at the forum on recent security developments and achievements in Afghanistan, as well as their regional and international impact.

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

IEA starts distributing title deeds to industrialists

KABUL (Pajhwok): The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) started distributing land ownership deeds in industrial zones to 91 various firms on Wednesday.

Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar told a gathering in this regard the distribution of land in industrial zones marked the beginning of a new chapter and would further strengthen the country's industrial sector.

He added that to regulate industrial zones, promote economic growth and development, attract private investment and ensure effective management and maintenance, the supreme leader of IEA had ratified the Industrial Zones Law.

Baradar explained the law provided the necessary framework and services for industrial activities and investment, thereby creating employment opportunities for citizens and contributing significantly to national economic progress.

He noted the leadership of the caretaker government had issued a directive to allocate land for the development of industrial zones in line with the new law, environmental protection measures, and the national urban master plan.

According to the directive, 1,000 acres of land will be allocated in each of the four directions of Kabul, 10,000 acres each in Nangarhar, Kandahar and Balkh provinces and 5,000 acres in Kunduz province.

The deputy premier added that, where feasible, 500 acres in each of the remaining provinces would be designated for industrial parks, while 5 to 25 acres in each province would be set aside for small industries and enterprises.

He said: "As part of these efforts, today we are witnessing the allocation of land ownership deeds in industrial zones to 91 industrialists to enable them to carry out industrial activities." He emphasised that this distribution signals the start of a new era for the country's industrial sector and urged recipients to utilise the land effectively for production and industrial development.

Baradar also called on Afghan investors living abroad to bring their capital and industries back to Afghanistan and actively contribute to strengthening the nation's economic foundations, creating employment, and expanding the industrial sector.

Also addressing the gathering, Acting Minister of Industry and Commerce Nooruddin Azizi stressed that the allocated land must lead to increased exports and the domestic production of raw materials.

He encouraged industrialists to request mining rights from the government to source raw materials for their production locally.

Meanwhile, Deputy Minister of Industry and Commerce Maulvi Zahid announced that 80,000 acres of land had been earmarked for industrialists by the IEA leadership.

He noted that over the past three months, 125 applications had been finalised, and land ownership deeds approved for 91 companies. These companies would receive a combined total of 325 acres of land.

Also speaking at the event, Sherbaz Kaminzada, Head of the Afghanistan Chamber of Mines and Industries, said that 800 factories in Kabul were currently operating in rented premises. He urged the government to prioritise land allocation to these existing industrialists and to investors who have recently returned to the country.

He added that Islamic Emirate and stand alongside it in its efforts to strengthen the national industrialists support the economy.



44 telecom sites approved for Paktika



KABUL (Pajhwok): The Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technology (MoCIT) has approved 44 new telecom sites in remote areas of south-eastern Paktika province.

Once built, these sites will provide telecom services to residents in remote areas of the province.

Inayatullah Alokozai, spokesman for MoCIT, wrote on his X handle that Acting Minister Maulvi Najibullah Hayat Haqqani, as part of his ongoing provincial visits, travelled to Paktika to assess telecommunications services.

During the visit, Haqqani assured relevant officials and local residents that the ministry was paying special attention to remote areas of the country and was striving to ensure that all parts of Afghanistan have access to telecom services.

145m afghani distributed to returnees at Torkham

KABUL (TOLONews): Officials at the temporary Omari Camp in the Torkham township have reported the distribution of 145 million afghani since April this year to nearly 20,000 families who were forcibly deported from Pakistan.

Abdul Hadi Akhundzada, head of the financial committee at Omari Camp, said: "We have distributed 145 million afghani. The distribution was as follows: families of two, three, or four members received 2,000 afghani per person, while families with five or more members received 10,000 afghani."

Meanwhile, a number of recently deported migrants have called on the caretaker government to provide greater support in the form of employment opportunities and shelter.

Nik Mohammad, who was expelled from Pakistan along with his family, described the dire situation Afghan migrants faced there: "We were doing different jobs—one of us worked as a butcher, another in a hotel, and some did labor work. Even so, the situation deteriorated, and migrants were being expelled. We had to abandon everything and return."

Ministry of Martyrs to start allowance payments soon

KABUL (TOLONews): As many families of martyrs and persons with disabilities continue to struggle with severe economic hardship, delays in their monthly payments have sparked new concerns.

According to them, they have lived with disabilities for more than two decades, yet covering even their basic living expenses remains a major challenge.

Mohammad Mubin, who became disabled 26 years ago and is the sole breadwinner for his family, said: "The unemployment rate is high. Even non-disabled people can't find work; but people with disabilities face even more problems. For example, a healthy person can reach the city with ten or twenty afghani, but a disabled person must take a taxi."

Rahima, a family member of a martyr, told TOLONews: "It's been four years since my husband passed away. Our situation is very bad. We need help with food supplies."

Many families of martyrs and persons with disabilities are facing similar problems. These families are demanding timely payment of their monthly allowances, saying that delays have further worsened their living conditions.

Noor Mohammad, another person with a disability, said: "Our salaries must be paid on time. We all have children and are living in very difficult conditions."

The Ministry of Martyrs and Disabled Affairs said that the payment process for the first quarter of the current solar year will begin in the coming days.

Faisal Khamosh, spokesperson for the ministry, told TOLONews: "The Ministry of Martyrs and Disabled Affairs will begin the process of distributing cash payments for the months of Hamal, Saur, and Jawza of the solar year to persons with disabilities, widows, and families of martyrs in all provinces, including the capital, in the coming days."

Earlier, the ministry announced that over the past three and a half years it has registered more than 653,000 widows, orphans, and persons with disabilities across the country.

Iran sets June 5 deadline for 4m illegal Afghans to leave

KABUL (Pajhwok): The Head of Iran's Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrant Affairs says more than four million Afghan refugees in Iran are considered illegal after the invalidation of census forms and they have until June 5 to leave the country.

Iran's BAFIA Director Naderyar Ahmadi as saying many Afghans had entered the country without identity documents and most of them constituted refugees and currently the number of Afghan citizens reaches 6.1 million in Iran. He said the number of illegal Afghans was 2.1 million last year and explained: "About two million people whose census forms were valid until March 20 were added to 1404 solar year invalid census forms, bringing the number of unauthorized citizens in Iran to 4.1 million".

UAE accepts credentials of IEA consul general

KABUL (Pajhwok): The United Arab Emirates has accepted the credentials of Abdul Rahman Fida as Afghanistan's consul-general in Dubai and the Northern Emirates.

Sheikh Maktoum bin Butti Al Maktoum, director of the UAE Foreign Ministry's Dubai office, received Fida's credentials during a meeting on Tuesday.

In a statement, the UAE Foreign Ministry said the official stressed the importance of bilateral ties with Afghanistan.

Sheikh Maktoum welcomed the consul general and congratulated him on his appointment, state news agency Wam reported.

He wished Fida success in his assignment and lauded the strong political, economic, commercial and investment ties between the nations.

The meeting underlined the UAE's commitment to strengthening relations with Afghanistan and supporting its future development.

At a meeting in Abu Dhabi in January, President Sheikh Mohamed and IEA Interior Minister Sirajuddin Haqqani had reviewed efforts to support Afghanistan's reconstruction and stability.



Thousands appear in Kankor examination in Logar province

PUL-I-ALAM (Pajhwok): About 2,500 contenders appeared for the Kankor (university entrance) examination in three days in central Logar province, an official said on Wednesday.

At a ceremony today, Head of Higher Education Institute Mufti Zia Ahmad Saram said about 2,500 contenders participated in three days of the Kankor examination.

On the other hand, Deputy Governor Maulvi Mohammad Anwar Dinparwar said now was the time for the youth to progress in the field of modern education and bring success to the country.

"Every Afghan has responsibility to provide literacy opportunities to other Afghans", he added.

According to him, it is the responsibility of school and university teachers to educate students with a spirit that enables them to serve the country with integrity.

Shafiullah, a participant of the Kankor exam, told Pajhwok he was happy attending this year's exam. He emphasized the Ministry of Higher Education should expand the scope of attracting youths to the country's universities.

The National Examinations Authority has begun the process of taking the Kankor exams for 1404 solar year in Logar and other provinces of the country, scheduled to be completed in the next three days.

The 1404 Kankor exam will be held in five phases from May 28 to June 10, and, more than 112,000 candidates would be absorbed into higher, semi-higher educational institutes and universities.

According to NEXA, the first phase of the Kankor exam would be held in Maidan Wardak, Parwan, Panjshir, Paktika, Ghor, Daikundi, Logar, Kapisa, Ghazni, Baghlan, and Bamyan provinces.



Kabul center gives hope to families with autistic children

KABUL (Pajhwok): The 'Kabul Speech Therapy and Rehabilitation Center' is a place where dozens of children with autism, as well as adults experiencing speech problems after a stroke, receive training in cognitive games and speech skills.

According to doctors, autism is a neurodevelopmental disorder that affects how individuals communicate, interact socially, behave, and learn. This disorder usually appears in early childhood (before the age of three) and remains with the individual for life. However, with timely diagnosis and professional intervention, the quality of life for people with autism can be significantly improved.

Such individuals face communication challenges such as the inability to initiate or maintain conversations, difficulty understanding body language or tone of voice, delayed speech development, or limited use of words.

They may also experience social difficulties such as challenges in interacting with peers, indifference or inappropriate responses to others' emotions, and lack of interest in group games or friendships.

This center is dedicated to children with autism; currently, dozens of children are under care here, and teachers are striving to improve their condition.

Sayed Jamal Elham Hashimi, the founder of the 'Kabul Speech Therapy and Rehabilitation Center', said in an exclusive interview with Pajhwok Afghan News that the center was established five years ago to support families with children diagnosed with autism.

He added that the center initially only served children with hearing impairments, distributing hearing aids to them. However, he started to question why a child who could hear still couldn't speak, leading him to launch a speech therapy program.

He said, "In Afghanistan, understanding and educating families is a bit challenging. When a hearing aid is installed, families think the child should also be able to talk. Many still believe that if their child can hear, they should be able to speak."

According to Hashimi, the center has recruited psychologists who have graduated from the Special Education program of the Faculty of Psychology to work in speech therapy and child rehabilitation.

This center for children with autism differs from typical educational institutions. In every classroom, you can hear teachers' voices as they teach the basics of speech to these children.

Children who cannot speak or hear, and who also have behavioral challenges—both boys and girls—attend separate classes where they listen to their teachers. Sometimes they are attentive, and sometimes they get distracted.

Neelab Mohammadi, one of the psychologists who graduated from the Special Education program at Kabul Education University, told Pajhwok that currently, 120 children with autism are being cared for by 30 female instructors at the center.

She said the center includes departments for speech therapy, cognitive therapy, motor therapy, and auditory training classes.

As the center's director, she noted that previously, such a facility did not exist in the country, and some families had to take their children abroad for treatment.

Mohammadi explained that treatment varies for each child: some may show improvement within a month, while others may need more time—sometimes even up to a year.

According to her, over the past five years, the center has had six graduating groups, and the children who graduated were introduced to public schools, where they are now studying in second and third grades.

She urged families of children with autism not to neglect treatment, emphasizing that earlier diagnosis meant quicker treatment.

Mohammadi added that the center also treats adults.

She explained: "Our center is not just for children. We also treat adults—those who, after a stroke, can no longer speak well despite having previously been able to speak. We help people who stutter, those who have difficulty pronouncing certain sounds, or those who lack self-confidence."

Mother of one of the children

Fahima Stanikzai, whose one child out of three has autism, said: "I realized my child had autism while we were living temporarily in Japan."

She continued: "My son was two years old at the time. I noticed he would spin around in circles, walk on his tiptoes, or, for example, didn't respond when I called him. Based on articles I had read about autistic children, I suspected my child had autism. But unfortunately, we were only temporarily in Japan. When we returned to Afghanistan, we couldn't find any centers for autistic children."

However, she later saw an advertisement for the center on Facebook, and now her child is receiving treatment there.

She added: "I'm very happy such a center exists, because I've seen a lot of positive changes in my son—he's improving day by day. Initially, my son had frequent temper tantrums, was very aggressive, and was extremely disorganized. He had no reaction to instructions we gave him."

She continued: "But since I started bringing my child here, there have been many changes. He has become very organized, almost like a normal child—he understands more of what we say. He's learned many things he didn't know before. For example, he now puts his clothes neatly in his closet, arranges his shoes properly, dresses himself, and has learned a lot from here."

We attempted to get comments from officials at the Ministry of Education regarding the number of autism treatment centers in the country, but despite repeated attempts, they did not respond.





MAKKAH: Federal Minister for Religious Affairs and Inter-Faith Harmony, Sardar Muhammad Yousaf visited Pakistan Medical mission.

Gaza rescuers say 16 killed in Israeli strikes

GAZA CITY (AFP): Gaza rescuers said sixteen people were killed Wednesday in Israeli strikes across the besieged Palestinian territory where Israel intensified its operations this month. "Sixteen people have been killed as a result of Israeli airstrikes on the Gaza Strip since dawn," civil defense spokesman Mahmud Bassal said.

Among them, nine belonged to the family of photojournalist Osama Al-Arbeed and were killed in a strike on their home in Gaza's north at 2am, Bassal said. He added that Arbeed was injured, noting that he is a videographer and editor at a local film production organization. Another six members of the same family were killed in central Gaza in a strike that left 15 people wounded, "including children."

One other person, a civilian per Bassal, was killed near the southern Gaza city of Khan Yunis. When contacted by AFP, the Israeli military declined to comment on the strikes, saying it could not do so without precise coordinates. Israel has stepped up its offensive in Gaza this month, aiming for "the defeat of Hamas," more than 18 months after the group's October 2023 attack on Israel triggered the war.

Some 1,218 people were killed in that attack, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on official figures. Militants also took 251 hostages, 57 of whom remain in Gaza, including 34 who the Israeli military says are dead. The health ministry in Hamas-run Gaza said on Monday that at least 3,822 people had been killed in the territory since Israel ended a ceasefire on March 18, taking the war's overall toll to 53,977, mostly civilians.

Meanwhile, British journalist Piers Morgan urged the Israeli government at the Arab Media Summit on

Israel hits Houthi targets including last plane at Sanaa airport

JERUSALEM/ADEN (Reuters): Israel said it had struck Houthi targets including the last remaining plane used by the group at Sanaa international airport, after the Yemeni militants launched missiles toward Israel a day earlier. The General Director of Sanaa International Airport, Khaled Al-Shaief, said in a post on his X account that the strike had completely destroyed the last of the civilian planes that Yemenia Airways was operating from the airport. The airport is the largest in Yemen and came back into service last week after temporary repairs and runway restoration following previous Israeli strikes.

It was mainly being used by UN aircraft and the plane destroyed in the latest Israeli strikes. Three other Yemenia Airways planes were destroyed in an attack earlier this month. "This is a clear message and a direct continuation of the policy we have established: whoever fires at the State of Israel will pay a heavy price," Israel's defense ministry said in a statement. The Houthis did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Part of Iran's "Axis of Resistance," a regional alliance that includes Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthis control territory where about 60 percent of Yemen's population resides.

Wednesday to let international journalists into Gaza. "It is ridiculous that Israel has the ability to prevent international journalists from reporting that the information and facts that the Israeli government is providing (are) not accurate," he said.

Morgan said that getting the facts regarding what is happening in Gaza is very difficult for journalists because Israel refuses entry to these media entities. "Let the journalists in, and then we can work out if what Israel is saying is right. The fact (that) they are not letting them in is very telling," he added.

Morgan interviewed Egyptian comedian Bassem Youssef in October 2023 when Israel launched its military attack on Gaza. "Youssef took me on a whole history lesson on the conflict of 75 years. I have been criticized by the Arab world for being pro-Israel. But I have always had more Palestinian supportive guests than any other show in the world, and I did that deliberately," he added.

His interview with Youssef went viral, accumulating over 23 million views. Morgan said that his initial understanding and views on the history of Palestine changed after his interview with Youssef. "My original view was that Israel had the fundamental right and duty to defend itself following the Oct. 7 attack. But my question from the start was always, 'What is a proportionate response?' To me, what has been happening in recent months, especially since the blockade and the bombardments, has crossed a line," he said.

"My position has evolved and moved, but I'm not overly defensive of the initial position I took at the start. I always try to be firm and fair and offer both sides a platform to try and get a solution," he added. "It's not my job to take sides in any of these stories. My job is to be a journalist and to hold everyone accountable and try to get to the truth and establish facts," he said.

account", he added. Since returning to office in January, Trump has reinstated his "maximum pressure" policy on Tehran, including by imposing new sanctions on the Islamic republic. Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei said Wednesday that "consultations are ongoing regarding the time and location of the next round of talks, and once finalised, they will be announced by Oman".

President Masoud Pezeshkian, currently on an official visit to Oman, thanked the Gulf state for its mediation efforts between the longtime adversaries, which have had no formal diplomatic ties since 1979. "Countries that were hostile to us and behaved unprincipledly over the years — we have always tried not to accept inspectors from those countries," Iran's nuclear chief Mohammad Eslami told reporters, referring to staff from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Tehran "will reconsider accepting American inspectors through the agency" if "an agreement is reached, and Iran's demands are taken into

also said that the issue of enrichment "has not been raised at all" and "the enrichment percentage should not be raised politically". "The enrichment percentage depends on the type of use. When highly enriched uranium is produced, it does not necessarily mean military use," he told reporters.

Baqaei meanwhile said: "The continuation of enrichment in Iran is an inseparable part of the country's nuclear industry and a fundamental principle for the Islamic Republic of Iran." "Any proposal or initiative that contradicts this principle or undermines this right is unacceptable."

Iran currently enriches uranium up to 60% — the highest level of any non-nuclear weapons state. That rate is still below the 90% threshold required for a nuclear weapon, but far above the 3.67% limit set under the 2015 deal. The European parties to the 2015 nuclear accord — France, Germany, and the United Kingdom — are weighing whether to trigger the agreement's "snapback" mechanism, which would reinstate UN sanctions on Iran for non-compliance. Tehran has repeatedly warned against activating the measure.

Kremlin rebuffs Zelensky's call for meeting with Trump, Putin

MOSCOW (AFP): The Kremlin on Wednesday rebuffed a call by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky for a three-way summit with counterparts Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin as Kyiv seeks to force Moscow to halt its more than three-year-long invasion.

Moscow said any meeting involving Russian President Putin and Zelensky would only happen after "concrete agreements" had been struck between negotiators from each side. Putin rejected calls to meet Zelensky in Turkey earlier this month, when Russia and Ukraine held their first direct peace talks in three years. Putin has repeatedly said he does not see Zelensky as a legitimate leader and called for him to be toppled.

US President Trump, meanwhile,

has expressed frustration at both leaders for not yet striking a deal to end the war. The two sides have traded waves of massive aerial attacks in recent weeks, with Ukraine unleashing one of its largest-ever drone barrages on Russia overnight, according to the defence ministry in Moscow. "If Putin is not comfortable with a bilateral meeting, or if everyone wants it to be a trilateral meeting, I don't mind. I am ready for any format," Zelensky said in comments to journalists on Tuesday that were published on Wednesday.

The Ukrainian leader said he was "ready" for a "Trump-Putin-me" meeting. Asked about Zelensky's comments, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said: "Such a meeting should be the result of concrete

agreements between the two (Ukrainian and Russian) delegations." The talks in Istanbul earlier this month failed to yield a breakthrough. Moscow has rejected coordinated Western calls for an immediate ceasefire.

Zelensky also urged the United States to deliver a package of hard-hitting sanctions on Russia's banking and energy sectors. "Trump confirmed that if Russia does not stop, sanctions will be imposed. We discussed two main aspects with him — energy and the banking system. Will the US be able to impose sanctions on these two sectors? I would very much like that," Zelensky said. Trump called Putin "crazy" and said he was "playing with fire" in rare rebukes of the Russian leader after Moscow's latest wave of aerial attacks.

Nawaz forced to conduct nuclear tests in 1998: Omar F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Leader of the Opposition in the National Assembly Omar Ayub Khan has revealed that then-Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was initially unwilling to go ahead with the nuclear tests, citing negotiations with the United States.

On the 27th anniversary of Pakistan's nuclear tests, Youm-e-Takbeer, he said, "May 28, 1998 was the day Nawaz Sharif's legs were trembling." "He had refused to conduct the nuclear tests and was negotiating a deal with the US administration to avoid going nuclear," he added.

Omar Ayub Khan also stated that Nawaz Sharif was ultimately compelled to authorize the nuclear tests due to significant pressure from key figures within the government and national leadership. "My late father Gohar Ayub Khan, the late Dr Abdul Qadeer Khan, the late Majeed Nizami, Raja Zafar-ul-Haq, and Sheikh Rashid Ahmad, strongly advocated in the cabinet meeting for proceeding with the tests. Their firm stance left the cabinet with no choice but to agree," he maintained.

He also stated that Shahbaz Sharif himself had confided in his father that a deal was being discussed with the US government. "Shahbaz Sharif told my father that Nawaz Sharif was engaging in negotiations with the American President in return for not conducting the nuclear tests," he said. "My father responded by stating that Pakistan was fully prepared and must proceed."

Omar Ayub paid tribute to the efforts of those who ensured Pakistan's defence and sovereignty by making the nation a declared nuclear power. "We remember and honour the patriots who stood firm in the national interest and safeguarded Pakistan's strategic future," he said.

In world first, Mexican voters to elect all judges

MEXICO CITY (AFP): Mexico is set to become the world's only country to let voters elect all of their judges, sparking sharp disagreement about whether the reforms will diminish or strengthen criminal influence over the courts. The government says the unprecedented popular vote for judges and magistrates at all levels — including the Supreme Court — is needed to address rampant corruption and impunity.

Critics argue it will undermine the judiciary's independence and warn the participation of controversial candidates — such as a former lawyer for notorious drug lord Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman — means it is doomed to backfire. On Sunday, voters will choose several thousand federal, district and local judges and magistrates. Another election for the remainder will be held in 2027.

Not just anybody can run for one of these jobs. Candidates must have a law degree, experience in legal affairs, what is termed "a good reputation," and no criminal record.

He also highlighted that today, the world faced numerous grave challenges including armed conflicts, diseases, climate change and economic crises and they had assembled there opting for compassion while rejecting conflicts. They were confident that the passion and wisdom would ultimately usher into peace and prosperity, he added.

In today's unpredictable volatile world, Prime Minister Sharif said the political security, connectivity, alignments and emerging technology were shaping the new reality, and in such a situation, Pakistan was very fortunate to have sincere brothers like Turkiye and Azerbaijan who stood with them as impregnable rocks and whom they could trust without any second thoughts.

They were always united in peace, justice and morality, he said, expressing his confidence that their time-tested relationship would not only prove beneficial to the well-being of their people but would also contribute to the peace and prosperity in the region and beyond. The prime minister further said that the trilateral format was of great

KP CM reviews preparation of upcoming ADP



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The final session in a series of consultative meetings regarding the preparation of the upcoming Annual Development Programme (ADP) was held here on Saturday with Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Gandapur. The meeting focused on extensive discussions concerning proposed development projects for inclusion in the ADP from the Mardan Division.

Members of the National and Provincial Assemblies representing the Mardan Division attended the session and presented their suggestions for new development projects in their respective constituencies. The meeting also included

a departmental review of the progress on ongoing development projects within the division.

Speaking on the occasion, Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur stated that the new Annual Development Programme would be a visionary one, laying a solid foundation and roadmap for the province's development plans over the next four years. He emphasized that the upcoming ADP would be formulated in light of recommendations from elected public representatives, ensuring that new projects reflect the genuine needs of local populations. The ADP will prioritize practical and high-impact initiatives serving the broader public interest. The Chief Minister fur-

ther noted that a significant portion of development funds for the next fiscal year would be allocated to the completion of ongoing projects whereas projects with 80% and more physical progress will be completed in the next year, resulting in the completion of nearly 50% of ongoing projects. Reaffirming his commitment to equitable development across all regions of the province, the Chief Minister stated that, in his capacity as the head of the provincial government, every constituency is his constituency, and all areas will receive their fair share of development based on population size, backwardness and public needs, adding that no region will face discrimination in this process.

Security, development initiatives reviewed

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A high-level government delegation led by Advisor to the Chief Minister on Information and Public Relations, Barrister Dr. Saif, paid a significant visit to Miran Shah, North Waziristan and Bannu yesterday. The purpose of the visit was to assess the overall security situation in the region and take steps to further strengthen peace and stability.

The delegation included Provincial Minister Pakhtun Yar, Chief Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Shahab Ali Shah, Inspector General of Police Zulfikar Hameed, and other senior officials. The visit was conducted on the special directives of Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ali Amin Gandapur.

During the visit, civil and military officials provided a comprehensive briefing on the security situation in North Waziristan and surrounding areas. The delegation also paid homage at the Martyrs' Monument and offered prayers for the elevation of the ranks of martyrs. A guard of honour was presented by the police on this occasion.

The delegation held in-depth discussions with local tribal elders on the state of peace and security in the region. Barrister Dr. Saif emphasized the vital role of tribal leaders and local communities in maintaining

peace and stated that the government highly values their involvement. He reiterated that local communities are being taken into confidence to ensure sustainable peace and long-term stability.

He further stated that establishing peace in the merged districts remains a top priority of the provincial government, with substantial funds being allocated to this cause. "Sustainable development is not possible without peace," he remarked. Barrister Dr. Saif acknowledged the historical deprivations faced by the merged districts and highlighted that the government is giving special attention to addressing those issues post-merger.

"The ultimate goal is to bring these districts at par with the rest of the province," he added. He also underscored the importance of the youth and tribal elders in ensuring lasting peace and urged them to play an active role. The delegation was briefed on key areas of development, including infrastructure, healthcare, education, and youth employment, which are being prioritized by the provincial government in the merged areas.

Following the North Waziristan visit, the delegation led by Barrister Dr. Saif proceeded to Bannu, where they received briefings from the Commissioner Bannu and senior police officials on

security and public issues. The delegation also met with tribal elders representing various communities in Bannu. Meetings were held with prominent local leaders including former Senator Baz Muhammad, Member Provincial Assembly Adnan Khan, and other elders from the Bannu City, as well as leaders from the Wazir tribe. The elders briefed the government delegation on the challenges faced by the area. The delegation also listened to public grievances and assured that their concerns would be addressed at the highest level.

Barrister Dr. Saif said that the Chief Minister had previously visited Bannu and that the current high-level visit was also conducted under his direct guidance. He stressed that resolving public issues at the community level is a key priority of the provincial government and reiterated the Chief Minister's directive to bring underdeveloped districts at par with more developed areas of the province.

The provincial government, he stated, is investing heavily in the uplift of backward regions to set them on a path of sustainable progress. Barrister Dr. Saif concluded by saying that a comprehensive report detailing observations, recommendations, and future action plans would be presented to the Chief Minister following the visit.

Pakistan desires peace

(Continued from Page 1)

The prime minister said that it was natural that their people were bound together with love and passion, supporting their common objectives. Their people had given them their support with outpouring of love and affection.

He also highlighted that today, the world faced numerous grave challenges including armed conflicts, diseases, climate change and economic crises and they had assembled there opting for compassion while rejecting conflicts. They were confident that the passion and wisdom would ultimately usher into peace and prosperity, he added.

In today's unpredictable volatile world, Prime Minister Sharif said the political security, connectivity, alignments and emerging technology were shaping the new reality, and in such a situation, Pakistan was very fortunate to have sincere brothers like Turkiye and Azerbaijan who stood with them as impregnable rocks and whom they could trust without any second thoughts.

They were always united in peace, justice and morality, he said, expressing his confidence that their time-tested relationship would not only prove beneficial to the well-being of their people but would also contribute to the peace and prosperity in the region and beyond. The prime minister further said that the trilateral format was of great

importance and significance that had given them 'political ownership and impetus to move collectively in unison in all spheres of their common interests.'

He also expressed his gratitude to Turkish and Azerbaijan Presidents for their firm stand and unwavering commitment to Pakistan during its conflict with India. Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev, in his remarks, said that the three countries were united on basis of their common and shared history, culture and religion. Turkiye and Pakistan extended moral support to them for which they were thankful for them, he said and highlighted the significance of solidarity and unity for the development of their nations by tapping resources to achieve their shared goals.

He said Azerbaijan wanted to advance its cooperation through joint ventures and envisaged \$2 billion investment in Pakistan's economy with specific development projects. President Aliyev further stressed upon joint cooperation over AI, space exploration, academic collaboration, cultural events and tourism links to enhance ties between their people. He said that tensions between Pakistan and India troubled them most and they expressed solidarity with Pakistan, adding that through dialogue and negotiations under the UN charter was a way to move forward.

President of Turkiye

Recep Tayyip Erdogan, in his speech, congratulated Azerbaijan on the Independence Day and said that the three brotherly countries were linked with mutual trust and confidence. Their ties were being strengthened and they were striving to translating their trilateral relationship into strategic cooperation, he added.

He hoped that the region would become focus of peace, stability and prosperity. Referring to recent visit of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to Istanbul, President Erdogan said that they discussed the scope of high level strategic council and historic ties.

He congratulated the prime minister for the prudent and wise approach during the conflict with India and said that the ceasefire had ended tensions between the two countries. He reiterated Turkiye's contribution towards securing a permanent peace.

President Erdogan further underscored the different challenges faced by the world ranging from security threats to economic meltdown and stressed upon joint projects and cooperation among the three countries in trade facilitation, investment promotion and digital formation. Condemning the Israeli aggression, he called on the entire world to create pressure on Israel for a ceasefire and ensure uninterrupted humanitarian supply in Gaza.