

**18 Pakistani Hajis died**  
**F.P. Report**  
ISLAMABAD: As many as 18 Pakistanis, mostly elderly, died while performing Hajj this year. The deceased Hajis included 10 men and eight women, said the sources in the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The majority of those who died during Hajj were elderly people, the sources said and added the Pakistani Hajis died due to heart attack and other diseases.

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# ‘Tehran will burn’, warns Israel

TEL AVIV/DUBAI/WASHINGTON (Reuters/AFP) - Israel's Defence Minister Israel Katz on Saturday warned Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei that "Tehran will burn" if it keeps firing missiles at Israeli civilians.

"The Iranian dictator is taking the citizens of Iran hostage, bringing about a reality in which they, and especially Teheran's residents, will pay a heavy price for the flagrant harm inflicted upon Israel's citizens. If Khamenei continues to fire missiles at the Israeli home front, Tehran will burn," Katz said in a statement.

Earlier in the day, Iran fired a new salvo of missiles at Israel in response to unprecedented Israeli air strikes against military and nuclear sites on Iranian soil, raising fears of an escalation in the region So far, 4 people have been killed and 63 injured in Israel, with several buildings reduced to rubble in counterstrikes launched by Iran after Israel launched an offensive against it.

Explosions have been reported in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem following Iran's latest missile barrage. Members of the US Embassy have taken shelter, and sirens have sounded across Tel Aviv, prompting citizens to rush into bunkers. In latest development, three Revolutionary Guards were killed in an Israeli attack on the northwestern Iranian city of Zanjan, Tansnim news agency reported Saturday.

Israel has also killed three more Iranian nuclear scientists, state television reported Saturday, bringing to nine the overall number slain in Israel's attack on the Islamic republic. "Three of the country's nuclear scientists -- Ali Bekaie Karimi, Mansour Asgari, and Saeed Borji -- were martyred during the Zionist regime's terrorist attacks," the broadcaster said.

Iran and Israel targeted each other with missiles and airstrikes early on Saturday after Israel launched its biggest-ever air offensive against its longtime foe in a bid to prevent it from developing a nuclear weapon. The Israeli military said rescue teams were working at a number of locations across the country where fallen projectiles were reported, without commenting on casualties. However, reports said four people were killed and 63 injured while several buildings were damaged in Iranian strikes.

Iran has named the retaliatory strikes "Operation True Promise 3" with a senior Iranian



TELAVIV: An Israeli police officer inspecting a damaged residential building after a ballistic missile strike in Ramat Gan.

## Iran warns US, UK and France against helping stop strikes on Israel

CAIRO: Iran has warned the United States, United Kingdom and France that their bases and ships in the region will be targeted if they help stop Tehran's strikes on Israel, Iran state media reported on Saturday. Iran's state TV also reported that around 60 people, including 20 children, were killed in an Israeli attack on a housing complex in Iranian capital Tehran. Two people were also killed in an Israeli attack on a missile site in Assadabad in western Iran. Iran's Mehr News Agency reported an Israeli strike near the northwestern Tabriz refinery, saying smoke was rising from the facility. Three Iranian nuclear scientists have been killed in Israeli attacks, the semi-official Tasnim news agency reported on Saturday. The scientists were identified as Ali Bakaie Karimi, Mansour Asgari, and Saeid Borji, Tasnim said. Iran's strikes against Israel will continue, with targets set to expand to include US bases in the region in the coming days, Iran's Fars news agency reported on Saturday, citing senior Iranian military officials. "This confrontation will not end with last night's limited actions and Iran's strikes will continue, and this action will be very painful and regrettable for the aggressors," Fars reported, citing senior military officials. They were quoted saying that the war would "spread in the coming days to all areas occupied by this (Israeli) regime and American bases in the region". — Agencies

military official, General Ahmad Vahidi, saying the strikes will continue as long as necessary. The strikes come hours after the Israeli regime, in unprovoked aggression, targeted locations in Iranian territory, including residential buildings.

The Iranian counterstrikes began without notice, and images and footage began to appear of missile after missile penetrating Israel's missile defenses and exploding upon impact on their targets. Huge fireballs lighted up the night sky in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem as they did. Reports say Israel's ministry of war has been hit. Israeli air defense batteries around other specific targets were also taken out before missiles came down on the higher-profile targets.

The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) said in a brief statement after the strikes

began that dozens of Israeli targets, including military sites and airbases, were being hit in pinpoint strikes. It said more details would be offered later. In a second statement later at about midnight, the IRGC said the force's missile and drone units had targeted the Israeli military bases that had been used to initiate the strikes on Iran, as well as industrial weapon manufacturing and other military sites deep in Israel. The statement said intelligence collected, including through satellite imagery, showed dozens of ballistic missiles had hit their targets.

Israel's firefighting service said its teams were responding to several "major" incidents resulting from an Iranian missile attack, including efforts to rescue people trapped in a high-rise building. "Firefighting crews are handling several

major incidents, mainly in the Dan region" around Tel Aviv, a statement said, adding that "firefighters are working in a high-rise building to rescue trapped individuals and extinguish a fire, as well as responding to two additional destruction sites."

AFP footage from central Tel Aviv showed fire and smoke rising from a condo tower, a large hole ripped open by an explosion at its base. After Israel targeted military and nuclear sites across Iran, the Islamic Republic sent a fleet of drones, followed by two salvos of missiles.

"In both series, more than 150 missiles were fired, most of which were intercepted by air defense systems", Israel's military spokesman Brigadier General Effie Defrin said in a statement. "There are a limited number of hits on buildings,

some from shrapnel from the interception", he added. Immediately after the first salvo, a thick plume of smoke billowed over the coastal Israeli city of Tel Aviv, an AFP journalist reported.

A residential building next to the defence ministry in Tel Aviv was also struck. Resident Chen Gabizon, 30, told AFP he ran to the building's underground shelter after receiving an alert notification. AFPTV images of the Tel Aviv suburb of Ramat Gan showed a street littered with debris of damaged nearby buildings whose facades were torn by a missile's blast. First responders worked to remove a dozen vehicles destroyed by bits of fallen concrete, metal bars and wooden planks from a destroyed residential building.

A spokesman for Israel's first

(Continued on Back Page)

## Iran cancels US nuclear talks

TEHRAN: Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has confirmed to Al Jazeera that the next round of Iran-United States nuclear negotiations, scheduled for Sunday in Oman, has been cancelled. Asked on Saturday, "Can we have a clear confirmation that Sunday's talks are cancelled?", Araghchi responded, "Yes". Shortly after that, Oman also confirmed the talks "will not now take place".

Earlier, Iran had clearly intimated that the continuation of nuclear talks with the US was unjustifiable while "barbarous" Israeli attacks target the nation, Iranian state media reported, quoting Araghchi. It seemed inevitable that the talks would fall victim to the sudden, massive escalation by Israel and Iran's retaliation. Tehran branded dialogue over its nuclear programme with the US as "meaningless" after Israel launched its biggest-ever military strike against Iran, which Tehran accuses Washington, DC, of supporting. "The other side [the US] acted in a way that makes dialogue meaningless. You cannot claim to negotiate and at the same time divide work by allowing the Zionist regime [Israel] to target Iran's territory," Iran's semi-official Tasnim news agency quoted Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Esmail Baghaei as saying on Saturday. — Aljazeera

## US warns Iran of 'dire' repercussions

UNITED NATIONS (Reuters): The United States has warned Iran of "dire" repercussions if it attacked its citizens, military bases and other infrastructure in the region amid escalation with American ally, Israel. "Our absolute, foremost priority is the protection of US citizens, personnel, and forces in the region," Anadoglu Agency quoted US Senior Bureau Official of the Bureau of International Organisation Affairs McCoy Pitt as saying. At least 20 senior Iranian commanders, including the head of the Revolutionary Guards, Aerospace Force Commander Amir Ali Hajizadeh, and scientists have been killed in the Israeli strikes. "Let me be crystal clear: no government, proxy, or independent actor should target American citizens, American bases, or other American infrastructure in the region. The consequences for Iran would be dire," the envoy warned while highlighting that Tel Aviv had advised Washington that its strikes were necessary for self-defence. Pitt's remarks came during the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) high-level meeting, held in the aftermath of the Israeli strikes on Iran's military infrastructure, senior officials as well as nuclear facilities.

This was followed by Tehran's retaliatory strikes against Tel Aviv in the form of multiple waves of missile attacks. During the UNSC huddle, Iranian Ambassador Amir Saeid Iravani accused Israel of seeking "to kill diplomacy, to sabotage negotiations, and to drag the region into wider conflict," and he said Washington's complicity was "beyond doubt". "Those who support this regime, with the US at the forefront, must understand that they are complicit," Iravani told the UNSC. "By aiding and enabling these crimes, they share full responsibility for the consequences," he remarked. US President Donald Trump said Friday that he had given Tehran a 60-day ultimatum, which expired on Thursday, to make a deal over its escalating uranium enrichment programme. A sixth round of US-Iran talks had been scheduled to take place in Oman on Sunday, but it was unclear whether it would go ahead. Meanwhile, Israel's UN Ambassador Danny Danon accused Iran of "preparing for war" and that Tel Aviv had been patient despite mounting risks. "We waited for diplomacy to work [...] We watched negotiations stretch on, as Iran made false concessions or refused the most fundamental conditions," Danon told the UNSC. He said intelligence had confirmed Iran could have produced enough fissile material for multiple bombs within days. In light of the increasing escalation, Pitt said the US will continue to seek a diplomatic resolution that ensures Iran will never acquire a nuclear weapon or pose a threat to stability in the Middle East. "Iran's leadership would be wise to negotiate at this time," Pitt told the council. While Washington was informed of Israel's initial strikes ahead of time it was not militarily involved, he said. UN nuclear watchdog chief Rafael Grossi told the UNSC the above-ground pilot enrichment plant at Iran's Natanz nuclear site had been destroyed, and that Iran has reported that nuclear sites at Fordow and Isfahan were also attacked.

## Pakistan stands with Iran against Israel: PM

**F.P. Report**

LAHORE: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif held a telephone conversation on Saturday with Dr Masoud Pezeshkian, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Saturday evening.

He said Pakistan stood resolutely in solidarity with the brotherly people and the Government of Iran in face of Israel's unprovoked and unjustified aggression. He strongly condemned Israeli attacks against Iran, that violated its sovereignty and territorial integrity, and were in complete defiance of the UN Charter and international law. Iran had the right to self-defence, as provided under Article 51 of the UN Charter, he added.

While expressing heartfelt condolences to President Pezeshkian over the loss of precious lives in the attacks, the prime minister recalled Pakistan's support to Iran at the UN Security Council's emergency meeting, held on Friday. The PM denounced

Israel's blatant provocations and adventurism as a grave threat to regional and global peace and stability. He also strongly condemned Israel's unabated genocidal campaign against the valiant Palestinians, carried out with complete impunity. He urged the international community and the United Nations to take urgent and credible steps to put an end to Israel's aggressive behaviour and its illegal actions. He stated that Pakistan was fully committed to promoting peace in the region and stood ready to play its role in this context.

President Pezeshkian thanked Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif for Pakistan's support and solidarity with Iran at this difficult time, particularly at the UN Security Council. He said this gesture was reflective of the close and brotherly relations between the two countries. He apprised the PM about Iran's perspective on the crisis with Israel and urged the international community, particu-

larly the Islamic countries, to work together closely to counter these threats. Both leaders agreed to remain in close contact. Earlier, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar also condemned the strikes calling it a brazen violation of Iran's sovereignty.

Dar, in a statement on his X timeline, said that this abhorrent action had shaken the foundations of international law as well as the conscience of humanity. The Foreign Office also condemned the "unjustified and illegitimate" aggression by Israel against Iran, reaffirming that it stood in resolute solidarity with the government and the people of Iran.

"The Israeli military strikes violate the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Islamic Republic of Iran and clearly contravene the UN Charter and fundamental principles of international law. Iran has the right to self-defence under Article 51 of the UN Charter," Foreign Office spokesperson added.

## India fails to push Pakistan onto FATF grey list

ISLAMABAD: India faced another diplomatic defeat in its efforts to isolate Pakistan, failing to push the country back onto the Financial Action Task Force grey list.

Meanwhile, Pakistan continues to strengthen its global standing with growing international confidence. Reports said India's diplomatic delegation made strenuous efforts to have Pakistan reinstated on the FATF grey list during the latest meeting. However, the FATF decided to keep Pakistan under its "enhanced monitoring" process instead of grey-listing, dealing a significant blow to India's agenda.

The FATF decision marks a complete failure of India's objectives. During the meeting, China openly supported Pakistan, advocating for relief, while Turkey and Japan also extended their full backing. Reports revealed that following Operation, India intensified its attempts to diplomatically isolate Pakistan, with the Indian intelligence agency RAW leading a propaganda campaign. — Agencies

## Pakistan stands firmly with Iran, Palestine: Tarar

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Information and broadcasting Attaulah Tarar said on Saturday that Pakistan took a clear and strong stand at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) against Israel's unprovoked attack on Iran, expressing full support for the Iranian people.

Speaking in the National Assembly, he said that the UNSC held a special meeting earlier in the day, during which Iran's representative thanked Pakistan and other countries for their support. "Today, Pakistan showed why it deserves a seat on the Security Council by firmly standing with Iran and defending international law," he said. "We not only condemned Israel's aggression but also stood side by side with our Iranian brothers and sisters."

He said that Pakistan believes Iran has the right to defend itself under the UN Charter, and this was clearly explained by Pakistan's representative. He also highlighted the close friendship and shared culture between Pakistan and Iran, mentioning that Allama Iqbal is highly respected in Iran as 'Iqbal Lahori.' The minister said Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and the Deputy Prime Minister had already conveyed their condolences

and solidarity with Iran after the recent attacks.

He praised Pakistan's actions at the UNSC as reflecting the nation's true feelings and said few countries had shown such a principled stance. He also mentioned Pakistan's growing relations with Iran, pointing to recent official visits, including the late Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi's trip to Pakistan, which helped strengthen ties. Talking about Palestine, the minister said the people of Pakistan have always stood with the oppressed Palestinians. "We believe their sacrifices will be remembered and will not go in vain," he said.

He recalled that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif had strongly condemned Israeli violence in Gaza during his speech at the UN General Assembly and had also announced aid for Palestinians, which reflected the will of the Pakistani people. "Pakistan has always raised its voice for Palestine at international platforms and is among the few countries that have successfully sent aid to Gaza," he said. The minister criticized the opposition for spreading false propaganda from outside the country, saying such actions damage Pakistan's image globally.

He said some PTI supporters living abroad have made false claims about

the government's stance on Israel. "They think they are hurting us, but they are really hurting Pakistan's image and its clear position on these issues," he said. He reminded the House that PTI member Asma Hadeed Malik had once spoken in favour of Israel in Parliament, yet her party never clarified or condemned her remarks. "If they took action, let them show it," he said. The minister also questioned the silence of PTT's founder on Israel's attack on Iran. "Why is he always criticizing Pakistan's army on social media but stays silent on Israel's aggression and Palestine's suffering?" he asked, adding that PM Shehbaz Sharif, the Deputy PM, and other members of the government have openly spoken on the matter.

"Where is the founder of PTI now? Why hasn't he said a single word about Israel's attack on Iran?" Tarar asked. He further advised the opposition to be cautious of party members who fled Pakistan during tough times. "Even when we were in opposition, we warned them — these people are not connected to the country. They disappear when trouble comes," he said. "These individuals are spreading division between patriotic citizens and opposition supporters. This is dangerous," he warned.

## SAPM Mubarak Zeb residence attacked with rocket in Bajaur

**F.P. Report**

KHAR: A rocket attack has once again targeted the house of member national assembly (MNA) Mubarak Zeb in Bajaur district on Saturday.

According to police sources, there were no casualties in the attack, but the main gate of the house was partial damaged. Police have arrived at the area and begun an investigation. This is not the first rocket attack on the house of MNA Mubarak Zeb as previously such incident were also reported.

Minister of State, Mubarak Zeb Khan, has issued a strong and clear message to elements opposing the progress of underdeveloped regions, stating that such cowardly attacks will not deter him from serving the people. The statement came after a rocket attack on his residence in Bajaur on Saturday. Although no injuries were reported, the incident has raised concerns about the resurgence of militant threats in the region.

In a statement issue here, he revealed that this was the second attack in a month. He said that the

earlier attack, which occurred on May 14, was claimed by the banned outfit Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). He alleged that recent rocket attack also bears the hallmarks of TTP, particularly in light of repeated threatening calls and messages received from international numbers in recent days.

He added, "The involvement of a banned outfit near the Pak-Afghan border, potentially with the support of some local elements, cannot be ruled out." Explaining the possible motives behind the attacks, he emphasized

that Mubarak Zeb Khan is known for his people-centered approach and has been utilizing all available resources to uplift the region.

"Those involved in such attacks are clearly opposed to the ongoing development work," he noted. "They contacted us through international numbers and issued threats to halt the developmental activities. But we are not afraid. The development of Bajaur will not stop," he said. Reaffirming their commitment, he said, "We have confronted such elements in the past and will continue to

do so. We will not back down from our mission to serve the people of this region."

Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif has strongly condemned the rocket attack on the residence of Member of the National Assembly and Special Assistant to the Prime Minister, Mubarak Zeb Khan, in Bajaur. According to a spokesperson, the PM on Saturday expressed deep concern over the incident and thanked Almighty Allah that no loss of life occurred during the attack.

He said that such acts of violence

were unacceptable and aimed at destabilizing peace in the region. The PM Shahbaz Sharif directed the relevant authorities to conduct an immediate and thorough investigation into the incident.

He also ordered the swift arrest of those involved in the attack, emphasizing that the perpetrators must be brought to justice without delay. The PM reiterated the government's resolve to eliminate terrorism and ensure the safety and security of public representatives and citizens across the country.





**LAHORE:** Former Federal Minister Khawaja Saad Rafique calls on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif. —APP Photo

## Saad meet PM Shehbaz

LAHORE (INP): Former Federal Minister and senior PML-N leader Khawaja Saad Rafique called on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Saturday.

During the meeting, Khawaja Saad Rafique congratulated the Prime Minister on presenting a public-friendly federal budget, describing it as a positive step towards economic stability and much-needed relief for the people.

The two leaders also held a detailed discussion on the current political situation in the country, reaffirming their commitment to addressing national challenges through unity and democratic dialogue.

## Police intensifies crackdown on drug-peddlers

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Police have intensified its province-wide crackdown on drug-peddlers, including targeted operations in Lahore.

According to a spokesperson, a total of 231 raids were carried out on drug dens over the past 24 hours, leading to the arrest of 136 drug-peddlers.

During the operations, police recovered 73 kilograms of charas, three kilograms of ice (crystal meth), four kilograms of heroin, 1,485 litres of liquor.

Inspector General of Police (IGP) Punjab Dr Usman Anwar directed all officers to continue special operations with full force. He stated that individuals involved in the drug supply chain must be apprehended and brought to justice with exemplary punishments.

The IGP also ordered strict action against those involved in drug trafficking near educational institutions and student hostels, stressing the need to protect the youth from falling prey to drug abuse.

## CM inaugurated 2nd phase of Shahrah-e-Bhutto

KARACHI (APP): Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah inaugurated the second phase of first complete segment of the Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto Expressway (Shahrah-e-Bhutto) during a drive along the newly opened road and described it [the expressway] as a significant gift from the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) government to the people of Karachi, promising enhanced transportation, economic growth, and better industrial connectivity.

Accompanied by senior ministers Sharif Inam Memon, Minister of Planning and Development Nasir Shah, and Senator Waqar Mahdi, the Chief Minister inspected the expressway and paid the toll tax. The Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto Expressway project spans 38.661 km, featuring six lanes and a design speed of 100 km/h. It connects DHA and Korangi to the M-9 Motorway near Kathore and includes six interchanges and 12 toll plazas. The overall progress of the project is currently at 80 per cent.

The inauguration event drew significant attendance from PPP members and the

public, with participants chanting slogans in praise of Bhutto and the Chief Minister. Syed Murad Ali Shah reiterated that the expressway is a vital gift from the PPP government to the people of Karachi, which will improve transportation, stimulate economic growth, and facilitate industrial links. He also directed that the section from Kathore to Quaidabad be completed promptly. This project is the largest public-private partnership initiative in Sindh.

The Chief Minister noted that the starting point of Shahrah-e-Bhutto is located 200 meters before the Jam Sadiq Interchange. To enhance connectivity from DHA and Korangi, either a permanent interchange or a roundabout is being constructed at the existing Korangi Causeway to facilitate traffic from all directions, including Korangi, DHA, and Shahrah-e-Faisal (KPT Interchange).

Emphasising the importance of infrastructure development for progress, Murad Ali Shah stated that the focus is on making urban and industrial connections faster and safer. Although

there have been some delays due to utility shifting and local issues, he assured that work is ongoing, with expected completion dates for the remaining sections by December 2025.

This inauguration follows the opening of the first phase of the first segment by PPP Chairperson Bilawal Bhutto on January 11, 2025, which covered the Shah Faisal to Quaidabad stretch. The government intends to prioritise further upgrades to Karachi's transport infrastructure, including the introduction of electric buses and the expansion of BRT lines in the city.

Mr Shah added that the final phase from Quaidabad to Kathore is expected to be opened by the end of December 2025, and he plans to request an appointment with Chairman PPP Bilawal Bhutto Zardari after the anniversary of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto's death. Future Plan: Addressing future plans, the provincial government aims to establish a link road from the port to Qayyumabad, with strong backing from the Karachi business community.

## PMA calls for increased voluntary blood donations

KARACHI (APP): Pakistan Medical Association (PMA) calls for increased voluntary blood donations on the occasion of World Blood Donor Day 2025.

PMA also urging the public to actively participate in voluntary blood donation to address the critical shortage of safe blood and blood products in the country. This year's World Blood Donor Day theme, "Give blood, give hope: together we save lives," resonates deeply with the PMA's ongoing efforts to

improve healthcare outcomes in Pakistan.

According to a press release issued by the Secretary General of PMA (Centre), that Pakistan faces a significant deficit in its annual blood collection, receiving less than half of the estimated five million units required. A concerning statistic brought forward by the World Health Organization (WHO) indicates that only about 10-18% of blood donations in Pakistan are voluntary, with the vast majority coming from family or replacement donors. The PMA emphasized that voluntary, unpaid blood donations are not only the safest but also the most sustainable source, as voluntary donors are less likely to transmit

infectious diseases.

The PMA underscored the life-saving impact of blood donation, stating that a single unit of blood can save up to three lives. They stressed the urgent need for a shift towards a culture of voluntary blood donation to ensure a stable and sufficient blood supply for patients undergoing surgeries, childbirth, and those suffering from chronic illnesses such as cancer, thalassemia, and hemophilia.

The PMA also called upon the government and all stakeholders to invest in and sustain national blood programs. They emphasized the importance of robust screening and testing protocols to ensure the safety of blood products.

## Bilal Yasin, Faisal Ayub lead WASA worker safety meeting

LAHORE (APP): On the directions of Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif, the Punjab government is implementing strict measures to ensure the mandatory use of safety equipment during sewer line cleaning and industrial operations, with a particular focus on protecting the lives of sanitation workers.

To oversee the enforcement of these measures, a high-level meeting was held at the Water and Sanitation Agency (WASA) Lahore on Saturday. The meeting was jointly chaired by Punjab Minister for Housing Bilal Yasin and Minister for Labour and Human Resources Malik Faisal Ayub Khokhar.

Senior officials in attendance included WASA Vice Chairman Chaudhry Shehbaz, Secretary Labour Naem Ghous, Director General WASA Punjab

Tayyab Fareed, and officers from the Metropolitan Corporation Lahore. Managing Directors of WASA offices in Lahore, Gujranwala, Faisalabad, Rawalpindi, and Multan also participated via video link.

The meeting featured a comprehensive review of the safety kits and equipment currently used during the cleaning of manholes and trunk sewer lines. DG WASA Punjab Tayyab Fareed emphasized the life-threatening danger posed by toxic gases released during such operations, warning that failure to follow safety protocols could result in fatal consequences for workers.

Punjab Minister for Housing Bilal Yasin underscored the urgent need for strict adherence to Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) across all sewer maintenance operations.

# Khawaja Asif calls for OIC session to devise joint strategy against Israel

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: Federal Defence Minister Khawaja Muhammad Asif on Saturday called on the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to hold an emergency meeting to develop a joint strategy in response to Israel's ongoing aggression.

Speaking in the National Assembly, the minister condemned Israel's brutal actions, especially its military aggression against Iran. He called it a serious threat to regional and global peace. "Palestinian children are being killed, yet there are more protests in non-Muslim countries than in Muslim nations," he remarked with regret. He said Iran is not just a neighbour but a brotherly country with deep-rooted ties with Pakistan.

He warned that if the Muslim world doesn't act together, every country will eventually become a target. "The way Israel has targeted Yemen, Iran, and Palestine shows a larger plan. Most Muslim nations are already facing security risks. Strong leadership is needed now," he said. Khawaja Asif said, "Israel has innocent blood on its hands. Pakistan stands firmly with Iran and will continue to support it on international forums," he said. The minister referred to India's recent aggression, saying it had faced consequences. "India's false pride has been broken, and their leadership is now embarrassed at home. This was only possible due to our strong military and the unity of our people," he said.

He praised the armed forces and the people for standing firm in the face of threats. "We proved to the world that Pakistan is not weak - not yesterday, not today," he declared. He said enemies tried to weaken Pakistan, but their plans failed. He highlighted how the world was closely watching Pakistan's coastal borders during recent tensions, and how Pakistan's armed forces defended the nation bravely. "Our navy's response forced the enemy to retreat," he said.

The defence minister said that

while Pakistan's military strength is commendable, the economy must also be strong. He praised Pakistan's youth, especially cyber experts, for delivering a strong blow to India during a recent cyber conflict. "Our young people shut down lights in stadiums, disrupted IPL matches, and even affected dams. Their skills surprised the world," he said. He added that the recent military operation Bunyanum Marsoos was a turning point, both strategically and for national morale. He said Pakistan's response to Indian attacks was firm and timely. "We struck back with full force," he said.

Khawaja Asif also spoke about Pakistan's sacrifices in the fight against terrorism. "Our soldiers and civilians have lost lives in attacks, especially in Balochistan. Groups like the TTP and BLA are fighting India's war on our soil," he claimed. He strongly condemned anyone who supports these militants. "Such people are not Pakistanis. They are enemies of the country," he said. He insisted that while political problems should be solved through dialogue, foreign interference, especially from India, must not be taken lightly. "Pakistan's unity - from Balochistan to Punjab - is our top priority," he added.

The defence minister said politics should be based on ideology, not individuals. "No person is bigger than the country. Leaders come and go, but the nation and its values remain," he said. He criticized those who reduce politics to personal legacy. "Political parties that are built on ideas survive even after their leaders are gone," he said. He gave examples of political martyrs in Pakistan whose parties lived on because of their beliefs, not their names. He praised the role of Pakistani youth in the fight against terrorism. "Nations are built through the sacrifices of martyrs, not by worshipping individuals," he said. The strength of a country, he said, comes from unity, not division.

Turning to the economy, Khawaja

Asif said Pakistan suffers huge losses due to tax evasion, especially in sectors like tobacco, real estate, steel, and tyres. "We lose around Rs 300 billion annually in tobacco taxes alone," he said. He acknowledged that the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has made some improvements, but much more needs to be done. "If we can just improve our tax collection by 50%, we wouldn't need foreign loans," he noted.

He demanded accountability and urged the finance ministry and FBR to brief the parliament on the people behind large-scale tax evasion. "We need honesty in governance. Only then can we provide real relief to the people," he said. He gave the example of how public shops in Punjab are rented for very low rates, while private shops in the same area earn ten times more. "This has continued for decades without accountability," he pointed out.

He called for a national campaign to end corruption, particularly in sectors dominated by a few corrupt families. Khawaja Asif praised Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb, calling him a professional and experienced person. He credited him for bringing back international trust in Pakistan's economy. He shared encouraging economic data: GDP growth improved from -0.2% to +2.7%, inflation dropped to 4.6%, and the current account posted a \$1.2 billion surplus. Foreign investment rose by 20%.

He admitted that the public may still be feeling economic pressure but said positive changes are happening. "The business community is showing more confidence, and the stock market recently hit a historic 125,000-point high," he said. He criticized those who now attack the government's economic policy but had once urged the IMF not to support Pakistan. "These people tried to sabotage our economy," he said. "Pakistan is not about any one person. It is a mission, a belief, and a shared history," he added. He urged political leaders to rise above personal ambitions and serve the nation with sincerity.

## Minister Khalid Maqbool attends NHU accreditation ceremony

**F.P. Report**

Zoom), shared:

"We will ensure that no stone is left unturned in supporting the students of NHU. We are offering scholarships to 500 deserving students. Our vision is to help shape a wonderful and progressive Pakistan. Thank you."

Dr. Tony, speaking on behalf of City & Guilds, said:

"We are honoured to collaborate with Pakistan's vocational and technical education sector. Our programs are aligned with world-class standards to ensure competence, confidence, and global recognition. Our partnership with NHU reflects our commitment to raising educational quality and global mobility for students."

Ms. Gulmina Bilal, Chairperson of NAVTTC, emphasized the wider economic impact of skill development:

"Getting accreditation will give our youth the required skills to access skilled labor jobs abroad. Currently, a large portion of Pakistanis are employed in unskilled labor markets. With skill development, our remittances will increase, helping turn the current account deficit (CAD) into a surplus, and our youth will prosper globally."

Other distinguished speakers included:

Professor Jane Harrington, Vice-Chancellor, University of Greenwich

Dr. Ghulam Ali Mallah, Executive Director, IBCC

In his chief guest address, Dr. Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui shared powerful remarks:

"This accreditation is a proud moment for Pakistan. The world is changing very fast, and we must strive to make Pakistan great. The real change today is driven by Artificial Intelligence and Biotechnology—these two fields are the future of the world. We must accept this change, or we risk becoming irrelevant. Fortunately, Pakistan has a large population of youth who can embrace this transformation with energy and vision.

We live in a democracy but under a feudal mindset that restricts the spread of education to maintain power. This system does not allow others to grow through learning. At the end, I say: Come, let's convert the potential energy of our youth into kinetic energy—towards the beginning of a new era."

The ceremony concluded with the signing of official accreditation agreements between NHU, GEMS Middle East, and City & Guilds, reinforcing NHU's position as a globally aligned institution committed to vocational excellence, innovation, and international collaboration.

## First direct flight from Tashkent touches down in Islamabad



**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: The inaugural direct flight of Uzbekistan Airways from Tashkent to Islamabad was warmly received today upon its arrival at Islamabad International Airport. A welcome ceremony marked the historic occasion, attended by prominent dignitaries and officials from both nations.

Among those present were H.E. Mr. Alisher Tukhtaev, Ambassador of Uzbekistan to Pakistan; Mr. Aftab ur Rehman Rana, Managing Director of Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC); Syed Aftab Ali Shah Gilani, Islamabad Airport Manager; Mr. Bakhtiyor Muminov, Country Manager of Uzbekistan

Airways; along with diplomats from other Central Asian states and senior officials from Pakistan Airports Authority (PAA), PTDC, and Civil Aviation Authority (CAA).

Ambassador Tukhtaev praised the launch of the new direct route, emphasizing its potential to enhance economic and trade ties between Uzbekistan and Pakistan. "This direct air link marks a strategic advancement in bilateral relations and aligns with the broader goals of the Central and South Asia Connectivity Initiatives," he stated.

Mr. Aftab ur Rehman Rana, Managing Director of PTDC, lauded the inaugural flight as a "significant step forward in strengthening air

connectivity between two brotherly nations."

He highlighted that this long-awaited air route addresses a consistent demand raised at regional forums such as the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) to improve regional connectivity.

"This new route will not only deepen bilateral ties across multiple sectors but also play a pivotal role in boosting regional tourism, fostering people-to-people contact, facilitating business travel, educational exchange, and promoting cultural cooperation," Mr. Rana added.

Emphasizing the tourism potential, he noted that the direct connection will encourage two-way tourism flows. "For Pakistani travelers, Uzbekistan's legendary Silk Road cities — Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khiva — are now more accessible than ever. Similarly, Uzbek tourists can now explore Pakistan's majestic northern mountains, spiritual heritage sites, and vibrant cultural landmarks with greater ease."

Mr. Rana also pointed out that tourism exchanges between the two countries have steadily increased in recent years due to shared historical ties, cultural heritage, and religious affinity. The new weekly flight provides a reliable and cost-effective travel option for tourists, students, pilgrims, and professionals seeking enriching cross-border experiences.



## Fulbright Foreign Language Teaching Assistant (FLTA) Program 2026

The U.S. Department of State and the United States Educational Foundation in Pakistan (USEFP) invite applications from young, early-career teachers of the English language. Individuals nominated for the program must be capable of succeeding in the dual role of teaching assistant and student at an undergraduate or graduate host institution. They must be open to living with U.S. students in undergraduate or graduate-level campus housing while engaging with faculty and staff in a professional setting. FLTAs from Pakistan will teach Urdu or Pashto at U.S. campuses during their nine-month grant, beginning in Fall 2026. This exchange program is fully funded by the U.S. Department of State.

**Application must be submitted online to USEFP by Thursday, July 31, 2025.**

For more information and to apply, visit **www.usefp.org**

**Plagiarism, fraudulent publications, or other misrepresentation in an application will lead to disqualification at any stage of the program. The use of generative artificial software to write application essays is prohibited.**





PESHAWAR: Advisor to Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Finance Muzammil Aslam addressing post-budget press briefing for 2025-26 at Civil Secretariat.

# KP retirement benefit, death compensation fund safeguards govt employees

PESHAWAR (APP): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government established Retirement Benefit and Death Compensation (RBDC) Fund which emerged as a cornerstone of social protection for civil servants across province, said White Paper issued here Saturday.

Established under the KP Civil Servants Retirement Benefits and Death Compensation Act, 2014, and operational since November 2014, the Fund operates as a distinctive contributory scheme, safeguarding government employees and their families against financial hardship.

Unlike many other provincial funds, the RBDC Fund is uniquely financed directly through contributions from civil servants themselves, mirroring the model of Benevolent Fund, rather than relying on government equity.

This self-sustaining mechanism provides vital financial assistance to employees or their dependants in the event of retirement, disability, or death whilst in service.

The Fund's oversight is robust, with the Finance Department managing its operations through a dedicated Fund Management Unit. A twelve-member Board, chaired by Chief Secretary, provides strategic direction, comprising ten ex-officio government members and two representatives from civil servants.

A Management Committee, led by Secretary Finance, streamlines processing of claims, ensuring efficient disbursement of benefits.

To date, civil servants have collectively contributed nearly Rs. 30 billion to the Fund, with a significant Rs. 16.9 billion already disbursed to eligible claimants. This impressive uptake underscores the Fund's vital role in supporting families during periods of transition or unforeseen loss.

Looking ahead, the RBDC Fund is poised for further growth and enhancement. Strategic priorities include optimising its investment portfolio to generate stable returns, guaranteeing timely claim processing, and implementing digital systems to elevate service delivery.

The provincial government is also committed to periodically reviewing and expanding the Fund's benefit structure, with potential inclusion of pre-retirement and post-retirement support.

Furthermore, efforts will focus on bolstering institutional capacity, strengthening fund governance, and forging partnerships with professional fund managers to ensure efficient management of investments.

These forward-looking measures are designed to secure long-term sustainability of RBDC Fund, ultimately enhancing benefits available to both current and future government employees across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

# KP-RIISP organizes workshop of district administration

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Rural Investment and Institutional Support Project (KP-RIISP) organized a one-day consultative workshop for the representatives of the partner line departments and district administrations from the Merged Districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The workshop brought together key stakeholders and implementing partners to discuss the project's progress, implementation challenges and role of administration and plans to strengthen coordination.

The workshop aimed to foster collaboration and coordination among KP-RIISP, Partner Line Departments, and District Administrations from all the Merged Districts, ensuring that the project's objectives are aligned with the needs and priorities of the local communities. The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Senior Member Board of Revenue Javed Marwat in his concluding remarks emphasized the significance of the project in promoting rural development, fostering local governance and improving service delivery for the people in the Merged Areas.

The participants included Deputy Commissioners and Additional Deputy Commissioners from all the Merged Districts, Project Directors of all the Project Implementing Units as well as the Core Team of the Project Coordination & Management Unit.

The workshop featured presentations by each Project Director on their respective components, highlighting the project's progress in respective areas.

The sessions focused on the Importance of Security Management Plan (SMP), Environment and Social Guidelines, and Project Criteria for Land Acquisition.

These discussions emphasized the project's commitment to ensuring that all activities are implemented in a manner that is environmentally sustainable, socially responsible, and secure.

Another key highlight of the workshop was the interactive session with the Deputy Commissioners and Additional Deputy Commissioners, where participants discussed challenges, opportunities, and strategies for effective project implementation.

The discussions underscored the importance of strengthening collaboration and coordination among all the involved partners in achieving the project's development objectives.

# KP's pro-people, uplift-oriented budget commendable: Sohail

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: Special Assistant to Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for Communications and Works, Muhammad Sohail Afridi, has termed provincial budget for the fiscal year 2025-26 comprehensive, people-friendly, and development-focused.

He stated that the budget will only be approved after receiving consent from PTI's Patron-in-Chief, Imran Ahmed Khan Niazi. If a meeting with Khan is not arranged or his approval is not granted, the provincial government will not pass the budget.

Despite current economic challenges, Afridi described the budget as forward-looking and balanced, with a focus on public welfare, essential services, and economic stability.

He termed the proposed increase in the minimum wage from Rs. 36,000 to Rs. 40,000 a genuine relief for workers, and appreciated the 10% salary hike for government employees and 7% pension increase.

Highlighting the importance of the Communications and Works Department, Afridi said it plays a crucial role in the province's development. He emphasized the government's commitment to modernizing roads, bridges, and infrastructure, which will improve transportation and create thousands of jobs.

He added that the development projects in the budget aim to provide equal growth opportunities to both urban and rural areas, setting Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on a path toward sustainable and inclusive progress.

Afridi expressed hope that the policy decisions included in the budget will meet public expectations and benefit all segments of society.

# KP govt allocated to Rs11.6b for Sport & Youth Affairs Dept

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has allocated to Rs. 11.6 billion for Sport and Youth Affairs Department in the Financial Year 2025-26, an increase of 30 percent from the previous year's 8.9 billion.

To empower the youth and enable them to become self-reliant, the government has earmarked Rs. 1.5 billion for the flagship "Ehsaas Nojawan

Programme," in the annual budget. Moreover, Rs. 800 million have been allocated for the organization of sports activities and the promotion of talented athletes and players.

Similarly, an amount of Rs. 316.8 million has been set aside for the establishment of futsal grounds, while Rs. 11 million have been allocated for the development, standardization and upgradation of sports facilities across the province. Rs. 315 million have been allocated for the Youth Development Package. Among the major new initiatives is the establishment of a multi-purpose international standard indoor gymnasium in District Buner to provide modern sports and fitness facilities for the youth.

Additionally, a project has been proposed for the establishment of indoor sports facilities for women at all divisional headquarters across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The inclusion of sports and youth sector among the government's priorities is a testament to the commitment of the provincial government under the leadership of Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur and the dedicated efforts of Provincial Minister for Sports and Youth Affairs, Syed Fakhar Jihan. The substantial budgetary allocations underscore the government's resolve to advance this vital sector.

# Governor assures help to Foreign Medical Graduates

PESHAWAR (APP): The Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Faisal Karim Kundi, in a meeting with Dr. Tahir Sikandari, President of the Foreign Medical Young Doctors Association (FMYDA), at Governor House here on Saturday discussed the challenges faced by young doctors who have graduated from foreign medical institutions.

During the meeting, Dr. Sikandari highlighted the pressing issues encountered by foreign medical graduates, particularly the lack of honorary house job opportunities provided by the provincial government.

In response, Governor Kundi assured that he would engage with senior officials to address the issue and find a viable solution.

Dr. Sikandari also raised concerns about the Pakistan Medical and Dental Council's (PMDC) recent decision to increase the passing marks for the licensing exam from 50% to 70%, calling it an unfair move that would severely impact foreign graduates.

Governor Kundi promptly contacted Federal Health Minister Mustafa Kamal to convey these concerns and affirmed his commitment to resolving the matter through all available channels.

Dr. Sikandari expressed gratitude to Governor Kundi for his swift action and continued support, particularly for immediately engaging with the federal minister to advocate for the rights and welfare of foreign-trained young doctors.

Meanwhile, Former student leader and prominent figure of the Pashtun community in Karachi, Malik Arshad Kundi, met with the Governor Faisal Karim Kundi, at the Governor House in Islamabad.

During the meeting, Malik Arshad Kundi briefed the Governor on the challenges faced by people from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa who are permanently settled in Sindh, particularly in Karachi.

He highlighted various social and administrative issues affecting the Pashtun population in the region.

Governor Faisal Karim Kundi assured him that he remains in regular contact with the Sindh government and the provincial leadership of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) to address the concerns of Pashtun residents in Sindh.

He emphasized that he has played an active role in resolving these issues in the past and will continue to make every effort in the future as well.

On this occasion, Malik Arshad Kundi expressed his gratitude to the Governor and stated that his efforts are a source of pride for the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the Pashtun community across the country.

# ATC convicts 2 extortionists for imprisonment Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: The Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) Peshawar Judge Muhammad Iqbal has sentenced two accused individuals, Asad Iqbal and Asghar Ali, to 20 years in prison and a fine of Rs. 100,000 each for extortion.

The accused were found guilty of demanding extortion money from the complainant on behalf of a banned organization and threatening dire consequences if the demand was not met.

The accused were charged with extortion and threatening the complainant on behalf of a banned organization.

The police registered a case against the accused under various sections and arrested them during a raid. The accused were later released on bail.

The court completed the trial and found the accused guilty based on the evidence and witness testimony.

ATC court sentenced the accused to 20 years in prison and a fine of Rs. 100,000 each.

The accused were arrested from the court premises and taken to jail to serve their sentence.

# Two dead in clash between rival groups

PESHAWAR (INP): Two people lost their lives and five became critically injured when an armed clash erupted between the two groups over a money dispute in Peshawar. Soon after receiving the report of the incident, local police rushed to the spot and shifted the dead and injured persons to the hospital.

Earlier in May 2025, as six people were shot dead while one woman received critical injuries during a clash between two groups over a family feud in Peshawar. The clash took place in Khattako Pul area of Peshawar. According to police, the armed clash between the two groups was due to old enmity.

# KP Public Debt Management Fund: A step towards economic development

PESHAWAR (APP): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has launched the KP Public Debt Management Fund (DMF) in 2024-25 fiscal year, kickstarting it with a substantial PKR 150 billion in seed capital.

This initiative aims to bolster province's ability to service its public debt and ultimately lower borrowing costs.

According to a spokesperson of KP Finance Department, the DMF operates by investing the government's unutilized funds into secure, income-generating instruments. This strategy is designed to create additional fiscal flexibility for development projects and improved public services.

The fund is governed by KP Debt Management Fund Rules, 2024, and overseen by a Management and Oversight Committee led by the Chief Secretary while a specialized team within Finance Department manages the fund.

The initial PKR 150 billion transferred to DMF for the 2024-25 fiscal year has been strategically invested in low-risk, high-yield options such as commercial bank term deposits and short-term government securities (like T-Bills). These investments have already begun generating income, which will be used to reduce the burden of debt servicing on annual budget.

The establishment of DFM represents a significant shift in KP's approach to managing its debt and liquidity. By transforming idle government funds into productive investments, the DMF would help finance a portion of debt obligations without solely relying on budgetary allocations.

This not only supports debt servicing but also fosters financial discipline and more efficient cash management. The province plans to continue expanding fund's investment portfolio prudently to ensure consistent returns while safeguarding public resources.

As the DMF matures, it's expected to play an increasingly vital role in reducing borrowing costs and enhancing fiscal sustainability.

The fund is envisioned as a long-term financial tool that will contribute to both budget stability and improved debt management practices for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

# ASJ convicts smuggler for lifetime imprisonment

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: Additional Sessions Judge (ASJ) Imtiaz Ali, has sentenced the accused, Zeb Khan, to life imprisonment and imposed a fine of Rs. 500,000 for smuggling narcotics worth millions of rupees.

Assistant Public Prosecutor Nabeela Gul argued that Zeb Khan was accused of smuggling over 62 kilograms of hashish, hidden in various parts of his vehicle.

The Excise Police arrested Zeb Khan on September 8, 2022, after foiling his attempt to smuggle the narcotics.

A case was registered against Zeb Khan under the Narcotics Act.

The trial was completed, and the court found Zeb Khan guilty based on the evidence and witness testimony.

The court sentenced Zeb Khan to life imprisonment and imposed a fine of Rs. 500,000.

In case of default in paying the fine, Zeb Khan will have to undergo an additional year of imprisonment.

# Progress on development schemes reviewed

PESHAWAR (APP): Senior officials of district administration Peshawar and relevant departments on Saturday visited various areas of University Road to review development schemes. In light of the directives from the provincial government, the district administration Peshawar and officials from the relevant departments conducted a detailed visit to various parts of University Road.

On this occasion, ongoing development schemes under the Annual Development Programme were thoroughly reviewed. During the visit, special attention was given to the pace of work, quality, and prioritization of public facilities.

The Deputy Commissioner of Peshawar directed the relevant departments to complete the development projects within the stipulated time and with high standards so that the public can benefit from these facilities as soon as possible.

He stated that any kind of negligence or delay will not be tolerated.

The district administration also appealed to the public to fully cooperate during the development work.

# Imran Khan Cricket Stadium Peshawar revives after 19 years — KP Panthers defeat KP Zalmi by 40 runs

**F.P. Report**

Director of Imran Khan Cricket Stadium Saleem Raza, President of Peshawar District Cricket Association Asghar Khan, Roz Ameen Khan, Assistant Director Accounts Shah Faisal and several other notable figures. A large crowd of spectators witnessed the match.

Speaking to the media DG Sports Tashfeen Haider stated that the exhibition match was organized on the special instructions of Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Gandapur and Provincial Sports Minister Syed Fakhar Jahan. He said the primary aim was to restore the vibrancy of the Imran Khan Cricket Stadium. From today the stadium will be available for both international and domestic cricket events. He also announced that floodlights will be installed this month enabling night matches in the near future.

He added that efforts are being made to bring match-

PESHAWAR: The long-awaited revival of the Imran Khan Cricket Stadium in Peshawar was marked with an exciting exhibition match between top cricketers of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. After 19 years the stadium once again echoed with the cheers of cricket enthusiasts as the KP Panthers faced off against KP Zalmi in the inaugural game.

The match featured both national and international players from the province. KP Zalmi was led by Test cricketer Sajid Khan while Sahibzada Farhan captained the KP Panthers. The Panthers secured a convincing 40 runs victory in the opening match.

Director General Sports Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Tashfeen Haider was the chief guest at the event. He was accompanied by Director Operations Jamshed Baloch,

es of PSL 11 and international fixtures to the venue allowing KP cricket fans to enjoy top-tier cricket after a long gap. He also revealed plans to host province-wide cricket leagues to keep the stadium active and engage local cricket lovers.

In the match KP Panthers batted first and posted a total of 198 runs for 7 wickets in the allotted overs. Amir Barqi top-scored with a brilliant 95 runs supported by Farooq's 41-run knock. For KP Zalmi M. Irfan took 3 wickets while Arshad Iqbal claimed 2.

In reply KP Zalmi were bowled out for 158 runs. Fazal Rehman was the standout batter with 48 runs. For the Panthers Azam Khan picked up 4 wickets while Sameen Gul took 2. Amir Barqi was declared Man of the Match.

The chief guest DG Sports distributed prizes among the players and officials at the end of the match.







## In brief

### Teenager body recovered F.P. Report

**LAKKI MARWAT:** Unknown armed men shot dead a teenager in the Takhtikhel area of Lakki Marwat district, said police on Saturday. Police said that the murder occurred in the limits of Shaheed Asmatullah Khan Khattak police station of Serai Naurang town. Mir Sahib Jan, father of the deceased, told police in his preliminary report that his son Abdul Qadeer, 17, had left home on his motorcycle in the morning and did not return back till evening. "Next day, his body was found dumped in a rainwater course near the village", he claimed. He said that the unknown killer(s) murdered his son with a firearm and also took away his motorcycle, a mobile phone and an assault rifle with them. Police said that they were investigating the murder after registering a case against unknown killer(s) under relevant sections of law.

### Ulema Council hold protest F.P. Report

**SHAHADKOT:** On the instructions of Qaid-e-Millat Jafariya Pakistan Allama Syed Sajid Ali Naqvi, a protest rally was organized by Shia Ulema Council Tehsil Qaboo Saeed Khan at Kachi Pul against the Israeli attack on the Islamic Republic of Iran. The rally was led by Shia Ulema Council leaders Khadim Hussain Jagirani, Maulvi Zaheer Abbas Muntazri, Fida Hussain Shahani, Nimano Faqir Jagirani, Zahid Jagirani and others. The participants held banners and placards on which slogans against Israeli aggression were written. The speakers, while addressing the gathering, termed the early morning attack on Iran by Israel as cowardly and condemnable. They said that these attacks are a despicable attempt to sabotage world peace and freedom-loving people around the world should raise their voices against these imperialist tactics. The leaders further said that the Israeli attack has caused human and material losses, in which several people, including Iranian commanders, were martyred. They said that the imperialist powers never want peace in the world and their actions are proof of this.

### Campaign launched F.P. Report

**WANA:** A planning meeting and inaugural ceremony was held at the District Health Office (DHO) Wana under the Social and Behaviour Change (SBC) campaign, with a special focus on dietary diversity, officials said on Thursday. Organised with the support of UNICEF, the event aimed to raise awareness about the importance of a balanced and locally accessible nutritious diet. The campaign is part of broader efforts to promote sustainable health practices in the region. The session was supervised by District Health Officer Dr Adnan Rashid and attended by National Programme Coordinator Dr Zain-ul-Abidin, as well as District Nutrition Focal Persons Subhanullah and Waris Khan. Health department representatives, EPI (Expanded Programme on Immunisation) experts, and various stakeholders also took part in the meeting, where participants deliberated on effective strategies to promote dietary diversity and improve public outreach. Speaking on the occasion, Dr Rashid said dietary diversity was critical not only for physical well-being but also for cognitive development in children.

# Importance of balanced diet for children and mothers highlighted

## F.P. Report

**LOWER DIR:** A month-long awareness campaign on 'dietary diversity' aimed at promoting the importance of nutritious food for children and breastfeeding mothers was launched in Lower Dir with the support of UNICEF.

The campaign, being conducted in collaboration with the district health department, UN World Food Programme (WFP), and the Benazir Nashonuma Program (BNP) will feature a series of awareness sessions across the district. The initiative formally began with a session held at the office of district health officer in Balambat, followed by an awareness walk led by Additional Deputy Commissioner Bashir Khan.

Participants carried placards and banners highlighting the significance of a healthy diet for mothers and young children. Health officials, representatives of international organizations, and local stakeholders attended the event. The seminar emphasized the urgent need to promote nutrition education and the use of seasonal, balanced diets to effectively tackle the serious issue of malnutrition, particularly in underdeveloped regions like Lower Dir.

On the occasion, social activist Izhar ul Haq Durrani spoke about the challenges and goals related to malnutrition, highlighting the importance of basic nutrition awareness at the local level and encouraging the use of locally available seasonal foods.

Addressing the gathering, District Health Officer Dr. Niaz Muhammad Afridi, UNICEF representatives Naimat Ali and Afaq Adil, EPI Coordinator Dr. Najibullah, and representative of the Asian Development Bank Ms. Zuhra Bibi expressed con-



cern over the low percentage of mothers and children receiving a balanced diet in the country. They said that while the national average stands at 12 percent, Lower Dir reports a worrying 5 percent.

The speakers emphasized the need for pregnant and breastfeeding women to include meat, eggs, vegetables, yogurt, and pulses in their daily meals. For children aged six to 23 months, they recommended foods such as bananas, semolina, cooked potatoes, wheat porridge, and rice to ensure dietary diversity and adequate nutrition. They also highlighted the benefits of seasonal fruits, fresh vegetables, and exclusive breastfeeding, stressing the long-term impact of proper nutrition on child development and maternal health.

UNICEF's Afaq Adil said that the awareness drive would continue at four key centers in the district. He urged community elders, media, religious scholars, and healthcare professionals to actively support the campaign by spreading awareness and encouraging families to adopt healthier eating habits. The initiative is part of a broader effort to combat malnutrition and promote public health in underdeveloped areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

**Residents demand restoration of street lights in Jandol bazaars:**

Residents have demanded immediate action from the government and the Tehsil Municipal Administration (TMA) Samarbagh to restore non-functional streetlights in Samarbagh, Kambut, and Mayar Bazaars, which, according to them have remained inoperative for years due to missing or faulty batteries.

A social activist Muhammad Saleem Khan Mohmand expressed serious concern over the issue, stating that the batteries installed several years ago have either been removed or gone missing. He questioned who dismantled the batteries, who sold them as scrap, and where the proceeds went. He also criticized the authorities for not initiating repairs or replacements despite repeated public complaints. "The entire market is plunged into darkness at night, making movement difficult and increasing the risk of theft and other crimes," he said, warning that if repairs are not started within a few days, residents would be forced to stage a strong protest.

Residents told local journalists that walking through the market at night had become unsafe. They urged the authorities to take preventive measures before any serious incident occurs. Citizens have called on the TMA to conduct a transparent inquiry into the matter and take prompt steps to restore the streetlights.

# Residents hold protest against water shortage

## F.P. Report

**TAKHTBHAI:** In the densely populated area of Mazdoorabad in Tehsil Takht Bhai, a strong protest was held by local residents against the severe water shortage that has persisted for the past five years. Protesters held banners and placards with slogans such as "Water is our right," "Give us the right to live," and "Thirsty for the last ten years."

The protest saw significant participation from women, the elderly, and children. During the protest, leaders from various political and religious parties, including Abdul Mastaan of Jamaat-e-Islami, Hussain Yousafzai of the Qaumi Watan Party, and Maulana Nisar Al-Badri, addressed the crowd. They emphasized that water is a basic and essential necessity of life, without which health, hygiene, and daily routines are unimaginable. They expressed disappointment that despite the PTI-led provincial government and the promises of rural development and basic facilities made by the MNA and MPA, residents of Mazdoorabad have been deprived of this

basic necessity for the past ten years. In most neighborhoods of Mazdoorabad, water supply is either completely halted or nearly non-existent. Residents—especially women and children—are forced to fetch water from far-off places daily.

In some areas, drinking water has to be purchased, which is an added financial burden on the low-income working class. The lack of water has led to poor hygiene conditions, resulting in health problems. Children's education is also being affected, as much of their time is spent fetching water. Women spend several hours daily struggling to obtain water, which negatively impacts their health and household responsibilities. The poor, already crushed by inflation, are now forced to spend from their pockets for clean drinking water. Despite repeatedly filing complaints with the relevant authorities, Water Board, and elected representatives, no sustainable or effective action has been taken.

The speakers demanded that the provincial government and the Department of Public

Health immediately restore water supply in the affected areas, repair or install new supply lines, and arrange emergency water delivery through water tankers.

## Three held Syed Waliullah Shah

**NOWSHERA:** Police have apprehended a 3-member gang of thieves, including the mastermind and an accomplice, and recovered stolen goods.

According to details, the complainant, Masood, reported that his house was burgled, and several items, including fans and electrical goods, were stolen. The investigation team worked tirelessly to track down the culprits.

The police arrested the mastermind, Wajid, and his accomplice, Akmal, and recovered the stolen goods. The police recovered all the stolen items, including fans and electrical goods. The police are still investigating and expect to apprehend the third accomplice soon.

## British delegation visits MCCI F.P. Report

**MARDAN:** Unity of Change Foundation England Chairman Zarak Jehanzeb and General Secretary Ilyas Khan visited Mardan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, met with the business community and industrialists and gave a detailed briefing on Unity of Change Foundation England and said that through this foundation, assistance will be provided to Pakistani brothers living in England and to the poor orphans and helpless people in Pakistan along with legal and financial assistance, work will be done to promote unity and solidarity in the issues faced by Pakistanis living in England.

The Chairman and General Secretary of Unity of Change Foundation England hosted a dinner on the occasion of the visit of Zahir Shah Group Leader of Mardan Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Provincial General Secretary of Central Organization of Traders to England in which the members of the foundation participated in large numbers and appreciated the objectives and vision of the foundation.

They invited the Chairman of the foundation Zarak Jahanzeb and General Secretary Ilyas Khan to visit the Mardan Chamber and expressed their determination to work together. Finally, the group leader of the Mardan Chamber of Commerce and the provincial general secretary of the central organization of traders Zahir Shah presented shield to the guest.

## Book fair organized F.P. Report

**BANNU:** Bannu students' forum, a student body will hold a two day book fair with support of district administration in Bannu city, claimed the forum leaders on Saturday.

Speaking at a press conference in the press club building, Salman Ehsas, Mushataq Ahmad, Mueeb Uzmi, Mubashir Khan, Munir Khan and others said that the two day event would start on June 16 to acquaint youths especially students with effective use of their resources.

They said that the book fair would provide an opportunity to students to highlight their political, social, economic and other problems before intellectuals and experts and take guidance from them for their resolution.

"The event will also prove helpful for youths to know about their rights through books", they maintained. The students' leaders said that deputy commissioner Muhammad Fahim would inaugurate the fair also featuring study circle corners, career counseling and book exhibition of local authors and poets.

A speaker said that the booksellers would offer a 50 percent discount to buyers while various topics including elimination of religious hatred, women empowerment and problems faced by people of southern districts would be discussed at study circles. He said that experts would be invited to the event to train and guide youths about career selection.

# Jirga declares imposition of tax in merged dists illegal

## F.P. Report

**LANDI KOTAL:** Members of Federally Administrative Tribal Area (Fata) Qaumi Jirga disapproved implementation of sales tax in merged tribal districts and announced it against the law.

It is worth mentioning here that the federal government has eliminated tax exemption of the merged districts and in the new fiscal year 2025-26 budget and 10% sales tax on the businesses in the area. In a consultative meeting held in the hujra of tribal elder Malik Muhammad Hussain Afridi in Nawaya village of tehsil Bara district Khyber last day, the participants categorically rejected imposition of tax in the extra-tribal region and said instead of granting relief,

the government rubbing salt on the wounds of the tribesmen.

Speaking on the occasion President Fata Qaumi Jirga Bismellah Khan, tribal elders Malik Khan Marjan, Malik Waris Khan Afridi, Malik Abdurrazzaq Afridi, Nawabzada Fazal Karim, Afraseyab, Malik Jalal Wazir, Malik Azam Khan Mehsud, Bazaar Gul Afridi and others said that the tribesmen had rejected Fata merge with the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and they had already filed petition against the Court.

Therefore they added that till the decision of the Court, the federal government could not impose tax in merged tribal districts. The tribal region has already suffered a lot in the militancy and forces operations in the last two decades

and imposition of tax is equal to deprive them of earning three meals for their families, they regretted.

The participants demanded the government to reserve a special package for the merged districts to reconstruct infra-structure of health education, employment and other social sectors, destroyed in militancy in the last twenty years. They observed that as they disliked enforced merging, materialised in 2018, they will not accept enforced tax policy of the government. The Jirga members passed certain resolutions against implementation of tax in, forces operations to be launched in the merged districts, formation of Aman Committees and release of local leader Malik Naseer Afridi.

# KP govt greets for presenting surplus budget

## Sahibzada Afridi

**KOHAT:** Kohat Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) President Rashid Paracha and other office bearers have congratulated the Provincial Minister on Finance and Law Aftab Alam Advocate and his financial team for presenting the surplus budget of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa despite the difficult economic conditions.

The KCCI termed the budget as a positive development, however, it has demanded a further increase in the budget allocated for industry and trade. According to the KCCI, after education and health, 3rd priority should be given to the industry and trade sector so that employment opportunities increase and the economy stabilizes. It reiterated its long-

standing demand of all the provincial chambers to eliminate double taxation so that unnecessary financial burden is not placed on the business community.

Tax exemptions for new industries, more incentives and facilities which are necessary should be provided so that investment increases and employment opportunities are created adding that it is possible to increase the sources of income in areas rich in natural resources, this needs to be worked, it demanded.

The KCCI also demanded of the Federal Government to ensure payments to the province according to its legitimate rights. It said that Kohat Chamber is in favor of tax exemption in FATA/PATA, however, outsiders are benefiting from it instead of locals, which has the con-

cerns of the people of the rest of the area, so it is very important to stop it. The KCCI grateful to the provincial government for fulfilling the request for more than 25% discount on the arrears of industrial buildings to some extent, which was a long-standing demand of Kohat Chamber.

Similarly, measures like reducing the tax on property transfer from 2% to 1% and tax exemption on houses less than 5 Marla are welcomed. It also welcomes the exemption from professional tax for low-paid professionals. The President KCCI hoped that the provincial government would increase the budget allocation for the industrial sector and would also consider providing more incentives and facilities to embark the province on the path to progress and prosperity.

# Mass wedding ceremony arranged

## F.P. Report

**MARDAN:** Twenty-four newlywed couples were presented with cheques worth Rs. 200,000 each in a mass wedding ceremony held here on Saturday in Mardan.

The event of mass wedding ceremony was organized by the provincial government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as per Imran Khan's vision of a welfare state inspired by Riyasat-e-Madina. Prominent attendees included Member Provincial Assembly (MPA) Abdul Salam Afridi, Chairman of the District Zakat Committee Jahanzeb Khan, PK-58 Coordinator Sajid Iqbal Mohmand, along with other Zakat committee members and senior local leaders.

During the ceremony, MPA Abdul Salam Afridi personally handed over the financial support cheques to each bride on behalf of the provincial government. In a gesture of goodwill, he also gifted each couple a copy of the Holy Quran and emphasized the government's commitment to uplifting the lower-income and underprivileged segments of society.

"This initiative reflects our top priority — providing relief and support to our poor communities in line with Imran Khan's vision," Afridi stated, adding that under the leadership of Chief Minister Ali Amin Khan Gandapur, we are determined to work for the welfare of our people. These actions mark a meaningful step toward realizing the dream of a welfare state in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa," he concluded. He went on to say that it was part of the provincial government's broader initiative to transform Khyber Pakhtunkhwa into a welfare-oriented province.

Meanwhile, Women Empowerment and Mentoring Program was held in Women University Mardan here on Saturday. This special initiative was designed to empower women, enhance their leadership abilities, and prepare them for professional advancement. The program focused on building confidence and promoting structured mentorship among female participants.

A total of 12 mentors and 32 mentees took part in the program. Through interactive training sessions, the participants not only gained knowledge but also shared valuable insights and experiences, creating a strong culture of peer learning and support.

The event was graced by Dr. Rasul Jan, former Vice Chancellor of the University of Peshawar, who was also chief guest on the occasion. Besides, Mr. Suleman Ahmed, Director of the National Academy of Higher Education (NAHE), participated as the guest of honor. In his address, Dr. Rasul Jan emphasized the need to promote women's leadership and strengthen their role in national development. He lauded Women University Mardan for taking a visionary step toward female empowerment and called the initiative a model for other institutions to follow.

Suleman Ahmed, an experienced academic leader known for his contributions to faculty development and higher education reform in Pakistan, also addressed the audience. On the occasion, he highlighted significance of mentorship programs in nurturing talent and bridging the gap between academic training and practical leadership. He encouraged the university to continue investing in such impactful initiatives, especially those focused on uplifting women in academia and beyond.

# Coordinated aggression in Muslim world

## Muhammad Mohsin Iqbal

**I**n a world already teetering on the edge of multiple crises, the recent Israeli attack on Iran has not only heightened regional tensions but also exposed the dangerous game being played by certain global actors. This act of aggression comes on the heels of the Indian incursion into Pakistani territory earlier in May, which was effectively repelled by Pakistan on May 7 through a calculated and courageous response. While the threat of a prolonged conflict between two nuclear-armed neighbors was fortunately averted, the winds of war appear to have shifted eastward, now blowing over Iran with unsettling force.

This is not the first time Israel has launched strikes on Iranian soil. Over the years, Tel Aviv has carried out numerous covert and overt operations aimed at sabotaging Iran's nuclear program and military assets. In 27 November 2020, the assassination of a

prominent Iranian nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhri-zadeh in Absard, Damavand County, near Tehran was widely attributed to Israel, though the latter never officially accepted responsibility. Earlier, in 2018, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu claimed that Mossad had obtained a vast cache of Iranian nuclear documents, a move that was seen as part of Israel's broader psychological warfare against Tehran.

More recently, Israel has increased the frequency and intensity of its aerial strikes on Iranian positions in Syria, with hundreds of such attacks recorded over the past decade. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, Israel carried out over 1,200 airstrikes between 2013 and 2023, many of which targeted Iranian personnel or affiliated militias. In April 2024, Israel was also believed to be behind a massive explosion at an Iranian military facility in Isfahan, further escalating the conflict. These incidents form a clear pattern of

hostility, aimed not merely at neutralizing perceived threats, but at weakening Iran's position in the region.

However, this latest assault appears to be different in scope and implication. It does not seem to be a tactical strike but part of a strategic shift—an escalation that may trigger a broader conflict. The silence or muted response of major powers, who otherwise advocate international law and peace, is telling. The question arises: why is there such unflinching tolerance toward Israel's repeated defiance of international norms, and why does the world community fail to respond with the same vigor when Muslim nations are targeted?

The answer lies perhaps in a larger, more unsettling reality. A pattern has emerged over the past two decades, in which rising Muslim states are systematically destabilized under various pretexts. Iraq was invaded under the claim of possessing weapons of mass destruction—claims that were never substantiated. Libya was bombed into oblivion in the

name of democracy. Syria has suffered a decade-long civil war, fueled by both regional and international interventions. And now, the focus has shifted to Iran, a country that has demonstrated resilience in the face of severe sanctions and diplomatic isolation.

It is worth observing that while some powers view any military or scientific progress by a Muslim state as a threat, no Muslim nation has declared a non-Muslim neighbor's advancement as a justification for preemptive aggression. Rather, most Islamic countries, including Iran and Pakistan, have maintained a defensive posture, advocating peace and coexistence. Yet, provocations continue, often with silent complicity from the global powers who portray themselves as champions of human rights and international order.

The events of May, when India attempted an aggressive maneuver against Pakistan, serve as a vivid reminder of this coordinated hostility. Reports have surfaced indicating that Israel and

India shared intelligence and possibly collaborated in planning that operation. Pakistan's response, however, was swift and decisive. Blessed by the Almighty Allah and executed by a professional and resolute military, Pakistan thwarted their ambitions and preserved regional stability. Failing to destabilize Pakistan, the focus now appears to have shifted to Iran, a nation that, despite decades of isolation, has continued to advance technologically and militarily.

Iran has every right under international law to respond to unprovoked aggression. If it fails to do so, it risks facing the same fate as Palestine, where an oppressed nation has been gradually stripped of land, rights, and international support. But should Iran retaliate, there is little doubt that powerful nations will quickly mobilize to shield Israel and condemn Tehran, continuing the cycle of double standards and strategic land encroachments. History shows us the likely outcome—either subjugation through silence or condemnation through

resistance.

This moment demands a collective awakening. The Muslim world, in particular, must reflect on the broader picture—how one after another, flourishing Islamic nations are being targeted, weakened, or dismembered. It is not merely about one country or one conflict; it is about a sustained campaign to prevent the rise of any Muslim nation that can assert itself on the world stage. Iran, like Pakistan, stands at a critical juncture. The decisions taken now will shape not only the future of individual nations but the dignity and sovereignty of the Muslim Ummah as a whole.

The time has come for the international community, especially those who uphold justice, to break their silence. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere, and unchecked aggression, especially when cloaked in selective morality, will only push the world closer to chaos. Let us hope that reason prevails before the region is plunged into a broader, perhaps uncontrollable, conflict.





**KHARTOUM:** Members of Sudanese army gather next to a destroyed military vehicles after a battle with Rapid Support Forces in capital.

## UK crime agency freezes assets of disgraced Sheikh Hasina ally

LONDON: The UK's National Crime Agency (NCA) has frozen properties in the United Kingdom owned by Saifuzzaman Chowdhury, Bangladesh's former Minister of Land, Al Jazeera's Investigative Unit (I-Unit) can reveal.

The move follows legal requests from Bangladesh authorities to take action against assets owned by Chowdhury, a political ally of deposed Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina of the now-banned Awami League party. Chowdhury is under investigation by Bangladesh authorities for money laundering. Last night, in a statement to the I-Unit, an NCA spokesperson confirmed the freezing order: "We can confirm that the NCA has secured freezing orders against a number of properties as part of an on-going civil investigation."

The property freeze means, in effect, that the assets cannot be sold by Chowdhury. The action by the police agency, often dubbed "Britain's FBI", coincided with this week's visit to London by Bangladesh's interim leader, Professor Muhammad Yunus.

Last year, Al Jazeera revealed Chowdhury, 56, owns more than

350 properties in the UK. While the full extent of the NCA's action is not yet understood, the I-Unit can disclose that Chowdhury's luxury home in St John's Wood, London, is part of the asset freeze. The home, bought for 11 million pounds (\$14.8m), was the scene of secret filming by undercover reporters from Al Jazeera's I-Unit. Reporters met Chowdhury during a long-running investigation into wealth that he had accumulated while he was still a government minister.

During the meeting, Chowdhury talked expansively to reporters about his global property portfolio and revealed his taste for expensive suits and designer "baby croc" leather shoes. He described his close ties to the now deposed Sheikh Hasina, telling Al Jazeera's journalists, "I am like her son, actually." "She knows I have a business here," he also told them.

The I-Unit revealed that Chowdhury, from a powerful family in the port city of Chittagong, amassed a property empire despite a \$12,000 annual limit as part of the nation's currency laws on the amount a citizen can take out of Bangladesh. The investigation uncovered that

Chowdhury spent more than \$500m on real estate in London, Dubai, and New York but did not declare his overseas assets on his Bangladesh tax returns. The undercover meeting was part of the Al Jazeera documentary The Minister's Millions, broadcast last October. Chowdhury had been a close ally of deposed Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who fled Bangladesh in August 2024 after hundreds were killed as security forces cracked down on student protests.

After Hasina's departure, Bangladesh authorities launched an investigation into allegations of widespread corruption in her government. Following the uprising and street violence in Bangladesh, the I-Unit tracked down Chowdhury to his London home, where he could be observed taking leisurely walks around his exclusive neighbourhood, which includes Lord's Cricket Ground. In earlier statements to Al Jazeera, Chowdhury said the funds used to buy his overseas properties came from legitimate businesses outside Bangladesh, which he had owned for years. The former minister claimed he was the subject of a politically motivated "witch-hunt" against him. - Aljazeera

## South Korea in 'final stages' to sign major tank deal with Poland

JOHANNESBURG (AFP): South Korea is in the "final stages" of negotiations to potentially sign a major deal to supply K2 tanks to Poland, according to South Korea's Defense Acquisition Program Administration. In 2022, the two countries signed a \$13.7 billion arms deal -- Seoul's largest to date -- which included South Korean K2 tanks and fighter jets for Poland, Ukraine's ally and neighbour.

The negotiations for the potential upcoming deal -- part of the broader 2022 agreement -- are "in the final stages, with both governments and companies working to expedite its conclusion", an official from

South Korea's Defense Acquisition Program Administration told AFP. While the agency did not disclose the amount, it said if signed, the deal would be the "largest ever based on a single weapon system". South Korea's Yonhap news agency reported that the potential deal is worth around \$6 billion, with the country's Hyundai Rotem set to manufacture 117 tanks and Poland's state-owned Polish Armaments Group producing 63 locally.

Yonhap reported that the signing ceremony is scheduled to take place in late June in Poland, but the Defense Acquisition Program Administration said the "signing schedule

for the second contract has not yet been finalised". "This contract includes provisions such as local production and technology transfer, which have required a significant negotiation period," it said in a statement. The contract was originally expected to be signed late last year, according to Yonhap, but was delayed due to issues including political turmoil in South Korea following the brief declaration of martial law in December.

South Korea has emerged as a major player in global defence exports, as Moscow's invasion of Ukraine created opportunities for its industry to secure large-scale contracts across

Europe and the Middle East. It has signed major arms deals with countries such as Poland and Romania, including the export of K9 Howitzers and Chunmoo missile systems. South Korea's President Lee Jae-myung, who took office last week, has vowed a more dovish approach towards Pyongyang -- an ally of Russia -- compared with his predecessor Yoon Suk Yeol. The nuclear-armed North, which technically remains at war with the South, has recently bolstered military ties with Russia. Pyongyang sent at least 14,000 troops to support Moscow's war in Ukraine, and officially declared the South an enemy state.

## Zelenskiy says Russia seeks to disrupt Ukraine, Moldova, Europe

ODESA, Ukraine (Reuters): Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said Russia was determined to sow chaos in and destroy the south of his country as well as nearby Moldova and Romania, and called for increased pressure on Moscow to prevent further military threats.

Zelenskiy, addressing a conference of southeast European leaders in the Black Sea port of Odesa, said collective efforts were needed to keep Moscow from causing further disruption. "The security of Southeastern Europe and the Black Sea is indivisible ... Today, we are forced to fight

not only for our country, but also for this reality to become the cornerstone of a new regional policy," Zelenskiy said on Telegram. "We are here in Odesa, a city that Russia wants to destroy, as it has destroyed countless other cities. Russian military plans are aimed at this region, and then at the borders with Moldova and Romania. We need protection now. But even more, we need long-term guarantees that this will never happen again." Odesa, site of three ports, has been a frequent target of Russian air strikes in three years of war. The city came under a massive

drone attack that targeted an emergency medical building, a maternity ward and residential buildings.

Much attention has focused on a possible Russian threat to Moldova, where pro-European President Maia Sandu has accused Moscow of trying to destabilise her country and unseat her. Her Party of Action and Solidarity, which holds a majority in parliament, faces a general election in September, the outcome of which could affect the president's ability to press on with a campaign to join the European Union in 2030. Ukraine has also started talks on EU membership. "For

three decades, Russia has tried to keep Moldova poor and unstable in order to take full control of it," Zelenskiy said. "If Europe loses in Moldova this year, it will embolden Russia to meddle even more in our countries' affairs, taking away your resources, your sovereignty, even your history."

Sandu told the conference that Moldova "knows just what hybrid war is and is prepared to share its experience". "Moldova is facing one of its most important elections. Russia wants to see Moldova turn away from Ukraine. More to the point, it wants to use Moldova against Ukraine and the EU."

## Chinese fighters flew close to Japanese patrol planes, Tokyo expresses concern

TOKYO (Reuters): Chinese fighter jets flew unusually close to Japanese military patrol planes over the weekend, Tokyo said, after two Chinese aircraft carriers were spotted operating simultaneously in the Pacific for the first time.

"We have expressed serious concern to the Chinese side and solemnly requested prevention of recurrence," Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshimasa Hayashi said, referring to

the June 7-8 incidents in which Tokyo said Chinese jets flew as close as 45 meters (148 feet) to Japanese planes. A Chinese J-15 jet from the aircraft carrier Shandong chased a Japanese P-3C patrol aircraft for about 40 minutes, according to Japan's defence ministry.

A J-15 chased a P-3C for 80 minutes, crossing in front of the Japanese aircraft at a distance of only 900 meters (2,950 feet), it

said. A spokesperson at the ministry's Joint Staff Office declined to disclose whether the same planes were involved in the incidents on both days. The P-3C aircraft, belonging to Japan's Maritime Self-Defense Force based in the island of Okinawa, were conducting surveillance over international waters in the Pacific, according to the ministry. "Such abnormal approaches by Chinese military aircraft could poten-

tially cause accidental collisions," the ministry said in a statement, attaching close-up images of the J-15 jet it took. There was no damage to the Japanese planes and crew, it added.

Hayashi, the top Japanese government spokesperson, told a regular briefing that Tokyo will maintain communications with Beijing at various levels and ensure the monitoring of airspace around its territories.

## France makes arrests over cryptocurrency kidnapping

PARIS (AFP): French police have arrested several people suspected of involvement in last month's kidnapping of the father of a wealthy cryptocurrency entrepreneur, a source close to the case said. French authorities have been dealing with a string of kidnappings and extortion attempts targeting the families of high-worth individuals dealing in cryptocurrencies.

The most recent suspects, apprehended according to the source, are believed to have been part of an attempt to extort funds from a wealthy man by abducting his father. On May 1, he was taken in Paris's southern 14th arrondissement in broad daylight by four men wearing ski masks who bundled him into a delivery van as passers-by looked on. The kidnappers demanded a ransom of several million euros (dollars) and cut off one of the man's fingers.

He was freed days later by a police tactical unit who stormed the house in a Paris suburb where he was being held. There was no word on the exact number or the locations of the arrests. The suspects can be held up to 96 hours without charges being brought. Since the start of the year crypto-related kidnappings and abduction attempt have sparked concern about the security of wealthy crypto tycoons, who have notched up immense fortunes from the booming alternative currency business.

One prominent cryptocurrency entrepreneur urged authorities to "stop the Mexicanisation of France" -- a reference to kidnappings by violent organised crime groups. The spate of abductions began in January, when kidnappers seized French crypto boss David Balland and his partner. Balland co-founded the crypto firm Ledger, valued at the time at more than \$1 billion. Balland's kidnappers cut off his finger and demanded a hefty ransom. He was freed the next day, and his girlfriend was found tied up in the boot of a car outside Paris.

The suspected mastermind of that operation and other similar attacks, 24-year-old Badiss Mohamed Amide Bajjou, was last week arrested in Tangier, Morocco. At least nine suspects are under investigation in that case. Last month, Interior Minister Bruno Retailleau held an emergency meeting with cryptocurrency leaders, with the ministry announcing plans to bolster their security.

## Gaza-bound activist convoy reaches Libyan capital

TRIPOLI (AFP): Hundreds of pro-Palestinian activists in a Gaza-bound convoy reached the Libyan capital of Tripoli as they drive eastward in a bid to break Israel's blockade of the Palestinian territory. The Soumoud convoy -- meaning steadfastness in Arabic -- set off from Tunis in buses and cars, hoping to pass through divided Libya and Egypt, which organisers say has yet to provide passage permits, to reach Gaza.

It was launched the day Israel intercepted an aid ship also attempting to breach its blockade on Gaza, which was carrying 12 people, including campaigner Greta Thunberg and European parliament member Franco-Palestinian Rima Hassan. The land convoy was welcomed by hundreds in Tripoli and escorted through the capital by police patrols.

Libya's Tripoli-based Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeibah hailed the convoy as a "fraternal humanitarian initiative" that Libyans "embraced in warmth and solidarity". "This is another example of Libya's commitment and generosity in support of the people of Gaza under siege and attack," the premier said in a statement. After 20 months of war, Israel is facing mounting international pressure to allow more aid into Gaza to alleviate widespread shortages of food and basic supplies.

## Australia confident US will proceed with Biden-era submarine pact

SYDNEY/WASHINGTON (Reuters): Australia's Defence Minister Richard Marles said he was confident the AUKUS submarine pact with the US and Britain would proceed, and his government would work closely with the US while the Trump administration conducted a formal review.

Australia in 2023 committed to spend A\$368 billion (\$239 billion) over three decades on AUKUS, the country's biggest ever defence project with the United States and Britain, to acquire and build nuclear-powered submarines. A Pentagon official said the administration was reviewing AUKUS to ensure it was "aligned with the President's America First agenda", on the eve of expected talks between President Donald Trump and Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese.

In an Australian Broadcasting Corporation radio interview, Marles said AUKUS was in the strategic interests of all three countries and the new review of the deal signed in 2021 when Joe Biden was the US president was not a surprise. "I am very confident this is going to happen," he said of AUKUS, which would give Australia nuclear-powered submarines. "This is a multi-decade plan. There will be governments that come and go and I think whenever we see a new government, a review of this kind is going to be something which will be undertaken," Marles told the ABC.

Albanese is expected to meet Trump for the first time next week on the sidelines of the G7 meeting in Canada, where the security allies will discuss a request from Washington for Australia to increase defence spending from 2% to 3.5% of gross domestic product. Albanese has said defence spending would rise to 2.3% and has declined to commit to the US target.

The opposition Liberal party pressed Albanese to increase defence spending. Under AUKUS, Australia was scheduled to make a \$2 billion payment in 2025 to the US to help boost its submarine shipyards and speed up lagging production rates of Virginia-class submarines to allow the sale of up to three US submarines to Australia from 2032. The first \$500 million payment was made when Marles met with his US counterpart Pete Hegseth in February. The Pentagon's top policy adviser Elbridge Colby, who has

previously expressed concern the US would lose submarines to Australia at a critical time for military deterrence against China, will be a key figure in the review, examining the production rate of Virginia-class submarines, Marles said. "It is important that those production and sustainment rates are improved," he added.

AUKUS would grow the US and Australian defence industries and generate thousands of manufacturing jobs, Marles said in a statement. John Lee, an Australian Indo-Pacific expert at Washington's conservative Hudson Institute think tank, said the Pentagon review was "primarily an audit of American capability" and whether it can afford to sell up to five nuclear powered submarines when it was not meeting its own production targets. "Relatedly, the low Australian defence spending and ambiguity as to how it might contribute to a Taiwan contingency is also a factor," Lee said.

John Hamre, the president of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) and a former senior Pentagon official, told a Lowy Institute seminar in Sydney there is a perception in Washington "the Albanese government has been supportive of AUKUS but not really leaning in on AUKUS", and defence spending is part of this. Under the multi-stage pact, four US commanded Virginia submarines will be hosted at a Western Australian navy base on the Indian Ocean from 2027, which a senior US Navy commander told Congress in April gives the US a "straight shot to the South China Sea". Albanese wants to buy three Virginia submarines from 2032 to bring its submarine force under Australian command.

Britain and Australia will jointly build a new AUKUS-class submarine expected to come into service from 2040. Following a recent defence review, Britain said it would boost spending on its attack submarine fleet under AUKUS. Former Prime Minister Scott Morrison, who struck the AUKUS deal with Biden, said Australia should "make the case again" for the treaty. AUKUS would build more submarines across the three partners and was "fundamentally about strengthening collective deterrence, particularly in the Indo-Pacific against potential adversaries", he wrote on LinkedIn.

## Thai ruling party grapples with border crisis

BANGKOK (Reuters): Thailand's ruling party, besieged by a faltering economy and a border crisis, faces more uncertainty this week as the Supreme Court begins hearing a case that could lead to jail time for its most influential politician, Thaksin Shinawatra.

The billionaire former premier, and the driving force behind the government of his daughter Paetongtarn Shinawatra, skipped prison on his return in 2023 from 15 years of self-exile by serving his detention in hospital, on grounds of ill-health. But this week's proceedings could add to mounting troubles for political newcomer Paetongtarn and her Pheu Thai party, if the court deems the hospital detention unlawful and orders Thaksin to serve his original prison time.

"There is already a crisis of confidence for the prime minister," said Wanwichit Boonprong, a lecturer in political science at Rangsit University. "Many people feel the government cannot handle all the crises the country is facing." An escalation in a border row with Cambodia has also rattled Paetongtarn's government, with Thailand's politically powerful military, which overthrew Shinawatra governments in 2006 and 2014,

making its presence felt as nationalist rhetoric heats up. Critics will scrutinise the government's handling of critical talks with its neighbour set, amid growing public unease over its management of an economy shackled by crippling household debt.

A negative outcome in Thaksin's case and the border dispute would ratchet up the pressure on Pheu Thai, say analysts, both in the ruling coalition and among the public, as protest simmers. But veteran Pheu Thai politician Somkid Cheuekong dismissed any potential political impact from Thaksin's case, emphasising that he has no direct say in government affairs. "He has only expressed his thoughts and suggestions on the government's work," said Somkid, who is Paetongtarn's deputy secretary-general. Thaksin could not immediately be reached for comment. His case and the government's handling of various challenges have chipped away at public confidence, said Rangsiman Rome, a lawmaker of the opposition People's Party.

"It will be very difficult to govern in the short term, because the people no longer have any confidence left." Thaksin appeared in good health as he met cheering crowds on his

return home in 2023, before appearing in court to be sentenced to eight years in jail for abuse of power and conflicts of interest. The 75-year-old spent just a few hours in jail before complaining of chest and heart problems and was transferred to the VIP wing of a hospital, prompting outrage and mockery from a public sceptical about the sudden deterioration of his health. A royal pardon cut his sentence to one year, and he was released on parole after six months. The Medical Council of Thailand will decide if three doctors who signed off on Thaksin's hospital stay should be punished for abusing their authority.

That decision will feed into a Supreme Court process that starts concerning the legality of the hospital detention. It is unclear when it will yield a verdict. Despite not holding any formal position, Thaksin has cast a long shadow over the government, through meetings with foreign leaders, campaigning in local elections and weighing in on policy. Sixty percent of respondents in a poll last week believed Thaksin's case would affect the stability of a government whose popularity was shaken after it paused a cash handout programme to tens of millions of Thais.

## Russia flies bomber planes over Baltic for first time

MOSCOW (Reuters): Russia sent Tu-22M3 long-range bomber planes on a flight over the Baltic Sea, the defence ministry said, in the first such mission since Ukraine carried out a stunning June 1 attack on air bases in Siberia and the far north. A number of Tu-22M3 and Tu-95MS bombers were destroyed or seriously damaged in those strikes, conducted by drones that were smuggled close to the airfields in trucks. Russia regularly conducts heavy bomber flights as a show of strength and deterrence to its adversaries, but also appeared aimed at sending a message of business as usual despite the Ukrainian attacks.

The defence ministry said the Tu-22M3s flew for more than four hours over neutral waters of the Baltic, escorted for some of that time by fighter planes from foreign, presumably NATO, countries. The Tu-22M3 and Tu-95MS, known to NATO respectively as Backfire and Bear-H, are part of a long-range aviation fleet that Russia has used throughout the war to fire conventional missiles at Ukrainian cities, defence plants, military bases, power infrastructure and other targets. The Bear-H and the newer Tu-160M Blackjack are nuclear-capable aircraft which, alongside ground- and submarine-launched ballistic missiles,

form part of Russia's strategic nuclear deterrent.

Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said that Moscow's potential for nuclear deterrence against the United States had not suffered "any tangible damage" as a result of the Ukrainian attacks. Ryabkov has previously said Russia would repair the damage from the strikes, although commercial satellite images show a number were clearly destroyed. The United States assesses up to 20 warplanes were hit, around half the number estimated by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy, and around 10 were destroyed, two US officials told Reuters last week.



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Rehmat Shah Afridi (Late)

Founder

Bilal Shah Afridi

Chief Executive

Jalil Afridi

Managing Editor

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Peshawar Office: 0300- 9009001

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

E-mail: fppeshawar@thefrontierpost.com

Lahore Office: 0335-4026284

Email: fplahore@thefrontierpost.com

Islamabad Office: 0321-5066253

Email: mahmoodafridi@thefrontierpost.com

Karachi Office: 021-32213411, 0300-8340907

Email: fpkarachi@thefrontierpost.com

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

## Cultural anxiety and Japan's immigration pains

HELLO Kitty seems an unlikely trigger for an immigration debate. But that's what happened in Japan this week when Megumi Hayashibara, a prominent voice actress behind icons from Kitty to the long-running anime franchise "Evangelion's" Rei Ayanami, took to her blog to discuss the growing population of outsiders.

She called for a crackdown on rule-breaking foreigners and criticized overseas students on free scholarships while locals pay for their education. The thrust of her post was a call for readers to vote. But her most cutting remark was a fear that local habits and Japaneseness itself might be lost if current trends continue, like the native crayfish endangered by an "invasive species" of crustacean threatening its natural habitat. (After online outrage, Hayashibara deleted the reference to crayfish.) While it's hardly the protests in Los Angeles, her comments show how immigration is becoming a heated topic in a country where it has only recently become a feature. And it's one that authorities should not ignore, as politicians elsewhere were content to do until fringe groups become seen as the only ones with the answers.

I wrote in 2022 about how Tokyo, long stereotyped as being closed to immigration, was accepting more foreign nationals than many realized. That trend continues, with immigrants nearly doubling in the past decade and a record 10% jump in 2024. It's less the absolute level as the pace of change: Foreign residents have gone from less than 1% to more than 3% of the population in the past three decades and will reach around 10% in 2050. Criticism is fueled by the mistakes of Western nations and promoted by influencers who conflate Japan with other countries. Tokyo's strategy has been far subtler than many nations now struggling with anti-immigration populism, but it's no less vulnerable to the YouTube algorithm: A quick search for "Japan immigration issues" immediately turns up videos by the likes of the ubiquitous Hiroyuki Nishimura, the message-board entrepreneur with millions of followers and a controversial take on everything. These videos have titles like "Why should Japanese have to provide for foreigners?," "Japan is defenseless" and "Japan will no longer be a country for Japanese!"

What they ignore is that Japan doesn't have a vast force of idle foreign residents who are burdening the state. It accepts few asylum seekers, has been selective about the nationalities it attracts and has functioning border control. The number of illegal residents is a quarter of three decades ago, despite the increase in foreign nationals; the number of foreign-committed crimes shows a similar downtrend. Copy-pasted arguments from other countries don't apply here. But there are also areas of legitimate concern where authorities have not kept pace. From worries that short-term stayers are exploiting Japan's generous medical insurance system, to a bizarre loophole allowing tourists to easily get Japanese drivers' licenses, there's a worry that the country's hospitality is being exploited.

The declining domestic population is complicating things. Working-age locals fell by 224,000 last year. This simultaneously lifts the need for foreigners to supplement the labor force, while heightening concerns about Japanese being "replaced" in their own country. The truth of Hayashibara's comments lies in the fact that the thing many love about Japanese society - the "it just works" nature of public life, from mass transit to health care to the low crime rate - is deeply dependent on everyone following the rules.

Newcomers are often irked by all the procedures, from putting out garbage to talking on the subway. But these are necessary for residents, in particular those in cities stacked cheek-by-jowl, to coexist in harmony. Hayashibara's complaints about bad manners will be familiar to those who live in Japan, foreign or local; everyday annoyances have increased since the borders were reopened after COVID-19. In a Justice Ministry survey, nearly 78% said they most wanted foreign residents to follow local rules and customs. The government hasn't kept up with the times. Only now is Tokyo discussing simple issues, such as stopping tourists with unpaid medical debt from returning or rejecting visa extensions for those who haven't paid health care. I recently noted Japan doesn't track how easy it is for foreigners to buy property. A highly followed story since then concerns a Tokyo building where foreign ownership is seemingly seeking to force out residents to operate an illegal Airbnb.

Politicians are reacting, slowly. Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba has pledged the country "will accept foreigners who follow the rules" while cautioning that those who don't "will be dealt with strictly." Longtime ruling party leadership candidate Taro Kono has recently been burnishing his credentials by criticizing illegal immigration. It's all the growing pains of a changing nation. Talk of "invasive species" is unhelpful at best. But Japan also shouldn't repeat the mistakes of countries that dismissed citizens' concerns about immigration and ghettoization, only to watch them turn to fringe politicians when no one else would listen. The way to stave off the rise of populist talking heads is to address these worries and enforce a sense of fairness and equal treatment. After all, what else would Kitty want?

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## Armenia is breaking up with Russia - and Putin can't stop it

Jason Corcoran

FOR decades, Armenia was one of Russia's most reliable post-Soviet allies - a small but loyal partner nestled in the volatile South Caucasus. But that marriage of convenience is now rapidly unraveling.

Today, Yerevan is no longer whispering discontent. It is shouting it from the rooftops. And Moscow? It is scrambling to salvage the remains of its diminishing influence with soft power schemes and desperate political maneuvers. The writing is now on the wall. Armenia is done waiting for a protector that never arrives.

The rupture can be traced most clearly to 2021 and 2022, when Azerbaijani forces launched cross-border attacks on Armenian territory and killed hundreds of Armenian soldiers. A founding member of the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), Armenia expected solidarity. Instead, it got silence. From Armenia's perspective, Azerbaijan likely would not have moved on Nagorno-Karabakh if Russia had not invaded Ukraine. The war drained the Kremlin's resources and attention, leaving a power vacuum in the South Caucasus. Baku seized the moment, knowing Russia was too distracted and weakened to respond.

The CSTO's refusal to intervene shattered the illusion that Russia would uphold its end of the bargain. When Nagorno-Karabakh, a region long supported by Armenians, was blockaded and then swiftly captured by Azerbaijan in 2023, Russian peacekeepers stood idly by. To Armenians, this was betrayal. Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has already suspended Armenia's participation in CSTO activities and refused to attend recent summits. Senior figures in his government told me last week that Armenia will never become a full participant again and may even leave altogether.

Armenia is now rapidly shedding its long-standing dependence on Russia as its primary security guarantor and shifting toward a policy of strategic diversification. No longer content to be a geopolitical satel-

lite, Armenia is pursuing deeper ties with the European Union, strengthening cooperation with the United States, and seeking normalization with Turkey. This pivot is not just symbolic. It is a decisive move to anchor Armenia's future in a multipolar world where security is not outsourced to a disinterested patron but built through balanced, pragmatic partnerships.

In late May, I attended the second Yerevan Dialogue, an international forum on peace, security, and cooperation. What stood out was not just who was there, but who was not. There were speakers and senior politicians from India, France, the U.K., Germany, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, the U.S., Iran and the EU. But, notably, no one from Russia was there - a clear sign of the region's shifting geopolitical landscape. Senior figures from Pashinyan's party confided in me about "Russian-backed actors trying to destabilise Armenia's democracy." One even quipped that the only silver lining in Armenia's relationship with Russia is that they do not share a physical border, limiting Moscow's direct influence.

What once might have been a subtle influence now feels like a Cold War psyop. Moscow is attempting to retake Armenia - not with tanks, but with Telegram channels, paid influencers, and geriatric loyalists. According to Vedomosti, Sergei Kiriyenko, Vladimir Putin's First Deputy Chief of Staff, has been tasked with reviving Russian influence in Armenia ahead of the 2026 parliamentary elections.

This will not be easy. Russian sources themselves admit there is now "no one to speak for Russia" in Armenia. Aside from aging ex-presidents Robert Kocharyan and Serzh Sargsyan, both tainted by corruption and nostalgia for authoritarianism, the pro-Russian camp is a virtual ghost town. Kiriyenko's playbook reportedly begins with "informational work." In other words, propaganda. Moscow is also grooming Kremlin-approved opposition figures, quietly flying them to Moscow for con-

sultations.

But it is hard to win hearts with empty promises, especially from the country that abandoned you in war. The Armenian public, especially the youth, is more interested in visas to Paris and tech jobs in Silicon Valley than Soviet fairy tales. Armenia is not just drifting away from Russia. It is actively building new bridges. A peace deal with Azerbaijan is inching closer, one that may finally open the closed borders with Turkey and transform Armenia from a landlocked outpost into a regional hub.

Yerevan is also deepening ties with the European Union and the United States. Armenia has welcomed a European Union civilian border mission, turning down a similar offer from Russia. This follows last year's agreement for Russian border guards to withdraw from Zvartnots Airport in Yerevan and key border areas near Azerbaijan, highlighting Armenia's move away from Moscow's direct control. European aid, investment and security dialogue are expanding while American diplomats are visiting more frequently. In April 2024, the U.S. and Armenia launched a new Strategic Dialogue focused on democratic reforms and security cooperation. These are not just diplomatic niceties; they are lifelines.

Armenia understands that its future lies not in the shadow of a declining empire but among liberal democracies that value sovereignty and partnership. The country's public trust in Russia has plummeted. A 2024 poll by the International Republican Institute showed just 31% of Armenians viewed ties with Moscow positively, down from 93% in 2019. In the eyes of most Armenians, France has emerged as their country's top political ally, with the US close behind.

But Putin will not back off so easily. The appointment of Kiriyenko is part of a last-ditch effort to stem the tide, but it's likely too little, too late. Kremlin-friendly voices in Armenia are losing credibility, and the Armenian public is no longer afraid to question Russia's motives or compe-

tence. On the streets of Yerevan, the influx of Russians who arrived post-mobilization has already faded. The majority of the estimated 100,000 Russian exiles have since returned or moved on, disillusioned by limited opportunities. The Russians are not missed. In fact, one Armenian friend complained that her rent almost doubled in a year from 100,000 drams (\$250) to 180,000 (\$475) due to the spike in housing demand.

Armenia may be rethinking its security alliances, but it won't become a separate planet in the South Caucasus. Geography is destiny. Russia remains a neighbor - even without a shared border - and trade with Moscow is still a key pillar of Armenia's economy. Russian brands like VTB, Gazprom and Yandex Taxi still mark Moscow's presence in Armenia. The country also remains heavily dependent on Russia for natural gas and electricity.

Even the recent surge in trade, fuelled by sanctions evasion, is seen as temporary. Beneath the surface, Russia's influence is waning, and even in central Yerevan, many young people no longer speak or understand Russian. Pashinyan's visit to Moscow for Victory Day on May 9 was a calculated gesture to reassure the Kremlin that Armenia's Russian pivot does not mean cutting Russia off entirely.

But in a sign of growing unease in Moscow, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov traveled to Yerevan last month for talks with Pashinyan - a visit widely seen as an attempt to reassert Russia's fading influence. The optics were clear: Armenia is no longer looking to Moscow as its default protector. Lavrov arrived not as a trusted ally, but as a messenger from a power whose security guarantees have repeatedly failed.

If Russia truly wants to remain relevant in the South Caucasus, it needs to reckon with the fact that coercion no longer works. Armenia has learned the hard way that Moscow's promises are conditional, unreliable and ultimately self-serving. Now, Yerevan is charting its own course. Russia may still be present, but it is no longer calling the shots.

## Russia's Railways are hard to knock off track and crucial for war

Emily Ferris

IN the same week that Russia experienced an unexpected drone attack on its airfields deep inside the country, explosions rocked several Russian railway tracks and the railway bridge into annexed Crimea was targeted with underwater explosives. Though these attacks lacked the novelty of Operation Spider's Web, they underline the centrality of Russia's railway network to its war effort.

Transport is a crucial component of Russia's strategic security considerations, with political heavyweights appointed by the Kremlin to oversee the country's roads, bridges, railway networks and its inland waterway system. It is also no accident that the Chairman of the Board at Russian Railways, Andrei Belousov, is also defense minister. Presidential aide Nikolai Patrushev also manages the development of Russia's waterways, which have important military implications for Moscow's relations with China and activities in the Arctic.

The link between transport and Russia's strategic security is also enshrined in law. Since 2014, transport has been included among the so-called strategic sectors, alongside defense, oil and gas. The Kremlin considers these parts of the economy to be fundamentally important and upon which Russia's national security rests, such as defense, oil and gas. Foreign investment in these enterprises is limited by law; they receive particular attention and funding from the federal center and usually play an important role in furthering Russia's foreign and domestic policies, as well as its warfare.

Railway networks are the only way that Russia's ground forces and materiel can travel around the country at speed and en masse. They were how Russian and Belarusian troops amassed on the border with Ukraine in February 2022 and remain the only way that Russian ground forces can be sustained on the battlefield for a long period of time.

Ukraine, Belarus and Russia all use the 1,520mm Soviet gauge, which made commandeering the railways to move Russian troops into Ukraine relatively straightforward. As Russia was pushed back, it attacked parts of Ukraine's rail network in the early part of 2022 to prevent the country maneuvering military reinforcements.

Russia's neighbors are acutely aware of this too. In the early days of the war, Belarusian partisans blew up Russian railway signaling boxes to delay trains carrying military equipment to the front. They were subsequently dealt with harshly. Ukraine also understood Russia's reliance on its rail systems and has tried to destroy its own network to prevent Russia from pressing more deeply into Ukrainian territory, and to disrupt Russia's railways inside the country, most notably in December 2023. In May 2025, neighboring Finland announced abruptly that it would be switching its entire network from the Russian to the European standard gauge system. Although this overhaul will not be fully operational until 2032, the security implications are clear - this

is to prevent any future Russian land incursion.

But Russia's rail network is not as vulnerable as it seems. Although Russia's railway lines are long and seemingly ungarded, particularly in the Far East. As the Ukrainians have seen, disrupting traffic for longer than a few days has proven difficult.

In part, this is because Russia has a specific railway brigade, an auxiliary wing of the armed forces, which is tasked with the swift repair of its network should it come under attack. The Railway Troops are an important part of the rear. They have been used to resupply the front line in conflicts such as Chechnya and perform an important civilian function during natural disasters by keeping traffic moving. The brigade has evolved over decades to repair damaged tracks at pace, including during warfare, and so Ukraine's attempts to subvert railway lines and damage bridges tend to only present a temporary stumbling block.

More broadly, Russia also has a supply chain problem with spare locomotive parts, exacerbated by the sanctions, as many of the parts were previously imported. This creates problems with loading capacities, with frequent breakdowns on the network due to a lack of spare parts such as bearings and electronic components. Reports of railcars idling, running slowly and clogging up the network are well documented.

Russia's broader demographic issues resulting from the loss of a significant chunk of the labor force to the armed forces have resulted in understaffing at repair plants. Russia is trying to substitute these parts with Russian-made alternatives, but the technology will take time to come onto the market. There are other more general threats to Russia's infrastructure. Climate change is melting the permafrost on top of which many railways are built, causing the land to buckle. Seasonal floods are increasing in scope each year. The wear and tear these processes cause as they warp the tracks will need to be repaired.

Hardware aside, Russia's railway software has encountered serious problems. Until it left Russia in April 2022, Siemens Mobility coordinated Russia's high-speed railway software, which helped monitor the maintenance of the railways. Russian developers had to swiftly replace the system with a domestic model. But the system is not fully automated. While it is working on growing digitalization, this in itself leaves the network vulnerable to attack, and has implications for Russia's ability to move its troops around at pace.

All of this highlights the importance of infrastructure throughout this war - and others - without which Russia would be unable to mobilize and sustain its forces. The levels of funding and political attention dedicated to Russia's transport networks indicate the important strategic position that infrastructure occupies in the minds of senior decision-makers in Moscow. Russia's current planning suggests that these networks will continue to be at the core of its warfighting and foreign policy strategies in the years to come.

The Moscow Times

## Lammy is picking a needless fight with America

Con Coughlin

THE alarming revelation that 2024 recorded the highest number of global conflicts since the Second World War should be taken as an incentive to deepen ties with key allies, not fracture them. That would certainly be the response of any government committed to the defence of the realm faced with the depressing statistic that last year saw 61 conflicts taking place in 36 countries.

Of these, 11 were defined as full-blown conflicts - those that claimed at least 1,000 battlefield deaths - and included the ongoing wars in Ukraine and Gaza, as well as other less-publicised violent eruptions in Sudan, Syria, Nigeria and Ethiopia. At a time when Sir Keir Starmer is attempting to promote his national security credentials, the rising tide of conflict detailed in a report by Sweden's Uppsala University should prompt his Government to strengthen

ties with key allies such as the US and Israel.

Instead, by opting to target two members of the Israeli government with sanctions, Starmer has shown that he is more interested in virtue-signalling than common sense. National security minister Itamar Ben-Gvir and finance minister Bezalel Smotrich may come from the ultra-nationalist fringe of Israeli politics, but they remain important members of Israel's democratically elected government, which is one of the UK's closest allies in the Middle East.

Moreover, Israel, just like Ukraine, finds itself in the vanguard of the West's deepening confrontation with two of the most potent threats it faces, in the form of Vladimir Putin's Russia and Iranian-sponsored Islamist terrorism. The UK's support for Ukraine, together with its European allies, is predicated on the understanding that Western security would be fatally compromised if

Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine were to succeed.

Similarly, the UK's declaration of support for Israel in the wake of the October 7 attacks in 2023 was based on the tacit acknowledgement that it was in the West's interests that Iran's backing for Hamas terrorists must not be allowed to go unchallenged, especially given the ayatollahs' fixation with developing nuclear weapons. The Labour Government's decision, therefore, to single out two prominent members of the Israeli government for public censure not only threatens to undermine relations with a key regional ally. It runs the risk of jeopardising our own national security, especially if the Israelis conclude it is no longer in their interests to share vital intelligence with the UK.

Israeli foreign minister Gideon Saar has already announced the Israeli cabinet

will meet next week to respond to what he called an "unacceptable decision". The British Government's decision to pick on the two politicians is hardly surprising given its previous lamentable track record of targeting Israel, with Foreign Secretary David Lammy declaring his support for the International Criminal Court and its highly politicised move to prosecute Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu for war crimes.

Yet, by siding with other self-righteous, but wholly naive, administrations in Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Norway, to provoke an entirely avoidable diplomatic row with Israel, Starmer and Co have placed themselves firmly on the wrong side of history. Apart from alienating Israel, the move also risks causing a rift with the US, another key ally. America's secretary of state Marco Rubio was particular-

ly critical of the measures imposed against Ben-Gvir and Smotrich for "inciting violence against the Palestinian people". The sanctions "do not advance US-led efforts to achieve a ceasefire, bring all hostages home and end the war," he said, urging the UK "not to forget who the real enemy is".

Hitting two controversial Israeli politicians with sanctions might play to Labour's vociferously anti-Israel supporters, but it could prove to be a self-defeating move in terms of safeguarding our own long-term interests. In terms of the likely impact it will have on Israeli policy, the sanctions will be about as effective as Greta Thunberg's equally puerile attempt this week to break Israel's Gaza blockade with her Freedom Flotilla.

At the same time they run the risk of sending a signal to Iran and other hostile regimes that the UK is more interested in embarrassing its allies

than confronting its enemies. It is certainly hard to grasp the logic of why, when Western powers like the UK are preparing to confront Iran over its nuclear programme, they should choose this moment to pick a fight with Israel, Tehran's sworn enemy.

The need to impose fresh sanctions against Iran was very much in evidence at this week's meeting of the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna, when Rafael Grossi, the body's director general, confirmed three new previously undeclared nuclear sites had been identified in Iran that could be used for developing nuclear weapons. The UK is among a number of European powers that have responded by pressing for the reimposition of sanctions against Tehran. But the ayatollahs are unlikely to change course on their nuclear ambitions if they believe they share a common interest with Britain and its allies in targeting the Israelis.



# Crime will be the next immigration. Politicians will be punished for it

Sherelle Jacobs

IT'S hard to shake off the sense that Britain is creeping towards lawlessness. Low-level crime is on its way to becoming legalised, whether officially - in the case of cannabis - or not - as with shoplifting. Public faith in the police is collapsing as many serious crimes like burglary and assault routinely fail to be solved, and sometimes even go uninvestigated, while "speech crimes" trigger the full wrath of the law.

Too many neighbourhoods are becoming hotbeds of anti-social behaviour, with begging prolific and buildings defaced by graffiti. True, Britain is cash-strapped. But it's the fusion of chronic underinvestment with liberal idealism which is so toxic. Disorder is being normalised, criminals treated as victims, the rule of law eroded. Though politicians remain convinced that crime is a second-order issue, it could eventually prove the Labour Government's undoing.

My own local area in west London is disintegrating. It started with a clutch of beggars congregating outside the Tesco after Covid. Now they are joined by dishevelled women selling "washing powder" and bare-footed addicts. For the most part, they are a nuisance rather than dangerous. Like many women in the city, when I walk the streets, I get the surreal feeling of being neither safe nor unsafe. With the crime rate in my area surging by a third since 2019, and several of my neighbours recently burgled, that may soon change.

When I expressed my concerns to police and crime commissioners this week, they echoed Mark Rowley's complaint about a lack of funds. Some say they find Rachel Reeves's claim that she is hiking police spending by 2.3 per cent each year exasperating.

A view prevails in Westminster that crime is a non-issue. Its proponents point to statistics that suggest it is at its lowest level on record. They think that technology is rendering crime a relic of the past, with their favourite example, car-jacking, now largely a fool's errand thanks to security device innovation.

They think that any ongoing problems pertain to a tiny number of chronic offenders. Meanwhile, Left-leaning criminologists insist that conservatives' fears that "soft" policing could drive up crime are prejudiced. Crackdowns are said to be "counterproductive", alienating

"disproportionately-targeted" minority groups. Such framing overlooks the risk that unrecorded crime is quietly climbing, as law-breaking becomes such a regular occurrence that some victims don't bother to report it. Other kinds are probably not being picked up properly by polling.

Even more worrying is the Leftist view that, if there is a spe-

breakers are, deep down, troubled souls. Shoplifters and fare dodgers who are allegedly "struggling with the cost of living" are the latest group to which any "compassionate" society should turn a blind eye, the Left insist.

This myth threatens to shake the foundations of our society by undermining the sacred principle that we are all equal under the law.

**Crackdowns are said to be "counterproductive", alienating "disproportionately-targeted" minority groups. Such framing overlooks the risk that unrecorded crime is quietly climbing, as law-breaking becomes such a regular occurrence that some victims don't bother to report it. Other kinds are probably not being picked up properly by polling. Even more worrying is the Leftist view that, if there is a specific issue with chronic offenders, it's the consequence of too much law and order rather than too little. Keir Starmer's prison guru, James Timpson, thinks Britain is "addicted" to sentencing. Sadiq Khan has backed "partial" cannabis decriminalisation, amid claims that policing the drug harms more than the substance itself. The way in which the Left tries to romanticise these criminals is if anything becoming more strident - we are told that in the wake of austerity and Covid, certain law-breakers are, deep down, troubled souls. Shoplifters and fare dodgers who are allegedly "struggling with the cost of living" are the latest group to which any "compassionate" society should turn a blind eye, the Left insist. This myth threatens to shake the foundations of our society by undermining the sacred principle that we are all equal under the law.**

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There is only so far we can fall down this rehabilitation rabbit hole before triggering a crime surge. Labour is adamant that the Michael Howard school of tough sentencing has failed. It has opted to release offenders early and ignore our rotting prison estate.

This is a terrible mistake. Even if prison isn't working in the sense that it isn't preventing ex-convicts from reoffending, policymakers should not use this as an excuse to avoid punishing those who break our laws. The answer to our failure

to rehabilitate is not to allow criminals to escape punishment. In the most important sense, prison almost always "works" by preventing somebody who is locked up from stealing or assaulting other people.

True, rehabilitation can sometimes work wonders. I have spoken with ex offenders who have been transformed by such programmes. One woman, Sonia, told me of how the support of one charity helped her evade the "revolving door back to prison". But resource-intensive, bespoke rehabilitation is tricky to scale. In austere times, the temptation to roll out rehab on the cheap could prove overwhelming, and will end in failure.

As veteran probation expert Mark Leech told me: "There are prisoners that have done the courses so many times they could deliver them better than the tutors who deliver them." Chasing a utopian ideal, with no idea how to make it work, let alone on a tight budget, is flirting with disaster.

Efforts by some criminologists to discredit the policing approach known as "broken windows" could also end badly. This concept, which clamps down on low-level crime such as graffiti and drug-taking on the basis that tolerating "minor" disorder leads to a culture that promotes much more serious crime, helped flatten a vicious crime wave in 1990s New York. It has been trashed in recent years, amid complaints it is racist and based on "bogus" evidence.

I disagree. Broken windows could once again be a vital weapon against certain serious crimes, such as sexual offences. Police officers on the front line certainly seem to think so: as Matthew Barber, PCC for Thames Valley, says: "You won't find many hardened criminals who didn't start doing things at a young age before getting steadily out of control. Fix those basics and you'll prevent an awful lot more serious crime down the road." Though Labour politicians may be in denial, a slow-burning crisis is unfolding. There is a widespread sense of malaise, that law is breaking down. In Red Wall towns, Labour's "levelling up" projects are being undermined by anti-social behaviour. In the cities, alarm at gang violence, as well as muggings and burglary, may yet nudge professionals to the Right. Labour's inability to tackle crime could cost it dear.

The Telegraph

other members. When Hill staff wear out, they sometimes move on to jobs as lobbyists, with think tanks, or in academia, again, all the time widening their circle of close friends.

Those who want to exploit their past glories and positions of power for fame and fortune as media stars or sensational book authors have very short half-lives, and their circle of former friends often shrinks. What does all this have to do with the Trump-Musk super feud? Not a whole lot. They go their separate ways, continuing to amass power, with any allusions to past friendships and loyalty losing any relevance. There's not much there that average citizens can identify with or even care about, other than for its pure entertainment value.

Trump is the only president in a century who has not had a dog while in office. An August 2018 Newsweek story, "Trump doesn't like dogs and dogs don't like him," quotes his first ex-wife Ivana from her memoir, "Donald was not a dog fan." He certainly didn't take to her pet poodle, Chappie, and vice versa. We don't know how many actual friends he has, but one thing that remains constant over time is that the presidency is probably still the loneliest job in town.

to 4,000. The situation recalls Arendt's later work, On Violence, in which she argues that power and violence are actually opposites - the state creates tinderbox situations when it has lost the expectation of public compliance. So if the protests were symbolic, they would be playing into the government's hands: an abstract resistance creating justification for concrete suppression. But the protests are not symbolic - the alternative to protesting against a raid by border guards is to let the raid go ahead and lose those neighbours.

The Russian-American columnist and author M Gessen cites a distinction made in political science between faith, where you believe that justice will simply prevail, and hope, where you observe and participate. Gessen wrote in the New York Times: "You can't take action without hope, but you also can't have hope without taking action." Everyone has a line over which they'd be spurred to action - there's no one who wouldn't lie down in front of the government van if their child were kidnapped and put inside it by masked men. So the real art of the autocratic state is not just to weaken protective institutions, but also to foster the conditions of fear and hopelessness ahead of a critical mass finding its hard limit. It's not clear, yet, whether the repression is a deliberate spectacle in order to create that fear, or whether, conversely, it's the accidental creation of conditions that demand action.

## East Africa's rulers saw what Gen Z can do

Patrick Gathara

did not break the spirit of protest, but it did send a message: this government is willing to use deadly force to silence dissent.

And now, as the 2025 Finance Bill winds its way through the public consultation process, the early signs are that the cycle may repeat. The arrests of Ojwang and Njeri, even before protests have properly begun, suggest a strategy of preemptive suppression: neutralise the nodes of mobilisation before the network can activate.

But this paranoia is not uniquely Kenyan. Just weeks ago, Kenyan activist Boniface Mwangi and Ugandan journalist Agather Atuhaire were arrested while in Tanzania to attend the trial of opposition leader Tundu Lissu, and allegedly tortured and raped by Tanzanian police. This points to the emergence of a regional authoritarian consensus. Fearing a coming together of popular movements in their individual nations inspired by the successes of Kenya's Gen Z movement, the Kenyan, Tanzanian, and Ugandan governments are forming their own informal alliance, sharing not just intelligence and resources, but political fears and tactics.

Their calculus is clear. Each is led by a regime facing economic turmoil, discredited democratic processes, and fragmented opposition movements. Each sees youth-led mobilisation as the most potent threat to its hold on power. Each has, in recent years, responded to such mobilisation with brutality. And, crucially, each knows that the costs of repression are lower than ever. For much of the post-Cold War era, authoritarian excesses in Africa were tempered by the fear of inciting Western disapproval. Rhetorical condemnation was not just embarrassing but carried real risks, not only of losing aid or feeling the weight of economic sanctions, but, perhaps more consequentially, a loss of popular legitimacy.

However, democratic decline and moral disarray in the West have dramatically altered that equation. Today, the West is shedding the false image of moral superiority which cloaked its domination of the globe. From arming and supporting a genocide in Gaza to the brutal suppression of dissent on its own streets and the demonisation of immigrants and refugees, it turns out that the first world is just the third world in drag. Their words of condemnation for the atrocities and brutalities of others would now simply reek of dishonesty and hypocrisy. Further, the same governments that once demanded good governance and civil rights

now prioritise counterterrorism, migration control, and market access. They strike deals with autocrats, turn a blind eye to repression, and reframe their interests as "stability". Western support for civil society has withered. Funding has declined. Visibility has shrunk. The result is a shrinking civic space and a growing sense of impunity among East African elites.

From the vantage point of these governments, this moment presents both a threat and an opportunity. The threat is clear: protests could spiral into a full-scale political reckoning. The opportunity is darker: to act now, preemptively and brutally, while the world is not looking and the opposition is disorganised. But it is also a moment of possibility for the movements these regimes are trying to suppress.

The 2024 Gen Z protests in Kenya marked a political awakening. They showed that it is possible to bypass traditional gatekeepers - political parties, NGOs, foreign donors - and mobilise around economic justice and dignity. They rejected the logic of ethnic patronage and elite negotiation. And crucially, they exposed the hollowness of the old accusations that civic protest is always the work of "foreign puppets". By framing civic activism as inherently un-African or externally manipulated, regimes attempt to delegitimise protest and sow doubt. But today's youth activists are pushing back - not by seeking validation from the West, but by grounding their struggles in lived reality: the daily pain of high taxes, joblessness, debt, and corruption.

The current crackdown is evidence that these movements have rattled the powerful. But fear is not the same as victory. The lesson of the past years is that organised, principled dissent is possible, and effective. What comes next must be regional. If authoritarianism is becoming a cross-border project, then so too must resistance. Kenya's civic actors must stand with Tanzanian and Ugandan activists. Solidarity must be built not only through shared hashtags, but through shared strategy: legal defence networks, data collection on abuses, secure communication channels, joint campaigns. Albert Ojwang's death, Rose Njeri's arrest, the violations against Boniface Mwangi and Agather Atuhaire - these are not aberrations. They are signals. Signals that the ruling classes of East Africa are preparing for a fight. The question is whether the rest of us are preparing to fight as well.

## Trump's Medicaid and SNAP red tape will devastate Americans

Taryn Morrissey

healthy eating.

In 2023, nearly 83 million children and adults - 24 percent of Americans - relied on Medicaid. Medicaid supports care from the cradle to the grave: Medicaid pays for more than 4 in 10 births in the US, and is the largest funder of long-term care, supporting the long-term services and supports needed by almost 6 million Americans in 2021. In 2023, SNAP provided food assistance to an average of 42 million Americans each month. SNAP is important across the age spectrum, too: Nearly half of all children in the US participate in SNAP before their 20th birthday, and more than 4 million seniors 60 or older receive SNAP.

The CBO estimates that if the Senate passes the bill in its current form, nearly 15 million Americans will lose their health coverage by 2034 because of Medicaid work requirements and other cuts. The reconciliation bill includes the largest SNAP cut in history. It will eliminate food benefits for more than 3 million adults (about 1 million adults over 55) and roughly 1 million children each month. Still, that doesn't keep Republicans from continually trying to portray recipients as lazy cheaters who need to lace up their boots and get back to the factory. They've been making the same mistake for years. Arkansas in 2018 and Georgia in 2023 implemented Medicaid work requirements. Those moves

merely caused thousands to lose insurance coverage, had no effect on employment and did not protect these states from fraud. In Arkansas, they were halted after one year.

The punitive requirements in the House Republicans' bill will not only fail to force millions of people into low-paying jobs, but they will also increase Americans' medical debt, creating a further, unnecessary strain on our economy and health care system. If Republicans really think that work requirements and paperwork reduce fraud, they are wrong. Medicaid fraud, for example, is relatively rare and more often committed by health care providers, not beneficiaries. Further, these work requirements will bury Americans in mounds of paperwork and cost millions to administer. Instead, they should try to limit the sophisticated tax evasion strategies used by the top 1 percent, which are rarely detected but very expensive for the country.

If Trump's complaint members of Congress really wanted to increase employment, expansions in public preschool and child care would be much more effective and economical. It's somewhat ironic that an administration that supposedly is taking a chainsaw to the federal bureaucracy is moving to wrap ordinary Americans in red tape. But the reality is the Trump administration seeks to break down barriers for millionaires, while building them up around the rest of us.

## Yes, protesting can help tyrants like Trump

Zoe Williams

WHEN Donald Trump was elected the first time round, the works of the German-American philosopher Hannah Arendt flew off the shelves in the US. It wasn't all good news - JD Vance's Hillbilly Elegy was also enjoying a surge in popularity and Trump was, of course, still about to be president. But Arendt's famous 1951 work, The Origins of Totalitarianism, was selling at 16 times its usual rate, which meant that by the time of the protests centred on the inauguration in January 2017, at least some of those people had read it.

Arendt's view of popular demonstrations was complicated. She wasn't blind to the way authoritarian rulers use public protest as an excuse for a display of physical power, embodied in the police, which turns the state into an army against its people, altering that relationship. If it's no longer government by consent, it's rule by force, and they have the equipment. Yet "how many people here still believe", she wrote of Germany in the 1930s, quoting the French activist David Rousset, "that a protest has even historic importance? This scepticism is the real masterpiece of the SS. Their great accomplishment. They have corrupted all human solidarity. Here the night has fallen on the future." It's an elegantly drawn lose-lose situation: if you lose the will to protest, you have been "morally murdered", but if you

don't, you play into the tyrant's hands.

But the Women's Marches of January 2017 didn't spark police violence. Not a single arrest was made across the 2 million protesters gathered in New York, Washington, Chicago, Los Angeles and Seattle. Commentators wondered whether this was due to the essentially peaceable nature of women and their allies, while academics drew comparisons with the hundreds of arrests made during the Ferguson uprising of 2014 (which, of course, happened under President Obama). "Tanks and rubber bullets versus pussy-hats and high-fives" was how one scholar, Abby Harrington, described the contrast, making the case convincingly that protesters were treated differently on essentially racist grounds. It would be wrong, and actually quite sexist, to say that the women weren't considered worthy of violent suppression because they didn't seem serious enough. It would be wrong, too, to say that they made no impact - they were enormous, dispersed across 408 places in the US, rallying by some estimates more than 4 million Americans, and spawning protests in solidarity across seven continents, including one in Antarctica.

The demand was very broad and consequently pretty loose, however: protesters wanted "vibrant and diverse communities" recognised as "the strength of our country".

They wanted reproductive rights and tolerance and protection from violence; mutual respect; racial equality; gender equality; workers' rights - it was a call for decency, to which the leader felt no need to respond, almost by definition, since he is not decent.

The recent US protests were sparked last Friday at about 9am, as border patrol agents massed outside a Home Depot in Paramount, a predominantly Latino area in Los Angeles. An assembly member, José Luis Solache Jr, happened to be driving past, so stopped and posted the scenes, which looked chillingly militaristic even days before the arrival of the national guard. Protesters started to arrive, not in huge numbers but with a vast purpose - to prevent what looked like an immigration raid of people trying to do their jobs. It came on the back of the arrest of a senior union official in the Fashion District, and one father arrested in front of his eight-year-old son. The message, when border guards sweep a workplace or a courtroom where people are doing regular immigration check-ins, is quite plain: this isn't about deporting hardened criminals.

The protesters' demand was comparatively plain: don't arrest our friends, neighbours or colleagues, when they pose no danger to anyone. Since then, 700 marines have been deployed to the city, and the number of national guards doubled





## Pharma, device importers urged to boost local medical technologies manufacturing

KARACHI (APP): Federal Health Ministry and the Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan (DRAP) urged the pharmaceutical companies and device importers to invest in local manufacturing—starting with basic devices and gradually progressing to complex technologies.

Industry representatives also demanded significant tax concessions and ease of doing business to kickstart local production.

Speaking at the 'Breaking Barriers' session of the Pakistan Med Movement at Salim Habib University, Federal Health Minister Syed Mustafa Kamal emphasized the urgent need for self-sufficiency in healthcare infrastructure.

"We can't continue to depend on imported devices forever. The solution lies in encouraging local production, and the government will extend complete regulatory support for this transformation," he added.

He warned that unless

Pakistan controls its surging population, even improved medical infrastructure would not suffice.

"Our hospitals have collapsed. Primary healthcare is in shambles. We are producing more people, then making them sick, and finally talking about building hospitals," he remarked, pointing to a system overwhelmed by undressed population growth.

The event, held in collaboration with DRAP, the Healthcare Devices Association of Pakistan (HDAP), Saman & Shifa Foundation, and the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC), brought together regulators, manufacturers, academia, and policymakers to discuss pathways for strengthening local device manufacturing.

Mustafa Kamal also highlighted Pakistan's public health crises, noting that 68 percent of diseases in the country stem from unsafe water due to non-existent sewage treatment systems. "Sewage water is

mixing with drinking water and someone is consuming it. Just like we install electricity systems, we must also install water treatment plants," he said, adding that Pakistan now tops the world in Hepatitis C and diabetes prevalence due to a lack of preventive strategies.

"We are investing billions in curative infrastructure but ignoring preventive healthcare. Prevention is the only way out."

DRAP Chief Executive Officer Dr. Obaidullah Malik told the gathering that Pakistan's medical device manufacturing sector is still in its infancy but holds potential. "You can't manufacture MRI machines overnight. Start small, grow gradually, and work together," he advised.

He urged the pharmaceutical industry to take the lead in building a new ecosystem for medical technology and lamented the disconnect between academia, industry, and regulators in Pakistan. "Invisible barriers exist

between stakeholders. Everyone thinks they are right. We must begin to understand each other's challenges."

Former HDAP Chairman and CEO of Hospicare, Masood Ahmed, welcomed DRAP's recent efforts to streamline registration of devices within three months, calling it a "good start" toward regulatory facilitation. However, he stressed that the biggest hurdle remains the 18 percent sales tax on medical devices. "This must be reduced to one percent—just like pharmaceuticals—if we want to promote local manufacturing," he said.

Speaking at the session, Syed Omer Ahmed emphasized that the event aimed to promote local manufacturing of medical devices, especially as 98 percent of such devices are currently imported. "In a country like Pakistan, where availability is a major concern, essential medical devices must be produced locally to ensure consistent supply," he said.



MULTAN: United Nation Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Pakistan Muhammad Yahya receives a commemorative shield from president MCCI Bakhtawar Tanvir Sheikh.

## First Tashkent-Islamabad flight lands

ISLAMABAD (APP): The inaugural flight of Uzbekistan Airways Tashkent-Islamabad direct flight landed in Islamabad on Saturday for further strengthening bilateral relations between the two countries.

The inaugural Tashkent-Islamabad direct flight of Uzbekistan Airways, the national airline of Uzbekistan, departed from Tashkent International Airport at 9:50 am on Saturday, June 14, carrying 250 passengers and arrived at Islamabad International Airport at 12 noon.

This historic flight of Uzbekistan Airways was attended by businessmen, officials and medical students in Uzbekistan, who described the flight as a milestone in the relations between the two countries.

During this, a grand ceremony was held on the arrival of the plane and a cake cutting ceremony was held in which the Ambassador of Uzbekistan to Pakistan, H.E Mr. Alisher Tukhtaev, along with the Ambassadors of Tajikistan and Kazakhstan to Pakistan, H.E. Mr Sharifzoda Yusuf and H.E Mr. Yerzhan Kistafin cut the cake here at Islamabad International Airport.

Speaking to APP on this occasion, Uzbek Ambassador, Alisher Tukhtaev said that today's launched of direct flight between the capitals of Pakistan and Uzbekistan, Islamabad and Tashkent, is a historic step in bilateral relations, which will not only strengthen the economic ties between the two countries but will also provide an opportunity for the people of both countries to come closer.

The Ambassador said that the launch of Islamabad-Tashkent flights will boost business in both countries and increase tourism.

Operating every Saturday, the new route underscores the shared commitment of Uzbekistan and Pakistan to strengthen their long-standing partnership and deepen cooperation across multiple sectors, he said.

He said that before this, there were two direct flights a week from Lahore and Tashkent, and these initiatives will further strengthen the economic and trade ties between the two countries and reduce the distance between the people of the two countries.

This direct link marks a strategic advancement in bilateral relations and aligns with the broader goals of the Central and South Asia Connectivity Initiative – a regional framework aimed at fostering infrastructure development, trade, energy cooperation, and people-to-people exchanges between the two regions.

Uzbek envoy said this is the second direct flight between the two countries, after the biweekly direct flights started between Tashkent and Lahore in this year, which is a part of the President Republic of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev vision for regional connectivity and the result of his personal interest.

He said that as part of a broader vision to enhance regional integration and connectivity, Uzbekistan Airways, the national carrier of the Republic of Uzbekistan has launched direct flights between Tashkent and Islamabad.

## UN supports key initiatives to boost South Punjab's economic potential: official

MULTAN (APP): United Nations Resident, Humanitarian Coordinator to Pakistan, Mohammad Yahya said on Saturday that South Punjab had immense economic potential and United Nations was extending support in different sectors to uplift the region's infrastructure.

He was addressing a ceremony at the Multan Chamber of Commerce here on Saturday. Mohammad Yahya stated that UN's 4000 persons were working across Pakistan. He stated that the region was an agriculture hub and FAO was working to promote agriculture, adding that the UN was also extending cooperation in skill development of youths. "The

UN always encourages learning and upgrading skill. South Punjab is an important geographical area and the UN would continue support in addressing challenges in climate change, technology, agriculture and other sectors," he added. He also invited MCCI members to visit Islamabad as they would jointly run a campaign for maximum investment in South Punjab.

Ms Fernanda Thomaz, representative of IFAD, shared that IFAD was also contributing to the poverty alleviation project in 10 districts of south Punjab. "It provided livestock to 400,000 poor women and 7,300 landless women were provided with hous-

es. Similarly, 40 community food banks supported 30,000 households," she added. President Multan Chamber of Commerce Bakhtawar Tanvir Sheikh gave a briefing on overall south Punjab, mentioning various challenges in agriculture, industry, climate change, girl education, poverty and other sectors. He also hailed Chairman Senate Syed Yusuf Raza Gilani for ensuring mega development projects in the region. He urged the UN to pay further focus on south Punjab as it was lagging behind many other areas of the country. He also mentioned different uplift projects, developed after recommendation of Multan Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

## ICCI, PAF hospital partner for business community welfare

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry (ICCI) and PAF Hospital have agreed to strengthen cooperation for the welfare of the business community, with a focus on enhancing healthcare access and promoting well-being among entrepreneurs and employees.

During a meeting at ICCI, President Nasir Mansoor Qureshi welcomed Air Commodore (Retired) Raja Viqar Ali, Executive Director of PAF Hospital, and highlighted ICCI's ongoing efforts to foster business growth, economic resilience, and social responsibility.

He stressed the need for strategic alliances with leading healthcare institutions to safeguard the health of those who drive the nation's economy.

President Qureshi reiterated ICCI's commitment to supporting the business sector through progressive policy advocacy, capacity building, facilitation services, and health-focused initiatives.

He emphasized that the well-being of business owners and their workforce is integral to sustainable economic progress.

In a detailed discussion, both sides agreed to collaborate on launching health awareness campaigns,

organizing medical screenings, and ensuring access to quality healthcare services for ICCI members.

The partnership aims to deliver long-term value through mutual engagement and socially impactful programs.

To mark the occasion, President ICCI presented a commemorative shield to Air Commodore Raja Viqar Ali in recognition of the budding partnership.

The meeting was also attended by Naeem Siddiqui, Special Advisor to the ICCI President; Ishtiaque Qureshi, Former Vice President ICCI; Umer Qureshi, ICCI Member; and other senior officials.

## LCCI condemns Israeli attack on Iran

LAHORE (APP): Lahore Chamber of Commerce & Industry (LCCI) Saturday condemned the Israeli attack on Iran and termed it a grave violation of international laws and a serious threat to regional and global peace.

In a media statement issued here, LCCI President Mian Abuzar Shad, Senior Vice President Engineer Khalid Usman and Vice President Shahid Nazir Chaudhry expressed deep concern over the escalation of Israeli military actions and urged the international community to take notice and act decisively.

They said that the unprovoked attack on Iran is not only a blatant breach of international law and the UN Charter but also a dangerous provocation that threatens the delicate balance of peace in the Middle East. "We at the Lahore Chamber of Commerce & Industry stand in absolute solidarity with the government and people of Iran during this critical and painful time," they added.

The LCCI office-bearers said that such acts of aggression are unacceptable under all circumstances and particularly alarming when they come from a state that has repeatedly defied global norms and used military force to destabilize the region. This

attack represents an escalation that could spiral into a larger conflict, with devastating consequences for millions. It must be condemned in the strongest terms.

Mian Abuzar Shad, Engineer Khalid Usman and Shahid Nazir Chaudhry said that Iran, as a sovereign nation, has every right to defend its territorial integrity and national security. They urged that the international community, the United Nations, Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and all peace-loving nations, to take immediate diplomatic and legal action to hold Israel accountable for its aggression and prevent further escalation.

This is not simply a matter of politics or military strategy. It is a question of human rights, sovereignty and the rule of law. Every nation, regardless of its political alliances, must respect the boundaries and dignity of others. No country should be allowed to act with impunity," the LCCI officials jointly stated.

They feared that continued instability in the Middle East would have far-reaching implications not just for political peace, but also for the global economy. They said that rising tensions could severely disrupt international trade routes, energy

markets and investor confidence across multiple regions.

Pakistan and Iran share deep-rooted historical, cultural, religious and economic ties. An attack on Iran is felt deeply by the people and business community of Pakistan. Pakistani nation send a clear message of solidarity and assure their full moral support to the Iranian nation. At a time when unity and diplomacy are needed, war and aggression must be rejected outright.

The LCCI office-bearers called for Muslim countries to show unity and take a firm, collective stance through diplomatic and economic forums. The LCCI leadership appealed to world powers not to turn a blind eye to Israel's repeated violations and to take steps to prevent any further military actions that could destabilize an already fragile region.

They said that the silence in the face of injustice is no longer an option.

The international community's inaction will only embolden the aggressor. It is time for governments, human rights bodies and international organizations to uphold justice, protect human lives and ensure that all nations are held equally accountable under international law.

## Overseas Pakistanis play a vital role in economic stability Remittances eliminate the \$28 billion trade deficit

### F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Chairman of National Business Group Pakistan, the President of the Pakistan Businessmen and Intellectuals Forum, the President of All Karachi Industrial Alliance, the Chairman of the FPCCI Advisory Board, and the President and former provincial minister, Mian Zahid Hussain, said on Saturday that despite intense economic pressure and global uncertainty, remittances from overseas Pakistanis continue to rise to act as a stabilizing force for the national economy.

He stated that the record increase in remittances is proof that the state is capable of timely and effective economic management. These inflows have played a decisive role in stabilizing the economy and closing the massive trade deficit of \$28

billion.

Mian Zahid Hussain highlighted that Pakistan received \$3.7 billion in remittances in May 2025, reflecting a 16 percent monthly increase and a 14 percent rise compared to May last year. This marks the second-highest monthly inflow in the country's history, surpassed only by the \$4.1 billion recorded in March 2025.

Speaking to the business community, the veteran business leader noted that, aside from seasonal spikes during Ramadan and Eid, the stable currency exchange rate and stringent actions against the informal hawala-hundi system have led to a greater reliance on formal remittance channels. This shift has improved both the transparency and volume of remittance inflows.

From July 2024 to May 2025, total remittances reached \$34.9 billion, 29 percent higher than the \$27.1

billion received during the same period in the previous fiscal year. As of April 2025, remittances had reached \$31.2 billion, representing a year-on-year increase of 30.9%. In light of this sustained growth, the State Bank of Pakistan has revised its full-year remittance projection from \$36 billion to \$38 billion.

He observed that the latest Economic Survey acknowledges that remittances have played a pivotal role in improving external accounts and turning the current account into a surplus. During the period from July to April, a current account surplus of \$1.9 billion was recorded, compared to a deficit of \$1.3 billion in the same period last year, representing a significant turnaround.

Mian Zahid Hussain further said that these inflows have contributed to an increase in national income,

improved per capita earnings, and offered some relief to households burdened by rising living costs.

However, he warned of looming threats, including shifting immigration policies in host countries and geopolitical tensions such as the Israel-Iran conflict, which could disrupt the momentum of remittance flows.

To address these risks and sustain economic progress, he urged the government to promote domestic industrialization and aggressively expand exports. Solving the problems faced by the export sector, he said, is essential for job creation and long-term economic resilience.

Mian Zahid Hussain emphasized the importance of protecting the remittance ecosystem by providing enhanced diplomatic and legal support to overseas Pakistanis, as well as further strengthening the formal banking system.

## Gems, jewelery exhibition kicks off to boost local industry

ISLAMABAD (APP): A two-day gems and Jewellery exhibition kicked off here on Saturday, showcasing gemstone treasure and finely crafted jewellery aimed at boosting local production and promoting exports.

The event was organized by Pakistan Gems and Jewellery Development Company (PGJDC) has officially been inaugurated by the Honorable Provincial Minister Government of Sindh Syed Riaz Hussain Shah Shirazi, said a news release.

Provincial Minister highlighted that this exhibition would provide a lucrative platform to the local exhibitors to showcase varieties of gems and jewellery products including loose precious, semi-precious gemstones, mineral specimens and fine jewellery (gold, white gold, silver) and gems studded jewellery.

He urged the diplomats, foreigners, dignitaries and other participants to capitalize on this exhibition as

it will be an excellent window of opportunities for buyers and sellers and will provide an enabling environment for the gems and jewellery traders, exporters and importers to establish linkages with each other.

The Chief Executive Officer PGJDC Muhammad Alamgir Chaudhry highlighted the true gems and jewellery potential of the country and explained that the objective behind this Exhibition is to develop an understanding between the Pakistani Gems & Jewellery Sector and the Business Community so that B2B linkages could be strengthened.

He expressed confidence that the Exhibition would play a vital role in enhancing the business growth.

He further submitted that organization of this exhibition is among the key steps which the company is taking towards revival of its initiatives and shows the commitment of the Government towards devel-

opment of this industry in Pakistan.

He also shed light upon the steps being undertaken by the government for facilitating trade and exports of this sector.

He explained that the government has constituted a committee to review the SRO 760(l)/2013 so that its impediments could be removed before its reinstatements.

The inauguration ceremony was attended by government functionaries, diplomats including consul generals from countries including Thailand, Sri Lanka, UAE, Oman, Indonesia, Bangladesh and representatives from chambers of commerce, gems and jewellery associations and renowned businessmen including ARY Jewellers, Motiwalla Jewellers, Hilton Jewellers, Hameed Jewellers, Arabian Jewellers, N. M Chhotani Jewellers, Golden Arts.

During the event Gems and Jewellery

exporters are displaying their gemstone treasures and finely crafted jewellery in front of discerning targeted audiences. These include New Era Jewellers, Heritage Jewellers, Bilal's (The Diamond Store), Syed Jewellers, The Emerald Royale.Co, Hussain Sons Jewellery (Tariq Road), Nadia Chhotani Designer Jewellery, Haroon Jewellers, Rozari and Galaxy Gemological Institute.

The participants of the Event highlighted that this exhibition is a positive step taken by MoIP and PGJDC for development of this sector and enhancing gems and jewellery exports and will act as a platform for the gems and jewellery sector of Pakistan to have interaction with each other and enter into long and short term business deals with each other.

They further submitted that this Exhibition will certainly help exploiting the true potential of Gems and Jewellery Sector of Pakistan.

decisively negative David Morrison, senior market analyst at financial services provider Trade Nation. "The question now is whether investors view this flare-up as a relatively contained incident within the longstanding animosity between Israel and Iran, or if this is the spark that ignites a conflagration across the Middle East and then beyond?"

While Friday was a

## Oil prices soar, stocks slide after Israel strikes Iran

NEW YORK (AFP/APP): Oil prices soared and stocks sank Friday after Israel launched strikes on Iran, prompting retaliation from Tehran and stoking fears of a full-blown war.

Oil futures rocketed more than 13 percent at one point before coming back to gains nearer seven percent, reigniting worries about a renewed spike to inflation.

After a down day in

Europe and Asia, Wall Street indices spent the entire day in the red before finishing the day down more than one percent.

"After having a pretty solid run in May and the first part of June, markets found an excuse to take some profits," said Art Hogan, chief market strategist of B. Riley Wealth.

Shares in major airlines tumbled after flights around the

Middle East were suspended.

The dollar climbed higher, while gold -- viewed as a safe haven investment -- was close to its record high of above \$3,500 an ounce set in April, having added around 30 percent since the start of the year.

The drop in equities and rise in safe-haven assets "all go to show just how fragile sentiment remains in the face of major geopolit-

ical events," said David Morrison, senior market analyst at financial services provider Trade Nation.

"The question now is whether investors view this flare-up as a relatively contained incident within the longstanding animosity between Israel and Iran, or if this is the spark that ignites a conflagration across the Middle East and then beyond?"

While Friday was a

decisively negative David Morrison, senior market analyst at financial services provider Trade Nation.

Investors "are parking back some risk, but this is hardly a panicky sell-off," said Steve Sosnick of Interactive Brokers.

The market is partially in "a wait and see approach to what happens over the weekend because it's obviously a very fluid volatile situation," Sosnick added.





In brief

Smith set to miss WI Test opener

LONDON (Agencies): Australia batter Steve Smith is set to miss the opening Test of their tour of West Indies with the finger injury he sustained in the World Test Championship final. Smith, 36, sustained a compound dislocation to the little finger of his right hand while fielding in the slips on day three of the match at Lord's, having dropped an edge from Temba Bavuma off the bowling of left-arm quick Mitchell Starc. The first of the three-match Test series between Australia and West Indies starts in Barbados on 25 June. Australia captain Pat Cummins said Smith's mood was "positive" after the injury but his prospects of playing at the the Kensington Oval are slim. "I think it's somewhere around 10 days to two weeks, and then maybe you try and bat with a splint and see how that looks. "So I think it's a bit of a wait and see. I'd say first Test maybe unlikely and then kind of go from there, but it's a bit early just to tell." Smith got his hands to the ball but shelled the catch, then immediately left the field in noticeable discomfort before he was taken to hospital for treatment. Smith made his Test debut for Australia in 2010 and has scored 10,350 runs in 208 innings at an average of 56.55.

Raducanu withdraws from Berlin Open

LONDON (Agencies): Emma Raducanu will not play in the coming week's Berlin Open as she continues to manage a back problem. The 22-year-old, who will regain her status as British number one on Monday, has been struggling with the issue since competing in Strasbourg last month before the French Open. The former US Open champion took an off-court medical timeout during her quarter-final loss to Zheng Qinwen at Queen's on Friday. "It's been lingering for the last few weeks, and I have had back issues before," she said. "It's just a vulnerability of mine. I know I need to take good care of it. "I need to let the back rest. [It] needs proper and careful management." Raducanu had opted to play in Berlin rather than Nottingham after being offered a wildcard for the WTA 500 event, which starts on Monday and is set to feature nine of the world's top 10 female players. She will leapfrog Katie Boulter when the WTA rankings are updated. Eastbourne takes place from 23-28 June and Wimbledon starts on 30 June. Raducanu beat Jessica Pegula at Eastbourne last year to claim her first win over a top-10 player, before reaching the fourth round at Wimbledon.

PSL tickets refund to begin from Monday

LAHORE (Monitoring Desk): The tickets refund process of the HBL-Pakistan Super League-X matches which could not take place in Multan and Rawalpindi due to rescheduling of fixtures will commence on Monday (June 16). The refund will be processed from June 16 to 20 with physical tickets refund will be available at designated TCS Express Centres. The tickets will be processed daily from Monday to Friday between 10am to 4pm from Lahore's Gulberg Office, Multan's Area Office, Rawalpindi Main Express Centre, Bahawalpur's Main Express Centre Model Town, Rahim Yar Khan's Station Office and Islamabad's I/9 Express Centre.



LONDON: Temba Bavuma of South Africa lifts the ICC World Test Championship Mace in celebration with his team.

# South Africa win World Test C'ship to land first major title

LONDON (AFP): Aiden Markram's magnificent century was the cornerstone of South Africa's five-wicket victory over Australia in the World Test Championship final at Lord's on Saturday as the Proteas ended decades of cricket heartbreak by at last winning a major global title. South Africa, set 282 to win, finished on 282-5 before lunch on the fourth day, with opening batsman Markram falling for 136 after taking South Africa to within six runs of the title. "It's special in a lot of ways," said Proteas captain Temba Bavuma in front of what was effectively a 'home' crowd given the large number of South Africa fans who had packed into Lord's. "Also, it's a chance for South Africa to be united," said Bavuma, who has now joined Springboks Rugby World Cup-winning captain Siya Kolisi in becoming a black African skipper of a South Africa side that has won a major global title. The Proteas resumed on 213-2, needing just 69 more runs for victory. Markram, dismissed for a duck in the first innings, was 102 not out and Bavuma unbeaten on 65

despite spending most of his innings limping with a hamstring injury. But South Africa have such a long history of folding under pressure they could not take anything for granted against serial winners and defending WTC title-holders Australia. In 18 previous attempts in the one-day international and T20 World Cups, South Africa had only reached a solitary final. That was in last year's T20 World Cup in Barbados, when they lost to India despite needing just 30 runs from their last 30 balls, with six wickets standing. 'Choke' But South Africa, so often labelled "chokers" for their failure to close out knockout games, held their nerve on Saturday as a largely unheralded side succeeded where star players such as Allan Donald, Shaun Pollock, AB de Villiers and Jacques Kallis had failed. South Africa's path to the final was criticised, with the Proteas playing just 12 Tests in the WTC cycle and none against England or Australia. But with Australia strong favourites to retain their title, South Africa posted an eighth

successive Test win in impressive style. "I hope our performance gives credit as to why we were in the final," said Bavuma. "Whilst we were batting, we could hear the Aussies using that dreaded word 'choke'. We've been etched in history, we're part of something that has never been done." The celebrations spread across the Lord's turf as each of the players took their turn with the silver and gold mace. "It is emotional, it's been a very long time coming," said Markram, who was named player of the match. "We've got close in the past couple of years and not got over the line. The first one is always going to be the toughest." "Bridge too far" Australia led by 74 runs on first innings but never got completely away from South Africa, with Proteas fast bowler Kagiso Rabada returning superb match figures of 9-110. "Unfortunately, it was a bridge too far," said Australia captain Pat Cummins, who led Australia to the 2023 WTC title after New Zealand won the inaugural 2021 final. "They (South Africa) were fan-

tastic in that fourth innings. There wasn't a lot in the wicket but they didn't give us a chance." South Africa suffered a setback early on Saturday when Bavuma, who had added just one run to his overnight score, was caught behind off Cummins to end a stand of 147 with Markram. But Markram got the target down to 50 by pulling Cummins for four before left-arm quick Mitchell Starc (3-66) bowled Tristan Stubbs. Australia took the new ball with South Africa needing just 14 more runs to win and Markram subsequently drove Josh Hazlewood for four and three to settle any nerves. He couldn't quite finish the job, though. His pull off Hazlewood was brilliantly caught by Travis Head at mid-wicket to end a 207-ball innings featuring 14 fours. As Markram received a standing ovation on his way back to the pavilion, several Australia players shook his hand. It was left to Kyle Verreynne to hit the winning run as South Africa completed the second-highest chase to win a Test at Lord's, behind the West Indies' 344-1 against England in 1984.

## Babar, Rizwan among 15 to attend Skills Development Camp from Monday

LAHORE (APP): Babar Azam, Mohammad Rizwan and Naseem Shah are among the 15 cricketers in the first batch who have been called to attend first phase of PCB's Skills Development Camp (SDC), hosted by the National Cricket Academy (NCA) from Monday (June 16) to Saturday (June 21). The PCB has outlined that the central feature of the camp is one-on-one coaching sessions. These personalised interactions will allow each player to engage directly with coaches, understand the finer details of their game and identify areas that need attention. It is about giving players the clarity and tools to improve. Aamir Jamal, Abrar Ahmed, Ahmed Daniyal, Babar Azam, Hasan Nawaz, Maaz Sadaqat, Mohammad Abbas Afridi, Mohammad Haris, Mohammad Nawaz, Mohammad Rizwan, Naseem Shah, Sahibzada Farhan, Saim Ayub, Salman Mirza and Sufyan Moqim will attend the first phase. A total number of 47 cricketers will attend the 20-day Skills

Development Camp in three phases during which the cricketers will undergo training and fitness sessions. The three phases have been divided into six-day each with 15, 16 and 16 men cricketers to attend. The other two phases will be held between 23 – 28 June and 30 June – 5 July. The names of the second and third batch of players will be announced in due course. Director High-Performance Aqib Javed in his remarks said, "We have invited 47 players to the 20-day skills camp at the National Cricket Academy following detailed discussions with white-ball head coach Mike Hesson. This is an invaluable opportunity for the players to take a brief pause from competitive cricket and focus on enhancing their fitness and refining key aspects of their game. "With a busy international calendar ahead, this window allows us to provide targeted support to the players, so they can return better prepared for the challenges to come. "There is a complete alignment between the coaching staff at the National Cricket Academy and

the national men's team. We are working in close coordination to ensure that every initiative contributes to the long-term progress of Pakistan cricket. Aqib Javed further said, in addition to supporting player development, this camp will also serve as a useful resource for the selectors as they begin to shape squads for both the Pakistan men's side and the Pakistan Shaheens ahead of upcoming international commitments." Furthermore, the players will take part in fitness and fielding sessions from 6am to 8am, while skill-based sessions (net practice) will be held from 2.30pm to 6.30pm at the LCCA Ground and NCA from Monday to Thursday. On Friday and Saturday, the players will feature in match scenarios at the LCCA Ground. The PCB further said that the camp for Pakistan men's team in preparation for the bilateral series against Bangladesh and the West Indies will be held in Karachi from 7 July. Camp for Pakistan Shaheens ahead of their tour to England will commence in Karachi from 10 July.

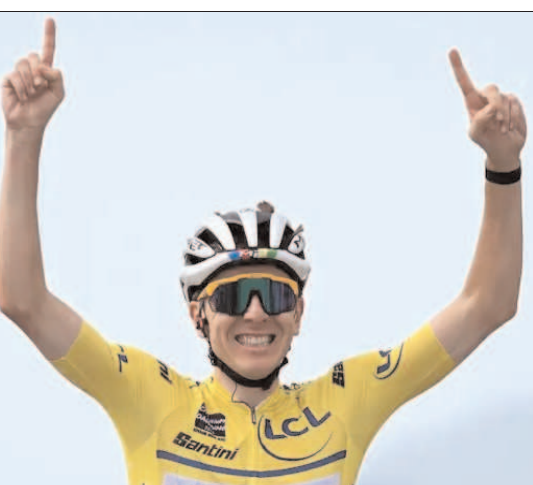
## Fifa, the Club World Cup and Saudi Arabia

LONDON (Agencies): Saudi Arabia's money appears to be underpinning the revamped Club World Cup. But why has the country helped to bankroll an event that has struggled to generate interest, drawing criticism for the impact it could have on players, domestic leagues, and the environment? For those wanting to understand the forces at play over the next month of competition in the US, Miami's Hard Rock Stadium on Wednesday would be an ideal place to start. That, after all, is where Real Madrid will kick off their Club World Cup campaign, with new signing Trent Alexander-Arnold set to make his debut. The fact the Spanish giants were willing to pay Liverpool a reported £8m to secure the defender's early release so he could play in the tournament is testament to the staggering riches on offer. With a prize pot of \$1bn (£750m), top European teams are in line to earn up to £97m if they win, leading to concerns such money could distort domestic leagues and skew competitive balance. Real's Saudi opponents - Al-Hilal - highlight another intriguing aspect of the tournament. The Riyadh club are owned by the kingdom's Public Investment Fund (PIF). But the vast sovereign wealth fund's involvement in this competition does not stop there. In December, sports streaming platform DAZN agreed to pay Fifa - football's world governing body - \$1bn for the tournament's global broadcast rights. That was not the only surprise, because it also promised to make the live action available for free. This despite Fifa having previously struggled to find broadcast partners, and after DAZN had posted several billion dollars worth of losses over recent years.

## ICC rejects India's bid, confirms England as host for next three WTC finals

LONDON (Agencies): The International Cricket Council (ICC) has rejected a proposal by the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) to host future editions of the World Test Championship (WTC) Final, reaffirming England as the home for the next three title matches in 2027, 2029, and 2031. Despite sustained lobbying by the BCCI and increasing demands from the global cricket community for a rotational hosting model, the ICC has opted to continue staging its marquee Test event in England, citing commercial advantages and logistical convenience. According to a media outlet, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) has already been privately informed of the decision, which is expected to be formally ratified during the ICC's Annual Conference in Singapore next month. Preparations for the 2027 WTC Final are set to begin once the ongoing 2025 final between Australia and South Africa at Lord's concludes. "English cricket is close to securing hosting rights for the next three WTC finals, despite India's strong interest in bringing the event home," the report stated, highlighting the ICC's prioritization of stability and profitability over geographic diversity. England has been the exclusive host of the WTC Finals since the tournament's inception, starting with Southampton in 2021 (New Zealand defeated India), The Oval in 2023 (Australia beat India), and the ongoing 2025 edition at Lord's. Ironically, despite being the consistent host, the England national team has yet to reach a WTC final. While BCCI had pushed to bring the final to Indian soil, especially given its massive cricketing audience and infrastructure, the ICC remained firm on keeping the event in England due to its central location, time zone suitability, and established venues. The final approval of this decision is anticipated at the Singapore conference, officially extending England's hold on the WTC Finals through the next three cycles.

## Tadej Pogacar wins second Dauphine stage to retain lead



VALMEINIER (Agencies): Slovenia's Tadej Pogacar consolidated his lead at the Criterium du Dauphine with a second consecutive stage victory in France. The reigning Tour de France and road world champion went clear 12 kilometres from the finish on the final ascent of Saturday's 132km 'Queen Stage' from Grand-Aigueblanche to Valmeinier. Slovenia's Pogacar eventually finished 14 seconds ahead of his closest rival, Denmark's Jonas Vingegaard. The UAE Team Emirates-XRG rider had taken the yellow jersey with a dominant victory in Friday's stage six and the 26-year-old now holds a lead of one minute and one second over the Visma-Lease a Bike man going into Sunday's final stage. "I launched it and maintained a good pace to the top," said Pogacar after securing his 98th career stage win, moving ahead of French sprinter Arnaud Demare for the most by an active rider. "Today Jonas was really strong. I did not want to go too deep myself. It was a super hot and long climb. Luckily, I had enough time to ease up in the last kilometres and recovered." "Happy I could defend the jersey like this." Germany's Florian Lipowitz was third in the stage but is two minutes and 21 seconds behind Pogacar while Remco Evenepoel lost more time and is now fourth overall, a further one minute and 50 seconds back. The race, a traditional warm-up for the Tour de France, which begins on Saturday, 5 July, concludes with another mountainous stage covering 133.3km from Val-d'Arc to the Plateau du Mont-Cenis. Stage seven results 1. T Pogacar (Slo/UAE Team Emirates-XRG) 4hrs 10mins 0secs, 2. J Vingegaard (Den/Team Visma-Lease a Bike) +14secs, 3. F Lipowitz (Ger/Red Bull-BORA-hansgrohe) +1min 21secs 4. T Halland Johannessen (Nor/Uno-X Mobility) +2mins 26secs 5. R Evenepoel (Bel/Soudal Quick-Step) +2mins 39secs 6. B Tulett (GB/Team Visma-Lease a Bike) +3mins 48secs 7. E Mas (Spa/Movistar Team) same time 8. E Buchmann (Ger/Cofidis) +3mins 51secs 9. C Rodriguez (Spa/Ineos Grenadiers) same time 10. G Martin-Guyonnet (Fra/Groupama-FDJ) same time General Classification after stage seven: 1. T Pogacar (Slo/UAE Team Emirates-XRG) 25hrs 44mins 58secs 2. J Vingegaard (Den/Team Visma-Lease a Bike) +1min 1sec 3. F Lipowitz (Ger/Red Bull-BORA-hansgrohe) +2mins 21 secs 4. R Evenepoel (Bel/Soudal Quick-Step) +4mins 11secs 5. T Halland Johannessen (Nor/Uno-X Mobility) +5mins 55secs 6. P Seixas (Fra/Decathlon AG2R La Mondiale Team) +6mins 50secs 7. M Jorgenson (USA/Team Visma-Lease a Bike) +7mins 18secs 8. B Tulett (GB/Team Visma-Lease a Bike) +7 mins 24 secs 9. C Rodriguez (Spa/INEOS Grenadiers) +7mins 41secs 10. E Mas (Spa/Movistar Team) +7mins 43 secs.

## Thunder rally to beat Pacers and level NBA Finals

NEW YORK (Agencies): Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 35 points as the Oklahoma City Thunder came from behind late on to beat the Indiana Pacers and level the NBA Finals. The Thunder won 111-104 at Gainbridge Fieldhouse in Indianapolis to tie the best-of-seven series at 2-2. They trailed by seven points entering the fourth quarter but outscored Indiana 31-17 in the last period, closing with a 12-1 run in the last three minutes. "I knew what it would have looked like if we lost tonight," said Gilgeous-Alexander. "I didn't want to go down not swinging." Thunder coach Mark Daigneaul gave Gilgeous-Alexander, this season's Most Valuable Player, a break late in the third quar-



ter rather than his usual rest early in the fourth. The Pacers led 101-97 with less than four minutes remaining, but Gilgeous-Alexander scored 15 of the Thunder's final 16 points and ended the game with 10 free-throws from 10 attempts.

Jalen Williams scored 27 points and made seven rebounds for the Thunder, while Alex Caruso added 20 points off the bench. Pascal Siakam led the Pacers with 20 points and Tyrese Haliburton 18. "We just didn't execute at the end of the

game," said Siakam. "We didn't get easy shots. The easy shots that we got, we missed them. And they made them." The Thunder host game five at Paycom Center in Oklahoma City at 19:30 local time on Monday (01:30 BST, Tuesday).





## In brief

### World Blood Donor Day observed

ISLAMABAD (APP): World Blood Donor Day was observed on Saturday in Pakistan and across the globe to raise awareness about the need of safe blood and blood products to save lives. This year's theme - Give Blood, Give Hope - highlights the life-changing impact blood donors have on those in need. The day was observed to raise awareness about the importance of blood donation and to urge more people to donate blood. The day also urges people to donate blood to help the constant supply of healthy blood for the healthcare industry. The annual observance aims to underscore the immense importance of blood donation and to encourage more people worldwide to become regular blood donors. Beyond immediate life-saving interventions, the day also serves as a crucial reminder of the necessity for a constant and healthy blood supply to support the broader healthcare industry, ensuring that medical facilities can meet ongoing patient demands.

### Wanted criminal arrested

RAWALPINDI (APP): Police have successfully arrested a wanted criminal involved in a murder case registered in December 2023. According to police, the accused, along with his accomplices, had opened fire over an old grudge, killing a citizen on the spot. Two of the accomplices had already been arrested earlier, while the main accused had been on the run. SP Rawal, Muhammad Haseeb Raja, said that the arrest was made using all available resources, including human intelligence. He added that the suspect will be presented in court soon, and the police have gathered solid evidence. The SP also appreciated the efforts of the investigation team of Waris Khan police station and reaffirmed the commitment to bring criminals to justice.

### Seven gamblers netted

RAWALPINDI (APP): Police have arrested seven gamblers during a crackdown carried out here on Saturday. According to a police spokesman, the accused were caught red-handed while gambling with cards. Police recovered Rs 41,000 in cash, six mobile phones, and playing cards from their possession. A case has been registered against all the suspects with Pirwadi police station and further investigation is underway. SP Rawal, Muhammad Haseeb Raja, praised the police team for their swift action and said the arrested individuals would be challaned with solid evidence. He added that gambling is often the root cause of other crimes and warned that strict action would be taken against such illegal activities without any discrimination.

### Two dacoits apprehended

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police on Saturday apprehended two suspects allegedly involved in a series of robberies and shop snatchings during a major operation carried out by Humak Police. An official told APP that the arrested suspects, identified as Muhammad Israr and Subhan Iqbal, were part of an organized gang operating in the area. Police recovered snatched cash, a laptop, mobile phones, and weapons along with ammunition used in various robberies from the suspects' possession. He said cases have been registered against the accused at Humak Police Station, and further investigations are underway.



ISLAMABAD: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar, chairs a meeting of the Committee for the Development and Management of the Hazrat Bari Imam Shrine. —APP Photo

## Work on Karachi-Hyderabad-Sukkur Motorways to start this year: Aleem Khan

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Communications Abdul Aleem Khan on Saturday said that in line with the promise to the public, the construction of the Karachi-Hyderabad-Sukkur Motorways would commence this year.

He added that the Islamic Development Bank has expressed willingness to fund the project while final decision regarding the loan approval is expected in September this year after its board meeting, said a press release issued here.

Commenting on the media talk of Chief Minister of Sindh regarding the Motorways, Abdul Aleem Khan expressed that as the Federal Minister, he takes responsibility for the past year only but does not want to comment on the inaction of previous Governments regarding the construction of the Sukkur, Hyderabad and Karachi Motorways.

He emphasized the corporate

importance of connecting Karachi Port to the National Motorway network, highlighting that without this connection, the Motorway's utility for import, export, and business would be of no use.

He pointed out that different political parties, including the Pakistan People Party remained in power but unfortunately, several years were wasted due to the failure to initiate these critical infrastructure projects like Motorways of Karachi-Hyderabad-Sukkur.

Abdul Aleem Khan reaffirmed the Federal Government's commitment to construct not only the Sukkur-Hyderabad Motorway but also the Hyderabad-Karachi section as well while the aim is to complete the entire route within two years. "Furthermore, the Northern Bypass will be converted into an 8-lane Highway and linked to the Hyderabad-Sukkur Motorway. He

added that the Sukkur-Hyderabad Motorway has been divided into 5 zones. The Islamic Development Bank will finance three of these zones while funding for the remaining two will be sought from other banks or donor agency".

The federal minister extended his thanks to the Chief Minister of Sindh and stated that the Federal Government would definitely not hesitate to request the Sindh Government's contribution of PKR 25 billion, if needed. He affirmed the Federal Government's desire to complete this USD 2 billion project as swiftly as possible through its own resources. Moreover, Abdul Aleem Khan stated that the National Highway Authority (NHA) is actively working on the Lyari Expressway. This project will also be upgraded to meet international standards and, upon completion will be presented as a gift to the people of Karachi.

## Police to ensure foolproof Muharram security: DIG

ISLAMABAD (APP): Deputy Inspector General (DIG) of Police, Muhammad Jawad Tariq, chaired a high-level meeting to review strategies for crime prevention and to finalize foolproof security arrangements for the upcoming holy month of Muharram.

An official told APP on Saturday that the meeting was attended by SSP Investigation, SSP Operations Islamabad, SP Security Operations, Zonal SPs, SDPOs, and SHOs. The participants discussed crime control strategies and comprehensive security planning during Muharram processions and gatherings.

DIG Tariq said that the arrest of hardened crimi-

nals, proclaimed offenders, and those with prior criminal records must be ensured at all costs. He emphasized that patrolling duties be made more effective and purposeful and that every officer must be visible in the field.

DIG Tariq said that crackdown operations must be launched against active criminal gangs. Arrests must be ensured of those involved in possessing illegal weapons, displaying arms publicly, and selling narcotics, he added.

DIG Tariq directed that all available resources be utilized for eliminating crimes and maintaining peace in the federal capital.

DIG Tariq said that all

officers must coordinate with the organizers of Imambargahs and strengthen liaison with the community to ensure peaceful observance of Muharram.

DIG Tariq instructed police officials to play their due role in maintaining a secure and peaceful environment during the holy month. He also directed that concrete measures be taken to provide maximum protection to Majalis and mourning processions.

DIG Tariq said that strict action must be taken against aerial firing, hooliganism, and one-wheeling, adding that protection of life and property of citizens remains the top priority of Islamabad Police.

## PHA striving to make Rawalpindi beautiful

RAWALPINDI (APP): Parks and Horticulture Authority (PHA) Rawalpindi is taking special steps to decorate and beautify parks and green belts across the city and provide the best recreational facilities to the public.

On the special instructions of DG PHA Ahmed Hassan Ranjha, PHA has completed the decoration of Gulzar-e-Fatima Ladies Park and magnificent horticulture work.

The colorful and lush flowers in Gulzar-e-Fatima Ladies Park look like the spring of plants and the lush environment has increased the beauty of the park, the decoration, the beautiful flowers that captivate the heart and the lush scenery have become the center of public attention, people flock to Gulzar-e-Fatima Ladies Park in the evenings and enjoy the best recreational facilities.

PHA has also made excellent security arrangements in Gulzar-e-Fatima Ladies Park, so that those who come to the park for entertainment can feel safe.

In addition, the PHA staff also diligently carries out horticulture work and care for flowers and plants.

DG PHA Ahmed Hassan Ranjha said that all necessary steps are being taken for the convenience and entertainment of the public.

PHA is trying to make Rawalpindi beautiful and green and provide a good entertainment environment to the public.

## Kundi assures support to Foreign Medical Graduates

ISLAMABAD (APP): Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Faisal Karim Kundi, in a meeting with Dr. Tahir Sikandari, President of the Foreign Medical Young Doctors Association (FMYDA), at Governor House here on Saturday discussed the challenges faced by young doctors who have graduated from foreign medical institutions.

During the meeting, Dr. Sikandari highlighted the pressing issues encountered by foreign medical graduates, particularly the lack of honorary house job opportunities provided by the provincial government. In response, Governor Kundi assured that he would engage with senior officials to address the issue and find a viable solution.

Dr. Sikandari also raised concerns about the Pakistan Medical and Dental Council's (PMDC) recent decision to increase the passing marks for the

licensing exam from 50% to 70%, calling it an unfair move that would severely impact foreign graduates.

Governor Kundi promptly contacted Federal Health Minister Mustafa Kamal to convey these concerns and affirmed his commitment to resolving the matter through all available channels.

Dr. Sikandari expressed gratitude to Governor Kundi for his swift action and continued support, particularly for immediately engaging with the federal minister to advocate for the rights and welfare of foreign-trained young doctors.

Meanwhile, Former student leader and prominent figure of the Pashtun community in Karachi, Malik Arshad Kundi, met with the Governor Faisal Karim Kundi, at the Governor House in Islamabad.

During the meeting, Malik Arshad Kundi briefed the Governor on the

challenges faced by people from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa who are permanently settled in Sindh, particularly in Karachi.

He highlighted various social and administrative issues affecting the Pashtun population in the region.

Governor Faisal Karim Kundi assured him that he remains in regular contact with the Sindh government and the provincial leadership of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) to address the concerns of Pashtun residents in Sindh.

He emphasized that he has played an active role in resolving these issues in the past and will continue to make every effort in the future as well. On this occasion, Malik Arshad Kundi expressed his gratitude to the Governor and stated that his efforts are a source of pride for the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the Pashtun community across the country.

## Israeli aggression brings region to brink of war: Gul

RAWALPINDI (APP): The chairman of Tehreek e Jawanan Pakistan (TJP) and senior defense analyst Mohammad Abdullah Hamid Gul has strongly condemned the Israeli airstrike on Iran, calling it a serious threat to peace and stability in the Middle East. He called the attack not only on Iran's sovereignty but also a moment of reflection for the entire Muslim world.

On Friday morning, the Israeli Air Force targeted several sensitive sites in Iran. According to Israeli media, the attack was carried out under "Operation Rising Line," which included the Natanz nuclear facility, military command centers, missile installations and scientific

research offices. The attack killed two top generals of the Revolutionary Guards and two key scientists associated with the nuclear program, while several civilians, including women and children, were also targeted.

Mehmet Abdullah Gul said, "Israel has once again proven that it does not hesitate to trample on international law, the UN Charter and diplomatic values in the name of power."

He called on the international community to take immediate and effective measures, including calling for emergency meetings by the UN, OIC, EU and other bodies and increasing diplomatic pressure on Israel.

Reports of retaliatory drone strikes by Iran have further complicated the situation. At the same time, there has been a strong reaction in global markets: crude oil prices have risen by 8%, while stock markets have been plunged into uncertainty.

Abdullah Gul suggested that Pakistan, Turkey, China and other regional powers form a peace mission to pave the way for negotiations between the parties. He said:

"The use of force can never be a means of lasting peace. The world must now return to the principles of diplomacy, justice and peace, otherwise humanity stands on the threshold of another devastating war."

## Retail payment model launched to aid BISP beneficiaries

ISLAMABAD (APP): In a significant operational shift, the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) has transitioned from campsite-based disbursements to a fully retail network payment model, aimed at protecting beneficiaries from the ongoing heatwave gripping the region. The move will take effect from Monday, said a news release.

The decision was announced during a high-level coordination meeting held in Bahawalpur, chaired by Additional Secretary BISP, Dr. Tahir Noor. The meeting was attended by representatives from partner banks, zonal officials, and field staff of BISP. The session focused on finalizing arrangements for the disbursement of the

fourth quarter tranche through bank-designated retail agents.

Dr. Tahir Noor said the new model ensures that beneficiaries can collect their payments from the nearest authorized retail outlets, minimizing travel and exposure to extreme weather. He emphasized that transparency and accountability remain central to BISP operations.

"Every beneficiary must receive her full entitlement along with a printed receipt," he directed, reaffirming the organization's commitment to fiscal discipline and the protection of beneficiaries' rights.

Partner banks presented detailed briefings on their readiness, including the deployment of retail agents, biometric verifica-

tion systems, fund allocation mechanisms, and real-time monitoring tools.

They also discussed outreach strategies to raise awareness among beneficiaries about the new payment mechanism.

The meeting concluded with a unified pledge by all stakeholders to ensure efficient, transparent, and timely delivery of funds.

Officials noted that the retail model reflects BISP's proactive approach to improving governance and service delivery while addressing both operational and environmental challenges. Also present at the meeting were the Zonal Director South, District Director Bahawalpur, and Deputy Director (Field Operations).

## RDA files FIR against Bostan Avenue Housing scheme owners

RAWALPINDI (APP): On the directions of the Director General, Rawalpindi Development Authority (RDA), the Land Directorate, RDA has initiated legal proceedings against the owners of the private Housing Scheme Bostan Avenue.

An FIR has been lodged at the Airport Police Station under the provisions of the Punjab Development of Cities Act, 1976.

The management of the Bostan Avenue Housing Scheme has continuously failed to comply with the legal requirements man-

dated by the RDA, including submission of the transfer deed, mortgage deed, and registration documentation.

Despite repeated notices and directives from the authority, the scheme owners did not fulfill their legal obligations nor cooperated with the RDA.

Additionally, the housing scheme has violated the approved layout plan, posing a potential threat to the rights and interests of the general public. Due to these violations and non-compliance, the RDA was compelled to take strict legal action to safeguard

the rights of citizens and ensure urban planning regulations are enforced.

The DG RDA has directed that all housing schemes operating under RDA jurisdiction must be legally registered and will only be permitted to function upon completion of all required documentation. RDA is fully committed to protecting the general public interest and will continue to take indiscriminate action against illegal housing schemes. The RDA urges citizens to verify the legal status of any housing scheme before making investment decisions.

## Regional Drama Festival concludes

RAWALPINDI (APP): A grand closing ceremony of the Regional Drama Festival was organized by the Punjab Council of the Arts, Rawalpindi. The festival was organized on the special instructions of Madam Azma Bukhari, Minister for Information and Culture, with the aim of reviving family theater and providing healthy, clean and quality entertainment to the public.

A total of 13 drama teams participated in the festival, who performed plays based on various social and societal themes while showcasing their art in a full-fledged manner.

Malik Iftikhar Ahmed, Parliamentary Secretary for Auqaf and Religious Affairs, was the chief guest at the closing ceremony. He presented certificates of appreciation and shields to all participating artists,

directors and members of the Drama Scrutiny Committee and said that artists are a valuable asset of our country who use their skills to promote Pakistani culture and bring glory to the country and nation. Prominent personalities who attended the event included Founder of Arts Council Naheed Manzoor, renowned poet Dr. Afshan, former Director of Arts Council Chaudhry Waqar Ahmed, PTV's News Producer Malik Waqar, PNCA officers, President of Rawalpindi Islamabad Union of Generalists Abid Abbasi, renowned artists, poets and writers of Rawalpindi Islam and appreciated the Punjab government for organizing the successful festival. The plays presented in this festival include Yar Muhammad's drama Rishte Aur

Ferishte, Anjum Malik's Ek Jhut So Jhut, Saeed Anwar's Main Ek Fankar Hoon, Aslam Mughal's Jhut Moot, Tahir Siddiqui's Namaish, Munawar Afridi's Shareekun Naun Aag Lag Gayi, Saleem Affandi's Zameen Ka Karz, Sabir Khan's Main Ek Mian Hoon, Rahat Khan's Sar Par Pairr, Arshad Minhas' Balkara, Pervaiz William's Gunjhalan, Shazia Sheikh's Andheray Kay Roop and Suleman Sunny's drama Neet Shouq.

Addressing the closing ceremony, Director PAC, Rawalpindi Muhammad Shakoor expressed special gratitude to all the distinguished guests, drama teams, members of the scrutiny committee, media, journalists and attendees and said that this festival is an important step for the promotion of fine arts and positive entertainment.



ISLAMABAD: Vendor busy mixing eggs to prepare burgers at their roadside food stall near Ghauri Town in the Federal Capital. —APP Photo



Taliban condemn strikes

KABUL (Amu TV): Taliban on Friday condemned Israel’s military strikes on Iran, calling them a clear violation of international law and a threat to regional stability. In a statement, Taliban said the attacks represented “a blatant breach of the fundamental principles of international law, particularly the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states.” Taliban also referenced the ongoing conflict in Gaza, where Israeli bombardments have continued for months.

Suspected killer arrested

KABUL (Pajhwok): The suspect accused of murdering Kobra Rezaei, an Afghan migrant residing in Iran, has been arrested and reportedly confessed to the crime during interrogation, say Iranian authorities. The Young Journalists Club cited Seyed Akbar Arabi, the police commander of Pishva district in Tehran, as saying that the suspect was identified and swiftly arrested through coordinated intelligence and operational efforts by law enforcement.

Over 632,000 Afghan migrants returned from Iran in five months

KABUL (TOLONews): The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that more than 632,000 Afghan migrants returned from Iran in the first five months of this year alone. Many of these returns have taken place without proper legal procedures, and returning migrants have complained of mistreatment and harsh conditions in Iran. Faramarz Barzin, spokesperson for UNHCR, told TOLONews: “From January 1 to May 31, 2025, more than 632,000 people have returned from Iran to Afghanistan. If we calculate the daily average since April 1, around 5,500 individuals return from Iran each day.” Similarly, the International Organization for Migration has reported an increase in the return of Afghan migrants from Iran, stating that in May alone, over 15,000 families returned to Afghanistan. Yasin and Abdullah, two friends from the same province, had migrated to Iran two years ago due to lack of job opportunities in Afghanistan and have recently returned. They were arrested about a month ago in Iran and deported along with dozens of other migrants. Yasin told TOLONews: “They deported us from Kerman to Zahedan, and from Zahedan to Afghanistan. They didn’t provide proper food, and the police treated us badly. We worked for two years, but our employer still has our money. There are no jobs here either.” Abdullah, another deported migrant, said: “We ask the Islamic Emirate to create job opportunities here so we don’t have to go to Iran again.” Some migrant rights activists have urged host countries, especially Iran, to treat Afghan migrants with dignity and humanity. Mohammad Khan Talebi Mohammadzai, a migrant rights activist, told TOLONews: “Considering human dignity, host governments must respect Article 2 of the Human Rights Charter and postpone such deportations.” Earlier, Iranian authorities announced that all Afghan migrants holding a return permit must leave the country by July 6, 2025 (15 Saratan 1404).

Flour, fuel, gold prices up

KABUL (Pajhwok): The prices of Kazakh flour, fuel and gold increased in Kabul during the outgoing week, market sources said on Saturday. Fuel A worker at the Ahmad-yar pump station told Pajhwok the rate of one litre of petrol surged from 58afis to 59afis, and the diesel price went up from 57afis to 59afis. He added the price of one kilogram of liquefied gas increased from 46afis to 48afis. Food items Zmarai Safi, head of the Food Traders’ Association, said the price of a 49-kg sack of Kazakh jumped from 1,300afis to 1,350afis. The price of a 24-kg bag of Pakistani rice remained unchanged at 2,600afis. A 49-kilogram bag of Indian sugar also remained stable at 2,500afis and, a 16-litre bottle of Malaysian cooking cost 1,600afis. – The same rate as last week’s. He added one kilogram of African black tea accounted for 400afis and the same amount of Indonesian green tea for 350afis. Hamid Sufizada, a retailer at Dahna-i-Bagh market, put the retail price of a 49-kg bag of flour at 1,400afis, a 24-kg bag of rice at 2,650afis and a 49-kg sack of sugar at 2,550afis. A 16-litre bottle of cooking oil cost 1,650afis, he said, adding one kilogram of black tea accounted for 400afis and the same quantity of green tea for 450afis. Gold up Mohammad Fawad, a jeweller in Timor Shahi area, said the price of one gram of Russian gold increased from 4,700afis to 4,850afis and the same amount of Arabian gold went up from 5,950afis to 6,200afis. Afghani vs dollar Haji Mohammad Hussain, owner of the Sadaqat Money Exchange Service, said one US dollar was traded at 70,20afis and 1,000 Pakistani rupees at 240afis against their previous week’s rates of 69afis and 240afis.

Afghan embassy in Turkey resumes passport issuance



KABUL (Ariana News): The Embassy of Afghanistan in Turkey has resumed the issuance of passports to Afghan citizens after a four-year suspension, the mission announced late Friday. Passport services at the embassy had been halted in 2021 following the collapse of the previous Afghan government and the fall of Kabul to the Islamic Emirate. In February this year, a foreign ministry official in Kabul said the Islamic Emirate’s diplomats at the Afghanistan embassy in Ankara provide consular services and represent the country. It came after the embassy said in a statement that all diplomats appointed by the previous government would end their missions.

Farah families reconcile, resolve 18 years feud



FARAH CITY (Pajhwok): Two families have reconciled and ended their 18-year-old enmity through the mediation of religious scholars, local officials and tribal elders in western Farah province. The conflict began after the killing of a member of one family. Maulvi Sharafuddin, deputy of the Farah Ulema Council, thanked both parties for their restraint and for foregoing revenge during the ceremony, saying, “Those who worked towards ending this enmity deserve appreciation and praise.” He also highlighted the harms and consequences of such feuds from an Islamic perspective, emphasizing that resolving these disputes leads to peaceful coexistence in society. Maulvi Abdul Hai Sabawon, head of the Information and Culture Department of Farah province, explained that the feud started 18 years ago between the families of Abdul Sattar and Haji Abdullah Jan, residents of Nahagh village in Pasht Rod district, following the killing of a member from one side. According to him, although one party fled the area after the incident, through persistent efforts by elders and local officials, this long-standing feud was finally resolved, with both parties pardoning each other. Meanwhile, both families expressed regret and remorse over the years of enmity and welcomed the efforts of the elders and officials in bringing peace.

Afghanistan-Iran trade exceeds \$3 billion annually: Iran officials

KABUL (TOLONews): According to Iranian officials, trade between the two countries exceeds \$3 billion annually. This would make Afghanistan Iran’s second largest economic partner after Iraq. The CEO of the Dogharoun Free Trade-Industrial Zone emphasized that Iranian export goods reach Afghanistan’s 40-million-person market through the region’s border crossing. He noted that 90% of Iran’s exports to Afghanistan are transported via Dogharoun to Herat province. Mohammad Nabi Afghan, an economic analyst, told TOLONews: “Our trade with Iran reaches \$3 billion annually—that figure is accurate. Our imports are high and exports low, mainly because Iran already produces much of what we have to offer. There is no serious barrier, and our exports to Iran can exceed \$50 million.” Afghan traders also stress the need to resolve transportation challenges. They believe that if these issues are addressed, Iran can become a significant market for Afghan goods. Omid Haidari, a trader, said: “We urge the Afghan government to secure practical commitments from Iran. Just as Afghanistan provides a good market for Iran, Iran should also offer opportunities for Afghan exports and support Afghan farmers. This would enable us to export to Iran and also use it as a transit route.” Afghanistan’s main exports to Iran include mineral stones, raisins, non-alcoholic beverages, vegetable seeds, sesame, and mung beans. Imports from Iran primarily consist of diesel, petrol, raw materials for factories, liquefied gas, auto parts, and machinery.

200 fruit orchards established in Balkh

BALKH (BNA): Officials from the Department of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock of Balkh province say that this year, in collaboration with partner organizations and institutions, they have established 200 new standard fruit orchards in the province. Mohammad Hossein Azimi, the agricultural extension manager of the Department of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock of Balkh, told a Bakhtar News Agency reporter that these orchards were created in the districts of Chimtall, Charbolak, and New Balkh. He stated that 25% of them are apricot orchards, while the rest include apple, cherry, peach, and sour cherry orchards. He added that improved saplings and trees have been planted in these orchards, which not only yield more fruit but also play a significant role in greening the environment, supporting the ecosystem, and addressing climate change. Meanwhile, several orchard owners in Balkh province have expressed satisfaction with the establishment of these orchards and the support of the Department of Agriculture. They also called for the promotion and planting of saplings that require less water.

Mother, child drown in Kapisa river

MAHMOOD RAQI (Pajhwok): A mother and her child have died, and the body of another person who went missing six days ago has been recovered from the Sayed River in central Kapisa province, an official said on Saturday. Police spokesman Abdul Fattah Fayeze told Pajhwok Afghan News that the incident occurred after a child from a family picnicking by the Gulbahar River in the Hesa-i-Awal Kohistan district was swept away by the flowing water. He said the mother attempted to rescue the child but also drowned. Both lost their lives, and their bodies were retrieved by security forces and local residents. Fayeze added that the body of a 19-year-old man named Shakibullah, a resident of Khoshak village in the Qamchaq Valley of Siyagar district, Parwan province, who had drowned last week, was also recovered from the river in Miana Qala-i-Shokhi village. In the past two weeks, six people — including the three mentioned — have died in drowning incidents across Kapisa province. Fayeze noted that due to the risks, the police have installed warning signs in various areas, particularly near the Sayed River and other flood-prone zones, to raise awareness among visitors. However, he said, public disregard for these warnings has contributed to the rise in such incidents.

Child laborers seek government’s support

KABUL (Pajhwok): A number of child laborers say the government should assist them, while the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs says subjecting children to hard labor is unlawful and calls on international institutions to fulfill their responsibility in addressing the stigma. June 12 is marked World Day against Child Labor. The International Labor Organization named this day after it in 2002. National and international laws prohibit hard labor that harms children’s mental development and physical health and prevents them from studying. According to reports, the number of child laborers is higher in countries with low incomes. Afghanistan is also one of the countries where many children do hard labor, but the exact number is not known. What child laborers say? Ahmad Javed, an 11-year-old resident of Maimana city who sells fruit juice on a hand-cart, says that he comes to the city after morning prayers and sells fruit juice until evening. “I sell energy juice and ear 100 to 200 afghanis and take the money home. God is kind, it is enough.” “I want the government to give us something so that I can go to school and I want to become an engineer, or a doctor, or a teacher in the future; I want my future to be built.” 11-year-old Abida, wear-

ing old clothes, shines people’s shoes in Maimana, the capital of Faryab. “We came to Faryab from Badakhshan, I have one brother and two sisters. My father is ailing and my mother works in people’s houses. I shine shoes and earn 30 to 40 afghanis, I take it home and buy food with it.” “I hope to become a teacher or a doctor and educate people,” she says. Abu Bakr, a 10-year-old resident of Kabul’s Taif Maskin neighborhood, who carries people’s goods on his handcart in the vegetable and fruit market, says he works from till 1pm and then goes to a madrasa and school to study. He described his work tiring and said he earned 100 afghanis a day. Abu Bakr says: “I ask the Islamic Emirate to find a job for my father so I can study.” Mohammad Kazim, a 9-year-old who carries people’s goods on his handcart in the vegetable and fruit market, also says after work he goes to school in the evening. He sometimes earns 100 or 200 afghanis a day. “Pushing handcart loaded with goods is hard, it makes me tired and exhausted.” Like Abu Bakr, Kazim also wants the government to find a job for his father so that he can study. Fourteen-year-old Shafiqullah, a resident of Kandahar city, says he has been working in a water machine and generator workshop that for the past five years against 300 afghanis a month to learn a skill. According to him, he is not studying because he does not have the time and there is no opportunity for him to work and study at the same time. He says that his father works in a motorcycle workshop but cannot meet the family’s needs. He is asking the government to create a work plan for children so that they can learn skills and also earn some income for their families. Adil: The situation of child laborers is worrying Afghanistan Federation of Trade Union president Mohammad Liaqat Adil said the situation of child laborers in the country was

a matter of serious concern. He says: “Unemployment in the country, lack of adequate wages, awareness, lack of attention from international officials, lack of transparent spending of international aid, and poor economic conditions of families have played a role in the increase in child laborers.” Ebrahimi: Employing children in hard labor is a legal violation Samiullah Ibrahim, spokesman for the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, said that inspectors from the ministry visit areas where children are engaged in hard labor. According to him, these inspectors give necessary instructions to ‘employers’ to prevent hard labor, and if they repeatedly employ children in hard labor, it is considered a legal violation and the inspectors take action against them. He added: “In order to address the problems of children who are engaged in hard labor and are mostly unsupervised, the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs has activated orphanages in all provinces, including Kabul, where more than ten thousand orphans and unsupervised children are cared for.” Ibrahim said that orphanages have also been activated in Kabul and 14 other provinces for orphans and unsupervised girls, and all services are provided by women. He said that these children are provided with edu-

cation, health, housing, food and drink from the budget of the ministry. He said: “Addressing the problems of all these children at the same time with limited resources is not inevitable. International institutions and organizations which are responsible for addressing the problems of children at the global level should discharge their responsibility in coordination with the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and increase their cooperation and coordination in this area.” He says that the ministry is responsible for addressing children’s problems at the national level and has addressed 40,000 children’s cases in the past four years.





LAHORE: Chairman Prime Minister Youth Programme, Rana Mashood Ahmad called on Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

## PPP not to support federal budget if demands are not met: Sindh CM

**F.P. Report**

KARACHI: Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah has threatened that PPP will not support the federal budget if their demands, including withdrawal of proposed 18 per cent tax on solar panels, are not fulfilled by the Centre.

Addressing his post-budget press conference in Karachi on Saturday, CM Murad Ali Shah said "Sindh is not a colony of the Federation as the province is not getting its full share from the Centre." Putting up a long list of complaints against the Centre, the chief minister said first Rs30 billion were allocated for Hyderabad-Sukkur Motorway and this allocation was reduced to Rs15 billion. "If the trend persists this project would not complete even in next 12 years," he added.

Murad Ali Shah said making the provincial budget for the next financial year (FY), 2025-26, was not a cakewalk. He said that one day prior to the day he was going to make the budget speech, he was told by the federal government through a letter that the Centre would not give Rs1,901 billion, but Rs1796.1 billion to the province, which was Rs105 billion less than what the province was going to receive from the federal government. "We collect taxes for the Centre. But the latter reduced our share," he said, adding, "This will definitely adversely affect the development budget for the next FY. We planned to announce a surplus budget this year. However, the federal government's decision did not allow this to happen." He said that the provincial government was about to complete 1,400 development projects during the ongoing FY.

He informed that Rs1,018 billion had been earmarked in the budget for development projects in the next FY. The chief minister said that as per the terms and conditions reached with the IMF, provinces have to save amounts rather than spending them. He further

said that despite so many constraints, the provincial government announced 12 per cent raise in the salaries of government employees. "The officers of grade 17 and above will get a 10 per cent raise in their pay, while their pensions have been upped by eight per cent."

CM Murad said that education topped the list of the provincial government's priorities, followed by health. "Next came the turn of local bodies and interior," he added. He went on to say that the budget for the energy sector was increased. "We have cut non-development expenditures." The chief minister informed that Rs103 billion would be spent on the education sector in the next financial year, while Rs132 billion on local government (LG).

He said that there was less production of important crops this year. "We have also given priority to the agriculture sector in the budget," CM Murad informed that there were special instructions from PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto to give priority to clean drinking water in the budget. "An amount of Rs90 billion has been set aside for water schemes." He told the media men that hefty amounts had also been allocated for Karachi in the budget.

He lamented that the opposition raised a hue and cry over what it called a lesser allocation of money for Karachi. "This it did without going through the document. Read it properly and you will come to know what is written in it," he said, adding, "Karachi is my city. And I have never thought of neglecting the city." Answering the objections raised by the opposition, the chief minister said that the construction of Shahr-e-Bhutto had been completed up to Quidabad locality of the city. "The project will cost the government Rs65 billion," he said, and added, "Marble City is another scheme which is meant for Karachi."

"Rs54 billion will be spent on different schemes in the port city under

the public-private partnership," he informed. The chief minister informed that Rs236 billion would be spent on the provincial capital's development projects in the next fiscal year. The total volume of the next FY's budget is Rs3.45 trillion. "Out of which, an amount of Rs1 trillion has been earmarked for development purposes."

He informed that presently the provincial government's expenditures stood at Rs2,150 trillion. "A large chunk of this amount is spent on the salaries and pensions of the government employees," he said, adding, "Rs1.1 trillion will be spent on the payment of salaries and pensions in the next financial year." Despite difficulties, the CM went on to say, the provincial government took a difficult decision of increasing the salaries of its employees, from grade 1 to grade 16, by 12 per cent.

"We have allocated 11 per cent more amount for the health sector in the budget for the next FY," he said, adding, "The amount earmarked for the LG is up by five per cent; for home department by 15.50 per cent, and for the energy sector by 16.50 per cent." Likewise, the chief minister added, the budget for the agriculture sector had been increased by Rs16 billion.

He informed that under its housing scheme, the provincial government had so far allotted 500,000 homes to the deserving people, while 800,000 were near completion. "The World Bank MD has herself witnessed these homes," he said, adding, "Not only were homes built, but the people were also given their ownership rights." CM Murad claimed that nowhere in the world, the construction of houses had been completed at such a brisk pace. He informed that the government planned to provide clean drinking water to 45,000 villages in Sindh. He said that no new tax had been imposed in the budget. "The government has reduced tax on restaurants."

## Israel kills 58 people in Gaza

GAZA: Israeli fire and air strikes have killed at least 58 Palestinians across the Gaza Strip, many of them near an aid distribution site operated by the United States-backed Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF), according to local health authorities, the latest deaths of people desperately seeking food for their hungry families.

Medics at al-Awda and Al-Aqsa hospitals in central Gaza, where most of the casualties were moved to, said at least 15 people were killed on Saturday as they tried to approach the GHF aid distribution site near the so-called Netzarim Corridor. The rest were killed in separate attacks across the besieged and bombed enclave, they added. Since the GHF started operations last month, at least 274 people have been killed and more than 2,000 wounded near aid distribution sites, according to a statement by the Gaza Ministry of Health.

The GHF said they were closed on Saturday. But witnesses said thousands of people had gathered near the sites anyway, desperate for food as Israel's punishing 15-week blockade and military campaign have driven the territory to the brink of famine. Al Jazeera's Tareq Abu Azzoum, reporting from Deir el-Balah, said Palestinians are starting to see GHF distribution hubs as "execution sites," considering the repeated attacks there. But people in Gaza "have run out of options, and they are forced to travel to these dangerous humanitarian spaces to get aid".

Israel imposed a full humanitarian blockade on Gaza on March 2 for 11 weeks, cutting off food, medical supplies and other aid. It began allowing small amounts of aid into the enclave in late May following international pressure, but humanitarian organisations say it is only a tiny fraction of the aid that is needed.

There has been no immediate comment by the Israeli military or the GHF on Saturday's incidents. The GHF – a United States and Israel-backed organisation led by Johnnie Moore, an evangelical Christian who advised US President Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign – began distributing food packages in Gaza on May 27, over-seeing a new model of aid distribution which the United Nations says is neither impartial nor neutral. Israel and the United States say the new system is intended to replace the UN-run network. They have accused Hamas, without providing evidence, of siphoning off the UN-provided aid and reselling it to fund its military activities. Israel has also admitted to backing armed gangs in Gaza, known for criminal activities, to undermine Hamas. These groups have been blamed for looting aid. UN officials deny Hamas has diverted significant amounts of aid and say the new system is unable to meet mounting needs. They say it has militarised aid by allowing Israel to decide who has access and by forcing Palestinians to travel long distances or relocate again after waves of displacement. — Al Jazeera

## Muzzammil terms KP budget realistic

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: Advisor to the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for Finance and Inter-Provincial Coordination, Muzzammil Aslam, has said that the province's economic performance is directly influenced by the federal government's policies, which have remained unsatisfactory over the past three years. Speaking at a post-budget press briefing in Peshawar, he stated that the national growth rate of 2.7% has been deemed disappointing by both economists and media analysts, adding that without improved national growth, economic performance cannot be expected to improve.

He criticized the federal government for completely ignoring Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in its development budget. Out of a national development allocation of Rs. 1,000 billion, only Rs. 550 million were earmarked for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa under the Public Sector Development Program (PSDP). "The federal government has two key responsibilities toward the province—PSDP funding and development allocations for the merged districts—yet both have been neglected," he added.

Muzzammil Aslam pointed out that while the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) have been administratively merged into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, financial integration has not taken place. "The federal government released only Rs. 66 billion for the merged districts' recurring expenses, whereas the province had to contribute an additional Rs. 47 billion from its own resources. Furthermore, Rs. 20 billion were spent from the province funds in AIP in the absence of federal funds," he explained.

Highlighting the federal government's shortfall in tax collection, Aslam said that a Rs. 1,000 billion shortfall at the national level resulted in a Rs. 90 billion revenue loss for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. However,

despite these setbacks, the provincial government initiated significant financial reforms, including the establishment of a Debt Management Fund, where Rs. 150 billion have been allocated.

Responding to criticism regarding provincial borrowing, the advisor clarified that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's total debt stands at Rs. 709 billion, which is proportionate to the size of its economy. "No new debt has been taken; what we received are disbursements of previously agreed loans. Future borrowing will only be undertaken for mega projects and will not be diverted elsewhere," he assured.

On the Sehat Card program, he shared that while the actual expenditure stood at Rs. 24 billion, Rs. 53 billion have been allocated in the new budget to ensure its smooth continuation. Presenting the budget figures, he said that the total revenue target for FY 2025–26 is Rs. 2,119 billion—21% higher than the previous year. Federal transfers are expected to be Rs. 1,506 billion, while the province has set a local revenue target of Rs. 129 billion.

Total expenditure is estimated at Rs. 1,962 billion—19% more than the previous year—with current expenditure at Rs. 1,415 billion, including Rs. 1,255 billion for settled districts and Rs. 160 billion for the merged districts.

Speaking on the provincial annual development program, the finance advisor praised Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur's leadership. He said the CM conducted extensive consultations at district, divisional, and constituency levels with public representatives to identify priority projects, resulting in the most comprehensive planning process in the province's history. A record Rs. 547 billion has been allocated for development, which is 31% more than the previous year. Of this, Rs. 39.6 billion has been earmarked for the merged districts.

## Pakistan wants resolution of Kashmir issue: Bilawal

BRUSSELS (APP): The head of the Pakistan parliamentary delegation and former foreign minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari on Saturday apprised the international community that Pakistan wanted permanent peace in South Asia region, resolution of longstanding Kashmir issue, water problems and terrorism through composite dialogue but India was not ready in this regard.

Addressing the press conference to international media in Brussels, the Chairman of Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP) called the internationally community to play its vital role and to engage with India and emphasize that military confrontation was not a solution to the Kashmir dispute or terrorism, stressing that dialogue was the only way forward. It was a moral obligation, he said that all international community should play its part

to encourage both sides to engage in dialogue through diplomacy for peace in the region, adding that Pakistan wanted bilateral composite dialogue to tackle the issues on table.

"Escalation is not a solution of the issues confronting between two nuclear states," Bilawal stressed. Former Foreign Minister said that Pakistan was desirous of durable peace in the sub-continent, but not escalation or weaponization of water. The United States (US) was willing for mediation on Kashmir dispute, but India had always adopted non-serious attitude to sort out the problems with Pakistan, he highlighted.

He said that following the stand off with India, Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif nominated a parliamentary delegation from Pakistan to advocate for the peace in the region through engaging with

international community by urging them to play role in defusing tension between two countries. "We believe that there is no military solution of Kashmir, terrorism and water issues between India and Pakistan. During the five days misadventures between two nuclear powers, international community had taken serious steps for finally made ceasefire between two countries," the PPP chairman added.

He said that Kashmir dispute was pending on the agenda of the UN since many decades. He urged the UN to make the Kashmir issue a top most agenda for its peaceful settlement. Following the terrorists' attacks in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IOJK), he said, the prime minister publically offered for impartial investigation into Pahalgam incident but India say no.

## Tehran will burn

(Continued from Page 1)

responders agency, the Magen David Adom, said on private Israeli television channel 12 that 21 people were injured by the missiles, including two in serious condition.

Iran and Israel targeted each other with airstrikes early on Saturday (Jun 14) after Israel launched its biggest-ever offensive against its long-time foe in a bid to prevent it from developing a nuclear weapon. Air raid sirens sounded in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, the country's two largest cities before dawn, sending residents rushing into shelters. The military said its air defence systems were operating, seeking to intercept Iranian missiles.

"In the last hour, dozens of missiles have been launched at the state of Israel from Iran, some of which were intercepted," the Israeli military said. It said rescue teams were operating at a number of locations across the country where fallen projectiles were reported, without commenting on casualties. Several explosions were heard in the Iranian capital Tehran, the semi-official Tasnim news agency reported. The Fars news agency said two projectiles hit Tehran's Mehrabad airport, and Iranian media said flames were reported there. Close to key Iranian leadership sites, the airport hosts an air force base with fighter jets and transport aircraft.

Israeli media said a suspected missile came down in Tel Aviv, and a Reuters witness heard a loud boom in Jerusalem. It was unclear whether Iranian strikes or Israeli defensive measures were behind the activity. The Fars news agency said Tehran launched a third wave of airstrikes on Saturday after two salvos on Friday night. Those were in response to Israel's attacks on Iran early on Friday against commanders, nuclear scientists, military targets and nuclear sites. In central Tel Aviv, a high-rise building was hit during a wave of the missile attacks, damaging the lower third of the structure, which stands in a densely populated urban area. An apartment block in nearby Ramat Gan was destroyed. Israel's ambulance service said 34 people were injured on Friday night in the Tel Aviv area, most with minor injuries. Police later said one person had died.

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The United States military helped shoot down Iranian missiles headed for Israel on Friday, two US officials said. Israel's military said Iran fired fewer than 100 missiles on Friday and that most were intercepted or fell short. Several buildings in and around Tel Aviv were hit. The Israeli strikes on Iran throughout the day and the Iranian retaliation raised fears of a broader regional conflagration, although Iran's allies Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon have been decimated by Israel.

There are reports of new explosions in the Iranian capital over the past hour, including at Tehran's Mehrabad international airport. The Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps-run Fars News Agency has now confirmed that at least two projectiles have hit the airport area. Iranian media is also reporting that explosions have been heard in the Vardavard area, west of the airport.

London-based news outlet Iran International is reporting that Iranian air defences are attempting to shoot down a new wave of Israeli projectiles attacking the city of Isfahan. On Friday, the Israeli Air Force said it had struck an Iranian nuclear facility near the city, located 450km (280 miles) south of Tehran. It's currently unclear if the same site is being attacked. We will bring you more information when we have it.

Sirens sounded across Israel and loud booms shook the air as Israeli interceptors could be seen arcing up toward the Iranian missiles. An Israeli military official said dozens of incoming missiles were detected. The Israeli military's Home Front Command has instructed people to move into shelters ahead of an expected Iranian missile attack. The army says Iran has launched missiles, and the safety order applies to the entire country.

The Iranian attack came as Tehran's defence system intercepted fresh projectiles as several explosions were heard in the city and its surrounding areas on Friday evening, Iranian state media reported, more than 12 hours after a huge wave of Israeli attacks on the country. "There were reports of explosions heard in the west of Tehran province," in the cities of Shahrjari and Malard and around the neighbourhood of Chitgar in Tehran city, state news agency IRNA reported, while Mehr agency reported a blast in Pakdasht southeast of the capital. IRNA said Tehran's defences were activated. "News received indicates that enemy projectiles have been intercepted by Tehran's defences," it said in a post on X.

Meanwhile, the Mehr news agency said a "massive explosion" was heard in Isfahan, a major city in central Iran, in a province that is home to several nuclear facilities. "A few minutes ago, a massive explosion was heard in Isfahan," Mehr said without immediately elaborating.

## Ex-House speaker, her husband killed

MINNEAPOLIS: A top Democratic state leader, and former House speaker, and her husband were shot and killed in Minnesota, and a second lawmaker and his wife were wounded, in what appear to be politically motivated assassination attempts in the United States, local officials say.

Melissa Hortman and her spouse were killed in an "act of targeted political violence," Minnesota Governor Tim Walz said on Saturday during a news conference. The shootings came at a time of great political polarisation in the US, at a time when political leaders nationwide have been attacked, harassed and intimidated.

US President Donald Trump said in a White House statement that the FBI would join in the investigation. "Our Attorney General, Pam Bondi, and the FBI, are investigating the situation, and they will be prosecuting anyone involved to the fullest extent of the law. Such horrific violence will not be tolerated in the United States of America. God Bless the great people of Minnesota, a truly great place!"

An investigation is ongoing while police are still hunting the person believed to be the assailant, Walz said. Officials said the suspect was dressed as a law enforcement officer. Walz said that in a second attack, Senator John Hoffman and his wife, of Champlin, were shot multiple times, underwent surgery and that he was "cautiously optimistic" that they would survive "this assassination attempt." Drew Evans, superintendent of the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension, said that authorities were actively searching for a suspect. — Al Jazeera

## MPs call for providing relief to masses

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: Lawmakers in the National Assembly on Saturday delivered a detailed and constructive review of the federal budget for FY2025-26 and called for providing more relief to the common man. While participating in the general discussion on Budget 2025-26, Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) senior leader Mirza Ikhtiar Baig emphasized the pivotal role of the industry, agriculture and services sector in driving long-term economic stability. Acknowledging the ongoing economic challenges, he said the government's push toward reforms, though modest GDP growth of 2.6% continues to be overshadowed by inflation, population pressure and mounting national debt.

He raised concern over pension reforms, particularly the withdrawal of posthumous benefits for pensioners' children after 10 years, warning this could create financial distress for many families. The lawmaker also cautioned against harsh tax enforcement measures, such as granting arrest powers to income tax officers, which he said could dampen business confidence.

However, he welcomed incentives in the construction and property sectors, including the reduction in withholding tax on property transactions from 4% to 2.5%, elimination of federal excise duty on commercial property transfers and reduction of stamp duty in Islamabad from 4% to 1%—measures expected to boost real estate activity. He also supported the increased defense budget, recognizing the valor and international standing of Pakistan's armed forces, particularly in light of recent hostilities.

Mirza Ikhtiar praised the record-breaking \$38 billion in remittances sent by overseas Pakistanis and called for an export-led growth model, especially through sectors like IT and rice. Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) legislator Asad Qaiser urged the government to revisit its decision to impose new taxes in the erstwhile FATA region, emphasizing the area's sacrifices in the war on terror. Asad Qaiser warned that further burdens could hinder socio-economic rehabilitation.

He also highlighted issues of power outages and damage to household appliances in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa due to erratic electricity supply, urging greater PSDP allocations for the province. Asad Qaiser raised alarms about the tobacco sector, noting the lack of a fixed minimum support price, which is driving companies out of KP. He called for urgent government intervention to protect farmers.

Senior MQM leader Dr. Farooq Sattar hailed the armed forces for their resilience during recent Pakistan-India tensions, crediting divine help and national unity under Field Marshal General Asim Munir. He appreciated relief measures for salaried classes in the budget but warned that the middle class continues to bear a disproportionate tax burden.

Farooq Sattar urged reforms to reduce electricity and gas tariffs and proposed a national economic dialogue to adopt a unified "Charter of Economy." He stressed the importance of taxing agricultural income through provincial consensus under Article 177 to improve Pakistan's fiscal credibility with international lenders. Condemning Israeli aggression, he reaffirmed solidarity with Iran amid recent tensions. PPP stalwart Syed Naveed Qamar took a strategic view, asserting that the federal budget must not be limited to a balance sheet but should reflect a coherent economic vision.

He stressed that budgetary allocations must align with policy goals rather than serve as mere political optics. Naveed Qamar criticized the neglect of agriculture, especially in terms of food security and misdirected subsidies that favor foreign producers over domestic farmers.

He lamented that serious economic reformers are often sidelined while superficial narratives dominate policymaking. Naveed Qamar criticized Pakistan's reliance on international lenders and the failure to promote domestic exports, particularly in the cotton sector. The fertilizer subsidies and price controls, he argued, have hurt small farmers while benefiting powerful industrial lobbies.

Naveed Qamar has called for the adoption of a clear, flexible, and consistent economic policy in anticipation of potential global oil price hikes, warning that the country cannot afford to remain tethered to outdated and reactive financial planning models. He cautioned that international oil price fluctuations pose direct risks to Pakistan's fiscal stability, inflation targets, and energy affordability. He criticized the government for preparing budgets based on optimistic oil price assumptions without accounting for geopolitical volatility. "In recent years, our budgets were framed based on declining global oil prices. But if the situation in the Middle East worsens and prices suddenly spike, do we have an alternative strategy in place?" he asked, urging the finance ministry to explain whether price increases would be passed on to consumers or absorbed through subsidies.