

**Bilawal hails meeting**  
F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: PPP Chairman, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, hailed the upcoming meeting between Pakistan's Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir and US President Donald Trump as a positive development for strengthening Pakistan-US relations. In a statement posted on social media platform X, Bilawal said, "Meeting is a step forward in improving bilateral ties between Pakistan and US."

# Israel-Iran conflict rages with ongoing aerial strikes



TEL AVIV: Israeli people taking shelter after missile attacks from Iran.

TEHRAN, TEL AVIV: The warnings were issued as Israel and Iran exchanged fire for a sixth consecutive day. The Israeli military said it struck 40 sites in Iran, including centrifuge production and weapons facilities. The strikes targeted two centrifuge production sites – one in Tehran and one in Karaj, according to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Reporting from Tehran, Al Jazeera's Tohid Assadi said explosions were heard near Payam International Airport in Karaj as well as in areas in eastern Tehran. An Iranian government spokesperson also confirmed cyberattacks on at least two of Iran's banks, he added.

Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz said Israeli jets "destroyed the Iranian regime's internal security headquarters" without providing evidence. Israel's military confirmed one of its remotely piloted aircraft fell in Iran after being shot at by a surface-to-air missile. "No injuries were reported, and there is no risk of an information breach," the military said. Iranian state media earlier had said Iranian forces shot down an Israeli drone and fighter jet.

Israeli strikes have continued to target other areas of Iran, including the central province of Isfahan. An Israeli strike on a vehicle in Najafabad killed six people, including a pregnant woman and two children, Iran's Tasnim news agency reported. According to Iran's Ministry of Health and Medical Education, at least 240 people, including 70 women and children, have been killed since Israel began attacking the country. In a statement on Wednesday, the Israeli army said it is "operating freely" in Iranian skies and had shot down 10 Iranian drones. It also said its forces intercepted an Iranian drone that entered airspace over the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights in Syria.

Meanwhile, as Iran continues to launch barrages of Iranian missiles at Israel, Al Jazeera's Nour Odeh, reporting from Amman, Jordan, said Iran's attacks are creating an unprecedented "disruption" of life. "Over the past six days, the Israeli public has experienced something they haven't in the past: a formidable army that is firing ballistic missiles at Israeli cities and sensitive Israeli sites," Odeh said.

They're seeing "reports in their back yard of dozens of buildings damaged and condemned for demolition," she said. "There are more than

## Trump said: 'I mean, nobody knows what I'm going to do'

WASHINGTON (AP): President Donald Trump would not say Wednesday whether he has decided to order a US strike on Iran, a move that Tehran warned anew would be greeted with stiff retaliation if it happens. "I may do it, I may not do it," Trump said in an exchange with reporters at the White House. "I mean, nobody knows what I'm going to do," Trump added that it's not "too late" for Iran to give up its nuclear program as he continues to weigh direct US involvement in Israel's military operations aimed at crushing Tehran's nuclear program. "Nothing's too late," Trump said.

"I can tell you this. Iran's got a lot of trouble." "Nothing is finished until it is finished," Trump added. But "the next week is going to be very big— maybe less than a week." Trump also offered a terse response to Iran Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's refusal to heed to his call for Iran to submit to an unconditional surrender. "I say good luck," Trump said. Khamenei earlier Wednesday warned that any United States strikes targeting the Islamic Republic will "result in irreparable damage for them" and that his country would not bow to Trump's call for surrender. Trump said Tuesday the US knows where Iran's Khamenei is hiding as the the Israel-Iran conflict escalates but doesn't want him killed — "for now." "He is an easy target, but is safe there — We are not going to take him out (kill!), at least not for now," Trump said. Trump's increasingly muscular comments toward the Iranian government come after he urged Tehran's 9.5 million residents to flee for their lives as he cut short his participation in an international summit earlier this week to return to Washington for urgent talks with his national security team. Trump said that the Iranian officials continue to reach out to the White House as they're "getting the hell beaten out of them" by Israel.

But he added there's a "big difference between now and a week ago" in Tehran's negotiating position. "They've suggested that they come to the White House—that's, you know, courageous," Trump said. Iran's mission to the United Nations refuted Trump's claim in a statement on social media. "No Iranian official has ever asked to grovel at the gates of the White House. The only thing more despicable than his lies is his cowardly threat to 'take out' Iran's Supreme Leader." The US president said earlier this week Russian President Vladimir Putin offered to serve a mediator with. But Trump said he told Putin to keep focused on finding an endgame to his own conflict with Ukraine. "I said, 'Do me a favor, mediate your own,'" Trump said he told Putin. "I said, 'Vladimir, let's mediate Russia first. You can worry about this later.'" The Russia-Iran relationship has deepened since Putin launched a war on Ukraine in February 2022, with Tehran providing Moscow with drones, ballistic missiles, and other support, according to US intelligence findings.

members of his ruling Justice and Development Party in parliament, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said his country wants to see the crisis resolved diplomatically and Ankara could play a constructive role.

Erdogan accused Israel of waging "crazed" attacks against Iran that amount to "state terrorism". Iran's response, he said, has been natural, legal and legitimate. Hassan Ahmadian, an associate professor at the University of Tehran,

## Iran won't accept imposed peace, war

TEHRAN (Reuters): Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said in a statement read by a television presenter on Wednesday that his country will not accept US President Donald Trump's call for an unconditional surrender. In his first remarks since Friday, when he delivered a speech broadcast on state media after Israel began bombarding Iran, Khamenei said peace or war could not be imposed on the Islamic Republic. "Intelligent people who know Iran, the Iranian nation, and its history will never speak to this nation in threatening language because the Iranian nation will not surrender," he said. "The Americans should know that any US military intervention will undoubtedly be accompanied by irreparable damage." Thousands of people were fleeing Tehran on Wednesday after Israeli warplanes bombed the city overnight, and a source said Trump was considering options that include joining Israel in attacking Iranian nuclear sites. Israel's military said 50 Israeli jets had struck around 20 targets in Tehran overnight, including sites producing raw materials, components and manufacturing systems for missiles. A source familiar with internal discussions said Trump and his team were considering a number of options, which included joining Israel in strikes against Iranian nuclear sites. Iran had conveyed to Washington that it would retaliate against the United States for any direct participation, its ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva, Ali Bahreini, said. He said he already saw the US as "complicit in what Israel is doing."



1,300 Israelis who now have to live in hotels because their homes are unliveable, damaged beyond repair." In another development, Iran's Ministry of Communications said it will temporarily limit internet access to prevent "the enemy from threatening citizens' lives and property." The announcement follows an earlier report from the London-based internet watchdog Netblocks stating that there was a "near-total national internet blackout."

The attacks have continued to cause global concern, and many countries have expressed a need for de-escalation. Russian President Vladimir Putin reiterated his country's willingness to help mediate the crisis. Speaking to

said he doubts the prospects for any diplomatic solution between Iran and the US, which had been trying to reach a new nuclear agreement before Israel launched its attacks. "The minimal trust that led to the negotiations with the US is currently nonexistent," Ahmadian said, adding that many Iranians now view the previous round of nuclear talks as little more than a distraction before the surprise Israeli attack. "I don't see much of a chance for diplomacy at this point – not until this confrontation ends and we see what comes next," he told Al Jazeera.

Iran has warned that any intervention by the United States in its conflict with Israel would risk an "all-out war", as the regional rivals trad-

## UAE, Russia's leaders discuss Iran-Israel conflict

LONDON: Russian President Vladimir Putin held a phone call with UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan to discuss the latest developments in the Iran-Israel conflict, which entered its sixth day as of Wednesday. The leaders addressed the grave implications of the conflict — which began on Friday — on regional and global security, according to the Emirates News Agency. They discussed efforts to contain the war and halt the spiraling escalation, and highlighted the importance of exercising restraint and pursuing dialogue to avoid further threats to security. Putin and Sheikh Mohamed voiced their support for all efforts aimed at achieving a solution through diplomatic means, WAM reported. — Arab News

ed missile fire for a sixth day. After President Donald Trump hinted at greater US involvement in the conflict and sent warplanes to the region, Esmacil Baghaei, spokesperson for Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on Wednesday pledged that Iran would defend itself with "all force".

Here are some key takeaways from an exclusive interview the Iranian official gave to Al Jazeera. Baghaei said Iran is "under an attack by a genocidal regime", adding it will defend itself with "full force" against Israel's "war of aggression". He said Iran is "for the time being" focused on targeting Israeli sites only, and Tehran trusts its neighbours would not allow the US to use their territory for attacks against it. "Right now, we focus on defending ourselves from attacks from Israel, and that is why we have been very careful, very responsible, very calculated in our response to these attacks. We have targeted military bases, security bases inside the occupied lands, so for the time being, we are focused on that," he said. "We have very good relations with Arab countries, and they are very cognisant of the fact that Israel has been trying to drag others into the war ... We are sure our Arab countries hosting US bases would not allow their territory to be used against their Muslim neighbours," he added.

(Continued on Back Page)

# The Frontier Post

**Blast derails Jaffar Express**  
F.P. Report

JACOBABAD: As many as four bogies of a passenger train derailed after a powerful bomb blast blown up the railway track in Jacobabad on Wednesday. Jaffar Express was going to Quetta from Punjab when it met the tragedy but no loss of life was reported from the site of the incident. Soon after the incident, police quickly arrived at the scene to investigate the incident and initiate rehabilitation work.

## Field Marshal Asim Munir meets Trump

WASHINGTON: Field Marshal Asim Munir met President Donald Trump over lunch at the White House, in what is being seen as a 'positive step' towards the enhancement of bilateral relations between Islamabad and Washington.

The rare one-on-one meeting between Chief of the Army Staff (COAS) Munir and Trump is being held at the White House Cabinet Room. This development came after both countries witnessed an increased bilateral engagement at the government level this year. The US president also brokered a ceasefire between Pakistan and India following days of hostilities and offered to resolve the longstanding Kashmir dispute.

Islamabad is eyeing strengthened ties with Washington based on geopolitical realities, mutual trust, and a development-oriented partnership. COAS Munir is also expected to meet Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth on his US trip. Speaking on media, former senator and Chairman Pakistan-China Institute Mushahid Hussain Syed said that US President Trump does not want tensions to escalate between Pakistan and India.

He noted that the focus of the meeting between Trump and Field Marshal



Munir will be the ongoing Iran-Israel conflict as well as the regional situation involving India. "I believe Trump would be keen to hear field marshal's analysis on the Iran-Israel war," he said. In response to a question, Mushahid said that Trump is expected to make a decision within the next day or two on whether the United States will join the war.

He remarked that after Pakistan's decisive military performance, Trump now views Pakistan's leadership from a new strategic lens. "Trump has always said he likes winners, not losers," he added. The former senator added that Trump's meeting with the Pakistani army chief would cause "mourning in India".

"Pakistan dealt a military blow to India, while the US delivered a diplomatic setback," he said, adding that despite Indian opposition, Trump acknowledged that resolving the Kashmir issue was essential. "Especially given the president's role in medi-

ating a ceasefire," he wrote. "Following Pakistan's decisive victory in the recent five-day war, India has regrettably resisted all efforts toward a permanent peace, including US-led diplomacy."

"Pakistan neither seeks conflict nor are we desperate for dialogue. But we do recognise that peace is in both nations' interests. There is no military solution to our disputes." "India's weaponisation of water, repression in Kashmir, and politicisation of terrorism are unsustainable positions. The path forward lies in honest diplomacy — not denial," he concluded. During his US visit, COAS Munir also met overseas Pakistanis in Washington DC a day earlier. The army chief lauded the diaspora's contributions to the country's economy and global reputation by contributing actively through remittances, investments and higher achievements in other domains, as per the ISPR. — Agencies

## Solar tax cut to 10% after review: Dar

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Senator Muhammad Ishaq Dar on Wednesday said that the digital sales tax on services would remain within the jurisdiction of provinces, while the proposed 18% GST tax on solar panels had been reviewed and revised down to 10% following consultations.

Speaking in the National Assembly, Senator Dar stated that after detailed discussions with coalition partners and relevant stakeholders, consensus had been reached on resolving several contentious budgetary issues. As part of the revisions, it was agreed that the imposition of digital sales tax on services falls under the constitutional domain of provincial governments. "The concerns regarding digital taxation were valid. We held in-depth consultations with all stakeholders, including the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR), and it has been decided that the matter will be clearly addressed in the Finance Minister's budget winding-up speech," he said.

Dar further clarified that the earlier proposal of imposing 18% General Sales Tax (GST) on solar panels had sparked considerable debate. Upon review, it was revealed that 54% of components used in solarization were already taxed under the existing regime, and the 18% tax applied only to the remaining 46%. However, after mutual consultations, we have now proposed reducing the solar GST from 18% to 10%, he announced.

He emphasized that tax proposals are essential for revenue generation, and any relief in one area necessitates compensation elsewhere. He pointed out that when the cabinet found the initial proposal of a 6% salary increase for government employees insufficient and raised it to 10%, corresponding budgetary adjustments also had to be made. "We must move forward collectively. Our approach is rooted in consensus and cooperation," he said.

## Restoring financial stability Cabinet okays Power Sector debt plan

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The federal cabinet on Wednesday gave the green light to Pakistan's largest financial restructuring scheme aimed at eliminating the crippling circular debt in the power sector.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif chaired the federal cabinet meeting here at the Prime Minister House, approved a series of key decisions ranging from energy sector reforms to diplomatic and institutional recognitions, a Prime Minister's Office news release said.

The Debt Plan, designed to restore financial stability in the energy industry without burdening the national budget, aims to eliminate PKR 1,275 billion in circular debt over the next six years. The approved scheme includes refinancing PKR 683 billion owed by the Power Holding Company and clearing long-standing dues of Independent Power Producers (IPPs). The Prime Minister termed the decision a "historic step toward economic stability and investor confidence in Pakistan's energy sector."

"This reflects our commitment to sustainable institutional reforms and reducing fiscal pressure, paving the way for a more stable and prosperous energy future," he said during the session. The cabinet also extended appreciation to Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb and his economic team for presenting a public-friendly budget for the upcoming financial year, acknowledging their efforts in stabilizing the national economy.

On the diplomatic front, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif lauded Chief of Army Staff Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir for his address to the Pakistani diaspora during his recent US visit. The Prime Minister commended the Field Marshal's firm commitment to defending Pakistan's borders and interests, calling it a powerful representation of national resolve.

In recognition of exemplary Hajj arrangements this year, the prime minister paid tribute to Minister for Religious Affairs Sardar Yousaf, citing the well-managed pilgrimage as a reflection of the government's commitment to public service excellence. In other key decisions, the cabinet approved the appointment of Kamal Uddin Tipu as Chairperson of the Commission for the Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals on the recommendation of the Ministry of Human Rights.

The cabinet also granted exemption under Section 21 of the Public Procurement Regulatory Authority Ordinance, 2002, to the National Power Parks Management Company Limited (NPPM-CL) for procurement related to the acquisition of Roush Power Plant. Additionally, the cabinet ratified the decisions taken during the Cabinet Committee on Legislative Cases meeting held on May 21, 2025.

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## President visits POF Wah

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari visited Pakistan Ordnance Factories (POF) Wah on Wednesday. Upon his arrival, he was received Chairman POF Wah, Lieutenant General Syed Tahir Hameed Shah. Federal Minister for Defence Production, Mohammed Raza Hayat Harraj and Secretary Defence Ministry of Production, Lt General

Muhammad Chiragh Haider (Retd) were also present during the visit.

The Chairman briefed the President on the various production units of POF and highlighted the organization's pivotal role in fulfilling the defence requirements of the country. He also highlighted POF's capabilities, technological advancements, and its contributions towards achieving self-reliance in defence manufacturing.





PESHAWAR: Special Assistant to the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for Industries, Abdul Karim Tordher listening to the problems faced by traders during a meeting on Wednesday.

## Traders apprise Tordher of challenges in various areas

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: A delegation comprising representatives of traders and the business community called on the Special Assistant to the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for Industries, Abdul Karim Tordher, here at Civil Secretariat in Peshawar.

The delegation was led by Hassan Tariq Malik, Executive Member of (HCCI) and Provincial Regional Convener of the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI), along with FPCCI Deputy Chairman Falak Sher, Zafar Iqbal representing All-Trade Bakers and Sweets, Abbottabad, Sheikh Waqas Ali, Member Haripur Chamber of Commerce and other provincial trade representatives.

Additional Secretary Industries Mujeeb-ur-Rehman, along with officers from the Department of Industries, Directorate General of Industries, Food Department and other concerned departments were also present at the meeting.

During the meeting, the business delegation apprised the Special Assistant of certain challenges they were facing in various areas with regard to public institutions and sought his support for their resolution.

The Special Assistant

## Proposed Integrated Tourism Zone in Ganol Valley to boost tourism

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: The proposed Integrated Tourism Zone (ITZ) project in the picturesque Ganol Valley of Mansehra-Kaghan is set to become a game-changer for tourism in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, providing a significant boost to the local economy while creating employment opportunities for the region's youth.

These thoughts were presented by Zahid Chanzeb, Adviser to the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Tourism and Culture, while speaking as the chief guest at a key road show organized by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Tourism Department at the Serena Hotel.

Zahid Chanzeb emphasized that the provincial government is not only prioritizing the Ganol Valley ITZ project but is also committed to ensuring the provision of all necessary resources and support for its successful completion. He said efforts are underway to develop Ganol Valley into a world-class tourist destination through seamless coordination between the government, investors, and relevant stakeholders.

The event was attended by several dignitaries and stakeholders including Habib Ullah Arif, Director General of KP Culture and Tourism Authority, Umar Khan, Director Admin and Finance, Aftab Rana, Managing Director of PTDC, and representatives from prominent organizations such as 18 Group of Companies, 7 Valleys, Ded K B, and the Hashoo Foundation.

The ceremony began with a recitation from the Holy Quran followed by a welcome address from the adviser.

Chanzeb highlighted the vast investment potential of Ganol Valley, situated at an altitude of 8,000 feet and spanning 60 acres with an additional 177 kanals designated for commercial use. The location's proximity to key destinations — just 185 kilometers from Islamabad, 31 kilometers from Shogran, and 47 kilometers from Kaghan Valley — significantly enhances its strategic importance.

The proposed facilities for the ITZ include a chairlift, cable car, hotels, resorts, and essential infrastructure. The total estimated cost of the project stands at Rs. 9.7 billion, with an expected completion time of three years and a return on investment within seven years.

The event featured a detailed presentation on the Ganol project, followed by a Q&A session. In his concluding remarks, the adviser reiterated the government's resolve to transform Khyber Pakhtunkhwa into a safe, prosperous, and developed tourist destination.

## Peshawar Safe City Project Another milestone achieved towards completion of project

**Syed Adnan**

PESHAWAR: In a significant development, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the Peshawar Safe City Project and the Educational Testing and Evaluation Agency (ETEA) to ensure the merit-based recruitment of technical and IT staff for the Safe City Project.

A formal ceremony was held at the Central Police Office, Peshawar, where Inspector General of Police (IGP) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Zulfiqar Hameed, Additional IGP Headquarters Ol Khan, DIG Headquarters Rizwan Manzoor, Principal Staff Officer to the IGP Imran Khan, Director IT Naveed Gul, and Director Public Relations Shehzada Kokab Farooq were present.

The MoU was formally signed by DIG Rai Ijaz Ahmad, Director Safe City Project, and Adil Saeed Safi, Executive Director of ETEA.

Under the agreement, ETEA will conduct written examinations, technical skills tests, and interviews to select suitable candidates for various technical and IT positions required by the Safe City Project Peshawar. The recruitment process will be entirely transparent, impartial, and based strictly on merit, giving top priority to candidates' eligibility and competence.

Selected candidates will be trained in modern surveillance systems, including CCTV networks, Facial Recognition Systems (FRS), digital communications, and other specialized security software. Additionally, these IT experts will be trained in global data protection standards to ensure the safety and confidentiality of public information.

It is worth mentioning that public trust plays a crucial role in ensuring safety and preventing

## Paradise in peril: Gilgit-Baltistan's fight against climate change

**Adnan Ali**

GILGIT-BALTISTAN is one of the most beautiful and naturally rich regions in Pakistan. Known for its majestic mountain ranges, crystal-clear rivers, mineral wealth, and cultural heritage, it attracts thousands of tourists every year.

The region's immense tourism potential contributes significantly to the local economy by creating employment, boosting small businesses, and increasing income for local communities. With proper planning, Gilgit-Baltistan can become a powerful engine of growth for Pakistan's northern areas and a top destination for eco-tourism in South Asia.

In recent years, however, this potential has been threatened by growing environmental and developmental challenges. One of the most critical issues is climate change, particularly global warming, which has led to the accelerated melting of glaciers, increased frequency of floods and landslides, and disruptions in local weather patterns. These natural disasters not only harm the ecosystem but also damage infrastructure and homes, directly affecting the lives and livelihoods of the people.

As tourism grows, so does the demand for infrastructure. Unfortunately, the rapid and often unplanned construction of hotels, roads, and other facilities is harming the fragile environment. Forests are being cut down, natural habitats are being destroyed, and pollution is rising. Poor sewage systems, lack of waste management, and deteriorating road conditions in some areas have also made travel difficult and unpleasant



for visitors-resulting in a noticeable drop in tourist arrivals in certain seasons.

## Alleged financial embezzlement NAB summons Azam Swati

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has issued a formal call-up notice to senior politician Mohammad Azam Khan Swati in connection with an ongoing inquiry into alleged illegal withdrawal and misappropriation of government funds.

The inquiry, initiated under Sections 18(c) and 19 of the National Accountability Ordinance (NAO), 1999, pertains to financial irregularities involving officials of the District Accounts Office in Kohistan and other connected entities. The case involves government funds listed under MES 323205.

According to the notice, NAB received a complaint indicating that Azam Swati may be in possession of key financial records relevant to the inquiry.

The bureau has asked him to appear as a defendant before the Combined Inquiry Team (CIT-I), Investigation Wing-I at NAB's regional office in Phase-V, Hayatabad, Peshawar.

The notice directs Azam Swati to present himself on June 23, 2025, at 11:00 AM, along with complete documentation regarding payments made to his bank account by M/s Kohistan Associate and Builders during the year 2024.

In the light of the nature of the allegations, prima facie it has been observed that you are in custody of important record relevant to the case," the notice states, adding that the records are crucial for a just decision in the inquiry.

Furthermore, the accountability body has warned that in the event of non-compliance, coercive measures may be taken under the provisions of the NAO, 1999.

The notice has been signed by Muhammad Kamran, Deputy Director (Coordination), on behalf of the Director IW-I.

This development comes amid growing scrutiny over the misuse of public funds in several districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, with NAB intensifying its investigations against both serving and former public officials.

## Southern districts uplift is priority: Syed Qasim

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Minister for Social Welfare, Syed Qasim Ali Shah, has said that a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has been signed between the Department of Social Welfare and the Kohat Development Authority.

On the occasion, Provincial Minister for Agriculture Major (R) Muhammad Sajjad Barkwal, Member of the Provincial Assembly, and other relevant officials were also present.

The Project Director gave a detailed briefing to cultural sector, vocational training for children, and educational facilities for girls.

He expressed these views on Wednesday while addressing the signing ceremony of the MoU held in Peshawar between the Department of Social Welfare and the Kohat Development Authority.

He added that they aim to bring these districts at par with developed regions. He further stated that under this agreement, the Kohat Development Authority will spend 700 million rupees for the improvement of these districts.

He expressed these views on Wednesday while addressing the signing ceremony of the MoU held in Peshawar between the Department of Social Welfare and the Kohat Development Authority.

On the occasion, Provincial Minister for Agriculture Major (R) Muhammad Sajjad Barkwal, Member of the Provincial Assembly, and other relevant officials were also present.

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## KP exceeds uplift fund target: Muzzammil

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: Advisor to the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on finance Muzzammil Aslam, has issued an important statement regarding the release and expenditure of development funds in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

He stated that in the previous budget, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government had allocated 144 billion rupees for development funds, but instead of 144 billion, 148 billion rupees were actually released. Thus, the total release of provincial funds stands at 103 percent, while expenditures are at 86 percent.

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Finance Advisor added that in contrast, the federal government had allocated 272 billion rupees for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, of which only 131 billion rupees were released. Muzzammil Aslam noted that the combined release of federal and foreign funding amounts to approximately 48%.

He emphasized that the blame for the low release of funds by the federal government should not be placed on Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. He said that opponents are afraid of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's excellent financial performance.

## Health advisor updates on congo fever situation

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Health Advisor, Ihtesham Ali, stated that the provincial health department had issued a public health advisory ahead of Eid to help citizens take timely preventive measures against the spread of Congo virus.

He informed that a total of six cases of suspected Congo fever have been reported in the province so far in 2025.

Out of these, three cases have been confirmed. The Department of Health responded promptly and effectively to all three confirmed cases.

Ihtesham Ali further shared that on June 6, three patients suspected of having Congo fever were admitted to Hayatabad Medical Complex.

One of the patients, who was in critical condition, unfortunately passed away. The other two patients are now stable and out of danger.

The Health Advisor also noted that prior to this incident, three suspected patients were brought to various hospitals. All of them recovered fully and have been discharged.

He urged the public to strictly follow precautionary measures, especially during the handling and caring of animals.

In case of any suspicious symptoms, people are advised to immediately seek medical attention at the nearest health facility.

drinking water, and hydropower across the country. Continued glacier melt could cause serious water shortages, increased risk of Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs), and other natural disasters. Moreover, deforestation, air and water pollution, and weak environmental regulations are further compounding the risks.

If these issues are not urgently addressed, Gilgit-Baltistan may lose not only its natural charm but also its economic and strategic significance. This would severely impact tourism revenues, reduce job opportunities for the local population, and weaken Pakistan's overall economic stability.

However, the situation can be reversed with strong policy action and sustainable growth strategies. The government, civil society, and local communities must work together to:

- "Implement strict environmental protection laws
- "Promote eco-friendly tourism
- "Improve basic infrastructure such as roads, water supply, and waste disposal
- "Encourage the use of renewable energy
- "Launch afforestation and glacier protection programs
- "Provide training and support to local businesses involved in tourism
- "With these measures, Gilgit-Baltistan has the potential to grow sustainably, attract international tourists, and even compete with famous destinations like Switzerland. By investing in clean development and preserving its natural beauty, the region can continue to be a source of pride and prosperity for Pakistan.

*Writer is student of Bs economics at Quaid e Azam University*



## In brief

### Police busts car-lifter gang Syed Waliullah Shah

NOWSHERA: Police has busted car-lifter gang including ring leader and receiver and recovered eight stolen vehicles and Rs 1.2 million obtained from selling these vehicles. The arrested car lifter is wanted by police in other districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, as well as Punjab and Islamabad, for multiple car lifting cases. The arrested individual is linked to multiple car lifting cases across different regions, highlighting the gang's extensive operations. Police conducting further investigation to uncover more details about the gang's activities and connections. This demonstrates the ongoing efforts of law enforcement agencies to tackle car lifting and theft, ensuring public safety and security.

### Protest rallies held in Larkana F.P. Report

LARKANA: Paramedical staff on the call of the Central body, protested by wearing black armbands for recognition of the budget and other demands. On this occasion, the employees also raised provocative slogans against the anti-employee policies of the Sindh government. Addressing the protest rally, leaders Javed Mugheri, Pir Bakhsht Brohi, Muhammad Sulaman Kamboh and others said that the current budget presented is an anti-employee budget, while despite such high inflation, no relief has been announced for the entire working class including the employees. They demanded from the Sindh government that like other provinces, the Sindh government should also end the unrest among the employees by providing other allowances including disparity reduction allowance for the employees of the health department. On the other hand, the PPP (Shaheed Bhutto) held a protest demonstration in front of the Press Club against the arrest of PPP (Shaheed Bhutto) leader Munir Brohi by the police from the Mangho Pir area of Karachi. The protesters held placards and banners and raised slogans against such action by the police. Addressing the demonstration, leaders Lala Sajjad Kajar, Wazir Ali Khoso, Gada Hussain Mastoi and others said that the police have arrested PPP (Shaheed Bhutto) District Qambar Shahdadkot leader Munir Ahmed Brohi from the Mangho Pir area of Karachi without any reason, which we strongly condemn and demand that the PPP (Shaheed Bhutto) District Qambar Shahdadkot leader be released immediately so that the unrest among the workers can end, otherwise the scope of the protest will be expanded.

### PFA intensified crackdown F.P. Report

TOBA TEK SINGH: Punjab Food Authority (PFA) has intensified its crackdown on unhygienic and substandard food products in Toba Tek Singh, as part of its ongoing efforts to ensure public health and food safety. In this regard, Additional Director PFA Faisalabad, Imtiaz Hussain, paid a visit to the district, where he supervised the disposal of food items deemed harmful to human health. During the visit, Deputy Director Yasir Mushtaq briefed the Additional Director on the recent enforcement activities and upcoming action plans initiated by the authority within the district. Additional Director oversaw the destruction of various food products that failed to meet hygiene and safety standards.



**BAHAWALPUR:** A traffic policeman using lifter to remove a wrongly parked vehicle obstructing the flow of traffic.

## Iran-Israel war and global HRs crisis

Dr. Zahid Naqash

**T**HE rising tension between Iran and Israel in the Middle East has brought not only the region but the entire world to the brink of a new crisis. The clashes, missile attacks, and airstrikes in recent days are not only targeting military targets, but also innocent civilians, women, children, and the elderly are becoming the fuel of this war game. Behind every missile is not just a target, but hundreds of lives affected.

The ongoing conflict between Iran and Israel has displaced thousands of families from their homes, hospitals have been targeted, and educational institutions have been closed. In these circumstances, human rights violations are reaching their peak.

Where basic human needs such as the right to life, the right to education, access to medical care, and protection have become mere words.

The United Nations, the European Union, the OIC, and other international organizations are seemingly issuing statements, but there is silence in the world of action. The big powerful countries are assessing the situation through the lens of their political interests, while the ground reality is that humanity is suffering.

The media is playing a two-way role — on the one hand, there are efforts to highlight the truth, and on the other, there is a hot market for bias, misrepresentation, and rumors. Fake news is not only misleading public opinion but also diverting attention from the real human rights situation.

There is intense public

outrage and protests in the Muslim world, but there is a lack of effective government response. The international community must understand that if human rights are being violated in one region, they cannot be safe anywhere else in the world. The ongoing war between Iran and Israel is not just a political conflict, but a test of humanity. It is time for the international community to move beyond mere condemnation and take concrete action.

Measures such as protecting human lives, helping refugees, and taking action against war crimes at the International Criminal Court are essential. We must promote dialogue instead of wars, tolerance instead of hatred, and justice instead of force — otherwise we will lose not only countries, but also humanity.

## Residents block road against load shedding F.P. Report

PABBI: The resident of Pabbi staged a protest against prolonged and unscheduled load shedding and blocked the GT Road for five hours. The roadblock resulted in long queues of vehicles and a suspension of the BRT service, causing inconvenience to commuters who had to walk several miles in the scorching heat.

According to details, the protesters blocked the GT Road by burning tires, leading to a standstill in traffic and widespread frustration among commuters. Shops in Pabbi Bazar, Akbar Pura Bazar, Sheikh Shahbaz Baba Bazar, and Pabi Station Bazar remained closed in support of the protest.

After successful negotiations between the Assistant Commissioner Pabbi, DSP Pabi Circle, and the Action Committee Pabbi, the road was reopened. The Action Committee announced that if their demands are not met by Friday, they will again block the road at Taru Jabba.

## Two killed F.P. Report

SHAHDADKOT: Almost two killed including a woman in village Omar Gopang in the premises of Mirokhan police station, on Wednesday.

According to sources, a young woman, Seema Magsti, and Abdul Ghaffar Chandio on suspicion of blackmail. On receiving information, Mirokhan police reached the scene of the incident to find out the details, took the bodies of the victims from the hospital.

# 28 persons charged in forest fires: DFO

## F.P. Report

BUNER: Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) Arshad Khan claimed that as many as 28 persons were charged for forest fire in Buner while police has been directed for their arrest. The incidents of repeated fire outbreaks in dense forests on different mountains across the district for the past one month.

Forest and and Wildlife Department, Rescue, Civil Defense, Local Government TMAs have taken actions to extinguish the fires. Every day, when there is a fire in one or two hills, they all come into action and try to extinguish the fire to save the forests and wildlife. However, the people of the area are worried, in trouble and angry because they are suffering worst because their forests, wildlife and tourism are being destroyed. They are also the ones who are the first to extinguish the fire.

These are the people who, seeing the precious trees of the forest and wildlife burning, get burned from within themselves. At the same time, they also curse the administration, the Forest and Wildlife and when they come down from the hill, they protest against these institutions in Pir Baba's bazaar and vent their anger.

DFO said that most cattle

breeders live in the mountain ranges and when they burn the old grass on their lands to pave the way for new grass to grow, often due to their carelessness and negligence, this fire gets out of control and spreads into the dense forests in the mountain range and brings destruction.

According to him, sometimes it happens that tourists light a fire to cook food and later the fire is not completely extinguished, due to which the spark flies with the wind and causes a fire in the forest. Sometimes a cigarette is thrown without extinguishing or half-extinguished, which causes a fire in the forest. Sometimes someone reckless and someone who is unaware of the consequences shows a match to a bush, which causes great destruction after they leave and harms the national wealth, tourism and living beings.

When asked whether such accused have been traced and any action has been taken against them, he said that this time around twenty-eight accused have been identified and cases have been registered with the police against them adding arresting and investigating them duty of police and fines and imprisonment rest in the hand of forest magistrate. When asked whether only collecting a

fine or simple imprisonment is sufficient in such a serious national crime, he said the Forest Department would requests that those involved in the crime of burning valuable forests and wildlife, damaging tourism and destroying the cool clear environment should be given long prison sentences.

When asked about the staff for protecting forests and extinguishing fires in case of fire, he said with great regret that when the Billion Tree Tsunami Project was running, two hundred and fifty guards and one hundred and fifty watchmen and the department's own staff were a good number, but now that the project is over, only twenty-eight staff of the department are insufficient.

About public cooperation, DFO honestly said that the heads and officials of each department do this duty as part of their services, but the public, by voluntarily supporting them, take the lead in protecting the forest and extinguishing fires in case of fire. He appealed to the public for another favour to inform the Forest Department in a timely manner whenever someone cuts down the forest and sets it on fire. So that immediate steps can be taken to protect this national treasure from being cut down and burned, he concluded.

# Mother & child health for better future stressed

## F.P. Report

SHANGLA: A significant seminar was held at the District Health Officer (DHO) office at Alpuri with the aim of promoting awareness about healthy nutrition for children, the vital role of healthy mothers, and turning the dream of a prosperous Pakistan into reality. The event focused on bringing positive changes in societal attitudes and raising public awareness regarding nutritious food.

The seminar was attended by District Health Officer Nazir Muhammad Khan, Nutrition Program Coordinator Abdul Samad "Khan Lala," Dr. Kamal Zada, Dr. Umayya Alam,

Lady Health Workers (LHWs), Lady Health Visitors (LHVs), religious scholars, journalists, and individuals from various walks of life.

While addressing the participants, DHO Nazir Muhammad Khan emphasized that "Healthy mothers are the foundation of a prosperous Pakistan, and providing them with balanced and nutritious food is essential for raising a healthy generation." He stressed the importance of spreading this message to every village, neighborhood, and household to protect future generations from diseases and deficiencies.

Nutrition Program Coordinator Khan Lala

shed light on the objectives and scope of the initiative. He elaborated on how the program is actively working under a strategic framework to improve child development and nutrition. He also presented collected data and informed the attendees about the program's positive impact.

The event concluded with an awareness walk, during which participants held banners and placards bearing powerful messages such as "Healthy Children, Prosperous Pakistan," "Balanced Diet is the Key to Good Health," and "A Healthy Mother, A Brighter Future." The walk delivered a strong and impactful message to the community.

# DC directs resolution of issues faced by tribesmen

## F.P. Report

LANDI KOTAL: DC, Khyber Capt (Retd) Bilal Shahid Rao hold an Open Court (Kuli Kachehri) in Landi Kotal Jirga hall on Tuesday evening and issued directives on the spot for the resolution of issues being faced by the residents of the Landi Kotal and adjacent areas.

Flanked by Commandant

Khyber Rifle, Col Asim Aziz Keyani, District Police Officer Rai Mazhar Iqbal, Additional DC, Irshad Mohmand, Assistant Commissioner, Tehsil Chairman Haji Shah Khalid, Landi Kotal Adnan Mumtaz, DC Khyber listened the complaints and directed the relevant departments who were present on the occasion to take prompt action for addressing the problems.

Speaking on the occasion DC, Khyber assured the complainants all their legal issues would be dealt on priority basis. On the directives of Chief Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, pattern of the Kuli Kachehri had been changed and before resolving the problems, registered in previous Kuli Kachehri new one would not be organized aimed to make the moot fruitful, he added.

# Pakistan faces critical situation in contemporary geopolitics: Kaira

## F.P. Report

HAFIZABAD: Senior leader of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), Qamar Zaman Kaira, has said that Pakistan is facing a serious imbalance between limited resources and growing challenges. Speaking to the media during his visit to Hafizabad, Qamar Zaman Kaira emphasized that while governments strive to offer relief through the budget, the current situation poses significant challenges in formulating a viable fiscal plan. He remarked that after the recent Indian aggression, security threats within Pakistan have intensified. Simultaneously, the ongoing fight against terrorism on domestic fronts has become increasingly costly. "In such circumstances, it is essential to increase the defense budget. It cannot be reduced or ignored under any condition," he asserted.

He reiterated the PPP's longstanding commitment to public welfare, stating, "The PPP has always prioritized the relief and facilitation of the people." He expressed concern over the plight of farmers, saying that they have already suffered a great deal. "If the upcoming wheat crop fails to yield a profitable return, it will be disastrous for farmers and the agricultural sector at large."

Addressing a question about the recent controversy over salary increases for public representatives, he noted that much debate surrounds the issue. "An increase in salaries for the

Speaker, Senate Chairman, and members of the Assembly would make a difference of merely 200 to 250 million rupees in the national budget. Is it justified that lawmakers receive salaries of just two to two and a half lakh rupees, similar to grade-17 officers?" he questioned. "If such low compensation persists, only millionaires and billionaires will be able to afford a political career, making it inaccessible for the common man."

He further argued that while there are only two positions, Speaker and Senate Chairman, hundreds of judges in the High Courts and Supreme Court receive monthly salaries ranging from 2 to 2.5 million rupees, along with pensions and other post-retirement benefits.

Regarding the federal budget, he stated that once the proposals are formally presented to the PPP, the party will deliberate and make a collective decision. He expressed optimism that a consensus would be reached.

On this occasion, several notable local PPP leaders were also present, including former District Bar President Advocate Muhammad Arshad Mehind, former Provincial Assembly candidate Syed Waseem-ul-Hassan Naqvi, former Bar President Khalida Shahid Awan, current Bar President Usman Afzal Chatha, and Secretary Ali Raza Bhatti.

**Two killed including suicide:** In two heartbreaking incidents reported from the Hafizabad district, a young man drowned while swimming in a

canal, and another ended his life by jumping in front of a moving train.

In the first incident, a 20-year-old youth identified as Faraz Ali, son of Yaseen and a resident of Kot Nanak village, drowned while swimming in the Upper Gogera Canal near Kot Nanak three days ago. Rescue 1122 teams responded promptly with an ambulance and rescue vehicle upon receiving the report. Despite continuous search efforts, the body could not be recovered during the first two days. However, on the third day, during an intensive bubble boating search operation, the body was finally found entangled in underwater vegetation approximately two kilometers downstream near the Ajnaniwala Bridge.

In a separate and equally tragic event, a young rickshaw driver from the village of Samra reportedly took his own life by jumping in front of a moving train near Kaleki Mandi. According to eyewitnesses, the incident occurred as a Peshawar-bound train was passing the area. The impact of the collision was so severe that the body was mutilated beyond recognition. The victim was later identified as Babar, a local rickshaw driver, through his mobile phone. Railway police reached the site promptly, carried out the necessary legal procedures, and handed over the body to the family. The reasons behind the suicide remain unknown, and police have launched an investigation into the matter.

**Stray dogs took control over roads & streets:** An alarming rise in the population of stray dogs and large rodents in Hafizabad city and its adjoining localities has become a serious public concern, severely disrupting daily life and spreading fear among residents.

According to locals, it has become common to see packs of stray dogs roaming the streets, alleys, markets, and residential neighborhoods during both day and night. These dogs not only pose a threat to pedestrians and motorcyclists, frequently causing injuries, but also endanger children, who are particularly vulnerable to attacks.

On the other hand, residents report that oversized rats have invaded homes and shops, causing significant damage to food supplies and valuable household items. In some areas, incidents of rodent bites have also been reported, sparking widespread fear, especially among parents with young children.

Public health experts warn that both stray dogs and rats are potential carriers of serious infectious diseases. If immediate and effective measures are not taken, the risk of disease outbreaks could increase significantly.

The worsening situation is being attributed largely to the negligence and inaction of the local municipal committee, which has so far failed to launch any comprehensive or consistent campaign to address the issue. The absence of a structured plan

or pest control strategy has allowed these populations to multiply rapidly, exacerbating the crisis.

Residents are calling on higher authorities and the district administration to take urgent notice of the situation. They demand the immediate launch of a practical, long-term plan for the control and elimination of stray animals and rodents to restore public safety and peace of mind.

"The authorities must act before the situation spirals out of control. This is not just a nuisance anymore, it is a threat to public health and safety," one concerned citizen remarked. As the problem intensifies, citizens continue to live in a state of fear, awaiting a prompt and effective response from the concerned officials.

**DPO reshuffles policemen:** In a significant administrative move aimed at improving departmental performance and ensuring efficient public service delivery, District Police Officer (DPO) Hafizabad, Atif Nazir, has ordered the transfer and posting of a large number of police officers and personnel across the district.

The comprehensive reshuffle includes transfers of 2 Inspectors, 18 Sub-Inspectors, 13 Assistant Sub-Inspectors, 16 Head Constables, 94 Constables, 57 Lady Constables, and 10 Police Station Assistants (PSAs). All officers and officials have been directed to immediately report to their newly assigned positions.

According to the DPO's office, this move is part of a broader strategy to activate the police system further and provide the public with improved security and responsive services. The initiative is aligned with DPO Atif Nazir's vision of institutional reform, transparency, and accountability within the police department.

Speaking on the occasion, DPO Atif Nazir stated that Departmental reform and public service remain among my top priorities. These transfers aim to enhance institutional performance, ensure efficient supervision, and uphold the principles of merit and integrity.

Meanwhile, the courage and swift action demonstrated by the Hafizabad police in two high-profile cases of sexual assault and child murder have not only brought a sense of justice to the affected families but have also significantly enhanced public confidence in the police force.

These sentiments were expressed during a meeting of the Awami Mahaz Hafizabad, chaired by District President Rana Khalid Mahmood. Participants praised the police for their exemplary performance, particularly in response to a gang-rape incident in the nearby village of Mangat Uncha. When a distressing video surfaced showing a woman being assaulted in front of her husband, District Police Officer (DPO) Atif Nazir promptly registered a case and formed multiple police teams to apprehend the culprits.



PYONGYANG: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un meets with Russian Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu at the headquarters of the ruling Workers' Party in North Korea.

## North Korea plans to send mly construction workers to Russia

SEOUL (AP): North Korea will send thousands of military construction workers and deminers to support reconstruction work in Russia's Kursk region, a top Russian official said, the latest sign of expanding cooperation between the nations.

North Korea has already supplied thousands of combat troops and a vast amount of conventional weapons to back Russia's war against Ukraine. In April, Pyongyang and Moscow said that their soldiers fought together to repel a Ukrainian incursion into Russia's Kursk border region, though Ukraine has insisted it still has troops present there. Wrapping up a one-day visit to Pyongyang, Russian Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu said that North Korean leader Kim Jong Un decided to send 1,000 sappers to clear mines in the Kursk region and 5,000 military construction workers to restore infrastructure there, according to Russia's state news agency, Tass. Another Russian state news agency, RIA Novosti, carried a similar report.

"Following the expulsion of invaders from Russian soil, we've agreed to continue our constructive cooperation, with the Korean side providing assistance in the restoration of the Kursk region," Shoigu said, according to RIA Novosti. "This is a kind of brotherly aid being sent by the Korean people and their leader, Kim Jong Un, to our country." Shoigu said that Moscow and Pyongyang agreed to erect memorials in both countries in honor of North Korean soldiers who died while fighting in the Kursk region, according to Tass and RIA

Novosti.

North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency said that Kim confirmed the contents of North Korea's cooperation with Russia with regard to Kursk's current situation but didn't mention the dispatch of army construction workers and deminers cited by Russian media. KCNA also said that Kim and Shoigu approved some plans for "conveying long the heroic feats displayed by" North Korean troops in operations to liberate the Kursk area, an apparent reference to the memorial construction plan.

North Korea and Russia have never disclosed how many North Korean troops have been sent to Russia or how many of them were killed. But according to South Korean, US and Ukraine assessments, about 15,000 North Korean soldiers have been deployed to Russia. South Korea's spy agency said in April that about 600 North Korean soldiers died on the Russia-Ukraine battlefronts. The deepening ties between North Korea and Russia have raised worries among the US, South Korea and their partners that Russian President Vladimir Putin may in return provide Kim with much-needed sophisticated technologies that can help advance his nuclear and missile programs.

The two countries, both in confrontations with the US and its allies, have sharply grown closer to each other in recent years. In 2024, Kim and Putin signed a landmark defense treaty that requires each side to provide aid if the other is attacked. It was Shoigu's third visit to North Korea in about three months. The two countries have exchanged high-level visits in past years, with Kim travelling to Russia in 2023 and Putin to North Korea in 2024.

Many observers say Kim could soon visit Russia again for another summit with Putin. South Korea's Foreign Ministry expressed "grave concern" over what it described as ongoing illicit cooperation between North Korea and Russia.

The US State Department told South Korea's Yonhap news agency that Russia's continued use of North Korean workers and soldiers were "deeply concerning" and stated that Pyongyang was "now relying on Russia to provide it with desperately needed funds in exchange for labor and soldier for hire schemes." Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba also expressed deep concern, saying advancing cooperation between Russia and North Korea threatens to jeopardize global security. In South Korea, there are worries that the 2024 North Korea-Russia defense treaty would lead to Russia intervening in a potential conflict on the Korean Peninsula. Experts say North Korea's military would also obtain valuable combat experiences from the Russia-Ukraine war.

## UN fact-finding mission says Sudan conflict escalating, aid weaponised

KHARTOUM: The UN Independent International Fact-Finding Mission for Sudan has warned that both sides in the country's civil war have escalated the use of heavy weaponry in populated areas while weaponising humanitarian relief, amid devastating consequences for civilians.

"Let us be clear: the conflict in Sudan is far from over," said Mohamed Chande Othman, chair of the Fact-Finding Mission, which presented its latest findings to the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva. "The scale of human suffering continues to deepen. The fragmentation of governance, the militarisation of society, and the involvement of foreign actors are fuelling an ever-deadlier crisis."

The brutal conflict, now in its third year, erupted in April 2023 between the

Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), and has killed tens of thousands of civilians and displaced more than 13 million Sudanese, according to United Nations data. The UN has previously said that Sudan is experiencing the world's "worst humanitarian crisis". The mission found that both sides escalated the use of heavy weaponry in populated areas. In May, an RSF drone strike on Obeid International Hospital in North Kordofan killed six civilians, while earlier this month, an SAF bombing in Al Koma killed at least 15 civilians. Aid was also being weaponised by the SAF, which imposed bureaucratic restrictions, as well as by the RSF, which looted convoys and blocked aid, the group said.

The mission also docu-

mented a sharp rise in sexual and gender-based violence, including gang rape, abduction, sexual slavery, and forced marriage, mostly in RSF-controlled displacement camps. Member of the Fact-Finding Mission Mona Rishmawi said what began as a political and security crisis has become "a grave human rights and protection emergency, marked by international crimes that stain all involved". "It is unconscionable that this devastating war is entering its third year with no sign of resolution," she said. Sudan has seen growing instability since longtime President Omar al-Bashir was removed from power in 2019 after months of anti-government protests. In October 2021, the Sudanese military staged a coup against the civilian

government of Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok, leading to his resignation in early 2022. Sudan's army chief, Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and rival Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, who leads the RSF, had shared power after the coup but then started fighting for control of the state and its resources in April 2023.

Last week, the Sudanese Army accused the forces of eastern Libyan military commander Khalifa Haftar of attacking Sudanese border posts, the first time it has charged its northwest-ern neighbour with direct involvement in the civil war. Egypt, which has also backed Haftar, has long supported the Sudanese Army. Sudan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs accused the United Arab Emirates of backing the RSF, which it denies. — Aljazeera

## South Korea's Lee cites 'inseparable' relationship with Japan in first summit

SEOUL/TOKYO (Reuters): South Korea's new President Lee Jae Myung and Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba vowed to deepen a relationship prized by Washington and closely watched by China and North Korea, as the pair met for their first summit.

The two leaders spoke on the sidelines of the G7 meeting in Canada. "Under the current strategic environment, the importance of Japan-South Korea relations and Japan-US-South Korea cooperation has not changed at all - rather, it has become more important," Ishiba said later at a press conference.

Lee said the two countries have an "inseparable" relationship like "neighbours who share a front yard." The leaders discussed maintaining and strengthening trilateral cooperation

with the United States to respond to geopolitical risks including the North Korea issue, his office said in a statement. Ties between the US allies have often been strained, rooted in historical disputes stemming from Japan's colonial rule over the Korean peninsula from 1910-1945. The United States has pressed the two countries to cooperate more closely to confront regional challenges such as North Korea's nuclear threat and rising competition from China.

Lee told Ishiba that cooperation would be mutually beneficial amid difficulties in the international trade environment and called for the improvement of ties in a "future-oriented manner". In recent years, Lee had been harshly critical of efforts by his predecessor, conservative Yoon Suk Yeol, to mend ties with

Tokyo, and his stance as president will be closely watched by the United States and China. He once called Yoon a "puppet" of Japan and decried a landmark 2023 summit with former Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida as the "most humiliating moment" in South Korea's diplomatic history. Lee, who moderated his rhetoric before assuming office this month, has said pragmatism is key to his diplomacy and he would continue with security cooperation between South Korea, Japan and the US.

"In terms of early diplomatic scorecard, President Lee isn't only saying the right things, he's doing things in the right order," said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul. "His first travel abroad for the G7 summit demonstrates South Korea's

global governance contributions with fellow middle powers like Canada that are committed to defending the international order," Easley said. Lee's visit to Canada for the G7 summit marks his first international trip as president, since winning the June 3 snap presidential election called after Yoon was impeached and removed for briefly imposing martial law last year. During the summit, Lee also met with other world leaders, including British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, where he called for progress on updating the free trade agreement between the two countries, according to Lee's office. In a meeting with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Lee promised to deepen strategic cooperation and highlighted South Korean investments in the South Asian country.

## Many flights to Indonesia's Bali cancelled after volcano eruption

JAKARTA (Reuters): Several flights to the Indonesian resort island of Bali were cancelled or delayed and the airport in Maumere in East Nusa Tenggara province was closed due to the eruption of Mount Lewotobi Laki-laki, officials said.

Mount Lewotobi Laki-laki, which is in East Nusa Tenggara province, erupted, spewing ash 11 km (6.84 miles) high, forcing the country's volcanology agency to raise the alert level to the highest. It erupted again, belching a 1 km (0.62 mile) high ash cloud, the agency said in a statement.

Several international flights from India, Singapore and Australia to Bali were cancelled due to the eruption, the Bali international airport website showed. Singapore Airlines cancelled four flights between Bali's Denpasar airport and Singapore, and its budget subsidiary Scoot cancelled flights to Bali and the neighbouring island Lombok, the airlines said. Qantas' low-cost carrier JetStar cancelled several morning flights to Bali from Australia and expects afternoon flights to be delayed. "Forecasts show the ash cloud is expected to clear by later tonight," JetStar said in a midday travel bulletin. The government closed the Fransiskus Xaverius Seda airport in Maumere "to ensure the safety of the passengers," said the airport operator AirNav in its Instagram post.

The eruption also forced local authorities to evacuate dozens of residents living in two villages near the volcano, Avi Hallan, an official at the local disaster mitigation agency told Reuters. "Streets in the two villages were filled with thick ash, gravel, and sand," she said, adding no casualties were reported. The volcano last erupted in May. Indonesia sits on the Pacific Ring of Fire, an area of high seismic activity atop multiple tectonic plates.

## Ishiba says disagreements remain with US on tariff talks

CALGARY (Reuters): Japan's Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba said his country has not reached a comprehensive tariff agreement with the United States as some disagreements persist between the two nations.

Ishiba, talking to reporters after the Group of Seven leaders' summit in Canada, emphasised the importance of securing a trade deal that benefits both countries while safeguarding Japan's national interests. Ishiba, who was at his first G7 summit as prime minister, held tariff talks US President Donald Trump, but the meeting ended without an agreement to lower or eliminate the 25% tariff Trump has imposed on Japanese auto imports.

Ishiba said US tariff measures were impacting the earnings of many Japanese companies, including those in the automobile sector, while causing a significant impact on the global economy. "Both Japan and the United States have continued sincere discussions, exploring the possibility of an agreement until the last moment," he said. But Ishiba added there still remain points of disagreement between the two sides. Ishiba's news conference in Calgary, Canada was held following a gathering of G7 leaders at the nearby Kananaskis mountain resort in the Canadian Rockies. Ishiba also met other leaders for bilateral talks including his first meeting with German Chancellor Friedrich Merz. The Japanese leader also discussed security relations with South Korean President Lee Jae-myung before heading back to Tokyo. The summit ended without a joint statement of support from the group for Ukraine after US President Donald Trump expressed support for Russian President Vladimir Putin and left the event a day early to address the Israel-Iran conflict.

## China downplayed nuclear-capable missile test

WELLINGTON (AFP): China tried to mislead foreign governments in 2024 by playing down the importance of a nuclear-capable missile test over the Pacific Ocean, New Zealand diplomats privately warned in documents obtained by AFP. Beijing sent shivers through the South Pacific in September 2024, when its elite Rocket Force fired a dummy warhead into the high seas near French Polynesia.

A tranche of classified government briefing notes obtained by AFP shows deep concern within the New Zealand government in the wake of the surprise launch, which China shrugged off as "routine". It was China's first long-range missile launch over international waters in more than 40 years, the papers confirmed, serving as a blunt reminder of Beijing's potent nuclear-strike capabilities. "We are concerned that China is characterising this as a 'routine test'," senior diplomats wrote in a memo to New Zealand's foreign affairs minister.

"It is not routine: China has not conducted this type of long-range missile test in over 40 years. We do not want to see this test repeated." China's military played down the test as a "legitimate and routine arrangement for military training". Behind the scenes, New Zealand diplomats privately decried China's "mischaracterisation". "As this is the first time that China has undertaken such an action in the Pacific in several decades, it is a significant and concerning development," they wrote in one of the briefing documents. AFP applied to access the heavily redacted documents -- written between September and October last

year -- under New Zealand's Official Information Act.

They were classified as "Restricted", which protects government information with diplomatic or national security implications. China has been seeking to cement its presence in the strategically important South Pacific, showering developing island nations with new hospitals, freshly paved roads, and gleaming sports stadiums. But rarely has it so obviously flexed its military might in the region, where the United States, Australia and New Zealand have long been the security partners of choice.

"We have again asked China why it conducted the test at this time, and why it chose to terminate the missile test in the South Pacific," New Zealand diplomats wrote. China's Rocket Force launched the intercontinental ballistic missile with little warning on September 25, 2024. Photos released by China showed a projectile streaking into the sky from a secret location atop a billowing plume of smoke. It appeared to be one of China's advanced Dong Feng-31 missiles, analysts said, a weapon capable of delivering a thermonuclear warhead.

The long-range missile splashed into a patch of ocean long designated a nuclear-free zone under an international treaty. Pacific island nations remain deeply scarred by the nuclear tests that shook the region in the decades following World War II. "This is the first time that we are aware of a test of a nuclear-capable missile terminating within the zone since its establishment in 1986," the New Zealand diplomats wrote. China alerted the

United States, the United Kingdom, France, Australia and New Zealand before the test. But there was only a vague indication of what it would do, according to a separate batch of Australian government documents obtained by AFP.

"Beijing advised us of a planned activity the evening prior to the launch, but specific details were not forthcoming," Australian defence officials wrote in November last year. Pacific island nations, however, were not provided with advance notice of the launch, New Zealand diplomats noted. Following the launch, Japan publicly voiced "serious concern". Australia said the test risked "destabilising" the South Pacific, and Fiji urged "respect for our region". Pacific nation Kiribati, one of China's warmest friends in the region, said the South Pacific Ocean should not be a proving ground for jostling big powers.

"The high seas in the Pacific are not isolated pockets of oceans... we appeal to all countries involved in weapon testing to stop these acts to maintain world peace and stability," read a government statement at the time. China foreign policy expert Nicholas Khoo said the intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) test was particularly significant because it took place in the South Pacific. "Since 1980, China's ICBM tests have taken place within Chinese territory," he told AFP. "The test is a reminder to regional states that China is a 'full spectrum' power that has economic and military power. It is a peer with the US." Harvard University researcher Hui Zhang said it was a forceful reminder of China's nuclear strength.

## Ex-Argentinian President Cristina given house arrest

BUENOS AIRES: A federal court in Argentina has granted former President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner house arrest to serve her six-year sentence for corruption charges. The court decided that the 72-year-old Fernandez's age and visibility as a political figure made house arrest a reasonable option for her confinement.

Just three years ago, in 2022, the popular left-wing leader faced an assassination attempt, wherein an assailant aimed a pistol at her head. The court cited such dangers in its decision, saying Fernandez's safety "would become complex in a situation of prison confinement in coexistence with any type of prison population". It is not uncommon for courts in Argentina to permit house arrest for individuals of advanced age as well.

The former president's house arrest must begin immediately, the court ruled. It also explained that she would be subject to electronic monitoring. She will serve out her sentence at her apartment in Buenos Aires that she shares with her daughter and granddaughter. Fernandez, the

court said, "must remain at the registered address, an obligation that she may not break except in exceptional situations". Any future visitors to the apartment - outside of household staff, healthcare workers and other approved individuals - will have to be vetted by the court. The former president's incarceration comes after Argentina's Supreme Court last week upheld her conviction and barred her from running for public office ever again. She was found guilty in 2022 of using public works projects, including roadways, to give beneficial contracts to a close associate of her family, Lazaro Baez. Prosecutors said the contracts awarded to Baez had rates 20 percent higher than normal - a sum that could translate to millions of dollars.

Other scandals have dogged her political career, including accusations of bribery and money laundering. Some of those cases continue to be weighed by Argentina's judicial system. But Fernandez has dismissed the allegations against her as political attacks. She had been preparing to launch a bid in this year's legislative elec-

tions, until the ban on her candidacy. Fernandez served as Argentina's president from 2007 to 2015, after succeeding her husband, the late Nestor Kirchner.

In 2019, four years after she left the Casa Rosada - the "Pink House" of the presidency - Fernandez returned to the executive branch as vice president to Alberto Fernandez, another left-wing politician. Both Fernandez and Alberto Fernandez - who share no familial relation - faced sharp criticism for their management of Argentina's economy, including their heavy reliance on government spending and their devaluation of the country's peso through the printing of excess currency. But particularly among working-class Argentinians, Fernandez continues to enjoy substantial popularity, particularly for her investments in social programmes to alleviate poverty. Since 2024, Fernandez has led the Justicialist Party, the main pillar of opposition against the government of current President Javier Milei, a libertarian. He took office in 2023, succeeding Alberto Fernandez.

## Brazil sells rights to oil blocks near Amazon river mouth

RIO DE JENEIRO (AFP): Brazil sold extraction rights to 19 oil and gas blocks near the mouth of the Amazon river, at an auction slammed by environmentalists months before the country is to host a UN climate summit. Two consortiums -- one comprising Brazil's state-owned Petrobras and US giant ExxonMobil, the other US multinational Chevron and China's CNPC -- spent \$153 million on exploration and production concessions for 19 blocks on offer in an area considered vulnerable to environmental harm.

They are among 172 blocks, most of them offshore, that went on auction as dozens of protesters gathered outside the venue under a banner reading: "Stop the doomsday auctions." Green groups have

expressed particular concern over 47 blocks in the Atlantic, in an area near the mouth of the Amazon River that flows through the world's largest carbon-capturing tropical rainforest. The first 19 blocks to which rights were sold were part of these 47.

In all, 34 blocks found takers at the auction, bringing in about \$180 million for the state. Investments of more than \$260 million are planned for exploration. Already Latin America's biggest oil and gas producer, Brazil is seeking to increase production from 4.68 million to 5.3 million barrels per day by 2030. At the same time, the country has pledged to reduce its emissions of planet-warming greenhouse gas emissions to 1.2 billion tons of CO2 equivalent (CO2e). By 2050, it is seeking to

reach neutrality -- meaning emissions do not exceed the amount captured, by forests, for example. Brazil's ClimaInfo research institute had estimated that the 172 blocks placed on auction would emit some 11.1 billion tons of CO2e. Leftist President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, seeking to position himself as a leader in the fight against climate change, supported the auction that will see the successful bidders pay royalties on whatever oil and natural gas they eventually do extract.

"If this wealth exists, we cannot ignore it, as it will help us to make the energy transition and secure funds to preserve our forests," Lula declared in February. "We must act responsibly. I do not want oil exploration to cause any harm to the environment," he added.

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## G7 leaders try to salvage their summit after Trump's early exit

Six of the Group of Seven leaders were trying on the final day of their summit on Tuesday to show the wealthy nations' club still has the clout to shape world events despite the early departure of US President Donald Trump. Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney and his counterparts from the UK, France, Germany, Italy and Japan will be joined by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and NATO chief Mark Rutte to discuss Russia's relentless war on its neighbour, reported Associated Press.

World leaders had gathered in Canada with the specific goal of helping to defuse a series of pressure points, only to be disrupted by a showdown over Iran's nuclear program that could escalate in dangerous and uncontrollable ways, reported Associated Press. Israel launched an aerial bombardment campaign against Iran on Friday, and Iran has hit back with missiles and drones. Trump left the summit in the Canadian Rocky Mountain resort of Kananaskis a day early late on Monday, saying: "I have to be back, very important." As conflict between Israel and Iran intensified, he declared that Tehran should be evacuated "immediately" — while also expressing optimism about a deal to stop the violence.

Before leaving, Trump joined the other leaders in issuing a statement saying Iran "can never have a nuclear weapon" and calling for a "de-escalation of hostilities in the Middle East, including a ceasefire in Gaza." Getting unanimity — even on a short and broadly worded statement — was a modest measure of success for the group.

At the summit, Trump warned that Tehran must curb its nuclear program before it's "too late." He said Iranian leaders would "like to talk" but they had already had 60 days to reach an agreement on their nuclear ambitions and failed to do so before the Israeli aerial assault began. "They have to make a deal," he said.

Asked what it would take for the US to get involved in the conflict militarily, Trump said on Monday morning, "I don't want to talk about that." But by Monday afternoon, Trump warned ominously on social media, "Everyone should immediately evacuate Tehran!" Shortly after that, Trump decided to leave the summit and skip a series of Tuesday meetings that would address the war in Ukraine and trade issues, Associated Press observed.

The sudden departure only heightened the drama of a world that seems on verge of several firestorms. Trump already has imposed severe tariffs on multiple nations that risk a global economic slowdown. There has been little progress on settling the wars in Ukraine and Gaza. Trump's stance on Ukraine puts him fundamentally at odds with the other G7 leaders, who back Ukraine and are clear that Russia is the aggressor in the war.

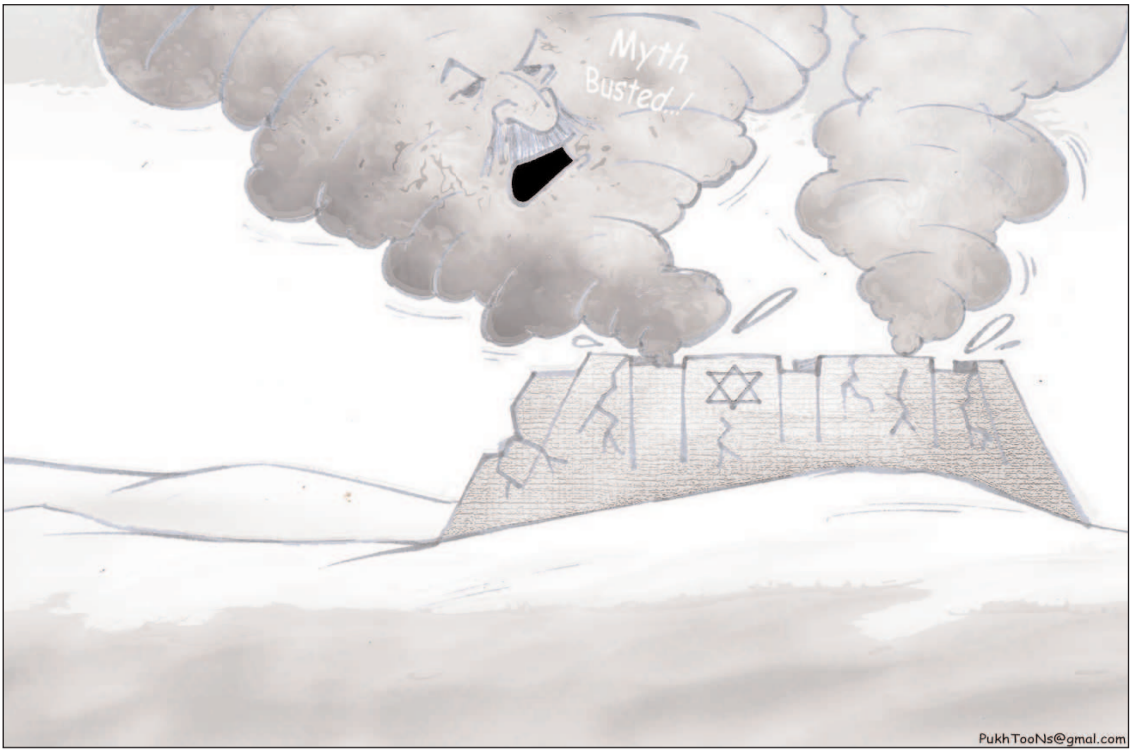
The US president on Monday suggested there would have been no war if G7 members hadn't expelled Putin from the organization in 2014 for annexing Crimea. Trump on Monday demurred when asked if he supported Russia, saying "I only care about saving lives."

With talks on ending the war at an impasse, Starmer said Britain and other G7 members were slapping new tariffs on Russia in a bid to get it to the ceasefire negotiating table. Zelensky was due to attend the summit later on Tuesday at Carney's invitation, along with other leaders including Rutte and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, said Associated Press.

Trump declined to join in the sanctions on Russia, saying he would wait until Europe did so first. "When I sanction a country, that costs the US a lot of money, a tremendous amount of money," he said. Trump had been scheduled before his departure to meet with Zelensky and with Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum.

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## Israel tried to break Iran – but it may have actually helped unite it

Mohammad Eslami

ISRAEL'S ongoing military assault on Iran has already become one of the most consequential cross-border strikes in the region's recent history. Far more than a targeted operation against missile silos or nuclear facilities, it has included high-profile assassinations and sophisticated cyberattacks. Among the most significant developments so far has been the assassination of several senior Iranian commanders, including Major General Mohammad Bagheri, Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) commander Hossein Salami and the head of its Aerospace Force, Amir Ali Hajizadeh. These targeted killings represent the most severe blow to Iran's military leadership since the 1980-1988 war with Iraq. Yet, beneath the surface, the assault is not merely a military manoeuvre – it is the expression of a political doctrine decades in the making.

While Israeli officials publicly framed the operation as a preemptive act to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon, its deeper strategic logic appears increasingly clear: the destabilisation – and eventual collapse – of the Islamic Republic.

For years, Israeli and some American strategists have argued – sometimes discreetly, sometimes overtly – that the only durable solution to Iran's nuclear ambitions is regime change.

The current campaign aligns with this longstanding

objective, not only through military means but also via psychological, political and social pressure inside Iran.

Recent developments suggest the operation was designed to provoke the early stages of an internal uprising. The playbook is familiar to observers of past regime-change efforts: assassinations of top military officials, psychological warfare, disinformation campaigns and the symbolic targeting of state institutions. In Tehran, Israeli-backed cyberattacks and precision strikes have reportedly hit government buildings and ministries, even temporarily disrupting national television broadcasts – a key pillar of the Islamic Republic's communications infrastructure.

Israeli political rhetoric has echoed this direction. In closed briefings and selected media interviews, officials have acknowledged that Iran's deeply fortified underground nuclear facilities – some reportedly buried more than 500 metres (1,640ft) beneath the Zagros and Alborz mountains – cannot be destroyed without full United States participation. Specifically, the operation would require the use of GBU-57 "Massive Ordnance Penetrator" bombs, deliverable only by American B-2 or B-52 strategic bombers.

In the absence of such capabilities, Israeli leaders appear to have concluded that halting Iran's nuclear programme is impossible without a change in gov-

ernment.

This context lends new meaning to Israel's concurrent military and political efforts. In the aftermath of the attacks, Israeli messaging aimed at the Iranian public intensified, portraying the IRGC not as national defenders but as the chief oppressors of the Iranian people. The messaging sought to separate the Islamic Republic from the Iranian nation with slogans such as: "This is not Iran's war. This is the regime's war." Iranian opposition figures abroad – including Reza Pahlavi, the eldest son of the last shah of Iran, and former footballer Ali Karimi – echoed these narratives, expressing support for the strikes and calling for regime change.

However, the strategy may have produced the opposite effect. Rather than igniting mass revolt or fracturing national unity, the attacks appear to have consolidated public sentiment across political lines. Many Iranians, including longtime critics of the regime, have expressed anger over what they perceive as a foreign assault on national sovereignty.

The collective memory of external intervention – stretching from the CIA-backed 1953 coup to the Iran-Iraq War – has reactivated a deeply embedded defensive reflex.

Even among activists from the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement – which sparked nationwide protests after the 2022 death of Mahsa Amini in police custody – there has

been visible reluctance to align with foreign military intervention. As images of bombed-out buildings and fallen Iranian soldiers circulated, a mood of empathy and solidarity momentarily replaced the demand for regime change. For many, the conversation has shifted from political reform to national defence.

Notably, several public figures and former opponents of the Islamic Republic voiced support for Iran and denounced the Israeli attacks. Football legend Ali Daei declared, "I prefer to die rather than be a traitor," rejecting cooperation with any foreign assault. Mohsen Borhani, a former judge and political prisoner, wrote, "I kiss the hands of all defenders of the homeland," referring to the IRGC and other armed forces.

What began as a calculated strike on military targets may be achieving the opposite of its intended outcome.

Rather than weakening the regime's hold on power, Israel's actions risk reinforcing it – by rallying national unity and silencing dissent. The attempt to engineer revolution from outside may not only fail – it may backfire.

If Israel's ultimate aim was to catalyse a regime collapse, it may have underestimated the historical resilience of Iran's political system and the unifying power of national trauma. As bombs fall and generals die, Iran's social fabric does not appear to be fraying. Instead, it may be stitching itself back together.

## Why Gavi's replenishment is critical to the fight against cancer

Dr. Zainab Shinkafi-Bagudu

I come from Nigeria, a lower-middle-income nation of 230 million people. As a cancer advocate, I witness daily how it devastates families, not because we lack the knowledge to prevent many cancers, but because we lack the resources and political will to scale life-saving preventive measures like the HPV and hepatitis B vaccines.

It is staggering that approximately 13 percent of global cancers are caused by infectious diseases that are vaccine-preventable. Yet there is a huge difference in how countries are able to access such vaccines.

Thus, when we provide HPV and hepatitis B vaccines to countries that otherwise would be unable to access them, we are not only making a highly effective health intervention, we are also making an equity intervention. The HPV vaccine protects future women from a leading cause of cancer death in women in many low- and middle-income countries — cervical cancer. Meanwhile, cases of liver cancer have been reduced by up to 91 percent in some studies of vaccinated populations. Clearly, vaccines reduce future cancer care costs, free up health systems and keep mothers alive for their children. The ripple effects are profound — for health, for economies and for the dignity of communities.

If these benefits are profound, perhaps what is more so is the fact that prevention in the form of vaccines creates a unique

opportunity for health systems in low- and middle-income countries to move from perpetual crisis management to a cost-effective and sustainable pathway that strengthens primary healthcare, builds trust in institutions and delivers intergenerational dividends for decades to come.

This is why the upcoming replenishment of Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance is an urgent opportunity to fund solutions that are backed by science, proven in implementation and catalytic in impact. It is a chance to protect millions of children and families from cancers they should never have to face.

As a public-private collaboration, Gavi has supported the vaccination of more than 1 billion children since 2000 and today ensures that over half the world's children are protected against deadly but preventable diseases. Through this work, it has prevented more than 17.3 million deaths and helped bring about a 50 percent reduction of child mortality in 78 lower-income countries.

Thanks to advances in science and sustained efforts to grow the supply of affordable, safe and effective vaccines, Gavi has recently begun scaling up efforts to tackle the scourge of cervical cancer. In Nigeria alone, there are more than 60 million women and girls at risk from this dreadful disease. With support from Gavi, 13.6 million girls have been

vaccinated against HPV in the last two years, thereby fulfilling one of the pillars of the cervical cancer elimination goals and giving a chance of life without fear of this dreadful yet preventable disease.

HPV vaccine delivery is now routinely available to girls aged nine to 14 at primary healthcare centers and, Gavi is on track to have vaccinated 85 million girls worldwide by the end of the year. Without support, we will revert to zero. It is worth noting that, prior to this, only 6 million girls had been vaccinated in the entire African continent.

The countries eligible for support from Gavi that have introduced the hepatitis B birth dose vaccination program are showing remarkable reduction in hepatitis B infection rates. These include Burkina Faso, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and even China, which was an early recipient of Gavi support. This will consequently translate into a reduction in liver cancer cases.

My role as president-elect of the Union for International Cancer Control, an organization representing more than 1,200 cancer institutions across 176 countries, commits me to working alongside Gavi and other partners to ensure that vaccines are embedded in national cancer control plans and delivered with the urgency they deserve. We have come a long way already, but there is so much more work to do and we need

sustainability. We need visionaries and we need investors.

In under two weeks' time, Gavi will ask its stakeholders — a coalition of wealthier donor countries, including Saudi Arabia — countries that receive Gavi's support, which are themselves stepping up more and more each year to fund their own immunization programs, and private sector and philanthropic institutions to provide the funding it needs for its next five-year strategy period.

An investment in Gavi today is not charity — it is leadership. It is foresight. And it is one of the smartest, most scalable investments anyone can make in global cancer prevention. I urge all Gavi's traditional and new backers to step up and support its mission, to protect the world's most vulnerable and to help countries as they themselves strive to build sustainable, self-sufficient health systems. This includes Saudi Arabia, which in recent years has stepped up to demonstrate true global leadership. In 2020, it became the first country in the world to back Gavi's COVAX program for equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines. More recently, it has backed efforts to eradicate polio off the face of the Earth.

Let us match the strength of our science with the strength of our commitments, because behind every dose of vaccine is a life protected, a future restored and a generation empowered.

## Iran-Israel war diverting attention from Gaza catastrophe

Hani Hazaimeh

AS the world turns its eyes to the explosive confrontation between Iran and Israel, another tragedy continues to unfold — largely amid international silence. Israel's war on Gaza, already one of the most destructive military campaigns in recent history, is now becoming a footnote in the global news cycle. Airstrikes, famine and mass displacement have not ended, they have merely been pushed out of the spotlight. This shift in attention is not merely coincidental — it is politically convenient. The question we must ask is: at what cost?

The Iran-Israel conflict, which has drawn in regional actors and sparked fears of a wider war, is undoubtedly significant. It has serious implications for global oil markets, international security and the delicate balance of power in the Middle East. But while diplomats scramble to contain this geopolitical wildfire, a slower, deadlier burn continues in Gaza — one that threatens the lives of millions, especially children, trapped in a war zone with no escape, no food and little hope.

Since the start of the Gaza war in October 2023, more than 55,000 Palestinians have been killed, according to local health authorities. Entire neighborhoods have been reduced to rubble, hospitals have been bombed and the Strip's already fragile infrastructure has collapsed under the weight of a sustained siege. The World Food Programme and other agencies have repeatedly warned of an impending famine, exacerbated by Israel's restrictions on humanitarian aid and targeted destruction of civilian resources.

And yet, with missiles now flying between Iran and Israel, the human catastrophe in Gaza is being relegated to the margins of global diplomacy. But this is not just a failure of media or politics — it is a moral failure. The world cannot afford to normalize genocide simply because something more "geopolitically urgent" has arisen. The scale of suffering in Gaza demands sustained, focused international attention. It is not a side note. It is not a collateral issue. It is a core crisis that reflects the failure of the international system to uphold the very principles it claims to defend: the protection of civilians, the rule of law and the universal value of human life.

To ignore Gaza now is to send a dangerous message — that some lives are more dispensable than others. That justice can be paused. That impunity is acceptable if the perpetrator is powerful enough or the timing is convenient. We must resist this logic. Civil society, journalists and humanitarian advocates must redouble their efforts to keep Gaza in the public consciousness. The same institutions and voices that were courageous enough to speak out months ago must not go silent now. Furthermore, governments must stop using the Iran-Israel war as a diplomatic excuse. They must continue to support investigations into violations of international law in Gaza, push for unimpeded humanitarian access and condition military support on adherence to human rights.

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The shift is palpable: once-vocal international condemnation has softened into diplomatic murmurs. UN debates on war crimes and humanitarian aid have slowed, while the coverage from major Western news outlets has thinned dramatically. We are witnessing, in real-time, how one conflict can serve as a smoke-screen for another.

This diversion is not just a matter of journalistic bandwidth — it is a calculated political maneuver. As Israel frames itself once again as a victim under existential threat from a regional rival, it reclaims a position of moral high ground in Western narratives. The Iran confrontation allows Israel to recast its military aggression in Gaza as part of a broader defensive strategy against a hostile axis, linking Hamas, Hezbollah and Tehran under a single "terror" umbrella. In doing so, it deflects international criticism and stalls momentum for accountability, including mounting allegations of war crimes.

Moreover, the Iran-Israel escalation has proven a convenient excuse for Washington and its European allies to delay or downplay tough decisions on Gaza. Calls for a ceasefire, arms embargoes or investigations into violations of international law are being drowned out by appeals for "regional de-

escalation" and the need to prevent "a wider war." But for the people of Gaza, the war is already wide enough. Their suffering does not pause simply because the West is worried about oil prices or the Strait of Hormuz.

The timing of Israel's intensified military operations in Gaza often appears to coincide with moments of high international distraction. In recent months, several large-scale offensives, particularly in Rafah and northern Gaza, have been launched just as global attention veered toward diplomatic flashpoints involving Iran. Whether this is by design or not, the result is the same: reduced scrutiny, minimal outrage and a delay in any form of international pressure.

This diversion also has devastating consequences on the ground. Humanitarian organizations have reported significant delays in aid delivery due to shifting political priorities among donor states. Media outlets that once dispatched special correspondents to Gaza have now redeployed them to Tel Aviv or Beirut. Even social media algorithms, driven by trending topics, have contributed to a sharp decline in visibility for Gaza-related content.

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Furthermore, governments must stop using the Iran-Israel war as a diplomatic excuse. They must continue to support investigations into violations of international law in Gaza, push for unimpeded humanitarian access and condition military support on adherence to human rights. The conflict with Iran cannot become a moral fig leaf for the obliteration of Gaza.

Political convenience or media attention spans should not constrain the human capacity for empathy and justice. If we truly care about peace, stability and human dignity in the Middle East, then we must care about Gaza — no matter what else is burning.

The road to peace in the region cannot be paved over mass graves in Gaza. And until the world reclaims its moral clarity and refuses to be distracted by the convenient theater of geopolitics, the suffering will continue — silently, but no less tragically.

# The Israeli-Iranian war and the security of the Gulf

The positions of the Gulf Cooperation Council states have been made very clear, as they openly expressed their opposition to Friday's initial Israeli military strikes that targeted Iranian nuclear facilities.

On that day, Saudi Arabia issued a clear statement in which it expressed its "strong condemnation and denunciation of the blatant Israeli attacks against the brotherly Islamic Republic of Iran, which undermine its sovereignty and security and constitute a clear violation of international laws and norms."

For its part, the Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced its "strong condemnation and deep denunciation of the Israeli attack targeting the territory of the Islamic Republic of Iran."

The UAE, in a statement issued by its Ministry of Foreign Affairs, expressed its "deep concern over the ongoing escalation and its repercussions on regional security and stability," stressing the "importance of exercising the utmost self-restraint and judgment to mitigate risks and prevent the expansion of the conflict."

The Gulf Cooperation Council's Ministerial Council, in its 48th extraordinary session, unanimously expressed its rejection of "the Israeli attacks on the Islamic Republic of Iran, which infringe its sovereignty and security and constitute a flagrant violation of international law and the Charter of the United Nations." It emphasized "the necessity of

returning to the diplomatic path" and "an immediate ceasefire," in order to "maintain the security and stability of the region." It also called on the "UN Security Council and the international community to assume their responsibilities toward the immediate cessation of this war."

The council's statement did not overlook a highly important point related to energy security, as it stressed "the importance of preserving maritime security and waterways in the region, and countering activities that threaten the security and stability of the region and the world, including targeting commercial ships, threatening maritime navigation and international trade, and oil facilities in the GCC states."

The GCC states' positions were not limited to statements alone. Direct phone calls took place between Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian. Pezeshkian also spoke with both Omani Sultan Haitham bin Tariq and UAE President Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan.

The foreign ministries of the Gulf states are also in contact with the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in order to coordinate and de-escalate and to arrange logistical matters related to Iranian citizens stranded in these countries or Gulf citizens stranded in Iran, in addition to the messages being conveyed by various parties aiming to de-esca-

Hassan Al-Mustafa

late the situation.

Added to all this are the direct communications between the kings and presidents of the Gulf states and the US, France, the UK, Türkiye and other influential countries, which aim to create a genuine and practical political path that pushes for the resumption of US-Iranian negotiations, the halting of military actions and making diplomacy the sole path toward resolving disputes.

Some may find these intensive efforts surprising, especially since they are coming from Arab countries that have political and security disputes with Iran. They have also experienced incidents where Tehran played a negative role that harmed Gulf security by supporting cells loyal to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, which engaged in interference and sabotage operations in several Arab countries.

These previous negative experiences are taken into account by the Gulf Arab states, but they have adopted a flexible, pragmatic approach that prevents them from remaining trapped in the past or being held hostage to reactions and emotional responses. This is especially the case given that a trust-building process has begun and is progressing step by step between Saudi Arabia and Iran following the signing of the Beijing Agreement between the two countries in March 2023, which was based on mutual respect and noninterference in each

other's internal affairs.

What distinguishes Riyadh and the other Gulf capitals is that they do not base their foreign policies on emotions. Rather, they build their diplomacy on what serves their national interests first, regional security second and their partnerships with neighboring countries — including Iran. They strive to make honest and serious dialogue the path to resolving ongoing issues.

These pragmatic policies have formed a safety net, especially since Oct. 7, 2023, as Israel has continued to pursue aggressive policies and wage a bloody war against the Gaza Strip, while rejecting calls for a ceasefire. It has also been working to undermine the two-state solution — an issue highlighted in the statement issued on Tuesday by the co-chairs of the UN High-Level International Conference on the Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine and the Implementation of the Two-State Solution, convened by Saudi Arabia and France.

This statement stressed that "the situation compels us to double our efforts to call for upholding international law, respecting the sovereignty of states and advancing peace," while emphasizing the importance of achieving a "just and lasting resolution of the Palestinian question through the implementation of the two-state solution."

The current extremist government in Israel rejects the two-state solution and it is exultant over what it sees

as a crushing victory against its "enemies" — whether Hamas in Palestine or Hezbollah in Lebanon — and the resulting shifts in Syria, as well as the halting of attacks against Israel by Iraqi armed factions.

This sense of overwhelming power within Benjamin Netanyahu's government is pushing its prime minister to adopt extremist policies aimed at cementing a fait accompli in which Tel Aviv controls the Middle East, becoming the dominant force in the region that changes things at will and acts without consequences. This is something Saudi Arabia and the GCC states reject, as it violates international norms and laws.

Furthermore, the current extremist Israeli policies are likely to foster an environment conducive to the growth of extremist ideologies — meaning that conflict will inevitably erupt again in the future, leading to further instability in the Middle East.

The GCC states are seeking to urge US President Donald Trump to pressure Israel to halt its military operations in the region and move toward resuming nuclear negotiations with Iran — concurrently with ending the war on Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank. This is because they realize that, without such steps, no one will be able to rein in Netanyahu's recklessness, his personal ambitions or the dreams of the Israeli far right, which listens to nothing but its own racist desires.

# Cross your fingers, Australia, and hope the AUKUS deal collapses

Gareth Evans

The AUKUS partnership, the 2021 deal whereby the United States and the United Kingdom agreed to provide Australia with at least eight nuclear-propelled submarines over the next three decades, has come under review by the US Defense Department.

The prospect of its collapse has generated predictable handwringing among those who welcomed the deepening alliance, and especially among those interested in seeing Australia inject billions of dollars into underfunded, underperforming American and British naval shipyards. But in Australia, an AUKUS breakdown should be a cause for celebration.

After all, there has never been any certainty that the promised subs would arrive on time. The US is supposed to supply three or possibly five Virginia-class submarines from 2032, with another five newly designed SSN-AUKUS-class subs (built mainly in the U.K.) coming into service from the early 2040s. But the US and the U.K.'s industrial capacity is already strained, owing to their own national submarine-building targets and both have explicit opt-out rights.

Some analysts assume that the Defense Department review is just another Trumpian extortion exercise, designed to extract an even bigger financial commitment from Australia. But while comforting to some Australians (though not anyone in the Treasury), this interpretation is misconceived.

There are very real concerns in Washington that even with more Australian dollars devoted to expanding shipyard capacity, the US will not be able to increase production to the extent required to make available three — let alone five — Virginia-class subs by the early 2030s. Moreover, Elbridge Colby, the US under-secretary of defense for policy who is leading the review, has long been a skeptic of the project and he will not hesitate to put America's own new-boat target first.

Even in the unlikely event that everything falls smoothly into place — from the transfers of Virginia-class subs to the construction of new British boats, with no human-resource bottlenecks or cost overruns — Australia will be waiting decades for the last boat to arrive. But given that our existing geriatric Collins-class fleet is already on life support, this timeline poses a serious challenge. How will we address our capability gap in the meantime?

Cost-benefit analysis should have killed the project from the outset. But in their eagerness to embrace the deal, political leaders on both sides of parliament failed to review properly what was being proposed. Even acknowledging the

greatly superior speed and endurance of nuclear-powered subs and accepting the heroic assumption that their underwater undetectability will remain immune from technological challenge throughout their lifetimes, the final fleet size seems hardly fit for the purpose of national defense.

Given the usual operating constraints, Australia would have only two such subs deployed at any one time. Just how much intelligence gathering, archipelagic chokepoint protection, sea-lane safeguarding or even deterrence at a distance will be possible under such conditions? Moreover, the program's eye-watering cost will make it difficult to

tion — the first Gulf War in 1991 — and my recollections are not pretty.

All that AUKUS and its associated alliance commitments have done for Australia is paint more targets on our back. Alongside the Pine Gap satellite communications and signals intelligence facility — which has always been a bull's-eye — one can add Perth's Stirling submarine base, the Northern Territory, with its US Marine and B-52 bases and possibly a future east-coast submarine base.

The crazy irony is that we are spending huge sums to build a new capability intended to defend us from military threats that are

There are very real concerns in Washington that even with more Australian dollars devoted to expanding shipyard capacity, the US will not be able to increase production to the extent required to make available three — let alone five — Virginia-class subs by the early 2030s. Moreover, Elbridge Colby, the US under-secretary of defense for policy who is leading the review, has long been a skeptic of the project and he will not hesitate to put America's own new-boat target first. Even in the unlikely event that everything falls smoothly into place — from the transfers of Virginia-class subs to the construction of new British boats, with no human-resource bottlenecks or cost overruns — Australia will be waiting decades for the last boat to arrive. But given that our existing geriatric Collins-class fleet is already on life support, this timeline poses a serious challenge.

acquire the other capabilities that are already reshaping the nature of modern warfare: state-of-the-art drones, missiles, aircraft and cyber defense.

The remaining reason for believing, as former Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating put it, that an American opt-out "will be the moment Washington saves Australia from itself," concerns AUKUS's negative implications for Australia's sovereignty. The Americans agreed to the deal because they saw it to be in their strategic interest, not ours. As then-US Deputy Secretary of State Kurt Campbell observed (indiscreetly) last year, "we have them locked in now for the next 40 years."

It defies credibility to believe that the US would transfer such a sensitive technology to us — with all the associated emphasis on the "interchangeability" of our fleets and new basing arrangements in Australia — unless it could avail itself of these subs in a future war. I have had personal ministerial experience of being a junior US ally in a hot conflict situa-

most likely to arise simply because we have that capability — and using it to support the US, without any guarantee of support in return should we ever need it. If the AUKUS project does collapse, it would arguably still be possible for Australia to acquire replacements for its aging submarine fleet within a reasonable time frame — and probably at less cost, while retaining real sovereign control — by purchasing off-the-shelf technology elsewhere. One can even imagine us going back to France, which was snubbed in the AUKUS deal, and making a bid for its new-generation Suffren-class nuclear-powered sub.

But a better defense option may simply be to recognize that the latest revolution in military technology is real and that our huge continent and maritime surroundings will be better protected by a combination of self-managed air, missile, underwater and cyber capabilities than by a handful of crewed submarines. There is no better time to start thinking outside the US alliance box.

# Restoring European tech leadership

OVER the past few decades, the EU has been relegated from global technology player to passive consumer of technologies developed elsewhere. Today, 80 percent of the technologies and services Europe needs for its digital transformation are designed and manufactured beyond its borders, mostly in the US and China. So deep is this consumer mindset that it has even shaped the philosophy behind its laws: the goal of recent tech regulations like the Digital Services Act and the Digital Markets Act was to protect Europeans as consumers by keeping them safe online and ensuring fair competition.

To their credit, these laws offer strong protections for EU citizens and they have even served as blueprints for competition policy and online safety worldwide. Regulatory excellence has become Europe's trademark. But without a complementary innovation policy — and an assessment of whether the bloc's current rules promote or impede it — the EU risks becoming a mere spectator in the global tech race, particularly in the artificial intelligence domain.

Despite the deals

announced during the AI Action Summit in Paris earlier this year, overall foreign direct investment into Europe fell to its lowest level in nine years in 2024, with France and Germany experiencing double-digit declines. And this decline is accompanied by other worrying figures: the EU's share of the global information and communications technology market fell from 21.8 percent in 2013 to 11.3 percent in 2022.

For too long, Europeans have passively benefited from Silicon Valley's risk-taking and Shenzhen's manufacturing prowess. But this was not a free lunch. As former European Central Bank President Mario Draghi, the author of a landmark 2024 report on European competitiveness, put it, Europeans have done "everything we could to keep innovation at a low level."

Europe must do much more than simply catch up to America and China. To reclaim a place in the global tech industry, it urgently needs to rethink its entire approach to autonomy, alliances, regulation and leadership.

This calls for a well-considered strategy. The aim is to ensure security by building its own core

Eric Salobir

capabilities, not to achieve technological autarky or autonomy in isolation. It makes little sense to invest heavily in technologies that are hard to scale or export. Recent efforts to develop home-grown cloud computing and alternatives to Google Search were motivated mainly by the desire for technological independence — but they have not succeeded despite strong political backing. Looking ahead, such projects' commercial viability should be stress-tested before they consume too much time or resources.

One especially important issue is strategic interdependence, particularly when it comes to critical physical and digital infrastructures. At this point, no country could withstand an abrupt shutdown of digital payments, for example. That is why the payments sector has long relied on co-badging (multiple payment brands using the same payment instrument). And similar models of shared responsibility are found in the provision of submarine cables, low-orbit satellites, semiconductors, energy and nuclear fusion.

But expanding such partnerships requires a

level playing field, so that all participants can use the available technological building blocks. For example, Helsinki, the German-based drone startup, relies on open-source large language models developed by the French AI leader Mistral. Thanks to this synergistic arrangement, Helsinki recently launched a factory with an initial monthly production capacity of more than 1,000 AI-enabled drones.

Europeans must also acknowledge their shortcomings. Draghi and former Italian Prime Minister Enrico Letta — the author of a major report on strengthening the European single market — have both warned that the current approach to enforcing the EU's digital laws is burdening small innovators. More clarity, simplicity and predictability in the legal framework for tech would bolster the single market and attract talent and investment back to Europe. This is not about watering down privacy or copyright laws. It is about creating a regulatory environment that both empowers and safeguards market participants.

At the same time, the work of protecting people in the digital realm is far from complete, consider-

ing that children around the world still lack comprehensive protections online. Harmonizing European innovation policies with protections for fundamental rights will remain a top priority. But Europe cannot leverage its diplomatic and regulatory power if it has no tech champions capable of shaping digital products, services and markets at the global level.

In this respect, a coalition of like-minded companies from across the EU and other countries that share its values could play an important advocacy role. The EU needs to show that generative AI could represent a major opportunity, but only if it is deployed in ways that respect human rights and workers. And it needs to create technological and legal frameworks that promote equity and pluralism across the bloc's many languages.

These are the big challenges and opportunities in front of us. To succeed, industry leaders and policymakers must collaborate closely with civil society, universities and trade unions. It is not too late to restore Europe's status as a global leader in technology and innovation. The most important step is a change of mindset.

# Water powers neighborly harmony

Cholpon Koichumanova

China's cooperation with Central Asian countries, including Kyrgyzstan, has significantly expanded in recent decades, covering a wide range of areas, including water resources and agriculture. These sectors are strategically important for the region's sustainable development, ecological security, food self-sufficiency and regional stability. As one of the world's leading investors and a neighboring country of Kyrgyzstan, China promotes various forms of collaboration, particularly under the Belt and Road Initiative framework, with a focus on water management, irrigation, agroindustrial cooperation and the adoption of innovative technologies.

Central Asia is one of the world's most vulnerable regions in terms of water resources. The Syr Darya (river) and Amu Darya, which supply much of the region's water, are under increasing strain due to climate change, increasing demand for irrigation, and wastage of water. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are the primary sources of transboundary rivers, while Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan,

and Turkmenistan heavily depend on the water from these rivers for irrigation and drinking.

The water issue is not only ecological but also political. Periodic disputes over water allocation among the countries in Central Asia require a comprehensive and coordinated approach to resolve. In this context, the involvement of China, which shares borders with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, is becoming increasingly prominent, because it offers infrastructure, technological and financial solutions to improve water management.

What's more, China has emerged as a key partner of Central Asian countries in modernizing their irrigation systems, building their reservoirs, and sharing its expertise in water resource management with them. A significant area of their collaboration is joint projects on transboundary water management. For instance, China and Kyrgyzstan have signed agreements on the sustainable use of the Naryn and Chu rivers and regularly consult each other on water balance and flow monitoring.

China's Ministry of Natural Resources has

strengthened cooperation with the government agencies of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan on the rational use of transboundary waters. This initiative includes data sharing, joint hydrological

supply for rural populations and promoting "green energy" development.

Agriculture is a key economic sector for most Central Asian countries,

Issyk-Kul regions, with the produce exported to China.

Paying special attention to knowledge transfer and professional training, China organizes skill upgrading and training programs for Central Asian

China's Ministry of Natural Resources has strengthened cooperation with the government agencies of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan on the rational use of transboundary waters. This initiative includes data sharing, joint hydrological monitoring stations, and professional training for specialists. Additionally, China supports the building and modernization of hydraulic structures, particularly in Kyrgyzstan. With Chinese investment, irrigation canals and small hydropower plants in the three countries are being upgraded, improving water supply for rural populations and promoting "green energy" development. Agriculture is a key economic sector for most Central Asian countries, including Kyrgyzstan. Despite its huge potential, the region faces challenges such as outdated farming techniques, inadequate irrigation systems, low labor productivity and limited access to external markets. China's cooperation in this regard is immensely helpful in that it is a vital source of investment, innovation and logistical solutions.

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Additionally, China supports the building and modernization of hydraulic structures, particularly in Kyrgyzstan. With Chinese investment, irrigation canals and small hydropower plants in the three countries are being upgraded, improving water

establishment of agricultural industrial parks, agrotechnology parks and joint farming ventures in the central Asian countries, with Chinese companies supplying modern machinery, drip irrigation systems, seeds and fertilizers. One notable example is a project growing organic fruits and vegetables in Kyrgyzstan's Chui and

farmers and agronomists, including at Chinese agricultural universities. And joint research projects focus on promoting sustainable farming and agroecological practices, and checking desertification.

Logistics remain crucial for agricultural development. Under the BRI framework, China funds

the construction and modernization of transport corridors linking Central Asia to Chinese markets. And Kyrgyzstan, due to its geographical proximity to China, plays a key role in facilitating agricultural exports to China. In particular, the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway project could significantly reduce transportation costs and expedite agricultural deliveries, while dry ports and logistics hubs being developed near China's border, including in Kyrgyzstan's Naryn and Osh regions, will further smoothen freight transportation.

China also helps set quality and sanitary standards, enabling Kyrgyz and other Central Asian producers to access the Chinese market, with agreements being signed to certify and approve the delivery of goods such as honey, meat, grain and fruits from Kyrgyzstan.

But despite the positive developments, cooperation in water and agriculture between China and the Central Asian nations faces challenges. For instance, Chinese-backed water projects should take into consideration their environmental impacts, including soil degradation,

altered water regimes and ecosystem changes, and ensure intensive farming based on China's model doesn't deplete resources. There is also a need to inform local communities about the developments.

But with proper oversight and joint planning, China-Central Asia cooperation can promote rural sustainable development, improve farmers' livelihoods, and modernize the agricultural sector. China's cooperation with Central Asian countries, including Kyrgyzstan, in water resources and agriculture is a key aspect of regional engagement. China not only provides financial and technical assistance but also facilitates technology transfer, infrastructure development and export capacity-building.

Achieving sustainable outcomes, however, requires a balanced approach that takes into consideration all stakeholders' interests, ecological sustainability and transparent implementation mechanisms.

Amid the worsening climate change and food security challenges, such partnerships can serve as a foundation for Central Asia's long-term stability and prosperity.



## SCCI, TDAP organise seminar on furniture sector

— participants apprised about wood identification, quality testing and export procedures

### F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: An endeavor to enhance export and create awareness among the business community to improve quality of local manufacturing products and meet competitiveness in the global market, Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry in collaboration with Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP) jointly launched a series of seminars and training programs.

According to details, SCCI has proposed holding training programs and workshops for various clusters/sectors, including furniture, honey, carpet and other export-oriented products in Peshawar and other regions of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

By practically implementing proposals of the SCCI, the TDAP preliminarily organised an aware-

ness seminar on “Wood Identification, Quality Assessment and Export Procedure of Furniture sector in joint collaboration with the Chamber and KP Furniture Associations here on Wednesday.

The main purpose of the seminar was to provide information on wood identification, quality testing, and export procedures, with the aim of developing Pakistan’s furniture industry and increasing the share of the furniture industry in the export sector.

The session was chaired by SCCI president Fazal Moqeem Khan.

Besides, SCCI vice president Shehryar Khan, former president Malik Niaz Ahmad, members of executive committee of the chamber Sabir Ahmad Bangash, Saifullah Khan, and Ihsanullah, Rashid Iqbal Siddiqui, WCCIP president Rabia Basri,

women chamber members, SCCI Secretary General Muqtasid Ahsan, traders, manufacturers and exporters associated with furniture clusters were present in a large number during the seminar.

Fazal Moqeem Khan, president SCCI in his opening remarks highlighted export-oriented furniture manufacturing in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa which has high demand in the rest of the world.

The chamber president stressed government relevant institutions’ patronage and assistance to boost export of furniture from KP to other parts of the world.

Moqeem expressed hope such seminars would help to further improve the quality of manufacturing furniture and enhance trade and export from this region.

He appreciated the TDAP for collaboration with SCCI to jointly hold a

series of awareness seminars and training sessions on diverse sectors.

Later, TDAP Deputy Director Zahid Muhammad, Pakistan Forest Institute (PFI) Peshawar Director Dr Zahid Rauf, Deputy Director PFI Dr Tanveer Hussain and TDAP Director Nadia Farooqi also spoke on the occasion.

Senior officials shed light on best practices and strategies to promote the quality and export potential of Pakistan’s furniture industry and to share knowledge for sustainable development.

Nadia Farooqi joined the seminar through video link apprised that TDAP is proactively taking initiatives to enhance export of Pakistan’s manufacturing products, besides conducting sessions for quality improvement and organising number of exhibitions to promote them at the global market.



PESHAWAR: President Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry Fazal Moqeem Khan addressing a seminar jointly organized by TDAP and SCCI.

## GM: Hybrid vehicles more expensive than fuel savings

### F.P. Report

KARACHI: Pakistani car buyers have bought more than 35,000 SUVs at a price above Rs 8.0 million in the last year, and to save the fuel cost, 50% customers preferred Hybrid Vehicles. But Pakistani car buyers are buying expensive HEV SUVs compared to conventional petrol versions. This was revealed by Syed Asif Ahmed, General Manager Marketing Division at MG, while talking to media.

Asif informed that MG has sold more than 16,000 vehicles in Pakistani market so far out of which approximately 2000 were Plug In Hybrid vehicles (PHEV) as Pakistani customers are realizing the true economic benefit of PHEV as it’s a perfect urban mobility option for the urban consumers.

He says despite the changing trend of converting to PHEV from HEV Pakistani consumers have just one choice in the shape of MG HS PHEV, although

having a better technology but still placed lower than most hybrids in Pakistan.

Asif said that MG leads specification leadership in Pakistan. All automakers now follow the global specs MG introduced in MG HS in both CBU & CKD. MG vehicles have crossed approximately 350 million miles since its launch in Pakistan in 2021, and MG HS has successfully tested for Pakistan’s fuel, terrain (road), and weather conditions, he added.

Asif said the vehicles in Pakistan are still expensive. Globally, hybrid vehicles deliver financial value when their purchase price does not exceed more than 10% of the cost of an equivalent petrol vehicle.

However, this benchmark is not practised in the Pakistani market. Here, the price gap between hybrids and their petrol counterparts is significantly wider averaging around 45%.

For example, a C SUV hybrid vehicle costs up to Rs 12 million, while similar C SUV conventional petrol

cars cost Rs 8.0 million. In Pakistan, the difference of price between hybrid and conventional petrol cars is approximately 4.0 million in the C SUV category.

While hybrids generally offer a fuel economy advantage of 8-10 km per litre compared to petrol vehicles, which equates to a Rs 35/km operational cost saving, the payback timeline is lengthy.

To recover the additional Rs 4.0 million, a consumer would need to drive the hybrid for approximately 115,000 km. Assuming an average annual mileage of 15,000 km, this payback period extends to over 7.5 years. Given these figures, the first owner of the vehicle is unlikely to fully recoup the higher upfront investment during their typical ownership cycle. This raises critical questions about the cost-effectiveness of hybrids in Pakistan.

In terms of technology, hybrid vehicles are only efficient if used in stop & go condition in city drive. A hybrid system only

engages at low speeds around 40 - 60 km per hour. On long routes at high speed, the fuel efficiency drops to the same as a gasoline car. Hybrids are environmentally friendly is more of a myth than fact.

The periodic maintenance of Hybrid cars is also the exact same as Petrol cars making its total cost of ownership higher than petrol due to high acquisition cost. A Hybrid car is only viable if the fuel saving net off the high purchase price in less than 3 years.

EV is totally fuel free and requires maintenance after 15 months making it the most efficient mobility option available. However, high acquisition cost and lack of charging infrastructure inhibit large scale EV adoption.

Currently, as per the global trends the PHEV - Plug In Hybrid vehicles offer the best value for money. It offers an EV only range and Hybrid mode also to save from range anxiety.

## ‘Science in Action and Fiscal Governance for Safe Food’ held



### F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: In recognition of World Food Safety Day, a thought-provoking symposium titled “Science in Action” was jointly organized by the Pakistan Senate, Gallup Pakistan, Impact Research International, and Islamabad Food Authority at Islamabad club. The event underscored the critical need for a science-led approach to food safety and called for urgent fiscal reforms particularly in taxation policy to support the formal food sector.

Senator Syed Masroor Ahsan, Chairman of the Senate Standing Committee on National Food Security and Research, presided over the panel. He stressed the urgent need to design and implement evidence-based policies that ensure access to safe, traceable food in line with international standards. “Food safety and security are not just issues of today, they are challenges for the future. Our systems must evolve to

guarantee compliance, traceability, and public trust,” he stated.

Ms. Rida Qazi, Advisor to the Senate on Special Initiatives, reinforced the message by saying, “Safe food deserves to be called food. Food safety must begin at the farm and extend all the way to our dining tables. Chairman Senate, Mr. Yousaf Raza Gillani, has remained a strong advocate of strengthening food supply chains to support this mission”, she said.

Jameel Ahmed Qureshi, Secretary of the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC), echoed the need for alignment between fiscal policies and health priorities. “We must incentivize formalization of the food sector”. While answering a question about taxing formal dairy sector he said “public welfare should be the priority and taxing safe packaged milk is counterproductive. Instead, our policies should reflect our national commitment to providing safe,

nutritious food for all”.

Addressing fiscal hurdles, Dr. Nasir, a seasoned food technologist and industry representative, pointed out the disconnect between policy and public health goals. “Our taxation framework should enable not obstruct the availability of safe food. Taxing the formal sector only pushes consumers toward unsafe, unregulated options and undermines food security.” He said.

Bilal Gillani, CEO of Gallup Pakistan, emphasized that true food security can only be achieved through the commitment and collaboration of a strategic triad: science, economy, and culture. He explained that scientists must lead with data-driven research, economists must design budgets that support both providers and consumers of safe food, and a cultural shift must be fostered where the consumption of safe, nutritious food becomes a natural part of daily life.

Dr. Hana Mehmood,

Chief of Global Health at the International Research Force, emphasized the role of science in policymaking. “Public health protection and consumer empowerment start with food safety and transparent nutritional information. Our decisions must be grounded in scientific evidence not assumptions,” she urged.

Zubair Faisal Abbasi from Impact Research International summarized the consensus that emerged from the symposium: “The formal food sector ensures traceability, nutritional labeling, and regular monitoring for microbial and chemical safety. These products adhere to Codex Alimentarius standards and are regulated by national and provincial food safety authorities. Therefore, our fiscal governance must be structured to actively incentivize the formal and documented sector,” he emphasized.

One of the strongest messages of the day resonated clearly: “It’s not food if it’s not safe.” This is particularly relevant for milk in Pakistan. While loose milk dominates 92% of the market and poses serious health risks, only 8% of the market comprises safe, packaged milk. Unfair taxation policies make this safer option less accessible to consumers. Experts from government, academia, and industry stressed that adopting equitable taxation aligned with global best practices will ensure fair access to safe nutrition and foster a healthier, more resilient nation.

## PPL marks 75 years of excellence

### F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Pakistan Petroleum Limited (PPL) commemorated its Platinum Jubilee with a landmark ceremony held in Karachi, celebrating 75 years of national service, energy leadership, and progressive transformation. Attended by distinguished stakeholders, retired executives, and serving leadership, the event served as both a tribute to the Company’s legacy and a bold declaration of its future direction.

The highlight of the evening was the formal unveiling of PPL’s refreshed Vision, Mission, Core Values, and Corporate Logo, all of which mark a significant inflection point in the Company’s strategic evolution.

In his keynote address, Imran Abbasy, Managing Director & CEO of PPL, emphasized that the transformation is the outcome of

a year-long, inclusive and rigorous engagement involving employees, senior management, and the Board of Directors. “This was more than a branding exercise; it was a recalibration of our collective purpose,” he noted.

**Empowering sustainable growth - A renewed vision**

PPL’s refreshed Vision—“Empowering sustainable growth through integrated energy solutions and beyond”—articulates the Company’s renewed commitment to playing a pivotal role in energy, sustainability, and innovation-driven national development.

The new Mission Statement—“Transform into a dynamic energy and minerals company focused on innovation and strategic diversification”; affirms PPL’s intent to expand beyond traditional energy boundaries and embrace emerging opportunities in the minerals and renew-

ables sectors.

**A logo that symbolizes renewal and resilience**

Also revealed during the ceremony was PPL’s new corporate logo; a tulip-inspired design that symbolizes renewal, resilience, and the blossoming of new possibilities. The logo reflects the Company’s forward-looking orientation while honoring its enduring legacy.

**A bold step into the future**

The event underscored PPL’s resolve to embrace change with agility, pursue operational excellence, and

strengthen its impact on national prosperity. With focused investments in digital transformation, green technologies, and mineral ventures, PPL is set to lead with purpose, driven by its refreshed identity.

As the Company transitions into this new era, Mr. Abbasy called on employees, partners, and stakeholders to unite under the shared vision: “Together, we will chart even greater milestones; empowering sustainable growth, delivering transformative solutions, and shaping a future worthy of our proud past.”



## Lessons for unity and defense from Iran-Israel conflict

### Abdul Basit Alvi

In the broader regional context, recent developments—such as the reported Israeli attacks on Iran resulting in the deaths of senior Iranian military officials and nuclear scientists—have further underscored the fragility of regional stability. These events serve as a stark reminder of the volatile security environment in which nations like Pakistan must operate, and the critical importance of preparedness, diplomacy, and national unity. These events have not only intensified hostilities between Tel Aviv and Tehran but have also revived concerns among other regional powers—including Pakistan—about the security of strategic assets, the reliability of defense systems, and the critical role of national unity in deterring external threats. For Pakistan, the recent Israeli-Iranian confrontation offers clear lessons: a unified national front combined with strong defense capabilities is essential to protect sovereignty and deter external aggression. The precision strikes carried out by Israel against Iran—reportedly involving advanced drones, missile technology, and air assaults—signal a new phase of warfare.

The deaths of senior Iranian military officials and key nuclear scientists represent more than just

personnel losses; they constitute a strategic attempt to degrade Iran’s defense and scientific infrastructure. These attacks aimed to weaken long-term capabilities, instill fear, and demonstrate the extensive reach and determination of Israel’s military and intelligence agencies.

India and Israel share a strategic alliance, and it is known that India deployed Israeli drones in its operations against Pakistan. Reports suggest that India closely observed the Israeli strikes on Iran with significant interest. For Pakistan—with its own cadre of military leadership, nuclear scientists, and strategic planners—this incident serves as a stark warning about the dangers posed by technologically advanced adversaries and the vulnerabilities exposed through asymmetrical warfare. It underscores the critical need not only to modernize conventional military equipment but also to safeguard key personnel, data networks, and vital infrastructure against both physical attacks and cyber threats.

Pakistan’s defense establishment has long understood the complexities of regional security, especially given its challenging relationships with neighbors India, Afghanistan, and Iran. Pakistan has demonstrated strong defense capabilities in past conflicts with India; however, the ongoing Iran-Israel ten-

sions reinforce the imperative to further enhance these strengths. In response to shifting regional dynamics and India’s growing military assertiveness, Pakistan must accelerate investments in indigenous defense technologies, improve intelligence-sharing among its armed forces, and deepen cooperation with trusted allies in fields like air defense, cyber warfare, artificial intelligence, and strategic deterrence.

Just as Iran’s vulnerabilities were exposed, Pakistan must ensure its own critical assets—nuclear facilities, command centers, and research institutions—are protected by multi-layered defense systems and robust contingency plans.

While military strength forms one pillar of national security, national unity constitutes the other—and is equally indispensable. The Israeli strikes on Iran did not only target military capabilities; they also aimed to erode public trust, exploit political divisions, and incite internal discord. Such tactics typify psychological and hybrid warfare, where societal fragmentation is weaponized and national unity becomes the ultimate target.

Given Pakistan’s diverse ethnic, linguistic, and sectarian makeup, national cohesion must be approached not as mere rhetoric but as a strategic imperative. History shows

that during periods of external challenge—such as the wars with India in 1965 and 1971, the Kargil conflict, Operation Bunyan Mars-oos, or the fight against terrorism—Pakistanis have consistently demonstrated resilience and unity under pressure.

It is therefore crucial for Pakistani leadership to take proactive steps to foster and maintain social harmony and political consensus on matters of national security. Initiatives in educational reform, responsible media practices, interfaith dialogue, and inclusive governance serve not only as tools for development but as essential bulwarks against foreign interference. A united citizenry acts as the frontline defense, strengthening the morale and resolve of soldiers, scientists, and diplomats alike.

One particularly troubling aspect of the Israeli attacks on Iran is the deliberate targeting of scientists and strategic thinkers—an approach that is unfortunately not new. Iran’s nuclear scientists have previously been assassinated through both physical and cyber means, underscoring the evolving nature of modern conflict. For Pakistan, a nation with a longstanding and carefully safeguarded nuclear program, these tactics serve as a stark reminder. It is imperative for the Pakistani state to implement comprehensive security measures to protect

its scientists, engineers, and military researchers. These measures include physical security, secure residences, encrypted communication networks, and advanced counter-surveillance systems.

Furthermore, cybersecurity must be integral to defense strategies. The era when defense meant solely tanks and troops is over—today’s conflicts extend into cyber realms through data breaches, espionage, and digital sabotage. Pakistan must also prioritize nurturing the next generation of strategic experts to ensure ongoing innovation and resilience. This entails promoting STEM education, establishing safe research environments, and providing world-class facilities to prevent brain drain. Protecting intellectual talent is just as critical as securing missiles.

The Israeli-Iranian conflict carries significant diplomatic consequences for Pakistan. As a Muslim-majority, nuclear-armed state with longstanding religious, cultural, and historical connections to Iran, while simultaneously balancing ties with Gulf countries, China, and the West, Pakistan must approach these developments with strategic nuance. Avoiding direct involvement in regional conflicts, Pakistan should seize the opportunity to deepen defense collaborations with friendly nations—especially in areas

like drone technology, cyber defense, and space surveillance. Pakistan’s diplomatic response must firmly reaffirm its dedication to national sovereignty, scientific progress, and peaceful coexistence, while clearly condemning any foreign-backed sabotage, targeted assassinations, or hybrid warfare tactics. Pakistan’s commitment to peace should never be mistaken for weakness.

As the Israeli strikes demonstrate, adversaries do not wait for formal declarations of war. Modern battlefields span land, air, cyberspace, and even the minds of citizens. Pakistan must confront these challenges not with fear but with renewed dedication to defense readiness, technological advancement, and internal unity. This moment calls for strengthening the nation from within—revisiting defense doctrines, enhancing inter-agency cooperation, and launching public campaigns on cyber hygiene, civic responsibility, and national pride. Every Pakistani—from students to lawmakers, engineers to soldiers—must feel a part of the mission to safeguard the homeland.

The recent Israeli attacks on Iran are more than just news stories; they are lessons etched in precision, power, and sacrifice. For Pakistan, they serve as a wake-up call to bolster defenses—not just through weaponry but with unity,

vigilance, and foresight. In today’s world, victory belongs not to the nation with the largest army, but to the one with the strongest sense of purpose and preparedness.

According to several reports, Israel employed “kamikaze drones” and “unmanned aerial systems” (UAS) as part of its modern SEAD/DEAD (Suppression/Destruction of Enemy Air Defenses) strategy to cripple Iranian air defenses during recent conflicts. A similar tactic was attempted by India against Pakistan between May 7th and 10th, 2025. However, the key difference lay in the level of professional preparedness. The Pakistan Army Air Defence (PAAD) was not only on high alert but also effectively employed both “hard kill” and “soft kill” countermeasures, anticipating every potential threat. As a result, all Indian drones and kamikaze strikes were intercepted and destroyed mid-air. In contrast, Iran’s air defense systems failed to respond in time, leading to significant vulnerabilities in its aerial defense. This contrast highlights the impact of military proficiency versus inadequate preparation—exemplified by strong, coordinated defense on one side and costly negligence on the other. In the recent Iran-Israel conflict, although Iran responded with full force and capability, the Israeli aggression highlights

the urgent need for national unity and comprehensive defense preparedness.

Indeed, Pakistan’s military and intelligence services, including the ISI, remain a source of great pride for the country and the Islamic world. Israel’s repeated strikes on Iranian military leadership expose weaknesses within Iran’s defense and intelligence capabilities. These recent attacks should also remind critics questioning Pakistan’s military expenditure—especially since Pakistan’s defense budget is significantly smaller than India’s and many other countries—that such investment is crucial for national security. National unity combined with enhanced defense capabilities is vital for Pakistan’s survival. To achieve this, Pakistan must prioritize investing more in defense by cutting down on elite luxuries and non-development expenditures.

Now is the time for Pakistan to shift from mere observation to decisive action. Strengthening both unity and defense is no longer optional—it is imperative. Amid regional tensions and global uncertainties, Pakistan must respond with a single voice, a unified mission, and an unwavering commitment to protect its sovereignty, its citizens, and its future. The entire nation must stand together, united in this mission, to make Pakistan safe, secure, and prosperous.



## In brief

## Nasir Iqbal moves in C'ships quarterfinals

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan's Nasir Iqbal has advanced into the quarterfinals of the 23rd Asian Individual Championships after outclassing Lai Cheuk Nam of Hong Kong in Sarawak, Malaysia. According to details, Nasir Iqbal beat Lai Cheuk Nam by 3-1 (11-7, 2-11, 11-5, 11-8). Meanwhile, Noor Zaman (Pakistan) lost to Joachim Chuah (Malaysia) by 2-3 (3-11, 3-11, 11-3, 12-10, 2-11). Nasir Iqbal will face Henry Leung (Hong Kong, China) in the quarterfinal matches on Thursday.

## SA to host Formula One

JOHANNESBURG (AFP): Toby Venter, owner of the Kyalami Grand Prix circuit near Johannesburg, said on Wednesday that plans to upgrade the track to Formula One standards had been approved by the controlling body. He told reporters the venue that last hosted a F1 race in 1993 had been given the green light by the International Automobile Federation (FIA) to implement design proposals. "Today, we turn the page to a bold new chapter for Kyalami. We are ready for the return of Formula One to African soil," said Venter. "When we acquired Kyalami in 2014, we made a commitment to restore it, not just as a world-class venue, but as a beacon for motorsport across Africa. "The acceptance by the FIA of our grade one design is a major step forward in that journey," added Venter, an importer of luxury vehicles. Kyalami and Cape Town in South Africa, Rwanda and Morocco have expressed interest in bringing F1 racing back to Africa. The British company charged with doing the upgrades said they were "minor", and could be completed within three months. FIA has given Kyalami a three-year deadline for completion. Upgrades, which will not change the 4.5 kilometre (2.8 miles) circuit layout, include enhancing run-off areas and barriers. "The proposed FIA grade one upgrade focuses on enhancing run-off areas, barrier systems, debris fencing, kerbs, and drainage," a company spokesman said. "This is a light-touch upgrade in engineering terms, but one that enhances the already excellent circuit standards to meet modern grade one requirements." More spectator zones and grandstands have also been earmarked as part of a bigger upgrade, leaving Kyalami as the only grade one certified venue in Africa.

## Chelsea's Mudryk charged over anti-doping violation

LONDON (AFP): Chelsea winger Mykhailo Mudryk has been charged by England's Football Association with violating anti-doping rules after failing a drugs test. Mudryk has not played for Chelsea since November 28 following his provisional suspension by the FA for an "adverse finding in a routine urine test" in December. The Ukraine international at the time said he was in "complete shock" and he "never knowingly used any banned substances". But Mudryk could face a potential ban of up to four years under FA rules. Confirming the 24-year-old has been charged with the offence, an FA statement on Wednesday said: "We can confirm that Mykhailo Mudryk has been charged with anti-doping rule violations alleging the presence and/or use of a prohibited substance, in terms of regulations three and four of the FA's anti-doping regulations.

# Pakistan reach FIH Nations Cup semi-finals despite defeat to NZ

KARACHI (Monitoring Desk): Pakistan's men's hockey team secured a spot in the semi-finals of the FIH Nations Cup on Wednesday, despite a narrow 4-3 defeat to New Zealand in their final Pool B match at the National Hockey Stadium.

The Green Shirts advanced after Malaysia failed to achieve the necessary goal margin in their subsequent match against Japan.

Malaysia, placed third in the standings with one point and a goal difference of negative one after two matches, needed to beat Japan by a margin of two goals to topple Pakistan's goal difference to secure second spot, which would have earned them semi-

final qualification.

Although they managed to beat Japan 2-1, it meant that their goal difference could not surpass that of Pakistan, who joined New Zealand from Pool B to reach the final four.

The green shirts will now face Pool A leaders France in the first semi-final on Friday, while New Zealand and Korea will lock horns in the other knockout fixture later that day.

The final of the eight-team tournament will be played on Saturday. It is pertinent to mention that Pakistan's opening match of the tournament, against Malaysia, ended in a 3-3 draw, despite Pakistan taking the lead twice during the game.

Ahmed Nadeem and

Abdul Rehman gave Pakistan an early edge with two quick goals in the first quarter, allowing them to enter the final quarter with a solid 2-0 lead.

However, Malaysia responded strongly in the fourth quarter, scoring twice in quick succession through Fitri Saari and Syed Cholan to level the score.

Pakistan briefly regained the lead when Rana Waheed Ashraf found the net, but Malaysia equalized just two minutes later as Cholan struck again, scoring his second goal of the match to make it 3-3.

In their second outing, the Men in Green edged past Japan 3-2 in a thrilling encounter, mounting a comeback after trailing 2-1 to clinch a hard-fought victory.

## Chinoy Foundation announce sponsorship deal with Pakistani squash players

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Amir S. Chinoy Foundation, a non-profit organization and member of the Amir S. Chinoy Group (ASC), proudly announced a multi-year sponsorship agreement with rising stars in squash, Sana Bahader and Saif Bahader.

According to details, Member companies of ASC Group namely, International Industries Ltd. (IIL), Pakistan Cables Ltd. (PCL) and International Steel Ltd. (ISL) are also the proud sponsors of this power duo.

As part of the partnership, both the athletes will represent member companies of ASC Group at all national and international squash tournaments for a period of 3 years with a strong focus on training and active participation in squash tournaments.

Hailing from Peshawar, Sana Bahader aged 19, and Saif Bahader aged 15, demonstrate exceptional grit and a powerful game, overcoming challenges witnessed at an early age. Born deaf and mute, both squash



players are defying odds and overcoming challenges. This duo is set to achieve greater heights for themselves.

"We are thrilled to partner with Sana and Saif. Their dedication to squash and journey of perseverance is an extremely inspiring, especially for the youth of Pakistan", said Samir M. Chinoy, Chairman Amir S. Chinoy Foundation. Mr. Sher Bahader, father of Sana and Saif Bahader was also present at the signing ceremony. "I am extremely grateful to the Foundation for their support. The sponsorship will enable Sana and Saif to train effectively and enhance their performance,

get international exposure and elevate their game. It certainly boosts their confidence in squash", he said.

The athletes are set to travel to Australia during June up to August with Sana competing in women's category and Saif in the men's category in the Greater Bendigo International tournament followed by other international squash tournaments being held across Australia during the time. The partnership reinforces Amir S. Chinoy Group's commitment to promote youth empowerment by supporting skill-based training, recognising and supporting upcoming role models in Pakistan.

## Five Pakistanis complete UCI online cycling course

ISLAMABAD (APP): Five Pakistanis have successfully completed the Union Cycliste Internationale's (UCI) online cycling Machines course and are now officially certified as Level 1 Coaches.

This was announced by the Pakistan Cycling Federation (PCF) as a major step forward in its commitment to education and capacity building, aligned with the standards set by the Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI), said a press release.

The newly qualified coaches include Miss Maham Tariq, Nisar Ahmad, Shayan Rahman, Muhammad Usman and Naeem Ahmad.

This accomplishment highlights the PCF Secretariat's ongoing

efforts to professionalize cycling in Pakistan by equipping trainers with internationally recognized credentials. By adopting global best practices, the Federation aims to nurture a new generation of skilled and knowledgeable coaches capable of developing young talent across the country.

In parallel with the Machines course, another educational program tailored for national cycling champions is currently underway. This program has seen the enthusiastic participation of over 30 participants who are undergoing structured training and assessments. The results of this course will be announced later this month and into the next, culminating in the certification of

additional national-level coaches and commissaires the formal establishment of specialized national commissaires.

These important strides in education and governance are strongly championed by Syed Ali Shah, whose dedicated leadership has been instrumental in laying the groundwork for a robust cycling education system in Pakistan. His vision is to ensure that everyone involved in the sport—from grassroots to elite levels—is not only passionate but also formally trained and qualified according to UCI standards.

Looking ahead, certified individuals will be entrusted with leading training initiatives and contributing to the administrative framework of the sport.



GALLE: Mushfiqur Rahim used the crease well against spin.

## South Africans welcome home Test champions the Proteas

JOHANNESBURG (AFP): Several thousand supporters were at the main airport in Johannesburg on Wednesday to welcome home World Test Championship winners South Africa. Temba Bavuma captained the Proteas to a five-wicket triumph over long-time rivals Australia at Lord's last Saturday to end a 27-year major trophy drought.

He and coach Shukri Conrad were the first to greet cheering supporters, with both holding the Mace they received for being crowned champions.

Each player then carried a bouquet of flowers while shaking hands with some supporters, hugging others and signing autographs.

Opening batter Aiden Markram recovered from a first-innings duck to hit 136 in the second innings and paved the way for a victory in London with a day and a half to spare. Pacesman Kagiso Rabada took nine wickets in the final to be another key figure as South Africa triumphed for the first time since lifting the 1998 ICC Knockout Trophy (now Champions Trophy).

Among those who greeted the team on a cool, sunny winter morning in the South African commercial capital were accountant Brian Gabela and receptionist Mandy Tshabalala.

Gabela, 35, said: "I had to be here and welcome the boys home. They have suffered so many heartbreaks during the past two decades. Now we are champions of the world. "I was pessimistic when we trailed by 74 runs after the first innings, but a magnificent second knock from Aiden Markram turned the tide."

Zimbabwe next Tshabalala, 37, travelled to the airport with her son, Monthathi, and admitted she was also worried after Australia built a first-innings advantage. "I have been supporting the Proteas since I was a child and it has been sad seeing them come so close so often without bringing home a trophy. "Apart from his studies, my high school son spends many hours each week keeping up to date with the Proteas. His favourite cricketer is Kagiso (Rabada)."

## Bangladesh tighten grip on first Sri Lanka Test

GALLE (AFP): Bangladesh continued their dominance over Sri Lanka on the second day of the first test Wednesday, finishing at a commanding 484 for nine -- despite a few late breakthroughs by the hosts.

The Tigers resumed on 292 for three overnight and turned the screws on a batting-friendly wicket, with Mushfiqur Rahim and Najmul Hossain Shanto extending their record-breaking partnership.

The 264-run partnership finally ended when Shanto fell for 148, deceived in the air as he attempted to drive one. Shanto's fluent innings was peppered with 15 boundaries and a six.

Mushfiqur kept going with wicketkeeper Litton Das before finally falling for 163, a marathon knock that spanned nearly nine hours and 350 balls.

Das piled on further misery for Sri Lanka with a brisk 90 off 123 deliveries, cashing in on tired bowlers and some loose fielding. He was particularly

severe on the spinners, using his feet to good effect to lift the ball cleanly over the in-field. But he also survived some anxious moments. Pathum Nissanka grassed a sitter at short mid-wicket when he had just 14 to his name.

Moments earlier, he had survived a run-out stemming from a mix-up. He eventually perished attempting a reverse sweep off debutant Tharindu Rathnayake, gloving it to Kusal Mendis behind the stumps.

Bangladesh batting coach Mohammad Salahuddin said it was a "very good effort by the batsmen". "We were very impressed with the way Mushfiqur Rahim went about things. He had not scored a big one in a while but we knew it was just a matter of time before he scored a big one," Salahuddin said.

"They (batsmen) showed character and we have almost scored 500 runs now. I hope our bowlers will be able to create opportunities bowl-

ing to attacking fields as we have got the runs on the board now. It will be an interesting day three." Sri Lanka's Milan Rathnayake said it was one of the "flattest wickets we have seen in Galle".

"It was a tough wicket to bowl on but I thought we did a decent job," Rathnayake said. "When they were building the pressure and taking the attack on to us, it was important to stay calm and show character. I thought after tea we came back stronger to claim five wickets."

With rain interrupting play shortly after lunch, only 61 overs could be bowled on day two. A persistent drizzle forced an early tea and fading light ended proceedings prematurely. Play will resume fifteen minutes early on Thursday to compensate for the lost time.

Brief scores: Bangladesh: 484-9 (Mushfiqur Rahim 163, Najmul Hossain Shanto 148) Toss: Bangladesh

## Man City ease into Club World Cup campaign with win against Wydad



PHILADELPHIA (AFP): Phil Foden scored inside two minutes to set Manchester City on the way to a comfortable 2-0 win against Wydad Casablanca in their opening match at the Club World Cup on Wednesday.

Jeremy Doku was also on target before half-time at Lincoln Financial Field in Philadelphia, where the majority of the 37,446 crowd were supporting City but most of the noise was made by the fans of the Moroccan side.

The afternoon was slightly marred for City as Rico Lewis was sent off for a dangerous tackle late on, but Pep Guardiola will be satisfied to see his team get off to a winning start. City have come to the Club World Cup eager to turn the page after a disappointing season domestically and in the Champions League.

Tougher tests await than that provided by the team that finished third in the Moroccan league, with the English club next facing Al Ain of the United Arab Emirates before they complete Group G against

Juventus. Guardiola used this occasion to field something of an experimental line-up, with new signings Tijjani Reijnders and Rayan Cherki making their debuts while teenage defender Vitor Reis started for just the third time since arriving in January.

This was always going to be a big ask for Wydad, whose coach Amine Benhachem was only appointed in the run-up to the Club World Cup. Their reinforcements for the tournament include a Brazilian defender signed on loan from the Portuguese second tier, a Dutch defender recruited from the Bosnian league, and 38-year-old Moroccan international Nordin Amrabat.

French international creator Cherki was deployed in a floating central role for City close to Foden, and it was the England star who got the breakthrough in the second minute. Used sparingly in the final weeks of the Premier League campaign, Foden was perfectly placed to sweep the ball home

inside the box after goalkeeper El Mehdi Benabid patted a Savinho centre out into his path.

Wydad, who qualified as a recent winner of the CAF Champions League, were not cowed and did have chances to give their passionate support something to celebrate.

Cherki, Reijnders make debuts

When Cherki gave the ball away cheaply, Thembinkosi Lorch produced an audacious attempt to beat Ederson from inside his own half, but the Brazilian goalkeeper was able to save.

South African forward Cassius Mailula then missed a fine opportunity after being set up by Lorch following a Reis error.

Nathan Ake and Foden had chances for City before the latter set up the second goal in the 42nd minute as his corner from the right was headed in by Doku.

Doku should then have done better after being left with just the goalkeeper to beat after pouncing on defensive hesitation early in the second half.

There would be no more goals, but Guardiola made a raft of substitutions as the second half went on, including withdrawing Cherki, Doku and Foden on the hour mark as Rodri and Erling Haaland came on.

They could come into the starting line-up against Al Ain in Atlanta on Sunday, but Lewis will not feature in that game.

The 20-year-old right-back was shown a straight red card in the 88th minute by the Brazilian referee after catching Wydad substitute Samuel Obeng high up with his studs.



KEMPTON PARK: Temba Bavuma returns home with the WTC mace.



## In brief

### ANF recovers 37 kgs drugs

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF), conducting three operations across the country, recovered as many as 37.8 kilograms of drugs worth more than Rs 4.356 million and arrested six suspects, including two women, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman on Wednesday. He informed that 12 kgs of hashish were recovered from a vehicle near RCD Road, Hub and two accused, including a woman, were arrested. In another operation, 6 kgs of hashish and 5 kgs of ice were seized near Islamabad Motorway Toll Plaza, and two suspects, including a woman, were apprehended. As many as 12 kgs of hashish and 2.8 kgs of ice were recovered from two suspects near Sher Shah Toll Plaza, Multan. Cases have been registered against the arrested suspects under the Narcotics Control Act, and further investigations are underway.

### IRSA releases 239,299 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Wednesday released 239,299 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 267,917 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, the water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1452.66 feet which was 50.66 feet higher than the dead level of 1402.00 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 167,600 cusecs and 151,900 cusecs, respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1168.30 feet, which was 118.30 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 27,918 cusecs and 15,000 cusecs, respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 181,416, 139,094, 90,950 and 35,180 cusecs, respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 21,000 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 20,499 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.

### RDA seals pharmaceutical unit

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi Development Authority (RDA) had sealed a pharmaceutical unit on High Court Road over violations of building bylaws. According to an RDA spokesperson, on the directions of Director General RDA Kinza Murtaza, the enforcement squad sealed honing pharmaceutical company over violations of land use and construction bylaws. The action was part of RDA's ongoing campaign to ensure strict compliance with zoning and regulatory frameworks across the city. The company was functioning without proper approvals and was in clear violation of existing zoning regulations. Kinza Murtaza said that RDA was committed to upholding the law and maintaining order in the city's development. This decisive move underscores RDA's zero-tolerance policy towards unauthorised commercial activities and illegal constructions. She said that the actions follow direct instructions from the Chief Minister of Punjab, Maryam Nawaz Sharif, who had mandated a zero-tolerance policy on encroachments and illegal developments. The RDA also calls on the public to cooperate in preserving encroachment-free areas and contribute to making Rawalpindi's streets safer, more accessible, and free of unnecessary congestion, she added.



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Hungary Mr. Bela Fazekas called on Speaker National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq at Parliament House. —APP Photo

## NA Speaker calls for stronger Pak-Hungary ties

ISLAMABAD (APP): Speaker National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq has stated that Pakistan and Hungary have vast potential for expanding bilateral relations particularly in the areas of parliamentary diplomacy, education, trade and cultural exchange.

He expressed these views during a meeting with Béla Fazekas, Ambassador of Hungary to Pakistan, who paid a farewell call on the Speaker at Parliament House on Wednesday.

During the meeting, Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq appreciated Ambassador Fazekas's positive contributions in strengthening bilateral ties during his tenure.

He also expressed appreciation of the ambassador's efforts in facilitating the visit of a Pakistani parliamentary delegation to Hungary, which was led by the speaker himself and regarded as a significant

milestone in bilateral parliamentary cooperation.

The speaker also expressed hope that Ambassador Fazekas would continue to serve as a bridge between the two nations and praised the ambassador's affection for Pakistan.

He also highlighted the importance of reactivating the Pakistan-Hungary Parliamentary Friendship Group, terming it essential for further enhancing mutual ties through people-to-people and legislative engagement.

Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq emphasized that Pakistan has always pursued a policy of restraint, particularly during periods of heightened tensions with India.

He stressed the urgent need for lasting peace in the region, noting that it is the common people who suffer the most in times of war and conflict. He also reiterated Pakistan's parlia-

mentary position on condemning attacks on Iran, expressing concern that such actions could further destabilize the already volatile regional security environment.

Ambassador Béla Fazekas has also expressed gratitude for the cooperation extended to him by the Parliament of Pakistan and shared that he carries fond memories of his time in the country. He counted the successful organization of the Pakistani parliamentary delegation's visit to Hungary as one of the proudest achievements of his diplomatic service in Pakistan.

The ambassador reaffirmed Hungary's interest in continuing to build upon the foundations laid during his tenure and expressed confidence that bilateral relations between Pakistan and Hungary would continue to grow in the years to come.

## Gilani lauds HEC's NOP for universities faculty, staff

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Chairman Senate appreciated Higher Education Commission (HEC), National Academy of Higher Education (NAHE) and Higher Education Development in Pakistan (HEDP) for creating and strengthening the culture of capacity building of higher education institutions.

HEC organised a flagship conference on Wednesday entitled Faculty Leadership & Management Excellence (FLAME) 2025 to showcase the success of National Outreach Program (NOP), a capacity building initiative executed by National Academy of Higher Education (NAHE) in 85 public sector universities. Over 4,000 faculty and management staff members have benefited from the program.

Chairman Senate Syed Yusuf Raza Gilani graced the closing ceremony of the conference as chief guest, whereas Federal Minister for Federal Education and Professional Training Mr. Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui honored the opening of the event. Governor Balochistan Sheikh Jaffar Khan Mandokhail also attended the conference alongside a big assembly of Vice

Chancellors from across Pakistan, said a press release.

Addressing the conference, Chairman Senate highlighted the role of academia in nation building, saying that the faculty members are the architects of future, while the university representatives carry forward the vision and pursuit of progress.

He emphasized the role of education in development of nation, stating that education is the foundation upon which nations are built. He underlined that the nation must proceed with unity of purpose, courage in leadership, and faith in the transformative power of education.

He also lauded NAHE's Women Empowerment and Mentorship Programme (WEMP), stating that Pakistan cannot reach its full potential until all the women have access to playing their part in the country's socio-economic development. "Women Empowerment and Mentorship Programme is very close to my heart," he added. Federal Minister Mr. Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui expressed his pleasure for being part of FLAME-2025.

He underlined that an education system aligned with the prevailing and future needs of the nation is a need of the hour. He also highlighted the importance of skill-based education in the socio-economic development of the country.

In his address, Governor Balochistan Mr. Mandokhail said that the university leadership and faculty are the torch-bearers of excellence, adding that initiatives like FLAME-2025 are pivotal to achieve teaching excellence and administrative effectiveness. Chairman HEC Dr. Mukhtar Ahmed emphasized that the survival of Pakistan lies in reaching excellence in education, research, and innovation.

He stressed the need for making significant investment in higher education to enable the educational institutions to play a more effective role in the development of Pakistan. He stated that the youth of Pakistan have a great potential that needs to be tapped. He underlined that the Pakistani youth graduated from the local universities are playing a pivotal role in the development of this country.



RAWALPINDI: A traffic police officer using a lifter to remove a wrongly parked vehicle in the Saddar area of the city. —APP Photo

## Delegation of Anjuman Imamia Asna Ashriya meets Hanif Abbasi

ISLAMABAD (APP): A delegation from Anjuman Imamia Asna Ashriya Rawalpindi Wednesday, met with the Federal Minister for Railways Muhammad Hanif Abbasi here to discuss the arrangements for Muharram-ul-Haram 1447 AH and the challenges faced by mourners during religious processions and gatherings.

The delegation was led by President Syed Mushtaq Shah and included Syed Mujtaba Naqvi (General Secretary), Mohsin Bhatt (Vice President), Jaffar Bhatt (Finance Secretary), Syed Ali Naqvi (Joint Secretary) and Syed Ejaz Shah (Information

Secretary).

During the meeting, various issues related to Muharram processions were discussed in detail, including administrative arrangements, obstructions along procession routes, shortage of drinking water, sanitation and security concerns.

The delegation apprised the minister that unnecessary blockades during processions and gatherings create significant hardship for participants. In addition, water scarcity and lack of cleanliness in key areas remain pressing concerns.

Hanif Abbasi gave the delegation a patient hearing

and immediately instructed the Commissioner of Rawalpindi to personally assess the situation and resolve the highlighted issues without delay.

"Ensuring the provision of clean water, sanitation, security and other essential facilities for mourners during Muharram is a top priority of the government. Clear directions have been issued to all concerned departments."

At the end, the delegation expressed gratitude to the minister for his prompt action and personal commitment. They also hoped for more improved and efficient arrangements during the upcoming Muharram.

### Muharram's code of conduct to be implemented

RAWALPINDI (APP): SSP Operations Rawalpindi Kashif Zulfiqar on Wednesday said the implementation of the Punjab Home Department's code of conduct and standard operating procedures (SOPs) regarding Muharram-ul-Haram would be ensured at all costs.

He was chairing a meeting here at the Sub-Divisional Police Officer (SDPO) City Office. The Superintendent of Police Rawal, SDPO City, station house officers, detective foot constables, and Imambargah custodians attended the meeting.

The Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) observed that the people would be allowed to attend gatherings/processions after passing a walk-through gate and full body search. As per the SOPs, he observed, all the gatherings and processions should start and end according to their scheduled time. No deviation of the routes of processions would be permitted, he added.

SSP Kashif said all resources were being utilized to maintain an atmosphere of peace and order during Muharram-ul-Haram. The custodians of Imambargahs and organizers of the Muharram processions assured their full cooperation to the administration in the implementation of the SOPs.

Meanwhile, the District Administration Rawalpindi said the illegal use of loudspeakers during Muharram would not be allowed, and warned the violators of action under Punjab Sound System Regulation Act 2015.

### Bykea rider killed in road mishap

RAWALPINDI (APP): A Bykea rider was killed and his pillion rider injured in the collision of motorcycle with a car outside the Golf Club here on the G T Road near Morgah on Wednesday. According to Rescue 1122, the deceased was identified as Ghulam Nabi, 66, a resident of Jhanda Chichi, while Raja Mushtaq, a resident of Askari 14, was wounded.



ISLAMABAD: Swiss Ambassador to Pakistan Georg Steiner, called on Sardar Waqar Shahzad Advocate and presented a Scout scarf, symbolizing friendship & community service. Sardar Waqar invited him to visit Swat.

## ICT admin seals 17 indoor Sheesha Cafés on violations

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Islamabad district administration has intensified operations against illegal indoor sheesha cafés across the Federal Capital and sealed 17 cafes at various locations of the city.

According to spokesman of ICT administration here, indoor sheesha cafés have been declared illegal under Islamabad High Court orders. Any business found violating this ban will face strict legal action.

In this regard, Deputy Commissioner (DC) Islamabad, Irfan Nawaz Memon has directed all assistant commissioners to take immediate action. He warned that any officer who fails to act against violators in their jurisdiction will be held accountable.

"No indoor sheesha café will be allowed to operate, and all those found on the

spot during raids, including customers, will face legal consequences," he stated.

In the latest move, the administration sealed 17 indoor sheesha cafés in G-6's Civic Centre, known as the 'Safa Gold Market' area. The operation was led by Assistant Commissioner Rural, with teams inspecting several locations across the city.

Earlier, two illegal sheesha cafés were sealed in Sector F-6 and one in Sector B-17. According to district administration officials, the owners of these cafés will now face police cases for operating in violation of the law. Customers present inside these cafés during the raids were also taken into custody.

DC Islamabad reiterated that operating indoor sheesha cafés without legal approval is a violation of

court orders and city regulations. He added that even outdoor sheesha cafés are not allowed to function without formal permits from the concerned assistant commissioner.

"From tomorrow, all indoor café owners found running illegal setups will face FIRs," said DC Memon, adding that enforcement teams will also arrest customers smoking sheesha indoors. He appealed to residents to avoid visiting such places and not participate in any unauthorized activity.

This city-wide crackdown is part of efforts to enforce court orders and maintain public health standards. The administration has urged the public to report illegal sheesha activity, promising strict action against all violators regardless of location.

The operation will continue across all zones of Islamabad with random inspections and on-the-spot legal proceedings. The district administration has clarified that there will be no leniency for anyone running or visiting indoor sheesha cafés without clearance.

DC Memon also confirmed that the campaign was launched after Islamabad High Court directed the authorities to clamp down on all forms of illegal sheesha use within enclosed spaces. "We are strictly implementing court orders, and all assistant commissioners have been briefed accordingly," he added.

The administration has also issued a public advisory urging citizens to avoid illegal establishments and not become part of activities that could result in arrest or legal complications.

**Emergency facility opened**

KABUL (Pajhwok): The Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) has inaugurated a new emergency and outpatient facility at Kabul's Maiwand Teaching Hospital to improve healthcare services, reduce overcrowding and assist patients efficiently. In a statement, the ministry said the project was completed at a cost of 3.4 million afghanis and is aimed at enhancing service delivery, easing patient access, and reducing congestion in various departments of the hospital.

**Akfa Group opens branch**

BALKH (BNA): The Akfa Group of Companies inaugurated its official branch in Balkh province, marking a \$2 million investment aimed at enhancing trade and industrial cooperation. The ceremony, reported by Bakhtar News Agency, attended by local officials and business leaders. The Akfa Group, after thorough assessments, identified Afghanistan as a promising venue for investment, signaling a commitment to bolster economic ties in the region.

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

## Traders concerned by halted goods

HERAT (TOLONews): As Israeli attacks on Iran continue, the Herat Chamber of Commerce and Investment has expressed concern over the goods belonging to Afghan traders and industrialists stored in Iran's Bandar Abbas.

According to officials from the chamber, Bandar Abbas is one of the key routes for importing goods into Afghanistan. Every day, hundreds of containers carrying commercial goods, including raw materials for Herat's industrial zone, enter the country via this port.

Younes Qazizadah, head of the Herat Chamber of Commerce and Investment, stated: "One of the major and strategic import routes of the country is through the warm waters of Bandar Abbas. We are concerned about the situation in Iran and hope that significant damage does not occur to Iranian ports and Afghan traders' goods stored in Bandar Abbas."

The Herat Chamber of Industries and Mines also reports that, amid ongoing threats of Israeli airstrikes on Iranian ports, the process of loading and transporting Afghan traders' goods at Bandar Abbas has slowed down.

Mohammad Naser Amin, head of the Herat Chamber of Industries and Mines, told TOLONews: "We've received many calls from industrialists saying that raw materials have been held for a period in Bandar Abbas under the pretext of testing. We request that the processing procedures be expedited, as this is an emergency situation. In such a state, our raw materials, which are only in transit, should not be held there."

A number of Afghan industrialists and traders are worried about Israeli airstrikes on Iranian ports and the possible damage to their goods.

Toryali Ghawsi, an industrialist in Herat, said: "Each industrialist who has goods in Bandar Abbas is worried that their merchandise may be lost. We hope that our goods remain undamaged and are safely transported into the country."

According to Iranian media reports, Bandar Abbas has been targeted multiple times by Israeli airstrikes in recent days; however, Iran's air defense system has reportedly intercepted these attacks.

## IEA strengthens bilateral ties with Turkey



KABUL (BNA): Mohammad Zubair Wadan, the Ambassador of Afghanistan in Ankara, met with Khurshid Yildirim, the Deputy Minister of Justice of Turkey. During their meeting, the two officials focused on enhancing bilateral ties between their countries. They discussed various avenues for collaboration, with a particular emphasis on the welfare of Afghan prisoners currently in Turkey.

## 8 out of 10 Afghan young women denied education

KABUL (Khaama Press): A UN Women report reveals that 8 out of 10 young women in Afghanistan are denied access to education and employment.

A newly released report by the United Nations Women's Division reveals that 8 out of 10 young women in Afghanistan are denied access to education, training, and employment. The report underscores the significant obstacles Afghanistan's women face in achieving basic human development goals.

The report further illustrates that Afghanistan's gender gap is notably wide, with the country ranking second globally in terms of gender inequality. With a staggering 76% disparity between men and women in health, education, financial participation, and decision-making, Afghanistan continues to lag behind international standards of gender equality.

The UN Women's report links these disparities to the restrictions imposed by the Taliban, particularly the banning of secondary and higher education for girls and women, including medical studies. As a result, the report predicts that the completion rate for secondary education among girls in Afghanistan will soon approach zero.

Additionally, the report highlights Afghanistan's substantial gender gap in the labor force. Only 24% of Afghan women participate in the workforce, in stark contrast to 89% of men. This disparity points to the systemic barriers women face in achieving economic independence and employment opportunities.

## National futsal players receive annual stipends



KABUL (Pajhwok): The Afghanistan National Olympic Committee says the national futsal team has received annual stipend for the solar year 1403.

In a post on its X handle, the General Directorate of Physical Education and Sports wrote that, as part of the stipend distribution process, the national futsal team players received their payments on Wednesday. Each player was granted 13,200 afghanis for the year.

The statement added that the distribution process began earlier this week, covering 3,767 athletes from 52 different federations.

The stipend distribution process officially commenced in early March 2025. At the time, Olympic Committee officials stated that nearly 50 million afghanis had been allocated for 3,767 athletes.

## EU to provide 161m in aid to Afghanistan

KABUL (Pajhwok): The European Commission has announced it will provide 161 million in humanitarian aid to Afghanistan this year to support the most vulnerable people.

In a statement, the Commission said the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan remains among the world's most severe.

It said this funding would support humanitarian organisations working inside Afghanistan with over 141 million, while also responding to the needs of Afghan citizens and refugees in Pakistan and Iran, with 10 million allocated per country.

The statement added: "As part of the EU support, a new flight of the EU Humanitarian Air Bridge to Afghanistan arrived on June 17, bringing nearly 100 tonnes of essential humanitarian supplies. Since the launch of this air bridge in 2021, a total of 40 flights have been arranged, carrying around 2,150 tonnes of relief items."

The new EU funding will include food assistance, healthcare services and treatment for malnutrition and improved access to clean water and sanitation in remote areas.

The commission said: "It will also support the protection of vulnerable groups, including offering legal assistance and safeguarding the rights of at-risk individuals. Education in emergencies will continue to be prioritised, with a particular focus on ensuring access for girls, as well as disaster preparedness measures."

Commissioner for Equality, Preparedness and Crisis Management, Hadja Lahbib, said: "As the Afghan people continue to face numerous hardships, both within Afghanistan and in Pakistan and Iran, the EU remains ready to help. Particularly concerning are the needs of the thousands of Afghans that have recently returned to Afghanistan from neighbouring countries, a situation that is only adding to the population's suffering."

She added this EU funding would provide much needed aid to the most vulnerable, so they can get food, healthcare, education and other essential services.

Since 2021, the EU has provided over 860 million in humanitarian funding for the crisis in Afghanistan.

**Afghan refugee flee Tehran**

KABUL (Khaama Press): Purple Saturdays reports that dozens of Afghan migrant families have fled their homes in Tehran due to Israeli attacks, seeking refuge. The "Purple Saturdays" movement, led by women's rights activist Maryam Marouf Arvin, has reported that Israeli airstrikes on Iran have forced dozens of migrant families to flee their homes in Tehran, seeking refuge in other areas.

According to a statement from the movement, most of these migrants are human rights activists, protesting women, and other vulnerable groups who fled Afghanistan due to Taliban threats. They now face severe challenges, with many unable to return to Afghanistan.

The movement emphasized that these displaced families are living in dire humanitarian and security conditions. The majority of them lack access to basic necessities such as clean drinking water, food, and adequate shelter.

In its statement, "Purple Saturdays" has urgently called on international organizations, especially the UN mission in Iran and human rights defenders, to address the migrants' situation. It demands immediate action to ensure their safety, shelter, and access to essential services.

Additionally, the movement highlighted that targeting civilians constitutes a war crime under international humanitarian law. It urges the global community to take immediate steps to protect Afghan migrants and refugees in Iran.

## Minister meets Chargé d'Affaires of Norwegian



KABUL (BNA): Qari Din Mohammad Hanif, the Minister of Economy, engaged in discussions with Per Albert Ilsaas, the Charge d'Affaires of the Norwegian to Kabul, focusing on strengthening economic cooperation and the continuation of humanitarian aid to the country.

During the meeting, Minister Hanif emphasized the urgent need for the international community and donor agencies to prioritize developmental aid. Furthermore, he called for the lifting of sanctions against Afghanistan and the release of the nation's foreign exchange reserves to facilitate economic stability and growth.

In response, Ilsaas reaffirmed Norway's commitment to supporting Afghanistan, announcing a planned \$80 million humanitarian aid package aimed at assisting the Afghan people in 2025.

## Concerns rise over returnee crisis, lack of humanitarian aid funding

KABUL (TOLONews): Amid increasing pressure on Afghan migrants in neighboring countries, more than two million people have been forcibly returned to Afghanistan over the past two years.

However, with the return of these migrants, concerns have grown over how they will be supported inside Afghanistan. Ahmad Reza Afshar, a deportee from Iran, told TOLONews: "Afghan migrants who do not have proper documents are considered undocumented there, and they are deported from wherever they are caught. It doesn't matter to them who the person is."

Another Afghan citizen deported from Pakistan said: "We even had documents, but they still arrested and deported us. All of our belongings and assets were left behind."

The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) has warned that only 20% of the humanitarian programs for Afghanistan in 2025 are funded so far. This situation may expose returnees to new crises such as poverty, homelessness, and social vulnerability.

Due to this funding shortfall, some support centers for returnees, such as the Jalalabad center, have scaled back their operations.

Jan Egeland, Secretary General of the Norwegian Refugee Council, said: "Afghans forced to return often had to leave everything behind. They are in urgent need of assistance. Our NRC staff at border crossings witness how returnees arrive empty-handed and often have nowhere to go. By mid-2025, humanitarian partners in Afghanistan will be less than 20% funded. At NRC, we've had to reduce support at our community center in Jalalabad. Without increased funding, we cannot meet the growing needs."

Abdul Nasir Rashtia, an economic affairs analyst, told TOLONews: "Since Afghanistan's economy has long depended on foreign aid, any reduction or cut in this aid inevitably leads to serious problems, especially for those returning from abroad. They need food and shelter, and under current sanctions and restrictions, it will be very difficult for the Afghan government to manage this crisis."

Meanwhile, migrant rights activists warn that without immediate support and sustainable livelihood programs, families returning from other countries will face severe poverty, homelessness, and social harm.

Ali Reza Karimi, a migrant rights activist, said: "Without urgent support and a long-term plan to improve livelihoods, the lives of families forcibly returned from neighboring countries will become even more difficult. The absence of basic aid could significantly increase poverty, unemployment, and vulnerability in Afghan society and among families."

Earlier, UNHCR reported that between October 2023 and the end of May 2025, more than 1.055 million Afghan citizens had returned from Pakistan to Afghanistan.

## FAO pledges continued support for agriculture in Nuristan



NURISTAN (BNA) The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) reaffirmed its commitment to supporting agricultural development in Nuristan province during a recent meeting with local officials.

Mawlawi Abdul Rauf Saeed, the Director of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock for Nuristan, expressed gratitude for the FAO's ongoing efforts in implementing various agricultural projects.

He provided insights into the department's initiatives aimed at enhancing agricultural productivity and shared the challenges faced in the agriculture and livestock sectors.

The FAO Deputy for Afghanistan assured that the organization will persist in its collaboration with Nuristan, focusing on agriculture, livestock, and forestry. He emphasized the importance of communicating the province's challenges to international donors to secure necessary support and solutions.

Director Saeed highlighted his department's dedication to working alongside national and international organizations to address the existing issues in agriculture and livestock, aiming to provide essential support and resources for local farmers and herders.

## Nearly 1,000 feuds recorded in Khost, says official

KHOST CITY (Pajhwok): The Department of Borders and Tribal Affairs says nearly 950 personal feuds have been registered across the southeastern province of Khost.

Mohammad Wali Sediqi, director of the department, said efforts were underway to resolve these long-standing disputes.

He made these remarks on Tuesday at a reconciliation ceremony in Tani district. The ceremony marked the end of a 20-year-old feud between two families.

The conflict between Shakirullah and Lawang families was formally resolved in line with Pashtun customs through the symbolic destruction of "dust-capped caps" — a traditional sign of reconciliation — facilitated by tribal elders and local officials. The two sides embraced each other and reconciled.

The ritual of breaking dust caps may seem symbolic to some, it marked the conclusion of a deadly dispute that had claimed three lives over the years.

Shakirullah, 20-year-old, said he was not yet born when his father and uncle were killed as a result of the feud.

"I was born four months after my father was killed," he said. "We want to focus on our education and building our lives. We've turned away from hostility and do not wish to prolong this feud."

With his face and choice of words showing visible signs of bitter memories and emotional pain over the past two decades, Lawang, a 55-year-old member of the opposing side, told Pajhwok Afghan News he was thankful to tribal elders who helped transform enmity into friendship.

"I am so happy today — it feels like the entire world belongs to me," he said. "Everyone gathered here, I see them as my sons and brothers. Let feuds disappear; there is no good in them."

The dispute originally stemmed from a disagreement over ownership of a village road.

Meanwhile, Mohammad Wali Sediqi, director of borders and tribal affairs department, said 950 personal feuds had been registered across Khost, with 323 of them recorded in Tani district alone.

"We are working to resolve these feuds one by one," he said. "You people are the backbone of the province's economy and are among the most educated — so why are the most feuds in your district? Khost has 12 districts and three administrative units, and Tani alone has 323 personal feuds. Either your tribal elders are deceiving you, or you do not fear God Almighty."

Tribal elders and community leaders said they were doing their best to prevent further violence, but warned that unless the government takes the issue seriously, the situation could worsen.

Ghazi Nawaz Tani, a tribal elder and head of the Afghan Tribal Solidarity Council, told Pajhwok: "Unfortunately, personal feuds have persisted in the Greater Paktia region for decades, with devastating effects. These include killings, economic hardship, and disunity. Our goal is to transform more of these conflicts into friendships. Even now, we witness people being killed daily or weekly in various areas."



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif chairing the federal cabinet meeting.

## Provision of equal educational opportunities top priority: PM

### E.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday said that provision of equal educational and developmental opportunities to the economically weaker children remained among the government's top priorities.

The prime minister directed that educational facilities in Daanish Schools and the University projects should align with the international standards. The prime minister chaired a review meeting on the progress of Daanish Schools and the establishment of Daanish University, PM Office Media Wing said in a press release.

Minister for Planning and Development Dr. Ahsan Iqbal, Minister for Federal Education Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui, Minister for Law and Justice Azam Nazeer Tarar, Minister for Economic Affairs Ahad Khan Cheema, and senior officials from relevant departments were present in the meeting. The prime minister instructed for the establishment of a world-class digital library under these projects. The prime minister also directed the provision of smart boards, e-libraries, and other modern facilities in all Daanish Schools in accordance with the contemporary educational needs.

"Children from underprivileged and marginalized communities in Pakistan possess immense potential and talent to prove themselves at the global stage," he observed and added educating these children was a guarantee for a bright future of the country. He said by ensuring equal access to education and development opportunities, they were committed to eliminating class divisions in society.

"The existing Daanish Schools are playing a significant role in enabling underprivileged children to contribute to the nation's progress and development," the press release, quoted the prime minister as saying. He further asked that all teaching staff and personnel for Daanish Schools and the university should be

recruited strictly on merit, besides instructing provision of maximum admission opportunities in these institutes to children from the economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

To ensure transparency and high standards in these projects, the prime minister stressed for third-party validation. During the meeting, the prime minister was briefed that five Daanish Schools would be established in Balochistan province in Sibi, Zhob, Musakhel, Mehterzai, and Dera Bugti.

Construction work started at Daanish Schools in Karachi and Chitral while Daanish school in Islamabad's Kurri area would be completed this year. The meeting was also apprised of the progress on Daanish School projects in Sultanabad, Shigar, and Astore in Gilgit-Baltistan.

In Azad Jammu and Kashmir, construction was underway on Bhimber and Sharda schools, while work on the Bagh campus would begin soon. Recruitment in Daanish Schools across the country would follow the merit-based model of Punjab's Daanish Schools, with competitive salaries, it was added. The draft for the Daanish Schools Authority Act had been prepared and would soon be submitted for the government's approval. Several international investors expressed interest in the construction of Daanish University during roadshows held in China and Turkiye, the meeting was told.

Meanwhile the Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif directed to align all vocational and technical training offered across Pakistan with international standards to enhance the global employability of the country's youth and boost foreign remittances.

Chairing a high-level meeting on the operations of the National Vocational and Technical Training Commission (NAVTC), the Prime Minister emphasized the need for globally accredited training programs

to strengthen Pakistan's skilled workforce and increase its demand in international markets, a Prime Minister's Office news release said.

"By ensuring international quality in our training institutions, we can create more opportunities for our youth abroad and contribute significantly to the national economy through increased remittances," said the Prime Minister. He instructed that all federal and provincial training institutes seek international accreditation.

The Prime Minister lauded the progress made and reiterated his government's commitment to youth empowerment through skill development aligned with global labor market needs. The NAVTC officials briefed the Prime Minister on recent initiatives, including the mapping of vocational institutions nationwide and the activation of the National Technical and Vocational Training Data Management System.

The cabinet was informed that all public sector training programs are being integrated under a unified regulatory framework managed by NAVTC, with curriculum standardization already underway. According to data shared in the briefing, 53 per cent of trainees from the 2023-24 training cycle secured employment within six months of completing their programs. It was further briefed that over 25,000 individuals trained under NAVTC from 2020 to 2024 have secured jobs overseas. This year alone, 146,000 individuals received training in diverse sectors including services, tourism, IT, banking, textiles, and construction. The target for the next year has been set at 350,000 trainees.

The meeting was attended by Federal Minister for Education Dr. Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui, Minister for Economic Affairs Ahad Khan Cheema, Minister for IT and Telecom Shaza Fatima, Chairman Prime Minister Youth Programme Rana Mashhood Ahmed Khan, and senior government officials.

## No US mediation in ceasefire with Pakistan: Modi

WASHINGTON (Reuters): India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi maintained in a conversation with US President Donald Trump that a ceasefire between India and Pakistan after a four-day conflict in May was achieved through talks between the two militaries and not US mediation, India's senior-most diplomat said.

Trump had said last month that the nuclear-armed South Asian neighbours agreed to a ceasefire after talks mediated by the US, and that the hostilities ended after he urged the countries to focus on trade instead of war. "PM Modi told President Trump clearly that during this period, there was no talk at any stage on subjects like India-US trade deal or US mediation between India and Pakistan," Indian Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri said in a press statement.

"Talks for ceasing military action happened directly between India and Pakistan through existing military channels, and on the insistence of Pakistan. Prime Minister Modi emphasised that India has not accepted mediation in the past and will never do," he said. Misri claimed that the two leaders spoke over the phone at the insistence of Trump on the sidelines of the G7 summit in Canada, which Modi attended as a guest. The call lasted 35 minutes.

The White House did not immediately respond to a request for comment about the Modi-Trump call. Pakistan has previously said that the ceasefire happened after its military returned a call the Indian military had initiated on May 7.

## Two cops killed in terror attacks

### Syed Adnan

PESHAWAR: In a span of just one week, two separate terror incidents have claimed the lives of two police personnel in the Upper Orakzai district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

On Wednesday, militants launched an attack on a police post in Upper Orakzai, resulting in the martyrdom of a police constable. A few days earlier, a similar assault on another checkpoint in the area led to the martyrdom of a sub-inspector.

In response to these incidents, several police checkpoints in Upper Orakzai have been removed while heavy deployment of personnel has been ensured at key posts. Regional Police Officer (RPO) Kohat Division Abbas Majeed Marwat stated that operations against terrorists are underway and have been intensified in Upper Orakzai.

He further praised the bravery and resilience shown by the police during both recent attacks, asserting that the militants also suffered losses in these encounters. "No leniency will be shown towards terrorists in Orakzai," he warned, adding that strict action is being taken. He confirmed that joint operations by the Frontier Corps (FC) and police are ongoing in the region to eliminate the threat of militancy.

## 18 dead as rains lash India's Gujarat

GUJARAT (AFP): At least 18 people have died since Monday as torrential rains lashed parts of India's western Gujarat, state officials said. Disaster response teams have been deployed to help residents in the south of the state, who are bracing for more heavy monsoon rainfall.

"Eighteen people have lost their lives in rain-related incidents, while dozens have been rescued across low-lying areas by disaster response teams," the state government said late on Tuesday. The worst-hit areas included Palitana and Jesar towns, which on Tuesday registered 867 millimetres of rain over the past 24 hours.

State relief commissioner Alok Kumar Pandey said the 18 deaths were the result of storms, lightning strikes and structural collapses due to rough weather. "The state is fully geared to handle the situation, and inter-departmental coordination is being intensified to ensure swift relief and rescue operations," Pandey said.

# Starving merged dists of funds fueling extremism: Saif

### F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Advisor to the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Information and Public Relations, Barrister Dr. Saif, has made an urgent demand to the federal government to immediately transfer the Rs. 350 billion allocated for the merged districts under the NFC Award for the fiscal year 2024-25 to the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

In an official statement issued from his office, Barrister Dr. Saif stated that although Rs. 350 billion had been earmarked by the federal government for the merged districts, the province has received only Rs. 83 billion during the past ten months. This leaves a balance of Rs. 267 billion still pending, with the federal government continuously using delaying tactics in its disbursement.

He emphasized that the lack of funds from the federation is severely impact-

ing the ongoing development projects in the merged districts. "These funds are not just financial assistance but a fulfillment of promises made to the people of these areas. The development of the merged districts and their integration into the national mainstream is a collective responsibility," he said.

Barrister Dr. Saif highlighted that the merger of FATA with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was a historic decision aimed at bringing these areas into the national fold and addressing their longstanding deprivations. However, the federal government's lack of seriousness is undermining this critical national initiative.

He further stressed that the non provision of funds was not only halting the development process but also significantly hampering ongoing efforts against terrorism. "Withholding funds meant for the merged districts promotes terrorism, as it is impossible to eliminate extremism with-

out initiating development projects in these areas," he warned. He demanded that all pending funds under the NFC Award for the merged districts be immediately released to the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government so that the development projects can be completed on time and the people can receive their rightful entitlements.

Barrister Dr. Saif added that the purpose of the merger was to bring the tribal districts at par with the rest of the province, but due to the federal government's negligence, these areas continue to suffer from deprivation. He said stating that if the federal government was truly serious about eliminating terrorism, it must immediately release the funds for the merged districts to accelerate development and address all existing grievances. He also strongly urged the federal government to stop treating Khyber Pakhtunkhwa especially the merged districts like a stepchild.

## India and Canada restore diplomatic services

NEW DELHI (AP): India and Canada agreed to restore diplomatic services nearly two years after Ottawa accused New Delhi of alleged involvement in the killing of a Sikh separatist leader, which turned into a row straining relations between the two countries.

The announcement was made after Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Canadian counterpart, Mark Carney, met Tuesday on the sidelines of the Group of Seven summit in Kananaskis, Alberta. "The leaders agreed to designate new high commissioners, with a view to returning to regular services to citizens and businesses in both countries," a statement from Carney's office said.

High commissioners are senior diplomats, representing their country's interests and fostering relationships with the host nation. Modi and Carney reiterated the importance of a bilateral relationship based on mutual respect and a commitment to the principle of territorial sovereignty, according to the statement. They also discussed further collaboration in several sectors, including technology, digital transition, food security, and critical minerals.

Meanwhile, India's foreign ministry underscored the importance of restarting senior ministerial

engagements to "rebuild trust and bring momentum to the relationship." Carney's predecessor, Justin Trudeau, shocked the world in September 2023 after announcing in Parliament there were credible allegations about India's link to the killing of Hareep Singh Nijjar near Vancouver. New Delhi vehemently denied the allegations and accused Trudeau's government of harboring extremists.

The Indian government had declared Nijjar a terrorist in 2020 under a law meant to suppress dissent. The Sikh independence advocate was a prominent member of the Khalistan movement, banned in India, to create an independent Sikh homeland. He was seen as a human rights activist by Sikh organizations.

Ties between the two countries continued to worsen and in October, India expelled Canadian diplomats and withdrew its high commissioner and other officials from Canada. Ottawa retaliated by dismissing Indian diplomats and accusing the Indian government of an intensifying campaign against Canadian citizens, a charge New Delhi denied. India's anxieties about Sikh separatist groups have long strained its relationship with Canada, where some two percent of the population is Sikh.

As Trump abruptly left the G7 summit, Modi had a detailed phone conversation with the US president and shared India's military response against Pakistan last month following the killings of 26 innocent people, mostly Hindu men, in Indian-controlled Kashmir, foreign secretary Vikram Misri said. In recent weeks, Trump had claimed to have brokered a ceasefire between India and Pakistan and offered trade concessions in part to make the nuclear-armed rivals reach an agreement after shooting at each other for days, which was checkmate by New Delhi. Trump had also proposed mediation over Kashmir.

In a statement, Misri said Modi clarified to Trump that India had never in the past accepted nor would it encourage in the future a third-party mediation over the simmering dispute of Kashmir, a Himalayan region claimed by both India and Pakistan in its entirety. Misri said Modi made it clear to Trump that during multiple talks held between New Delhi and Washington senior officials amid the ongoing military conflict, there was no mention of a trade deal or the US mediation over Kashmir. The talks to stop military actions were held directly between the military leaders of India and Pakistan through existing channels, Misri said.

## Israel-Iran conflict rages

(Continued from Page 1)

"I trust that the understanding between Iran and our neighbouring countries would not allow any third party to abuse their territory," he said. According to Baghaei, "diplomacy never ends". But he said Tehran no longer trusts Washington. "We were in the middle of [nuclear] negotiations [with the US], and all of a sudden, Israel started attacking Iran. And no one can imagine in our region, not only in Iran, that Israel started this war without a prior green light from the US," he said. "So I think what is at stake is the credibility of a country that is supposed to be a global power. What is at stake is the international law that has been almost annihilated because of all the atrocities committed in occupied Palestine and in Syria and elsewhere," he noted.

Baghaei said Iran is in contact with other countries, including Russia, because it is a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council. "We expect everyone that has leeway, that has a mandate under the UN Security Council, to act to help achieve a resolution in condemnation of this attack," he said. Israel has said its attacks on Iran came to stop Tehran from building nuclear weapons. Iran has repeatedly denied that it seeks nuclear bombs and that its nuclear programme is peaceful.

Baghaei argued: "Where are the IAEA's violation reports? The true criminals bomb inspected facilities."

"Our nuclear programme has been part and parcel of our right under the NPT [Non-Proliferation Treaty]. So we have not done anything wrong under international law. Our nuclear programme started in the 1950s and it has continued for the past five decades completely peacefully," he said.

He accused Israel of attacking a "peaceful installation" in Iran and questioned why members of the NPT allowed the attack to happen. "This is completely banned under international law. This is completely criminal. And in accordance with Article 573 of [the UN convention on nuclear safety, as adopted by the International Atomic Energy Agency] IAEA ... the threat of attack against a country's peaceful installation constitutes a threat to peace and security," he noted. "Now, we are witnessing a serious breach of peace ... so I think the international community must make Israel and its supporters accountable for what they have done in their aggression against Iran." — Aljazeera

**Israeli strikes have killed at least 585 people in Iran, human rights group says:** Intense Israeli airstrikes targeted Iran's capital early Wednesday in a conflict that a human rights group said had killed at least 585 people across Iran and wounded 1,326 others.

The Washington-based group Human Rights Activists said it had identified 239 of those killed in Israeli strikes as civilians and 126 as security person-

nel. The group, which also provided detailed casualty figures during the 2022 protests over the death of Mahsa Amini, crosschecks local reports in the Islamic Republic against a network of sources it has developed in the country.

Iran has not been publishing regular death tolls during the conflict and has minimized casualties in the past. Its last update, issued Monday, put the death toll at 224 people killed and 1,277 others wounded. Uncertainty roiled the region and residents of Tehran fled their homes in droves on the sixth day of Israel's air campaign aimed at Iran's military and nuclear program.

Israel asserts it had to launch its airstrike campaign to stop Iran from getting closer to being able to build a nuclear weapon. It came as Iran and the United States had been negotiating over the possibility of a new diplomatic deal over Tehran's program, though President Donald Trump has said Israel's campaign came after a 60-day window he set for the talks. Iran long has insisted its nuclear program was peaceful, though it was the only non-nuclear-armed state to enrich uranium up to 60%, a short, technical step away from weapons-grade levels of 90%. The International Atomic Energy Agency, the United Nations' nuclear watchdog, was still conducting inspections, though limited, in the country. US intelligence agencies as well have said they did not believe Iran was actively pursuing the bomb. — Agencies

## Dispensation of justice top priority: CJP

### E.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Yahya Afridi said on Wednesday that ensuring justice for the people is a top priority, and addressing public grievances is their foremost concern.

While addressing the Peshawar High Court Bar, Chief Justice Afridi congratulated the newly elected cabinet and emphasised that the bar and bench cannot be separated. He said that every step they take will be in the interest of upholding the rule of law. "Do not forget your seniors," he advised, urging young lawyers to follow in the footsteps of their predecessors. He encouraged the youth to step forward and support development projects, adding that the Bar Association should back such initiatives as they benefit everyone. He also announced the construction of a new judicial complex in Peshawar.

Justice Afridi reiterated that resolving public complaints remains the judiciary's first priority. He paid tribute to senior lawyers, including Abdul Latif Afridi and Barrister Zahoor ul Haq, acknowledging their leadership and contributions.

He added that measures are being taken to provide facilities to lawyers and judges, and he is fully aware of the challenges faced by the lower judiciary. "We will deliver justice to the people," he affirmed. Later, Acting Chief Justice of the Peshawar High Court, Justice Syed Muhammad Atique Shah, addressed the gathering and praised the presence of the Chief Justice of Pakistan at the ceremony, calling it commendable.

He emphasised the importance of utilizing modern facilities, describing it as a necessity of the time, and stressed the need to strive for the supremacy of the rule of law. Justice Shah highlighted that 236,000 cases are currently pending in the lower judiciary, a significantly high number.

## Israeli forces kill 69 Palestinians in Gaza

GAZA: At least 69 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli fire across Gaza on Wednesday, including 29 people who were waiting for aid trucks, Palestinian health officials say, the latest carnage hitting people desperate to secure food for their hungry families.

The latest incidence of the daily killing of Palestinian aid seekers in recent weeks took place early on Wednesday on Salah al-Din Street near the Netzarim Corridor in central Gaza, medical sources told Al Jazeera. More than 100 others were injured in the attack, they said. In other deadly Israeli strikes across Gaza, eight people were killed, and others injured, in an air strike on a home in the Zeitoun neighbourhood south of Gaza City, medical sources told Al Jazeera.

Eight more people were killed, and others injured,

in Israeli strikes on tents of displaced people in al-Mawasi camp in Gaza's south, medical sources told Al Jazeera. The victims included a woman and two children, the Palestinian news agency Wafa reported. Another strike took place on the Maghazi camp in central Gaza, news agencies reported, citing medics. Wafa reported that 10 people, including a husband, wife and children from a single family, were killed in the strike.

Hamas condemned Israel's assault on residential areas across the enclave, as well as its targeting of aid seekers at distribution points managed by the contentious US- and Israeli-backed Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF). "The systematic abuse of innocent civilians, the escalation of massacres, the targeting of the starving, forced evictions, and the shrinking of areas the

occupation claims are 'safe'" amount to war crimes, the group said. Israel's attacks are "part of the brutal war of extermination that has been ongoing for nearly 20 months", it added.

The Israeli military, when asked for comment, told the Reuters news agency that it was looking into the reported deaths of people waiting for food aid. Regarding the other reported strikes, it claimed it was "operating to dismantle Hamas military capabilities" and taking "feasible precautions to mitigate civilian harm", Reuters reported.

The GHF began distributing a trickle of food aid in Gaza at the end of May after Israel partially lifted a nearly three-month total blockade on food, medicines and other essential items, leading to fears of famine for the population of 2.3 million. — Aljazeera

## Pak Navy undertake medical evacuation of Indian Seafarer

### E.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Joint Maritime Information and Coordination Centre (JMICC) of Pakistan Navy received a distress call from the Liberian-flagged oil/chemical tanker, MT High Leader, with all Indian crew onboard, requesting medical evacuation for one of its injured crew members.

JMICC immediately activated its established maritime coordination protocols to ensure a rapid and effective response. Consequently, Pakistan Maritime Security Agency (PMSA) promptly evacuated the injured seafarer from MT HIGH LEADER and transferred him to a local hospital in Karachi for emergency medical care.

The successful medical



evacuation is yet another testament to the operational readiness and responsiveness of Pakistan's maritime safety apparatus. The coordination and swift execution reflect Pakistan Navy's resolve to fulfill its international obligations for

the safety of life at sea, irrespective of the nationality of the seafarers involved. PN JMICC is the principal node for generating a coordinated response to any maritime incident by involving a wide range of stakeholders.