

**Police post attacked**  
**F.P. Report**

TANK: Unknown assailants launched a rocket-propelled grenade at the Luqman Shaheed police check post on Friday, injuring one policeman and causing significant structural damage. The attack resulted in the complete collapse of the post's wall. Constable Aslam sustained injuries and was immediately shifted to the District Headquarters Hospital in Tank for treatment.



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# Iran missiles strike Israel as war continue

European leaders push for Tehran's return to talks; Iran's FM says Israel attacks betrayed diplomacy with US

TEL AVIV/DUBAI/WASHINGTON: Israel and Iran's air war entered a second week on Friday, and European officials sought to draw Tehran back to the negotiating table after President Donald Trump said any decision on potential US involvement would be made within two weeks.

Israel began attacking Iran last Friday, saying it aimed to prevent its longtime enemy from developing nuclear weapons. Iran retaliated with missile and drone strikes on Israel. It says its nuclear program is peaceful. On Friday, European foreign ministers met with their Iranian counterpart to discuss the conflict. They emerged from a three-hour meeting in Geneva having urged Tehran to resume negotiations with the US over its nuclear program.

Meanwhile in New York, the UN Security Council held a bad-tempered meeting over the conflict, with Iran and Israel trading accusations. The head of the UN nuclear watchdog agency Rafael Grossi offered stark warnings over the risks of radiation leaks if Israel continues to bomb Iranian nuclear facilities. Salvos of Iranian missiles were fired at Israel on Friday, with a strike hitting Haifa and wounding 19. In Tehran, funerals took place for some of those killed in Israel's airstrikes.

European powers on Friday urged Iran to continue diplomacy to find a solution in the standoff over its nuclear program. "The good result today is that we leave the room with the impression that Iran is ready to further discuss these questions," said German Foreign Minister Johann Wadephul in a statement alongside his British, French and EU counterparts after talks with Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi. British Foreign Secretary David Lammy said "we are keen to continue ongoing discussions and negotiations with Iran, and we urge Iran to continue their talks with the United States", while French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot said there "can be no definitive solution through military means to the Iran nuclear problem".

## Iran, EU diplomats hold talks

GENEVA: Iran's top diplomat has held talks with European foreign ministers in Geneva in an attempt to prevent an escalation in the country's conflict with Israel, after United States President Donald Trump said he would decide within two weeks whether to join the assault on Tehran. Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi met diplomats including French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot, British Foreign Secretary David Lammy, German Foreign Minister Johann Wadephul, and European Union foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas on Friday. The talks in Switzerland sought to test Tehran's readiness to negotiate despite there being scant prospect of Israel ceasing its attacks soon, diplomats said.

Kallas and the ministers from the three European countries – known as the E3 – spoke to Araghchi earlier this week and discussed the need to return to the negotiating table and avoid further escalation. At Iran's suggestion, the two sides agreed to meet face-to-face. "The Iranian Foreign Minister has expressed his willingness to continue discussions on the nuclear programme and more broadly on all issues, and we expect Iran to commit to the discussion, including with the United States, to reach a negotiated settlement," Barrot said after the talks. Lammy said the European countries were eager to continue talks with Iran. "This is a perilous moment, and it is hugely important that we don't see regional escalation of this conflict," he said. — Aljazeera

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned on Friday that expansion of the Israel-Iran conflict could "ignite a fire no one can control" and called on both sides and potential parties to the conflict to "give peace a chance." At the same meeting, Iran said it would continue to defend itself against Israel, while Israel's UN ambassador vowed that his country would not stop its attacks until Iran's nuclear threat is dismantled.

"We will not stop," Israeli UN Ambassador Danny Danon said. "Not until Iran's nuclear threat is dismantled, not until its war machine is disarmed, not until our people and yours are safe." Iran's UN Ambassador Amir Saeid Iravani urged the Security Council to take action.

"Israel apparently declared that it will continue this strike for as many days as it takes. We are alarmed by credible report that the United States... may be joining this war," he said. The US ambassador to the UN, Dorothy Camille Shea, said the United States "continues to stand with Israel and supports its actions against Iran's nuclear ambitions." Missiles fired from Iran on Friday left at least 19 people

injured in the northern Israeli port of Haifa, a local hospital said.

At least one projectile appeared to evade Israel's air defences, slamming into an area by the docks of Haifa where it damaged a building and blew out windows, littering the nearby ground with rubble, AFP images showed. A spokesman for the city's Rambam hospital said 19 people had been injured, with one in a serious condition.

Earlier, Israel's Magen David Adom rescue service reported two people had been injured by falling shrapnel after the attack but did not specify the location. The head of the UN nuclear watchdog agency on Friday warned against attacks on nuclear facilities and called for maximum restraint amid Israel's strikes on Iran. "Armed attack for nuclear facilities should never take place and could result in radioactive releases with great consequences within and beyond boundaries of the state which has been attacked," Rafael Grossi, director of the International Agency for Atomic Energy, told the UN Security Council.

(Continued on Back Page)

## Guterres urges 'give peace a chance' in Israel-Iran conflict

NEW YORK (Reuters): UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned on Friday that expansion of the Israel-Iran conflict could "ignite a fire no one can control" and called on both sides and potential parties to the conflict to "give peace a chance." The head of the UN nuclear watchdog agency, speaking at the same United Nations Security Council session, warned that attacks on nuclear facilities could result in the release of radiation "within and beyond boundaries" of Iran, and called for maximum restraint. Guterres said there were "moments when the directions taken will shape not just the fate of nations, but potentially our collective future."

"This is such a moment," he said. He said expansion of the conflict would "ignite a fire that no one can control" and added: "We must not let that happen." "To the parties to the conflict, the potential parties to the conflict, and to the Security Council as the representative of the international community, I have a simple and clear message: give peace a chance," Guterres said. The Security Council session took place as European foreign ministers met their Iranian counterpart on Friday hoping to test Tehran's readiness to negotiate a new nuclear deal despite there being scant prospect of Israel ceasing its attacks soon. Israel has repeatedly bombed nuclear targets in Iran and Iran has fired missiles and drones at Israel as a week-old air war escalated with no sign yet of an exit strategy from either side. The White House said on Thursday US President Donald Trump would make a decision within the next two weeks whether to get involved on Israel's side. Iran said on Friday it would not discuss the future of its nuclear program while under attack by Israel.

Israel's UN ambassador, Danny Danon, said his country sought genuine efforts to dismantle Iran's nuclear capabilities from Friday's meeting between European and Iranian ministers, not just another round of talks "We have seen diplomatic talks for the last few decades, and look at the results," he told reporters. "If it is going to be like another session and debates, that's not going to work." Rafael Grossi, head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, outlined Israeli attacks on nuclear facilities at Natanz, Isfahan and Arak. He said the level of radioactivity outside Iran's Natanz site has remained unchanged and at normal levels, indicating no external radiological impact on the population or the environment there. However, he said that within the facility there was both radiological and chemical contamination. He said the IAEA was not aware of any damage at Iran's Fordow plant at this time. An attack on Iran's Bushehr plant would be most serious, he said: "It is an operating nuclear power plant and hosts thousands of kilograms of nuclear material." "I want to make it absolutely and completely clear: In the case of an attack on the Bushehr nuclear power plant, a direct hit would result in a very high release of radioactivity to the environment," Grossi said. "Similarly, a hit that disabled the only two lines supplying electrical power to the plant could cause its reactor's core to melt." He said any action against the Tehran nuclear research reactor will also have severe consequences, "potentially for large areas of the city of Tehran and its inhabitants."



## UN nuclear chief warns of disaster

NEW YORK: Rafael Grossi, chief of the United Nations's atomic watchdog, has warned that an Israeli strike on Iran's Bushehr nuclear power plant could trigger a regional catastrophe, as the two countries continue to trade attacks for the eighth straight day. The director of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) told the UN Security Council on Friday that a direct hit on Russian-built Bushehr, located on the the Gulf coast, could "result in a very high release of radioactivity", with "great consequences" beyond Iran's borders. "I, therefore, again call for maximum restraint," said Grossi, telling delegates at an emergency session on the Iran-Israel conflict that armed attacks on nuclear facilities should never take place.

In a worst-case scenario, a strike on Bushehr, which contains "thousands of kilogrammes of nuclear material", would require evacuation orders to be issued for areas within several hundred kilometres of the plant, including population centres in other Gulf countries, he said. Grossi said that a strike on the two lines that supply electricity to Bushehr could cause its reactor core to melt, with dire consequences. Authorities would have to take protective actions, administering iodine to populations and potentially restricting food supplies, with subsequent radiation monitoring covering distances of several hundred kilometres. Grossi appealed for a diplomatic solution and repeated his willingness to travel to negotiate a deal. "The IAEA can guarantee through a watertight inspection system that nuclear weapons will not be developed in Iran," he said. Grossi made his comments as Iranian news portal rouydad24 reported that air defences in the city of Bushehr had been activated. No information about the target of the alleged Israeli attack was initially available. — Aljazeera

## Pakistan wants peace in region: Field Marshal

### F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: During his official visit to the United States, Chief of Army Staff (COAS), Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir, held a comprehensive and candid exchange with senior scholars, analysts, policy experts, and representatives of leading international media outlets in Washington D.C.

The interaction with prominent US think tanks and representatives of the strategic affairs institutions, provided an opportunity to articulate Pakistan's principled stance on key regional and global issues, and to deepen understanding of Pakistan's strategic outlook.

In his remarks, the Chief of Army Staff highlighted Pakistan's unwavering commitment to regional peace and stability, and its constructive role in fostering a rules-based international order. The Field Marshal eluded to the details and analysis of the Maarka e Haq, Operation



Bunyamun Marsoos and elaborated on Pakistan's perspective on terrorism, noting the malign influence of certain regional actors in sponsoring and perpetuating terrorism as a tool of hybrid warfare. The COAS emphasized that Pakistan has been on the front lines of the global war against terrorism, having rendered immense sacrifices—both human and economic—in pursuit of a safer and more secure world.

Field Marshal Asim Munir shed light on Pakistan's remarkable untapped potential, particularly in the domains of information technology,

agriculture, and its vast and underexploited reserves in the mining and mineral sectors. He invited international partners to explore collaborative opportunities in these sectors to unlock shared prosperity.

The Army Chief also provided a detailed exposition of Pakistan's balanced approach to regional and global conflicts, advocating for dialogue, diplomacy, and adherence to international law. He reaffirmed that Pakistan continues to play a responsible and proactive role in mitigating regional tensions and promoting cooperative security frameworks.

## Pakistan defeated India: Bilawal

### F.P. Report

KARACHI: After leading a diplomatic mission to Europe and the US in the wake of Pakistan-India clashes, Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Chairman and former foreign minister Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari said on Friday that Islamabad defeated New Delhi on the battlefield and diplomatic front.

Bilawal received a warm welcome from the PPP leaders and workers in Karachi upon returning to the country on Friday. The Bilawal-led high-level diplomatic delegation visited world major capitals during the 11-day tour. It presented Pakistan's stance and highlighted New Delhi's provocations and aggression against Islamabad.

Addressing the workers on Friday, he said that the high-level delegation visited major capitals in the US, UK and Europe on the directives of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and President Asif Ali Zardari. Bilawal said the delegation presented Pakistan's message of peace, the country's stance on Kashmir dispute, Indus Waters Treaty and counterterrorism.

"India must comply with int'l law, Indus Waters Treaty, or Pakistan will fight another war," warned PPP chief. The former foreign minister credited the tireless efforts of Pakistani ambassadors across the globe for the country's victory on the diplomatic front. The PPP chief said India had also attacked Pakistan in 2019 during the government of Imran Khan but "he did not respond to New Delhi properly".

He claimed that Islamabad gave a solid response to New Delhi both on the battlefield and diplomatically after the arch-rival used Kashmir to attack Pakistan. "It is our historic victory as the world accepted that Kashmir is not a bilateral but a global issue," said Bilawal while pointing towards US President Trump's statement offering mediation on the longstanding issue. He also claimed that the statement from the head of the US military to acknowledge Pakistan's efforts in counterterrorism and calling Islamabad a "phenomenal partner in war against terror" was also a prove of the success of his diplomatic mission.

## PM, US Secretary of State discuss issues

### F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif received a telephone call from US Secretary of State Marco Rubio Friday evening and discussed matters of bilateral and regional interest.

During their warm and cordial conversation, the Prime Minister conveyed his best wishes for President Donald Trump. He praised President Trump for his bold leadership and appreciated Secretary Rubio's proactive diplomacy that played a pivotal role in helping Pakistan and India to arrive at a ceasefire understanding and averting a major catastrophe between the two nuclear armed states.

The PM added that Trump's positive statements about Pakistan were most encouraging for a durable peace in South Asia, which could only be made possible by initiating meaningful dialogue between Pakistan and India.

In this context, he reaffirmed Pakistan's willingness

## Fazl, PM discuss situation

### F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif Friday visited President of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (F) Maulana Fazlur Rehman at his residence and inquired about well being of his younger son Asjad Mehmood. He expressed his grave concern over the attack on Asjad Mehmood and the failed attempt to kidnap him. The prime minister ordered legal action against the people involved in the failed attack. The two leaders also discussed the overall political situation in the country.

for talks with India on all outstanding issues, including Jammu & Kashmir, the Indus Water Treaty, trade and counter-terrorism. The situation in the Middle East, particularly the Iran-Israel crisis, was also discussed, where the PM emphasized the need to find a peaceful resolution to this grave crisis, through dialogue and diplomacy.

He stated that Pakistan was ready to play a constructive role in any effort for peace in the current situation, which was deeply worrying, not only for the region, but for the entire world. While recalling President Trump's focus on trade, the PMr stated

that Pakistan and the US needed to work together to advance mutually beneficial cooperation across a wide range of areas, including trade, investment, energy, mining, rare earth metals, and IT. On security and counterterrorism, the Prime Minister reaffirmed Pakistan's resolve to deal with the menace of terrorism from the entire country, particularly the threat from BLA, TTP and other militant groups. In this regard, Secretary Rubio appreciated Pakistan's counter-terrorism efforts and assured Pakistan of full cooperation by the US in countering all such threats.

**Polio case reported in Bannu**  
**F.P. Report**

BANNU: A new case of wild poliovirus was reported in KP's Bannu district, taking the national tally to 12, the Regional Reference Laboratory for Polio Eradication at Islamabad's National Institutes of Health (NIH) said in a press release on Friday. The 33-month-old boy from Bannu's Shamsikhel Union Council is the sixth case of polio reported from KP this year.

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**KARACHI:** Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah speaks on the floor of the provincial Assembly during the budget session. —APP Photo

## Mayor, Opposition Leader discuss budget

KARACHI (PPI): Mayor Karachi Barrister Murtaza Wahab and the Leader of the Opposition in the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC), Advocate Saif Uddin, met today to discuss the 2025-2026 budget, focusing on cooperation and inclusivity in the fiscal planning process.

Mayor Wahab shared projected revenue figures and collection estimates with Advocate Saif. The conversation centered on transparent budget development, addressing the needs of Karachi's diverse residents. The mayor stressed the importance of bipartisan collaboration and encouraged input from the opposition. The leaders examined crucial development areas, infrastructure plans, and long-term service initiatives. They pledged to work together for the betterment of Karachi and its inhabitants, promoting a collaborative governance approach.

Wahab supported strengthening local bodies, particularly concerning the Karachi Water & Sewerage Corporation and the Sindh Solid Waste Management Board, aiming for enhanced localized service delivery. KMC Municipal Commissioner SM Afzal Zaidi, PPP Parliamentary Leader Karamullah Waqasi, and other senior officials also participated in the meeting.

## 8-member committee formed to appoint HEC chairman

LAHORE (APP): An eight member committee has been formed to appoint new chairman of the Higher Education Commission (HEC) on merit through a competitive and transparent process, deciding not to extend the tenure of the current chairperson.

Higher Education Commission (HEC) local chapter sources told APP that the extension given to the current chairperson has already been challenged in the court of law. According to the HEC Act, the chairman can be extended only once.

According to the sources, the 8-member search committee will be headed by the Federal Minister for Federal Education and Professional Training. The committee will be responsible for shortlisting suitable candidates for the post of chairman HEC and making recommendations, so as to ensure effective leadership and better governance in the higher education sector.

Federal Minister for Federal Education and Professional Training Dr. Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui will be the chairman of the committee, while the members include Minister of State for Federal Education and Professional Training Dr. Wajih Qamar, Arif Saeed, Salman Akhtar, Secretary Apex Committee Jahanzeb Khan, Provost, Aga Khan University Dr. Anjum Hilal, Provost, Aga Khan University Dr. Muhammad Naseem Qaisrani, Secretary Federal Education and Professional Training Nadeem Mehboob as members/secretaries of the committee.

## Punjab to set up 2,000 charging stations for electric buses

LAHORE (APP): The Punjab government has announced plans to establish 2,000 electric vehicle (EV) charging stations across the province. Under the directive of Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif, 600 electric buses will be introduced in the initial phase of this initiative.

The plan was reviewed during a high-level meeting chaired by Chief Secretary Punjab Zahid Akhtar Zaman via video link at the Civil Secretariat here on Friday. The meeting was attended by the secretaries of the health and transport departments, and the CEO of Lahore Waste Management Company, while the Director General of the Lahore Development

Authority, divisional commissioners, and all deputy commissioners participated virtually.

The Chief Secretary directed the deputy commissioners to identify appropriate sites in their districts for setting up charging stations and bus depots. He emphasized that in line with the Chief Minister's vision, the initiative aims to deliver modern, comfortable, and international standard transport facilities to citizens across Punjab. He also instructed the authorities to launch a campaign against overloading in public transport to enhance commuter safety.

Reaffirming the government's priorities, the Chief Secretary said that the improved governance and healthcare services remain

at the forefront of the provincial agenda.

He noted that the exemplary cleanliness measures implemented during Eid-ul-Azha reflected the administration's commitment to efficient service delivery, adding that the administrative officers are required to maintain and build upon these standards through continued diligence.

The Chief Secretary further underscored the need to eradicate corruption in the Revenue Department, terming it a fundamental responsibility of deputy commissioners and a crucial step in providing relief to the public. He also called for the swift completion of land record computerization and issued directives for effective measures against stray dog bite incidents.

## PTI vows to continue struggle for Imran's release

KARACHI (PPI): Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Sindh President Haleem Adil Sheikh on Friday vowed to continue vigorous struggle for the release of the party founder, Imran Khan.

Speaking at a high-level PTI Sindh meeting, Mr Sheikh expressed, "We will not allow the nation to be enslaved. We will reclaim our true freedom through struggle." He portrayed Imran Khan as a leader not motivated by personal power but driven by a vision of justice and constitutional governance, akin to the ideals of Quaid-e-Azam.

PTI Sindh General

Secretary Dr. Masroor Siyal and other key leaders discussed various strategies to address the current political and economic challenges facing the nation.

Mr Sheikh highlighted the dire state of national affairs under the current administration, criticizing the recent constitutional amendments and the economic policies that have led to unprecedented inflation and increased poverty. "The 26th Constitutional Amendment has weakened the judiciary, and the amendments to PECA have silenced the media," he stated, labeling the existing government as a "dictatorship under the guise of

democracy."

The PTI leader did not shy away from voicing the widespread discontent among various political circles in Sindh, suggesting a potential shift of allegiance by several key politicians to PTI. He emphasized the party's efforts to broaden its organizational reach across the province in preparation for a stronger political platform once Imran Khan is released.

Furthermore, the meeting witnessed the formation of specialized committees aimed at addressing legal reforms, human rights violations, and strengthening party organization throughout Sindh.

## Pakistan and Russia strengthen energy ties



**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: A high-level Pakistani delegation, led by Federal Minister for Petroleum Ali Pervaiz Malik, held a meeting with representatives of Gazprom, Russia's leading oil and Gas Company, headed by Mr. Sergey Tumanov, General Director of Gazprom International. Mr. Ahmed Hayat Lak, MD/CEO Oil and Gas Development Company Limited (OGDCL) was also present in the meeting. The discussions focused on

enhancing bilateral cooperation in the energy sector, with a particular emphasis on joint ventures and business development opportunities between OGDCL and Gazprom International.

During the meeting, both parties reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening energy collaboration, leveraging Pakistan's growing energy demands and Gazprom's extensive expertise in oil and gas exploration, production, and infrastructure development. The discussions

highlighted potential areas of partnership.

It was agreed that OGDCL and Gazprom International would continue discussions to identify viable projects and partnerships, ensuring sustainable energy development and economic growth for both countries.

The meeting marks a significant step forward in Pakistan-Russia energy relations, reinforcing the shared vision of energy collaboration and economic prosperity.

# Pakistan proved as responsible nuclear state: Shazia Marri

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Peoples Party's central spokesperson Shazia Marri said that Pakistan is a responsible nuclear state and the Pakistan Army by giving a befitting reply to India in a professional manner proven to the world that it has the full capability to crush the evil intentions of the enemy.

Talking to the media outside the Parliament House, she said that Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, along with a high-level parliamentary delegation, unveiled the truth about the Pahalgam incident to the world during his 11-day foreign tour and exposed the hideous face of India. Shazia Marri said that Bilawal Bhutto Zardari will be given a grand welcome upon his return from a successful tour. Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, along with a high-level parliamentary delegation, made an 11-day

tour of various countries including the United States of America.

He successfully completed the mission entrusted by Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif to the former Foreign Minister and the young leadership of Bilawal Bhutto Zardari.

Accomplished, the delegation held a total of 64 high-level meetings, including meetings with US members of parliament, think tanks, and diplomatic missions, and informed the entire world about the Indian false flag operation and its aggression and illegal unilateral actions to abrogate the Indus Waters Treaty. On the other hand, India also sent a delegation that was seen eating and singing with the people of its community and no think tank listened to their voice.

Shazia Marri said that they have been saying since day one that the

Pahalgam incident was a false flag operation. Modi's case is just propaganda while Pakistan's case is true.

Bilawal Bhutto said that we want peace, Pakistan is the only country that wants to end terrorism while India has always conspired through fabricated statements. Now the world has come to know the truth about India. Shazia Marri said that after a long time, the world is taking Pakistan seriously. Shazia Marri said that Bilawal Bhutto also had 17 meetings with the international media and Bilawal Bhutto's arrival is expected today after this successful visit, for which people are in a crowd in Karachi to welcome him. Pakistan People's Party spokesperson said that he had gone to fight the case of Pakistan as a Pakistani. Bilawal Bhutto has raised Pakistan's head with pride.

What is it? - Shazia Marri said that we are proud of our Pakistani forces, who have demonstrated their capabilities. We are confident that our defense is strong. - Bilawal Bhutto was the youngest Foreign Minister. Considering his diplomatic skills, Prime Minister Muhammad Shahbaz Sharif formed a parliamentary delegation under his leadership, for which we are also grateful to the Prime Minister. - Bilawal Bhutto and his team met with important countries for 11 days. During his visit to the United States, he met with 25 members of the US Senate and Congress. - Bilawal Bhutto Zardari also condemned the ongoing barbarity in Gaza and expressed solidarity with the Palestinians. Bilawal Bhutto also condemned the recent Israeli aggression against Iran and expressed solidarity with the people of Iran.

## Water filtration plants to be installed in govt schools

LAHORE (APP): The government has announced the installation of water filtration plants in government schools at a cost of 12 billion.

According to School Education Department (SED) sources, funds of 20 to 25 lakhs per school will be provided for water filtration plants, residents of the area will also be able to get clean water from the filtration plant, taps will be installed outside the school to provide clean water.

The sources further said that expensive water filtration plants will be installed if the quality of water deteriorates, and schools will be shifted to solarisation to run water filtration plants. The Education Department sources further informed APP that so far more than one thousand schools have been shifted to solar.

## New rules, regulations announced for MDCAT exam

LAHORE (APP): Pakistan Medical and Dental Council's (PMDC) has announced new rules and regulations for MDCAT examination.

According to PMDC sources, a minimum of 65 percent marks in FSC is mandatory for admission to medical and dental colleges. Only candidates with domicile of the province will be able to participate in MDCAT.

A domicile holder of one province will not be able to take the MDCAT exam in another province. Only the Saudi capital Riyadh will be the center for MDCAT exam abroad. This year, the MDCAT exam will be held under new rules and regulations, they said.

**اطلاع عام**  
عوام الناس کو مطلع کیا جاتا ہے کہ نمبر 99-یکٹر 2-2، 5-قرن 5-رواج 2-2 KDA کوٹ کے مالک سلطان محمد ولد آدم خان کے وفات کے بعد مولج کوٹ سے جاری حدود کی زمین سے عرض انداز جو یہ ان کی منیت سے ظاہر ہو چکے ہیں نے مذکور ملک کی ذری کی درخواست کرادی ہے۔ اگر کی ادارے رقم میں ایک کوٹ کی عراض ہوئے مذکور ملک کی کے حق میں ہو یا کسی پاس ذری کی ویرہ ہو یا کوٹ کے گھر میں اپنے آپ کو سلطان محمد کوٹ دارت ظاہر کرنا چاہتا ہو 15ہم کے اندر دے ایک آفیسر UADA کوٹ سے تحریری طور پر بعد موت رابطہ کریں۔ اس صورت مذکور ملک کی عرض انداز جو یہ کہ نام فراست کر دیا جائے گا۔ اور بعد میں کوٹ ملے تو ان میں ہوگا۔ ہذا نمبر 2-2 آفیسر اس میں ایذا پہنچتہ اعدائی کوٹ۔

## Preparations for next year's Hajj formally begin: Minister

ISLAMABAD (INP): Minister for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony, Sardar Muhammad Yousaf, Friday said that preparations for next year's Hajj have formally begun, stressing that all Saudi guidelines will be fully observed to guarantee a smooth and safe pilgrimage for Pakistani pilgrims.

Participating in the Budget Debate in the National Assembly, the minister said the Saudi government has issued the Hajj policy and timeline, and Pakistan's official quota—set at 179,210 pilgrims—is expected to be confirmed by July 10.

Sardar Yousaf, who personally monitored the 2025 Hajj operations, said 115,000 Pakistanis performed the pilgrimage this year, including 88,000 under the government scheme and the rest through private operators. He noted that all pilgrims completed their Hajj with devotion, and the prime minister also commended the efforts.

Commenting on Indian aggression, he stated that the people of Pakistan emerged victorious in the Pakistan-India war, attributing this success to the blessings of Allah and the dedicated efforts of the Pakistan Army.

Commenting on the federal budget, the minister described it as "balanced" and indicative of the government's resolve to fast-track economic recovery. He noted that the increase in salaries and pensions would help ease the financial burden on citizens.

Additionally, steps have been taken to boost exports. He emphasized that development projects aimed at benefiting the public are the responsibility of the provinces, which must fulfill their roles accordingly.

On regional issues, Sardar Yousaf voiced serious concern over the denial of basic human rights and alleged discrimination against the people of Hazara, particularly in Mansehra district. He said

the region's population of over 300,000 lacks access to clean drinking water, gas, and proper infrastructure. He urged the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government, led by Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), to stop marginalizing the region and ensure fair treatment.

He also called for the reconstruction of education and healthcare infrastructure destroyed in past earthquakes and demanded prompt compensation for those affected by the Suki Kinari Dam project. Stressing administrative reform, he reiterated his demand for the formation of new provinces, including Hazara, to improve governance and service delivery.

Meanwhile, Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) MNA Syed Khurshid Ahmed Shah highlighted the need to revise Pakistan's Hajj quota based on population. He said that under the current 0.1% quota allocation, at least 230,000 Pakistani citizens should be given the opportunity to perform Hajj.

## ٹینڈرنوٹس

ترجمہ کی پٹور چڑیا گھر میں مندرجہ ذیل کیا باتیں اکثر پیش کیلئے حکومت کے مختلف ایجنسیوں اور KPRPA کے ساتھ مزید درخواستوں اور افراد سے سہمہ ٹینڈر مطلوب ہیں۔ جو کہ مورخہ 2025-07-10 اور 2025-07-11 (11:00AM) تک دفتر خدائیں میں گرانے ہو گئے۔ ٹینڈر کی تاریخ 11:15 بجے خواہشمند ٹینڈر دہندگان یا ان کے جائز نامہ دہندگان کی موجودگی میں بھی کے سامنے کھولے جائینگے۔ تعمیل درج ذیل ہے۔

نمبر شمار	کنٹرکٹ کی تفصیل	مدت عہدہ	کنٹرکٹ کے لیے پٹور چڑیا گھر سے ٹینڈر فارم اور دستاویزات وصول کر کے کی آخری تاریخ اور وقت	ٹینڈر کو کھولنے کی تاریخ اور وقت	رقم کا بل پھاڑت
1-	گور پارک اندرون پٹور چڑیا گھر	برائے ایک سال	09-07-2025 05:00 PM	10-07-2025 11:15 AM	500,000/- روپے
2-	گیس پداختی میں مسمولی	برائے ایک سال	09-07-2025 05:00 AM	10-07-2025 11:30 AM	2,000,000/- روپے

- شرائط کارہ اور مشروطیات اور دفتر پٹور چڑیا گھر سے ملنے۔ 500/- روپے (قابل ادائیگی) کی ادائیگی و دفتری وقت کارہ کے دوران مورخہ 09/07/2025 حاصل کیے جاسکتے ہیں۔
- چڑیا گھر میں ایندھن کی فراہمی کے لئے دالے اور پٹور چڑیا گھر کے واسطے سے خراب کارکردگی سرٹیفیکٹ لینے والے عہدیدار میں صدر لینے کے بل نہیں۔
- خواہشمند حضرات کو ٹینڈر میں صدر لینے کیلئے کسی بھی خطی بل ریجک سے جاری کر دے۔ مٹل چانچا کا ذکر روپے کی قابل ادائیگات ہام اندر ذکر پٹور چڑیا گھر دفتر خدائیں ٹینڈر کے ساتھ جمع کرنا لازمی ہے۔
- بمکمل اور مشروطیات اور مٹل دالے ٹینڈر قابل قبول نہیں ہو گئے۔
- کوئی بھی شخص اداروں کے ساتھ رجسٹریشن کی فوٹوکاپیاں درخواست کے ساتھ منسلک کرنا لازمی ہو گا اور ہامی میں نہیں کیا جائے گا۔ قادم لینے کے لیے کوئی / فرم / لائسنس پٹور چڑیا گھر سے ٹینڈر میں صدر لینے کیلئے کسی بھی خطی بل ریجک سے جاری کر دے۔ مٹل چانچا کا ذکر روپے کی قابل ادائیگات ہام اندر ذکر پٹور چڑیا گھر دفتر خدائیں ٹینڈر کے ساتھ جمع کرنا لازمی ہے۔
- چڑیا گھر انتظامیہ کا اختیار ہو گا کہ غیر تسلیم شدہ کسی بھی شخص کی ہمت کیلئے مندرجہ ذیل سے اور اس پر عملیہ اور کو اس عراض میں حاصل نہیں ہو گا۔
- کیا سب ٹینڈر دہندگان کا نوٹہ دہندگان کے ساتھ اسٹاپ بھیجے۔ معاہدہ کرنا لازمی ہو گا جس میں عہدہ کے بارے میں تفصیلی وضاحت درج ہو گئے۔
- ٹینڈر کی مکمل تفصیلی ٹینڈر فارم میں موجود ہے۔
- مزید معلومات کے لیے دفتر کی وقت کارہ کا نوٹہ درج ذیل نمبر پر رابطہ کیا جاسکتا ہے۔

ڈائریکٹر پٹور چڑیا گھر  
آفس کیمپس بلڈنگ پٹور چڑیا گھر  
فون نمبر: 091-7256677

## PUBLIC NOTICE AUCTION OF GOLD

Details: Branch: DI Khan Auction Date: 25<sup>th</sup> June -2025 Branch code: 3033 Time: 11:00 AM

Finance facilities were extended by Mobilink Bank against the security of deposit and pledge of gold to the customers mentioned below. The customers who have neglected and failed to repay the finance extended to them by Mobilink Bank along with the markup thereon.

Customer Name	CNIC #	Address	Gold Weight (GM)	Detail of Gold Ornaments
Abdul Ghaffar	32103-6041548-9	Post Office Khas Tarman, Tehsil Tunsia, District Dera Ghazi Khan	54	1 Tuls, 1 Tika, 1 Jhumar, Kantay, 1 Tuls
Muhammad Noman	12102-7872168-5	Jhok Jhundheer Jata, Tehsil Perwa, District Dera Ismail Khan	71	5 Katmala
Gul Amir	12101-1498788-9	Post Office T.T. Mills Korai, Tehsil Dera Ismail Khan, District D.J Khan	29	2 Mala, 2 pairs of Kangan

Notice is hereby given to the customers in above mentioned that if payment of entire outstanding amount financed along with markup is not made by them to Mobilink Bank within 1 day of the publication of this notice, Mobilink Bank shall auction the gold ornaments and no further Public Notice shall be issued to call upon the customers to make the payments.





**PESHAWAR:** Consul General Shante Moore met with a group of business and political leaders from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, including Provincial Minister of Labor Fazal Shakoor Khan, Additional Secretary of Information (PML-N) Arbab Khizar Hayat, former KP Assembly Member Syed Mazhar Ali Shah, and former Mayor Kohat Gohar Ali to discuss different aspects of the U.S.-Pakistan bilateral relationship as it pertains to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, with emphasis on strengthening economic and commercial ties.

World Refugee Day

# Governor highlights plight of Afghan refugees

PESHAWAR (APP): Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Karim Kundi, in his message on World Refugee Day observed on Friday, emphasized the urgent need for global attention toward the plight of Afghan refugees, saying that being a refugee is not a crime but a deeply painful compulsion.

“No one willingly abandons their home, homeland, or identity,” he said, urging for greater compassion and understanding for displaced individuals, particularly the millions forced to flee Afghanistan due to decades of conflict and instability.

Highlighting Pakistan’s longstanding humanitarian role, the Governor said the country especially Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has hosted Afghan refugees for decades, setting a global example of generosity and solidarity.

“Pakistan, and particularly this province, have shown the world that

standing with the oppressed is deeply rooted in our culture, history, and religious values,” he added. Governor Kundi praised the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for hosting the largest number of Afghan refugees despite limited resources, offering them dignity, protection, and essential services.

He pointed out that the consequences of war are long-lasting and often displace generations.

“The ongoing suffering of refugees from Afghanistan, Palestine, Syria, and other war-torn regions continues to shake the conscience of the international community,” he remarked.

The Governor stressed that a refugee is not weak but a victim of circumstance who deserves empathy and support, not discrimination or neglect.

He called on the global community to uphold refugee rights and take meaningful steps toward sustainable and dignified

solutions.

In conclusion, Governor Kundi prayed for peace around the world, the end of all wars, and a future in which every human being can live safely and with dignity in their homeland.

Meanwhile, Governor Faisal Karim Kundi in a meeting with a delegation from the merged districts, comprising former Senator Alhaj Taj Muhammad, former MNA Bilal Afridi, Secretary Abdul Waheed, and social figure Wali Muhammad focused on the rights and pressing issues faced by the people of the merged tribal districts.

The delegation expressed grave concerns over the continued denial of constitutional and legal rights to the residents of merged areas.

They criticized the provincial government for what they described as the unjust seizure of development funds, claiming that the unfair distribution of resources and centralized decision-making have

exacerbated the sense of deprivation among the tribal population.

Governor Kundi assured the delegation that he would continue to raise his voice at every relevant platform to protect the rights of the merged districts.

He said that he would also meet with the President and Prime Minister of Pakistan to bring these issues to the highest level of national attention. “The purpose of the FATA merger was to bring backward areas into the mainstream, not to push them further into neglect,” the Governor stressed. He added that ongoing injustices in the merged districts would not be tolerated in silence.

The delegation appreciated Governor Kundi’s leadership and efforts, expressing hope that his commitment would help ensure the tribal communities receive their rightful share of development and governance.

# PHC reserves verdict in enlisting of individuals in ECL

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: The Peshawar High Court (PHC) has reserved decision on a petition filed by two individuals, Fawad and Haris, challenging inclusion of their names in the Exit Control List (ECL) and their deportation from Iran, on Friday.

PHC’s two-member bench comprising Justice Syed Arshad Ali and Justice Abdul Fayyaz heard the

case. The lawyers, Noor Wali Khan and Roshana Khattak, argued that the petitioners were deported from Iran and their names were included in the ECL without justification.

The counsel argued that Haris had applied for a student visa to the UK, which was approved, while Fawad was offloaded from a flight to Saudi Arabia. The lawyers argued that deportation from one country should not affect travel to

another country.

The Assistant Attorney General informed the court that a review committee has been established to examine such cases. The petitioners’ lawyers stated that they had also approached the review committee, but their names had not been removed from the ECL.

PHC divisional bench comprising of Justice Syed Arshad Ali and Justice Abdul Fayyaz reserved the verdict after hearing the arguments.

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# 156 more drug addicts shifted to rehabilitation centres

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: As part of the fourth phase of the “Drug-Free Peshawar” campaign, Commissioner Peshawar Division Riaz Khan Mehsum led a successful operation in which 156 more drug addicts were taken into custody and shifted to rehabilitation centres. With this, the total number of addicts transferred to rehab facilities from the provincial

capital’s streets, alleys, graveyards, and other areas has reached 428. The operation will continue until the last drug addict is shifted to a rehabilitation centre, reaffirmed Commissioner Mehsum.

According to details, the fourth phase of the campaign to completely rid Peshawar of drug addicts is ongoing. Despite extreme heat and humidity, four special teams formed under the

supervision of assistant commissioners carried out operations across University Road, Karkhano Market, Hayatabad, and GT Road. During this operation, 156 individuals, including women and children, were taken into protective custody and moved to rehab centres.

Over the span of two days, a total of 428 drug addicts have been transferred to treatment facilities,

significantly reducing the visible presence of drug users in the city. Commissioner Riaz Khan Mehsum expressed satisfaction over the progress and issued directives to continue the operation until every addict has been rehabilitated.

He also expressed his determination to make Peshawar the first drug-free city in Pakistan by the end of the campaign’s fourth phase.



**PESHAWAR:** Female police arresting a woman drug addict to shift her to rehabilitation center as part of Drug-Free Peshawar campaign.

## Training on Changing Diabetes in Children held at BKMC Swabi

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A full-day training session on “Changing Diabetes in Children (CDiC)” was successfully conducted at the Auditorium Hall of Bacha Khan Medical Complex-MTI, Swabi, in collaboration with the Health Promotion Foundation.

The session focused on the practical management of Type 1 Diabetes, equipping healthcare professionals with updated knowledge and hands-on strategies to improve care for children living with diabetes.

The event was graced by leading experts from Karachi and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, while more than 50 paediatrics consultants and doctors from Swabi participated in the session.

The program began with a project overview presented by Mr. Ubaid-e-Yazdan. Dr. Umar Yousaf Raja, Joint Secretary of the Pakistan Endocrine Society (PES), delivered an in-depth session on Type 1 Diabetes, covering its diagnosis, challenges, and potential solutions.

Prof. Dr. Arshad Hussain shared his insights on the management of Type 1 Diabetes, focusing on hypoglycaemia and insulin dose adjustments. Mrs. Mahvish Sheraz discussed real-life scenarios and practical strategies related to diet and lifestyle for children living with Type 1 Diabetes.

Dr. Musarrat Riaz highlighted complications and co-morbidities, along with the management of Diabetic Ketoacidosis (DKA). Ms. Erum Ghafoor, Project Manager for CDiC, spoke about the educational aspects of Type 1 Diabetes, emphasizing awareness and capacity-building. Dr. Aqil Noor addressed the management of hypoglycaemia in children, while Dr. Qadeer Ahmad delivered a session on self-monitoring of blood glucose and target-setting.

The session saw active participation from paediatricians who engaged in discussions and Q&A segments. Experts responded thoroughly to all queries, making the training highly interactive and impactful. With the rising prevalence of Type 1 Diabetes in children, the session highlighted the urgent need for early prevention, timely diagnosis, and education.

GKMC/BKMC-MTI management extended heartfelt gratitude to the entire CDiC team for their commitment and dedication in conducting such a fruitful and impactful training session.

The event concluded with the distribution of certificates to all participants in recognition of their active participation and commitment to improving the care of children with Type 1 Diabetes.

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## Opposition MPs meet Governor

PESHAWAR (APP): A high-level delegation of opposition members from the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly met with Governor Faisal Karim Kundi at the Governor House on Friday to express their concerns over the conduct of the Chief Minister and ongoing political developments in the province. The delegation was led by Leader of the Opposition Dr. Ibadullah and included prominent lawmakers from Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI), including Ahmad Karim Kundi, Sardar Shah Jehan Yousaf, Jalal Khan, Makhdoomzada Syed Aftab Haider Shah, Adnan Khan, Sobia Shahid, and Syeda Shehla. During the meeting, the opposition lawmakers conveyed their dissatisfaction with the chief minister’s behavior, calling it undemocratic and confrontational. They categorically said that they would not become part of any unconstitutional or extra-parliamentary moves, reiterating their commitment to upholding democratic principles and the rule of law.

# Your scent lingers on

Sharjeel Inam Memon

**JUNE 21 marks the birth anniversary of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto (Shaheed Bibi). She was born on June 21, 1953, in Karachi. On that day, her father, Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, her mother, Begum Nusrat Bhutto, and the entire Bhutto family celebrated the immense joy her birth brought them. Shaheed Bhutto described this moment in detail in a letter he wrote to Shaheed Bibi on her 25th birthday, June 21, 1978, while on death row in Rawalpindi Jail. This letter was later published in book form under the title My Most Beloved Daughter.**



In this letter, Shaheed Bhutto wrote that Shaheed Bibi was a deeply compassionate and sensitive child, so much so that she once cried the whole day and refused to eat after a pigeon died. To this same daughter, on her birthday, he gifted her “the hand of the people,” saying he had nothing else to give from his death cell. This remarkably kind-hearted Shaheed Bibi went on to confront some of the most ruthless and heartless colonial forces in the world to uphold that gift. She ultimately sacrificed her life for Pakistan and its people at the age of just 54.

Shaheed Bibi once wrote that during her final meeting with her father, a day before his execution, she promised him that she would carry forward his mission. After making this solemn vow to Shaheed Baba, she dedicated the next 30 years of her life to fulfilling it, enduring immense hardships and suffering until her martyrdom.

What was Shaheed Bhutto’s mission? Shaheed Bibi carried it forward as a well-defined program. His mission was to empower the people by giving them the right to make all decisions through democracy and to make the defense of the state of Pakistan impregnable. Shaheed Bhutto firmly believed that no democratic or political system can thrive in a militarily weak state. This was the essence of Shaheed Bhutto’s philosophy.

In light of recent Indian aggression against Pakistan and Israeli aggression against Iran, the importance of this philosophy is becoming increasingly clear. Democracy and the struggle for a strong, stable state must go hand in hand. The way Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto advanced this mission is truly unparalleled.

The era of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto was marked by immense challenges, not only for the democratic forces of Pakistan but also for the security and sovereignty of the nation. Shaheed Bibi not only revived democracy by leading a peaceful yet determined struggle against two military dictators, but she also took extraordinary steps to strengthen Pakistan’s defense.

Today, on her birth anniversary, it is the most fitting moment to acknowledge and honor the exceptional contributions Shaheed Bibi made toward making Pakistan’s defense impregnable. It is widely recognized that Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was the political architect of Pakistan’s nuclear program, while Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto played the key role as the political architect of Pakistan’s modern missile program.

She not only safeguarded her father’s nuclear legacy but actively advanced it. In 1974, when India conducted its first nuclear test, Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto finalized Pakistan’s nuclear program. Similarly, in 1988, after India tested its Prithvi missile, Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto took decisive steps to make Pakistan’s nuclear deterrent operational and viable.

Just as Shaheed Bhutto used his diplomatic channels to acquire nuclear technology from France and other countries, Shaheed Bibi skillfully engaged with North Korea and China to obtain missile technology. In 1989, as Prime Minister, she established the Missile Technology Board, obtained blueprints from North Korea, and signed multiple defense agreements. It was during her tenure that Pakistan’s Hafiz missile program was launched and successfully tested.

Moreover, the defense agreements she signed with China gave Pakistan a strategic edge over India in military technology, an advantage that endures to this day. When India exhibited aggression, Pakistan, under her guidance and legacy, responded in kind, leaving a mark India would not forget.

The most meaningful way to pay tribute to Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto on her birth anniversary is to recognize and salute her unparalleled efforts in fortifying the defense of Pakistan.

The Pakistan Peoples Party is the only political party in the country whose leadership has sacrificed their lives not only for the cause of democracy but also for the security and sovereignty of the state of Pakistan. During her exile, in a conversation with journalists in Washington in March 2005, Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto said:

“My father laid the foundation of Pakistan’s nuclear program. I brought missile technology from North Korea. I signed defense agreements with China. I am told that I am the only one who can secure modern weapons for Pakistan from other countries, I am the one who can bring F-16s from the United States and Mirage jets from France. But what have they done to us? The whole world knows. Still, despite all the hardships, we will not give up our struggle to restore democracy in Pakistan, nor will we abandon our mission to strengthen its security and defense. We live and die for Pakistan and its people. Even in exile, I am doing more for Pakistan through diplomacy than those in power.”

These words reflect not only her unwavering dedication to democratic ideals but also her tireless efforts to ensure Pakistan’s strategic strength, even when far from home, under pressure, and in exile.

Shaheed Bibi clearly advanced the mission of her Shaheed Baba through her actions. This mission encompassed both the democratic rights of the people of Pakistan and the security of the state. Today, that same mission is being carried forward by Shaheed Bibi’s brother and Pakistan Peoples Party Chairman, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari. Just as he continues to raise the flags of Pakistan’s victories on the diplomatic front, he is upholding the core agenda of the mission begun by Shaheed Bhutto and Shaheed Bibi.

Today, on the 72nd anniversary of Shaheed Bibi, we deeply miss her presence. As Ghalib beautifully expressed, “Aisa kahan se laun ke tujh sa kahin jise” - “Where could I find someone like you, whom I could call ‘like you’?” Shaheed Bibi used to say that a person can be imprisoned or exiled, but an ideology cannot be. We continue to uphold this belief—that a person may be imprisoned, exiled, or even killed, but an ideology will always survive. The ideology of reconciliation that Shaheed Bibi championed for Pakistan and its people, as an alternative to revenge, will forever endure. As the poet says...

*(Tere baad bhi guzray hain kuch log  
Magar teri khushboo na gayi reh guzar se)  
Even after you, some people did pass by,  
But your fragrance never left the path.*

Writer is Minister for Information and Transport, Government of Sindh

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## Sohni Waterfall Tragedy Chanzeb urges tourists to take precautions

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Adviser to the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Tourism and Culture, Zahid Chanzeb, has expressed deep sorrow over the tragic deaths of three tourists caused by a falling glacier chunk near Sohni Waterfall, located between Naran and Batakundi.

The incident claimed the lives of 35-year-old Tahir, 13-year-old Abu Bakar, and 22-year-old Tayyab, all of whom were residents of Lahore.

In a condolence message, Zahid Chanzeb extended heartfelt sympathies to the bereaved families, stating that the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa stands with them in this hour of grief. He appreciated the swift response of the Kaghan Development Authority



(KDA) and Rescue 1122 teams, who promptly recovered the bodies and shifted them to a nearby medical center in Naran. Arrangements are now being made by the KDA to transport the bodies to Lahore.

The tourism adviser stressed that this tragic incident underscores the importance of exercising caution at tourist destinations. He urged visitors to remain vigilant against natural hazards, particularly avoiding risky activities such as tak-

ing selfies near melting glaciers or unstable terrains.

Zahid Chanzeb reiterated the government’s commitment to ensuring the safety of all tourists. He announced that awareness campaigns would be launched to help prevent such incidents in the future. Additionally, he directed the relevant authorities to strengthen safety measures at tourist sites and to prominently display clear safety instructions for visitors.

He appealed to all tourists to enjoy the natural beauty of the region responsibly while prioritizing their own safety and that of others. Chanzeb added that a comprehensive strategy would be formulated to prevent future tragedies and ensure that tourists can explore the scenic destinations of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa safely, protecting precious lives.





## In brief

### Muharram security reviewed F.P. Report

KOHAT: An important meeting of the Line Departments on the arrangements and law and order of the upcoming Muharram-ul-Haram, was held with the Deputy Commissioner Kohat in the chair at his office on Friday. The meeting beside others, was also attended by the District Police Officer Kohat Dr. Zahidullah, Additional Deputy Commissioner (G) Hamid Iqbal, officials of police, district administration, line departments and other relevant institutions. The meeting reviewed in detail the security and other arrangements for the upcoming Muharram Al-Haram and assigned responsibilities to all departments and institutions in this regard. The meeting also took certain important decisions related to the Muharram-ul-Haram. Deputy Commissioner Kohat on this occasion, directed all the departments and institutions to complete their arrangements before the arrival of Muharram-ul-Haram so that the mourners do not face any kind of difficulty and these religious rituals are performed in a better way. He strictly directed to ensure the cleanliness, lighting, medical facilities, security, water supply and other basic necessities in the Inmambargahs and procession routes. Deputy Commissioner further directed all the departments and institutions to take timely measures with mutual cooperation and to work under a coordinated strategy by utilizing all available resources for ensuring the peaceful environment during Muharram-ul-Haram. He hoped, Insha Allah, this year too, Muharram-ul-Haram will pass peacefully.

### Construction of dams sought F.P. Report

LAKKI MARWAT: Ghaznikhel tehsil council chairman Zeeshan Muhammad Khan has asked the provincial government to build small dams in Lakki Marwat district to overcome water shortage problem for irrigation and drinking purposes. During a meeting with deputy commissioner Zeeshan Abdullah on Thursday, he said that there were several feasible sites for small dams in the Ghaznikhel tehsil and there was the need to formulate a comprehensive strategy for rainwater harvest in the area. He said that the residents of his constituency were faced with problems in power, water supply, irrigation and works and communication sectors. The tehsil council chairman said that the availability of water in the Marwat canal round the year would boost the agriculture sector in the district. He asked the deputy commissioner to approach the provincial government for provision of funds for repairing and maintenance of canals and outlets. The deputy commissioner assured the local government representative of taking all possible steps to resolve people's problems and ensure provision of quick relief to them.

### DRC established F.P. Report

BANNU: Dispute Resolution Council, an initiative of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government to resolve disputes amicably, has been established in the Wazir subdivision of Bannu district. For the first time after the merger of the area (former frontier region) in Bannu district, the local tribesmen will use the forum to settle their disputes. After establishment of the council, the district police officer Saleem Abbas Kulachi met with its members on Thursday and held a detailed discussion with them about the nature of disputes of tribal people and problems faced by them.

# Dir activists slam delay in Koto Hydropower Project



### F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: Social activists in Lower Dir have criticized the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government over prolonged delays in completing the much-anticipated Koto Hydropower Project (Koto-HPP), and demanded immediate action to bring the strategic energy initiative online. Speaking to this reporter in Timergara, activists Akbar Khan, Ibrash Pasha, and Shad Muhammad said the delay in the project's completion reflects the provincial government's lack of seriousness toward a vital development initiative that promises clean and affordable electricity. They pointed out that despite repeated promises and claims by the authorities, the 40.8-megawatt project remains incomplete nearly a decade after its ground-breaking.

Launched on July 4, 2015, by the PTI founding chairman Imran Khan along with then KP chief minister Pervez Khattak, the Koto HPP was initially scheduled for completion by February 2019 at a cost of Rs1399. 999 million. However, the project has faced persistent delays due to administrative, financial, and technical bottlenecks.

The project site is located on the Panjkora River near Koto village, about seven kilometers from Timergara. First identified in 1992, the project underwent feasibility studies between 2008 and 2011.

The activists said that although only three percent of the work remains, progress has stalled yet again. In the current provincial budget, the government allocated a token Rs0.001 million for the project, raising the total cost to an estimated Rs1400 million. According to officials from the Pakhtunkhwa Energy Development Organization (PEDO), 97 percent of the physical work has been completed.

Once operational, the Koto HPP is expected to generate 207 GWh annually and generate over Rs1.7 billion in revenue at a tariff of Rs8.241/kWh. All civil works and the one-kilometer transmission line have been completed, and the project has received all necessary approvals from the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (NEPRA). However, signing of the Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) with the Central Power Purchasing Agency (CPPA-G) and PESCO is still pending. PEDO officials attrib-

uted the current delay to the incomplete switchyard, a critical component for grid connectivity. They said the required equipment must be imported from China, but foreign exchange shortages and restrictions on Letters of Credit (LCs) have stalled procurement. The project has also faced multiple setbacks over the years, including land acquisition disputes, delays in licensing, security concerns for Chinese engineers, flood damage, and interruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite these challenges, senior PEDO officials remain hopeful that the project will be completed soon after the arrival of switchyard equipment. Security for the Chinese engineers working on-site has been tightened, with 215 police and Dir Levies personnel currently deployed. While several deadlines for completion have come and gone, PEDO last year promised that the project would be ready by December 2024. Activists urged the government to take the matter seriously, resolve the remaining issues without further delay, and ensure that the long-awaited project begins contributing to the province's power grid.

# MoU for uplift 5000 deprived families signed

### F.P. Report

KARAK: A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has been signed between the Karak-Kohat Division Development Project (KDDP) and the Social Welfare Department, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, with the aim of putting 5,000 extremely poor households of Karak, Hangu and Kohat districts on the path of self-sufficiency through provision of assets.

The signing ceremony was specially attended by the Provincial Minister for Social Welfare, Mr. Qasim Ali Shah, Minister for Agriculture, Major (ret'd) Sajjad Barakwal, and Member Provincial Assembly, Shah Turab Khan. The MoU was signed by the Project Director and Director Social Welfare, KDDP. The program will be funded through 10 percent oil and gas royalty funds under KDDP.

The beneficiaries will be selected in a transparent manner based on the Poverty Scorecard (PSC 0-32) so that the assistance reaches the real beneficiaries. The project not only involves the distribution of assets, but also includes needs assessment, provision of suitable assets and provision of vocational training for sustainable employment.

**Commissioner visits Banda Daud Shah:** Commissioner Kohat Motasim Ballah Shah visited Tehsil Banda Daudshah in detail, inspected the colony including the hospi-

tal, tehsil office and listened to public issues. On the occasion of the visit to Tehsil Banda Daudshah, DC Karak Shakeel Ahmed Jan and Assistant Commissioner Banda Daudshah were also present. He visited Tehsil Banda Daud Shah, during which he inspected the Tehsil Headquarters Hospital, reviewed the cleanliness situation, availability of medical facilities and staff attendance.

He stressed the importance of ensuring people-friendly services and directed the medical staff to fully cooperate with the citizens and ensure uninterrupted provision of health care. F u r t h e r m o r e , Commissioner Kohat visited the Tehsil Office including Tehsildar Office, Qanungo Office and other departments. He checked the attendance of the staff, reviewed the cleanliness of the office and issued strict instructions to prioritize the provision of public services.

**Seminar on mother milk feeding held:** One-day training session and awareness walk on the benefits of mother's milk, SBC Focal Person Kashif Khattak declared mother's milk as the best food for newborns for six months.

In this regard, a one-day seminar was organized in the conference hall of the DHO office in Karak in collaboration with Benazir Nashunama Program, Health Department, World Food Program and UNICEF to remove malnutrition among women and children and create aware-

ness. Deputy DHO Dr. Niaz Ali, Deputy Director of Benazir Nashunama Program Waheed Khattak and a large number of paramedics and health workers participated in the seminar.

**Price review committee meeting held:** A meeting of the Price Review Committee was held under the chairmanship of Deputy Commissioner Karak Shakeel Ahmed Jan, in which officers of the district administration and food department, officers and officials of other concerned departments and representatives of traders from Dadri participated.

While talking to the participants of the meeting, Deputy Commissioner Karak said that no minute will be wasted to provide quality food items to the public at fixed prices and in this regard, the administration will take action against any public complaint and will take indiscriminate action against wholesalers, hoarders and adulterators. He strongly urged all shopkeepers to prominently display the fixed price lists for the convenience of the public.

On this occasion, consumers and traders presented various suggestions, keeping in mind which the prices of various food items were reduced according to the market. Deputy Commissioner Karak clarified that it is the responsibility of the relevant stakeholders to provide food items to the public at fixed prices and no one will be allowed to set arbitrary and self-imposed prices.

# UoM lecturer gets PhD degree

### F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: Mr Adnan Khan, Lecturer in Department of Commerce & Management Sciences, University of Malakand & PhD Scholar at Department of Management Sciences, Qurtuba University of Science and Information

Technology, Peshawar has successfully defended his PhD dissertation under the supervision of Prof Dr. Naveed & co-supervision of Dr. Zahid Ali, Associate Professor DCMS, University of Malakand. Dr Sayed Haidar Ali, Associate Professor, Bahria University,

Islamabad served as External Examiner. The Chairperson, Department of Commerce & Management Sciences, University of Malakand Prof Dr Nazim Ali & Faculty Members Congratulated Dr Adnan Khan & Research Supervisors for PhD Public Defense.

## Unknown gunmen attack DSB personnel residence F.P. Report

SHANGLA: A devastating terrorist attack occurred in the remote Martung area of Shangla district, where militants targeted the home of District Security Branch (DSB) personnel Jan Khan. The attack, which took place on Wednesday night, left Jan Khan and his uncle, Mubashir Shah, seriously injured.

According to reports, terrorists launched a sudden assault on Khan's residence, sparking a fierce exchange of fire. The injured individuals were promptly rushed to the Tehsil Headquarters Hospital in Puran and later transferred to Saidu Sharif Hospital in Swat for further medical treatment. Following the incident, local police cordoned off the area and initiated a search operation to apprehend the perpetrators. Senior police officials visited the site to oversee the ongoing operation and ensure that no stone is left unturned in bringing the culprits to justice.

**Residents hold protest against prolonged power outages:** Residents of Shangla district are up in arms against the severe load shedding, which has become a norm in the area. Despite generating 85 megawatts of electricity from the Khan Khwar Dam, Shangla only requires 6-7 megawatts to meet its local needs. However, the district faces power outages exceeding 12 hours, causing immense difficulties for the residents.

The power crisis in Shangla is attributed to various factors, including. The existing power infrastructure is unable to meet the growing demands of the region. High technical losses and low recovery rates plague the distribution companies, contributing to the power shortage. The absence of a coherent energy policy has hindered the development of the power sector in Shangla. The prolonged power outages have severe consequences for the residents.

## Three killed in firing incident F.P. Report

KOHAT: At least three people, including two women, were killed and 10 others injured in a firing incident during a funeral ceremony in Ghundi Chechnah area of the district on Friday.

The tragic incident took place when the attackers opened fire on mourners attending the funeral of a woman, allegedly over old enmity. The police said the attackers targeted the residence of a man namely Miran Badshah, where the funeral was being held. They added that the injured included seven women and several passersby who were caught in the crossfire. After the incident, Rescue 1122 teams and a heavy contingent of police reached the spot and shifted the deceased and injured to a nearby hospital.

## Police seize 30 kg ice in Landi Kotal F.P. Report

LANDI KOTAL: Thirty kilo gram ice was seized and four drug peddlers were apprehended in Landi Kotal, SHO police station, Landi Kotal said on Friday. Station House Officer (SHO), Landi Kotal Adnan Afridi said that in routine, a police party led by sub-inspector Hajat Khan was deployed for a temporary road-blocking at the bypass highway.

In checking a suspected motor car was stopped for examination. During the search 14 kg ice were recovered, hidden in various cavities of the car and two ice smugglers identified as Mamin and Amanullah resident of Landi Kotal were arrested on the spot and shifted to the police for legal formalities, SHO said.

During investigation, the detainees spotted a hujra (male guest house) in Piro Khel village as a hub of ice dealing on which the police raided and recovered 16 kg ice.

# Jirga discuss construction of dams

### F.P. Report

WANA: In a significant move aimed at addressing water scarcity and boosting local development, the Ahmadzai Wazir tribe on Friday held a major tribal jirga in Wana, reaffirming its full support for the timely and transparent construction of five government-approved check dams in the region.

The event organized under the banner of the Wana Welfare Association (WWA), the jirga took place at the District Press Club Wana, drawing a large and diverse crowd of tribal elders, religious scholars, legal experts, political figures, civil society members, and business leaders.

Among the prominent attendees were Malik Tariq Khan, Malik Jamil, Malik Saifullah, President of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry Saifur Rehman Wazir, and Maulana

Mehmood Alam Wazir, all of whom expressed strong backing for the initiative.

The participants unanimously vowed that no impediment would be allowed to disrupt the construction of the five check dams approved for Tehsil Birmal's Zalai area. They further resolved that contractors would not be pressured for commissions, no undue interference would be tolerated in the execution process, and full protection would be provided to engineers and laborers working on the sites.

Addressing the jirga, WWA President Rehmatullah Wazir provided detailed insights into the project, revealing that the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government, with the personal involvement of Chief Secretary Shahab Ali Shah, had approved funding worth Rs. 1 billion for the construction of the dams. He assured that the work

would begin soon and be carried out with a focus on transparency, sustainability, and quality.

The jirga participants praised WAWA's ongoing contributions to the region, terming it a trusted and active force in driving forward development. They pledged unwavering support for its efforts. "We will extend complete cooperation to WAWA and will not allow any hurdles in the way of these projects," said one elder. "These initiatives will create jobs for our youth and bring progress to our region."

In closing remarks, WAWA President Rehmatullah Wazir thanked all participants, saying: "It is our collective dream to see South Waziristan emerge as a prosperous and self-reliant region. Turning that dream into reality will require unity and joint effort — and we are ready."

# KUST concludes S-RiPE

### Sahibzada Afridi

KOHAT: Kohat University of Science and Technology (KUST) successfully concluded the Self-review of Institutional Performance and Enhancement (S-RiPE) process aimed at evaluating and improving its academic, administrative, and support systems.

A review committee led by Dr. Muhammad Jamil, Dean of the Faculty of Biological Sciences, conducted the assessment. The committee included Dr. Imranullah Khan Marwat, Director of Quality Assurance, Higher Education Department, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa; Dr. Izhar; and Mehwish Asmatullah.

During the review, the committee held meetings with heads of departments, faculty members, students, section in-charges, and support staff. These interactions were conducted to



gather detailed feedback regarding the university's performance, facilities, and academic standards.

The committee also visited various departments across the campus to inspect the facilities provided to students and assess their quality. Dr. Zeeshan Bangash, Director of the Quality Enhancement Cell (QEC), extended full support to the committee throughout the process. His contributions in data compilation, analysis, and the preparation of a comprehensive report were highly appreciated.

On this occasion, Vice

Chancellor Prof. Dr. Syed Zafar Ilyas praised Dr. Zeeshan Bangash for his dedication, hard work, and professional commitment, acknowledging his services as commendable in the university's institutional improvement journey. The committee also held a detailed discussion with KUST Registrar Zilladar Khan, exchanging views on the feedback received. This self-review exercise is expected to serve as a cornerstone in shaping an effective roadmap for future academic and administrative enhancements at the university.

# PVE project concludes with strong collaboration

### Anees Taakr

MARDAN: A collaborative initiative to Prevent Violent Extremism (PVE) concluded successfully in District Mardan, bringing together local government officials, journalists, civil society, and community members.

Funded by the European Union and implemented by Individual Land Pakistan, the project focused on enhancing community-led strategies and media engagement to promote peace and counter extremism.

Titled "Enhancing Collaborative Community Action for PVE by Leveraging Media Strategies," the project was part of the larger Countering and Preventing Terrorism in Pakistan (CPTP) program, led by the National Counter

Terrorism Authority (NACTA) and implemented by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in partnership with 30 civil society organizations.

In Mardan, the initiative engaged over 400 youth including incarcerated individuals, along with 30 journalists, 10 government officials and 20 civil society representatives. Activities included capacity-building workshops, collaborative dialogues and 30 media campaigns promoting peace and counter-narratives to extremism. A 20-member working group was also formed to guide local PVE planning and response.

Dr. Azmatullah Wazir, Deputy Commissioner of Mardan, praised the initia-

tive's inclusive approach, emphasizing the need for sustained collaboration to address injustice and inequality.

Mayor Himayatullah Mayar called for national clarity on the definition of terrorism and stronger state ownership of PVE efforts.

A UNODC representative acknowledged the contributions of the EU, NACTA, and Individual Land in successfully developing a localized PVE strategy. The closing ceremony also featured the winners of the youth art and peace media competitions. Harinder Devi, a woman from the Hindu minority community, received recognition and expressed pride in being acknowledged as part of an inclusive platform.

# AWKUM secures first position in competition

### F.P. Report

MARDAN: Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan (AWKUM) won first position in science and technology competitions across the province. Relevant officials of the University said that the Science and Technology Awards 2025 organized by the Directorate General of Science and Technology, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, were held in IM Sciences, in which Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan won five research grants in the undergraduate research program and seven in the interdisciplinary Masters studentship program, ranking first among 33 universities across the province.

Abdul Wali Khan University won a total of 12 research awards, while the University of Peshawar won one GIK, one COMSATS, Abbottabad won five, Hazara University won three, Pak Austria won seven, Bacha Khan University won one, University of Swat won three, Swabi University

won one, University of Haripur won one, University of Bannu won one, and the Provincial Minister for Science and Technology, Dr. Shafqat Ayaz, was the chief guest.

Secretary Science and Technology, DG Science and Technology, Vice Chancellors, Directors of ORIC and a large number of students from across the province were present.

Provincial Minister for Science and Technology Dr. Shafqat Ayaz, while addressing the ceremony, said that in the present era, wars are fought with technology. We should pay special attention to technology. This success is not only the result of the hard work of educational institutions but also the result of the facilities provided by the government and individual capabilities.

Dr. Ayaz encouraged the students to work harder for research and development in the field of science and technology so that the future of the country can be bright and independent. He also said that the govern-

ment will provide all possible resources so that the students can make full use of their capabilities.

Commissioner orders to displays new rates: Commissioner Mardan Division, Nisar Ahmad has directed the installation of awareness boards outside revenue offices to inform the public about the recent reductions in various property-related taxes announced in the federal and provincial budgets. The aim is to expedite the land transfer process and enhance government revenue.

He issued these instructions while addressing the monthly Revenue Performance Review Meeting held at the Commissioner's Office Conference Room. The meeting was attended by Deputy Commissioner Swabi Nasrullah Khan, Additional Deputy Commissioners Islahuddin (Swabi) and Eid Nawaz (Mardan), Secretary to Commissioner Fazal Wahid, Assistant Commissioners, AACs, and other concerned officials.





TEL AVIV: A woman evacuated from the site of a direct hit from an Iranian missile strike in Ramat Gan, Israel.

## Kenyan LGBTQ community vogues despite threat of repressive law

NAIROBI (AFP): Before a cheering audience in Nairobi, the performer gets the ball going with a string of acrobatic moves -- a celebration of queer resistance from a Kenyan LGBT community feeling threatened by new legislation. "Balls", where participants can vogue and catwalk with full freedom, were created by the Black and Latino gay and transgender community in the United States in the 1960s. They reached Kenya in 2022. They remain hidden, held by the LGBTQ+ community behind closed doors, but are still glorious explosions of colour, music and glamour. "The vibe here is enchanting," said one participant, who like all attendees AFP is not naming for security reasons.

"It's so comfortable when you get to be around people who are like you." Organisers said the number of such events -- and tolerance more generally -- were growing in Kenya, even if hostility is still widespread in the predominantly conservative Christian nation, especially outside the capital Nairobi. Same-sex relationships are officially punishable by 14 years imprisonment under a colonial-era law, though it is rarely enforced.

And even in the country's biggest city, many of the participants juggle a double life. "Tomorrow you have to go and act like you're someone else," said Kat, 25, her face hidden behind a crochet veil. "It does weigh on me," she said.

One of the organisers, a 26-year-old man, wrapped in a hooded kimono and

wearing high heels, said that despite the freedoms offered on such nights, the situation for the LGBTQ+ community was dire. "Our government is trying to pass this bill that is threatening literally our entire existence," he said. The so-called Protection of the Family Bill could be considered later this year by parliament.

According to the latest version seen by AFP, it proposes sentences of up to 30 years in prison for same-sex relations, and calls for them to be reported. MP Peter Kaluma, who has urged parliament to pass the bill, recently participated in the "Pan-African Conference on Family Values" in Nairobi. He told the conference that "LGBT+ perversion... [is] deeply rooted in our societies," and called for a "morally sound, socially secure, and politically sovereign" future.

Organised by evangelical groups claiming to defend the continent's "traditional" values, the event saw Western speakers pushed ultra-conservative messages. Such calls have made strides in Kenya thanks to foreign backers' deep pockets, according to Ivy Werimba of the LGBTQ+ advocacy organisation Galck+. Between 2008 and 2020, US Christian groups -- at least one of which spoke at the conference -- have sent more than \$280 million abroad, according to an OpenDemocracy investigation.

Their impact was "decisive" in achieving neighbouring Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Act in 2023, according to Human Rights Watch.

The law is among the most repressive in the world with harsh sentences for same-sex relations or "promoting" homosexuality, including the death penalty in some cases. By contrast, at the Cosmopolitan Affirming Church, two rainbow banners emblazoned 'Happy Pride' streamed down the walls of the prayer space, a colourful rebuttal to the open hostility preached elsewhere.

The church believes sexuality is not taboo, and has been welcoming believers each for the past decade. "People have gone to spaces that have rejected them very badly," said non-binary pastor Caroline Omolo. The 48-year-old welcomes worshippers into a place "that allows them to fully express themselves, with all their differences, with all their queerness".

The service offers a different reading of the Bible, with congregants finding acceptance where once they were rejected. "I believed God made me queer so He could take me to hell," said a 25-year-old member, but Omolo's preaching "changed my perspective".

The church, which numbers just over 100 from its initial congregation of just seven, is now warning members about the potential of the proposed Family Protection Bill. Omolo insists that in the future the world will recognise and celebrate their community. In the meantime, as the young designer at the ball put it: "We are shapers of the culture and you cannot erase us."

## Zelenskyy calls for more pressure on Russia after deadly Kyiv missile strike

KYIV (AP): Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said a Russian missile strike on a nine-story Kyiv apartment building was a sign that more pressure must be applied on Moscow to agree to a ceasefire, as Moscow intensifies attacks in the three-year war.

The drone and missile attack on Kyiv, the deadliest assault on the capital this year, killed 28 people across the city and injured 142 more, Kyiv Military Administration head Tymur Tkachenko said. Zelenskyy, along with the head of the presidential office Andrii Yermak and Interior Minister Ihor Klymenko, visited the site of the apartment building in Kyiv's Solomianskyi district, laying flowers and paying tribute to the 23 people who died there after a direct hit by a missile collapsed the structure.

"This attack is a reminder to the world that Russia rejects a ceasefire and chooses killing,"

Zelenskyy wrote on Telegram, and thanked Ukraine's partners who he said are ready to pressure Russia to "feel the real cost of the war." Attack on Kyiv was part of a sweeping barrage as Russia once again sought to overwhelm Ukrainian air defenses. Russia fired more than 440 drones and 32 missiles in what Zelenskyy called one of the biggest bombardments of the war, now in its fourth year.

As Russia proceeds with a summer offensive on parts of the roughly 1,000-kilometer (620-mile) front line, US-led peace efforts have failed to gain traction. Russian President Vladimir Putin has effectively rejected an offer from US President Donald Trump for an immediate 30-day ceasefire, making it conditional on a halt on Ukraine's mobilization effort and a freeze on Western arms supplies.

Meanwhile, Middle East tensions and US trade tariffs have drawn world attention away from Ukraine's pleas for more diplomatic and economic pressure to be placed on Moscow.

Russia in recent weeks has intensified long-range attacks that have struck urban residential areas. Yet, Putin denied that his military had struck such targets, saying that attacks were "against military industries, not residential quarters." Speaking to senior news leaders of international news agencies in St. Petersburg, Putin said he was open to talks with Zelenskyy, but repeated his claim that the Ukrainian leader had lost his legitimacy after his term expired last year -- allegations rejected by Kyiv and its allies.

"We are ready for substantive talks on the principles of a settlement," Putin said, noting that a previous round of talks in Istanbul had led to an exchange of prisoners and the bodies of fallen soldiers. Putin praised Trump's push for peace in Ukraine. But Ukraine's Foreign Minister Andrii

Sybiha wrote on X that it was his country that had "unconditionally accepted" the US proposal for a ceasefire, and said that Russian claims of willingness to end the war were "manipulations."

"It has been exactly 100 days since Ukraine unconditionally accepted the US peace proposal to completely cease fire, put an end to the killing, and move forward with a genuine peace process ... 100 days of Russia escalating terror against Ukraine rather than ending it," Sybiha wrote. "Ukraine remains committed to peace. Unfortunately, Russia continues to choose war, disregarding US efforts to end the killing," he added.

Overnight, Russia fired a barrage of 104 Shahed and decoy drones across Ukraine, according to the country's air force. Of those, 88 were intercepted, jammed, or lost from radars mid-flight. There were no immediate reports of casualties or damage caused by the attack.

He said the country had the simple choice of meeting that target, "or we leave NATO." Fico would not have the authority to pull Slovakia out of the alliance, which could be prompted by a referendum and would require action by Parliament. A broad spectrum of politicians rejected the notion in reaction to his comments.

NATO meets for a summit in the Netherlands on June 24-25, where the allies are due to agree a new defense spending target in line with demands by US President Donald Trump. The aim is to increase the spending to 3.5% of GDP for core defense spending on tanks, warplanes, air defense, missiles and hiring extra troops. A further 1.5% would be spent on things like roads, bridges, ports and airfields.

Slovakia, a NATO member since 2004, currently spends 2%. Pellegrini and most Slovakian politicians, from the government and the opposition, dismissed Fico's suggestion to become neutral. The president said that Slovakia will stay united with its allies on the spending issue at the summit. Fico's views on Russia's war on Ukraine differ sharply from most other European leaders.

### Chapo's ex-lawyer elected Mexican judge

MEXICO CITY (AFP): A former lawyer for jailed Mexican drug lord Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman has been elected a judge in a city neighboring the United States, the results of the country's first-ever judicial elections showed.

Silvia Delgado, 51, was a member of Guzman's legal team in Ciudad Juarez, where the Sinaloa cartel co-founder was detained before being extradited to the United States in 2017. She was elected a judge in the crime-plagued border city of Ciudad Juarez, results from the June 1 election showed. She received the second-highest vote of the five women who were elected to the bench in northern Chihuahua state, alongside five male judges.

Delgado's candidacy was one of the most controversial in the election, which will make Mexico the world's only country to choose all of its judges and magistrates by popular vote. She argued that her defense of Guzman did not make her a criminal. "Every person has the right to counsel," she said, talking up her experience to voters.

She was one of around 20 candidates identified by the rights group Defensores for "high-risk" for the legitimacy of the judiciary due to allegations of cartel links, corruption and sexual abuse. The Sinaloa cartel was one of six Mexican gangs designated terrorist organizations in February by US President Donald Trump. Mexicans were called on to elect 881 federal judges, including nine members of the Supreme Court, as well as hundreds of local judges and magistrates. An election for the remainder of the judiciary will be held in 2027. Critics have warned that asking citizens to elect judges will erode democratic checks and balances and leave judges more vulnerable to criminal influence.

### Slovakia might be better off neutral: Populist leader

BRATISLAVA, Slovakia (AP): Slovakia's populist Prime Minister Robert Fico suggested that his country might be better off neutral as he and other officials prepared for a NATO summit next week. Fico made the remarks before heading into a meeting with political party leaders and President Peter Pellegrini to discuss proposals to increase defense spending to meet targets that the alliance is moving toward. Fico accused Western leaders of being "warmongers" who enable weapons profiteering in their support of Ukraine.

"Neutrality would be very beneficial for Slovakia," he said, adding that, "Unfortunately, such a decision is not in my hands." He released a statement saying the NATO defense spending requirements would amount to more than 7 billion euros (\$8 billion) or almost a fifth of the country's budget, which he called "absolutely absurd."

He said the country had the simple choice of meeting that target, "or we leave NATO." Fico would not have the authority to pull Slovakia out of the alliance, which could be prompted by a referendum and would require action by Parliament. A broad spectrum of politicians rejected the notion in reaction to his comments.

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## Hackers wiped out \$90m from Iran cryptocurrency exchange

DUBAI (AP): Hackers with possible links to Israel have drained more than \$90 million from Nobitex, Iran's largest cryptocurrency exchange, according to blockchain analytics firms. The group that claimed responsibility for the hack leaked what it said was the company's full source code. "ASSETS LEFT IN NOBITEX ARE NOW ENTIRELY OUT IN THE OPEN," the group wrote on its Telegram account.

The stolen funds were transferred to addresses bearing messages that criticized Iran's Revolutionary Guard, Blockchain analytics firm Elliptic wrote in a blog post. It said the attack likely was not financially motivated as the wallets the hackers had poured the money into "effectively burned the funds in order to send Nobitex a political message." The hackers group, Gonjeshke Darande -- "Predatory Sparrow" in Farsi -- accused

Nobitex of having helped Iran's government to evade Western sanctions over the country's rapidly advancing nuclear program and transfer money to militants, in a post on X claiming the attack.

Nobitex appeared to have confirmed the attack. Its app and website were down as it assessed "unauthorized access" to its systems, it said in a post on X. The theft spanned a range of cryptocurrencies, including Bitcoin, Ethereum, Dogecoin and more, said head of national security intelligence at Chainalysis Andrew Fierman. The breach is "particularly significant given the comparatively modest size of Iran's cryptocurrency market," he added.

The hack appears to be motivated by escalating tensions in the Israel-Iran conflict, which broke out last week when Israel struck Iran's nuclear sites and military officials, drawing Tehran's response with bar-

rages of missiles. It came after the group said it had destroyed data in a cyberattack against Iran's state-controlled Bank Sepah. Elliptic said that relatives of Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei were linked to the exchange and that sanctioned Revolutionary Guard operatives had used Nobitex. It shared evidence that the exchange had sent and received funds from cryptocurrency wallets controlled by Iranian allies including Yemen's Houthis and Hamas.

Gonjeshke Darande has previously claimed responsibility for other high-level cyberattacks against Iran, including a 2021 operation that paralyzed gas stations and a 2022 effort against a steel mill that sparked a large fire. Israeli media have widely reported that Gonjeshke Darande is linked to Israel but the country's government has never officially acknowledged ties to the group.

## Shinawatra, Thailand's PM, under siege

BANGKOK (Reuters): After less than a year in office, Thailand's Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra has her back to the wall - and little room left to manoeuvre. For months, the 38-year-old - the second woman and the youngest Thai to hold the position - has grappled with a faltering economy that has stalled her Pheu Thai party's flagship economic scheme while coping with an unwieldy ruling coalition.

But the leaked audio of a phone call with Cambodia's former leader Hun Sen, after weeks of bickering between the two Southeast Asian neighbours over a disputed border, could be the final blow to her 10-month term. "Paetongtarn is untenable now," said Thitinan Pongsudhirak, a political scientist at Bangkok's Chulalongkorn University.

"The leaked conversation is deeply compromising to her position as prime minister and deeply damaging for Thailand. I think there's no way she's going to last." In her June 15 call with Hun Sen, who she referred to as "uncle", Paetongtarn not only appeared to kowtow before the veteran Cambodian politician but also denigrated a senior Thai military commander - seen as red lines by her critics and allies alike.

Facing an unprecedented backlash, Paetongtarn - a political novice who held no government position before becoming premier - delivered a public apology, insisting that she did not know the call with Hun Sen would be recorded. "This was a private call from my personal phone," she told reporters.

But it came after the conservative Bhumjaithai party - the third largest in parliament's lower house - pulled out of the ruling coalition, citing the audio of the call, which was released in full by Hun Sen after the initial leak of a clip. The Pheu Thai party now only holds a narrow majority in Thailand's 495-member parliament, and the exit of some other coalition partners, some of which are due to hold individual meetings to decide their respective positions, could swiftly bring down the government. Thailand's main opposition, the People's Party, underlined the lack of public trust in Paetongtarn and called on the government to dissolve parliament, which would trigger fresh elections.

"Paetongtarn needs to take responsibility for what has happened," said Pavin Chachavalpongpun, a Thai academic at Japan's Kyoto University, referring to the audio in which she described a prominent Thai army commander as being part of "the opposite side". "She may not trust the army. But she should not be telling this to foreign leaders," Paetongtarn, educated at Chulalongkorn University and Britain's University of Surrey, was primarily involved in the Shinawatra family businesses before becoming prime minister but has spent much of her life exposed to the tumult of

Thai politics.

She was 8 when her father, Thaksin Shinawatra, entered politics in 1994 and began a meteoric rise to become prime minister by a landslide in 2001 - only to be ousted in a coup five years later. In 2011, her aunt and Thaksin's sister, Yingluck, also found her way to the premiership but was ejected by a court ruling, followed by a military coup.

On the campaign trail in 2023, seeking to resuscitate her family's political fortune, Paetongtarn harked back to the track record of previous Shinawatra administrations and promised robust government policies to kick-start Southeast Asia's second largest economy. Paetongtarn, who is married with two children, also made no bones about her closeness to her father, Thailand's most influential but divisive politician who returned to the country in 2023 after over a decade-and-a-half in self-exile to avoid a prison term.

Since she became prime minister last August, following the abrupt removal of her predecessor by a court order, Paetongtarn has struggled to deliver on her party's promises, even as she operated under the long shadow of her father, who is himself facing court cases that could see him return to prison. In particular, a decision last month to freeze a \$14 billion cash handout programme, a key plank in the 2023 election, in the face of potential US tariffs has hit Pheu Thai's popularity.

## Aung San Suu Kyi marks 80th birthday in junta jail

YANGON (AFP): Myanmar's deposed democratic leader Aung San Suu Kyi marked her 80th birthday in junta detention, serving a raft of sentences set to last the rest of her life. Suu Kyi was the figurehead of Myanmar's decade-long democratic thaw, becoming de facto leader as it opened up from military rule.

But as the generals snatched back power in a 2021 coup, she was locked up on charges ranging from corruption to breaching Covid-19 pandemic restrictions and is serving a 27-year sentence. "It will be hard to be celebrating at the moment," said her 47-year-old son Kim Aris from the UK.

"We've learned to endure when it's been going so long." He has run 80 kilometres (50 miles) over the eight days leading up to her birthday, and collected over 80,000 well-wishing video messages for his mother. But Suu Kyi will not see them, sequestered in Myanmar's sprawling capital Naypyidaw from where the military directs a civil war against guerilla fight-

ers. Aris said he has heard from his mother only once via letter two years ago since she was imprisoned. "We have no idea what condition she's in," he said, adding that he fears she is suffering from untreated medical problems with her heart, bones and gums. No formal celebrations took place in junta-held parts of Myanmar, but a gaggle of followers in military-controlled Mandalay city staged a spontaneous protest ahead of her birthday, local media said.

A few masked protesters showered a street with pamphlets reading "freedom from fear" and "happy birthday" as one member held up a portrait of Suu Kyi in shaky camera footage shared on social media. "Do you still remember this great person?" asked one of the protesters in the video, which AFP has not been able to independently verify. Other small protests were also reported, including in a rebel-contested area of northern Sagaing region where women marched holding roses in

tribute to the former leader, who famously wore garlands of flowers in her hair.

While Suu Kyi remains hugely popular in the majority Buddhist country, her status as a democracy icon abroad collapsed before the military takeover after she defied the generals in their crackdown against the Rohingya Muslim minority. Hundreds of thousands were sent fleeing to neighbouring Bangladesh under her rule, though some argued she was powerless against the lingering influence of Myanmar's military. Nonetheless institutions and figures that once showered Suu Kyi with awards rapidly distanced themselves, and her second round of imprisonment has received far less international attention.

Suu Kyi, the daughter of Myanmar independence hero Aung San, became a champion of democracy almost by accident. After spending much of her youth abroad, she returned in 1988 to nurse her sick mother but began leading anti-military protests crushed by a crackdown.

## Australian mushroom murder suspect not on trial for lying

SYDNEY (AFP): An Australian woman accused of killing three lunch guests with deadly mushrooms should not be judged guilty just because she lied after the meal, her defence lawyer said. Erin Patterson, 50, is charged with murdering her estranged husband's parents and aunt in July 2023 by spiking their beef Wellington lunch with death cap mushrooms.

She is also accused of attempting to murder a fourth guest -- her husband's uncle -- who survived the lunch after a long stay in hospital. Patterson has steadfastly maintained her innocence during a seven-week-long trial that

has made headlines from New York to New Delhi. As the trial came to its closing stages, defence lawyer Colin Mandy sought to explain Patterson's behaviour in the days following the deadly feast. Patterson told police investigating the deaths that she did not own a food dehydrator, which was allegedly used to prepare the death cap mushrooms.

Security footage showed Patterson dumping a dehydrator at a nearby rubbish facility, and forensic tests found trace amounts of death cap mushrooms on the appliance. "No one knows what they would have done in a similar situation," Mandy

told the trial. "She is not on trial for being a liar." Mandy said there was nothing unusual about Patterson's knowledge of death cap mushrooms.

She developed an interest in foraging for mushrooms during the pandemic lockdown in 2020, Mandy said, teaching herself which varieties were safe to eat. It made "perfect sense" that Patterson would have become "aware of death cap mushrooms" during this period, Mandy said. Patterson "loved" mushrooms, he added, because they were healthy and full of flavour. This interest explained why Patterson visited a website listing locations of

death cap mushrooms near where she lived, Mandy said. Patterson originally invited her estranged husband Simon to join the family lunch at her secluded home in the farming village of Leongatha in Victoria state.

But he turned down the invitation on the eve of the meal, saying he felt uncomfortable going, the court heard earlier. The pair were long estranged but still legally married. Simon Patterson's parents Don and Gail, and his aunt Heather Wilkinson, attended the lunch. All three were dead within days. Heather Wilkinson's husband Ian fell gravely ill but eventually recovered.



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Middle East's critical reminder

AMONG the UN's designated days, one stands out for its growing urgency in the face of climate change: this week's World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought. Established in 1994 by the UN Convention to Combat Desertification, this day, which is marked on June 17 every year, is a global reminder of the escalating crisis of land degradation and water scarcity. While the effects of desertification are seen worldwide, few regions are as vulnerable - or as consequential - as the Middle East.

World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought highlights the need to preserve land and water resources, especially in regions already teetering on the edge of collapse. Already this year, parts of the Middle East have experienced record-breaking drought conditions, declining rainfall and increasingly frequent sand and dust storms. These climate extremes, combined with decades of unsustainable land and water use, are accelerating desertification across a region already strained by conflict, population pressures and resource scarcity. In Iraq, Jordan and Iran, the land is not only drying up - it is disappearing. In Iraq, the crisis is acute. Once considered the heart of the ancient Fertile Crescent, it is now facing catastrophic levels of land degradation. The Tigris and Euphrates rivers, which provide the majority of the country's surface water, have seen dramatic reductions in flow, exacerbated by damming upstream and climate-induced drought. The output of these rivers is down by 30 to 40 percent compared to 40 years ago.

Nearly half of Iraq's agricultural land is at risk of becoming desert. The southern marshlands, a UNESCO World Heritage site and home to buffalo herders for centuries, have dried out to the point where families are abandoning their herds and relocating to already overwhelmed cities. Dust storms, which used to be occasional, now roll in with alarming regularity, reducing visibility, disrupting daily life and endangering public health. What was once Iraq's lifeline is now a fading memory of abundance. Jordan faces a different but equally urgent crisis. The country is one of the most water-scarce in the world, with annual renewable water resources per person far below the threshold for survival. Rainfall is minimal and increasingly unpredictable, and Jordan's aquifers are being drained far faster than they can recharge. Compounding the crisis is the fact that nearly half of the country's treated water is lost due to aging, leaky infrastructure.

The Jordan Valley, historically a hub of agricultural production, is struggling to sustain crops and many farmers are abandoning their land. This has led to increased dependence on food imports and placed additional pressure on the economy. The burden of water scarcity is most heavily felt by vulnerable populations, including refugees and impoverished communities. Without swift action, Jordan's water crisis could spiral into a humanitarian disaster. Iran is confronting an even more expansive and deep-rooted ecological collapse. In 2025, rainfall across the country is down by 45 percent and key reservoirs like Lar Dam are nearly dry. Dozens of cities are relying on emergency water deliveries and the government is struggling to maintain a consistent supply, even in urban centers. More than 100 million hectares - about half of Iran's total landmass - is at high risk of turning into desert.

In central Iran, advancing sand dunes have already begun to engulf towns and infrastructure, even threatening ancient cultural sites. Agriculture, a vital sector for rural communities and national food security, is faltering. Traditional crops like wheat and pistachios are becoming harder to cultivate and widespread water shortages have previously sparked protests and civil unrest. The environmental crisis is rapidly becoming a national emergency with political consequences. If left untreated, the consequences of desertification and drought in the Middle East will be catastrophic. Agricultural systems will collapse, triggering widespread food insecurity and economic destabilization. Millions will be displaced, as rural populations abandon uninhabitable land and move toward cities or across borders, increasing the pressure on urban areas and neighboring countries.

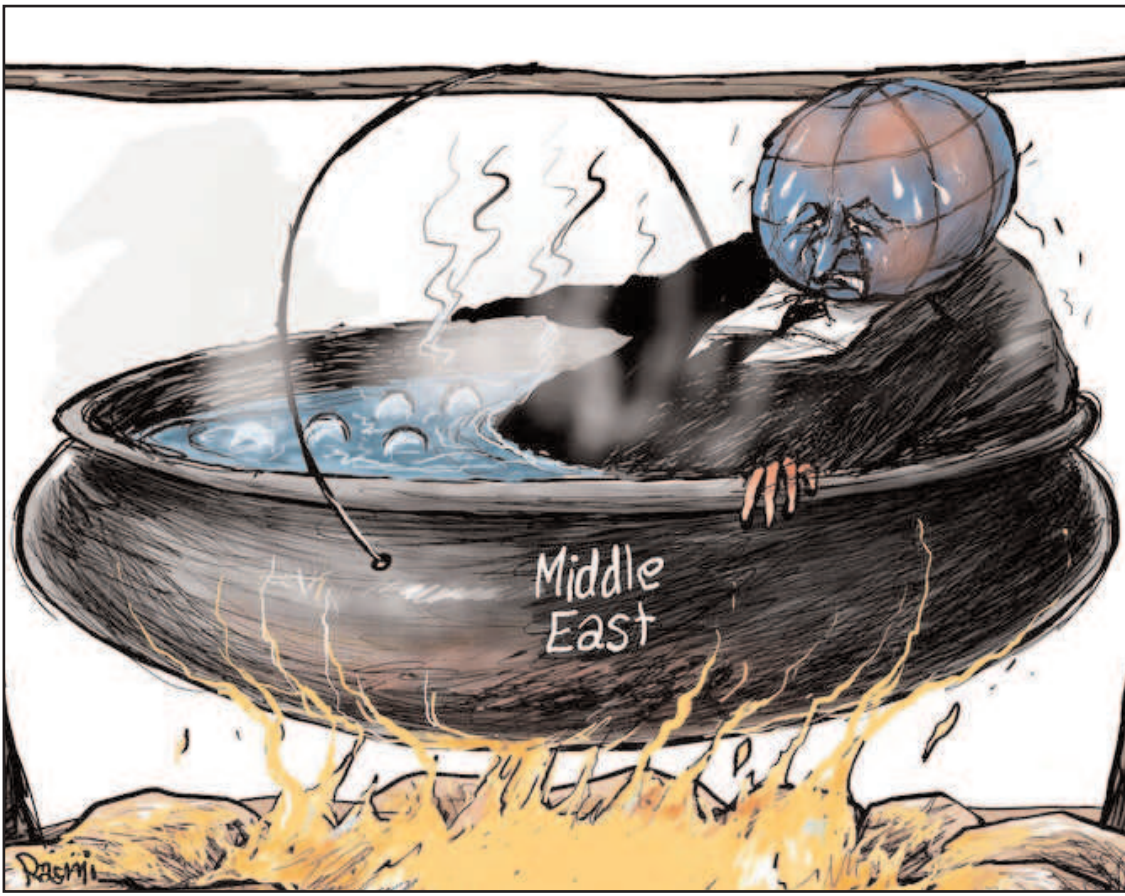
Dust storms and water shortages will worsen public health, particularly among children and the elderly. Entire cultural landscapes, some thousands of years old, could vanish. As water becomes scarcer, competition over shared rivers and aquifers could spark new conflicts, intensifying already fragile geopolitical dynamics in the region. Despite the bleak outlook, there are solutions. Modernizing irrigation systems can dramatically reduce water waste and improve agricultural yields. Restoring degraded land through reforestation, controlled grazing and soil regeneration efforts can halt and even reverse desertification. Recycling wastewater and collecting rainwater can provide alternative sources of water for households and farms.

Fixing aging infrastructure, especially water pipes and dams, can reduce losses and make existing resources go further. Promoting drought-resilient crops and providing support to small farmers can help sustain rural economies. Regional cooperation is also essential. Shared rivers like the Tigris, Euphrates and Jordan require collaborative management between countries, not competition. The international community has a crucial role to play. Significant investment is needed to support drought and land degradation mitigation efforts. The UN has estimated that reversing land degradation globally will require trillions of dollars in funding by the end of this decade. For the Middle East, that funding must be prioritized.

International expertise in water efficiency, environmental monitoring and climate adaptation should be shared with governments and local communities. Research institutions can support data collection and analysis to guide policy decisions. Conflict mediation efforts must include water diplomacy to prevent disputes over shared resources. Private companies should be encouraged to invest in water technologies, sustainable farming and green infrastructure. World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought offers a chance to shift the conversation from despair to determination. For the Middle East, this is not just another observance - it is a critical reminder of what is at stake. Some parts of the region are approaching a tipping point, after which recovery may no longer be possible. Yet, with political will, coordinated action and international solidarity, there is still a chance to turn the tide. Combating drought and desertification is not simply about saving the land. It is about preserving human dignity, economic stability, cultural heritage and peace. For the Middle East, the sands are rising - and so too must the world's response and support.

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A new era in diplomacy: Field Marshal's White House visit

Nabeeha Fajar Javed

FIELD Marshal Syed Asim Munir, Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff (COAS), in a historic and unprecedented development on June 18, 2025, embarked on a mission to Washington DC to meet the US President Donald J. Trump at the White House and engage with the US cabinet.

This landmark event, underscoring a new chapter in military diplomacy between Pakistan and the United States, marks a critical shift in Pakistan's foreign relations, reflecting both the growing recognition of Pakistan's military leadership on the global stage and recalibration of geopolitical rivalries.

No previous Chief of Army Staff in Pakistan's history has ever held a meeting of this magnitude with a sitting U.S. President at the White House. This historic engagement marks a defining moment in the history of Pakistan-US relations, signaling a recognition of Pakistan's military establishment as the dominant force shaping National and Regional policy. In this light, it is not just a meeting but a reflection of US trust in Pakistan's military leadership to handle complex issues on its own terms.

Historically, U.S. engagement with Pakistan's military leadership has been complex, shaped by external geopolitical factors. General Pervez Musharraf met U.S. Presidents during his tenure, but as President of Pakistan, not as Army Chief. General Raheel Sharif (2015) and General Qamar Javed Bajwa (2022) visited Washington for defense-focused engagements but did not meet with the U.S. President at the White House, nor in the presence of the full Cabinet, and certainly not in a solo diplomatic capacity.

However, Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir made history as the first military leader in Pakistan to meet the US President at the White House in such a capacity. This high-profile engagement marked a significant departure from the previous military visits, with no civilian government delegation accompa-

nying him, making it uniquely solo military level diplomatic interaction. Moreover, this engagement included a formal lunch with the President Donald trump and high-level diplomatic engagement with the US cabinet key members. This exclusive interaction underscored the importance and depth of dialogue, making evident the growing significance of Pakistan's Military Leadership in the calculations of US foreign policy.

The visits of previous

*This high-profile engagement marked a significant departure from the previous military visits, with no civilian government delegation accompanying him, making it uniquely solo military level diplomatic interaction. Moreover, this engagement included a formal lunch with the President Donald trump and high-level diplomatic engagement with the US cabinet key members. This exclusive interaction underscored the importance and depth of dialogue, making evident the growing significance of Pakistan's Military Leadership in the calculations of US foreign policy. The visits of previous Pakistan Army Chiefs to Washington were based on military-to-military talks and did not involve such high-level political engagement.*

Pakistan Army Chiefs to Washington were based on military-to-military talks and did not involve such high-level political engagement. However, Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir's visit to Washington is even more significant due to the absence of a civilian government delegation. This move signals a distinct shift in U.S. policy, recognizing Pakistan's military as the key pillar of the nation's political and strategic decisions.

In contrast with today's situation, the dynamics of Pakistan-US relationship has undergone a seismic

shift. US policymakers now aware of India's limitations in maintaining regional stability as evident from its immature response to Pahalgam attack backed by Operation Sindoor, followed by Pakistan's precise retaliation through Operation Bunyan al Marsoos, are turning towards Pakistan's military leadership as a strategic partner. While India's uncalculated, non-pragmatic behavior escalated tensions, Pakistan's calculated military response reflected

global community. The fact that Field Marshal Asim Munir was invited to the White House before any Indian delegation is a clear signal of Pakistan's strategic priority in U.S. foreign policy calculations.

However, discussions also encompassed avenues for expanding bilateral cooperation in multiple domains including trade, economic development, mines and minerals, artificial intelligence, energy, cryptocurrency, and emerging technologies. President Trump expressed keen interest in forging a mutually beneficial trade partnership with Pakistan based on long-term strategic convergence and shared interests.

On the other side, in the broader geopolitical context, as tensions escalate between Iran and Israel, Pakistan, being a direct neighbor of Iran, holds critical geopolitical weight. Field Marshal Munir's meeting with the U.S. President Trump at this time suggests Washington's intent to engage Pakistan closely in maintaining regional stability. Moreover, Pakistan's military strength and given key role in the Middle East, is recognized by the US as central to not only managing South Asian security but also broader Iran-Israel tensions, underscoring Pakistan's significance in future diplomatic efforts.

The absence of any civilian government delegation makes this a rare, stand-alone military-to-executive engagement. It demonstrates confidence in the Pakistan Army's leadership and its global diplomatic stature. Ultimately, this moment stands as a symbol of national pride, setting a new precedent for how Pakistan's leadership, particularly its military leadership, is recognized and engaged on the world stage. The fact that the U.S. is now choosing to engage directly with Pakistan's military leadership, bypassing India, is a significant departure from the past. It's a reflection of the changing balance of power in the region, as well as an acknowledgment of Pakistan's vital role in maintaining peace and security in the broader Middle East and South Asia.

both strength and restraint. This shift in US perspective shows India's growing incapacity as a reliable ally, while Pakistan's military leadership now recognized as a key to regional peace and stability.

Therefore, this shift in U.S. policy comes at a significant geopolitical moment, soon after President Trump successfully mediated a ceasefire between Pakistan and India. The COAS acknowledged President Trump's statesmanship and his ability to comprehend and address the multifaceted challenges faced by the

A lifeline for Netanyahu

Jonathan Fenton-Harvey

JUST a day before launching airstrikes on Iran, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, facing bribery and fraud charges, narrowly survived a Knesset vote that could have collapsed his government [1]. Alongside the legal charges, Netanyahu's domestic popularity has plummeted over corruption, economic woes and failures to return Israeli hostages from Gaza. But for Netanyahu, the war offered more than military momentum: it has given him a temporary reprieve.

Within days, Israeli airstrikes reportedly weakened Iranian nuclear and military infrastructure, eliminated senior military figures, and killed hundreds of civilians. On X, Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz claimed "civilians in Tehran will pay a collective price," signaling a destructive intent. As Iran has hit back, firing missiles at Israeli infrastructure and cities, diplomacy over Iran's nuclear program has all but collapsed. Even if a ceasefire occurs, Israeli-Iranian tensions have escalated to near irreversibility as long as both the current Israeli and Iranian governments remain in power. Israel presents the assault on Iran as a necessary move to neutralize its nuclear ambitions, a claim repeated over the years, despite the lack of convincing evidence that Tehran was close to building a nuclear bomb. In reality, the war is driven more by Netanyahu's personal survival than just Israel's.

As with Israel's prolonged onslaught on Gaza, this conflict appears designed to consolidate domestic support - attempting to rally the population around the image of an existential enemy - just as it did with Hamas and the Palestinians in Gaza. That same logic extended into Lebanon, where Israel's assault weakened Tehran's ally Hezbollah and coincided with a jump in public approval [2] for Netanyahu's Likud party. But with neither Gaza nor Lebanon yielding lasting political dividends, Iran has become the next catalyst in Netanyahu's survival strategy.

For Netanyahu, projecting external threats has not only been a means of consolidating power, but also unity. His government, already fragile, is also caught between deeply divergent factions - secular versus ultra-Orthodox, nationalist versus technocratic. This internal fragmentation of Israeli civil society raised the specter of a looming civil war, warned of even before the Gaza war. But Israel's wars and the projection of external enemies aim to unify Israeli society, at least for now. There is also the international dimension. Netanyahu and other officials are wanted by the International Criminal Court over war crimes in Gaza, while Western backers face domestic pressure to end arms sales to Israel. The Israeli initiated Iran conflict has provided Netanyahu with yet another political lifeline as Western governments have clearly aligned with Israel. The G7 and the EU have expressed support for Israel, while the US, UK, Germany and France had pledged to uphold Israel's security.

Even though Western public opinion on Israel has

shifted recently - including legal cases and political pressure - arms sales are still expected to continue, or even increase. Moreover, the focus on Iran has also taken away spotlight from Israel's actions in Gaza, which continues to endure Israeli airstrikes and blockade-induced starvation.

Before the escalation, US President Donald Trump, however, had taken an unexpected turn. His truce with Yemen's Houthis and openness to renewed nuclear talks with Iran suggest a willingness to pursue diplomacy - even if it angers Israel. Trump appears caught between appeasing his pro-Israel support base and his America First-driven MAGA base - the latter of which prompted him to override Israeli objections in favor of US interests, namely economic engagement with Iran. Netanyahu is certainly banking on Trump siding with Israel in the event of a deeper escalation with Iran. Trump's own "urging" of Iranians to leave Tehran signals an alignment with Tel Aviv, even if he may seek to continue keeping the door open for future diplomacy with Iran. Ultimately, the cost of Netanyahu's bid to maintain his own grip on power is regional instability.

The war has bought Netanyahu time. Less ideologically headline voices have resigned from his coalition government over failures in Gaza, allowing him to consolidate power around extremist figures like Bezalel Smotrich, Itamar Ben Gvir and Israel Katz. Yet this hardline government, which Netanyahu has fostered to maintain his own position, is further contributing to Israel's diplomatic and economic isolation. That'll undoubtedly add to the economic costs of the war on Gaza, which has cost around 10% of its GDP and scared foreign investors off, creating future fiscal instability in Israel.

However, the Netanyahu-led multi-front offensives in Syria, Lebanon, Yemen and now Iran also reflect a notable historic pattern: regimes tend to lash out when they feel increasingly threatened or cornered. Netanyahu's calculus, partly driven by a sense that Israel is facing compounding global scrutiny for its military operations, may further harm its global image - even if Western governments continue to support Israel's actions for the time being.

For his own political survival, Netanyahu will resist efforts to halt the violence, unless sustained international pressure forces Israel to halt its operations. Because he knows that, if he ends the wars, he'll almost certainly face renewed calls for his indictment in Israel, or be unseated in the next Israeli elections, due by October 2026. As such, he has every incentive to prolong the violence unless international pressure forces a change in course. If Trump or other key powers push for de-escalation and accountability, it could shift the trajectory toward regional stability, especially as Iran weighs withdrawing from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Otherwise, Netanyahu's own instincts risk plunging the region - and inadvertently Israel - into deeper regional instability that could ultimately harm Israel itself.

AA

Israel's war gamble: Netanyahu's strike on Iran risks global chaos

Osama Al Sharif

ISRAEL is at war once more. The unprovoked blitzkrieg of Iran's nuclear and missile sites, which began on Friday, is something that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has wanted and planned for many years. This time, he received the green light from US President Donald Trump, who, until a day before, had said that he wanted to give the US-Iran nuclear talks a chance and had urged Netanyahu not to derail them.

It turned out to be a ruse. Israel's wide-ranging attack on Iran would not have happened without tacit US knowledge and approval. But what began as a preemptive strike, as Israel called it, could soon devolve into a regional war that could drag on and endanger the stability of the entire region and the world.

The strike had stunned Iran. It took out the upper echelon of the Islamic Republic's military and intelligence leaders. Israel assassinated at least eight of Iran's top nuclear scientists. The damage to Iran's most strategic nuclear plants, research centres, and uranium enrichment facilities has been extensive. The entire nuclear programme has been degraded, and it would take years for Iran to rebuild it.

But Iran is not Hezbollah or Hamas. It is a vast country of over 100 million people with a rich history and distinct identity. To think that Israel would be able to humiliate Tehran into submission is a colossal miscalculation. Iran has responded with a barrage of long-range ballistic missiles that caused unprecedented destruction in Tel Aviv and its neighbourhoods. Iran spoke of targeting military airports

and bases. The world held its breath.

The sneak attack occurred two days before a sixth round of US-Iran nuclear talks was scheduled to take place in Oman. Both sides had indicated that progress was made in the previous rounds. But Iran had insisted that any agreement would not prevent Tehran from maintaining its enrichment activity, albeit within acceptable margins. Israel wanted the entire programme to be scrapped.

The heavy Iranian response had stunned Israel. Netanyahu called on the Iranian people to rise against the ayatollahs. That is unlikely to happen. The Israeli attack was seen as an aggression on Iran's sovereignty and an affront to its national pride and identity.

The belief that regime

change could come out of the Israeli attack is myopic. Iran now knows that Israel had waged an existential war. In reality, this is a war that serves Netanyahu's interests above all else. Ironically, it is Israel, not Iran, that is in breach of international law regarding its nuclear activities. It had kept its nuclear program secretive since the 1960s. It had weaponised that programme and is believed to have tens of atomic bombs.

Netanyahu had once more boasted that Israel was redrawing the map of the Middle East, one where it emerges as the only regional power. If Iran falls and sinks into chaos, it is Israel that stands to call the shots across this vast and strategic part of the world. The geopolitical fallout from this will shape the region's

fate for many decades to come.

But Netanyahu may have miscalculated for many reasons. Israel has started this war, but it cannot determine how and when it will end. This could easily spill over and force Iran to raise the stakes by disrupting oil exports and undermining the stability of its neighbours. Also, Trump had promised not to start new wars or engage in regime change tactics as the neocons had done in Iraq and Afghanistan in the first decade of the new millennium. His MAGA supporters were quick to express their rejection of America being dragged into a new war in the Middle East for the sake of Israel. That critical mass of voters has become vociferous in criticising Israel's grip over US foreign policy.

Furthermore, a prolonged war will further undermine the international world order. Israel continues its attack on the people of Gaza and has

rejected all attempts to end the war. The position of Western leaders who rallied to support Israel's attack on Iran in the name of self-defence is polarizing the world further. Netanyahu, who has been accusing Iran of building a nuclear bomb since the early 1990s, must not be allowed to ignite an international crisis that could easily get out of control.

Trump has erred by relenting to Netanyahu and believing that bombing Iran in this manner will bring Tehran to the negotiating table. A diplomatic process was in place, and it was close to reaching an acceptable agreement, which Iran's neighbour had urged the US president to pursue. Now we are on the brink of a major conflagration, and it is Israel, as well as Iran and the entire region, which could pay a high price.

Gulf News



# Shaping AI before it shapes us

**THE period from the Information Revolution to the present, when artificially intelligent systems rule, represents the most significant shift in human history. Without a doubt, technology has rapidly advanced from simple computers to sophisticated devices that can reason, make decisions and even mimic human creativity. Industries, economies, and the fundamental nature of human interaction have all undergone significant changes as a result of this evolution. We are currently in the era of artificial intelligence (AI), characterized by its advanced machine intelligence, widespread automation, and rapid development.**

The emergence of AI raises both enormous opportunities and serious concerns, as is the case with any significant technological shift. AI has the potential to enhance communication, education, health-care and productivity significantly. However, our increasing reliance on self-governing systems calls into question our morals and social standing. Given this fact, it is imperative that the moral, social, cultural and religious implications of AI be urgently examined in order to determine how these fundamental human ideas will coexist with and, more importantly, be influenced by AI.

Human identity and behaviour are inherently characterized by harmony and balance. They serve as the foundation for the principles that give rise to ethics and enable us to recognize moral integrity, social acceptability and piety. While social ethics offer norms that influence societal evolution through adaptation, religious ethics set boundaries, defining who we

Dr. Muhammad Anwar Farooq

should aspire to be like. These well-established frameworks face an unprecedented challenge from AI. It compels us to face a new set of issues: either we modify our conception of society to accommodate the technology, or we run the risk of letting AI radically alter our moral frameworks.

We need to create structures that encourage inclusivity, reduce judgmental errors and have a positive impact on people. Humanitarianism must be the foundation of all endeavours. Each AI-enabled task must be carried out under human supervision, even though AI may help physicians & surgeons diagnose patients more quickly or relieve teachers of the burden of providing individualized instruction. When applied positively, AI can help people become more resilient.

AI must be in line with fundamental human values; otherwise, there could be disastrous consequences. AI could enable omnipotent totalitarian control in the absence of strong privacy and freedom protections. There are already serious privacy issues, as evidenced by the collection of data using questionable methods. Constant monitoring and data collection erode privacy, endangering personal freedom. Freedom becomes the most important factor in these situations. Algorithmic bias also endangers social harmony and violates human dignity. Imagine a society in which systems created with no ethical restrictions, such as credit-scoring systems, policing drones, or biased hiring algorithms, normalize social class discrimination. This risk is real.

Equally concerning is the quiet

erosion of cultural identity. As advanced AI systems continue to expand, local languages, traditions, and unique ways of thinking are at risk of fading into obscurity. All cultures may find themselves struggling to preserve their voice in a world increasingly shaped by machine logic. Even more troubling is the moral and ethical cross-roads humanity now faces. While machines may excel in processing data and performing complex tasks, they lack empathy, the deeply human ability to feel, care and understand the emotional weight of our choices. In matters of life & death, justice, conflict, and caregiving, it is this compassion that guides truly humane decisions. Handling over such profound responsibilities to artificial systems risks reshaping the very foundations of our moral compass, a shift that calls for serious reflection and collective caution.

Our social fabric is also at risk. Automating caregiving functions may lead to emotional detachment. While machines can efficiently aid aged people or educate young children, we must not overlook the potential loss of genuine human concern that accompanies this efficiency. Effective solutions require preemptive action. Integrating AI demands prioritizing respect for humans, combating discrimination and embracing diversity. AI architectures must be designed to be verifiable, defensible and resistant to misuse. Robust global regulation and coordinated strategies defining the ethical use of AI technology are essential. Public understanding is equally critical. People must be sufficiently informed about AI to engage in proactive discourse and

raise pertinent questions. Education frameworks must therefore prioritize digital literacy and character building to properly equip the future generations.

AI systems must embrace a variety of social constructs and respect pliable boundaries to preserve cultural and religious frameworks. AI frameworks that actively incorporate and protect indigenous languages, customs and knowledge are what we need. In order to contribute wisdom beyond technical proficiency, religious communities, academics and cultural representatives must actively engage in discussions about AI ethics. Building a bridge between AI and human values will be aided by it.

In the end, it is not a question of whether AI will influence our future, it already is. The real question is whether we, as a global society, can make sure that this future embodies the best aspects of humanity. It is a great moral obligation to align AI with our values; it is not just a technical challenge. If successful, AI could become a powerful force for good. Failure, however, runs the risk of creating a society in which justice, compassion, and genuine human connection are subordinated to efficiency and power. The way to deal with AI will decide the future of humanity. No doubt, at this critical cross-roads, we must remember: true progress is measured not by the intelligence of our machines but by the wisdom and ethics with which we deploy that intelligence in service of humanity.

*The writer is Director at Institute of Humanities and Arts in Khwaja Fareed University of Engineering and Information Technology, Rahim Yar Khan, Pakistan.*

# How autistic people caught in Russia’s war on difference

Ayman Eckford

**ELEVEN years ago, I created the first Russian-language website dedicated to neuro-diversity. It grew into an autistic-led organization that offered one-to-one peer support and ran workshops for mental health professionals and lawyers. While there are also existed large NGOs, they were led by non-autistic people who patronized and refused to listen to us.**

Not that my group has a lot of influence - such grassroots initiatives are considered too insignificant in Russia. Today is Autistic Pride Day. Roughly 1 in 45 people are autistic, which means we are everywhere. We are part of society and you cannot have a free and fair society without including minorities like us.

But the Russian system has never tried to be fair to those who think differently. Institutionalized ableism became part of state politics and everyday life. One of the biggest issues in talking about autism in Russia is that it is extremely difficult for adults to be recognized as autistic. Although Russia officially recognizes the World Health Organization's norms and uses the ICD-10 medical standardization system (though not the updated ICD-11 codes). Instead, doctors often rely on outdated Soviet-era standards, where autism is equated with childhood schizophrenia, which means that autistic people automatically have their diagnosis changed when they turn 18. This results in autistic adults not only being denied support and recognition but also facing an increased risk of forced institutionalization. In Russia, there are many jobs you cannot get if you are diagnosed with schizophrenia, and the social stigma is extremely severe.

And this automatic diagnosis

change is not just a relic of the Soviet past - it remains alive in medical education. In 2015, I spoke to a medical student at one of Saint Petersburg's top universities. He told me that, according to his curriculum, distinguishing autism from schizophrenia is extremely difficult. There is a deeper ideological reason for this. The stereotype of autism as a form of schizophrenia is not just medical incompetence. It is not a political myth, rooted deeply in Russian history. During the Soviet era, many political dissidents were forcibly hospitalized and given diagnoses like schizophrenia or sluggish schizophrenia. The latter was a fictional disorder created by Soviet psychiatrists after World War II.

Sluggish schizophrenia was supposedly a diagnosis for people with conditions we now understand as schizotypal personality disorder, but it was mainly used against dissidents and anyone who did not conform. Soviet and now Russian culture are built on extreme conformity. Those who don't fit in are dismissed as deluded or dangerous, and autistic people often think differently and do not accept socialization like other kids. One of the biggest problems facing autistic people in Russia is society's overall attitude toward disabled people. They are often seen as less valuable, less human. Parents of autistic children are frequently pressured to send their kids to special institutions. According to a survey by the Russian Public Opinion Research Center, 63% of Russians do not want to see Autistic kids in ordinary schools, 51% don't want to see them in kindergartens and 46% of Russian adults think they should not be

allowed in playgrounds. Actually, on playgrounds, autistic children are at risk of being attacked just for being near normal kids, even in reputable neighborhoods.

There is virtually no inclusion in schools, no effective government programs for inclusive employment, and no legal recourse for the harassment that autistic people face in public. Based on both my experience and that of the autistic people I worked with, many only realized what it was like not to be harassed for looking different or experiencing sensory overload once they moved to Europe. If society does not see you as valuable, your life is considered unimportant. Social Darwinism is part of Russian culture - unless you are useful for society, you are not valued. Survival of the fittest is considered a virtue. There are no disability studies programs in Russian universities. Disability is viewed purely as a medical defect. The social model of disability - the idea that people are disabled by societal barriers, not their conditions - is not recognized by Russian experts.

In Russia, only a small number of autistic people even know that they are autistic. But even those with a diagnosis are not heard when they try to change the system. In Russia, I tried to promote not just personal stories but also research on how autism manifests in women and girls. These efforts were dismissed as woke, no matter how much evidence we provided for their importance. The only professionals who were open to listening were talking therapists who already worked with LGBTQ+ organizations. But on my first day in Britain, I saw an article about autistic

girls and women in a tabloid newspaper. In Britain, Europe and the US, many disability rights policies - including those about autism - have been developed by disabled people themselves. In Russia, if you are autistic, you are pitied. Your opinions - even about autism - are not considered valuable, even by independent NGOs and charities that should help autistic people. The best-case scenario is that they listen to neurotypical parents of autistic kids, but not autistic adults themselves. There is no funding and no support for autistic people who want to make the world better for their neurodivergent peers.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that Russia is one of the most challenging regions in the world for autistic activism. The problem lies not just in the political regime, but in the dominant mentality of the public. Social Darwinism is so deeply ingrained in Russian culture that it prevents the disabled - including autistic people - from having any influence on laws, the education and medical systems, and leads to everyday discussion. This is a disturbing sign, not only for the disabled and autistic communities but for society as a whole.

One of the best ways to understand a society is to look at how it treats those who do not fit in. Before the Third Reich began its genocidal campaign against Europe's Jews and Roma, it targeted disabled people through the T4 Program. The oppression of autistic and disabled people in Russia is a clear example of the state's failure to value the lives of individuals. Without changing this attitude, no meaningful social progress in the country will be possible.

# 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 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.

China has been increasing its investments in the region's agricultural sector, particularly in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Bilateral agreements have led to the 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 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 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.

*The China Daily*

# Putin wants to mediate between Israel and Iran

**FROM the very beginning of the unprecedented military escalation between Iran and Israel, Russia has expressed its concern about the conflict, in which, until now, hundreds of people have been killed on both sides. Although the Russian Foreign Ministry has "strongly condemned" Israel's June 13 strikes on Iran, describing these as a "clear violation of the UN Charter as well as established principles of international law," Moscow has pretensions of being a mediator between the two conflicting sides.**

Russia's President Vladimir Putin had two phone calls that same day - both with the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian. He is one of a small number of political leaders in a position to hold talks simultaneously with Tehran and Tel Aviv.

The new unfolding conflict in the Middle East was also discussed by Putin and his United States counterpart Donald Trump on June 14. Among other things, Putin emphasized the "readiness of the Russian side to engage in possible mediation efforts." The American president, in turn, told ABC News he would be "open" to Putin's idea to serve as a mediator between Iran and Israel.

But does the Russian leader have a real chance to help achieve a ceasefire in the Middle East? The more important question is whether Putin is actually interested in stopping the bloodshed in the region. For many years, Putin's Russia could brag about its close relations with the key actors in the Middle East, including those who are at loggerheads with each other.

This balancing gave Moscow a chance to strengthen its presence in the region, including a military one. One of the brightest examples in this regard was Syria, wherein Russia had a close cooperation with Iran, Turkey and, to a certain extent, Israel - especially via intelligence services. However, with the start of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, other issues began to fade into the background for the Kremlin, including the situation in the Middle East. The reduction of political, diplomatic and military resources in the region led to a weakening of the Russian presence and the inability to influence processes seriously.

The rapid collapse of the Bashar al-Assad

Ruslan Suleymanov

regime in Syria at the end of 2024 made it clear that the Kremlin no longer has the ability to support allies in the region, as it did 10 years ago. Assad's fall was also a personal blow to Putin, whose apparent weakness gave his regional partners an additional reason not to trust him. Furthermore, over the past three years, Moscow's balancing policy in the Middle East has been shaken. The Kremlin's active military cooperation with Iran, as well as support for Tehran's proxies in the region - starting with the Houthis, Hamas and Hezbollah - has spoiled the Russian-Israeli partnership amid the escalating conflict over the Gaza Strip. Relations have also been strained by inaccurate statements by several officials, starting with Foreign Minister Lavrov, who in May 2022 said that the Jews themselves were responsible for the Holocaust.

At the same time, Iran also has reasons to distrust Moscow. Thus, during its presence in Syria, Tehran suspected the Kremlin of close cooperation with Israel. For example, after the attack on the Iranian consulate general in Damascus on April 1, 2024, in which several high-ranking generals were killed, Tehran, among other things, looked for evidence of Russian involvement. Diplomatic conflicts also arise periodically between Russia and Iran. In 2023, the heads of Russia's diplomatic mission in Tehran were twice summoned to the Islamic Republic's Foreign Ministry because of Moscow's pro-Emirati position on three islands in the Strait of Hormuz, which are controlled by Iran. But the United Arab Emirates (UAE) - a more profitable economic partner for the Kremlin - disputes ownership of the chain. Thus, neither Iran nor Tel Aviv currently counts on Moscow as a reliable partner. The current escalation in the Middle East is certainly beneficial to the Kremlin. It distracts the attention of the United States and Europe from the war in Ukraine, giving Putin the opportunity to continue.

In the event of Washington's military participation in the conflict, this will also require the involvement of resources, including weapons for the Jewish State. When choosing between Israel and Ukraine, Trump will obviously give priority to the first one. At the same time, the war in the Middle East

also means an increase in oil prices, to which the Russian budget is strongly tied. However, Moscow, still wanting to maintain a presence in the region, is not interested in an uncontrolled conflict with catastrophic consequences for all actors.

Moreover, the Kremlin fears, if not a collapse, then at least a weakening of the regime in Tehran. This would lead to the conservation of large-scale joint projects, such as the North-South transport corridor, the Russian-Iranian gas hub, and the construction of new reactors for the Bushehr nuclear power plant. At the same time, the current escalation involving the Islamic Republic will lead to a reduction in military cooperation between the two countries. This has the potential to disrupt the supply of Iranian drones, ballistic missiles and other weapons and military equipment to Russia. The fall of the theocratic regime in Iran will turn out to be another geopolitical defeat for the Kremlin in the Middle East after the overthrow of the Assad regime at the end of last year, on which Moscow relied in the region for more than 50 years.

As a result, Russia is interested in a slowly simmering conflict in the Middle East, but not in a large-scale war, as if invoking the Koranic principle "Fight ... but do not transgress." An attempt to act as a mediator could strengthen the Kremlin's position as a major international player and an active participant in the Middle East agenda. However, in addition to the mistrust of Moscow, potential negotiations between Iran and Israel do not seem possible on a more fundamental level. Given the current level of hatred, any potential deal with the enemy will be seen as a sign of weakness in both Tehran and Tel Aviv.

The most decisive factor in achieving peace in the Middle East will be the will of Trump, who currently has two options: to intervene in the military conflict on the side of Israel or to make a deal with Iran. In both cases, it will be a question of forcing Tehran to abandon its nuclear ambitions. If Trump chooses a diplomatic solution, Oman - which has organized five previous rounds of US-Iranian negotiations - will most likely act as a mediator between the US and Iran. One way or another, this fierce conflict will be resolved without Russia's participation.

*The Moscow Times*

# Right or wrong side of history? - crunch time for EU

Li Yang

**EVER since the Democrats lost the presidential election in the United States in November, some pro-US politicians in the European Union are worried that the return of the "America First" administration of the Republicans would leave the bloc high and dry on issues related to China, on which the EU tried to hold the line with the previous US administration.**

That the current US administration has singled out the EU as a party exploiting the US through its sizable trade surplus has justified such concerns, prompting a quick about-face on China. The country is no longer viewed as a systemic challenge or strategic threat, but rather as an important party that they say the EU should work with to jointly address global challenges.

The EU thus started mending its trade ties with China to remove the obstacles the former US administration created for their relations. This, in effect, has provided the EU with leverage to seize more initiative in its trade talks with the US. At the just-concluded G7 Summit in Canada, both the US and the EU leaders spoke positively about the US-EU trade talks and it seems the two sides are close to agreeing to a "good and fair" deal. This has prompted some EU leaders at the summit to revert to their previous tough rhetoric on China again.

But the extent to which European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen went in a bid to

cajole the US was still beyond the expectations of many. The chief of the EU executive body accused China of "weaponizing" its leading position in producing and refining critical raw materials, and of ignoring global trade rules to undercut competitors. "When we focus our attention on tariffs between partners, it diverts our energy from the real challenge - one that threatens us all." She warned of what she called "a new China shock," accusing Beijing of flooding global markets with cheap State-subsidized products, and urged the G7 countries to tackle its dominance in the raw materials sector. She even brought a prop to the meeting: a permanent magnet, which is crucial to Europe's core industries, such as car and wind turbine production.

Yet the summit's joint statement stopped short of a name-check of China, as she pushed for, indicating most of the G7 leaders don't buy the "new China shock" theory she is peddling. As the spokesperson of the Chinese embassy in Canada said, China's economic achievements are the result of following international trade norms and market economy rules, and are attributable to its megasized market, complete industrial system, abundant human resources and fierce market competition.

The EU and China just commemorated the 50th anniversary of the establishment of their diplomatic ties last month. Over those years, China and the EU have become comprehen-

sive strategic partners, two major forces promoting multipolarization, two major markets supporting globalization and two major civilizations advocating diversity. All sensible minds on both sides will agree that China-EU relations have become one of the most influential bilateral relations in the world, contributing greatly to enhancing the well-being of their peoples, and promoting world peace and development. As partners not rivals, and opportunities not challenges to each other, China and the EU should deepen their strategic communication, enhance their mutual understanding and trust, strengthen their partnership, expand their mutual openness, and properly handle their differences.

Most of the EU leaders recognize that the truly harmful market-distorting practices that do the biggest damage to the multilateral trading regime are the practices of imposing unjustified tariffs, unilateral trade bullying and politicizing and weaponizing economic and trade issues. They also know that it is not China that is guilty of such behavior, and it is not only the EU that is a victim of such behavior. China urges the EU to remain committed to multilateralism and inclusive economic globalization, to uphold fairness and justice and oppose unilateralism and bullying, and to join forces with it to address global challenges and jointly build an equitable and orderly world. In doing so, it is encouraging the EU to stand on the right side of history.





# Upgradation of Skardu International Airport formally launched

**F.P. Report**

SKARDU: The upgradation project of Skardu International Airport has been formally launched, marking a significant milestone in enhancing aviation infrastructure and regional connectivity in Gilgit-Baltistan.

The project launching

meeting was held at a local resort in Skardu, where the joint venture consultancy - comprising Swiss firm Intairplan and its Pakistani partners - presented their strategic approach for the airport's upgradation and development.

Senior officials from the Pakistan Airports Authority were present on

the occasion, including the Director Planning & Development, Additional Director Project Monitoring, Project Director Skardu International Airport, and the Airport Manager Skardu. Also in attendance were senior representatives from local government, the armed forces,

law enforcement agencies, and other stakeholder institutions.

The cost of the airport's upgradation design consultancy has been set at Rs. 180 million. Construction work is scheduled to commence within a year, following the completion of the detailed design and PC-1.

All stakeholders reaffirmed their full support for the timely completion of the project. They commended the efforts of the Pakistan Airports Authority in positioning Skardu as a gateway for international tourism and trade, and in contributing to the broader economic uplift of the region through improved air connectivity.

The Skardu International Airport Upgradation Project represents a major milestone in the development of Gilgit-Baltistan and will open new opportunities for growth, prosperity, and global integration.



**MULTAN:** Workers sort freshly harvested premium-quality mangoes and pack them into plastic crates at a local market to meet high seasonal demand

## SAPM highlights govt plans to reach zero transport emission

ISLAMABAD (APP): Special Assistant to the Prime Minister (SAPM) on Industries and Production Haroon Akhtar Khan on Friday highlighted the government ambition plan to reach net zero transport emissions by 2060 aimed at promoting an environmentally friendly transport system.

Addressing the dissemination workshop on New Energy Vehicle Policy 2025-30, the special assistant said that "This policy aims to enable 30% of all new vehicles to be electric by 2030, and the ambition of reaching net zero transport emissions by 2060."

Haroon reaffirmed the government commitment for sustainability, for innovation, and for industrial competitiveness.

This transition is projected to save 2.07 billion liters of fuel annually, amounting to nearly \$ 1 billion in foreign exchange savings. Additionally, the policy is expected to reduce carbon emissions by 4.5 million tons and cut healthcare-related costs by \$405 million per year.

The government had already issued sixty one licenses for manufacturing of motorbikes and three-wheelers while two licenses for the manufacturing of electric vehicles. Many international companies are interested in energy vehicle investment in the country.

Currently, over 90% of parts for two- and three-wheelers are already manufactured locally. The government will also introduce special support packages for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to further boost localization", he added.

He highlighted the five pillars of the policy which includes subsidy, tariff, infrastructure, quality, and institutional framework.

Under the policy subsidies for buyers, Rs.65,000 for two-wheelers, Rs. 400,000 for three-wheelers, the rickshaws, and Rs. 15,000 per kilowatt hour for four-wheelers.

Free registration, reduced taxes, and green financing are part of the package and all these are

going to encourage people moving from the internal combustion engine to the electric way.

The second pillar, tariff protections for local manufacturers until 2026.

He said International Finance Corporation (IFC) has already granted \$1.8 million for the policy and negotiations for further financing with other donor agencies were under process.

The third pillar, 40 fast-charging stations on highways by 2025 and aimed at 3,000 charging station by 2030.

"The new policy is not just about cleaner vehicles it's about promoting industrial growth and strengthening domestic manufacturing," Haroon remarked.

In his opening remarks, Additional Secretary Ministry of Industries and Production Asif Saeed Khan Lughmani welcomed all the distinguished guests from the public and private sector, academia, international partners, and civil society.

The country faced dual challenge of greenhouse

gas emissions while energizing its industrial base. Transport accounts for a significant share of our emissions, while our energy and manufacturing sectors remain underutilized in key value chains.

The NEV policy brings these two realities together, not as a problem, but as a platform and a national opportunity.

The NEV policy is a smart industrial strategy which not simply subsidize, it prioritizes accountability, technological advancement, and market fairness which based on five main pillars.

He said that for the skill development National Vocational and Technical Training Commission (NAVTTTC) also coordinating to train around 10,000 apprentices.

The policy ensures that citizens are not just consumers, but beneficiaries. Buyers are protected through a new legal framework covering information transparency, currency risk sharing, and performance guarantees.

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## Kitchen items' prices up by 0.27pc

ISLAMABAD (APP): The weekly inflation, measured by the Sensitive Price Indicator (SPI), increased by 0.27 percent for the combined consumption groups during the week ended on June 19, Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported on Friday.

According to the PBS data, the SPI for the week under review in the above-mentioned group was recorded at 310.35 points as compared to 309.51 points during the past week.

As compared to the corresponding week of last year, the SPI for the combined consumption group in the week under review witnessed a decrease of 2.06 per cent.

The weekly SPI with the base year 2015-16 =100 covers 17 urban centres and 51 essential items for all expenditure groups.

The SPI for the lowest consumption group of up to Rs 17,732 witnessed an increase of 0.05 per cent and went up to 299.58 points from last week's 299.44 points.

The SPI for consumption groups of Rs 17,732 to 22,888, Rs 22,889-29,517, Rs 29,518-44,175 and above Rs 44,175, went up by 0.05 percent, 0.10 percent, 0.13 percent and 0.42 percent respectively.

During the week, out of 51 items, prices of 23 (45.101%) items increased, 08 (15.69%) items decreased and 20 (39.21%) items remained stable.

The items, which recorded major increase in their average prices on a week-on-week basis included f LPG (14.86%), Potatoes (3.75%), Diesel (3.10%), Gur (2.25%), Chicken (2.17%), Sugar (2.13%), Petrol (1.88%), Mustard Oil (1.12%), Powdered Milk (0.97%), Rice Basmati Broken (0.84%), Cooked Daal (0.68%), and Tea Prepared (0.39%).

The commodities which recorded major decrease in their average prices on a week-on-week basis included Eggs (9.53%), Tomatoes (5.62%), Garlic (1.03%), Pulse Gram (0.35%), Vegetable Ghee 2.5kg (0.17%), Cooking Oil 5 litre (0.03%) and Bananas & Firewood (0.01%).

## COMSATS University rises to 664 in world rankings

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: COMSATS University Islamabad (CUI) has secured 664th rank in the QS World University Rankings 2026, marking a continued upward trajectory in global academic excellence.

Around 1500 leading universities from across the world including 18 from Pakistan were assessed on this year's ranking. COMSATS University Islamabad secured 6th position in Pakistan, improving its global rank from 711-720 band to 664.

The QS World University Rankings are among the most prestigious and widely recognized benchmarks of international higher education performance. COMSATS University's position at 664 in the world reflects its dedication to quality education, impactful research, global outreach, and commitment to Sustainable Development Goals

(SDGs).

Prof. Dr. Sajid Qamar, Rector, COMSATS University Islamabad, while congratulating the university faculty and staff said that "Our inclusion among the top 700 universities worldwide is a significant milestone for CUI despite its resource constraints. It may not have been possible without the hard work of our faculty, the dedication of our students, and stakeholders. It reaffirms our commitment to excellence, innovation, and contributing to the knowledge economy."

Over the past years, CUI has made significant strides in improving academic quality and research output, enhancing faculty credentials through its Faculty Development Academy, strengthening industry linkages through its Career Development Centers, and expanding its international collaborations.

Recently the varsity introduced a fully funded

PhD program, in order to attract the best talent from around the world to contribute towards its research. The upward trajectory on the QS Ranking has also been attributed to focused efforts towards improving student placement in the industry and engagement with its Alumni body of over 100,000 graduates. During 2024-25 the university made significant infrastructural investments and focused on improving student services and learning experience, which is expected to yield dividends in the coming years.

These strategic efforts have reinforced the status of COMSATS University Islamabad as a premier institution of higher learning in Pakistan and the region. CUI remains dedicated to further advancing its position by focusing on quality assurance, student success, sustainable development, and fostering an environment of inclusivity and academic freedom.

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Macter International Limited witnessed a maximum increase of Rs 56.63 per share closing at Rs621.82 whereas runner-up was Hoechst Pakistan Limited with Rs47.74 rise in its share price to close at Rs3,198.50.

PIA Holding Company LimitedB witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs 1,239.31 per share price, closing at Rs 11,153.83, whereas the runner-up Pakistan Services Limited with Rs 47.41 decline in its per share price to Rs 941.11.

## PSX gains 20.65 points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-Index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) witnessed a bullish trend on Friday gaining 20.65 points, a positive change of 0.02 percent, closing at 120,023.24 points as compared to 120,002.59 points on the last trading day.

A total of 421,643,224 shares were traded during the day as compared to 604,536,506 shares the previous trading day, whereas the price of shares stood at Rs 15.651 billion against Rs 20.442 billion on the last trading day.

As many as 468 companies transacted their shares in the stock market, 178 of them recorded gains and 245 sustained losses, whereas the share price of 45 companies remained unchanged.

The three top trading companies were WorldCall Telecom with 42,791,268 shares at Rs 1.45 per share, TRG Pakistan Limited with 26,664,589 shares at Rs 56.68 per share and Pervez Ahmed Co. 25,526,681 shares at Rs 2.84 per share.

## Musk's xAi increases yield offer on \$5 bln debt raise

NEW YORK (Reuters): Elon Musk's xAi is increasing the yield it is offering on a \$5 billion debt raise led by Morgan Stanley, a source with knowledge of the matter said on Friday.

xAi is offering to pay 12.5% yield on \$3 billion in

bonds, said the source who asked for anonymity to disclose non-public information.

Previously, sources told Reuters the company had offered a 12% yield.

xAi is also offering 12.5% fixed yield on a \$1

billion term loan and set to price a \$1 billion term loan B at 725 basis points over the Secured Overnight Financing Rate, known as SOFR. The term loan B is set to be priced at a discount of 96 cents on the dollar, the source said.

## Finance Bill 2025 Amendments spark debate FBR assures to safeguard legal rights of compliant taxpayers

**F.P. Report**

KARACHI: Finance bill is currently being discussed in the National Assembly and among various business circles. A number of news stories in the digital and print media give the impression that some of the amendments introduced in the finance bill are not understood well by the public at large.

For instance, the legal provisions for the arrest of those involved in a tax fraud have already been provided under Section 37A of the Sales Tax Act, 1990 along with an elaborate procedure to be followed after the arrest which involves intimating the Special Judge immediately and the production of such person before Special Judge within 24 hours. However, the proposed amendment now restricts the powers of the officer to arrest by making prior inquiry after approval of

the Commissioner Inland Revenue (CIR). Only on the basis of the findings of the inquiry CIR will authorize the investigation which would give the investigation officer the powers of an officer in charge of a police station under Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898 (Act V of 1898). The arrest can only be made with the prior approval of CIR if the investigation officer has reasons to believe that a tax fraud may have been committed by a person.

The new legal provision further provides that if the arrest is mala fide the matter will be referred to the Chief Commissioner for fact finding inquiry.

This shows that in contrast to the earlier provision where an Assistant CIR could arrest an offender, the new provisions bring transparency in the process by a mandatory prior inquiry and investigation and final permission by the CIR.

Moreover, certain changes and amendments are also necessary to reassure the compliant taxpayers that those evading taxes or involved in tax fraud are dealt with by the state with an iron hand.

FBR Chairman Mr. Rashid Mahmood Langrial has expressed his willingness to discuss the recent changes made in the tax laws and introduce changes wherever needed, for example, the provisions related to arrest could be revised to mandate the permission of multiple senior officers before any arrest.

Furthermore, in order to ensure that these powers are not misused by the authorized tax officers against the compliant taxpayers and business community, the Honorable Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has formed a high powered committee, which will be headed by Minister for Finance and Revenue,

to re-evaluate the proposed amendments and suggest adequate safeguards to prevent potential misuse of powers.

The other members of the Committee will include Ministers of Law and Economic Affairs Division, Minister of State for Finance, SAPM Industries and Chairman FBR. The Committee will also examine various options to ensure that legal economic activities are not stifled and propose additional protective measures against unlawful use of authority. The Committee will submit its recommendations to the Honorable Prime Minister in three days.

FBR is committed to safeguard the legal rights of the compliant taxpayers and to increase the tax collection and state revenues by discouraging non-compliant taxpayers and acknowledging those who are paying their due share to the state.

## Private sector key to economic revival of economy: President ICCI

ISLAMABAD (APP): President of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI), Nasir Mansoor Qureshi, has emphasized the critical role of the private sector in driving Pakistan's economic revival, job creation, industrial expansion, and innovation.

Speaking to trade and industry leaders at the Chamber House on Friday, he called for bold structural reforms and a consistent policy environment to attract both local and foreign investment, said a press release issued here.

Qureshi underscored that Pakistan's economic stability hinges on empowering the private sector and creating an enabling environment for businesses, particularly in the manufacturing sector.

He welcomed the government's recently announced five-year tariff reform plan, terming it a "transformative initiative" that could boost Pakistan's exports by several billion dollars—provided it is implemented with transparency and aligned with market realities.

He stressed the urgency

of simplifying regulations, streamlining business licensing, and removing bureaucratic obstacles to improve the overall investment climate. "A conducive environment is essential for business growth and competitiveness," he noted.

Highlighting the potential of Pakistan's youth and small and medium enterprises (SMEs), the ICCI President called for targeted support in skill development, technology integration, and improved access to global markets. "Youth empowerment and SME

facilitation are pivotal to unlocking Pakistan's full economic potential," he said.

Nasir Mansoor Qureshi also spoke about ICCI's ongoing efforts to strengthen public-private partnerships, enhance industrial infrastructure, and ensure effective representation of business interests in policymaking forums. He reiterated ICCI's commitment to serving as a strong voice for the business community and contributing to national economic growth.

## Wall Street edges up with Trump's Middle East decision in focus

NEW YORK (Reuters): Wall Street's main indexes nudged higher on Friday, tracking strength in global stocks after President Donald Trump held off from making an immediate decision on U.S. involvement in the Israel-Iran war.

Trump will take a call in the next two weeks, the White House said on Thursday, as hostilities between the two Middle Eastern countries approached their second week.

Markets have been on edge as Trump has kept the world guessing on his plans - veering from proposing a swift diplomatic solution to suggesting the U.S. might join the fight as Israel aims to suppress Tehran's ability to build nuclear weapons.

A senior Iranian official

Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi has arrived in Geneva to meet European counterparts, who are hoping to establish a path back to diplomacy.

"Any news flow that's going to lean in the direction of de-escalation is going to be a market positive and we're seeing that to a certain extent here," said Art Hogan, chief market strategist at B. Riley Wealth.

Concerns about price pressures in the U.S. were also in focus after Federal Reserve policymakers on Wednesday warned inflation could pick up pace over the summer as the economic effects of Trump's steep import tariffs kick in. They kept interest rates unchanged.

On Friday, Fed governor Chris Waller said the central bank should consider cutting interest rates at its next meeting given recent tame inflation data and because any price shock

from tariffs will be short-lived.

At 10:06 a.m. ET, the Dow Jones Industrial Average (DJ), opens new tab rose 123.38 points, or 0.29%, to 42,295.04, the S&P 500 (.SPX), opens new tab gained 13.34 points, or 0.22%, to 5,994.21 and the Nasdaq Composite (.IXIC), opens new tab gained 38.74 points, or 0.20%, to 19,585.01.

Nine of the 11 major S&P 500 sub-sectors rose. Real estate (.SPRLCR), opens new tab led sector gains with a 0.7% rise. On the flip side, healthcare (.SPXHC), opens new tab stocks lost 0.5%.

All three main indexes are set for weekly gains.

Investors are also bracing for any potential spike in volatility from Friday's "triple witching" - the simultaneous expiration of stock stock options, stock index futures, and stock index options contracts that

happens once a quarter.

Among megacap stocks, Apple (AAPL.O), opens new tab advanced 1.3%.

Kroger (KR.N), opens new tab rose 6.4% after the grocery chain increased its annual identical sales forecast.

Mondelez International (MDLZ.O), opens new tab gained 2.4% after brokerage Wells Fargo upgraded the Cadbury parent to "overweight" from "equal-weight".

Accenture (ACN.N), opens new tab fell 7.2% after the IT services provider said new bookings decreased in the third quarter.

Wall Street's strong gains last month, primarily driven by a softening in Trump's trade stance and strength in corporate earnings, had pushed the benchmark S&P 500 index close to its record peaks before the ongoing conflict in the Middle East made investors risk-averse.





In brief

Salah nominees for Player of the Year award

LONDON (AFP): Liverpool forward Mohamed Salah was among six players nominated for the Professional Footballers' Association Men's Player of the Year award on Friday. The 33-year-old played a key role in Liverpool's Premier League title triumph last season with 29 goals and 18 assists. The Egypt star was voted Footballer of the Year by the Football Writers' Association -- securing almost 90 percent of the votes, marking the biggest winning margin this century -- and is the firm favourite to land the PFA prize. Salah is joined on the shortlist by Liverpool team-mate Alexis Mac Allister, Arsenal's Declan Rice, Cole Palmer of Chelsea, Newcastle striker Alexander Isak and Manchester United midfielder Bruno Fernandes. Palmer, who won the PFA Young Player of the Year award for 2023-24, was a surprise choice for the list given his struggles for Chelsea last season. Rice started in midfield for Arsenal, hitting a career-high nine goals while adding 10 assists in 52 appearances in all competitions. Sweden striker Isak scored 23 goals for Newcastle as they qualified for the Champions League and ended a 56-year trophy drought by winning the League Cup. Fernandes was one of United's few bright spots in the club's worst top-flight campaign since 1973-74, with eight league goals and 10 assists. This year's awards ceremony will be held in Manchester on August 19.

Sinner says Halle exit gives him more time to prepare

HALLE WEST-FALEN (AFP): World number one Jannik Sinner is looking forward to a bit of unexpected down-time after his second round loss at Halle, to better prepare for Wimbledon. The Italian defending champion went down 6-3, 3-6, 6-4 to the 45th-ranked Kazakh Alexander Bublik in Thursday's second round in the German grasscourt Wimbledon warm-up. "I have to accept what happened. I'm now going to have a few days rest before Wimbledon, which are going to do me good" said Sinner. He now has 10 days between Thursday's loss and the start of his Wimbledon campaign, where he seeks to dethrone Carlos Alcaraz, his conqueror in a five-set epic French Open final at Roland Garros earlier this month. Halle in 2024 is the only grass court title Sinner has to his name. He made it to the semi-finals in Wimbledon two years ago. Last year he was beaten in the quarters. "Honestly a little break is going to do me good," the 23-year-old told Sky Italia. "I came here (to Halle). I gave it my all after the Roland Garros defeat, it wasn't easy," he added. "Despite everything I'm happy enough. I've played two matches before Wimbledon, if there'd been more it would have been even better. "Now I've got to boost myself both mentally and physically, that takes a little time," but for Wimbledon, "everything will be fine". Sinner's loss to Alcaraz at the French Open was his first defeat in a Grand Slam final. Prior to that defeat Sinner also lost to Alcaraz in the Rome Open final just after returning from a three-month doping suspension following his Australian Open success.

Pakistan edge France in thrilling shootout to reach Nations Cup final

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan stormed into the final of the FIH Men's Nations Cup after edging France 3-2 in a dramatic penalty shootout in the first semifinal, following a gripping 3-3 draw in regulation time in Kuala Lumpur on Friday. According to information received here, the first quarter of the high-stakes encounter saw both teams aggressively vying for an opening goal, but strong defensive play and goalkeeping ensured the score remained deadlocked. The second quarter unfolded in a similar fashion, with both France and Pakistan striving to break the deadlock. France struck first, as

Smenjaud Xavier deftly deflected the ball into the post to put his team ahead. Entering the third quarter, Pakistan's hopes of a comeback appeared bleak. France doubled their lead through Charlet Victor, who found the back of the net with a sharp flick, further strengthening their position. But Pakistan refused to back down. Afraz reignited their campaign with a much-needed goal, offering a glimmer of hope. In a dramatic turn of events during the final minutes of the quarter, the Green Shirts surged ahead with two quick goals. Sufyan Khan and Muhammad Hammadudin found the target in

rapid succession. However, three minutes before the end Charlet converted a penalty to neutralise Pakistan's lead, leading to the decisive penalty shootout. Pakistan held their nerve as Afraz, Shahid Hannan and Rana Waheed converted their attempts, while France faltered under pressure, missing three of their five shots. Shootout Summary: • France: 2 (Monteco, Sellier scored; Lockwood, Tynevez, Esmenjaud missed) • Pakistan: 3 (Afrax, Shahid, Rana scored; Abdul Rehman missed) The final will be played on Saturday.



Pakistan team celebrates after defeating France in the semifinal of the FIH Hockey Nations Cup in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, June 20.

Bangladesh's lead over Sri Lanka nears 200 in first Test

GALLE (AFP): Bangladesh edged ahead of Sri Lanka on day four of the first Test in Galle on Friday, extending their lead to 187 runs with seven wickets in hand. The visitors finished at 177-3 after a strong partnership of 68 between opener Shadman Islam and skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto. All-rounder Milan Rathnayake dismissed Shadman for 76 but veteran campaigner Mushfiqur Rahim, fresh off a first-innings century, joined his captain to steady the innings. The duo put on an unbroken 49-run partnership for the fourth wicket to put their side in the driver's seat heading into the final day. Bangladesh off-spinner Nayeem Hasan earlier took five wickets to halt Sri Lanka's first-innings charge, with the visitors dismissed for 485 after

lunch to trail by 10 runs. Nayeem was well supported by Hasan Mahmud, who finished with 3-74. Sri Lanka looked set for a useful lead after the first session, reaching 465-6 with Kamindu Mendis and Rathnayake stitching together a gritty 84-run stand for the seventh wicket. However, Sri Lanka surrendered the momentum with a lower-order collapse, losing their last four wickets for 15 runs. Rathnayake had shown commendable defiance for his 39 but was undone by an inside edge onto the stumps off Mahmud. Kamindu followed in the next over with Sri Lanka's score unchanged, falling to Nayeem's off-spin as the ball kicked off the surface and caught the left-hander by surprise. His composed 87 included eight fours and a six but he fell with a third hundred against Bangladesh within sight. Nayem then removed debutant Tharindu Rathnayake for a duck with another sharp off-break that went through the gate as Sri Lanka lost three wickets for just one run in 10 deliveries. He then removed Asitha Fernando (4) to close out Sri Lanka's innings. The last Test draw at the Galle cricket ground was between the same two sides in 2013. Brief scores: Bangladesh 1st innings: 495 all out (Mushfiqur Rahim 163, Najmul Hossain Shanto 148; Asitha Fernando 4-86) Sri Lanka 1st innings: 485 all out (Pathum Nissanka 187, Kamindu Mendis 87, Dinesh Chandimal 54; Nayeem Hasan 5-121, Hasan Mahmud 3-74) Bangladesh 2nd innings: 177-3 (Shadman Islam 76, Najmul Hossain Shanto 56, Toss: Bangladesh.

National Karate C'ship begins in Abbottabad

PESHAWAR (APP): Four-day National Karate Championship kicked off in the scenic city of Abbottabad. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The championship was officially inaugurated by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Sports and Youth Affairs, Syed Fakhar Jehan, who cut the ribbon to mark the beginning of the event. The opening ceremony was attended by Deputy Commissioner Abbottabad Captain (Retd.) Sanaullah Khan, who welcomed the provincial minister upon his arrival. Also present were Director General Sports Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Tashfeen Haider, Chairman of Pakistan Karate Federation Muhammad Jahangir, Secretary PKF Andaleeb Sandhu, RSO Hazara Ahmad Zaman, President of KP Karate Association Khurshid Khan, Senior Vice President Khalid Noor, Secretary Asim Qureshi, Director of Sports Operations Jamshed Baloch, and Assistant Director Finance Shah Faisal. Organized by the Pakistan Karate Federation in collaboration with the Directorate General of Sports KP and the KP Karate Association, the national championship is being held at Government Postgraduate College No. 1 Abbottabad. Teams from all four provinces, as well as Islamabad, Pakistan Army, WAPDA, Police, Railways, and HEC, both male and female, are participating in the event. Addressing the opening ceremony, Minister Fakhar Jehan emphasized that sports play a vital role in engaging youth in positive activities. He said the provincial government is taking practical steps to promote sports in line with the vision of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Chairman Imran Khan and KP Chief Minister Ali Amin Khan Gandapur. He assured that talented male and female players in every sport will be provided with equal opportunities to shine at the national and international levels. He also announced that a Sports Festival would be held in Swat Valley in August, featuring regional and national competitions in various games, followed by Hazara Games. The minister expressed pleasure over the significant participation of players from Balochistan, noting the immense martial arts talent in the province. Earlier, Director General Sports KP Tashfeen Haider welcomed players, officials, and judges from across the country, expressing hope that such events will continue annually to offer athletes more opportunities to improve their performance and bring pride to the province and the country on international platforms. In his address, Minister Fakhar Jehan also announced cash prizes for the top-performing teams: PKR 200,000 for first place, PKR 100,000 for second place, and PKR 75,000 for third place. He reiterated that sports are a priority for the KP government, which is why equal sports facilities and infrastructure are being developed across all districts for both male and female athletes.

Messi strikes as Inter Miami stun Porto at Club World Cup

ATLANTA (AFP) : A Lionel Messi trademark free-kick earned Inter Miami a shock 2-1 comeback win against Porto in the Club World Cup on Thursday. The Argentine superstar found the top corner with a second half set-piece to clinch a surprise victory for the MLS side and give them a strong chance of progressing from Group A. Inter Miami and Palmeiras have four points each, after the Brazilian side beat Al Ahly 2-0 earlier on -- the Egyptians like Porto have one point. Samu Aghehowa's early penalty gave the Portuguese side the lead as they had the better of the first half and could have scored more. However Telasco Segovia blasted Miami level and then Messi's free-kick helped them claim a noteworthy scalp, in a match many thought would be straightforward for Porto. Co-owned by former England international David Beckham, Inter Miami played their first MLS match in 2020 and signed Messi in 2023, raising their profile significantly. This was the first competitive victory for an MLS side over European opposition, in their second encounter after Chelsea beat Los Angeles FC earlier in the week. "It's a huge joy, the whole team made a big effort, we worked really well," Messi told DAZN. "It's a really important win for us and we have to enjoy it..." "You can see that we want to compete, and today we competed against a really good European team..."

we knew that today we were weaker, but we had our strengths." Even with Messi, arguably the face of the tournament, the Mercedes-Benz Stadium was under half-full at kick-off, hamstrung by another 3:00 pm kick-off on a working day as it was for Chelsea's opener at the venue. More fans entered throughout the game, keen to get a glimpse of the 37-year-old widely considered to be the game's greatest ever player, with nearly 32,000 present in the end. Messi did not disappoint and was the game's outstanding player, involved heavily from the off. The former Barcelona great clipped a dipping ball in behind for veteran striker Luis Suarez, who could only prod it at the goalkeeper. Porto took the lead in the eighth minute after being awarded a soft penalty after a VAR review, as Miami defender Noah Allen made light contact with Joao Mario in the box. Spain international Samu Aghehowa beat Oscar Ustari, who had saved a penalty in the goal-less draw against Al Ahly, even though the stopper got a hand to his low effort. Uruguayan striker Suarez, 38, might have levelled after Messi threaded him through on goal but, forced to use his weaker left foot, Porto goalkeeper Claudio Ramos denied him. Javier Mascherano's side almost levelled through US international Benjamin Cremaschi after a charge forward from Suarez broke open Porto's defence, but Ramos made a smart near post stop to thwart him.

Maximiliano Falcon brilliantly headed off his own goal-line with Ustari beaten by Rodrigo Mora's effort to keep Inter Miami hopes alive. Ustari denied Aghehowa and then scrambled the ball to safety as it rolled towards his net after Alan Varela crashed a shot off the upright and it hit him on the back, as Porto turned the screw before the break. 'Clutch moment' Inter Miami levelled right at the start of the second half, with Segovia blasting home Marcelo Weigandt's inviting cut-back to stun the Portuguese side. Messi then sent Miami ahead with a goal all of his own making after 54 minutes. The playmaker was brought down outside the area and dusted himself down before arrowing a classic Messi free-kick into the top right corner. "(Messi) is a leader, he's the player he is, he's the greatest player in the world," Inter Miami forward Fafa Picault told DAZN. "I had a feeling (the free-kick) was going in. That was a great goal, a great show of leadership and coming in a clutch moment for us." Miami battled hard to keep Porto at bay and groans travelled around the stadium after seven minutes of stoppage time was announced. Mascherano's players threw themselves in the way of shots in a way the former Argentine defensive midfielder would have done himself, and Inter Miami were eventually able to claim their much-craved victory.

Pacers thrash Thunder to stay alive in NBA Finals



LOS ANGELES (AFP): The Indiana Pacers, rallying around injured star Tyrese Haliburton, crushed the Oklahoma City Thunder 108-91 on Thursday to force a decisive game seven in the NBA Finals. Haliburton, cleared to play with a right calf injury only a couple of hours before tipoff, scored 14 points with five assists and two steals in a solid contribution to a comprehensive team effort. "We just wanted to protect home court," Haliburton said. "We didn't want to see these guys celebrate a championship on our home floor. "Backs against the wall, we just responded," he added. "So many different guys chipped in, total team effort. I'm really proud of this group." Obi Toppin led the Pacers scoring with 20 points off the bench as Indiana's reserves outscored Oklahoma City's bench 48-37. Andrew Nembhard added 17 points and Pascal

Siakam had 16 points and 13 rebounds as the Pacers, who had lost the last two games to stand on the brink of elimination, leveled the best-of-seven championship series at three games apiece. Haliburton, who said he'd do everything he could to play after limping through most of game five, showed virtually no sign of his injury as the Pacers grabbed the game by the throat in the second quarter and never let go. Indiana led by 22 points at halftime and by as many as 31 early in the fourth quarter. NBA Most Valuable Player Shai Gilgeous-Alexander led Oklahoma City with 21 points but had eight of the Thunder's 21 turnovers. Gilgeous-Alexander missed his lone three-point attempt while Jalen Williams -- coming off a 40-point performance in game five -- missed all four of his three-point attempts on the way to 16 points. The Thunder, winners of

a league-best 68 regular-season games -- pulled their starters after falling behind by 30 going into the fourth quarter. They'll be searching for answers as the series heads back to Oklahoma City for game seven on Sunday -- the first game seven in the championship series since 2016. The Thunder are seeking their first title since the franchise relocated to Oklahoma City in 2008, having won it all in 1979 as the Seattle SuperSonics. The Pacers are in search of a first NBA title. They won American Basketball Association titles in 1970, 1972 and 1973 before joining the NBA as part of the ABA-NBA merger in 1976. One game "You know, we've got one game," Haliburton said. "All cards on the table. It's going to be a lot of fun." For a few minutes, it looked like the Thunder might roll to the title. The Pacers missed their first eight shots and fell into a quick eight-point hole. But they settled in to connect on six straight attempts and took the lead on a three-pointer from Nembhard midway through the first quarter. Indiana piled on the pressure with a pair of three-pointers and a trey from Haliburton -- his first basket of the night -- pushing their lead to as many as nine points.



LEEDS: Ben Stokes sends Yashasvi Jaiswal back.





## In brief

### IRSA releases 240,310 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Friday released 240,310 cusecs water from various rim stations with an inflow of 265,055 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, the water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1454.60 feet which was 52.60 feet higher than the dead level of 1402.00 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 167,500 cusecs and 149,800 cusecs, respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1169.10 feet, which was 119.10 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 27,045 cusecs and 20,000 cusecs, respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 163,066, 139,428, 85,457 and 35,180 cusecs, respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 20,800 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 18,019 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.

### 2 suspects arrested

RAWALPINDI (APP): Two suspects have been arrested by the Saddar Beruni Police in the girl rape case. It was reported to the police that the girl had gone to her uncle's house four to five days ago where the uncle had allegedly raped her, a Rawalpindi Police spokesman said on Friday. The Saddar Beruni Police have initiated the process for the medical examination of the victim. City Police Officer Syed Khalid Hamdani has taken notice of the incident and sought a report from Superintendent of Police Saddar Muhammad Nabeel Khokhar about it. SP Khokhar said the accused involved in the incident would be brought to justice.

### 20 law breakers netted

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Police during operations against lawbreakers across the district on Friday arrested 20 accused, including drug and liquor suppliers, illegal arms owners, a proclaimed offender and Tenancy Act violators. According to a police spokesman, three suspects were taken into custody during anti-drugs operation with over 3 kilograms charas. The Rawat Police recovered 1.54 kg charas from an accused while R A Bazaar Police nabbed two suspects recovering 1.5 kg of the contraband item from them. Similarly, six accused were held with 60 bottles and 40 litres of liquor from different areas. The Kahuta Police netted three persons with 60 bottles and 10 litres of liquor, while the Bani Police caught an accused with 20 litres of the commodity. Likewise, the City and Wah Cantt Police also captured an accused each on the recovery of 5 litres of liquor each. Meanwhile, five accused were detained for possessing illegal arms and ammunition from the areas of Waris Khan, Gujar Khan, Saddar Beruni and Dhamial police stations. The New Town Police arrested a proclaimed offender arrested wanted in a cheque dishonour case. The accused had been absconding since 2024. The New Town Police also carried out a search operation and took into custody two accused for the violation of Tenancy Act.

### 2 robbers nabbed

RAWALPINDI (APP): The New Town Police on Friday nabbed two accused involved in robbery cases. An amount of Rs 31,000 snatched from the citizens was recovered from the detained persons, the Rawalpindi Police spokesman said.



ISLAMABAD: H.E. Idesbald Van der Gracht, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Belgium, met with Senator Azam Nazeer Tarar, Federal Minister for Law and Human Rights, to review bilateral cooperation and Pakistan's recent legal and human rights reforms. —APP Photo

## Belgium envoy meets Federal Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar

ISLAMABAD (APP): His Excellency Idesbald Van der Gracht, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Belgium to Pakistan, met with Senator Azam Nazeer Tarar, Federal Minister for Law & Justice and Human Rights, to reaffirm the strong and friendly ties between Belgium and Pakistan.

The meeting reflected the mutual desire to strengthen cooperation in the fields of law, human rights, and governance. During the meeting, both sides reviewed recent developments in Pakistan's human rights landscape. The Minister shared that the overall situation has shown marked improvement, with a visible decline in rights-related violations and increased institutional responsiveness.

The Ministry of Human Rights, in coordination with relevant departments and stakeholders, is active-

ly engaged in strengthening legal protections and enhancing mechanisms for redress and accountability.

The Minister highlighted recent legislative reforms, including over 110 amendments to the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC), aimed at improving access to justice for ordinary citizens. These reforms reflect the government's strong commitment to legal modernization and inclusive governance.

The Minister also informed the Ambassador about the recently enacted Islamabad Capital Territory Child Marriage Restraint Act, 2025, which sets the minimum age of marriage at 18 for both boys and girls. This legislation represents a significant step toward aligning Pakistan's legal framework with international child rights standards, and efforts are underway to encourage similar reforms

across all provinces.

The Minister also addressed the findings of the Global Gender Gap Report 2025, expressing concern that the data presented does not fully or accurately reflect the realities on the ground, owing to methodological limitations and gaps in data collection. To address this, the Ministry is actively engaging in consultations with relevant stakeholders, research institutions, and development partners to identify and correct disparities in national data. This collaborative approach aims to ensure that future reporting is based on comprehensive and verified indicators, aligned with the progress being made across sectors.

The Minister further shared that discussions are ongoing in Parliament regarding a potential policy shift on the death penalty, including consideration of a bill proposing life imprisonment in place of capital punishment for select offences. This reflects the government's openness to aligning national laws with evolving global human rights principles.

Ambassador Van der Gracht appreciated Pakistan's positive reform trajectory and welcomed the recent enactment of the National Commission for Minority Rights Act, 2025, which establishes a statutory body to safeguard the rights of religious minorities.

He expressed Belgium's continued support for Pakistan's efforts to strengthen democratic institutions, protect vulnerable communities, and advance social justice. Both sides agreed to continue close collaboration in areas of mutual interest, particularly in promoting human rights, legal development, and inclusive policy reform.

## Opposition failed to offer budget proposals: Aqeel

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister of State for Law and Justice Barrister Aqeel Ahmed Friday said that the opposition did not make any budget proposal but wasted the budget session time by making irrelevant speeches and demanding release of the PTI founder.

Talking to journalists outside the Parliament House, Barrister Aqeel said that the government has presented the best and balanced budget in the current

circumstances.

He said that I thought that the opposition would give suggestion for the betterment of Pakistan and its people during the budget session, but unfortunately I have to say that they focused on political grandstanding.

He said that the opposition made unnecessary speeches during the budget session and did not give suggestions regarding the budget. They only kept

demanding the release of the founder of PTI. On the contrary, the coalition parties gave suggestions which were welcomed adding that the allies carried out the suggestions which was the work of the opposition.

The opposition's speeches were deemed unnecessary, with their demands centered solely on the release of the PTI founder, while ignoring key issues like health and education, he added.

## New CEO Education assumes charge

RAWALPINDI (APP): The newly appointed Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Education Rawalpindi, has assumed his duties in replacement of his predecessor. Former CEO, Aman Ullah Kham has been transferred to School Education Department, Lahore as mentioned in the official notification issued by the department.

Tariq Mahmood, was warmly welcomed today in a grand and enthusiastic ceremony. Expressing his remarks on his joining the new assignment, the new CEO reaffirmed his commitment in uplifting the standard in educational institutions. He also reiterated to put his best efforts in redressal of the challenges facing the city's schools.

The event was attended by District Education Officer (DEO) Dr. Gul Ahmad, General Secretary of APECA Punjab Faheem Akbar Janjua, President of APECA Rawalpindi Malik Arshad Sultan, Chairman of Punjab Teachers Union Rawalpindi Sardar Muhammad Qasim and other officials from the Education Department.

## Ahsan visits under-Construction ‘National Police Hospital’

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, Ahsan Iqbal, paid a visit to the under-construction National Police Hospital located in Sector H-11, Islamabad.

The Minister was accompanied by Minister of State for Interior Talal Chaudhry, Inspector General of Islamabad Police, and Deputy Commissioner Islamabad, said a press release issued here on Friday.

During the visit, the Federal Minister reviewed the construction progress and expressed satisfaction over the pace of work.

He directed the concerned authorities to ensure the timely completion of the project by June 2026, emphasizing that the hospital

is a significant step toward the welfare and healthcare of police personnel.

“This project reflects the state's firm commitment to supporting law enforcement agencies. Our police force forms the frontline of internal security, and it is the state's responsibility to ensure their health and well-being,” stated Ahsan Iqbal.

Sharing details of the project, the Minister said the National Police Hospital will be a state-of-the-art facility with a capacity of 250 beds. It will provide services in general medicine, surgery, emergency care, and other specialized areas. Upon completion, it will directly benefit nearly 12,000 police personnel by offering them access to modern medical facilities.

He further noted that the project was approved in May 2023 and underscored the importance of its timely completion. “These projects are funded by taxpayers' money and must be treated as a national trust. Any negligence in their delivery is unacceptable,” he said.

Officials from the relevant ministries, engineers, and project stakeholders briefed the Minister on the current status and progress of construction.

Ahsan Iqbal instructed all involved to maintain transparency, quality, and speed in implementation, adding that sustainable and timely completion of development projects is vital for the uplift of vulnerable segments of society and the strengthening of state institutions.

## Distt Peace Committee held; finalized Muharram security plan

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad's district administration held a joint meeting with law enforcement officials, religious scholars, and trade representatives to review preparations ahead of Muharram and issue a code of conduct for the upcoming religious events.

A meeting of the District Peace Committee was held in Islamabad to discuss arrangements for Muharram. Deputy Commissioner Irfan Nawaz Memon attended the session, which included officers from the city administration and law enforcement.

Islamabad DIG Operations Muhammad Jawad Tariq represented the police, while senior superintendents, assistant commissioners, and the director of the Metropolitan

Corporation were also present. Religious scholars from different schools of thought attended the meeting, along with representatives from trader associations.

During the session, officials reviewed the overall security and administrative arrangements for Muharram. A comprehensive code of conduct was issued for processions and gatherings. Another set of guidelines was specifically prepared for mosques across the capital during the holy month.

According to the administration, the code of conduct was developed after consultation with religious scholars to ensure peaceful observance of Muharram.

DIG Muhammad Jawad Tariq said that all security measures for the month had been finalized. He added that processions would be

monitored through Safe City cameras.

DC Irfan Nawaz Memon thanked all religious scholars and departments for attending and contributing to the planning process. He stated that the district administration and police would remain in constant contact with scholars around the clock.

Memon further said that detailed consultations on procession routes and religious gatherings had been completed. He appealed to citizens to cooperate with law enforcement during the religious observances.

The DC assured that all suggestions made by religious leaders would be implemented in coordination with relevant authorities. The meeting ended with a prayer for national peace and security.

## 'Historic meeting marks new era for US-Pak relations'

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Local Government & Community Development, Mr. Zeeshan Rafique Friday praised Pakistan's diplomatic efforts, calling the meeting between U.S. President Trump and Pakistan's Army Chief, Field Marshal Asim Munir historic and a boost to Pak-US relations.

Talking to PTV News Channel, Zeeshan Rafique described the meeting between U.S. President Trump and Pakistan's Army Chief, Field Marshal Asim Munir, as a major milestone in diplomatic relations. He also admired the historic encounter, emphasizing how the U.S. President not only met with General Munir but also offered a positive response, acknowledging the significance of

Pakistan's role on the global stage. Minister of Punjab further highlighted that such recognition marks a new chapter in strengthening Pak-US ties.

Rafique added the warm reception Pakistan's Army Chief, General Asim Munir, received during his visit to the United States.

He further added that such engagements not only enhance mutual understanding but also pave the way for deeper cooperation in regional security and economic affairs.

The Minister hailed the efforts of both leaders, stating that the meeting marked a pivotal moment for the future of Pakistan's relations with the United States.

Responding a query, he further remarked that the warm reception given to

General Asim Munir in the United States has left the Indian government unsettled.

He stated that the positive diplomatic gesture and the strengthening of US-Pakistan relations were a clear signal to those who had been "dreaming" of weakening Pakistan's international position.

Rafique highlighted that India, which had long been critical of Pakistan's military and diplomatic engagements, is now confronted with the reality of a shifting geopolitical landscape.

He added that the reception not only reaffirmed Pakistan's strategic importance but also showcased the growing support for Pakistan in the international arena, particularly from major global powers like the United States.

## Das calls for legal remedy to safeguard minority rights

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister of State for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony Kesoo Mal Kheal Das on Friday voiced concern in the Senate over the abduction of Hindu girls in Shahzadpur, Sanghar district, and called for immediate legal reforms to safeguard minority rights in Pakistan.

Responding to concerns raised by minority members in the Upper House at the request of the Deputy Chairman of the Senate, the State Minister stated that the incident occurred on June 18, when three daughters and a cousin from the same Hindu family were abducted. He informed the House that swift action had been initiated following his communication with the Inspector General of Police (IG) Sindh, MNA Shazia Atta Marri, and the Chief Minister of Sindh.

“The girls were rescued by Sindh police and were in police custody, and presented in court today. Their statements have been recorded under Section 164,” he added.

The minister urged the Law Minister Azam Nazeer

Tarar and the Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi to take urgent steps to ensure justice. “This is not only a tragedy for the affected family but a matter of national image. Our enemies are exploiting it in international media to malign Pakistan,” he added.

Kheal Das emphasized that Islam and the Constitution of Pakistan categorically forbid religious coercion, and stressed that such actions contradict both Islamic teachings and state policy.

The minister highlighted that in 2020, a Parliamentary Joint Committee formed under the then Prime Minister and headed by Senator Kakar had made significant progress toward minority protection. However, he regretted that external pressures had stalled key legislative initiatives, just as the Pakistan People's Party tried to make a law in Sindh, then pressure is exerted and it had to withdraw the law.

“Our Constitution guarantees full religious freedom, yet these heinous incidents persist. How can a 12 or 14-year-old decide to renounce their religion or

leave their parents without coercion?” he asked.

He also acknowledged the efforts of Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar, who brought the Minority Commission under Human Rights from religious affairs ministry. The hard work done by law minister provides us protection; Senator Ali Zafar and all the other members also supported it.

He also lauded the Senator Ali Zafar, and other lawmakers for facilitating the passage of the Minority Rights Bill, which now awaits presidential assent. He proposed the immediate establishment of a Minority Commission, which he said would serve as a safeguard against such violations.

“My community is protesting. I request the interior minister to immediately contact Sindh government and took quick action over this incident,” he said. “I cannot face my people in Sindh if immediate action is not taken.” He said the Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and PML-N leader Nawaz Sharif, have always advocated for interfaith harmony and equal protection for all citizens.



ISLAMABAD: An elderly man pulls an overloaded cart with his full force through Raja Bazaar to earn a livelihood for his family under burning sun as temperatures soar in the city. —APP Photo



**4.5-magnitude earthquake shakes Herat**  
HERAT (Amu tv): A 4.5-magnitude earthquake rattled Herat Province in western Afghanistan early Friday. The tremor struck at approximately 5:11 a.m. (Kabul time), centered around the Karrokh district and felt across much of Herat city and surrounding areas. According to USGS, the earthquake was also felt in Turkmenistan. As of midday, locals say there have been no reports of casualties or significant property damage.

**Afghan products showcased in 88 booths at China-South Asia Expo**  
KABUL (TOLONews): The 9th China-South Asia International Expo opened Thursday in Kunming City, China, with the participation of Afghan traders. Afghan business owners are showcasing a variety of products in 88 booths, including carpets, handicrafts, dried fruits, and saffron. The exhibition features 1,400 companies from 54 countries around the world. Ali Maysam, an Afghan exhibitor, said: "I'm very happy that I was able to participate this year."

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

## Minister: 20-year jihad was not for power or suppression



KABUL (TOLONews): Acting Minister of Interior Khalifa Sirajuddin Haqqani said during a public gathering in Paktia that the past 20 years of struggle were for independence and the implementation of Sharia, not for oppression or seeking privileges. Sirajuddin Haqqani also emphasized unity among the people. He stated: "Jihad was not waged to gain a position or to make myself a warlord or ruler. It was fought to liberate this sacred land from disbelief and corruption."

Speaking about government downsizing, he said: "Downsizing is being done to eliminate unnecessary positions that place pressure on both the budget and the people."

At the same gathering, tribal elders raised their demands regarding reconstruction, healthcare, education, and the construction of water dams and other development projects.

## One-Month visa exemption for Pilgrim

HERAT (BNA): A one-month visa exemption has been announced to facilitate Iranian pilgrims traveling to Herat, Afghanistan. Rahmatullah Fayzan, Deputy Representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Herat, met with Iranian Consul General Ali Reza Marhamati to discuss this initiative. During their meeting, Fayzan condemned the recent invasion of Islamic territory by the Zionist regime, labeling it a crime against humanity and a violation of international laws.

Fayzan expressed the Afghanistan government's commitment to stand with the people of Iran, emphasizing that the local administration in Herat is fully prepared to welcome and assist Iranian pilgrims.

In response, Marhamati praised the Afghanistan government's supportive stance and expressed readiness to collaborate in facilitating the pilgrimage. He highlighted this cooperation as a symbol of Islamic brotherhood and unity between the two countries.

## Taliban units leave district Badakhshan

BADAKHSHAN (Amu tv): Taliban counternarcotics units have withdrawn from the Khash district of Badakhshan Province following two days of local protests against the destruction of poppy fields, according to residents and local sources.

Sources told Amu TV that the demonstrations erupted after Taliban forces began eradicating poppy crops in the remote district, prompting push-back from farmers who rely on the cultivation of opium as a primary source of income.

Following the withdrawal, local residents set fire to five tractors belonging to the Taliban, according to the same sources.

One local figure, identified by sources as Amanuddin, a senior Taliban commander in Badakhshan, is said to have intervened and threatened demonstrators. No injuries have been reported, but tensions remain high.

Protesters say they will continue to resist efforts to destroy poppy crops in Badakhshan unless similar operations are also conducted in southern provinces such as Helmand and Kandahar, where large-scale cultivation reportedly continues with minimal interference.

Taliban have not commented publicly on the incident. They have pledged in recent years to eliminate poppy cultivation but have faced criticism over uneven enforcement and the economic fallout for farmers.

## UN sounds alarm on deepening gender inequality in Afghanistan

KABUL (Amu tv): UN Women unveiled the 2024 Afghanistan Gender Index, warning of an "unprecedented assault" on Afghan women's rights nearly four years after the Taliban returned to power.

Presenting the findings at the Palais des Nations in Geneva, Sofia Calltorp, UN Women's Chief of Humanitarian Action, called the gender gap in Afghanistan "devastating," highlighting that Afghan women are achieving only 17 percent of their potential compared to a global average of 60.7 percent.

"The report reveals that Afghanistan now has the second-widest gender gap in the world," she said. "No women hold positions in the de facto Cabinet or subnational governance structures."

The Index—Afghanistan's most comprehensive gender equality assessment since 2021—evaluates progress across eight Sustainable



Development Goals. Among its most alarming findings: nearly eight in ten young Afghan women are excluded from education, employment, or training—four times the rate for men. Women's participation in the workforce has dropped by 25 percent over 18 months, with most relegated to low-paid, insecure, or informal roles.

Despite these constraints, Calltorp emphasized that Afghan women continue to persevere. "They are still running businesses, advocating for their rights, and even negotiating with the authorities," she said.

UN Women urged international donors to increase long-term, flexible support for women-led civil society organizations, ensure that at least 30 percent of funding to Afghanistan promotes gender equality, and guarantee Afghan women's participation in decision-making about the country's future.

"The choices we make now," Calltorp said, "will show whether we truly stand for the rights of women and girls."

## Termination of 25-year contract with Chinese company sparks reactions

KABUL (TOLONews): The cancellation of a 25-year oil extraction contract with China's "Af China" company for the Amu Darya project has sparked strong reactions from economic analysts in Afghanistan.

Experts view this move as a serious threat to the future of the country's major economic projects. They believe that reassigning the Amu Darya project will take considerable time, and any delay in restarting the operations could have negative economic consequences.

Economic analyst Ahmad Firdaws Bahgzain stated: "Often, violations of project and contract terms reduce the interest and motivation of companies and investors, as such actions damage the credibility of a project. In the case of this Chinese company, which is a foreign investor, it was expected to have a solid long-term strategy for its 25-year investment."

Another economic expert, Siyar Quraishi, also commented: "Cancelling such contracts creates a climate of commercial distrust and casts doubt on Afghanistan's investment



environment. Furthermore, financial and technical obligations between both parties raise questions about investment security. Altogether, this can threaten the investment landscape and leave negative impacts on the sector."

However, the Ministry of Mines and Petroleum insists that this move will not hinder the continuation of the project.

According to the ministry's spokesperson, the cancellation sends a clear message to both domestic and international companies that all contractual commitments must be fully honored.

Ministry spokesman Homayoun Afghan elaborated: "Contracts are settled and reviewed by third-party and international auditing compa-

## Afghan Singer Zalala Hashemi Missing for over two weeks in Kabul

KABUL (Khaama Press): Afghan singer Zalala Hashemi has been missing for over two weeks in Kabul, with no updates on her whereabouts.

Local sources in Kabul have reported the disappearance of Zalala Hashemi, a well-known Afghan female artist, who was allegedly abducted by unidentified individuals nearly two weeks ago. Her whereabouts remain unknown, and no group has claimed responsibility for the abduction.

Sources said on Friday, June 20, that Hashemi has been missing for over 15 days. Despite ongoing efforts, her family has received no leads regarding her location or well-being. The case has sparked growing public concern over the safety of civil society figures in Kabul.

A family insider revealed that Hashemi's husband has formally



requested assistance from Taliban authorities, but as of yet, no official response or investigation update has been provided.

Afghanistan's social media. The emotional footage has drawn significant public attention and renewed calls for action to locate the missing artist.

The disappearance comes amid growing concerns about freedom of expression, personal safety, and women's rights under Taliban rule.

Human rights organizations, including Amnesty International, have previously warned about the shrinking space for artists, journalists, and activists in Afghanistan.

Unless swift and transparent action is taken by local authorities, trust in Afghanistan's ability to protect its citizens—especially women in public roles—will continue to erode. The international community is urged to raise its voice and pressure for accountability in Hashemi's case and others like it.

## Hanafi: Afghanistan committed to expanding regional economic ties



KABUL (TOLONews): Abdul Salam Hanafi, Administrative Deputy of the Prime Minister's Office, during his speech in China emphasized Afghanistan's policy of non-interference and called for expanded economic relations with regional countries.

Hanafi said that Afghanistan's territory will not be used against any other country and expects other nations to refrain from interfering in Afghanistan's internal affairs. Hamidullah Fitrat, Deputy Spokesman of the Islamic Emirate, stated: "Afghanistan does not allow any individual or group to use its soil for threats, and it does not interfere in the internal affairs of any other country. We also expect reciprocal behavior from other nations."

Speaking at the Ninth China-South Asia International Expo, Hanafi also called for enhanced cooperation with Beijing and South Asian countries in the fields of mining, energy, transit, technology, and trade. He stated that Afghanistan can become a connecting bridge between Central,

South, and East Asia.

Economic analyst Mohammad Nabi Afghan said: "China is a highly suitable market for us, and we must directly invite them—especially in key sectors such as infrastructure, electricity, and mining. These areas are vital because without solid infrastructure and energy, and with our mines being extracted in a disorganized manner, we cannot achieve self-sufficiency. We must establish mutual agreements with China and formally request the transfer of their machinery."

Another economic expert, Qutbuddin Yaqubi, said: "Afghanistan can leverage these expos and its geopolitical location, particularly with China as a global economic and industrial powerhouse, to play a crucial and strategic role—and gain maximum benefit from such opportunities."

In closing, Hanafi cited general amnesty, security provision, anti-narcotics efforts, and the launch of development projects as key achievements of the caretaker government.

## Afghan Refugees continue to face uncertainty



KABUL (TOLONews): World Refugee Day arrives as thousands of Afghan refugees continue to face an uncertain and unsettled future.

These refugees are not only struggling with economic pressures and legal challenges in host countries, but recent political and security developments, especially the Iran-Israel tensions and Pakistan's forced deportations—have further deepened the concerns.

Abdul Rauf Mohammadi, who was deported from Iran, shares his story: "On the last night when I moved, the war had already started. Israel had launched an attack. We set off and after that, we didn't see anything else, but the conflict was raging."

Meanwhile, the European Union Delegation in Afghanistan has once again reaffirmed its commitment to supporting Afghan refugees.

In a public statement, the delegation stated that it would continue to assist Afghan refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and returnees—particularly in regional countries such as Iran, Pakistan, and Central Asia, in areas such as education, healthcare, and economic support.

A section of the EU statement reads: "Today, on

World Refugee Day, the European Union renews its commitment to supporting displaced Afghans. In Afghanistan and across the region (Iran, Pakistan, and Central Asia), we support the protection, education, and livelihoods of refugees, returnees, and IDPs."

Ali Reza Karimi, a refugee rights activist, says: "Afghans are increasingly choosing dangerous migration routes, both legally and illegally. To reduce this trend, the government or the Islamic Emirate must seriously focus on ensuring political stability, providing security, improving the economy, expanding job oppor-

tunities, and supporting human rights."

Political analysts and refugee rights advocates believe that close cooperation between host countries, the United Nations, and the Islamic Emirate is essential to managing the ongoing refugee crisis.

Political affairs analyst Moeen Gul Chamakni stated: "A joint committee could be formed between Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the United Nations to hold negotiations and eventually reach a solution. However, the current approach to deportations is intolerable."

Juma Khan Pouya, an advocate for refugee rights, added: "It is crucial that host countries of Afghan refugees, including Iran and Pakistan, as well as international organizations such as UNHCR and IOM, work toward a joint solution to address the challenges facing refugees and those at risk, based on international conventions, including the Geneva Convention and its additional protocols."

This comes as the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriations previously reported that since the return of the Islamic Emirate to power, more than 5.97 million Afghans have returned from neighboring countries.





ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif meeting with Chief of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (F), Maulana Fazlur Rahman.

## Senate takes up key legislative business

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Presided over by Deputy Chairman Senate Sardar Syedal Khan, the Upper House on Friday continued its discussion on the Finance Bill 2025 and addressed key legislative matters while granting time extensions to various standing committees for the submission of reports on constitutional and legislative bills.

Senator Shahadat Awan, on behalf of Senator Farooq Hamid Naek, Chairman of the Standing Committee on Law and Justice, moved motions for sixty-day extensions of time concerning five bills, including The Constitution (Amendment) Bill, 2024 (Amendment of Article 51). These were introduced by Senators Manzoor Ahmed and Danesh Kumar; The Constitution (Amendment) Bill, 2024 (Substitution of Article 140A and amendment of Article 160) introduced by Senator Khalida Ateeq; The Constitution (Amendment) Bill, 2024 (Amendment of Articles 1, 51, 59, 106, 154, 175A, 198 and 218) introduced by Senator Aon Abbas; The Constitution (Amendment) Bill, 2024 (Amendment of Article 62) introduced by Senator Samina Mumtaz Zehri; The Family Courts (Amendment) Bill, 2024 introduced by the same senator.

Meanwhile, the Senate also granted a sixty-day extension to Senator Jam Saifullah Khan, Chairman of the Standing Committee on Railways, for presenting a report on a starred question related to the outsourcing of luggage vans by Pakistan Railways.

Similarly, Syed Masroor Ahsan, on behalf of Senator Amir Waliuddin Chishti, Chairman of the Standing Committee on National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination, was granted a sixty-day extension to present the report on the Islamabad Healthcare Regulation (Amendment) Bill, 2025, introduced by Senator Mohsin Aziz.

Senator Syed Waqar Mahdi, on behalf of Senator Sherry Rehman, secured a 60-day extension for the report on the Pakistan Trade Control of Wild Fauna and Flora (Amendment) Bill, 2024.

Moreover, the House approved a sixty-day extension for the Standing Committee on Federal Education and Professional Training, chaired by Senator Bushra Anjum Butt, regarding the University of Business, Sciences and Technology Bill, 2025, introduced by Senator Abdul Shakoor Khan. Besides these motions, several reports were laid before the House.

## 35 killed in new Israeli attack on Gaza aid seekers

GAZA: At least 35 Palestinians have been killed and several others wounded by Israeli fire while waiting for humanitarian aid near the Netzarim Corridor, in the central Gaza Strip, sources at al-Awda Hospital told Al Jazeera. Israeli jets also bombed a house west of Deir el-Balah in central Gaza, killing at least eight people and injuring more.

Hospitals in Gaza said at least 70 Palestinians were killed by the Israeli army on Friday. Israeli attacks on hungry Palestinians near aid centres have killed hundreds of people since the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF) started distributions on May 27. The shadowy Israeli- and United States-backed group tasked with distributing aid supplies has been criticised by the United Nations for its "failure" to ensure the safe delivery of supplies in Gaza, where aid agencies have warned that the entire population is facing the threat of famine after Israel imposed a total blockade from early March to late

May.

Ismail al-Thawabta, the director-general of Gaza's Government Media Office, said on Thursday that the total number of aid seekers killed stood at 409, and 3,203 more had been injured. UNICEF warned the Gaza Strip was also facing a man-made drought as its water systems collapsed.

"Children will begin to die of thirst," spokesperson James Elder told reporters in Geneva on Friday. "Just 40 percent of drinking water production facilities remain functional." The UN agency warned that the GHF distribution system was "making a desperate situation worse".

Elder, who was recently in Gaza, said he had many testimonials of women and children injured while trying to receive food aid, including a young boy who was wounded by a tank shell and later died of his injuries. He said a lack of public clarity on when the sites, some of which are in combat zones, were open was causing mass casualty events. "There have been instances where informa-

tion [was] shared that a site is open, but then it's communicated on social media that they're closed, but that information was shared when Gaza's internet was down and people had no access to it," he said.

On Wednesday, the GHF said in a statement it had distributed three million meals across three of its aid sites without an incident. As Israel's war on Gaza continues, it has also traded air attacks with Iran for a week. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan warned on Friday that Israel's conflict with Iran and its genocide in Gaza are "quickly reaching the point of no return".

"This madness must end as soon as possible," Erdogan said during a speech to the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation's youth forum in Istanbul. "Israel complained about damage to its hospitals today, yet it has so far carried out over 700 attacks on healthcare facilities in Gaza alone," he added, reiterating calls for a ceasefire.—Aljazeera

## Reserved seats: SC Bench to continue hearing

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court's Constitutional bench on Friday adjourned the hearing of review petitions against the verdict on reserved seats until June 23. The eleven-member bench, headed by Justice Amin-ud-Din Khan, heard the case.

Representing Kanwal Shauzab, senior lawyer Salman Akram Raja argued that Article 184(3) of the Constitution empowers the Supreme Court to act in the public interest and for the protection of fundamental rights, particularly in exceptional circumstances. Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhail concurred, stating that the Supreme

Court must act if there is a constitutional violation even in the absence of a specific article.

However, Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar noted that Article 199 cannot be read in conjunction with Article 187, as the Supreme Court does not possess the same jurisdiction as the High Courts under Article 199. Raja responded that the Supreme Court has broad constitutional powers which can be exercised wherever necessary.

Justice Mandokhail inquired whether the original verdict on reserved seats involved any constitutional or legal violation. Raja replied in the negative but explained that independent

candidates were allowed to join political parties within 15 days instead of three, as no alternative was available under existing law.

During the hearing, Justice Mandokhail pointed out that reserved seats relate to both minorities and the general public, to which Raja affirmed, adding that the general electorate's role is equally important. Justice Najafi asked whether securing reserved seats is a fundamental right of political parties. Raja asserted that the public, through their votes, essentially endorse reserved seats as well, making it a fundamental right of parties, albeit one regulated by law. The court then adjourned the hearing until June 23.

## Pakistan issues travel advisory for Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan government has issued travel advisory urging citizens to avoid non-essential travel to Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria due to Iran-Israel escalation. In a statement, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs advised Pakistani nationals currently residing in these countries to remain extremely cautious.

Citizens of Pakistan were also urged to limit

movement and avoid all unnecessary travel within those territories. The advisory specifically directed citizens to stay in close contact with their nearest Pakistani embassies for assistance and up-to-date information. The directive comes amid rising regional tensions, particularly involving Iran and Israel, which have affected security dynamics across several Middle Eastern nations.

The Pakistan Foreign

Office asserted that the advisory is a precautionary measure to protect Pakistani nationals and ensure their safety during the current volatile situation. Israel and Iran's air war entered a second week on Friday and European officials sought to draw Tehran back to the negotiating table after President Donald Trump said any decision on potential US involvement would be made within two weeks.

## PHC seeks response in FIR against lawyer

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: The Peshawar High Court (PHC) has issued notices to the federal government and other relevant authorities, seeking their response to a petition filed by a local lawyer, Roman Shah, challenging the registration of FIR against him under the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA), on Friday.

PHC's divisional bench comprising Justice Syed Arshad Ali and Justice Abdul Fayyaz heard the case. The petitioner, Roman Shah, informed the court that a FIR was registered against him under the PECA Act, and he was unaware of the reasons behind it.

Justice Abdul Fayyaz questioned how the police Station House Officer (SHO) could register FIR under the PECA Act, which falls within the jurisdiction of the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA).

In the meantime, Justice Syed Arshad Ali observed that if the FIA has jurisdiction over PECA Act cases, how can a SHO register the FIR? The Assistant Attorney General informed the court that the petitioner had shared a post on social media against a high-ranking officer of a security agency.

The petitioner denied owning the social media account and claimed that fake accounts are often created with someone's picture and used for malicious purposes. The court issued notices to the federal government and other parties, seeking their response to the petition.

## Italian Navy Ship join bilateral exercise

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Italian Navy Ship its Antonio Marcegaglia participated in a bilateral exercise with Pakistan Navy ship and aircraft in the North Arabian Sea. The primary objective of the exercise was to enhance operational efficiency and foster deeper cooperation between the two navies.

The exercise featured a comprehensive series of advanced operational drills, covering key aspects of maritime warfare. These drills were designed to strengthen coordination in maritime security operations and improve the overall readiness and operational integration of both navies.

Its Antonio Marcegaglia's visit follows the visit of the Italian Carrier Strike Group, which included its cavour and its Alpino to Karachi in October 2024. This visit further solidified the bond between Italian Navy and Pakistan Navy. The ongoing series of engagements demonstrates the growing strategic relationship between the two countries, particularly between their navies.

The joint exercise between Pakistan Navy and Italian Navy underscores the importance of naval cooperation, reaffirming both nations' commitment to strengthening bilateral ties and promoting peace and stability in the region. The exercise concluded with a shared aim to expand the scope of collaboration and explore new avenues of mutual cooperation between the navies of both countries.

# Global resurgence in N-power noted

F.P. Report

LAHORE: The Centre for Aerospace and Security Studies (CASS), Lahore, hosted a high-level national seminar titled "Unleashing the Atom: Civilian Nuclear Power in the 21st Century." The event was widely attended by academia, students, intellectuals and domain experts. In her introductory remarks, Nidaa Shahid, Associate Director at CASS Lahore, emphasised Pakistan's achievements in civilian nuclear power and called for leveraging advanced technologies to keep Pakistan at the forefront of global nuclear innovation.

Dr Ansar Parvez, Advisor Nuclear Power to the National Command Authority (NCA), delivered a compelling keynote address tracing the global evolution of nuclear energy and Pakistan's civil nuclear journey. He noted the global resurgence in nuclear power but cautioned that public apprehensions, safety concerns, and regulatory challenges continue to hinder broader acceptance. He emphasised that the future of nuclear energy depends not only on safe and efficient plant operations but also on building sustained public trust.

Dr Javaid Khurshid, Consultant for Science, Communication, and Diplomacy at COM-STECH, emphasised that nuclear power, now increasingly recognised as a green, safe, and sustainable energy source, holds immense potential in addressing the



challenges of climate change. He highlighted the critical importance of responsible policymaking, effective science communication, and proactive public engagement in securing nuclear energy's long-term role in enhancing climate resilience and advancing sustainable development.

Mr Amer Manzoor, DG International Affairs Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission (PAEC), outlined global trends and emerging opportunities for Pakistan in the civil nuclear domain. He advocated for the integration of Small Modular Reactors (SMRs), as well as non-electric applications such as desalination and hydrogen production. He emphasised PAEC's pivotal role in driving sustainable development across energy, health, and agriculture, and highlighted the need for innovation-driven policies and robust institutional capacity to harness the full potential of nuclear technology.

In his concluding remarks, Air Marshal Asim Suleiman (Retd), President of CASS Lahore, highlighted that nuclear energy stands at the heart of

Pakistan's strategy for achieving energy security, environmental sustainability, and national resilience. He emphasised that with over 3,500 MW already contributed to the national grid, Pakistan's civil nuclear programme is a proven success, but must now evolve to meet 21st century demands. This includes embracing emerging technologies like SMRs, investing in research and innovation, localising the nuclear value chain, and cultivating the next generation of nuclear professionals. He stressed that nuclear energy is more than just an electricity source; it is a strategic pillar for national development, environmental responsibility and technological progress. Therefore, a forward-looking, inclusive approach is essential to fully harness the potential of nuclear energy for sustainable development. The seminar concluded with a lively Q&A session, engaging participants in a forward-looking discussion on innovations in the civil nuclear technology and its importance for sustainable development in Pakistan.

## KP cabinet okays purchase of 50 buses, health funds

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The 34th meeting of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Cabinet was held here on Friday with Chief Minister Ali Amin Khan Gandapur in the chair. Cabinet members, Chief Secretary, Additional Chief Secretaries, Senior Member Board of Revenue, Administrative Secretaries and Advocate General Khyber Pakhtunkhwa attended the meeting.

The cabinet approved the procurement of 50 additional identical diesel-hybrid buses for BRT Peshawar at an estimated cost of Rs. 3.2 billion. It is worth noting that TransPeshawar initially procured 220 buses, with 24 more added in 2022, bringing the fleet to 244. However, due to growing public demand and the expansion of operational routes from six to eight - including the recent addition of DR-11, DR-13, and DR-14 - the procurement of more buses has become essential.

The cabinet approved the merger of ADP Scheme campuses of the Model Institute for State Children "ZamungKor" located in Swat, D.I. Khan, Abbottabad, and the Girls Campus in Peshawar into the already functional autonomous body of the ZamungKor Model Institute for State Children, Peshawar. Currently, 600 children are enrolled at the Peshawar institute, while an additional 425 students are enrolled across the four ADP scheme campuses.

The cabinet approved signing of agreement between Pak Qatar Asset Management as the 13th Asset Management Company under CP Fund Rules 2022. To address the

## KP CM threatens to dissolve assembly

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur has said that he holds the authority to dissolve the provincial assembly at any time. In a video message, Gandapur stated that PTI's founding leader has been unjustly imprisoned and that their mandate was stolen after the events of May 9. "Despite all efforts to dismantle the KP government, the people of KP have stood by their mandate," he said.

He criticised the KP governor for not calling the budget session, terming it a constitutional responsibility. "The PTI founder has the legal and moral right to be consulted on the budget, yet he is being denied access," Gandapur added. He warned that failure to present the budget could allow the federal government to impose an economic emergency and take over the province. He directed all MPAs not to vote on the budget demands in today's session and said he will announce the next plan of action on Monday. "I have the authority to dissolve the assembly anytime—there is no requirement to wait for the budget," Gandapur declared. "This is a direct message to all institutions." He also cautioned party members that attempts were being made to repeat the events of May 9 and February 8. "PTI workers should prepare mentally and physically. We will not let this conspiracy succeed." He concluded by saying, "When we come out, no budget neither in the National Assembly nor in any province will be passed. The time is now. If not now, then when?"

issues of unsustainable pension expenses, the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa initiated pension reforms in 2015, which included the transition from an unfunded pension system to a funded pension scheme. Consequently, Contributory Provident Fund was introduced. Under the new system, contributions from both employees and government are invested in the market through professional asset management companies registered with the Security and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP).

In January 2022, the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa began entering into agreements with

asset management companies having SECP voluntary pension scheme licenses under the Contributory Provident Fund Rules, 2022. Consequently, 12 companies entered into agreement with the government to manage the Pension Fund.

The cabinet approved amendments in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Right to Public Services Act, 2014. The purpose of the amendment is to simply notifying Public Services, coordination between the Commission and Departments, clarification of the vague provision for e-governance, provision for public oversight and accountability of the Commission.

# Iran missiles strike Israel as war continue

(Continued from Page 1)

"I therefore, again call for maximum restraint." Iran's foreign minister on Friday condemned the Israeli attacks against the Islamic republic as a "betrayal" of diplomatic efforts with the US, saying Tehran and Washington had been due to craft a "promising agreement" on the Iranian nuclear programme. "We were attacked in the midst of an ongoing diplomatic process," Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi told the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva ahead of a crunch meeting with European foreign ministers.

Araghchi, making his first trip abroad since the strikes began, denounced Israel's attack as an "outrageous act of aggression". US Special Envoy Steve Witkoff had planned to meet Araghchi in Oman on June 15 but the meeting was cancelled after Israel began the strikes days before. Thousands of people joined a protest against Israel in the Iranian capital on Friday after weekly prayers, chanting slogans in support of their leaders, images on state television showed.

"This is the Friday of the Iranian nation's solidarity and resistance across the country," the news anchor

said. Footage showed protesters holding up photographs of commanders killed since the start of the war with Israel, while others waved the flags of Iran and the Lebanese militant movement Hezbollah. Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi rejected any negotiations with the United States while Israel continues its attacks on Iran, in an interview with state TV broadcast on Friday.

"The Americans have repeatedly sent messages calling seriously for negotiations. But we have made clear that as long as the aggression does not stop, there will be no place for diplomacy and dialogue," said the chief diplomat, who was due in Geneva for talks with his European counterparts. The head of Russia's nuclear energy corporation, Alexei Likhachev, said on Friday that Russian specialists were still working at the Bushehr nuclear power plant in Iran and that the situation there was normal and under control.

Likhachev said he hoped Russia's warnings to Israel not to attack the site had been received by the Israeli lead-

ership. Russia, which has close ties with Iran, has warned strongly against US military intervention on the side of Israel.

Israeli defense minister Israel Katz warned Lebanon's Hezbollah to exercise caution on Friday, saying Israel's patience with "terrorists" who threaten it had worn thin. Katz also instructed the military to intensify attacks on "symbols of the regime" in Tehran, aiming to destabilize it. "We must strike at all the symbols of the regime and the mechanisms of oppression of the population, such as the Basij (militia), and the regime's power base, such as the Revolutionary Guard."

The head of Iran-backed Hezbollah, Naim Qassem, said on Thursday that the Lebanese group would act as it saw fit in the face of what he called "brutal Israeli-American aggression" against Iran. Foreign ministers from Britain, France and Germany together with the EU's top diplomat will hold nuclear talks with their Iranian counterpart in Geneva on Friday, officials and diplomats said.

The meeting comes as European

countries call for de-escalation in the face of Israel's bombing campaign against Iran's nuclear program — and as US President Donald Trump weighs up whether or not to join the strikes against Tehran. "We will meet with the European delegation in Geneva on Friday," Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said in a statement carried by state news agency IRNA.

European diplomats separately confirmed the planned talks, set to involve French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot, British Foreign Secretary David Lammy and German Foreign Minister Johann Wadepuhl, as well as EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas. Britain's Foreign Secretary David Lammy said Thursday after meeting high-level US officials that there is still time to reach a diplomatic solution with Tehran.

Lammy met with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and special envoy Steve Witkoff at the White House, before talks on Friday in Geneva with Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi alongside his French, German and EU counterparts. "The

situation in the Middle East remains perilous," Lammy said in a statement released by the UK embassy in Washington. "We discussed how Iran must make a deal to avoid a deepening conflict. A window now exists within the next two weeks to achieve a diplomatic solution," Lammy said. Israel has targeted nuclear sites and missile capabilities, but also has sought to shatter the government of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, according to Western and regional officials.

"Are we targeting the downfall of the regime? That may be a result, but it's up to the Iranian people to rise for their freedom," Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Thursday. Iran has said it is targeting military and defense-related sites in Israel, but it has also hit a hospital and other civilian sites. Israel accused Iran on Thursday of deliberately targeting civilians through the use of cluster munitions, which disperse small bombs over a wide area. Iran's mission to the United Nations did not immediately respond to a request for com-

ment. With neither country backing down, the foreign ministers of Britain, France and Germany along with the European Union foreign policy chief were due to meet in Geneva with Iran's foreign minister to try to de-escalate the conflict on Friday.

"Now is the time to put a stop to the grave scenes in the Middle East and prevent a regional escalation that would benefit no one," said British Foreign Minister David Lammy ahead of their joint meeting with Abbas Araghchi, Iran's foreign minister. Iran fired at least one missile at Israel that scattered small bombs with the aim of increasing civilian casualties, the Israeli military said on Thursday, the first reported use of cluster munitions in the seven-day-old war. Israeli military officials provided no further details. Israeli news reports quoted the Israeli military as saying the missile's warhead split open at an altitude of about 4 miles and released around 20 submunitions in a radius of around 5 miles over central Israel. One of the small munitions struck a home in the central Israeli town of Azor, causing some damage. Times of Israel military correspondent Emanuel Fabian reported. There were no reports of casualties from the bomb. — Arab News