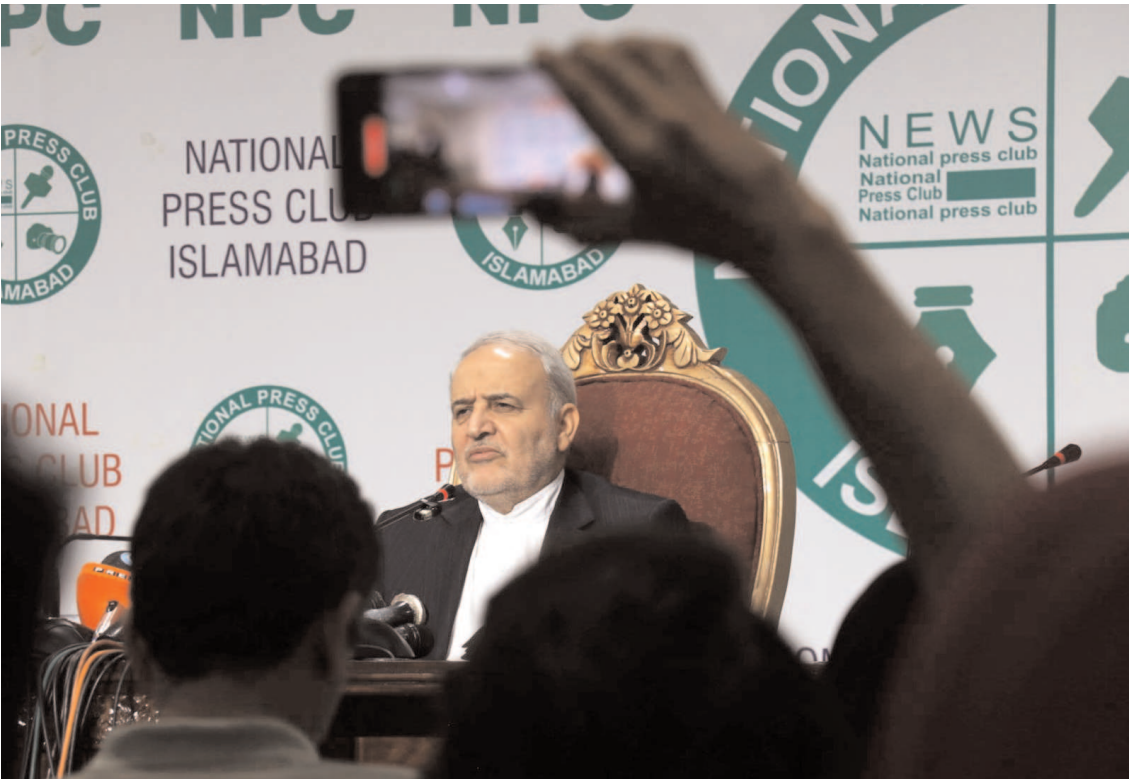


JI flays govt  
F.P. Report

LAHORE: Deputy Emir of Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) Pakistan, Liaqat Baloch, has strongly criticised the federal government and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif for recommending U.S. President Donald Trump for the Nobel Peace Prize, calling it a "blunder." In a statement, Baloch said the move reflected poor judgment in foreign policy.





ISLAMABAD: Iranian Ambassadors to Pakistan Reza Amiri-Moghaddam adressing a press conference at NPC. —INP Photo

## Pakistan's crucial ports and shipping industry underdeveloped: PDP

KARACHI (PPI): Pakistan's crucial ports and shipping industry is underdeveloped, and enhancing it could drastically improve the nation's economy, stated Pasban Democratic Party (PDP) Chairman Altaf Shakoor on Sunday.

Shakoor noted that despite extensive coastlines and major ports like Karachi and Gwadar, Pakistan trails behind in this vital sector due to flawed governmental strategies. He contrasted this with smaller countries like Denmark and Singapore, global leaders in the industry, attributing their success to focused government support.

Highlighting Denmark's maritime achievements, he credited the nation's rich seafaring history, innovative methodology, and strategic planning. Home to prominent shipping corporations like Maersk and DFDS, Denmark boasts a sophisticated maritime infrastructure, encompassing shipbuilders, technology firms, and research establish-

ments. The country excels in alternative fuels and wind propulsion, pioneering intelligent shipping solutions using AI and blockchain technology. Shakoor emphasized Denmark's supportive tax policies, incentives for shipping enterprises, substantial investments in green transition, and exceptional maritime education as key factors.

Turning to Singapore, he described the small nation as the world's busiest transshipment center and a maritime services leader. He pointed to the country's business-friendly environment, lack of capital gains tax, low corporate taxes, and free trade policies, which have attracted over 4,000 maritime companies. Singapore's focus on digital innovation is exemplified by the Tuas Port, set to become the world's largest fully automated terminal by 2040, utilizing AI, blockchain, and drone inspections.

Shakoor argued that Pakistan could similarly transform its ports

into world-class centers by adopting international best practices and capitalizing on its strategic location. Addressing current shortcomings like obsolete infrastructure, shallow drafts, and low efficiency, he advocated for modernizing equipment, deepening channels, and implementing AI-powered cranes, automated gates, and blockchain cargo tracking.

He proposed establishing specialized terminals for LNG and CPEC rail-linked terminals, drawing inspiration from China's Yangshan Port. He also suggested enhancing transshipment capabilities through incentives and duty-free policies similar to Dubai.

PDP chief further underscored the need for advanced marine engineering universities and the improvement of port areas like Keamari by tackling pollution, traffic congestion, and encroachments. He concluded that Karachi and Gwadar could become top global ports with adequate government focus and investment.

## BD university delegation concludes productive visit

ISLAMABAD (APP): A high-level academic delegation from Bangladesh has successfully concluded its week-long visit to Pakistan, resulting in the signing of over 20 Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with leading Pakistani universities and industry partners, marking a new chapter of academic collaboration between the two countries.

The seven-member delegation, comprising vice chancellors and senior officials from prominent universities of Bangladesh, visited Pakistan from June 16-21 at the invitation of the OIC Ministerial Standing Committee on Scientific and Technological Cooperation

(COMSTECH).

During the visit, the delegation toured top-tier Pakistani institutions in Lahore, Islamabad, and Murree, including member universities of the COMSTECH Consortium of Excellence (CCoE).

The MoUs signed with 20 leading Pakistani universities cover a wide range of collaborative areas such as faculty and student exchange, joint research projects, academic cooperation, sharing of expertise and infrastructure, conference organization, and PhD fee waivers.

A key highlight was the agreement with Gourmet Foods, aimed at offering industrial internships to

Bangladeshi students, enhancing practical skills, and industry-academia linkages.

The delegation was hosted at receptions organized by Dr. Chaudhary Abdul Rehman, Chairman, Association of Private Sector Universities of Pakistan; Md. Iqbal Hussain Khan, High Commissioner for the People's Republic of Bangladesh Bangladesh to Pakistan; and Prof. Dr. Muhammad Iqbal Choudhary, Coordinator General, COMSTECH, where they interacted with the stakeholders on different areas of mutual cooperation.

Speaking at the conclusion of the visit, the Bangladeshi delegation

## DC reviews LDP progress, emphasizes timely completion

LAHORE (APP): Deputy Commissioner Syed Musa Raza chaired a weekly review meeting to assess the pace and quality of ongoing development projects under the Lahore Development Programme.

The meeting was attended by Additional Deputy Commissioner (Finance and Planning) Hafiz Mudasar Nawaz and Chief Officer Metropolitan Corporation Lahore Shahid Abbas Kathia. Assistant Commissioners briefed the DC on the progress of development schemes in their respective areas.

DC Syed Musa Raza reiterated that

there would be no compromise on transparency, quality, and deadlines in the execution of Lahore Development Programme. He stated that all projects initiated under the vision of Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif would be completed within the specified time frame.

He directed the WASA to expedite sewerage and water supply works to prevent unnecessary delays and ensure uninterrupted civic services for residents. The DC further instructed immediate removal of encroachments in development zones to facilitate smooth construction.

To enhance the aesthetics of city neighborhoods, the DC ordered that raised platforms and street shades be demolished wherever they obstruct development. He stressed that all infrastructure must be durable, sustainable, and citizen-friendly, ensuring long-term convenience and better urban living standards. He also directed the NESPAK to ensure strict quality control in all ongoing works and maintain regular site inspections. "There will be no leniency on timeline adherence, transparency, or work standards," he added.



LAHORE: Porters rest on a swing under the shade of a tree, taking a break outside the railway station. —APP Photo

## Punjab Police issues 26,489 driving licences

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Police continues its robust campaign to ensure efficient public service delivery and strict enforcement of traffic laws across the province.

In the last 24 hours alone, 26,489 citizens were issued driving licenses, reflecting the department's commitment to timely and accessible services.

According to the Punjab Police spokesperson, a total of 40,593 challans were issued for various violations of traffic rules, generating fines worth Rs. 24 million. In addition, 600 smoke-emitting vehicles were fined for environmental violations, and 91 of these were impounded at respective police stations.

Inspector General of Punjab Police Dr. Usman Anwar stressed the need to continue strict actions against those violating traffic laws and called for effective recovery of outstanding traffic fines from defaulters. He reiterated the department's resolve to promote safe driving practices and ensure cleaner, safer roads across Punjab.

## Tahaffuz Marakaz assist 33,800 individuals in Punjab

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Police's Tahaffuz Marakaz are playing a vital role in offering protection, care, and assistance to vulnerable and marginalised groups across the province.

According to a Punjab Police spokesperson, 33,893 individuals have benefited from the services provided at these centres so far this year. The beneficiaries include 16,483 women, 12,622 children, and 4,788 transgender persons.

In Lahore alone, 534 individuals received help at the Tahaffuz Marakaz, comprising 382 women, 132 transgender persons, and 20 children. Currently, 38 Tahaffuz Marakaz are operating across Punjab, including three in the provincial capital.

Inspector General of Punjab Police Dr Usman Anwar directed officials to expand outreach programs and ensure prompt support to victims of gender-based violence, exploitation, social insecurity, and abuse.

## MT section backbone of Police force: AIG logistics

ISLAMABAD (APP): Additional Inspector General (AIG) Logistics Abdul Haq Umrani conducted a detailed visit to the Motor Transport (MT) Headquarters, reviewing the performance of the police fleet, workshop arrangements, and fleet management system, while issuing key directives to improve service delivery.

An official told APP on Sunday that on the occasion, AIG Abdul Haq reviewed the performance of the motor transport staff, inspected the condition of vehicles, workshop arrangements, and other fleet management affairs and issued directives for improving the service station.

Senior officers briefed the AIG Abdul Haq on the number of current vehicles, repair processes, challenges faced, and daily performance. AIG Abdul Haq also inspected the workshops, stores, and parking areas and interacted with the staff.

AIG instructed for immediate repair of non-functional vehicles, speeding up the supply of spare parts, and taking prompt steps to resolve the issues faced by the workshop staff.

AIG Abdul Haq emphasized that the Motor Transport (MT) is the backbone of the police force, and its improvement is directly linked to the success of operations. All officers and personnel should perform their duties with honesty and professionalism.

## Sindh opens showroom of ENVEREX EV electric cars

KARACHI (PPI): Sindh pushes for green transportation with the inauguration of the first ENVEREX EV electric car showroom by Provincial Energy Minister Syed Nasir Hussain Shah.

The minister, joined by ENVEREX Industries CEO Muhammad Zakir Ali and other officials, opened the facility and examined the displayed vehicles, receiving a briefing on the cars and post-purchase support, including home charging installation.

Minister Shah told the press, "We commend the domestic manufacturing of electric vehicles and pledge our full backing. The Sindh government is

The running cost for these vehicles is merely four rupees per kilometer."

Following Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari's environmental focus, the Sindh administration is actively encouraging green energy initiatives. Public land will host charging stations, and new constructions in Sindh must incorporate charging provisions. Stations will appear in major cities and along highways every 30 to 40 kilometers for driver convenience.

Dedicated funding, directed by Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, will support environmentally conscious ventures. The Sindh government is

dedicated to providing necessary resources for such projects, aiming to transition more cars and motorcycles to electric power. The availability of charging infrastructure is crucial to the success of electric vehicle adoption, Shah stressed.

"Investors in eco-friendly businesses will receive governmental support. The Sindh government encourages local manufacturing and will provide tax breaks for the electric vehicle sector," the minister confirmed.

The showroom opening concluded with a celebratory cake-cutting and the presentation of traditional Sindh gifts to the provincial minister.

## Punjab govt finalises foolproof security

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Health Minister and Chairman Cabinet Committee on Law and Order Khawaja Salman Rafique has said that all stakeholders are united on one platform to ensure fool-proof security arrangements during Muharram-ul-Haram.

He expressed these views while presiding over a meeting on Sunday, convened to review and finalise security measures for Muharram on the special directions of Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif. The Cabinet Committee also visited key procession routes, including Nisar Haveli and Karbala Gamay Shah, to inspect the on-ground security preparedness.

Khawaja Salman Rafique informed the meeting that comprehensive security plans have been finalised for all 5,235 gatherings and 927 processions across Lahore Division. He stated that 76 Zakireen and speakers have been district-listed, and language restrictions have been imposed on 71 individuals to maintain

peace. He added that police, Rescue 1122, Civil Defense, Pakistan Army, and Rangers will jointly perform duties during the holy month.

The minister emphasized that security arrangements were made in close consultation with the organizers of processions and majalis. He also highlighted that the Punjab government is ensuring uninterrupted electricity and water supply along all procession routes. "The role of Ulema and scholars is vital in promoting religious harmony and unity among Muslims during Muharram," he said.

Punjab Minister Bilal Yasin stressed the importance of rooftop deployments to enhance security, while Minister Bilal Akbar Khan informed that all hanging wires are being removed and patchwork on roads is underway to facilitate safe passage of processions. Minister Malik Sohaib Ahmed Bharath noted that security arrangements are being reviewed across the province through on-

ground visits.

Home Secretary Dr. Ahmed Javed Qazi briefed the meeting on efforts to curb the spread of hate speech and misinformation on social media during Muharram. He said the government has taken concrete steps to prevent the misuse of online platforms.

Members of Peace Committees, procession organizers, scholars, and Mashaikhs expressed satisfaction over the arrangements. Commissioner Lahore and RPO Sheikhpura, along with DCs and DPOs from Lahore, Kasur, Nankana Sahib, and Sheikhpura were also present in the meeting.

The meeting was further attended by the Divisional Peace Committee, prominent Ulema, Mashaikh, Additional IG Special Branch, and DIG Counter Terrorism Department (CTD), who all provided detailed briefings and reaffirmed their commitment to maintaining peace and harmony during Muharram-ul-Haram.

## PDMA Punjab urges vigilance

ISLAMABAD (APP): Though scattered showers hit parts of the region, the majority remained under a humid atmosphere, leading PDMA Punjab to issue a warning for citizens to stay cautious and take precautions against the light rain and muggy conditions.

The spokesperson of PDMA Punjab in a recent statement with PTV news channels emphasized the need for residents to remain cautious amid ongoing weather conditions.

With light rain continuing in various regions and high humidity persisting,

the public is urged to take appropriate precautions to ensure their safety. The advisory comes in response to the potential health risks associated with such weather patterns.

The spokesperson particularly highlighted the combination of rain and humidity, which can lead to slippery roads and increased chances of heat-related illnesses.

Citizens have been advised to avoid unnecessary outdoor activities, especially during peak rainfall hours and to stay hydrated. In addition, driv-

ers are urged to exercise caution on the roads, as the wet conditions could lead to reduced visibility and longer braking distances.

PDMA Punjab assures the public that all agencies are on high alert and will continue to monitor the situation closely.

Citizens are advised to follow all safety guidelines and remain informed through official channels.

The authorities are committed to ensuring the safety and well-being of the public throughout the duration of the ongoing weather conditions.

## ESD responds 1,176 road traffic crashes across all 37 Punjab districts

LAHORE (INP): The Emergency Services Department (ESD) responded to 1,176 road traffic crashes (RTCs) across all 37 districts of Punjab in the last 24 hours, in which 13 people died and 1,386 were injured.

Of the total injured, 643 people with serious injuries were shifted to hospitals, while 743 with minor injuries were treated at the scene by Rescue 1122 medical teams, helping reduce the burden on emergency wards.

According to rescue 1122 spokesperson, a significant 74 percent of the accidents involved motorcycles, indicating an urgent need for stricter enforcement of traffic rules, especially regarding lane discipline and helmet use, to help prevent such incidents.

The breakdown of victims shows that among those injured or died were 741 drivers, including 66 underage drivers, 148 pedestrians, and 510 passengers.

Lahore recorded the highest number of accidents with 222 crashes, leaving 260 people affected, followed by Faisalabad with 86 crashes and 108 victims, and Multan with 82 crashes involving 85 victims.

In terms of gender, 1,134 males and 265 females were among the victims.

The age distribution indicates that 301 victims were under 18 years, 727 between 18 and 40 years, and 471 were over 40 years of age.

The vehicles involved included 1,089 motorcycles, 76 auto-rickshaws, 134 cars, 33 vans, 11 passenger buses, 37 trucks, and 90 other vehicles, including slow-moving carts.

These alarming figures highlight the critical need for road safety education, improved enforcement of traffic regulations, and targeted interventions to protect vulnerable road users across Punjab.

## 5,180 water filtration plants to be outsourced

LAHORE (APP): The Punjab government has decided that 5,180 water filtration plants across the province would be outsourced and their samples will be checked through laboratory tests.

Chief Executive Officer Punjab Saaf Paani Authority Syed Zahid Aziz, while talking to APP, said that initially 1,800 filtration plants would be outsourced to ensure provision of water to people according to the vision of Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif.

He said the water filtration plants' samples would be checked through lab tests as experts say that contaminated water was a major contributor to disease, with some studies indicating that it was responsible for around 60 per cent of diseases. He said in developing countries, specifically waterborne diseases like diarrhea, cholera, dysentery, hepatitis, and typhoid are often linked to the consumption of unsafe water. He said according to the vision of the the chief minister, "Every drop of water is precious.





**PESHAWAR:** Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Karim Kundi presenting the Maarka-e-Haq Award to journalists including Peshawar Press Club President M. Riaz.

## Transparency, timely completion of projects termed a challenge

PESHAWAR (APP): In light of the Good Governance Roadmap Program, dealing matters with merit and transparency in institutions is the top priority, for which the biggest challenge is to complete the ongoing energy projects in the department within the stipulated time frame.

Following directives of the Chief Secretary, all officers, officials should do their part in enabling e-tendering, e-paid, one-window platform. These views were expressed by Secretary Energy and Power Muhammad Zubair Khan in a meeting attended by the heads of PEDO, KPOil and Gas Company, Electric Inspectorate and Energy Planning Directorate regarding the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Good Governance Roadmap here.

Additional Secretary Admin Shoaib Khan,

Additional Secretary Power Anwar Khan Sherani and other senior officers also attended the meeting.

Meanwhile, the Secretary while emphasizing the strict implementation of the guidelines set for ongoing energy projects, said that currently work is progressing rapidly on Balakot, Lawi, Gorkin Matiltan, Gabral Kalam, and Madyen Hydropower projects. Secretary added

that timely completion of these projects within the stipulated time frame is a major challenge. He stressed to complete the ongoing energy projects in view of the prevailing circumstances and to promote investment in these projects by amending and revising the Power Policy 2016. He issued instructions to prepare work plans, timelines and activity plans to bring transparency in all projects.

## Speaker KP Assembly strongly condemns US attack on Iran

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: Speaker of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly, Babar Saleem Swati, has strongly condemned the unprovoked US attack on Iran's nuclear installations, terming it a grave violation of Iran's sovereignty, territorial integrity, the UN Charter, and international law.

He stated that this aggression has come at a



time when Iran is already facing hostilities from Israel, and such actions will only escalate regional tensions and endanger global peace.

Babar Saleem Swati expressed full solidarity

and sympathy with the people and government of Iran, emphasizing that the international community must take notice of this blatant aggression and play its role in ensuring peace and stability in the Middle East.

He further added that global institutions like the United Nations must not remain silent spectators and must play their role in upholding international law.

## Clean water – A necessity for healthy life

PESHAWAR (APP): As the early morning sun casts a golden hue over Peshawar's dusty roads, the 40-year-old rickshaw driver from Lala Kala village loads six large tanks of clean drinking water from Chamkani, hauling them back home for his extended family of 15.

For many might be taking it as a burden, but Abdul Waheed had been beginning his day with this practice for the past three years, to provide clean drinking water for his family as a necessity of life.

"My brother died of cardiac arrest in 2022, and I took it upon myself to provide clean water for both of our families," Waheed shared, wiping beads of sweat trailing down his face.

"Our local water has turned toxic. And it is not just about thirst anymore but about our survival."

Waheed is not alone in this struggle. Thousands of residents from Peshawar's peripheral villages including Tarnab, Akbarpura, Taru, Amankot, Khuderzai, Babay Jadeed, Tarkha, Korvi and Khushmaqam face similar struggles daily in sizzling heat.

Contaminated water is resulting in diseases like cholera, hepatitis A and diarrhea in areas where untreated human and industrial waste and agricultural runoff seep into groundwater supplies and water courses.

The 2022 floods dealt a lasting blow to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's water systems, altering water tables and contaminating wells. Today, nearly 90% of Peshawar's population reportedly relies on unfiltered water, exposing them to a range of serious health risks.

Even in affluent urban areas like Hayatabad and University Town, clean water is hard to come by. Despite paying municipal taxes, many residents resort to purchasing water from private tankers due



to outdated infrastructure and rusted pipelines—some of which haven't been replaced in decades.

In 2020, KP passed the Water Act to regulate water management and resource allocation.

But according to experts, the lack of an operational Water Resources Regulatory Authority and red tapism have hindered its enforcement.

"Clean drinking water has emerged as a major crisis in Peshawar these days," said Dr. Naemur Rehman Khattak, former Chairman Economics Department at University of Peshawar.

"Despite legislation, poor implementation and weak institutional capacity in KP have turned availability of clean water a daily life challenge."

Citing declining rainfall, over-extraction by car wash centers, and poor planning as compounding factors, he said, "we've seen Pakistan's per capita water availability falling from 5,260 cubic meters in 1951 to barely 1,000 today. This is water scarcity, plain and simple."

Amidst this grim scenario where clean drinking water and overall per capita water availability continues to be a challenge, he said new water storage and energy projects are now offering a glimmer of hope for people.

Construction on the Mohmand Dam, one of the largest hydropower projects in Pakistan, is well underway.

This 213 meters high dam to be completed by 2027-28 is poised to store 1.29 million acre-feet water, irrigate 18,233 acres of new land and support 160,000 acres of existing farmland. Critically, it will provide 300 million gallons of clean drinking water per day to Peshawar, a game-changer for the city's residents.

"This dam would not just provide water and power—it will protect districts like Charsadda and Nowshera from floods. It is a lifeline," said Engr Zahoor, Director at WAPDA.

In tandem with Mohmand Dam, the provincial government is pushing forward with multiple small and medium-sized dam projects to address water and energy woes of the people.

According to Engr Tariq Sadozai, Special Assistant to the Chief Minister on Energy, 56 small dams have already been completed in KP with a total storage capacity of 281,410 acre-feet, irrigating over 300,000 acres of land.

"Unlike mega dams, small dams can be constructed within two to three years and are ideal

for the topography of KP," Sadozai explained.

"We are targeting areas like Kohat, Karak, Lakki Marwat, Swabi and Nowshera with 30 more small dams projects, many in the final stages."

The push for renewable energy is also gaining ground. Eight hydroelectric projects have been completed, generating 172 MW of power and earning the province over Rs five billion annually.

Projects like 84 MW Gorkin Matiltan in Swat and 40.8 MW Koto HPP in Dir are expected to come online this year, contributing to KP's clean energy goals and providing revenue to fund further water infrastructure.

Despite this progress on the water and energy front, experts caution against viewing dams as a silver bullet. "New storage projects must be environmentally sustainable," warned Dr. Naem.

"Sedimentation, displacement of communities, and water rights must be addressed carefully."

Others highlight the need for regulatory enforcement and public education on water conservation. "If unchecked car wash centers and illegal groundwater extraction continue, even our best infrastructure efforts may fall short," said Dr. Nafees Ahmad, Chairman Environmental Sciences Department, Peshawar University.

For now, he hoped that a blend of large-scale infrastructure, community-level interventions, and better governance will steer KP out of its water crisis.

But for people like Abdul Waheed, every rickshaw ride is a reminder of continued struggles that underpin Pakistan's looming water emergency.

"We need clean water like we need clean air," Waheed said. "It is not a luxury but a necessity for healthy life."

## Kundi accuses KP govt of clinging to power, raises concerns over governance

PESHAWAR (APP): Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Karim Kundi on Sunday accused the provincial government of being unwilling to give up power at any cost, claiming that the current administration sees Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur as a "golden goose" and is merely bluffing about dissolving the provincial assembly.

Speaking to a delegation of journalists from Dera Ismail Khan, led by senior journalists Muhammad Irfan Mughal and Saeedullah Marwat, Governor Kundi said that the KP government is desperate to pass its budget, even if it means using indirect means.

He added that despite the Chief Minister's threats, meeting Imran Khan is not an option for the government, and it will

find excuses to ensure the budget gets approved.

He warned that the possibility of an emergency in the province could not be ruled out, and predicted that Gandapur would resort to any tactic necessary to retain power.

During the meeting, which included journalists Muhammad Rehan, Naveed Sultan, M. Salahuddin, Ahmad Mughal, Abdullah Jan, Hammad, Nusrat, Adil Waqar and others, regional issues and public grievances were discussed in detail.

The Governor expressed concern over the deteriorating security situation in the province and criticized the provincial government's lack of interest.

He said that the survey for the Dera Ismail Khan International Airport is in progress, and the Lift

Canal project has entered the re-tendering phase under Wapda, with phased planning underway.

Addressing the issue of load shedding, Governor Kundi said the power outages in Dera Ismail Khan are unbearable.

He rejected Wapda's justification regarding low recoveries and pressure from Islamabad, saying that the public should be given control over feeders and that load shedding should be proportionate to recovery rates.

Highlighting the injustice stemming from the 1991 water agreement, he said Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has not received its due water share and urged the federal government to grant the province its rightful share.

He also demanded that the provincial government take control of local electricity distribution companies (DISCOs).

The Governor revealed that 14,000 out of 24,000 Wapda posts in the province remain vacant, exacerbating the electricity crisis.

He criticized the excessive load shedding and low voltage, calling it a form of cruelty, especially amid the ongoing heat-wave in the region.

He announced plans to hold another meeting with Wapda officials in the coming days to resolve the crisis and suggested that power management would improve significantly if the province were given control over electricity.

Governor Kundi also alleged that Wapda staff are complicit in electricity theft and emphasized the need to address the injustices faced by the local population regarding the Yarik Toll Plaza on the Indus Highway.

## Ideology and Islam: Two distinct concepts merged

**Rehman Yar**

**FOR decades, this question has sparked intense debate. The commonly held belief is that Pakistan was created in the name of Islam - that its very foundation rests on Islamic principles. But is this understanding complete or even accurate? Did Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, envision a religious state governed by clerics? Or was his idea rooted in something broader - a modern, inclusive state where Muslims could live freely, without fear of cultural domination, while respecting the rights of minorities?**

The debate about the nature and character of the Pakistani state has never been more tense than it is today. Some factions, such as the Pakistani Taliban and other religious groups, openly advocate for a theocratic state governed by Shari'a law.

Others argue that Islam has little to do with the state. Most Pakistanis would perhaps reflect a balance between these two positions. In this debate, there is no voice more important than Muhammad Ali Jinnah's, the founder of Pakistan.

Plainly, the Quaid-e-Azam never once used the phrase "Ideology of Pakistan" during the struggle for independence or even after the country's formation. He has made it very clear what basis the state had been created on, in one of his most important speeches, on August 11th and 14th, 1947, which has been given the title of "Gettysburg Address" by Akbar Ahmed. He was

aware of the ongoing crises and disturbances and made consistent speeches through radio and public meetings. He clearly wanted a secular state, not a theocratic one.

In a 1948 broadcast to the United States, Jinnah stated: "Pakistan is not going to be a theocratic state ruled by priests with a divine mission...". When his enthusiastic admirers addressed him as 'Maulana Jinnah' (Our Master Jinnah) he put them down, saying, 'I am not a maulana, just plain Mr Jinnah.' These statements reflect a clear rejection of religious extremism or clerical rule.

The founder of Pakistan has made it clear in his speeches that everyone is free in this state. Religion, caste, or creed has nothing to do with the business of the state. Moreover, Jinnah attended events hosted by various religious communities -Hindus, Christians, and Parsees - to reinforce the idea that Pakistan belonged to all citizens.

Muhammad Ali Jinnah was as clear as crystal, and his guidance was superb. He wanted a progressive Pakistan where people lived and worked in accordance with the principles of Islam, namely, equality, fraternity, and justice.

He didn't at any time envisage the creation of a backward theocratic state, Islamic in name and totally un-Islamic otherwise. Then where did Ideology of Pakistan come from?

For fifteen years after the establishment of Pakistan, the ideology of Pakistan was not known to anybody until, in 1962, a solidarity member of Jamat-i-Islami for the first time used the words when the 'Political Parties Bill'

was being discussed. Ayub Khan had made a cabinet in 1962, and the Political Parties Bill was under discussion, and a person moved an amendment to the bill proposing that no party would be formed whose object was opposed to the 'ideology of Pakistan'. On this, Chaudhary Fazal Ilahi, who was the former president of Pakistan, rose from his seat and objected that then 'ideology of Pakistan' shall have to be defined. Then, the member who had moved the original amendment replied that the ideology of Pakistan was 'Islam', but nobody asked him the further question, "What is Islam?" If an ideology is mixed with religion, wouldn't it become unfair or one-sided, especially for people who don't follow that religion?

Furthermore, the ideology of Jamat-i-Islami at that time was perfectly simple. It aimed at the establishment of the sovereignty of Allah throughout the world, which, in other words, means the establishment of a religio-political state, which the Jamat called Islam. According to them, a government which is not based on the conception of a nation is, according to Maulana Amin Ahsan Islahi, a Sanatic government, and according to Maulana Abul Ala Maududi himself, it is Kufr; all persons taking part in government, whether as administrators or otherwise or willingly submitting to such system, are sinners. Ulama at that time had extremely conflicting arguments about the ideology of Pakistan. Most of the interviews taken from different Ulama Heads from different sects have been present in the book "From

Jinnah to Zia" by Muhammad Munir - Chief Justice of Pakistan (Retd).

The concept of Pakistan's ideology remains an enormously contested and evolving narrative. While it is often simplistically equated with Islam, a closer examination of Muhammad Ali Jinnah's speeches and intentions reveals a vision of a modern, democratic, and inclusive state. One rooted in justice, equality, and the protection of minority rights, not in theocracy or clerical rule. Jinnah explicitly rejected the idea of a state run by religious authorities and emphasized that religion was a personal matter, not a foundation for governance.

The term "Ideology of Pakistan" only began to gain formal usage years after independence, shaped more by political maneuvering and the rise of religious parties than by the founder's original blueprint. This posthumous reinterpretation has led to confusion and even conflict over the identity and direction of the country. If ideology is to be the guiding principle of the state, it must be clearly defined, inclusive, and in harmony with the principles of justice, liberty, and equality that Jinnah so passionately advocated.

As Pakistan continues to grapple with questions of identity and governance, returning to the clarity and foresight of Jinnah's original vision could serve as a unifying compass-steering the state away from extremism and towards a truly progressive, pluralistic future.

*Writer is student of Public Policy at Government College University, Lahore.*

## CUSIT conducts first phase of Goodwill & Talent Scholarship Test

PESHAWAR (APP): City University of Science and Information Technology (CUSIT), a private sector university in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, successfully conducted the first phase of its Goodwill & Talent Scholarship Test on Sunday at the university's Main Campus located on Dilazak Road here.

The initiative, aimed at recognizing academic potential and offering financial assistance to talented students, witnessed an enthusiastic turnout of over 250 candidates from across the region. Students from various educational backgrounds participated in the test, aspiring to secure scholarships for their higher education at CUSIT.

The scholarship test forms part of the university's broader mission to promote accessible and affordable quality education, and to support bright students who may face financial constraints in pursuing their academic dreams.

According to university officials, the program also helps foster goodwill between the university and

the local community by encouraging academic excellence and providing opportunities to deserving individuals. Dr. Imranullah Khan, Registrar of CUSIT, expressed his satisfaction over the smooth conduct of the test and the level of participation, saying that "We are extremely pleased to see such a positive response from students and parents".

"Our objective is not only to offer financial support but to identify and nurture talent that can contribute meaningfully to society". "Education is the key to the future, and CUSIT remains committed to helping students achieve their goals," he added.

The second phase of the Goodwill & Talent Scholarship Test is scheduled to be held on June 29, at the same venue. Students who were unable to participate in the first phase still have the opportunity to register and appear in the upcoming session.

The registrar said interested students and parents can visit the official CUSIT website or contact the university's admissions office for information.







## In brief

### Young woman killed in wedding Allah Dad Chandoi

LARKANA: Yesterday, a 17-year-old young woman, Irfana Dhi Sikandar Jatoi, who had come to attend a wedding ceremony in village Badu Jatoi of Ratodero taluka near Larkana, was shot dead by her cousin and fled. On receiving information, the police reached the spot and took the body into custody and handed it over to her heirs after necessary formalities from the taluka hospital. On this occasion, the deceased woman, JP Sikandar Jatoi, while shouting in front of the media, said that her daughter was sleeping at home when the accused Irfan shot her dead without any reason. We are poor while the oppressor has oppressed us. According to the police, the investigation into the incident has been started and the results will be out soon. On the other hand, there is a rumor in the area that the woman was killed by her husband in the name of honor.

### Land dispute claims five lives

BANNU (APP): At least five people were killed in an exchange of gunfire between two groups over a land dispute in Bannu district, police said on Sunday. According to police, the incident took place in the Mamand Khel area, where confrontation over land ownership escalated into an armed clash. The exchange of fire left five individuals dead on the spot, while three others sustained injuries and were rushed to the hospital for treatment. The deceased have been identified as Abid son of Saifullah, Ibrahim son of Najeeb, Shah Baraz son of Noor Uddin, Noor Shah Alam son of Noor Uddin, and Samiullah son of Mah Baraz. Police reported that three of the deceased belonged to one group, while the other two were from the opposing side. Police and law enforcers reached the scene promptly after receiving information about the incident and started investigation.

### drugstores challaned

SARGODHA (APP): Acting on the directives of the Chief Minister Punjab Drug Task Force, Deputy Drug Controller Dr Faheem Zia conducted surprise inspections at various medical stores in Tehsil Shahpur on Sunday. According to official sources, during the raids, significant quantities of unregistered and undocumented medicines including controlled drugs and narcotics were recovered from three medical store owners: Mumtaz, Zohaib, and Feroze. Legal proceedings were initiated under the Drug Act 1976, and formal challans were sent to the District Quality Control Board, Sargodha, for further legal action. Samples of five different types of medicines were collected from Khan Medical Store and dispatched to the Drug Testing Laboratory in Rawalpindi for quality verification, Deputy Drug Controller Dr Faheem Zia added.

### CTD sub-inspector killed

KALAT (INP): Five people were killed while four were injured in different incidents in Kalat. Sources in the police and Levies told that Fida Ahmad, a sub-inspector in CTD, was killed after unidentified persons sprayed him with bullets. Similarly, two personnel of the bomb disposal squad were killed while four were injured in a bomb explosion near a police checkpoint at Mangchar.

# Swat boat accident: Death toll rises to four

Shafi ullah

SWAT: The death toll in the Kalam Shahi Bagh boat accident has risen to four, with the bodies of two children recovered from the Swat River. The victims' bodies were shifted to Matta Hospital for further proceedings.

A case has been registered against the boat owner, and all agencies, including Rescue 1122, are participating in the rescue operation. The search for one missing person is still ongoing.

The unfortunate family that died in the incident belongs to Shergarh Mardan.

The victims who lost their lives in the tragic incident are Miss Fatima, 35, wife of Bashir Zamin, Asiya, 20, daughter of Muhammad Zarin, Nadia, 4, daughter of Faisal, Umar, 6, son of Faisal.

The boat capsized in the water due to engine failure in the tourist area of Swahti Shahi Bagh, resulting in 10 people being on board. Five people were rescued alive,

while the bodies of two women were recovered from Shahi Bagh.

The locals, police, and 1122 rescue personnel are busy searching for the following missing persons, Owais, 14, son of Muhammad Zamin, Sadid's condition is mentioned as rescued injured, however, one more child is still mentioned missing.

The authorities are working tirelessly to locate the missing persons and provide support to the affected families.

## Rescue 1122 conducts mock exercise

FAISALABAD (APP): Punjab Emergency Services (Rescue-1122) conducted a mock exercise to respond to potential flood emergencies in and around the district.

A spokesman for the Rescue-1122 said here on Sunday the mock drill was conducted at Gugera Branch Canal in Jaranwala to evaluate operational readiness and strengthen inter-departmental coordination in the face of natural

disasters.

Assistant Commissioner Jaranwala Aurangzeb Goraya witnessed the exercise as a chief guest.

He reviewed the various departmental camps and appreciated their readiness.

Rescue & Safety Officer Muhammad Shahid gave a detailed briefing on Rescue-1122's flood response strategies and preparedness measures.

Various departments actively participated in the

exercise including health, civil defence, social welfare, police, traffic wardens, agriculture, municipal committee, education and livestock.

Each department set up dedicated camps to demonstrate their flood-response capabilities and coordination protocols.

Rescue 1122's Water Rescue Team demonstrated and showcased their quick and skilled techniques in saving drowning victims.

## Conference on biotechnology ends

Sahibzada Afridi

KOHAT: Bio-Hub International on Biotechnology and Bioengineering Successfully Concluded at Kohat University

The Department of Biotechnology and Genetic Engineering at Kohat University of Science and Technology (KUST), in collaboration with the Office of Research, Innovation and Commercialization (ORIC), successfully organized a two-day Bio-Hub International Conference on Biotechnology and Bioengineering.

The prestigious academic and research event was supported by the Directorate General of Science and Technology (DGST), Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The conference was inaugurated by the Director of Directorate General of Science and Technology, who, in his opening address, highlighted the global and regional significance of

biotechnology in addressing challenges in health, agriculture, and industry.

Prof. Dr. Noor Muhammad, Head of the Department of Biotechnology, served as the chief organizer of the event, while the faculty and students of the department played a vital role in organizing and managing the conference. Prof. Dr. Muhammad Jamil, Dean of the Faculty of Biological Sciences, was the Patron, and Prof. Dr. Syed Zafar Ilyas, Vice Chancellor of KUST, served as the Chief Patron.

The international gathering was attended by distinguished scholars and researchers from countries including Germany, China, Australia, Turkey, Chile, Sweden, and the United States. They delivered keynote and invited talks, sharing insights on cutting-edge trends, research, and innovations in biotechnology and bio-engineering.

Renowned experts from leading Pakistani institutions also participated, including NIBGE

Faisalabad, Quaid-i-Azam University Islamabad, Precision Medicine Lab RMI, University of Peshawar, Islamia College University Peshawar, University of Science and Technology Bannu, University of Malakand Chakdara, and NUST Islamabad.

More than 20 PhD researchers presented their research papers, while over 50 students showcased their innovative projects through poster presentations. The conference drew participation from over 200 students, with a notable number from the merged districts, reflecting inclusivity and regional academic integration.

Vice Chancellor Prof. Dr. Syed Zafar Ilyas congratulated Prof. Dr. Noor Muhammad and his team on the successful organization of the conference and expressed hope that such academic and research activities in the field of biotechnology would continue with the same momentum in the future.



# Dying souls of culturally rich rural traditions

MULTAN (APP): When the mankind galloped off on the road to modernism, many primitive values were trampled down knowingly or unknowingly, to be replaced by modern living and styles.

Some very noble and heart-soothing cultural and traditional values faded away with the passage of time entirely changing the lifestyle, overall social fabrics and even the family system.

Once used to maintain strong binding among communities in both rural and urban areas, many traditions have slowly been swallowed by modernity and inflationary trends. These customs not just cultural but a basis for emotional lifelines, are no more seen around.

From the 'panchayat' system to 'saipi' (barter) system, community living and many other dying beautiful traditions tell the

story of a matchless cohesive rural life. "Panchayat was a nice tradition of village life – an informal platform for dispute resolution by the elders at village level," said Rao Liaquat, a social worker and political figure. "The panchayat was not about the law but a mode of collective wisdom to resolve disputes with consensus, honor and dignity." "It was more than a local court. It was the village's conscience, saving locals from unnecessary litigation. But, it is no more there and today people spend millions of rupees with counsels at courts," he remarked.

The grace of this system lied in its functioning. Comprised of respected elders, 'panchayat' used to gather at common place along with other villagers and local resolve the disputes like quarrels, fighting, boundary conflict, family misunderstanding

or financial issues.

"There was no lawyer or a case like in a court or the paperwork," Rao Liaquat maintained. "The decision of the elders was final and accepted with respect. It wasn't always about punishing. But, reaching a settlement with dignity and harmony."

This system not only used to resolve issues quickly and without any cost but also preserved relationships. Today, with its decline, minor matters often turn into long legal battles, draining time and resources.

Similarly, there used to be 'Night Patrol' by the youth who used to march or gather at important points of a village to guard the residents from thieves and decoits.

In an age when there were no CCTV cameras and private security, young men from the village used to take turns keeping

watch during the night walking through streets often carrying batons and lanterns.

"We didn't see it as a duty. It was a pride. We were guardians of our people. The village slept peacefully because we stayed awake," shared a teacher Israr Khari, recalling his youth days.

"That system created a deep sense of shared responsibility and bonding among youth and also trained them in discipline, unity, and leadership," he said. "Sadly, this selfless tradition is now obsolete, replaced by individual concerns and security guards."

Among the most fascinating systems was the 'Saipi' barter model, where tradesmen like barbers, carpenters, blacksmiths and potters offered year-round services and, in return, received grains or goods at harvest.

"We didn't charge cash," say Bashir and Haq Nawaz, senior barbers from Vehari. "We received respect, seasonal wheat and were treated like family members during weddings."

Delivering wedding invitations was also a specialty of some barbers. They didn't just carry cards but emotions of love and respect. "People gave generous gifts to the card-bearer," recalls Haq Nawaz. "It was an honour. We used to feel immense pleasure after getting the gifts".

Similarly, weddings were community events as there were no fancy halls or hotels. Tents were pitched in open fields or village streets. Friends and cousins assisted the cook and serve and arrange multiple shifts of food for guests.

"A wedding in a village was happy moment for everyone," says Ahmed

Nawaz Asar, a landowner. "There was no hired staff, only heartfelt services rendered by the local community."

"Similarly, villagers themselves had to manage cots, chairs, bed sheets and residences for the guests. Guests of a house were considered as guests of the whole village," said Ahmed Nawaz.

"During all seasons, there had been a central village tandoor (clay oven) where women baked large wheat breads," he said. "Every women used to wait for her turn and it was not just waiting but also a source of chatting, humor, laughing and helping each other during baking of tandoori breads."

"Sharing food was another noble tradition. Curries passed over walls, lassi offered to neighbors and guests without formality and neighbors even sharing fodder for ani-

mals," said Shaukat Khan Daba, a cultural enthusiast. "Today, people are restricted to boundaries and forgot the revered customs of the past."

Another beautiful tradition of "Wangaar" was also common in rural areas. At times of sowing and harvest crops, construction of houses and other major activities, villagers helped each other cut crops or lend hand in other tasks without expectation.

"It was unpaid labor, powered by friendship. People used to help one another on turns," says Shah Nawaz, a farmer. "It was glaring norms of collectiveness and cohesion at communities' level."

But, all these customs have slowly been replaced with individualism and modernism. People have sufficient money and avenues but not strong bonding collectiveness and cohesion.



HYDERABAD: A large number of people enjoying oating at Al-Manzar Picnic Point at Kotri Barrage.

## Hakim visits site for university

SWAT (APP): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Livestock, Fisheries, and Cooperatives, Fazal Hakim Khan on Sunday conducted a preliminary inspection of a private site in Kokarai, Swat, for the potential establishment of a temporary campus of the University of Veterinary and Animal Sciences.

The visit was aimed at ensuring uninterrupted academic activities for university students while the permanent campus is under construction, enabling an effective interim teaching setup.

Chairman of the District Development Advisory Committee (DDAC) Swat, Akhtar Khan Advocate, Vice-Chancellor of the University, Prof. Shakeeb Ullah, and relevant officials accompanied the provincial minister during the visit. A comprehensive briefing was given regarding the proposed site.

Speaking to the media, Fazal Hakim Khan stated that education is the foundation of a nation's progress, and the provincial government prioritizes the educational needs of students. He emphasized that the academic progress in vital fields like veterinary sciences will not be disrupted under any circumstances, and all necessary measures are being taken by the government to support this cause.

He further clarified that the site visited is part of an initial assessment and that all technical and administrative aspects will be thoroughly considered before making a final decision. The provincial minister assured that the government is committed to safeguarding students' valuable time and future.

If the proposed site meets all academic, legal, and administrative standards, temporary classes will begin soon.

Fazal Hakim Khan also highlighted that the Veterinary University in Swat has become an important academic hub not only for local students but for the youth of the entire Malakand Division.

He added that, to further educational development and provide higher education opportunities, students enrolled in the university will be granted special concessions.

## Brother-in-law abducts widowed sister-in-law

Wali Ullah Shah

NEWSHERA: In a shocking incident of abuse and harassment in Tehsil Pabbi of Nowshera, a woman has alleged that her brother-in-law abducted her and kept her hostage in various cities.

The victim, a widow named Asma, daughter of Jamal Shah and the late Sulaiman, stated during a press conference at the Nowshera Press Club that although she was later recovered by the police, her brother-in-law is now threatening her with dire consequences if she does not change her statement.

Asma revealed that multiple attempts have also been made on her life. She pleaded with the Nowshera Police to provide her justice and protection from her abusive brother-in-law, Shahsawar.

Detailing the incident,

Asma said that her sister had a dispute with her husband Shahsawar and had returned to her parental home. One day, Shahsawar arrived at their house in Pabbi with armed accomplices and knocked on the door. As she was alone at home, Asma did not open the door. Shahsawar then scaled the wall, entered the house, and fired shots in the air to intimidate her. He forcibly took her mobile phone, cash, and abducted her.

She was taken to Mardan, and later, fearing arrest, Shahsawar moved her to District Dir. There, under pressure from a police official named Wajid-allegedly an accomplice-Shahsawar tried to coerce her into giving a false statement, claiming that her father was abusing her and that she had willingly come with her brother-in-law.

Asma strongly rejected the forced statement, declaring herself an honorable widow who wanted justice. She said that Shahsawar has now been arrested, but he is still pressuring her to marry him in order to seize her late husband's inheritance. He has allegedly threatened to abduct her again upon release, create an inappropriate video of her, and force her into marriage. He also threatened to kill her other brother-in-law Hilal and his father.

In her emotional appeal, Asma urged the Inspector General of Police Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the Regional Police Officer of Mardan Division, the District Police Officer of Nowshera, the judiciary, and other government authorities to ensure her protection and deliver her justice from the cruel and manipulative Shahsawar.



SARGODHA: A police personnel rides a motorcycle without a number plate and helmet at Kheam Chowk, a clear violation of traffic laws.

## Heat wave: People advised to stay indoors

BAHAWALPUR (APP): Health expert have advised people to spend more daytime at home to save themselves from bad effects of the heat wave.

Very hot weather and a heat wave have been continuing in Bahawalpur for last several days which has made people sick, with an increasing number of patient visiting hospitals.

Talking to APP, health expert, Dr. Naeem Akhtar

said that a number of people had been reported to be suffering from diseases caused by the heat wave. He advised people to stay indoors and take cold water besides taking bath with cold water.

Dr. Akhtar said that several patients suffering from high blood pressure, headache, nausea and other diseases were brought at hospital after they were affected by the heat wave.

He also emphasized the need to keep children at home, especially in daytime, besides saving them from sunlight.

Meanwhile, the local Met Office has said that highest maximum temperature 42 centigrade and the lowest minimum 32 centigrade were recorded during last 24 hours in Bahawalpur. It forecast that the heat wave might continue for next 72 hours.





# A confidential brief urges the ICC to investigate Wagner’s promotion of atrocities in West Africa

DAKAR, Senegal (AP): Editor’s Note: This story contains graphic images and descriptions of atrocities. The International Criminal Court has been asked to review a confidential legal report arguing that the Russia-linked Wagner Group has committed war crimes by spreading images of apparent atrocities in West Africa on social media, including ones alluding to cannibalism, according to the brief seen exclusively by The Associated Press.

In the videos, men in military uniform are shown butchering corpses of what appear to be civilians with machetes, hacking out organs and posing with severed limbs. One fighter says he is about to eat someone’s liver. Another says he is trying to remove their heart.

Violence in the Sahel, an arid belt of land south of the Sahara Desert, has reached record levels as military governments battle extremist groups linked to al-Qaida and the Islamic State group. Turning from Western allies like the United States and France, the governments in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger have instead embraced Russia and its mercenary fighters as partners in offensives.

Observers say the new approach has led to the kind of atrocities and dehumanization not seen in the region for decades. Social media offers a window into the alleged horrors that often occur in remote areas with little or no oversight from governments or outside observers.

Experts say the images, while difficult to verify, could serve as evidence of war crimes. The confidential brief to the ICC goes further, arguing that the act of circulating the images on social media could constitute a war crime, too. It is the first

such argument made to the international court.

“Wagner has deftly leveraged information and communications technologies to cultivate and promote its global brand as ruthless mercenaries. Their Telegram network in particular, which depicts their conduct across the Sahel, serves as a proud public display of their brutality,” said Lindsay Freeman, director of the Technology, Law & Policy program at the Human Rights Center, UC Berkeley School of Law.

Under the Rome Statute that created the ICC, the violation of personal dignity, mainly through humiliating and degrading treatment, constitutes a war crime. Legal experts from UC Berkeley, who submitted the brief to the ICC last year, argue that such treatment could include Wagner’s alleged weaponization of social media.

“The online distribution of these images could constitute the war crime of outrages on personal dignity and the crime against humanity of other inhumane acts for psychologically terrorizing the civilian population,” Freeman said. She said there is legal precedent in some European courts for charging the war crime of outrages on personal dignity based predominantly on social media evidence.

The brief was submitted to the ICC before the U.S. sanctioned the court earlier this year. It asks the court to investigate individuals with Wagner and the governments of Mali and Russia for alleged abuses in northern and central Mali between December 2021 and July 2024, including extrajudicial killings, torture, mutilation and cannibalism. It also asks the court to investigate crimes “committed through the internet, which are inextricably

linked to the physical crimes and add a new dimension of harm to an extended group of victims.”

The Office of the Prosecutor of the ICC said their investigations have focused on alleged war crimes committed since January 2012, when insurgents seized communities in Mali’s northern regions of Gao, Kidal and Timbuktu.

The ICC told the AP it could not comment on the brief but said it was aware of “various reports of alleged massive human rights violations in other parts of Mali,” adding that it “follows closely the situation.”

Wagner did not respond to questions about the videos.

As the world largely focuses on wars in Gaza, Ukraine and Sudan, the Sahel has become the deadliest place on earth for extremism.

Half of the world’s nearly 8,000 victims of terrorism were killed across the territory last year, according to the Institute for Economics and Peace, which compiles yearly data.

While the U.S. and other Western powers withdraw from the region, Russia has taken advantage, expanding military cooperation with several African nations via Wagner, the private security company.

The network of mercenaries and businesses is closely linked to Russia’s intelligence and military, and the U.S. State Department has described it as “a transnational criminal organization.”

Since Wagner leader Yevgeny Prigozhin was killed in a plane crash in 2023, Moscow has been developing a new organization, the Africa Corps, as a rival force under direct command of Russian authorities.

Earlier this month, Wagner announced its withdrawal from Mali, declaring “mission accomplished” in a Telegram post.

In a separate Telegram post, Africa Corps said it is staying. In Mali, about 2,000 Russian mercenaries are fighting alongside the country’s armed forces, according to U.S. officials. It is unclear how many have been with Wagner or are with the Africa Corps.

Both the Russian mercenaries and local military allies have shared bloody imagery on social media to claim battlefield wins, observers say.

“The mutilation of civilians and combatants by all sides is disturbing enough,” said Corinne Dufka, a Sahel expert and the former head of Human Rights Watch in the region. “But the dissemination of these scenes on social media further elevates the depravity and suggests a growing and worrying level of dehumanization is taking root in the Sahel.”

The confidential brief, along with AP reporting, shows that a network of social media channels, likely administered by current or former Wagner members, has reposted content that the channels say are from Wagner fighters, promoting videos and photos appearing to show abuses by armed, uniformed men, often accompanied by mocking or dehumanizing language.

While administrators of the channels are anonymous, open source analysts believe they are current or former Wagner fighters based on the content as well as graphics used, including in some cases Wagner’s logo.

AP analysis of the videos confirms the body parts shown are genuine, as well as the military uniforms.

The videos and photos,

in a mix of French and local languages, aim to humiliate and threaten those considered the enemies of Wagner and its local military allies, along with civilian populations whose youth face pressure to join extremist groups. But experts say it often has the opposite effect, prompting reprisal attacks and recruitment into the ranks of jihadists.

If the videos aim to deter and terrorize, it’s working, some in Mali say.

The ones appearing to show atrocities committed by Malian soldiers “caused a psychological shock in the Fulani community,” a representative of the nomadic community’s civil society told the AP, speaking on condition of anonymity for fear of retaliation. The Fulani are often caught in the middle of the fight against extremism, the focus of violence from both government forces and extremists, and of jihadi recruitment.

Thousands of Fulani have fled to neighboring countries in fear of being victimized, the representative said, and asserted that at least 1,000 others disappeared last year after encountering Mali’s army or allied militias, including Wagner.

In July last year, a Wagner-affiliated Telegram channel reposted three videos of what appeared to be Mali’s armed forces and the Dozo hunters, a local defense group often fighting alongside them, committing apparent abuses that allude to cannibalism.

One video shows a man in the uniform of Mali’s armed forces cooking what he says are body parts. Another shows a man dressed as a Dozo hunter cutting into a human body, saying he is about to eat the liver. In a third video, a group of

Dozo fighters roasts what appears to be a human torso. One man carves off a hunk of flesh and tosses it to another.

Mali’s army ordered an investigation into the viral videos, which were removed from X for violating the platform’s rules and put behind a paywall on Telegram. The army chief described it as “rare atrocity” which was not aligned with the nation’s military values, and “competent services” would confirm and identify the perpetrators. It was not clear whether anyone was identified.

A video apparently from Burkina Faso, shared on X the same month, showed an armed man in military pants and sleeveless shirt dancing, holding a severed hand and foot, at one point grinning as the foot dangled from his teeth. In another, a man in Burkinabe military uniform cuts through what appears to be a human body. He says: “Good meat indeed. We are Cobra 2.” Another man is heard saying: “This is BIR 15. BIR 15 always does well its job, by all means. Fatherland or death, we shall win.”

BIR 15 Cobra 2 is the name of a special intervention unit created by Burkina Faso’s ruler, Ibrahim Traore, to combat extremists. “Fatherland or death” is the motto of pro-government forces.

The videos were removed from X and put behind a paywall on Telegram. Burkina Faso’s army condemned the videos’ “macabre acts” and described them as “unbearable images of rare cruelty.”

The army said it was working to identify those responsible, adding that it “distances itself from these inhumane practices.” It was not clear whether anyone has been identified.

Other posts shared by alleged Wagner-affiliated channels include images of what appear to be mutilated corpses and beheaded, castrated and dismembered bodies of people, including ones described as extremist fighters, often accompanied by mocking commentary. One post shows two white men in military attire with what appears to be a human roasting on a spit, with the caption: “The meat you hunt always tastes better,” along with an emoji of a Russian flag.

It is hard to know at what scale cannibalism might occur in the context of warfare in the Sahel, and actual cases are “likely rare,” said Danny Hoffman, chair in international studies at the University of Washington.

But “the real force of these stories comes from the fascination and fear they create,” Hoffman said of the videos, with the digital age making rumors of violence even more widespread and effective.

“Whether it is Wagner or local fighters or political leaders, being associated with cannibalism or ritual killings or mutilations is being associated with an extreme form of power,” he said.

Some of the graphic posts have been removed. Other content was moved behind a paywall.

Telegram told the AP in a statement: “Content that encourages violence is explicitly forbidden by Telegram’s terms of service and is removed whenever discovered. Moderators empowered with custom AI and machine learning tools proactively monitor public parts of the platform and accept reports in order to remove millions of pieces of harmful content each day.” It did not say whether it acts on material behind a paywall.

The Telegram channel

White Uncles in Africa has emerged as the leading source of graphic imagery and dehumanizing language from the Sahel, reposting all the Mali videos. UC Berkeley experts and open source analysts believe it is administered by current or former Wagner members, but they have not been able to identify them. While the channel re-posts images from subscribers, it also posts original content.

In May of this year, the channel posted a photo of eight bodies of what appeared to be civilians, face-down on the ground with hands bound, with the caption: “The white uncles found and neutralized a breeding ground for a hostile life form.” It also shared an image of a person appearing to be tortured, with the caption describing him as a “hostile life form” being taken “for research.”

Human Rights Watch has documented atrocities committed in Mali by Wagner and other armed groups. It says accountability for alleged abuses has been minimal, with the military government reluctant to investigate its armed forces and Russian mercenaries.

It has become difficult to obtain detailed information on alleged abuses because of the Malian government’s “relentless assault against the political opposition, civil society groups, the media and peaceful dissent,” said Ilaria Allegrozzi, the group’s Sahel researcher. That has worsened after a U.N. peacekeeping mission withdrew from Mali in December 2023 at the government’s request.

That void, she said, “has eased the way for further atrocities” — and left social media as one of the best ways to glimpse what’s happening on the ground.

## Ukraine army chief vows to expand strikes on Russia

KYIV (AFP): Ukraine’s top military commander vowed to increase the “scale and depth” of strikes on Russia in remarks made public Sunday, saying Kyiv would not sit idly by while Moscow prolonged its three-year invasion.

Diplomatic efforts to end the war have stalled in recent weeks.

The last direct meeting between the two sides was almost three weeks ago and no follow-up talks have been scheduled.

Russian attacks on Ukraine have killed dozens of people during the interim, including in the Ukrainian capital Kyiv, according to officials.

“We will not just sit in defence. Because this brings nothing and eventually leads to the fact that we still retreat, lose people and territories,” Ukrainian commander-in-chief Oleksandr Syrsky told reporters including AFP.

Syrsky said Ukraine would continue its strikes on Russian military targets, which he said had proved “effective.”

“Of course, we will continue. We

will increase the scale and depth,” he said.

Ukraine has launched retaliatory strikes on Russia throughout the war, targeting energy and military infrastructure sometimes hundreds of kilometres from the front line.

Kyiv says the strikes are a fair response to deadly Russian attacks on Ukrainian infrastructure and civilians.

“They have an advantage”

In wide-ranging remarks, Syrsky also conceded that Russia had some advantages in drone warfare, particularly in making fibre-optic drones that are tethered and difficult to jam.

“Here, unfortunately, they have an advantage in both the number and range of their use,” he said.

He also claimed that Ukraine still held 90 square kilometres (35 square miles) of territory in Russia’s Kursk region, where Kyiv launched an audacious cross-border incursion last August.

“These are our pre-emptive actions in response to a possible enemy offensive,” he said.

Russia said in April that it had gained full control of the Kursk region and denies that Kyiv has a presence there.

Moscow occupies around a fifth of Ukraine and claims to have annexed four Ukrainian regions as its own since launching its invasion in 2022 — in addition to Crimea, which it captured in 2014.

Kyiv has accused Moscow of deliberately sabotaging a peace deal to prolong its full-scale offensive on the country and to seize more territory.

The Russian army said Sunday that it had captured the village of Petrivske in Ukraine’s northeast Kharkiv region.

Russian forces also fired at least 47 drones and three missiles at Ukraine between late Saturday and early Sunday, the Ukrainian air force said.

At least two people were killed in the attacks on Ukraine’s eastern Donetsk region, including a 17-year-old boy, the region’s governor said.

## London police charge seven Iranians with assault

LONDON (Reuters): London police on Sunday said they had charged seven Iranians with grievous bodily harm after a reported fight at a protest near the embassy last week.

London’s Metropolitan Police said they had been alerted to an apparent fight outside the Iranian embassy on Friday, which local media reported occurred during a protest against the Iranian leadership.

Police said eight people were arrested in connection with the incident, including one man who was in hospital with serious but non-life threatening injuries. Another man was also hospitalized.

“Seven of those arrested were charged with causing grievous bodily harm,” police said in a statement. “All are Iranian nationals.”

Police said that they had been remanded in custody ahead of a court appearance on Monday. The eighth person was still in hospital and had been bailed, they added.

**UK’s Starmer urges Middle East de-escalation**

**in calls with leaders of Jordan and Oman**

LONDON (Reuters): British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said that Iran should return to the negotiating table and that an escalation of the situation in the Middle East is in no-one’s interests in calls with the leaders of Jordan and Oman, his office said on Sunday.

A Downing Street spokesperson said Starmer “agreed on the grave threat posed by Iran’s nuclear programme and reiterated calls for them to return to the negotiating table” in a call with Sultan of Oman Haitham bin Tarik al Said.

“An escalation of the conflict is in no-one’s inter-

ests and the focus must be on de-escalation, they added,” according to the readout after strikes by the United States on Iran.

In a separate call with King Abdullah II of Jordan, Downing Street said “they called on Iran to return to the negotiating table in pursuit of a diplomatic solution.”



## Ambassador Tirmizi delivers keynote at NLCSDMUN 2025

**Asif Ali Yousafzai**

ABU DHABI: Pakistan’s Ambassador to the United Arab Emirates, H.E. Faisal Niaz Tirmizi, delivered the keynote address at the opening ceremony of the North London Collegiate School Dubai Model United Nations (NLCSDMUN) Conference 2025.

Ambassador Tirmizi was warmly received by the school’s Principal, Mr. Jonathan Locke, alongside student delegates and faculty members. He thanked Director General Ms. Fatima Tariq for the invitation and commended the school for promoting critical thinking, global citizenship, and youth engagement in diplomacy.

Organized by North London Collegiate School Dubai, NLCSDMUN provides a platform for young delegates to engage in dialogue, simulate diplomatic processes, and explore solutions to pressing global issues. This year’s theme is “Strengthening Partnerships for Peace and Security.”

In his address titled “Pakistan’s Role in Global Diplomacy, Multilateral Cooperation, and the Importance of Youth in International Relations,” Ambassador Tirmizi emphasized the need for constructive dialogue in addressing global challenges such as conflict, climate change, poverty, and public health crises.



“Today’s world faces complex challenges that cannot be resolved through conflict. Even the most destructive wars in history ended at the negotiation table,” he remarked.

He reaffirmed Pakistan’s commitment to multilateralism and highlighted the country’s proactive engagement in global peace and diplomacy. Referring to melting glaciers and recurring floods, he also drew attention to Pakistan’s vulnerability to climate change and called on young delegates to lead climate action and sustainability efforts. Ambassador Tirmizi praised the UAE as a model of peaceful coexistence, where over 190

nationalities live and work in harmony. “The UAE represents an inclusive, tolerant society - a true example of how diversity can foster peace, prosperity, and mutual respect,” he said.

He encouraged students to consider careers in diplomacy, whether in national service or through international institutions, emphasizing their role in shaping a peaceful and cooperative global future.

The event concluded with an interactive Q&A session, during which the Ambassador responded to students’ questions on Pakistan’s foreign policy, career opportunities in diplomacy, and the role of youth in global affairs.

## Toll in lynching of Nigeria wedding guests rises to 12

JOS (AFP): The number of people killed after a mob stormed a bus carrying Muslim wedding guests in central Nigeria’s volatile Plateau state has risen to 12, according to the Nigerian presidency. The dead include the groom’s father and brother, it said.

President Bola Tinubu has condemned the killings, the latest attack to hit the region where tensions are high after a series of bloody attacks in recent days, with ethnic Fulani nomadic Muslim herders suspected of killing dozens of people in Plateau’s Mangu local government area.

Police, survivors and local organizations said around 30 people on a bus to a wedding lost their way, stopped to ask for directions,

and were accosted by an irate mob.

They were attacked with sticks, machetes and stones and their bus set ablaze, a survivor told AFP. Initially authorities had confirmed eight dead with four reported missing.

Tinubu described the

lynching “as unacceptable and barbaric,” said a statement from his office which said the dead included the groom’s father and brother.

The Nigerian leader ordered the arrest and punishment of the culprits as he urged the Plateau state government to “take decisive

action in handling these vicious cycles of violence.”

Fulani herders in the state have long clashed with settled farmers, many of whom are Christian, over access to land and resources.

Police say they have arrested 22 suspects in connection with the attack.





The Frontier Post

Rehmat Shah Afridi (Late)

Founder

Bilal Shah Afridi

Chief Executive

Jalil Afridi

Managing Editor

Printed and published by Mahmood Afridi at Moraka's Printers, 27 Abdara Road, University Town, Peshawar.

Peshawar Office: 091-5700095, 0300- 9009001

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

Email: fppeshawar@thefrontierpost.com

Lahore Office: 0335-4026284

Email: fplahore@thefrontierpost.com

Islamabad Office: 0321-5066253

Email: mahmoodafridi@thefrontierpost.com

Karachi Office: 021-32213411, 0300-8340907

Email: fpkarachi@thefrontierpost.com

USA and Canada Toll Free Number 1-800-5905747

## US military-industrial complex the real threat

**I**N 1961, US President Dwight D. Eisenhower warned of the "unwarranted influence" of the military-industrial complex in the United States whereby a powerful union of defense contractors, the armed forces and policymakers might get control of national policy. Subsequent decades have seen his words of caution turn into a self-fulfilling prophecy, with the US, the world's largest military spender, continually increasing its military budget for the benefits of certain interest groups.

Now the US accounts for 40 percent of the world's annual military spending, with its military budget — at around \$820 billion in 2023 — larger than the next nine countries combined. That this "misplaced power" thrives on wars and regional tensions may explain why the US has been engaged in almost all conflicts and wars across the world over the past several decades.

The nexus forged by the government, legislature, military institutions and the weapons industry in the US makes the country a significant source of global tensions and conflict.

Yet despite the US having established nearly 800 foreign military bases in at least 80 countries and regions, and its 11 aircraft carrier strike groups patrolling the high seas ready to project US firepower in any corner of the world, Washington still does not feel secure enough from the perceived threat from its adversaries. And it is demanding that its North Atlantic Treaty Organization allies and those in the Asia-Pacific spend 5 percent of their gross domestic product on their defense needs, calling it a "global standard".

When explaining the US Defense Department's view on US allies in Asia, department spokesperson Sean Parnell said on Friday that "given the enormous military buildup of China as well as North Korea's ongoing nuclear and missile developments, it is only common sense for Asia-Pacific allies to move rapidly to step up to match Europe's pace and level of defense spending".

Yet it is also common sense that it is the taxpayers who will have to foot the bill of increased military spending. In the US, about 45 percent of its citizens' income taxes go to pay for current and past military spending. This has made it increasingly difficult for the US to continue to use its China-threat hyperbole to try to hoodwink its allies into dipping into their pocket to help increase the revenues of major US arms producers.

Which explains why Japan canceled an annual high-level meeting with the US after the US administration demanded it spend more on defense, the Financial Times reported on Friday.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth had been expected to meet Japanese Foreign Minister Takeshi Iwaya and Defense Minister Gen Nakatani in Washington on July 1 for the annual 2+2 security talks. But Tokyo scrapped the meeting after the US asked Japan to boost its defense spending to 3.5 percent of GDP, higher than an earlier request of 3 percent. Japan's military spending as a share of GDP was 1.4 percent in 2024.

Apart from Japan, more US allies have stood up to say no to the US' defense spending coercion. Spain has officially rejected the US demand that it increase its military spending to 5 percent of GDP, with Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez calling it "unreasonable".

"For Spain, committing to a 5 percent target would not only be unreasonable, but also counterproductive, as it would move Spain away from optimal spending and it would hinder the EU's ongoing efforts to strengthen its security and defense ecosystem," Sanchez wrote in a letter sent to NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte last week.

Italy, another NATO member, has questioned the very reason for the by-product of the Cold War to continue to exist, with the country's defense minister, Guido Crosetto, arguing on Friday that the transatlantic military alliance has lost its relevance in a world no longer dominated by Europe and the US.

"The center of the world is no longer the US and the EU," he said, adding that NATO must adapt to the new geopolitical landscape if it is to preserve its "reason for existence".

"If NATO was born to guarantee peace and mutual defense, then it must either become an organization that undertakes this role at a global level — engaging with the Global South ... or else we will fail to achieve the goal we all share: building a security framework in which everyone can participate under rules that apply equally to all."

The US should heed these voices of reason and rethink its ideologically driven perpetual military spending that only benefits its own military-industrial complex at the cost of human lives and peace.

### Important Notice

The Frontier Post will not be responsible for the comments in the articles and letters. The Frontier Post requests the writers of articles and letters to please make sure that they write their email addresses and mention the names of the cities, towns, districts or tehsil of their residences at the bottom of their articles and letters.



## The fall of false giants

Muhammad Mohsin Iqbal

**WAR, in its essence, is a tragic manifestation of human failure-failure to resolve differences through dialogue, failure to respect boundaries, and failure to uphold justice. It unleashes horrors upon the innocent and tarnishes civilizations with the blood of the underserving. Yet, there are rare moments in history when the flames of war, though undesirable, illuminate truths long buried under arrogance, deceit, and unchecked aggression. The months of May and June this year bore witness to such moments-when two long-oppressed regions, South Asia and the Middle East, saw the masks fall off powerful aggressors, and the world stood astonished by the reversal of long-standing myths.**

For many decades, India has positioned itself as a regional giant in South Asia, supported by international alliances and a growing sense of militaristic self-righteousness. It has used its influence to intimidate its neighbors, particularly Pakistan, engaging in diplomatic brinkmanship, covert destabilization, and an unending campaign of misinformation. However, on the 7th of May, by the grace of Almighty Allah, Pakistan responded with a swiftness and precision that shook the very foundation of India's inflated self-image.

What transpired on that single day was not merely a military maneuver-it

was a moral rebuke, a strategic checkmate, and a divine balancing of the scales.

The Indian establishment had perhaps grown too comfortable in its assumptions. Years of unchecked narratives, exaggerated claims of superiority, and a false sense of invulnerability had clouded their judgment. But Pakistan's resolve, born not just from military strength but from a deep-rooted sense of justice and faith, delivered a blow that reminded the world-and India itself-that arrogance has a price. Since that day, an unusual silence has prevailed across the border, a quiet not of peace-loving reflection, but of stunned recalibration.

Yet, those familiar with history know well that old habits die hard. India may momentarily pause, but the patterns of provocation will likely continue. Still, May 7 has become a date engraved in memory-a day when truth, preparedness, and divine help intersected.

Equally astonishing has been the parallel unfolding in the Middle East. For decades, Israel has operated with impunity, shielded by powerful allies and international double standards. Its actions in Gaza and across the Palestinian territories have often been brutal, unchecked, and in violation of every principle of human dignity. Yet, it has rarely faced retaliation of equal magnitude. That changed when Iran, often vilified, isolated,

and under tremendous economic and strategic pressure, responded in a manner that startled even its staunchest critics.

In a stunning display of resilience and strategy, Iran pierced through the layers of defense and struck the heart of Israel-Tel Aviv and other cities-bringing the war to the very streets from which oppression had long been dispatched.

The world, accustomed to seeing Gaza in ruins, now witnessed images from within Israel that were indistinguishable from those usually reserved for occupied Palestinian land. For the first time in recent history, the line between aggressor and victim was blurred on Israeli soil.

This was not merely a retaliatory strike-it was a moment of reckoning. Iran, by the mercy of Allah, overcame not only its external enemies but also internal constraints and regional challenges to deliver a response that will be studied in strategic circles for years to come. It has, so far, emerged as a nation that refused to be bowed, demonstrating to the world that no matter how isolated a country may be, if it is rooted in belief and driven by justice, it can rewrite the rules of engagement.

It is crucial to understand that this is not a glorification of war. No person of conscience celebrates bloodshed. The loss of life-on any side-is a tragedy. Yet, what deserves recognition is

the rare assertion of justice against long-standing oppression. These events have shown that power, when misused, can be challenged; that no state, however militarily powerful or diplomatically protected, can claim eternal exemption from consequences.

Both Pakistan and Iran, in their respective theatres of conflict, stood not as aggressors but as defenders-of their people, their dignity, and their right to exist in peace. Their actions were not fueled by hatred, but by necessity. And in doing so, they restored a sense of balance to a world that had for too long tilted in favor of tyranny.

These developments in May and June will be remembered-not because they brought pain, but because they brought clarity.

They reminded us that faith still matters, that justice is not dead, and that divine will, when it intervenes, can reverse even the most entrenched injustices. Future generations will look back at these days not just as moments of conflict, but as moments of awakening-when the oppressed spoke, and the oppressors were forced to listen.

May Allah continue to protect the innocent, guide the unjust toward truth, and grant peace with honor to all nations. For real victory lies not in destroying others, but in upholding justice and living in dignity. And when justice prevails, even through the path of fire, it leaves behind not ashes-but light.

## Israel vs. Iran: Why Riyadh is committed to de-escalation

Faisal J. Abbas

**A**s anyone who has followed the recent statements coming out of the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs will tell you, the Kingdom has made its stance regarding the recent regional tensions unequivocally clear: The current aggression against Iran is not only unacceptable, but also a dangerous provocation that threatens the stability of the entire Middle East.

It is important for observers to note that Saudi Arabia today views Iran not as an adversary, but as a fellow Muslim nation facing a grave and unjustified assault. In condemning this attack as a blatant violation of international norms, Riyadh has voiced strong solidarity with the Iranian people, rejecting any breach of their sovereignty. This principled position reflects the Kingdom's long-standing belief in non-intervention and mutual respect among nations.

What is particularly alarming is the apparent objective behind the timing of these hostilities: to derail sensitive negotiations between Tehran and Washington.

Saudi Arabia sees this as a calculated move to sabotage dialogue that could de-escalate one of the region's most intractable challenges —

the Iranian nuclear file.

Since the landmark Beijing agreement in March 2023, Saudi-Iranian relations have, slowly but surely, entered a promising new chapter. While it is true that previous hostilities could not easily be forgotten, trust-building measures have been gradually taking root, with bilateral committees working across various domains to ensure differences do not escalate unchecked.

This fragile progress — and the greater idea of a peaceful and prosperous Middle East — is precisely what stands to be lost if the drums of war drown out diplomatic momentum.

Riyadh has also emphasized that regional stability hinges on stronger cooperation among Muslim nations. Under the umbrella of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the Kingdom believes in the potential for a united front that can foster peace and development, so long as intentions are sincere and not clouded by geopolitical ambitions.

In a flurry of diplomatic engagement, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has been on the phone with world leaders,

all the way from Washington to London to the Far East, calling for collective action to halt what could possibly be a regional disaster.

He has also spoken directly with Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian, underscoring Saudi Arabia's commitment to de-escalation and its willingness to mediate.

This leadership extends beyond political gestures. On the ground, the Kingdom provided shelter, medical care, and transportation to over 70,000 Iranian pilgrims stranded in Saudi Arabia due to the conflict. Acting on the crown prince's directive, the Kingdom funded their stay and coordinated their safe return home — a humanitarian move reflecting the values Saudi Arabia consistently upholds.

Meanwhile, Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan has been tirelessly engaging with global counterparts, rallying support for a ceasefire and meeting directly with his Iranian counterpart to explore diplomatic solutions.

Notably, Riyadh had urged Tehran — well before the outbreak of hostilities — to engage with Washington's final offer seriously, warning that the

US stance on the nuclear issue should not be underestimated.

Looking forward, should Iran face humanitarian challenges in the aftermath of this crisis, there is no doubt that the Kingdom will be among the first to offer aid. This is not merely altruism — it is a strategic and moral imperative rooted in the belief that the well-being of neighboring nations affects the collective fate of the region.

Crucially, Saudi Arabia has drawn a firm line: No belligerent party will be permitted to use its airspace, land, or waters. Riyadh's neutrality is active, not passive — it is deliberate, disciplined, and unwavering in its commitment to de-escalation.

Needless to say, the deliberate targeting of civilians, bombing of media outlets and hospitals, and threats to the Islamic Republic's Supreme Leader are condemnable and appalling; but by continuing to accept them we risk normalizing unacceptable war crimes.

Hopefully, there will be some adults in decision-making rooms around the world who will agree that this escalation needs to stop before we reach the point of no return.

## What is Netanyahu's endgame?

Yossi Mekelberg

**A** direct, large-scale military confrontation between Iran and Israel was always perceived as too dangerous because it risked consequences too devastating for either side to seriously contemplate, let alone initiate.

That was until Israeli authorities decided last week to strike first in what is their biggest military gamble since the nation's founding fathers made the decision to declare independence.

An overnight Israeli operation, daring and successful beyond imagination, turned a decades-long war of words into an actual war between the two major military powers in the Middle East. And they have already demonstrated their ability, and desire, to inflict great damage on one another in what might become an open-ended war of attrition.

Unless common sense prevails among both leaderships, which appears a far-fetched hope, or, more likely, concerted international pressure can succeed in halting this deadly confrontation immediately, it might well spiral out of control.

To state the very obvious, no one outside Iran, and few inside the country, wants to see it armed with nuclear weapons, which would inevitably lead to a nuclear arms race. As a matter of fact, a nuclear-weapon-free Middle East must be a long-term objective.

But Israel's decision to embark on a military operation of this scale, and the timing of it, raises questions and concerns about its true objectives. It is no secret that for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the self-proclaimed "Mr. Security," there have for a long time been two main overarching objectives, to the point of obsession: to prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state, and to eliminate Iran's nuclear program.

He views them both as existential threats to the Jewish state and, equally, as his own ticket to political relevance and endurance.

There has been much discussion about, and will eventually be a formal investigation into, the ways in which Netanyahu's destructive policies designed to prevent the possibility of a two-state solution to Israel's conflict with the Palestinians contributed to the events of Oct. 7, 2023, the most devastating Israeli security failure ever which led to the ongoing war in Gaza.

For him to now embark on what might prove to be the most consequential war in his country's history, people need to be convinced beyond any shred of doubt that the decision was not tainted by any ulterior motive. Alas, the Israeli prime minister's behavior throughout his political career, and most definitely during his present term in office, has failed to instill the necessary confidence that this is the case.

Moreover, entering into a conflict that by some estimates could result in hundreds, if not thousands, of civilian casualties requires a united country. His government has not only divided the nation more than ever before, it has made unwarranted and acerbic criticisms of the very people now charged with carrying out the strikes against Iran, simply because they peacefully opposed the government's attacks on the country's democratic foundations, or called for an end to the war in Gaza and to bringing the hostages home.

In such a high-stakes confrontation with an enemy in possession of potentially devastating capabilities, there is a need for trust in the leadership directing it, but this is hardly the case here. Most Israelis support the war against Iran — but not Netanyahu and his government.

This is not that surprising, considering his legal woes, his desperation to remain in power, and his record of trying to deflect attention from his own domestic and foreign failures by pursuing a more aggressive stance, verbal or otherwise, on unresolved conflicts with

Israel's neighbors.

There is a lingering concern that his decision to turn up the heat on Iran had as much to do with the ongoing crisis within his own coalition government, and the fact that he is in the early stages of the prosecution's cross-examination in his corruption trial, as it had to do with the security threat emanating from Tehran.

In the event of a prolonged war with Iran, it is almost impossible to envisage that any member of the coalition would resign, and Netanyahu would have the perfect excuse to delay for weeks, if not months, his appearance in court.

He has claimed that the attacks on Iranian targets were justified based on new information, which he was not prepared to share, about the imminent successful conclusion of a secret Iranian program to finally obtain nuclear weapons. He stated that Tehran already had the capacity to build a number of bombs, a claim refuted by several American intelligence reports that concluded Iran is still a few years away from developing such weapons.

It is more likely that Israeli authorities feared the US might reach what they consider to be an unsatisfactory nuclear deal with Iran. It is also the case that Israeli decision-makers identified an opportune moment to strike, given that Iran's "axis of resistance" has been substantially weakened, and the Trump administration, while it did not give a green light for Israel to proceed with a military operation, neither did it order them to hit the brakes. In fact Washington is still sending mixed signals about whether it is more interested in an immediate ceasefire, or would be happy to see Iranian negotiators return to the bargaining table with their country badly wounded and humiliated — a strategy that might backfire.

Israel, despite its impressive military performance until now, does not on its own have the capability to completely degrade Iran's nuclear project, and it is too early to assess the extent of the damage inflicted so far. Netanyahu gambled the US would be sucked into the conflict, either to finish the job, should the first stages of the war succeed in creating a "once in a lifetime" opportunity to put to bed the Iranian nuclear program once and for all, or, if things went seriously wrong, that Washington would come to Israel's rescue.

Increasingly, it seems as though Trump is inclined to order his military to finish the job; he has stated his desire to see a "real end" to the conflict and demanded "total surrender" from Iran, rather than a ceasefire.

Top Israeli officials, chief among them Netanyahu, have not hidden their yearning for a humiliating defeat of Iran on the battlefield that could lead to regime change. However, there is no evidence to suggest the regime in Tehran would not be able to weather such a storm, or that there are opposition forces ready and able to mount an effective challenge.

If anything, Iranian citizens who see their country under attack are more likely to rally round the flag. To the regime, meanwhile, the conflict provides a further excuse to take even harsher action against any signs of domestic discontent.

Moreover, regime change commonly suggests a desire among the external forces that attempt to initiate it to install an administration more favorable to them — yet past experiences do not provide much reassurance that this is what would happen; quite the reverse, in fact.

Netanyahu has taken the gamble of his life and in doing so he is also gambling with Israel's long-term security, and possibly that of the wider region as well.

No one will benefit from a prolonged war that could entangle other regional powers. Diplomacy must step in quickly and play a central role in resolving the conflict or this will be a long and bloody summer.



# Championing the region’s children living with disabilities

Sara Al-Mulla

What if our world were designed so that every child, including those living with disabilities, had the care, support and opportunities they needed not just to survive, but to flourish? The children of today are growing up amid many unprecedented uncertainties, including economic instability, armed conflicts, pandemics and climate change — each posing compounding threats to their well-being.

According to a UNESCO report, one in every seven children in the Middle East and North Africa region is living with a disability, totaling about 21 million children. Conflicts, displacement and under-resourced social services have left many children with disabilities isolated or excluded. Even in more stable settings, policy frameworks warrant greater attention to ensure they deliver universal, inclusive, affordable and quality support. As such, children living with disabilities and their carers disproportionately bear the brunt of multifaceted challenges.

Even with the delivery of fragmented services, scaling is urgently needed in terms of reach, quality and funding. Without adequate scale-up, children with disabilities will continue to fall through the cracks of limited and disconnected programs, unable to access the full spectrum of services and support required for maximum impact.

For instance, the exclusion of children with disabilities from early childhood centers and schools significantly reduces their access to crucial early interventions and denies them their right to learn, play and socialize with their peers.

A number of gaping challenges are still present, such as a lack of inclusive education policies, inaccessible

sible school facilities, curricula that are not adapted to special learning needs, and a shortage of adequately trained teachers to support children with special educational needs. During conflicts, schools are susceptible to destruction and become unsafe, forcing children to be cut off from vital school-based services, such as learning, psychosocial support and nutrition programs.

Children with disabilities also face significant disparities in accessing quality healthcare. This

.....  
***Part of the solution lies in gathering reliable, up-to-date and comprehensive data on the status of children living with disabilities in order to understand their real-time needs and design high-impact programs and services accordingly. This information must then be tied to the work of government agencies — such as those responsible for disaster preparedness or disability-inclusive urban planning — to ensure a more coordinated approach.***  
.....

includes challenges in early detection, accurate diagnosis and access to essential rehabilitation services and treatments. During conflicts, access to healthcare, lifesaving medications and rehabilitation services becomes ever more challenging and restrictive, exacerbating existing impairments and resulting in a spike in new disabilities due to conflict-related injuries or illnesses.

Insufficient social protection programs for families of children with disabilities places immense financial strain on households, as families often have to incur high costs for care and treatment. At the same time, physical barriers significantly isolate children with disabilities, as public spaces, transport and buildings may lack accessibility features.

Furthermore, children with disabilities are more

likely to be abandoned or separated from their caregivers during conflicts or sudden displacement, leaving them not only physically vulnerable, but also defenseless to compounded trauma from fear, anxiety, isolation, stigma and exclusion in emergency settings.

Governments can play an essential role in transforming the lives of children with disabilities. Safeguarding their well-being requires a well-designed mix of policies, programs, services and regulations, anchored by clear

targets, sufficient budget allocations and clearly defined roles and responsibilities.

Part of the solution lies in gathering reliable, up-to-date and comprehensive data on the status of children living with disabilities in order to understand their real-time needs and design high-impact programs and services accordingly. This information must then be tied to the work of government agencies — such as those responsible for disaster preparedness or disability-inclusive urban planning — to ensure a more coordinated approach.

Inclusive education must be prioritized. This means investing in teacher training, designing inclusive-friendly curricula and making schools physically accessible. Schools could also be fertile grounds to improve access to sports, the arts and recreational

activities for children with disabilities. In conflict zones, education efforts should include safe and accessible temporary learning spaces, remote learning options and training for teachers and humanitarian workers on how to support children with disabilities during emergencies.

Psychosocial support services could help alleviate the burdens faced by children with disabilities, and their carers, and assist them in navigating the myriad challenges confronting them. This transformative

service is crucial for directly addressing prevalent mental health issues, such as anxiety, depression and trauma, which can significantly impact both children and those who care for them.

Caregiver stipends and flexible work policies ought to be offered to significantly lighten families’ financial burdens, while deploying vocational training programs tailored for caregivers and offering support for home-based income-generating activities are other options to improve the economic self-sufficiency of households.

Regulatory frameworks must protect the rights of children with disabilities to access education, healthcare, social protection and participation in society, and prevent incidents of violence, abuse or neglect, and exploitation. In tandem, robust monitoring mecha-

nisms should be deployed to ensure that all stakeholders comply with standards and are accountable for delivering these commitments.

Healthcare services are imperative for protecting children with disabilities, starting with birth registration. Early detection and diagnosis programs must be supported, while simultaneously expanding access to affordable, quality rehabilitation services and offering disability-related services within hospitals and clinics across urban and rural areas. Moreover, governments can empower community health workers to deliver essential services to children with disabilities in rural areas.

For children living in conflict zones, it is vital to include disability-related healthcare within humanitarian aid delivery, ensuring emergency medical teams are trained in alleviating the many healthcare burdens faced by children with disabilities. Sustained funding is essential to ensure uninterrupted access to medication and specialized therapies, in addition to the provision of nutritious meals to counter critical levels of malnutrition.

Furthermore, emergency response plans should commit to safeguarding the well-being of children with disabilities. This includes tracking their locations and ensuring essential services are available for them, such as psychosocial support, meals provision, healthcare services and caregiving assistance. Moreover, it is imperative that child protection schemes are put in place so that children do not fall prey to abuse and neglect.

There remains a window of opportunity to improve the lives of children with disabilities and ensure they move from exclusion to empowerment.

# An African credit rating agency? Easier said than done

Hafed Al-Ghwel

Africa’s sovereign debt crisis is not merely a story of fiscal mismanagement or external shocks. It is amplified by a systemic anomaly: The continent pays more to borrow than its peers with comparable economic indicators.

This penalty, often termed the “African premium,” costs the region an estimated \$24 billion annually in excess interest payments, and has deprived it of more than \$46 billion in potential lending. With 20 low-income African nations in or near debt distress, and 94 percent of rated African sovereigns downgraded over the past decade, the search for solutions appears to be culminating in the establishment of an African Credit Rating Agency, or AfCRA for short.

For now, the move is being framed as both a corrective measure and a symbol of financial sovereignty. Yet while politically sound, it faces profound operational and philosophical challenges. Even if the ambition to establish the agency is framed as a bold act of sovereignty, the terrain it seeks to conquer is littered with the wreckage of similar aspirations in richer, better-equipped regions.

Granted, the financial logic behind the move is well-established: Africa’s sovereign debt is routinely mispriced, with subjective and often opaque assessments by the “Big Three” credit rating agencies — Moody’s, Fitch and S&P — inflating risk perception and pushing average borrowing costs ever higher.

As a result, total annual lending losses and excess interest payments exceed annual official development aid to the continent. That Africa is being “penalized” beyond its macroeconomic fundamentals is no longer a niche theory among a few experts, policymakers or scholars at poorly attended conferences, it is a measurable economic hemorrhage.

But attempting to correct this through AfCRA introduces a dilemma. Can a continent hobbled by thin capital markets, erratic fiscal transparency, and a fragmented political economy build a ratings agency that would be perceived as credible by the very investors it seeks to court?

The evidence so far is not encouraging. Europe, despite its institutional depth and capital abundance, has failed to create a viable alternative to the Big Three, even after sinking more than 300 million (\$346 million) into various experiments, all of which ended in regulatory quagmires or strategic surrender.

The most successful nonaligned agencies, such as Scope in Europe or Morningstar DBRS in Canada, only survived by serving niche markets and accepting that they could not displace the incumbent.

Africa’s task is even tougher. Most of the continent’s 21 Eurobond issuers are repeat borrowers, yet their ratings have on average worsened since their inaugural issuances. This contradicts the usual pattern in emerging markets, where familiarity tends to reduce pricing premiums. Even the most prominent issuers — Egypt, Nigeria and South Africa — have faced frequent downgrades, often based on models that lack local granularity or fail to consider governance heterogeneity.

Furthermore, agencies frequently do not send analysts to the countries they rate; Fitch has no office at all on the continent, and

both S&P and Moody’s operate out of a single office in Johannesburg, covering dozens of vastly different economies.

Meanwhile, unsolicited ratings, those issued without government request or input, are both more common in Africa and more damaging. Moody’s leads the way in such unsolicited assessments, despite objections by African governments to their inherent opacity.

It is not surprising, therefore, to see a resurgent push for an independent agency, given the cost of delays. Between 2021 and 2024, for instance, the average coupon on African Eurobonds nearly doubled to just under 11 percent, even as fundamentals remained stable.

Moreover, the absence of localized assessment left 22 African countries unrated, starving them of institutional capital. When Botswana and Mauritius secured investment-grade ratings, they accessed financing at 300-400 basis points below regional peers. At a continental level, each one-notch upgrade in a rating could unlock more than \$15 billion in much-needed capital.

The cost of waiting is

.....  
***A very familiar, and suffocating, dependency loop swiftly kicks in; the AU’s own programs remain more than 60 percent funded by the EU and other external partners, and if these same entities are now expected to bankroll an “African-owned” ratings apparatus, the concept begins to cannibalize its own purpose. Beyond the matter of funding, AfCRA would also find itself confronted by the same structural hurdles that felled its European predecessors. Regulatory legitimacy, for one thing, cannot be assumed. In many global markets only ratings from the Big Three are recognized, particularly among institutional investors bound by prudent regulation. Even with improvements in rating models, the acceptance of new agencies into the portfolios of pension funds or sovereign wealth funds hinges on an arduous and opaque process of validation by regulators located far outside Africa.***  
.....

clear and unambiguous. Yet, the creation of AfCRA cannot be reduced to a matter of injustice alone. The economics of operating a credit rating agency are ruthless. Even the most optimistic forecasts suggest that the launch of a credible African agency would require \$400-500 million in capital, an amount that dwarfs the annual budget of the African Union itself.

A very familiar, and suffocating, dependency loop swiftly kicks in; the AU’s own programs remain more than 60 percent funded by the EU and other external partners, and if these same entities are now expected to bankroll an “African-owned” ratings apparatus, the concept begins to cannibalize its own purpose.

Beyond the matter of funding, AfCRA would also find itself confronted by the same structural hurdles that felled its European predecessors. Regulatory legitimacy, for one thing, cannot be assumed. In many global markets only ratings from the Big Three are recognized, particularly among institutional investors bound by prudent regulation.

Even with improvements in rating models, the acceptance of new agencies into the portfolios of pension funds or sovereign wealth funds hinges on an arduous and opaque process of validation by regulators located far out-

side Africa. Without international regulatory recognition, AfCRA risks becoming an advisory service masquerading as an agency; technically useful but irrelevant where it matters.

Even if credibility can somehow be established, the pipeline of rating activity might not justify the operating costs. Government debt issuance in Africa remains sporadic and constrained. Moreover, much of the domestic debt, particularly in Francophone Africa, is already absorbed by regional banks under arrangements that do not require third-party ratings.

Corporate appetite for ratings is growing but still shallow. GCR Ratings, once Africa’s most promising homegrown agency, did not consider government bond ratings a serious business line, and it has since been acquired by Moody’s, effectively reversing the localization effort.

And then there is the governance risk. Africa’s existing national and regional agencies have not been free from scandal. Recent cases, such as West African agency DataPro’s withdrawal from a local firm because of a fraudulent rating that was exposed

.....

# Zohran Mamdani’s mayoral bid is bigger than New York

Somdeep Sen

Sitting in northern Europe, I shouldn’t care about the New York mayoral race.

Yet, despite all that is happening in the world, the contentious Democratic primary for the 2025 New York City mayoral election has found its way into conversations around me — and onto my social media feed.

This attention isn’t just another example of the New York-centric worldview famously skewered in Saul Steinberg’s 1976 New Yorker cover, View of the World from 9th Avenue. A genuine political struggle is under way, one that has the potential to reverberate far beyond the Hudson River. At its centre is the increasingly polarised contest between Andrew Cuomo and Zohran Mamdani.

The name Cuomo may ring a bell. He resigned as New York’s governor in 2021 following multiple allegations of sexual harassment. While he expressed remorse at the time, his political comeback has been marked by defiance — suing one of his accusers and the state attorney general who found the accusations credible. He claims the scandal was a “political hit job”.

Cuomo’s record in office was far from unblemished. He diverted millions of dollars from the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), jeopardising the financial health of New York’s essential public transit system. He formed the Moreland Commission

to root out corruption but disbanded it abruptly when it began probing entities linked to his own campaign. During the COVID-19 pandemic, his administration was accused of undercounting nursing home deaths, allegedly to deflect criticism of policies that returned COVID-positive patients to those facilities.

Given that legacy, one might imagine Cuomo’s chances of becoming mayor would be slim. Yet, he currently leads in the polls.

Close behind him is Zohran Mamdani, a Democratic Socialist and state assemblyman from Queens. When he entered the race in March, Cuomo led by 40 points. A recent poll now puts Mamdani within 8 points.

Born in Kampala and raised in New York, Mamdani is the first Muslim candidate to run for mayor of the city. But his significance extends beyond his identity. What distinguishes Mamdani is his unapologetically progressive platform — and his refusal to dilute it in the name of “electability”. His appeal rests on substance, charisma, sharp messaging, and a mass volunteer-led canvassing operation.

At the heart of Mamdani’s campaign is a vision of a city that works for working-class New Yorkers. He proposes freezing rents for all rent-stabilised apartments, building 200,000 affordable homes, creating publicly-owned

grocery stores “focused on keeping prices low, not making profit”, and making buses free. He supports free childcare for children under five, better wages for childcare workers, and “baby baskets” containing essentials for new parents.

To fund these initiatives, Mamdani proposes increasing the corporate tax rate from 7.25 percent to 11.5 percent, and imposing a 2 percent income tax on New York City residents earning more than \$1m annually.

He also wants to raise the minimum wage, regulate gig economy giants like DoorDash, and protect delivery workers. His plan to establish a Department of Community Safety would shift resources away from traditional policing towards mental health and violence prevention.

He further promises to “Trump-proof” New York by enhancing the city’s sanctuary status, removing ICE’s influence, expanding legal support for migrants, defending LGBTQ+ rights and protecting reproductive healthcare access.

But championing such bold policies — as a brown, Muslim candidate — has made Mamdani a lightning rod for hate. Recently, in a rare show of emotion, Mamdani teared up while recounting threats he has received: “I get messages that say the only good Muslim is a dead Muslim. I get threats on my life ... on the people that I love.”

The NYPD is investigating two voicemails from an unidentified caller, who labelled Mamdani a “terrorist”, threatened to bomb his car, and ominously warned: “Watch your f.cking back every f.cking second until you get the f.k out of America.”

Cuomo’s campaign has also played into Islamophobic tropes. A mailer targeting Jewish voters from a Cuomo-aligned super PAC doctored Mamdani’s photo — darkening and lengthening his beard — and declared that he “rejects NYPD, rejects Israel, rejects capitalism and rejects Jewish rights”.

Much of this centres on Mamdani’s outspoken support for Palestinian rights. He has been criticised for refusing to affirm Israel’s right to exist as a Jewish state and for defending the slogan “globalise the intifada”, which he describes as “a desperate desire for equality and equal rights”. He also noted that the Arabic term intifada has been used by the US Holocaust Memorial Museum to describe the 1944 Warsaw Uprising.

Despite the attacks, Mamdani’s movement is surging. He has received endorsements from Senator Bernie Sanders, Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Congresswoman Nydia Velazquez, Attorney General Letitia James, the New York Working Families Party,

United Auto Workers Region 9A, and Jewish Voice for Peace Action.

In contrast, Cuomo is backed by major real estate donors wary of Mamdani’s housing agenda. His campaign has received \$1m from DoorDash, presumably in response to Mamdani’s proposed labour protections. Other prominent donors include Home Depot co-founder Ken Langone and hedge fund billionaire Bill Ackman — both known for supporting Donald Trump.

Still, Mamdani’s grassroots campaign has continued to gain ground. Whether or not he wins the nomination, his candidacy has already achieved something vital: it has offered proof that an anti-corporate, anti-Trump, community-powered campaign — one rooted in progressive values and refusal to compromise — can resonate with American voters.

But the stakes extend far beyond New York. Across Europe, South America, South Asia and Africa, right-wing populists are gaining ground by exploiting economic precarity, stoking culture wars and vilifying minorities. Mamdani’s campaign offers a clear counter-narrative: one that marries economic justice with moral clarity, mobilises diverse communities and challenges the politics of fear. For progressives around the world, it is a rare and instructive blueprint — not just for resistance, but for rebuilding.

Daoud Kuttab

# Discrimination in East Jerusalem

Periods of war are exceptional times, during which it is perfectly understandable that governments would place certain restrictions on the population. When there is danger to the public from rockets, drones or flying debris, officials understandably prefer that large gatherings be avoided.

In normal emergencies, in normal countries, this is reasonable and acceptable. But in the case of East Jerusalem, the Israeli government takes the issue to an exaggerated, maximum degree. It uses the war situation to punish the Palestinian population, using the justification that they are simply trying to protect them.

The Old City of Jerusalem is home to more

than 30,000 Palestinians. It is also the main shopping area for much of the city as a whole, the population of which numbers over 300,000. The Old City is also home to the cradles of world religions.

While the Israeli-initiated war on Iran has raged this past week, Israel unilaterally closed the Old City of Jerusalem to everyone except those who can prove, with ID cards, that they have a local address. In addition, Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre were closed by Israeli security orders.

On the surface, these might appear to be prudent and natural actions to protect the population. But when one realizes that other large shopping areas, such

as West Jerusalem’s Mahane Yehuda, have remained open, it becomes clear that this is a punitive measure and not a genuine effort to protect people.

Regarding the holy places, again, if the policy had been applied to all religious sites, one would concede that it was a decision reached out of caution. But when it becomes clear that the Buraq Wall, also known as the Western Wall, which is a holy site to Jews, has remained open during this period (although few people have visited it), one concludes that the closure of the other sites is not a simple security decision but an unacceptable, prejudicial action based on ethnic and religious discrimination.

Furthermore, Israeli security officials, using the war-like atmosphere as an excuse, have been bullying local muezzins (those who call Muslims to prayer) to considerably reduce the volume of their daily calls or even stop them altogether. In addition to the closures of public spaces and the discrimination against the entire Old City of Jerusalem, Israeli police have been acting in a discriminatory manner against pedestrians. Anyone spotted filming with a cell phone is harassed and ordered to surrender the device so that officers can check whether they have liked any social media posts that might be deemed to indicate support for Iran. In one incident, a Pale-

stinian child and a young man were shot in the A-Tur neighborhood of the city.

The Palestinians of Jerusalem, unfortunately, have no one to defend them, or to plead with the government that collects their taxes to provide compensation for the merchants of the Old City for the large losses they are suffering, or at least to suspend the Arnona municipal property tax.

Since the sudden death of Faisal Al-Husseini in Kuwait in 2001, Palestinians in Jerusalem have not been able to organize and unite under any single leader or spokesperson, and so there has been no representative or leadership in a position

to lobby for them.

Of course, the Israelis make the most of this leaderless reality — for Palestinians in the city, and fight tooth and nail against any nationalist efforts in Jerusalem.

Orient House, which served as the headquarters for Al-Husseini and his Arab Studies Society, was seized by Israeli authorities following his death and has remained closed for more than two decades as a result of a recurring six-month order.

Other local organizations, including the chambers of commerce and the tourism union, are also regularly closed. Cultural centers that attempt to organize any public events that Israeli authorities deem to have nationalistic under-

tones or to be connected, directly or indirectly, with the Palestinian government in Ramallah are automatically shut down by order of the Israeli police.

Even events such as children’s puppet festival at the Hakawati Theatre, a screening of a documentary about the drug problem East Jerusalemites are facing, or a graduation ceremony sponsored by a local club, have been suddenly canceled on the orders of the Israeli army, using nearly century-old British Mandate emergency regulations.

Despite all of these concerted Israeli efforts, and following a public protest in the form of a statement issued by a nongovernmental organization in Jerusalem criticizing the

closure of the holy sites, on Thursday the Israelis finally permitted Muslim worshippers to attend prayers at Al-Aqsa Mosque, albeit a mere 450 of them. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre also finally reopened on Tuesday to a handful of local Christian worshippers, and the Catholic Latin Patriarch was allowed to hold religious ceremonies, though they were attended by only a few.

While the situation has slowly, through the force of public pressure, started to return somewhat to normal, there is no doubt that the ways in which Israeli authorities deal with the Palestinians of Jerusalem and the Jewish Israelis of Jerusalem are totally different.





# PAJCCI welcomes One Year Multiple Entry Visa policy for Afghan drivers

E.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Senior Vice President, Pak-Afghan Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PAJCCI), Zia-ul-Haq Sarhadi has welcomed the decision taken by Pakistan government of introducing a One Year Multiple Entry Visa for Afghan drivers to boost cross border trade.

In a bid to enhance bilateral trade and streamline border management, Pakistan has recently announced a new policy of granting Afghan drivers and transporters a one-year multiple entry visa.

“The step taken by government would help in reducing the hindrances in Pak-Afghan trade and transit trade by facilitating passage of good laden trucks between the two countries,” Zia commented.

In a press statement issued here on Sunday, Ziaul Haq Sarhadi who is also Executive Member Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI) also made some suggestions of making the new policy more practical and long lasting.

He said before this policy, government had decided to issue TAD-1 docu-

ments for Afghan drivers, with a one year validity.

Initially the visa fee for TAD was set at \$100, but then it happens that during processing fee increases to \$500 and \$1,000, creating problems for drivers and traders.

Zia said measures should be taken to ensure implementation of fixed fee for new visa issuance policy and drivers are not compelled to pay additional amount.

SVP PAJCCI also suggested for developing a desk at Torkham border point for visa issuance and renewal for drivers and

cleaners.

He also recalled issuance of ‘Red Pass’ by Pakistan government in late 80’s to people associated with Pak-Afghan trade who keep on traveling across the border for business purpose.

Revival of Red Pass policy will also help in expediting cargo traveling procedure and timing in Pak-Afghan trade, Zia opined.

He said visiting of drivers to embassies for application submission and other formalities will be time consuming and may cause delay in transportation of import-export bound goods between the two countries.

# BMP pushes for policy adjustments to make budget workable for industry

E.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry’s Businessmen Panel (BMP) has raised strong concerns over the Federal Budget 2025–26, calling it a document full of theoretical optimism but lacking the concrete execution strategy required to address Pakistan’s deep-rooted economic and industrial challenges. The BMP leadership said the government missed a critical opportunity to push forward structural reforms and provide the private sector with practical relief to overcome prevailing financial hardships, rising production costs, and export stagnation.

BMP Chairman and former FPCCI President Mian Anjum Nisar, voicing the collective position of the business community under the BMP umbrella, said the budget failed to outline any viable roadmap for industrial expansion, job creation, or meaningful growth in the manufacturing sector. He regretted that

instead of facilitating businesses, the budget has prioritized tax revenue goals without fixing fundamental issues affecting productivity and competitiveness. He stressed that Pakistan’s economic revival is not possible without the active engagement and support of the business community, which continues to feel sidelined despite repeated promises of stakeholder-driven policy.

Mian Anjum Nisar criticized the government’s excessive reliance on indirect taxation and short-term fiscal tools, warning that such an approach will only widen inequality and hinder long-term economic planning. He pointed out that the government has introduced aggressive tax measures without corresponding reforms in documentation and enforcement, creating fears of harassment among already compliant businesses. He strongly opposed granting tax authorities unchecked powers, such as freezing business accounts without prior notice, terming them anti-

business and contrary to the spirit of voluntary compliance and trust-building.

The BMP observed that while the budget acknowledges inflationary pressures and attempts to provide some relief to salaried individuals, it does little to address the burden on industry. No visible steps were taken to reduce electricity and gas tariffs, which continue to make Pakistani exports uncompetitive in international markets. The panel noted that energy remains the single biggest cost component for manufacturers, especially in the value-added textile and engineering sectors, and called the absence of any rationalisation in power tariffs a major policy failure.

The Businessmen Panel lamented that while the budget included broad commitments to digitalisation and tax reform, it lacked timelines, mechanisms, and enforcement capacity to make those reforms work. The panel supported the idea of expanding the tax net through technology, such as e-invoicing and POS integration, but cautioned that these systems should not become additional compliance burdens on legitimate businesses without first fixing existing procedural flaws. BMP urged the FBR to ensure proper safeguards, training, and grievance redress mechanisms before rolling out any new system nationwide.

Addressing the PSDP allocations, BMP said that the Rs1,000 billion earmarked for development spending is inadequate to meet the pressing infrastructure needs of Pakistan’s economy, especially in industrial zones, ports, logistics corridors, and power transmission lines. Mian Anjum Nisar said that unless these funds are used transparently with

strict project prioritisation, they will have minimal impact. He urged the government to revive long-stalled industrial and transport infrastructure projects, which are essential to improving supply chains and reducing the cost of doing business.

On the issue of financing and liquidity, BMP highlighted that Pakistan’s small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) continue to face major hurdles in accessing affordable credit due to persistently high interest rates and slow bank lending. The budget, according to BMP, lacks any clear program or policy directive to ease financing constraints for SMEs or exporters. In the current environment of inflation, currency instability, and global market pressure, BMP warned that without targeted financial relief and subsidised credit windows, the country’s export engine would stall further.

The Businessmen Panel also expressed serious disappointment over the continued neglect of value-added sectors, particularly textile, apparel, and light engineering, which are the backbone of Pakistan’s export economy. Anjum reiterated the panel’s longstanding demand for the revival of the zero-rated regime and the removal of procedural hurdles in sales tax refunds. He noted that working capital remains stuck in refund cycles, which creates a liquidity crisis for exporters already struggling with thin margins and delayed shipments.

BMP called for a complete rethinking of the country’s tax strategy. Instead of placing more burdens on the formal sector, the government should broaden the base by targeting untaxed segments and expanding documentation through rational incentives.



ISLAMABAD: A vendor sells seasonal mangoes at his stall in Weekly Bazaar at H-9 Sector.

## Pak food items shine at China-South Asia Expo

LAHORE (APP): Pak Food Products, representing the rich culinary heritage of South Punjab, received an overwhelmingly positive response at the 9th China-South Asia Expo held in Kunming, China.

The company captivated international buyers, distributors, and food industry experts with its vibrant showcase of traditional and innovative snack items.

Talking to China Economic Net, Saif Ur Rehman, Coordinator to the Federal Tax Ombudsman and leader of the food exporters’ delegation, said that “Zia Snacks”, a flagship brand of the Family Food Products company, stood out for its authentic taste, superior quality ingredients, and hygienic packaging. He added that the brand reflects the culinary excellence and cultural richness of South Punjab.

Led by a committed and passionate team, Pak Food Products presented a diverse assortment including spicy nimko, sweet treats, and organic roasted nuts. Visitors lauded the brand not only for taste and quality but also for affordable pricing and export-ready packaging that aligns with global standards.

Saif Ur Rehman highlighted that the Expo served as a crucial platform for networking and building trade partnerships with buyers from China, ASEAN countries, and 73 other nations. “Our participation reflects the growing confidence of Pakistan’s SMEs in international markets,” he noted. He further said that the enthusiastic response from buyers signals promising prospects for integration into global supply chains. The Pak brand “Zia” is now actively exploring long-term export contracts, joint ventures, and retail placements across Asia, he concluded.

# ‘Investor-friendly industrial policy vital for economic revival’

LAHORE (APP): SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry former President Iftikhar Ali Malik on Sunday urged the government to engage all stakeholders before finalizing the new industrial policy, which is aimed at revitalizing Pakistan’s manufacturing sector and boosting overall production.

In a statement issued here on Sunday, Iftikhar Ali Malik stressed the importance of comprehensive consultation with chambers of commerce, trade bodies, and industrialists to ensure that the upcoming policy reflects on-ground realities and effectively contributes to national productivity. He

emphasized that the new industrial policy must focus on increasing industrial output, generating employment opportunities, and providing long-term, sustainable solutions to the challenges faced by the manufacturing and SME sectors.

Highlighting the major hurdles confronting the industry, he pointed to high energy costs, outdated technologies, a lack of innovation, and inconsistent taxation policies, all of which demand a unified and pragmatic approach in policy formulation.

He further noted that a stable and investor-friendly policy framework is essen-

tial not only for boosting exports but also for attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) and enhancing economic resilience. He called for the inclusion of technology transfer, skills development, and environmentally sustainable industrial practices in the new policy blueprint.

He added that proactive engagement with the private sector would foster trust, ensure stakeholder ownership, and enhance the effectiveness of the policy. Expressing hope, he said the government must prioritize inclusive economic growth by making industrial revival a central focus of its national economic agenda.

# Traders team visits Sindh Food & Consumer Expo

HYDERABAD (APP): A delegation of the Hyderabad Chamber of Small Traders and Small Industry (HCSTSI), led by Acting President Ahmed Idrees Chohan, on Sunday visited the Sindh Food and Consumer Expo 2025 held at Abdullah Mall, Bypass Road, Qasimbabad, Hyderabad.

It is worth mentioning that HCSTSI is proudly associated with this grand event as a supporting partner, in collaboration with RK Marketing Network. During the visit, Ahmed Idrees Chohan extended heartfelt congratulations to Rizwan Ahmed Qazi, CEO and Chief Organizer of RK Marketing, as well as to the management of Abdullah Mall, for organizing such a well-coordinated, vibrant and secure event.

Talking to media repre-

sentatives during the visit, he said the expo serves as a unique recreational, educational and commercial opportunity for the people of Hyderabad.

He appreciated the strong participation of the food industry, consumer product brands and local entrepreneurs, adding that the expo hosts dozens of stalls offering a wide range of delicious food items, household products and other consumer goods.

Chohan personally visited each stall and acknowledged the tireless efforts of local and national exhibitors.

He stated that such initiatives promote local commerce, offer consumers access to quality and variety, and encourage entrepreneurial spirit among the youth.

Idrees Chohan appealed to the business community,

young entrepreneurs and the citizens of Hyderabad to visit and support the expo, making it a resounding success and playing their part in strengthening the local economy.

He further emphasized that HCSTSI has always supported youth-led businesses and will continue to actively participate in all such initiatives in the future. He lauded the expo as a successful blend of commercial culture and family entertainment, truly reflective of Hyderabad’s evolving business landscape.

He thanked RK Marketing Network, Abdullah Mall management, security teams, and all supporting organizations for their dedication in making the Sindh Food & Consumer Expo 2025 a remarkable and memorable event.

# Strategic importance of Field Marshal’s US visit

Abdul Basit Alvi

The recent visit of Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir to the United States marks a critical juncture in the long-standing, complex, and strategically vital relationship between Pakistan and the US. This relationship, spanning over seven decades, has navigated periods of close collaboration and considerable tension, yet remains a cornerstone of regional geopolitics, encompassing counterterrorism, economic development, strategic diplomacy, and regional stability. Field Marshal Munir’s visit was not merely a diplomatic formality; it served as a robust platform to address pressing defense and economic issues, signaling a renewed commitment to bilateral cooperation and offering a glimpse into significant future developments for Pakistan.

Following the ceasefire, Trump publicly commended the leadership of both nations and pledged to assist in resolving the Kashmir issue, stating, “I will work with you both to see if, after a ‘thousand years,’ a solution can be arrived at concerning Kashmir.” Pakistan welcomed this offer, appreciating the US role in facilitating the ceasefire and expressing hope for a peaceful resolution aligned

with UN Security Council resolutions. Trump’s pragmatism and strategic recalibration helped restore a semblance of balance in South Asia and significantly boosted US-Pakistan engagement during a volatile period.

Against this backdrop, Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir’s recent visit to the United States assumed immense strategic importance. His address to the Pakistani community in Washington provided profound insights into Operation Bunyan Marsoos and critical issues facing Pakistan, including terrorism, the economic situation, and relations with the US and the Iran-Israel war.

Field Marshal Munir revealed details of India’s attempt to blame Pakistan for the Pahalgam incident, demanding it be declared an act of terrorism. Pakistan’s blunt refusal, asserting that freedom movements were active in Occupied Kashmir and questioning the effectiveness of Indian forces, highlighted Pakistan’s firm stance. He recounted India’s subsequent threats and Pakistan’s resolute response, emphasizing that Pakistan would retaliate against aggression regardless of international pressure. The Field Marshal specifically underscored the seamless coordination between the government and the Pakistan Army

during Operation Bunyan Marsoos, noting Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif’s informed assessment of escalation risks and Air Marshal Zahir Ahmad Babar Sidhu’s testament to the Air Force’s “lead wall” defense. The operation was named “Bunyan Marsoos” (a Quranic verse meaning “a solid structure”) to reflect the military’s unwavering spirit and courage.

Field Marshal acknowledged China’s provision of some equipment but stressed the unique proficiency with which Pakistani forces utilized it. He vividly described how Pakistan’s forces effectively neutralized India’s systems: hacking into networks, crashing systems to cause power outages, opening dam spillways, defacing the BJP’s website, conducting extensive drone surveillance over Gujarat and Delhi, seizing missile defense systems, and selectively hitting military targets. The Field Marshal attributed the real strength of the Pakistani forces to the unwavering support of its people, describing the army’s response as perfectly organized and akin to a scripted operation. Humbly, he attributed the victory against India not to personal credit, but to a “miracle.”

Regarding the Kashmir issue, Field Marshal Munir noted Donald Trump’s 13

public statements on Kashmir and predicted significant future developments. He stated that discussions on terrorism with India would inevitably bring up India’s 1971 role in creating the Mukti Bahini, highlighting India’s own history of supporting proxy terrorism. Importantly, he revealed that the United States and India are not on the same page regarding terrorism in Pakistan, with the US unequivocally opposing it.

On the economic front, Field Marshal Munir presented a compelling proposal. He highlighted the US interest in mineral metals from Ukraine (valued at \$400-500 billion) and contrasted it with Pakistan’s estimated \$1 trillion in mineral reserves. He suggested that US investment could yield \$10-15 billion annually for 100 years. Furthermore, he announced an upcoming agreement between the Pakistan Crypto Council and the American Crypto Council, positioning Pakistan as a future hub for crypto mining and artificial intelligence data centers.

Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir’s recent visit to the US was indeed a pivotal moment, characterized by high-level engagements and strategic discussions. His meetings with senior US officials focused on enhancing defense collab-

oration, counterterrorism efforts, joint military training, and intelligence sharing. Interactions with US lawmakers reaffirmed the strategic partnership and Pakistan’s commitment to regional peace.

A significant aspect of his visit was his advocacy for resolving longstanding regional issues. He reiterated Pakistan’s stance on the Kashmir dispute, emphasizing resolution in accordance with UN Security Council resolutions and the aspirations of the Kashmiri people. He also addressed the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, urging immediate international action, a ceasefire, and a two-state solution, and expressed keen interest in de-escalating the Iran-Israel conflict.

During his official visit to the United States, Field Marshal Asim Munir held a significant meeting with US President Donald Trump at the White House. The discussions covered a range of critical issues, including the escalating Iran-Israel conflict, as well as cooperation in trade, energy, minerals, artificial intelligence, and cryptocurrency.

Also present at the high-level meeting were US Secretary of State Senator Marco Rubio, US Special Representative for Middle East Affairs Steve Witkoff, and Pakistan’s National Security Advisor. The

meeting commenced with a luncheon in the Cabinet Room, followed by a visit to the Oval Office.

Field Marshal Munir expressed gratitude to President Trump on behalf of Pakistan and its people, commending his global leadership and strategic insight. In turn, President Trump acknowledged Field Marshal Munir’s pivotal role in regional stability and praised his leadership during complex geopolitical challenges. Notably, Trump thanked the Field Marshal for his efforts in preventing a potential conflict between Pakistan and India, both nuclear-armed states.

President Trump also expressed keen interest in building a long-term strategic and economic partnership with Pakistan, emphasizing shared interests. The dialogue between the two leaders lasted over two hours, reflecting the depth and importance of their discussions.

Following the meeting, President Trump told the media that it was an honor to meet Field Marshal Munir. He emphasized that the Field Marshal had been invited to the White House as a gesture of appreciation for helping avert war with India. Trump also mentioned that a trade agreement with Pakistan was under negotiation.

This historic engagement marked the first time

a US President formally met with the Chief of the Pakistan Army, underscoring both the global stature of Field Marshal Asim Munir and the strategic importance of Pakistan. The recent success of Operation Bunyan Marsoos was highlighted as a transformative moment for Pakistan’s international image, with the country emerging stronger and more resilient. Field Marshal Munir, often referred to as Pakistan’s “Iron Man,” has proven instrumental in guiding the nation through its most pressing challenges.

Another important point to note is that following Pakistan’s recent victory, its relationships with the United States and other countries have reached a more balanced level. Pakistan’s voice on the international stage has grown stronger. Historically, Pakistan has consistently provided moral support to oppressed peoples around the world, standing in solidarity with the people of Kashmir, Iran, Palestine, and others facing aggression.

Pakistan has actively raised its voice in support of these communities across various international platforms. The official statements from the Pakistani government and the Field Marshal are publicly available and recognized globally. This new

chapter in Pakistan-US relations will further enhance Pakistan’s ability to offer moral support to nations suffering from injustice and violence.

However, it is also important to acknowledge that Pakistan continues to face both internal and external security challenges, with unresolved tensions with India remaining a key issue. These challenges limit Pakistan’s capacity to engage directly in international conflicts. Nonetheless, Pakistan is on a path toward becoming stronger and more secure, and a more stable and powerful Pakistan will be better positioned to speak out more effectively against global aggression and atrocities.

Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir’s visit to the US was of paramount importance, addressing critical defense and economic issues that will undoubtedly benefit Pakistan. The nation harbors high hopes for the tangible results of this successful visit in the coming months, anticipating that it will contribute significantly to a stronger, more secure, and prosperous Pakistan. The visit has clearly laid a groundwork for enhanced strategic engagement and economic partnership, reinforcing the enduring, albeit complex, relationship between Pakistan and the United States.





In brief

**Canada qualifies for WC KING CITY** (Agencies): Canada has secured its place in the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026 after a comprehensive seven-wicket victory over the Bahamas at the Maple Leaf Cricket Ground in Ontario. It became the 11th team to qualify for the 20-team event, alongside co-hosts India and Sri Lanka. The other qualified sides include Afghanistan, Australia, Bangladesh, England, South Africa, United States, West Indies, Ireland, New Zealand and Pakistan. Seven more teams – two from Europe Qualifier (to be played from July 5–11, 2025), two from Africa Qualifier (to be played from September 19 – October 4, 2025) and three from Asia-EAP Qualifier (to be played from October 1–17, 2025) – will join the Men's T20 World Cup through the Regional Qualifiers. Canada made its debut in the men's T20 World Cup in 2024, winning one of the four group stage matches against Ireland.

**Marquez wins in Mugello**

**MUGELLO** (Agencies): Marc Marquez won the Italian Grand Prix to extend his lead at the top of the riders' standings in MotoGP. The Spaniard had already won Saturday's sprint race and secured a record-breaking 100th pole position to start Sunday's race from the front at the Mugello circuit. From the very first corner Marquez, his brother Alex and home favourite Francesco Bagnaia swapped positions in a breathless start. With Bagnaia tailing off the front two, Marc Marquez was able to regain the lead from his brother on lap nine and pulled away in the remainder of the race to take the chequered flag. The 32-year-old Ducati rider now leads the championship by 40 points from Alex Marquez after securing his first victory in Italy since 2014. "[It is] an amazing feeling," said Marc Marquez. "We are at a Ducati track and I know it's super special for them so [it's good] to have three Ducatis on the podium." "From the beginning Francesco [Bagnaia] and Alex [Marquez] attacked me but I was calm and I am happy to take the deserved points." Bagnaia was looking to make it four straight wins at his home grand prix but was beaten into third place by fellow Italian Fabio di Giannantonio. The c'ship continues next weekend with the Dutch Grand Prix at Assen.

**Three fans die in Algeria**

**ALGIERS** (Agencies): Three people have died after falling from the upper stand of a stadium in Algeria just after the final whistle as local football team MC Alger won the league title, the health ministry says. Dozens of others were injured when a security barrier collapsed, with fans surging forward to celebrate before falling on to the lower tier of the 5 July Stadium in Algiers, according to local media. More than 70 people have been treated in three hospitals, the health ministry says, adding that most have since been released. Players and staff from MC Alger have gone to the hospitals to donate blood to the injured, reports the news agency Reuters. The stadium was packed for the game that saw MC Alger retain the league title they won last year. During the match the mood was celebratory, with green smoke from flares engulfing the stadium. Following the tragedy, the presentation of the league trophy was postponed. Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune offered his condolences.



LEEDS: Brydon Carse had Yashasvi Jaiswal caught behind with a pearl, England vs India, 1st Test.

Vondrousova warms up for Wimbledon with Berlin title

**BERLIN** (AFP/APP): Marketa Vondrousova ended the run of Chinese qualifier Wang Xinyu to land the Berlin WTA title on Sunday and ignite dreams of a second Wimbledon victory. The Czech, who won Wimbledon in 2023, was pushed hard by Wang, appearing in her first final, but eventually emerged the 7-6 (12/10), 4-6, 6-2 winner. This was Vondrousova's third success on the WTA tour and it proved she is hitting form at the right moment after a torrid time with injury with Wimbledon starting on Monday week. The 25-year-old, finalist at the Tokyo Olympics in 2021, has tumbled down the world rankings to 164 from sixth

after months away from the court with a left shoulder injury for which she underwent surgery last year. "We've all worked hard for me to come back," said Vondrousova, acknowledging the hard work she and her team have put in to get her back firing on all cylinders. Wang broke Vondrousova twice to lead 6-5 in the first set only for the Czech to level at 6-6, taking the tie break 12/10 after saving six set points. With her serve under pressure she lost the second set before running away with the third as Wang appeared to run out of steam at the end of a loaded week coming through the qualifiers. "We came here hoping to win the first match and here I am. I'm so grateful,"

smiled Vondrousova. This was her first title match since she defeated Ons Jabeur in straight sets at Wimbledon two years ago. Immediate reward for the win will come on Monday when she shoots up inside the top 100 to 73 in the latest WTA world order. Sunday's success was the icing on the cake for Vondrousova who stunned world number one and three-time Grand slam winner Aryna Sabalenka in the semi-final. For Wang it was just a step too far after what she had described as a "dream" week on the grass of the German capital including defeats of 2021 Berlin champion Ludmila Samsonova and French Open champion Coco Gauff.

Iran karate star Helena Gholami killed in Israeli airstrike



**TEHRAN** (Monitoring Desk): Renowned Iranian karate champion Helena Gholami was killed during an Israeli airstrike, adding to the growing civilian toll in the ongoing conflict. She belonged to the western province of Lorestan and was considered a national icon and a role model for Iranian youth. The Iranian Karate Federation officially confirmed Gholami's death, expressing deep sorrow over the loss.

According to the statement, she was not only a top athlete but also deeply involved in promoting youth sports and women's participation across Iran. Her tragic death has created a wave of mourning in Iran's sports circles. On June 13, 2025, Israel launched several airstrikes across Iran. These attacks occurred during ongoing negotiations between Iran and the United States regarding uranium enrichment and nuclear agreements. The sudden escalation caught many by surprise, especially as talks were showing signs of progress.

The Iranian karate community has responded with widespread grief. Athletes, coaches, and public figures posted tributes on social media, calling Gholami a "symbol of strength and resilience." According to a spokesperson for the Iranian government, at least 224 people have died in the recent strikes. These include 74 women and children. The Ministry of Health reported that over 1,800 individuals were injured, many of whom remain in critical condition. The humanitarian toll continues to rise as air raids persist in key regions. Iranian officials have called the strikes an act of open aggression and have urged the international community to intervene. There has been no immediate response from global powers beyond basic statements of concern.

Iranian officials have called the strikes an act of open aggression and have urged the international community to intervene. There has been no immediate response from global powers beyond basic statements of concern.

Pak cueists victorious in Asian C'ship

**ISLAMABAD** (APP): Four Pakistani cueists have earned victories in matches of the Asian 6 Red Championship at Colombo, Sri Lanka. According to details, a total of 32 players from 13 countries were participating in the championship. These players have been divided into eight groups. Each player will play three matches in the

league round, out of which two players will qualify for the pre-quarters. Awais Ullah Munir from Pakistan Defending Champion of This Championship. In Day 1st Results, Awais Ullah Munir (Pak) beat Chi Kin Chan (Macao China) 4-2 (1-53, 41(41)-01, 38(31)-06, 09-38, 49(37)-0, 57(52)-0),

Muhammad Asif (Pak) outplayed Neang Tola (Cambodia) 4-1 (37(37)-17, 47(37)-0, 9-59(35), 44-0, 29-9) and Muhammad Sajjad (Pak) defeated Khalil Busaif (Bahrain) 4-0 (46-35, 34-17, 48-17, 46(33)-13). Awais Ullah Munir (Pak) beat Zia ur Rahman Azad (Bangladesh) 4-0 (65(65)-0, 47(47)-17, 59(43)-8, 75(75)-0).

Three Pakistan players signed by Riders

**ISLAMABAD** (APP): Three Pakistan players Iftikhar Ahmed, Akif Javed, and Khawaja Nafay have signed with the defending champions Rangpur Riders for the 2025 Guyana Global Super League (GSL), set to take place from July 10 to 19 at the Guyana National Stadium in Providence. Iftikhar Ahmed brings valuable all-round experience from his stints in the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) and Lanka Premier League (LPL). Pacer Akif Javed, also with LPL exposure, joins the squad, while middle-order batter Khawaja Nafay begins his second overseas T20 season—following two campaigns in the BPL, as quoted by cricketpakistan.com.pk. The Riders have also retained key squad mem-

bers, including captain Nurul Hasan and top order batter Soumya Sarkar—the tournament's leading run scorer in the inaugural GSL. Fast bowler Kamrul Islam Rabbi remains as the spearhead of their attack, ensuring a balanced squad. Other Pakistanis in the tournament include Saud Shakeel (Guyana Amazon Warriors), Mohammad Nawaz, and Sahibzada Farhan (both with Hobart Hurricanes), pending NOCs. Rangpur Riders squad for GSL 2025: Nurul Hasan Sohan, Soumya Sarkar, Mohammed Naim Sheikh, Mahidul Islam Ankon, Kamrul Islam Rabbi, Mohammed Saif Hassan, Abu Haider Rony, Rakibul Hasan, Yasir Ali Chowdhury, Kyle Mayers,

Tabraiz Shamsi, Ibrahim Zadrar, Iftikhar Ahmed, Akif Javed, Harmeet Singh, Khawaja Nafay. Guyana Amazon Warriors squad for GSL 2025: Imran Tahir, Evin Lewis, Johnson Charles, Moeen Ali, Shimron Hetmyer, Saud Shakeel, Romario Shepherd, Dwain Pretorius, Gudakesh Motie, Akeal Hossein, Ramanullah Gurbaz, Mark Adair, Jewel Andrew, Shamar Springer, Amir Jangoo. Hobart Hurricanes squad for GSL 2025: Ben McDermott, Billy Stanlake, Nikhil Chaudhary, Jackson Bird, Tim Ward, Jake Doran, Raf MacMillan, Marcus Bean, Mac Wright, Sahibzada Farhan, Mohammed Nawaz, Mohammed Nabi, Odean Smith.

PNF names 12-member team for Asian C'ship

**ISLAMABAD** (APP): Pakistan Netball Federation (PNF) has announced a 12-member team for participating in the Asian Youth Netball Championship 2025, to be played from June 27 to July 4, at Jeonju Hwasan Gymnasium, Jeonju-si, Korea. According to President, Pakistan Netball Federation, Sameen Malik the 12-member team includes Parisa Abbas, Amani Fuad Garib, Alina Maya Garib, Leya Raza Shah, Alisha Amer Naveed, Israh Umer Malik,

Haleema Sakina Safdar, Sarina Naseem Hussain, Sumaya Safiya Ahmed, Sumayya Kauthar Safdar, Jasmine Elizabeth Farooq, Farrah Sherry Ross Rashid, Mudassar Razak and Amanda Arleen have been appointed as Manager and Head Coach, respectively. Haroona Bario Zaman will act as Assistant Manager/Coach and Irfan Sadia Hussain as Primary Care. Eleven teams are participating in the championship and divided into two groups; Group-A;

Malaysia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Hong Kong and India. Group-B; Chinese Taipei, Japan, Korea, Pakistan, Maldives and Saudi Arabia. Pakistan will play five league matches in Group-B. Pakistan will play its first match with Saudi Arabia on June 27, 2nd match with Chinese Taipei on June 28, 3rd match with Korea3on June 29 while Pakistan will play its 4th and 5th match in its group with Japan and Maldives on June 30 and July 1, respectively.

WBPF President extends felicitations to PBBF

**ISLAMABAD** (APP): Following the recent elections of the Pakistan Bodybuilding Federation (PBBF), a wave of congratulatory messages has poured in from international bodybuilding circles. The President of the World Bodybuilding and Physique Sports Federation (WBPF), Datuk Paul Chua, along with his executive team, extended heartfelt congratulations to the newly elected officials of the Pakistan Bodybuilding Federation, said a press release. In his special message, Datuk Paul Chua said, "We take great pride in Pakistan's democratic and transparent success. This

new chapter in Pakistani bodybuilding signifies a future filled with growth, unity, and enhanced global recognition." He emphasized that the elections, held under the supervision of the Pakistan Sports Board and conducted by the Board's Election Commission through a fair, transparent, and legal process, have once again established the Pakistan Bodybuilding Federation as the only internationally recognized representative body for the sport. The elected officials will serve a four-year term and are expected to lead the federation toward further professionalism and structured

development. Datuk Paul Chua said, "With this historic development, the chapter of all illegal, unrecognized, and controversial organizations related to bodybuilding in Pakistan is now closed for good." It is worth noting that the Pakistan Bodybuilding Federation is the sole national body officially affiliated with global institutions, including the World Bodybuilding and Physique Sports Federation (WBPF), the Asian Bodybuilding and Fitness Federation (ABBF), and the South Asian Bodybuilding and Fitness Federation (SABPF).

Padel tennis: A new sporting wave rising

**ISLAMABAD** (APP): As the sun dips behind the Margalla Hills and floodlights flicker on across the courts of the Padel Pit in Sector E-11, Islamabad, the rhythmic thud of ball against glass echoes across the summer air, marking the rise of a new sporting wave in Pakistan. The fledgling sport of padel tennis, a dynamic hybrid of tennis and squash, is quietly gaining traction across Pakistan. While cricket continues to reign supreme, padel is rapidly carving out its niche, particularly in urban hubs like Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad and Rawalpindi. With purpose-built courts, late-night playing hours and youth increasingly seeking alternatives to screen-heavy lifestyles, the sport is becoming a magnet for both recreational players and emerging athletes. "We're seeing growing interest every week," said Saad Ghayaz, co-owner of Padel Pit. "People are realizing that padel is not only fun but also accessible to a wide range of fitness levels. It's fast-paced, social

and perfect for this generation," Osama, co-owner of another club, Padel Deck at G.T Road near DHA 2 Islamabad added: "The beauty of padel is how quickly you can pick it up, and yet it's deep enough to keep you hooked. Whether it's school students or professionals, we're seeing people flood in from all age groups." Among the sport's rising stars in the capital are national tennis players Huzaima Abdul Rehman and Rafay Aimal, who have swiftly made a mark on Pakistan's padel scene. Both regularly train at Padel Deck. Huzaima, crowned Player of the Tournament in the recent PADEL IN Open (Men A Category), is one of the brightest prospects. "It's not just a sport. It's a mindset," he said. "Padel teaches you to think on your feet, adapt quickly, and stay mentally sharp." "The environment at Padel Deck has played a key role in my development. I've had the chance to train with skilled players, improve my strategy,

and stay consistent with my fitness." "For me, it's more than competing; it's about building a strong mental and emotional framework through sport." Beyond the capital, Lahore is also experiencing a padel awakening. Abid and Abdullah, both experienced tennis players, are now among the driving forces behind padel's local growth. "It's fast, exciting and tests your reflexes in a different way. More importantly, it brings people together in a very interactive settin," he remarked. Abid, who also works as a coach in Lahore, is particularly focused on building harmony between the two sports. "We're trying to create a healthy balance between padel and tennis," he noted. "They complement each other — tennis gives you foundational skills, while padel sharpens your agility and teamwork." "We've already seen several tennis players make the shift to padel or incorporate both into their routines. This crossover is crucial for growing a versatile

athlete base in Pakistan." The sport's formal structure is also taking shape, thanks to the efforts of Mudassar Arain, the Chief Executive Officer spearheading the Pakistan Padel Federation. "In October last year, we received affiliation from the International Padel Federation, and we're also linked with the Asian Padel Federation," Mudassar shared. "Recognition by the Pakistan Sports Board is in its final stages as about 90% of the process is complete," he claimed. According to him, several players, including Aziz Khan from Peshawar, have already begun competing internationally. "These early breakthroughs show that we have what it takes to compete on the global stage." Mudassar also highlighted the explosive domestic growth. "We now have over 100 clubs in Lahore, more than 60 in Karachi, and a similar number operating across the twin cities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad," he said. "We've begun a nation-

al registration process to streamline player databases and enhance our club network." With such exponential expansion, the infrastructure is quickly catching up to the sport's enthusiasm. Lights stay on well past midnight at clubs like Padel Pit and the facility at DHA with matches often stretching till 3:00 am or even 4:00 am. This flexible timing allows students and professionals alike to participate after work or school, offering a wholesome alternative to screen time and sedentary habits. This point is emphasized by psychologist Fozia Kamran, who sees a deeper societal benefit behind padel's growing popularity. "We are seeing an increasing number of young people who are sleep-deprived and socially isolated due to excessive screen use," she said. "Sports like padel offer a healthy, social and structured outlet." "Beyond fitness, it improves mood, focus and social engagement. It's not just about move-

ment; it's about creating a positive routine." The international trend is also feeding local ambitions. The International Padel Federation notes a global surge in club construction and player registration, especially in Spain, Sweden, UAE and Argentina. There's even growing talk of padel being featured in future multi-sport events, including the Olympics. In Pakistan, the same momentum is palpable. Inter-city leagues, talent hunts, and international exchange programmes are already in the planning phase. "There's real momentum here," Mudassar said. "With the right structure and community, Pakistan can become a strong contender in the Asian and even global padel circuit," he maintained. With every smash, volley and cheer echoing off the padel courts into the summer nights, one thing is certain: Padel in Pakistan is not just a trend — it's the next big thing in sports.





## In brief

### Gang of 'thieves' busted

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Mandra Police have busted a four-member gang involved in several cases of theft and burglary. The arrested accused have confessed to burglarizing mosques, madrasas, houses and shops, a Rawalpindi Police spokesperson said on Sunday. Electronics and household goods, including LEDs, UPS, irons, sewing machines and other items worth more than Rs 900,000, had been recovered from the arrested accused, he added. Moreover, stolen amount of Rs 90,000 and a motorcycle were also recovered from them, the spokesman said. Superintendent of Police Sadder Muhammad Nabeel Khokhar directed the Mandra Police to collect solid evidence against the accused so that they could not escape from punishment by courts.

### Honey-trap gang arrested

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Chauritra Police have carried out a major operation arrested a three-member gang that had been robbing citizens through honey traps on the pretext of matchmaking. The arrested accused included two women and a man, a Rawalpindi Police spokesman said on Sunday. According to Superintendent of Police Sadder Muhammad Nabeel Khokhar, the gang members used to invite citizens for a meeting on the pretext of matchmaking, where their indecent videos were made, which were later used for blackmailing to extract huge sums of money from them. He said that the accused would not escape from sentence from the courts as the police had gathered solid evidence of their criminal activities. The Rawalpindi Police, he said, continued to take all possible steps to protect citizens and the elements "who blackmail them through such means cannot escape the clutches of the law".

### Liquor suppliers netted

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi Police in operations across the district on Sunday netted 10 suspects, including four liquor suppliers and six illegal arm owners. Besides illegal weapons and ammunition, some 26 litres of liquor were recovered from the accused, a Rawalpindi Police spokesman said. The Bani Police arrested three accused with 20 litres of liquor while the New Town Police recovered 6 litres of liquor from an accused. Similarly, the Naseerabad Police held four suspects, recovering weapons along with ammunition from their possession. The Ganjmandi and Kallar Syedan Police arrested one suspect each for having illegal weapons along with ammunition.

### Three drug dealers netted

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi Police continued anti-drug operations on Sunday and netted three accused, including a woman, recovering 1.84 kilograms drugs. According a police spokesman, the Pirwadhai Police netted a lady drug dealer on the recovery of 1.1 kg heroin from her. Similarly, the Dhamial Police also recovered 520 grams charas from an accused. The City Police also nabbed an accused and recovered 220 grams charas from him.



ISLAMABAD: Stagnant rainwater and mud accumulated at the 10th Avenue underpass in the Federal Capital following last night's rainfall. —APP Photo

## Mushaal expresses deep concern over US attack on Iran

ISLAMABAD (APP): Kashmiri leader and social activist Mushaal Mulick has expressed deep concern over the alleged attacks on Iran's nuclear facilities by the US. She has said that such actions can further increase tensions in a sensitive region like the Middle East and endanger global

peace, said a press release here on Sunday.

In her statement, Mushaal Mulick said that all countries should resolve disputes through dialogue and diplomatic means, and not follow the path of war. She stressed that the nations of the world should respect inter-

national law and the sovereignty of states.

Criticizing the Israeli lobby, she said that once again the US was being pushed into an unnecessary and unjust war, the consequences of which would be borne by the entire world. Referring to the Iraq war, she said that

we should learn lessons from the past that unilateral military actions prove to be disastrous.

Mushaal Mulick appealed to world leaders to come together to support peace and show solidarity with the people of Iran, saying that peace, not war, is the only way forward.

## Pilgrims' cooperation for hajj improvements acknowledged

ISLAMABAD (APP): Secretary for Religious Affairs, Dr. Syed Ata ur Rehman, Sunday expressed gratitude to Pakistani pilgrims for their successful Hajj this year, acknowledging their adherence to Saudi regulations and reaffirmed the government's dedication to enhancing the Hajj process through early preparations, stricter selection criteria and improved coordination among all involved parties.

In a recent radio program, he recognized the efforts of the welfare staff in Makkah during Hajj, highlighting their dedication and hard work.

He also emphasized the crucial need for timely training and clear instructions for 'Nazimeen' (group leaders) to ensure

they are fully equipped and prepared to assist and guide pilgrims effectively throughout the journey.

Dr. Ata ur Rehman also revealed that the government will implement more thorough and specialized selection processes for welfare and health staff in the future.

He pointed out that support staff should be fully knowledgeable about Mina's geography and future assessments will incorporate this criterion to boost the quality of assistance provided to pilgrims.

He expressed pride and inspiration for the entire team, highlighting the positive feedback from various sources about the exceptional Hajj arrangements.

He further highlighted that the government is upgrading pilgrim accommodations, with a special focus on the elderly, by offering ground-floor rooms and enhancing the facilities in Mina and Arafat camps.

He also commended the pilgrims for their outstanding cooperation throughout this year's Hajj, noting that their collective commitment and discipline played a crucial role in ensuring the smooth and successful execution of the pilgrimage.

Their patience and adherence to guidelines made a significant difference in maintaining order and safety, contributing to the overall success of the event, he added.

## ICT Police rescue lost hikers couple from Margalla Hills Trail

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police late at night rescued two citizens who lost their way in the forested area of Trail-5 in the Margalla Hills due to darkness.

An official told APP on Sunday that a distress call was received on the emergency helpline "Pukar-15" from a couple who reported that they were lost in the woods while hiking on Trail-5 and unable to find their way back. The area falls within the jurisdiction of the Secretariat Police Station.

He said upon receiving the call, Deputy Inspector General (DIG) of Police Muhammad Jawad Tariq directed SP City to launch an immediate search and rescue operation. Acting swiftly, SP City mobilized teams including the SDPO Secretariat, SHO Secretariat Police Station, and the Margalla Patrol Unit.

He said that despite the challenging terrain and low visibility during nighttime, the police teams managed to trace the location of the couple and safely rescued them after a short, well-coordinated effort.

He said the couple had come to Islamabad for sightseeing and had ventured onto Trail-5 when they lost their way in the forest after sunset.

He said the rescued individuals expressed heartfelt gratitude to the Islamabad Capital Police for their timely response and professional conduct.

DIG Tariq appreciated the performance of the police teams involved in the operation and reiterated that ensuring the safety and security of citizens, even in high-risk conditions, remains the top priority of the Islamabad Capital Police.

## Pak's narrative gaining global support: Senator

ISLAMABAD (APP): PPP Senator Rubina Qaim Khani Sunday commended Chairman Bilawal Bhutto for his diplomatic efforts to unveil India's agenda, stressing that the Modi government has failed to back its negative propaganda, and Pakistan's truth-centred narrative is receiving increasing global support, debunking India's unfounded claims.

While in a fresh conversation with a local news channel, PPP Senator Qaim Khani highlighted the significant diplomatic efforts of Chairman Bilawal Bhutto, stating that his tireless work, along with the

diplomatic delegates under his leadership, has been crucial in exposing India's false narrative and reshaping global perceptions.

She emphasized that the team's coordinated efforts have successfully countered India's baseless allegations and showcased Pakistan's commitment to truth and justice on the international stage.

She further admired the historic visit of the Chief of Army Staff Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir to America, stating that it marks a significant moment in strengthening Pakistan's diplomatic ties. Senator emphasized that the visit is

part of Pakistan's ongoing efforts to expand regional peace initiatives, showcasing the country's commitment to stability and cooperation on the global stage.

She also emphasized that Pakistan's dignity and integrity come first, asserting that there will be no compromise on these core values. She made it clear that the country will always stand firm in safeguarding its honour and sovereignty.

Responding to a query, PPP Senator stated that Pakistan is gaining global recognition for its efforts, while India is clearly disappointed by this shift in international perception.

## Arrest warrants issued for ICT DC

ISLAMABAD (APP): A legal dispute involving the freezing of properties of Banking Society has taken a new turn after a court issued arrest warrants for the Islamabad Deputy Commissioner (DC) Irfan Nawaz Memon.

The warrants were reportedly issued after a revenue officer failed to appear in court despite being informed of a previous order concerning property seizures linked to a banking society case.

According to details, the court issued arrest warrants for the Deputy Commissioner (DC) of Islamabad after directions regarding property freezing in a 2024 case were not implemented in full.

The issue dates back to September 30, 2024, when a court ordered the freezing of properties connected to the Bankers Society. These properties were located in Islamabad, Rawalpindi, and Haripur. On March 26, 2025, the court directed the Deputy Commissioners of

the three districts to act as receivers of the identified properties. The formal orders were sent to the DCs of Islamabad, Rawalpindi, and Haripur, giving them the legal authority to take control of the assets in their respective jurisdictions.

However, sources said that during a court hearing held in June, the revenue officer responsible for handling the Islamabad part of the case did not appear, reportedly due to illness. The court was officially informed about the officer's health condition and his inability to attend the proceedings. Despite the explanation, the court responded by issuing arrest warrants for the DC Islamabad, holding the office accountable for the revenue officer's absence.

The sources further explained that in revenue-related matters, the DC Islamabad holds the same administrative rank as the Commissioners of Rawalpindi and Hazara divisions. In Rawalpindi

and Haripur, the court's orders were directly addressed to the respective DCs, while in Islamabad, the instructions were received by the Commissioner Revenue.

Sources added that just like the DCs in the other districts, in Islamabad the responsibility for implementing such orders rests with the concerned Collector Revenue, not necessarily the DC himself.

In the next hearing, a Naib Tehsildar (sub-divisional revenue officer) is expected to submit a report to the court, providing an update on the implementation status of the property freezing directive and any progress made in assigning control to government officials.

The court's decision to escalate the matter to issuing warrants signals the seriousness of the delay in implementing the order. Further action is expected after the court reviews the Naib Tehsildar's report in the upcoming hearing.

## Water crisis in Rawalpindi to end soon

RAWALPINDI (APP): Chairman of the National Assembly's Standing Committee on Cabinet Secretariat Malik Abrar Ahmed has said that the water crisis in Rawalpindi would end soon with the completion of new dams and projects to conserve rainwater.

Millions of gallons of water would be available daily with the construction of underground water tanks in the cantonment and city areas, he said while talking to a delegation of Rawalpindi Restaurants, Caterers, Sweets, and Bakers Association, led by its President Muhammad Farooq Chaudhry here at his office, according to PML-N news release on Sunday.

Malik Abrar Ahmed, whose also Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz Rawalpindi Division President, said work was underway on the construction of new Daducha and Chahan dams.

Similarly, he added, water capacity in Rawal and Khanpur dams was also being increased. He said in the summer

every year, the residents of Rawalpindi and Chaklala cantonments, which fall in his National Assembly constituency, faced severe shortage due to lack of water storage facilities.

That was the reason that priority was being given to the release of allocated funds for the timely completion of underground tanks projects to ensure abundant water supply to the people during the hot season, he added.

Malik Abrar said the underground projects, which would also help conserve rainwater, were in the final stages'. The construction of underground water tanks at Bhata Chowk with a storage capacity of 200,000 gallons per day and Gomalwandi with 100,000 gallons per day storing capacity was progressing rapidly.

Likewise, he said, projects were in progress in Naseerabad, Barf Khana Chowk, Ghaziabad, Afshan Colony, Tench Bhatta, Tahli Mohri and Wards 7, 8, 9 and 10 of Chaklala Cantonment,

each designed to store 50,000 gallons per day.

He said the traders of Rawalpindi had played an important role in the revival of the country's economy and assured the delegation all the problems faced by traders in the food business would be resolved on priority.

The delegation also including Association's senior vice presidents Chaudhry Zahid Mahmood, Chaudhry Muhammad Imtiaz and Huzaifa Ansar, Deputy General Secretary Hashim Ijaz Butt, vice presidents Sardar Ijaz, Velayat, Qadeer Abbasi, Chaudhry Shahroz, Sheikh Muhammad Irfan and Sardar Saleem Sher Zaman, executive members Raja Abid Mahmood and Chaudhry Khalid Mahmood

and Muhammad Shahroz, and others presented a presented a bouquet to the MNA.

A congratulatory message from the Association's Patron-in-Chief Haji Naeem and Chairman Haji Mumtaz Ahmed was also conveyed to Malik Abrar.

## Islamabad's vanishing trees deepen heat crisis

ISLAMABAD (APP): As Islamabad faces yet another punishing heatwave with "feels like" temperatures soaring to 50°C, the city's shrinking tree cover is turning entire sectors into heat traps. In neighborhoods where mature trees still stand, residents find some refuge from the scorching sun—but in many areas, the absence of shade is making life unbearable. The capital's changing climate is no longer a warning—it's a lived reality, demanding urgent action from both the civic authorities and the citizens.

In areas like F-6 and parts of E-7, mature trees—such as neem, peepal, bohar, and amal-tas—do more than beautify the streets. They lower temperatures, allow for breezes, and make it possible for residents to sit outdoors even during scorch-

ing afternoons.

But the situation changes dramatically in places like G-6, G-7, G-13, and G-14. Here, tree cover is sparse or consists of younger trees that provide minimal cooling. "The streets feel like ovens," said Kamran Khan, a G-6 resident. "The sun burns from above, and the heat radiates from below. There's no escape."

Islamabad urgently needs thousands of new trees—especially in rapidly urbanizing sectors like G-13, G-14, the H-sectors, and Bhara Kahu. But not just any trees—the city needs native, climate-resilient species that provide real shade and cooling benefits.

"Trees are no longer a luxury—they're a necessity," said Noreen, a resident of G-7. "If we want to survive these summers, we need shade, not just

more concrete."

One major misstep has been the widespread planting of safeda (eucalyptus) trees. Though they grow quickly, these trees are now criticized for consuming vast amounts of groundwater, providing little shade, and leaving the ground warmer. "It might grow fast, but it gives back very little," wrote one concerned citizen on Facebook. "We need trees that help the environment, not just fill space."

Environmental expert Nasir Ali Panhwar warns of worsening urban heat island effects in fast-growing cities like Islamabad. He stresses the importance of nature-based solutions, including extensive tree plantation and green infrastructure like green roofs and vertical gardens. "These not only cool urban areas but also

restore biodiversity and improve air quality," he explained.

The climate threat is growing, compounded by rapid urbanization and unchecked population growth. According to Global Forest Watch, Pakistan lost 5.35 thousand hectares of tree cover to fires and 4.19 thousand hectares to other causes between 2001 and 2024. Alarming, in just one week, from June 8 to June 15, 2025, 2,587 fire alerts were recorded across the country. This marks a steep rise compared to previous years.

Under the leadership of Chairman Muhammad Ali Randhawa, the Capital Development Authority (CDA) has launched an ambitious tree-planting campaign, aiming to plant one million trees during the Spring and Monsoon sea-

sons of 2025. But experts caution that planting alone isn't enough, it's about planting the right trees in the right places.

Naseer Memon, a leading voice on climate change and urban planning, paints a grim picture: "Our cities are fast becoming mini-hells. Green belts are disappearing, replaced by unchecked infrastructure. Vehicular emissions and over-use of air conditioning are creating hot islands across urban Pakistan."

Memon calls for aggressive social forestry measures, enforced by building control agencies. "Every new structure should be mandated to plant and nurture trees until they reach maturity," he said. "Cosmetic plantation drives won't solve the problem. Trees are a nature-based solution to improving microclimates in

cities exposed to severe and frequent heatwaves."

When Islamabad was established in the late 1960s, it was planned as a green city surrounded by forests, with nearly two-thirds of its land covered by trees. Over the decades, rapid urban growth and development have reduced this tree cover dramatically. Today, less than one-third of the city's original forest area remains, making the loss of greenery a visible and urgent challenge for the capital's climate and livability.

As Islamabad continues to expand, experts and residents alike are calling for smarter urban forestry strategies. Planting native, climate-adapted trees is not just about comfort, it's about survival, in the face of escalating climate change and global warming.



Herat establishes committee

HERAT (Ariana News): In response to the sharp rise in the number of returnees from Iran, local authorities in Herat have announced the formation of an emergency committee to address the urgent needs of the returnees. The decision was made during a meeting held at the office of the Herat governor. The participants discussed immediate assistance for returnees and the creation of employment opportunities, particularly in Herat's industrial park.

Emerald mining started

PARAKH (Pajhwok): The extraction of emeralds in 15 areas out of 21 newly discovered emerald sites has begun in Hes-e-Awal district of Panjsher, an official said. Head of Mines and Petroleum Department Maulvi Mohammad Qasim Amiri told Pajhwok Afghan News: "Recently, 21 new emerald mining areas have been discovered and confirmed by the professional and technical team of this department in the vicinity of the Hes-e-Awal district".

Turkmenistan reaffirms support for peace in Afghanistan

KABUL (TOLOnews): The Deputy Foreign Minister of Turkmenistan Ahmad Gurbanov held talks with Paola Pampaloni, Director of the European External Action Service for Asia, about the situation in Afghanistan and regional security.

Gurbanov emphasized Turkmenistan's policy of neutrality and non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, stating that his country supports peace and sustainable development in Afghanistan.

Caspian Post, quoting the Turkmenistan Foreign Ministry stated: "The Turkmen side presented its approach based on the principles of neutrality, good neighborliness and non-interference in the internal affairs of states. It was emphasized that Turkmenistan consistently promotes initiatives aimed at restoring peace and sustainable

development in Afghanistan, including providing humanitarian aid and supporting peace initiatives."

Najib-ur-Rahman Shamal, a political analyst, commented: "This positive step by Turkmenistan is a highly effective move for Afghanistan's economic growth and for addressing the challenges facing the Afghan people and the country." The implementation of major infrastructure projects, such as the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan railway and the creation of new energy and transport corridors, was also discussed by both sides.

Experts consider Turkmenistan's support important for regional economic development.

Janat Faheem Chakari, another political analyst, said: "If regional countries and the European Union jointly decide to ensure

lasting peace in Afghanistan and expand this process, it will be very beneficial for regional economic stability."

Abdul Nasir Rashtia, an economic expert, said: "Turkmenistan is one of Afghanistan's neighbors and is very interested in reaching South Asian countries through Afghanistan. This requires infrastructure that can facilitate Afghanistan's transportation system and help Turkmenistan export its goods to South Asia."

As one of Afghanistan's neighbors, Turkmenistan has in recent years sought to play a constructive role in Afghanistan's peace process, development, and economic cooperation while maintaining its policy of neutrality. However, it has not formally recognized the current interim government in Afghanistan.

Low-quality honey imports take a toll on Kandahar beekeepers

KANDAHAR CITY (Pajhwok): Beekeepers in southern Kandahar province say their business has been severely affected by the influx of low-quality and adulterated imported honey.

Meanwhile, the provincial Department of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock reports a significant increase in honey production this year.

Ahmadullah, a beekeeper in Arghandab district, said: "We produce pure and natural honey, but some traders are selling sugar-mixed products in the name of honey. This has harmed our income and must be stopped."

He said artificial honey made from sugar was being imported from neighbouring countries and was often mixed with local pure honey by some vendors.

Abdul Bari, another beekeeper from Dand district, said: "People cannot distinguish between genuine and fake honey. The adulterated products are cheaper and therefore sell more. We want proper market access for our natural honey and a ban on fake alternatives."

He called on the caretaker government to take firm action against the sale of substandard honey and to regulate the market.

Mohammad Yaqub, an employee at a honey farm, added: "I've been involved in beekeeping for ten years. In the beginning, we suffered many losses—many bees died. But with time and experience, we began producing quality honey. Unfortunately, we still lack a proper market, and the presence of fake products has badly hurt our sales."

Similarly, Masood Shah Ahmadi, a honey trader, said: "In Kandahar and many other provinces, some vendors mix fake honey with genuine products or sell completely artificial honey made from sugar or other materials at low prices. This has severely damaged the market for Kandahar's original honey."

He called for the establishment of a laboratory to help identify genuine honey and distinguish it from counterfeit products.

In response, Mohammad Hanif Haqmal, spokesperson for the Kandahar Department of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock, told Pajhwok Afghan News that honey production in the province was expected to double this year compared to last year.

He said an estimated 100,000 kilograms of honey would be produced in Kandahar this year, compared to 50,000 kilograms last year.

According to Haqmal, around 80 small and large honey farms are currently operating in Kandahar city and districts, providing livelihoods to dozens of families.

Karzai, Abdullah condemn US strikes on Iran

KABUL (Pajhwok): Former Afghan President Hamid Karzai and ex-chairman of the High Council for National Reconciliation (HCNR) Dr. Abdullah Abdullah have condemned the United States' strikes on Iran, calling them a violation of international norms and principles.

Israel launched airstrikes on Iran on June 13, sparking a conflict that has now entered its tenth day, with both sides conducting missile and aerial attacks.

On Sunday morning, US President Donald Trump confirmed that American forces had targeted Iran's nuclear facilities in Isfahan, Natanz, and Fordow. He warned Tehran that if it did not pursue peace, "future strikes would be even more severe."

Former President Karzai criticised the US strikes, describing them as contrary to the objectives and principles of the United Nations Charter.

He said such actions undermined peace efforts, risked escalating conflict in the region, and threatened global peace and security.

He stressed that disputes over Iran's nuclear



programme should be resolved through logical, peaceful means by relevant international bodies, rather than through the use of force.

Karzai also emphasised the importance of all countries—especially permanent members of the UN Security Council—to adhere to their obligations under the UN Charter, the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, and international law.

Expressing solidarity with Iran, he said it would be more appropriate for the

United States to pursue diplomacy and peaceful negotiations.

Dr. Abdullah Abdullah also condemned the US joining the Israeli war on Iran in a post on his X account.

He wrote: "The criminal Zionist regime, continuing its inhumane actions, has now dragged the United States directly into its aggressive assault on Iran, targeting peaceful nuclear facilities in clear violation of all accepted international laws and norms."

Abdullah noted that

while diplomatic talks between Iran and European countries had only recently resumed, such "hostile actions under the guise of peace" would not aid resolution to the issue. Instead, he warned, they could lead to further instability and unpredictable, serious consequences for the region.

He concluded by condemning the US action and expressing his belief that the "conscience of humanity" would ultimately deliver a fair judgment on such measures.

IE plans joint banks with regional allies to counter sanctions

KABUL (TOLOnews): Abdul Latif Nazari, the Deputy Minister of Economy, told Russia's Sputnik news agency that in response to international banking and political sanctions, the Islamic Emirate is working to create joint banks with regional countries to reduce the impact of these sanctions.

He added that negotiations to establish such banks are underway with Russia, China, and Iran.

"We are trying to solve this problem by establishing joint banks with countries that have good relations with us and are not participating in the political

sanctions against Afghanistan. This will enable banking transactions between us and these countries, facilitate money transfers for our traders, and integrate Afghan banks with the region," Abdul Latif Nazari said.

According to Nazari, the Islamic Emirate is ready to play an active role in regional economic reconstruction through an economy-focused policy. He pointed to increasing economic, political, and trade ties between Kabul and Moscow, and urged Russia to collaborate with Afghanistan in rebuilding infrastructure.

Nazari further added: "We want to rebuild and

strengthen Afghanistan's infrastructure. Of course, we need help from Afghanistan's friendly countries like Russia, and we hope that these collaborations will enable that, since much of Afghanistan's infrastructure resulted from Russian activities."

He also noted that insecurity during the previous government was the biggest obstacle to advancing the TAPI pipeline project in Afghanistan, but emphasized that this barrier is now removed and there are no challenges to pushing the TAPI project forward on Afghan soil.

He highlighted that the

main remaining hurdles for the project are due to regional geopolitical competition. The deputy minister said: "In the past, the insecurity in Afghanistan during the so-called republic era was the biggest obstacle. Right now, all barriers have been removed, and the Emirate's officials have the will and motivation to complete this project."

Finally, the deputy minister warned that the recent conflict between Iran and Israel could adversely affect Afghanistan's trade with Iran, even as trade volume between Kabul and Tehran had been planned to rise to ten billion dollars.

Ahmad Wali Hotak upbeat about overcoming Dagestani opponent

KABUL (Pajhwok): Afghan mixed martial arts (MMA) fighter Ahmad Wali Hotak, who is facing a Dagestani opponent next week, says he has undergone intense training and hopes to become the first Afghan to defeat a fighter from Dagestan.

Hotak will take on his opponent, Zirakov, on June 27 in Belarus.

In an exclusive interview with Pajhwok Afghan News on Saturday, Hotak said he has been training rigorously for the past two months and is optimistic about overcoming his Dagestani rival.

"Dagestani fighters dominate the global MMA scene. The opponent I'm facing has trained under Khabib's father and is part of Khabib's team. He has fought four official matches, winning three," he explained.

Hotak acknowledged his opponent's strong skills but said he has crafted a clear strategy. "I plan to take the advantage in boxing first, then shift to submission techniques. If neither works, my goal is to win on points," he said.

He also mentioned that he was initially overweight when selected for the bout. After intense training, he has lost 10 kilograms to

meet the 70 kg weight class. Although he has been away from competition for nearly two years, Hotak emphasized that he never stopped training and has remained committed to his preparation.

He stressed the importance of winning this match, noting that a victory would bring joy to the Afghan people and help advance his career in the organization. Hotak called on the public to keep him in their prayers and to continue supporting him.

His fitness coach, Shaheen Qahari, said Hotak is in top condition and has worked hard on his physi-

cal, technical, and tactical performance. "I believe he will win this fight," he added.

Murtaza Stanakzai, a Kabul resident, expressed hope that Hotak would defeat his Dagestani opponent and bring pride to the nation.

Another Kabul resident, Islamuddin, said he is eagerly awaiting the fight and hopes Hotak's hard work pays off with a victory. Hotak has fought 11 professional matches, winning 10 and losing only one.

He is also scheduled to compete next month in the Fight Nights organization in Russia.

Expecting mothers face health risks in Ghor

FEROZKOH (Pajhwok): Expecting mothers in Dawlatyar district of western Ghor province face severe health risks due to limited prenatal care, lack of awareness, and cultural barriers that prevent access to essential medical services.

They report that distance from health centers, limited awareness, and at times, family-imposed restrictions hinder their access to pregnancy-related healthcare.

Medical professionals stress that prenatal care is critical, as a mother's body undergoes significant changes during pregnancy, and the developing fetus requires close monitoring and support for healthy growth.

According to doctors, regular prenatal checkups help monitor the mother's blood pressure, overall health and the fetus's development. Based on these evaluations, mothers receive vital guidance to prevent complications such as miscarriage, premature birth, and other pregnancy-related risks.

**Lack of awareness**  
Zar Gul, a resident of Tilak village in Dawlatyar, complains about the absence of a well-equipped health clinic in her area. She says she was five months pregnant when she suffered a miscarriage due to her lack of knowledge about warning signs.

"We live far from the clinic, and no one told us what we should or shouldn't do during pregnancy. I lost my baby because I lifted heavy water barrels," she told Pajhwok Afghan News. "At first, I noticed light bleeding, which became heavier and eventually led to severe hemorrhaging."

Zar Gul urges the government and aid organizations to implement awareness programs on pregnancy risk factors and establish well-equipped clinics in remote communities.

Cultural barriers to healthcare access

Anisa, a resident of Somak village, also suffered a miscarriage due to lack of awareness and being unable to access medical care.

"There's no clinic in our village, and even if there were, our men wouldn't let us go," she said. "They say what are local midwives for?" So, we're forced to deliver our babies at home with the help of traditional birth attendants."

Anisa experienced a miscarriage in her first pregnancy at six months due to the absence of prenatal care. Her three other children were also delivered at home by a traditional midwife.

Obstetricians call for increased awareness

Dr. Noshafarin Shahab, a gynecologist in Ghor, told Pajhwok that a major cause of maternal mortality is the lack of awareness among women regarding pregnancy complications, as well as the prevalence of home births conducted by untrained individuals. "Women must be educated about the warning signs of pregnancy and should regularly visit doctors during pregnancy," she said.

Dr. Shahab added, "If pregnant women experience light spotting early in pregnancy, it may not be alarming. However, heavy or abnormal bleeding requires immediate medical attention, as it could indicate a miscarriage, ectopic

pregnancy, or premature labor."

She emphasized that when such symptoms appear, pregnant women should consult a doctor who can prescribe rest, medication, or other necessary interventions.

Dr. Hakima Kazemi, another gynecologist in the province, echoed the importance of professional care during pregnancy.

"When pregnant women experience symptoms such as heavy bleeding, swelling of the hands, feet, or face, decreased fetal movement, severe abdominal pain, or vision problems, they must go to a health center and consult a qualified gynecologist or midwife to protect both their own health and that of their baby," she said.

Dr. Kazemi stressed that raising awareness in remote areas, expanding access to healthcare, and providing social support for pregnant women can significantly reduce maternal and neonatal health risks.

Public health efforts underway

Sheikh Abdul Wahid Hamas, Director of Public Health in Ghor, told Pajhwok that the Ministry of Public Health has launched various programs aimed at improving maternal and child healthcare, though he did not share specific details.

"Thanks to God, the Islamic Emirate is paying serious attention to the care of mothers and children," he said. "Healthcare services are available in all districts, and we are working to establish health centers in underserved areas"—regions that currently lack access due to long distances and difficult terrain."

Two killed, nine injured in Afghanistan last week

KABUL (Pajhwok): Last week, Kazakhstan appointed a special envoy for Afghanistan and Russia said it would decide on recognizing the Islamic Emirate at an appropriate time, while the UN claimed a three percent increase in security incidents in Afghanistan, which the IEA rejected, and the European Union announced 161 million in aid to Afghanistan.

**Casualties:**  
Last week, two people were killed and nine others were injured in various incidents across Afghanistan.

Local officials reported that, due to explosions of old unexploded ordnances, five people were injured in Faryab and two children in Kunar. In Nangarhar, a 16-year-old boy lost his life in a similar incident, and his brother and sister were injured.

Additionally, last week, unidentified gunmen killed a former provincial council secretary of the previous government in Faryab.

In the previous week, three people had been

killed in Afghanistan.

Before the regime change in 2021, hundreds of civilians, insurgents and security personnel would get killed and maimed in clashes and bomb blasts every week.

**China-South Asia Expo**  
Last week, Deputy Prime Minister for Administrative Affairs Maulvi Abdul Salam Hanafi departed for China at the head of a high-level delegation to attend the 9th China-South Asia Expo.

Hanafi said that Afghanistan was keen to expand cooperation with China and South Asian countries.

He emphasized that, due to its strategic geographical location, Afghanistan could serve as a vital bridge connecting Central, South, and East Asia.

Hanafi described the China-South Asia Expo as an important platform for fostering economic, cultural, and political cooperation among regional countries.

He noted that China, as a global economic power, has laid a strong foundation for

regional development and progress through initiatives like the Belt and Road.

He reiterated Afghanistan's interest in enhancing collaboration with China and South Asian nations in sectors such as mining, energy, transit, technology, and trade.

Hanafi underlined Afghanistan's potential to play a key role as a regional connector due to its unique location.

Similarly, during a meeting with Wang Dongming, the Vice Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress of China, Hanifi expressed hope that cooperation between the two countries would be further strengthened and expanded in various sectors.

Dongming said that Afghanistan and China, as two neighboring countries, do not have any issues between them. He also expressed hope that relations between the two nations would grow even stronger and broader.

**Diplomatic ties**  
Kazakhstan has named

Yerkin Tukumov as the country's special representative for Afghanistan.

The spokesperson of the Islamic Emirate, Zabihullah Mujahid, praised Kazakhstan's appointment of a special envoy and expressed hope that bilateral relations would further improve.

A Norwegian delegation will soon visit Afghanistan to assess bilateral relations between Kabul and Oslo, Norway's chargé d'affaires in Kabul announced.

Per Albert Isaas made the announcement during a meeting with Foreign Minister Maulvi Amir Khan Muttaqi on Wednesday.

The spokesperson for the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that Moscow is awaiting the arrival of the Islamic Emirate's ambassador.

In an interview with Sputnik News Agency, Maria Zakharova also commented on the issue of recognizing the Islamic Emirate, saying that Russia's leadership will make a decision on the matter at an appropriate time.





**KARACHI:** A large number of people chanting slogans against US and Israel during a rally in support to Iran and Palestine. — INP photo

# World leaders react as US strikes Iranian nuclear sites

NEW YORK (Reuters): World leaders have issued strong and varied responses after US forces launched air strikes on three Iranian nuclear sites on Sunday, in a dramatic escalation of tensions in the Middle East.

The strikes, confirmed by the White House early Sunday morning, targeted Iran's Fordow, Natanz, and Isfahan nuclear facilities. The US administration framed the attacks as a response to Tehran's continued enrichment efforts and as a warning to deter further escalation in ongoing conflict with Israel.

President Donald Trump described the operation as a "necessary and proportionate act to prevent a greater conflict".

The reaction from global capitals was swift, ranging from staunch support in Israel to sharp condemnation from Iran and its allies. The United Nations and several countries called for immediate de-escalation and a return to diplomacy.

**'A grave violation of int'l law': Iran FM Araghchi**

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi condemned the strikes in a message posted on X (formerly Twitter), calling them a serious breach of international norms.

"The United States, a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, has committed a grave violation of the UN Charter, international law and the NPT by attacking Iran's peaceful nuclear installations. The events this morning are outrageous and will have everlasting consequences."

He added that Iran "reserves all options to defend its sovereignty, interest, and people", citing the right to self-defence under the UN Charter.

**'A direct threat to int'l peace and security': UN chief**

UN Secretary-General António Guterres expressed deep concern over the attack, stating: "I am gravely alarmed by the use of force by the United States against Iran today. This is a dangerous escalation in a region already on the edge – and a direct threat to international peace and security..."

There is no military solution. The only path forward is diplomacy. The only hope is peace."

Global reactions: calls for diplomacy and restraint

New Zealand Foreign Minister Winston Peters said the developments were "extremely worrying".

"Ongoing military action in the Middle East is extremely worrying, and it is critical further escalation is avoided. We urge all parties to return to talks. Diplomacy will deliver a more enduring resolution than further military action."

An Australian government spokesperson echoed the call for calm:

"We have been clear that Iran's nuclear and ballistic missile programme has been a threat to international peace and security... We continue to call for de-escalation, dialogue and diplomacy."

Mexico's Foreign Ministry issued a statement on X urging "diplomatic dialogue for peace" and emphasising its commitment to a pacifist foreign policy.

Similarly, Venezuela's Foreign Minister Yvan Gil described the US action as "military aggression", adding: "Venezuela Condemns US Military Aggression Against Iran and Demands an Immediate Cessation of Hostilities."

Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel also took to X to condemn what he called a "dangerous escalation", accusing the United States of violating the UN Charter and pushing the region into crisis.

US lawmakers register mixed reactions

In Washington, reaction to the strikes revealed deep divisions within Congress, with Republicans largely backing the president's decision and Democrats warning of overreach and potential long-term conflict.

Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Roger Wicker said the operation was commendable but warned of "very serious choices ahead."

Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chair Jim Risch called it a necessary step in support of an ally:

"This war is Israel's war, not our war, but Israel is one of our strongest allies and is disarming Iran for the good of the world... There will not be American boots on the ground in Iran."

Others strongly disagreed.

"This is not constitutional," said Representative Thomas Massie, referring to Congress's authority to declare war.

House Speaker Mike Johnson defended the president, stating:

"The president gave Iran's leader every opportunity to make a deal, but Iran refused to commit to a nuclear disarmament agreement."

In contrast, Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries accused Trump of misleading the nation and bypassing Congress:

"Donald Trump shoulders complete and total responsibility for any adverse consequences that flow from his unilateral military action."

Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez went further, saying:

"The president's disastrous decision to bomb Iran without authorisation is a grave violation of the Constitution... It is absolutely and clearly grounds for impeachment."

Senator Tim Kaine criticised what he described as "horrible judgment", while Representative Rashida Tlaib said the strikes were reminiscent of "decades of endless war in the Middle East... all based on the lie of 'weapons of mass destruction.'"

Former congressman Max Rose, now a senior adviser at VoteVets, called the action illegal and warned that "this conflict is his and the Republicans who have abrogated all their responsibilities."

## Hundreds protest against NATO summit, Israel-Iran conflict

HAGUE (Aljazeera): Hundreds of people have protested in The Hague, in the Netherlands, against NATO and increased military spending in advance of a summit, as Iran's conflict with Israel and the United States intensifies by the day.

People demonstrated on Sunday against the military alliance, Israel's punishing war in Gaza and the Israel-Iran conflict, hours after the US targeted three nuclear sites in Iran in a sudden escalatory move in support of its biggest ally in the Middle East.

Hossein Hamadani, 74, an Iranian who lives in the Netherlands, told The Associated Press news agency that they are "opposed to war".

"People want to live a peaceful life ... Things are not good. So why do we spend money on war?" he added.

Following the US's attack on Iran, an unnamed NATO official told the Reuters news agency that the alliance was watching the situation "closely".

The summit is expected to kick off on Tuesday, with leaders of the 32 NATO-allied countries to meet a day later on Wednesday. During the

meeting, the heads of state will discuss an increase in defence spending, which has been repeatedly demanded by US President Donald Trump, along with thinly veiled threats to leave the military alliance.

On Thursday, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez spoke out against the agreement to increase defence spending to 5 percent of national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as not only "unreasonable but also counterproductive".

In a letter to NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte, Sanchez asked for a "more flexible formula"

that either makes the spending target optional or excludes Spain from its application.

But Trump said a day later that Madrid was "notorious" for under-spending on defence and said it needed to pay what other NATO members were paying.

The allied countries have ramped up defence spending since Russia invaded Ukraine more than three years ago; however, almost a third of the members still do not meet the bloc's current target of at least 2 percent defence spending.

## President expresses concern over escalating tensions in Middle East

### F.P. Report

ISLAMAAD: President Asif Ali Zardari expressed concern over the escalating tensions in the Middle East,

which could spiral out of control with serious consequences for millions of innocent people.

The President urged all parties involved in the conflict to exercise maximum restraint and to choose the path of peace, dialogue and Diplomacy to ensure enduring peace and stability in the region. President Asif Ali

Zardari also called upon the international community to play its part in de-escalating the crisis in the interest of regional stability as well as the well-being of its people.

## US didn't target Iranian troops or people, but 'devastated' nuclear plan: Pentagon

NEW YORK (AFP): A series of unprecedented US strikes against Iran "devastated" its nuclear programme, Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth said Sunday, as he asserted Washington was not seeking regime change in Tehran. The Pentagon chief urged Iran's leaders to find an off-ramp to the conflict after President Donald Trump announced the strikes on a key underground uranium enrichment site at Fordo, along with nuclear facilities in Isfahan and Natanz. "We devastated the Iranian nuclear programme," Hegseth told a Pentagon press briefing, adding that the operation "did not target Iranian troops or the Iranian people". Trump "seeks peace, and Iran should take that path", Hegseth continued. "This mission was not, and has not, been about regime change," he added. Trump's intervention — despite his past pledges to avoid another "forever war" — threatens to dramatically widen the conflict after Israel launched an unprecedented bombing campaign against Iran last week, with Tehran vowing to retaliate if Washington joined in. Earlier, the US president said Washington would hit more targets if Tehran did not capitulate. Hours later, Iran launched two waves of attacks against its long-time foe Israel.



**WASHINGTON, DC:** U.S. President Donald Trump delivers an address to the nation accompanied by U.S. Vice President JD Vance, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio and U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth from the White House in Washington, D.C.

## Shehbaz policy against national interests: Saif

### F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Advisor to the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Information and Public Relations, Barrister Dr. Saif has called Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's move to nominate U.S. President Donald Trump for the Nobel Peace Prize "the height of sycophantic politics."

He termed the nomination of a leader who rains bombs on Muslims for a peace prize as incomprehensible. Barrister Dr. Saif pointed out that President Trump — the very person Shehbaz Sharif wishes to see as a Nobel laureate — not only ordered a direct attack on Iran but also rejected UN ceasefire resolutions in Gaza on eight occasions.

Amidst the current tensions between Iran and Israel, instead of mediating, direct attacks are being launched on innocent civilians. Shehbaz Sharif, by remaining silent and still supporting Trump's nomination, is committing a condemnable act. Dr. Saif added that even flattery has limits, and Shehbaz Sharif's recent statements are not only shameful but also a clear display of complete subservience. Nominating Trump for the Nobel Prize is essentially an insult to the entire Muslim Ummah.

Addressing the Prime Minister directly, Barrister Dr. Saif said that Shehbaz Sharif must abandon his flattering behavior and show the courage to say "Absolutely Not." If sycophancy is a requirement for

staying in power, then it would be far more honorable to become Prisoner No. 804. He stated that although Imran Khan is currently behind bars, his "Absolutely Not" policy has kept him alive in the hearts of the people. Imran Khan never traded the blood of the Muslim Ummah, but rather always worked for its honor, dignity, and elevation.

Barrister Dr. Saif emphasized that sacrificing national and public interests at the altar of sycophantic politics is unacceptable.

He urged that Pakistan must stand on the international stage with pride and self-respect, not by nominating those who are responsible for attacks on the Muslim world.

## UN SC to meet on Iran as Pakistan push for ceasefire

UNITED NATIONS (APP): The U.N. Security Council is set to meet Sunday afternoon (Midnight Pakistan Time) to discuss U.S. attacks on Iran's nuclear facilities as Russia, China and Pakistan proposed the 15-member body adopt a resolution calling for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire in the Middle East.

Diplomats said the three countries have circulated the draft text, but whether it will be voted today remains to be seen.

A resolution needs at least nine votes in favour and no vetoes by permanent members — the United States, France, Britain, Russia or China — to pass.

The Council meeting was sought in the wake of the US strikes on three Iranian nuclear facilities that President Donald Trump called "spectacular military success."

"The U.S. military carried out massive precision strikes on the three key nuclear assemblies in the Iranian regime: Fordo, Natanz and Isfahan," President Trump said in a national address from the White House Saturday night. "Our objective was the destruction of Iran's nuclear enrichment capacity and a stop to the nuclear threat posed by the world's number one state sponsor of terror."

Prior to his address, the president wrote on his Truth Social platform that a "full payload of BOMBS" was dropped on the "primary site" Fordo. The president also said all U.S. planes made it safely out of Iranian airspace.

And in second post, Trump wrote: "This is an HISTORIC MOMENT FOR THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, ISRAEL, AND THE WORLD. IRAN MUST NOW AGREE TO END THIS WAR. THANK YOU!"

The president addressed the nation regarding the strikes late Saturday night, saying that "Iran's key nuclear enrichment facilities have been completely and totally obliterated" and issuing a warning to Iran to strive for a peace deal in its war with Israel.

"There will be either peace, or there will be tragedy for Iran far greater than we have witnessed over the last eight days," Trump said while flanked by Vice President JD Vance, Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth. "Remember, there are many targets left."

Meanwhile, Iran lashed out at the U.S. for crossing "a very big red line" with its risky gambit to launch strikes on three Iranian nuclear sites with missiles and the bunker-buster bombs.

"The warmongering and lawless administration in Washington is solely and fully responsible for the dangerous consequences and far-reaching implications of its act of aggression," Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said, adding that he would immediately fly to Moscow to coordinate positions with close ally Russia.

## Turkish court arrests prominent journalist

ANKARA (Reuters): A Turkish court arrested prominent independent journalist Fatih Altayli over comments on his social media allegedly threatening President Tayyip Erdogan, broadcaster NTV and others reported on Sunday.

Altayli, who has more than 1.5 million YouTube subscribers, was detained on Saturday over comments in a video he posted on Friday in which he addressed a poll showing most Turks opposed Erdogan's ruling for life.

Altayli referenced Ottoman rulers, saying Turks had "killed" or "drowned" some they no longer wanted in power.

Prosecutors in Istanbul later said the remarks "contained threats" against the president and launched an investigation.

NTV said that in his defence to the court, Altayli denied threatening Erdogan, quoting him as saying that his remarks were taken out of context and made to appear like threats, even though they were simply part of rhetorical historical discussions.

The development comes amid a series of detentions of opposition figures in recent months, including the arrest of Istanbul Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu — Erdogan's main political rival — in March.

The main opposition CHP and some Western countries have called the crackdown a politicised move to eliminate electoral challenges to Erdogan.

The government denies these claims, saying the judiciary and Turkiye's courts are independent.

## Ukraine fighting 10,000 Russian troops

KYIV (Reuters): Around 10,000 Russian soldiers are fighting in Russia's Kursk region, about 90 square kilometers (35 square miles) of which is controlled by Ukraine, Ukraine's top military commander said.

"We control about 90 square kilometers of territory in the Hlushkov district of the Kursk region of the Russian Federation, and these are our preemptive actions in response to a possible enemy attack," Oleksandr Syrskyi said without elaborating, in remarks released by his office for publication on Sunday.

The Ukrainian military said the activity in this area prevented Russia from sending a significant number of its forces to Ukraine's eastern region of Donetsk, where some of the heaviest fighting has taken place in the more than three-year-old full-scale invasion.

Syrskyi's troops are repelling Russian forces along the frontline, which stretches for about 1,200

km, where the situation remains difficult, the Ukrainian military said.

Russian gains have accelerated in May and June, though the Ukrainian military says it comes at a cost of high Russian casualties in small assault-group attacks.

While the military says its troops repelled Russian approaches toward Ukraine's Dnipropetrovsk region borders last week, the pressure continues in the country's eastern and northern regions.

The Russian military also continues its deadly drone and missile attacks on the Ukrainian cities further from the front, prompting Ukraine to innovate its approaches to air defence.

Ukraine's military said it currently destroys around 82% of Shahed-type drones launched by Russia but requires more surface-to-air missile systems to defend critical infrastructure and cities.

The military said the air force was also working on developing the use of light

aircraft and drone interceptors in repelling Russian assaults which can involve hundreds of drones.

Ukraine also relies on its long-range capabilities to deal damage to economic and military targets on Russian territory, increasing the cost of war to Moscow.

Between January and May, Ukraine dealt over \$1.3 billion in direct losses in the Russian oil refining and fuel production industry, energy and transport supplies as well as strategic communications, the Ukrainian military said.

It also dealt at least \$9.5 billion more of indirect damages through the destabilization of the oil refining industry, disruption of logistics and forced shutdown of enterprises, it added.

It was not clear whether the Ukrainian military included the damages from its operation "Spider's Web" which damaged Russian warplanes — and Ukraine said cost billions in losses — in the estimates.

## Israeli forces recover bodies of three hostages

JERUSALEM (Reuters): Israeli forces have recovered the bodies of three hostages which had been held in the Gaza Strip since the Palestinian militant group Hamas' 2023 attack, the military and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Sunday.

The hostages were identified as civilians Ofra

Keidar and Yonatan Samerano, and soldier Shay Levinson. All were killed on the day of the attack, on October 7, 2023, the military said.

With their retrieval, 50 hostages now remain in Gaza, only 20 of whom are believed to be alive.

The abduction of Samerano, 21 at the time of

his death, by a man later identified by Israeli officials as a worker at the U.N.'s Palestinian refugee agency UNRWA, was caught on CCTV.

Around 1,200 people were killed and 251 taken hostage during the Hamas-led attack on southern Israel, according to Israeli authorities.