

2 killed in grenade blast
F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: Two people were killed and three others sustained serious injuries when a hand grenade exploded at a scrap shop in Zor Mandi, located opposite the China Market in Khall Bazaar here on Saturday. According to Khall police, the explosion occurred inside the shop, spreading panic among the local population as the blast was heard from a considerable distance.

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Ch Tanvir gets bail
F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: Former senator and PML-N leader, Chaudhary Tanvir Khan gets post arrest bail in Ch. Adnan murder case. Additional Sessions Judge Chaudhry Majid Hussain Gadi approved the post-arrest bail in Rawalpindi. The court ordered Ch. Tanvir to submit two surety bonds of Rs. 1.0 million each. The verdict was reserved on June 27 after the completion of arguments from both sides.

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PESHAWAR: Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir, NI (M), Chief of Army Staff interacting with an injured jawan of suicide blast during visit to CMH.

Field Marshal briefed on ongoing counter-terrorism operations

— reaffirms Pakistan's support for Kashmir people rights

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir, NI (M), Chief of Army Staff (COAS), visited Corps Headquarters Peshawar on Saturday, where he was briefed in detail on the prevailing security situation and ongoing counter-terrorism operations.

During the visit, the Field Marshal also attended funeral of Shuhada of the incident at Bannu Garrison and visited the injured at Bannu CMH. COAS paid rich tribute to the unwavering courage and resilience of Pakistan's security forces, who continue to confront and neutralize the Indian-sponsored Fitna al-Khawarij with exemplary valour. He reaffirmed that the people of Pakistan stand united in their resolve to eradicate terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, until the threat is decisively eliminated from the country.

Reiterating the state's uncompromising stance, the Chief of Army Staff vowed that all facilitators, abettors, and perpetrators of terrorism will be relentlessly pursued and brought to justice-without exception and at all costs and face of true perpetrator of terrorism in the region will be exposed to the entire world.

Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir assured the nation that the blood of every innocent Pakistani shall always be avenged, and any attempt to undermine Pakistan's internal stability will be met with swift and decisive retribution.

The Field Marshal also emphasized the critical need for institutional capacity enhancement of civilian law enforcement agencies, particularly the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Police. He urged relevant government stakeholders to prioritize these efforts, while

reaffirming the Army's continued support in building and augmenting the capabilities of law enforcement institutions. Upon arrival at Corps Headquarters, the Chief of Army Staff was received by Corps Commander Peshawar.

Meanwhile, Chief of Army Staff Field Marshal Asim Munir has stressed the need to resolve the lingering Kashmir dispute, highlighting the ongoing struggle of Kashmiris against India's illegal occupation.

Field Marshal Asim Munir addressing the passing out parade of Pakistan Navy cadets at PNS Rahbar on Saturday urged Pakistanis to remember the Kashmiris during these times and reaffirmed Pakistan's support for Kashmir's right to self-determination and its commitment to settling the dispute. "In recent years, under the pretext of counterterrorism, India's political leadership — marked by a troubling absence of strategic foresight — has twice undertaken acts of unprovoked aggression against Pakistan," he said, while referring to Indian aggressions after 2019 Palwama attack and the recent Pahalgam attack.

On both occasions, he said, India's recklessness was met with Pakistan's resolute response, which not only preserved national honour but also averted a dangerous, broader regional escalation. "Pakistan, despite grave provocations, acted with restraint and maturity and demonstrated its commitment to regional peace and stability, which has led to Pakistan's role as net regional stabiliser," he added.

Reiterating Pakistan's longstanding position on the Kashmir dispute, he said: "We continue to stand firmly with the people of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) in their just struggle for the

right to self-determination, in accordance with United Nations Security Council resolutions and the aspirations of the Kashmiri people." Refuting Indian claims that equate the Kashmiri resistance with terrorism, he said that the ongoing struggle in IIOJK is a legitimate freedom movement, as recognised by international law and conventions.

"Those who have tried to suppress the Kashmiri people's will and pursue conflict elimination instead of resolution have only made the movement more relevant through their own actions," he added. He said India will never forget its humiliating defeat in Operation Bunyan-un-Marsoos, a Pakistani military offensive that forced the enemy to ceasefire. He also condemned India's arrogant and aggressive behaviour, asserting that Pakistan's firm response has prevented a larger conflict in the region.

Despite India's provocations, Pakistan showed restraint, and today Pakistan is recognised as the "Net Regional Stabiliser" in South Asia. Field Marshal Asim Munir emphasised that the strong bond between the armed forces and the public for national progress remains "indispensable". He also congratulated the successful cadets from brotherly countries including Türkiye, Bahrain, Iraq and Palestine.

According to the top military commander, the naval warfare is rapidly evolving and maritime security challenges in the region are increasing, making it essential for Pakistan to maintain a robust maritime force. Speaking on regional security, he vowed to bring the war on terror to its logical conclusion and stated that the Marka-e-Haq, or 'Battle for Truth', against India will never be forgotten.

Reserved seats verdict undermines judicial integrity: Saif

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Advisor to the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Information and Public Relations, Barrister Dr. Saif, has termed the recent Supreme Court verdict on reserved seats a serious blow to the integrity of the country's justice system. In a statement issued from his office, he said the ruling could prove more detrimental than the controversial decision that led to the execution of former Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.

Barrister Dr. Saif stated that the 26th Constitutional Amendment paved the way for such decisions and legitimizing past judicial missteps. He added that PPP had rendered a disservice to Bhutto's legacy by supporting the passage of the amendment.

He alleged that the ruling elite had compromised the justice system for political motives and accused them of subordinating national interests to personal agendas. According to him, political factions are misusing institutions to maintain power and have no regard for constitutional principles.

Dr. Saif also expressed concern over what he described as the erosion of democratic norms. He stated that the mandate of the people, as expressed in the February 8 general elections, was disregarded, and that PTI, despite being the country's most popular party, was denied its rightful share of reserved seats through what he called manipulation of election results. He concluded by warning that undermining electoral and judicial processes poses a grave threat to democratic stability.

Reference against 26 MPAs will be sent to ECP

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Punjab Assembly Speaker Malik Muhammad Ahmad Khan has announced that a reference against 26 suspended members of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) will be sent to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) following their disruptive conduct in the assembly.

The PTI MPAs were suspended for 15 sessions after resorting to loud sloganeering, tearing documents, and violating assembly rules during an ongoing session.

In a press conference in Lahore, the Speaker condemned the behavior, emphasising that the dignity of the assembly cannot be compromised for the sake of one individual.

13 security personnel martyred

14 khwarij sent to hell by security forces in North Waziristan

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: In a cowardly attack, planned and orchestrated by the terrorist state of India, and executed by its proxy Fitna al Khwarij, a security forces convoy was targeted on Saturday in general area Mir Ali, North Waziristan District.

A vehicle borne suicide bomber attempted to explode himself on a security forces convoy, who was intercepted by the leading group, foiling his nefarious design. However, in their desperation, an explosive laden vehicle was rammed by the Indian sponsored Kharjis into one of the vehicles of the leading group.

Resultantly, thirteen brave sons of soil, embraced Shahadat. In this tragic and barbaric incident, three innocent civilians including two children and a woman also got severely injured.

Shuhada include Subedar Zahid Iqbal (age: 45 years, resident of District Karak), Havildar Sohrab Khan (age: 39 years, resident of District Naseerabad), Havildar Mian Yousaf (age: 41 years, resident of District Buner), Naik Khitab Shah (age: 34 years, resident of District Lower Dir), Lance Naik Ismail (age: 32 years, resident of District Naseerabad), Sepoy Rohail (age: 30 years, resident of District Mirpur Khas), Sepoy Muhammad Ramzan (age: 33 years, resident of Dera Ghazi Khan), Sepoy Nawab (age: 30 years, resident of District Quetta), Sepoy Zubair Ahmed (age: 24 years, resident of District Naseerabad), Sepoy Muhammad Sahki (age: 31 years, resident of District Dera Ghazi Khan), Sepoy Hashim Abbasi (age: 20 years, resident of District Abbotabad), Sepoy Muddasir Ejaz (age: 25 years, resident of District Layyah), Sepoy Manzar Ali (age: 23 years, resident of District Mardan).

In the ensuing sanitization operations, khwarij were pursued and after intense fire exchange, fourteen khwarij have been sent to hell by the security forces. The operations in the area would continue and perpetrators of this heinous and cowardly act will be brought to justice.

The security forces of Pakistan in step with nation remain steadfast in their resolve to eradicate Indian sponsored terrorism from the country and such sacrifices of our brave soldiers and innocent civilians further reinforce our unwavering commitment of safeguarding our nation at all costs.

Meanwhile, Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Karim Kundi on Saturday strongly condemned the terrorist attack on a security convoy in Mir Ali, North Waziristan, which claimed the lives of 13 soldiers.

He expressed deep condolences to the families of the martyrs and prayed for their patience and strength. Governor Kundi praised the bravery of the fallen heroes, calling them the pride of the nation, and reaffirmed that the nefarious designs of terrorists to destabilize the region would never succeed. He lauded the unwavering commitment and courage of the security forces and stated that the entire nation stands united with the armed forces in the fight against terrorism.

President Asif Ali Zardari Saturday strongly condemned the terrorist attack on a convoy of security forces in North Waziristan. Terrorists of Fitnatul Hindustan rammed a vehicle loaded with explosives into a military convoy. The President paid tribute to 13 brave soldiers who sacrificed their lives during the operation.

The martyrs ensured the security of the motherland by sacrificing their lives, he added. "The nation will never forget the sacrifices of its martyrs", he said adding "Those who sacrificed their lives in the path of defending the homeland are our real heroes." He said, "Such a cowardly attack cannot dampen the morale of the nation." He also appreciated the security forces for killing 14 Khawarij in North Waziristan.

"Pakistani nation and security forces are determined to root out Indian-sponsored terrorism," he remarked. The President prayed for the speedy recovery of the injured civilians, children and women. "May Allah Almighty elevate the ranks of the martyrs and grant patience to their families," he said adding, "Security forces operations will continue until terrorism is completely eradicated."

NDMA chairman briefs PM on rainfall situation

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif Saturday telephoned Chairman NDMA to stay in touch with all the provincial governments, especially in the upper areas, and provide assistance.

He also directed Chairman NDMA to further enhance communication with rescue agencies, district administrations and provincial governments in this regard. He also asked for issuance of instructions to inform citizens about the weather situation through mobile phone messages.

Moreover, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif expressed satisfaction over Bloomberg report on stability in Pakistani economy.

Swat tragedy; death toll rises to 11

Shafi Ullah

MINGORA: The death toll from the tragic Swat River incident climbed to 11 on Saturday, after rescue teams recovered the body of another child, Rescue 1122 confirmed. Two individuals from the same family remain missing, while rescue efforts continue for a second consecutive day.

The tragedy occurred on Friday when 17 members of a family from Sialkot, enjoying a picnic by the Swat River, were swept away by a sudden surge in water. Despite immediate rescue efforts, many were caught in the powerful current. Four people were rescued alive in the initial response.

Director General Rescue 1122 stated that the extensive search operation is being conducted in Khwazakhela, Kabal Bypass, and Barkot, with more than 120 rescue personnel from Swat, Malakand, and Shangla participating. Boats, divers, and modern scanning equipment are being used to comb the riverbanks and deeper water channels.

Amid growing outrage and public pressure, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government suspended Swat Deputy Commissioner Shahzad Mahboob for alleged negligence and failure to enforce preventive measures in the area.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister's spokesperson, Faraz Ahmad Mughal, announced that an inquiry committee had been formed to probe the incident. The committee recommended a complete crackdown on illegal encroachments along the river. "The district administration has been instructed to demolish all unauthorized structures within three days," he said, adding that all hotels in the region will now be permanently registered for effective oversight.

In a significant move, Chief

KP govt takes action to mitigate flood impact in Swat

F.P. Report

MINGORA: The Chief Secretary of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Shahab Ali Shah, visited the flood-affected areas in Swat and reviewed the situation. During his visit, he announced a series of measures to address the crisis and prevent future occurrences.

The Chief Secretary announced an immediate ban on all types of mining in the riverbed and strict action against hotels and other encroachments established on the banks of the rivers. An effective operation against encroachments will be launched from Sunday, and those found negligent will be identified and punished according to the law. An investigation team has been formed to investigate the Swat incident, and the investigation has formally started. The Chief Secretary assured that those responsible for negligence will be held accountable.

The Chief Secretary decided to declare the ADC Relief office as a "Response Center" to coordinate the response efforts. Rescue teams are being equipped with modern equipment, including drones, life-saving jackets, and other necessary equipment. The stranded people will be identified through drones, and immediate steps will be taken to rescue them. The Chief Secretary ordered the deployment of rescue, police, and administration on patrol for effective monitoring of all rivers in Malakand division. Instructions were also issued to keep the public away from the rivers and ensure their safety. Rescue teams will be deployed on a regular basis at all sensitive points of the rivers.

Residents stage protest against KP govt

F.P. Report

SWAT: Thousands of residents in Swat took to the streets on Saturday to protest against the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) government's failure to effectively rescue stranded tourists following recent flash floods in River Swat. The demonstrators, including local elders, youth, and civil society members, gathered in Mingora city, chanting slogans against the provincial authorities and demanding urgent reforms in emergency response protocols. According to protesters, 18 tourists had been stranded in River Swat after flash floods and despite repeated calls for help, the KP government response was delayed, poorly coordinated, and lacked necessary equipment.

Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa also issued directives for the immediate removal of all encroachments along the Swat River. Furthermore, he imposed a complete ban on sand and mineral excavation from the river, citing environmental degradation and

the threat it poses to both ecological balance and public safety.

Public protests erupted across several parts of Swat on Saturday, with demonstrators expressing grief and anger over what they termed a preventable disaster.



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Governor Kundi, Opposition leader deplore assembly session prorogue

ISLAMABAD (APP): Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Karim Kundi and Leader of the Opposition of the Provincial Assembly, Dr Ibadullah, held a meeting here on Saturday and expressed deep concern over the provincial government's decision to prorogue the KP Assembly Session. They termed the indefinite postponement of the assembly session a blatant disrespect of the Supreme Court's ruling and an open

refusal by the provincial government to accept the court's decision on the matter of reserved seats. The meeting also strongly condemned the recent Swat tragedy, where several tourists lost their lives due to drowning. The leaders criticized the government's negligence and inefficiency in handling tourism safety, holding the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa directly responsible for the deaths, as the tourism port-

folio falls under his direct supervision. Governor Kundi and Dr Ibadullah demanded the immediate resignation of Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur, saying that suspending district officials and rescue personnel would not absolve the CM of his primary responsibility. They also urged the Prime Minister to announce financial compensation for the families of those who perished in the Swat incident.

Sindh launches crackdown on drug trafficking and abuse

F.P. Report

KARACHI: In a press statement, Spokesperson Sukhdev Hemnani has said that Sindh government has launched a province-wide crackdown on drug abuse and trafficking, prioritizing protection of the youth and public safety. He shared that these efforts are in line with the directives of President Asif Ali Zardari who laid out his priority action areas before the cabinet at the outset of his presidential tenure - emphasizing urgent and coordinated action against narcotics.

Hemnani stated that Sindh is working proactively to contain the menace of drugs, especially among the young population, and has done substantial legislation with Sindh Control of Narcotic Substances Act

2024 introducing tough penalties: 7-14 years for drug use, 7 years for cultivation, and property seizure for drug sales. Hemnani stated that under the said law, a dedicated Anti-Narcotics Force will be formed and the provincial cabinet has already approved establishing 3 special courts to ensure swift processing and resolution of drug-related cases. Shedding light on the government's ongoing efforts, he said that the provincial government is working in collaboration with both ANF and UNODC to control narcotics usage. The government aims to increase the number of rehabilitation centers, he added. Hemnani also shared that government will soon establish a fusion centre for

intelligence-sharing and better coordination among federal and provincial agencies to contain illicit drug trade - similar to the anti-terrorism fusion centre established in 2024. Spokesperson Sukhdev Hemnani further stated that Sindh police has ramped up operations for drugs control across the province. Over 100 homes were raided in a recent Karachi Police and Rangers operation in Sharafi Goth, Malir, while Home Department is working to secure border areas. A dedicated helpline (021-111-374-634) has been established for public reporting, he shared. The Sindh government remains fully committed to a drug-free province through prevention, rehabilitation, enforcement and legal reforms, stated Hemnani.

CM orders to provide e-buses to South Punjab

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif has issued clear instructions to prioritize the provision of electric buses to the districts of South Punjab, with a special focus on reaching remote and underdeveloped areas. Chairing a meeting to review the Transport Department's progress, here on Saturday, she reiterated her commitment to ensuring equitable development across all regions of the province. During the briefing, the Transport Department presented updates on ongoing and upcoming projects, particularly the electric bus initiative. The CM stressed the need to break the long-standing pattern of introducing modern facilities only in major urban centers. She said that the government's aim is to elevate rural areas to the same standard as big cities, ensuring equal access to modern transport services for all. In the first phase, 240 electric buses will be distributed to 24 underdeveloped districts as a matter of priority. Between August and October, an

additional 500 e-buses will be provided to Lahore, Faisalabad, Bahawalpur, Multan, and Rawalpindi. Furthermore, 600 more e-buses are scheduled to arrive in Punjab between November and December. Under the Punjab Clean Air Program, 400 electric buses will also be deployed in Lahore, Sheikhupura, Nankana Sahib, and Kasur to promote environmentally friendly transportation. The meeting also featured a detailed review of the Gujranwala Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project. The 22-kilometer-long BRT corridor from Rahwali to Eminabad will include 28 stations and will offer two-way service every eight minutes. To support the project, four electric bus depots will be established in Gujranwala. A smart traffic control solution will be implemented along the route to manage flow effectively. In addition, 80 feeder buses will be launched to ensure connectivity between the city and surrounding suburban areas. A proposal to extend the BRT route was also discussed.

Progress on the Red Line and Orange Line transport systems in Faisalabad was reviewed as well. The Red Line, spanning 23.4 kilometers with 24 stations, is projected to carry over 185,000 passengers, while the Orange Line, stretching 29 kilometers with 21 stations, is expected to serve more than 111,000 commuters. Following the Chief Minister's directive, the route from FIEDMC to Salami Chowk has also been added to the transport development plan. CM Maryam Nawaz instructed the Transport Department to begin all public welfare projects without delay and emphasized that the planning of e-bus routes must be guided by actual public commuting needs. She reiterated her commitment to equitable development, stating that all districts hold equal importance and that progress must be inclusive and far-reaching. "Our approach should be entirely people-centric," she said. "In this journey of progress, every citizen must have equal access to opportunities and facilities."

Power outage disrupts water supply across city

KARACHI (APP): A major power breakdown occurred at the Dhabeji Pumping Station on Friday night which disrupted water supply infrastructure of the mega city. According to Karachi Water Corporation spokesperson, the power outage affected operations at both the K-II and K-III pump houses. The spokesperson confirmed that K-Electric has only managed to restore electricity to the K-II pump house, while the K-III pump house remains without full power. As a result, two main pumps at the K-III facility have been non-operational for the past 38 hours. Despite the passage of time, K-Electric has not yet resolved the fault, the Water Corporation's spokesperson stated.

Due to this prolonged disruption, several areas in Karachi—including Nazimabad, New Karachi, Landhi, and Korangi—are experiencing severe water shortages. The ongoing outage has resulted in an estimated shortfall of 171 million gallons of water supply over the last 38 hours, exacerbating the crisis in the city's water distribution. Water Corporation officials said they were in constant contact with the K-Electric administration to resolve the issue as swiftly as possible, he added.

CS, IGP pin badges on police officers

LAHORE (APP): A badge-pinning ceremony was held at the Central Police Office (CPO) on Saturday to honour Punjab Police officers recently promoted to the senior ranks of Additional Inspector General (Addl IG) and Deputy Inspector General (DIG). Punjab Chief Secretary Zahid Akhtar Zaman attended the event as the chief guest, while Inspector General of Police (IGP) Punjab Dr Usman Anwar was also present. The chief secretary and IGP Punjab pinned badges on the newly promoted officers and congratulated them on their career advancement. The presence of the officers' families added further significance to the occasion, making it both proud and memorable.

Among those promoted to Grade 21 as Additional IGs are Tariq Rustam Chauhan, Khurram Shakoor, Shehzada Sultan, Flight Lieutenant (ret'd) Wasem Ahmad Khan, Syed Khurram Ali, and Humayun Bashir Tarar. Officers promoted to Grade 20 as DIGs include Asad Sarfraz Khan, Captain (ret'd) Muhammad Ali Zia, Muhammad Umar Farooq Salamat, Sahibzada Bilal Umar, Mustafa Hameed Malik, Muhammad Fawaduddin Riaz Qureshi, and Muhammad Ali Nekokara.



LAHORE: Shopkeepers displays Ashura processions related stuffs to attract the customers in Provincial Capital City. —APP Photo

5 dead, 20 injured in rain-related incidents

LAHORE (APP): heavy monsoon rains continued to lash various districts of Punjab, in which at least five people lost their lives and 20 others were injured in multiple incidents over the past 24 hours, Rescue 1122 reported on Saturday. According to Rescue Punjab spokesperson, most of the casualties resulted from roof collapses triggered by persistent downpours across the province. "Our emergency teams have responded to dozens of distress calls involving structural damage, injuries, and electrocution cases caused by severe weather," the spokesperson said.

In Faisalabad, a four-year-old girl, Ummah Hania, died when the roof of a mud house collapsed in Roshan Wali Jhal, Samundri Road. Two others were injured in the same incident. Additionally, separate roof collapses in Kotli Jhanda Singh and

Peoples Colony No. 2 left four individuals injured.

In Lahore's Shahdara Abbas Nagar, two minors, seven-year-old Ayesha and eight-year-old Hasnain, were killed when their house roof caved in due to rain. Four others were seriously injured and provided on-site medical treatment before being shifted to a nearby hospital.

In Gujranwala, 55-year-old Muhammad Saif lost his life when a wooden roof gave way in Syed Nagar village, Wazirabad. Meanwhile, in Attock, 40-year-old Masooma Zahra drowned in a flooded storm drain in Samandarabad locality during heavy rainfall.

Other incidents were reported in Muzaffargarh, Sheikhupura, Hafizabad, and Okara, where rain-induced roof collapses and electric shocks caused injuries. In Sheikhupura's Aaray Wala Bazaar and

Safdarabad, three people were injured, while in Chak Chattha, Hafizabad, one person was hurt due to falling bricks. Another individual suffered an electric shock in Thatta Bhoom village.

Rescue teams across the province remained on high alert, conducting rapid response operations, administering first aid, and ensuring timely hospital transfers of the injured.

The spokesperson urged citizens to avoid staying under weak or dilapidated structures and to take extra precautions during the ongoing monsoon spell. "We request the public to report emergencies immediately by calling Rescue 1122 and to stay informed through official weather updates," he added.

Further rain is forecast in several regions, and authorities have advised residents to remain vigilant and follow safety guidelines issued by local administrations.

Sharjeel condemns Mir Ali attack, mourns martyrdom of soldiers

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Sindh Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon has strongly condemned the cowardly attack on security forces in Mir Ali and expressed profound sorrow and grief over the martyrdom of 13 Pakistan Army personnel. In a statement, Sindh Senior Minister and Provincial Minister for Information, Transport, and Mass Transit Sharjeel Inam Memon said that this was not merely an attack on a convoy, but an assault on the heart of the entire nation.

He affirmed that the nation would respond to this act with unity and unwavering resolve.

Sharjeel Inam Memon expressed deep sorrow and sympathy for the families of the martyrs, stating that the entire nation and the Sindh government stand in solidarity with the Pakistan Army and the families of the martyrs in this hour of grief.

He stated that this homeland has been sanctified by the blood of our martyrs and that the sacrifices of our soldiers will never be in vain.

He said that those who

take innocent lives and shatter families deserve no leniency.

This act of the Khawarij is a clear manifestation of cowardice and enmity towards Pakistan.

He emphasized that the war against terrorism is not the responsibility of a single institution, but a collective struggle of the entire nation, in which every individual must play their part.

Sharjeel Inam Memon appealed to all political parties, the media, and civil society to further strengthen the national narrative against terrorism.

NAB holds open hearing, promises compensations to victims

LAHORE (APP): National Accountability Bureau (NAB) Lahore Director General Ghulam Safdar Shah held his first open hearing session at NAB Lahore Bureau after assuming office, receiving an overwhelming response from victims of fraudulent Ponzi schemes and alleged fake housing societies.

The affectees of Bahria Cuisine, Blink Capital Investment (BCI), Al-Rehman Garden Phase-4, New Lahore City, Al-Jalil Garden, Khayaban-e-Ameen Housing Society, Grand Avenue Housing Society, Pak-Arab Housing Society, and Omega Residencia attended the session for redress of grievances. The DG NAB personally heard the grievances and issued on-the-spot directives for redressal.

In response to the complaint from victims of the Bahria Cuisine mega scandal, the DG NAB ordered the retrieval of all related FIRs from CCPO Lahore office registered against said accused for further action. Additionally, instructions were issued for publishing Public Notices

regarding Bahria Cuisine scandal and to depart a dedicated NAB team to Ghotki for victims' facilitation. Formal Complaint Verification proceedings against Bahria Cuisine's management has been officially initiated.

Regarding complaints from New Lahore City, the DG directed that each affectee be addressed individually and progress reports be submitted to him during upcoming week. He further mentioned that, if tangible progress couldn't not be observed before upcoming Open Hearing, the management of the society must be summoned to face the victims directly.

"No affectee should have to run from one office to another seeking justice," he remarked. Addressing complaints related to Khayaban-e-Ameen Housing Society, the DG conveyed Chairman NAB's directive, victims who have paid over 50 percent of the total amount to the administration will be eligible for recovery worth three times the paid amount through NAB efforts.

In response to concerns raised by victims of the

Grand Avenue Housing Society regarding delays in recovery and refund, the DG called for a comprehensive briefing on the auction progress of surrendered properties of the accused. He said that NAB Lahore is committed to ensuring prompt recovery by auctioning the confiscated assets of the perpetrators. Regarding Al-Jalil Garden, the DG demanded a detailed progress briefing on ongoing investigations and refund-related difficulties faced by victims.

For Al-Rehman Garden Phase-4, he confirmed that the investigation is nearing completion, with major developments expected soon. While addressing the participants of the open hearing, the DG reiterated Chairman NAB's stance on adopting a zero-tolerance policy against culprits involved in defrauding general public. "NAB's primary objective remains the restitution of victims' losses," he stated, "but our broader vision is to establish a people-centric NAB, a goal towards which decisive measures are underway."

Over 26,000 cops deployed on 2nd Muharram

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Police, under the direction of Inspector General Dr Usman Anwar, implemented strict security arrangements across Lahore and other parts of the province on the 2nd of Muharram.

According to a Punjab Police spokesperson, more than 26,000 police officers and personnel were deployed to safeguard mourning processions and majalis held throughout the province. In Lahore alone, over 2,800 police officers and personnel were assigned to ensure fool-proof security. On the 2nd of Muharram, a total of 90 mourning processions and 3,495 majalis were held across Punjab. The provincial capital hosted 8 processions and 386 majalis on this day. More than 14,000 community volunteers also participated in assisting security arrangements across the province.

IG Punjab Dr Usman Anwar said that high-alert security will continue throughout the first ten days of Muharram. He added that Section 144 is being strictly enforced across Punjab. Aerial firing, display of weapons, dissemination of hate material, and incitement through speech or action are strictly prohibited. No gatherings or processions are allowed outside officially designated routes and venues.

All activities are being closely monitored through cameras installed by the Punjab Safe Cities Authority and district administrations. Various police units, including the Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD), Special Branch, Traffic Police, Dolphin Squad, PRU, and other field formations, are actively engaged in Muharram security duties. The IG has also instructed strict implementation of the Loudspeaker Act and directed a crackdown on individuals spreading hateful content on social media platforms. Control rooms have been set up in all districts and remain in constant communication with the Central Control Room at the Central Police Office to ensure real-time coordination and monitoring.

Two children die in house collapse

LAHORE (APP): Two children lost their lives and four other family members were injured when the roof of a single-storey mud house collapsed in Abbas Nagar, Shahdara Town, early Saturday morning.

According to Rescue 1122, two children were found dead at the scene, while four injured individuals were rescued and shifted to hospitals for treatment. The deceased were identified as Husnain, 8, and Ayesha, 7 — children of Atiq, 38. The injured include Atiq himself, his wife Sumaira Bibi, 36, and their two sons, Ali Hassan, 10, and Suleman, 5.

The bodies were moved to Shahdara Hospital, while the injured were taken to Mayo and Shahdara hospitals. Preliminary investigations suggest the roof may have deteriorated over time, possibly worsened by recent weather conditions.



KARACHI passengers sitting on the roof top the bus while travelling in city cause any incident needs attention of concern authorities. —INP Photo

Swat River tragedy:

Governor slams KP govt over poor response

PESHAWAR (INP): Death toll in the Swat River tragedy rose to 11 after bodies of two more tourists were recovered on Saturday during an ongoing search operation for the victims who are still missing.

The group, on a leisure trip, had been having breakfast along the riverbank in the Mingora area at around 8am on Friday when heavy rainfall upstream triggered a rapid and unexpected rise in the river's water level.

Initially, the bodies of nine victims were recovered and four people were rescued, while the search continued for four others who remained missing in

the river.

This morning, two more bodies, including that of a child, were recovered bringing the death toll to 10. Seven bodies, along with the survivors, have since been shifted to Daska.

Today, three of the deceased were taken to Daska Kalan, three to the Lalarian locality, and two others to Mohallah Mohammadpura.

Funeral prayers for eight of the victims have also been offered.

Taking notice of the incident, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government formed an inquiry committee, tasked with determining the reasons behind the tragic flash

flood incident and identifying any responsible individuals or institutional lapses.

Reacting to the tragic incident, Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Karim Kundi has censured the CM Ali Ami Gandapur-led provincial government and failure to ensure timely response and preventive measures. "This is not just incompetence. It is a shameful failure of duty," Governor Kundi wrote in a post on X.

Kundi expresses condolence on death of Zain's sister

PESHAWAR (APP): Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Faisal Karim Kundi, on Saturday expressed deep sorrow and grief over the death of the sister of former Deputy District Education Officer (DDEO) Tank, Zainullah Garwaki, the wife of Irfanullah Garwaki of Gomal Tank.

In his condolence message, the Governor prayed for the eternal peace of the departed soul and extended heartfelt sympathies to the bereaved family.

He also prayed for strength and patience for the grieving family to bear this irreparable loss.



PESHAWAR: President SCCI Fazal Moqem Khan presiding over session regarding Digital Investigation System at Chamber's House.

Business and industries unprepared to abruptly adopt new system: SCCI

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Traders and manufacturers rejected imposition of heavy penalties and declaring defaulters under section 25-A of the SRO-709 and abrupt implementation of digital invoicing system to integrate small and large scale businesses and industries in one go.

Business community raised voices against the government and FBR for its unilateral policy and initiatives, especially the aforementioned new system through three different resolutions that were adopted unanimously during an awareness session on Digital Invoicing organised by Sarhad Chamber of Commerce of Industry in collaboration with Federal Board of Revenue (PRAL – Pakistan Revenue Automation Private Limited here in the chamber.

The session was chaired by SCCI president Fazal Moqem Khan.

Senior vice president of the chamber Abdul Jalil Jan, member of the SCCI executive committee Adnan Nasir, Aftab Iqbal, Ashfaq Ahmad, Muhammad Nadeem Rauf, Sajjad Zaheer, former senior vice president Imran Khan Mohmand, carpet exporters Mazhar ul Haq, Atif Rasheed Khawaja, Afshan Khan, Sadder, Fazal e Wahid, Secretary General SCCI Muqtasid Ahsan, representatives, managers of various industries, business and importers and exporters were in attendance in a large number.

The resolutions strongly denounced the imposition

of heavy penalties and declaring the business community defaulters over violation of not digitizing in digital invoicing system and imposing heavy penalties under the Section 25-A, and called it an attempt to discourage the business and industries and demanded immediate abolishment of the afore-stated section forthwith.

Another resolution against S.R.O.709(1)/2025, stating that businesses and industries are unprepared technically and physically to adopt this new system abruptly, therefore, it is strongly called to give an extension into implementation of the new system for an indefinite period.

In the third resolution, the business community suggested phase-wise and sector wise implementation of the new digital invoicing system, right from large-scale manufacturing industries to small businesses and traders.

Traders and manufacturers opposed the section 25-A that has made mandatory to electronically integrate their hardware and software with FBR's computerized system through a license integrator or PRAL and to issue invoices, which unable for them to adopt abruptly while keeping in inadequate digital infrastructure, particularly in underdeveloped and remote industrial zones, insufficient technical readiness among enterprises, especially SMEs, limited digital literacy and capacity, both at user and support levels. They viewed that FBR is not itself fully digitized.

Business community furthermore pointed out that frequent downtime of FBR's IRIS services couldn't enable them to generate invoices in wake of inaccessibility of the system.

Cost barriers for SMEs, they questioned what affordable alternatives are available for small traders who lack ERP systems or cannot hire dedicated IT support?

Therefore, they called for phase-wise and sector-wise implementation of the new digital invoicing system.

Fazal Moqem Khan in his opening remarks started the business community categorically rejecting the enforcement of the new system and conveyed their extreme resentments and apprehensions to senior officials of FBR/PRAL.

The SCCI chief highlighted key points and reservations that are unfeasible and impossible to immediately integrate business and industries with the new digital invoicing system.

Later, FBR/PRAL officials KP/Peshawar including Junaid ur Rehman, M. Abid Naeem, Ms Farheen Azhar and M Umar Saddiq during the session through a multimedia presentation briefed the participants about registration and integration of business and industries with the new system.

Senior officials assured issues relating to the new digital invoicing system will be taken up with high-ups to address them amicably and all facilities and easiness in the new system will be ensured as per recommendation of the SCCI.

ATC sought complainant testimony in 9th May vandalism Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: The Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) Peshawar has sought the testimony of the complainant and the investigating officer in a case related to the 9 May riots, where protesters allegedly attacked Radio Pakistan and damaged government property during a protest against the arrest of PTI founder Imran Khan.

ATC Judge Wali Muhammad Khan presided over the hearing, during which the court was informed about the details of the case.

According to prosecution a case was registered against several PTI leaders and workers, including Asif Khan, Meena Khan Afridi, and Fazal Elahi, for their alleged involvement in the violence.

The protesters attacked Radio Pakistan, setting fire to the building and damaging public and private property. The attack resulted in significant damage to the property of Radio Pakistan.

The court has summoned the complainant and the investigating officer to record their statements.

The case was registered at the East Police Station against the protesters. Several PTI leaders and workers have been nominated in the case.

ATC adjourned further hearing until 15 July for further proceedings.

Zaheer appointed Chairman

PESHAWAR (APP): The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provincial government has appointed senior bureaucrat and former Commissioner of Hazara Division, Zaheer-ul-Islam, as the Chairman of the FATA Tribunal, KP. He has officially assumed charge of his new position.

On this significant and prestigious appointment, Deputy Commissioner Mansehra Khalid Iqbal Khatkhat and District Police Officer Shafiullah Gandapur on Saturday paid a special visit to his residence and congratulate him.

During the visit, they lauded Zaheer-ul-Islam's administrative services, professional expertise, and his longstanding efforts for public welfare.



PESHAWAR: Deputy Commissioner Peshawar Sarmad Saleem Akram and Director General Capital Metropolitan Government Waqas Ali Shah being briefed in Supreme Commander Post.

Responsible for negligence to be penalized, says CS

PESHAWAR (APP): Chief Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Shahab Ali Shah on Saturday said that a formal investigation into the recent Swat incident has initiated and those responsible for negligence would be penalized.

Chairing a meeting, Shahab Ali Shah also outlined several crucial measures to address aftermath of floods and prevent future tragedies.

He stated that a ban had been imposed on all forms

of mining in riverbeds and authorities were set to take strict action against all types of encroachments, including hotels built within riverbeds.

An effective operation to clear encroachments on and along riverbanks will commence tomorrow.

Chief Secretary further announced that ADC Relief office will be designated as a response center, where officials from all relevant departments will be stationed.

To bolster rescue efforts, he said teams are being equipped with modern tools such as drones, life-saving jackets, and other essential gear. Drones will be used to locate stranded individuals and facilitate their rescue.

Plans are also underway to review and improve irrigation early warning system. For effective monitoring of all rivers in Malakand division, rescue, police, and administrative personnel will be deployed

for patrols. These teams will also be responsible for keeping public away from dangerous river areas, he said.

The CS urged the print, electronic and social media outlets to actively inform tourists and citizens about flood situation in rivers.

The meeting concluded with prayers for the victims of the Swat River tragedy. Rescue teams were also directed to intensify efforts to locate the three individuals who are still missing.

Mayor expresses sorrow over Swat incident, criticize KP govt

PESHAWAR (APP): Mayor Peshawar, Haji Zubair Ali has expressed profound sorrow and grief over the tragic incident in which several members of the same family were swept away by a flash flood in the Swat River.

He said that the lives lost due to provincial government's criminal negligence

and a complete failure of the rescue system. He said that no timely warnings were issued and safety measures at dangerous sites were not taken by provincial authorities.

Condemning the provincial ministers, he remarked that they are limited to mere delivering statements while

people continue to lose their lives in monsoon annually. He extended heartfelt sympathy to bereaved family and said that we stand with them in this hour of distress. He further warned that unless the provincial government takes public safety seriously, preventing such incidents in the future

would be impossible.

Mayor also demanded immediate financial assistance for the affected family and called for emergency safety measures along all riverside areas including Swat. He also urged the installation of modern warning systems to prevent such disasters in the future.

Envoy thanks journalists for extending supporting during war

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Consul General of Iran in Peshawar, Ali Banafahekhah, expressed his gratitude to Pakistan's prominent journalists and columnists for their writings in support of Iran. He commended their acknowledgment of Iran's resilience and steadfast spirit in confronting imperialistic powers.

He expressed these views while talking to a five-member delegation of the Abasin Columnists Association (ACWA) which called on him under the leadership of its President, Zia-ul-Haq Sarhadi.

The delegation members included General Secretary Abid Akhtar Hassan, Finance Secretary Waseem Shahid, Legal Advisor Sahibzada Talha Saeed Advocate and Member of the Executive Committee Aurangzeb Ahmed.

The delegation extended heartfelt congratulations to the Supreme Leader of Iran, Ayatollah Khamenei, the people and the government of Iran on the recent victory against the econom-



ic forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

On this occasion, Zia-ul-Haq Sarhadi said that the hearts of the people of Pakistan and Iran beat together, and Iran's victory is actually the victory of the Muslim Ummah.

Iran's courage, independence, spirit of martyrdom and services for the exaltation of the religion of Islam are commendable.

The Consul General of the Islamic Republic of Iran said that the way Pakistani writers and penmen have encouraged Iran in recent days, we are deeply grateful to them.

Iran and Pakistan are

connected to each other in terms of civilization, values, history and culture. We both have the same goal and that is the exaltation of the clear religion of Islam.

He called the unity, solidarity, brotherhood and sincerity of the Muslim Ummah indispensable and said that the most important requirement of the time is that we unite and organize ourselves to stand firm against imperialistic powers and become an invincible force and make it clear to the world that we are one and will not hesitate to make any sacrifice for our survival and the exaltation of Islam.

The Consul General thanked the delegation and said that this success is the success of the entire Muslim Ummah and especially of this region.

"This war has brought both countries and nations of Pakistan and Iran closer. We are deeply grateful for the bravery with which the Pakistani government and people have expressed solidarity with Iran in this difficult time," Iranian diplomat added.

Ziaul Haq Sarhadi and the delegation members thanked Consul General Ali Banafahekhah and assured all possible cooperation from their association.

Swat tragedy: A wake up call to unite against deforestation and climate change

PESHAWAR (APP): The tragic drowning of 18 tourists in the swollen Swat River has sent shockwaves across the country, exposing once again Pakistan's deep vulnerability to climate change.

In what was supposed to be a summer retreat to the "Switzerland of Pakistan," the lives lost in a flash flood served as a grim reminder of the mounting risks driven by environmental neglect that put lives of Swatis living near the river bed at risks.

The victims, hailing from Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, were swept away in broad daylight by

surging river waters made more ferocious by years of unchecked deforestation, rampant construction, and inadequate disaster preparedness.

Experts point to a combination of environmental degradation, poor preparation for monsoon and weak governance system as the underlying cause of the disaster.

"Let's be honest—the flood that claimed 18 lives was caused by decades of encroachment and forest destruction," said Professor Dr. Shafeequr Rehman, former Chairman of Environmental Sciences at the University of Peshawar.

"The large-scale deforestation during the Taliban insurgency in Upper Swat has left the region alarmingly exposed to extreme weather events,"

He emphasized that the construction of illegal hotels, restaurants, and homes along the riverbanks has narrowed waterways and exacerbated flood risks.

Suspending local officials after such tragedies, he warned, is merely an "eyewash"—a symbolic gesture that sidesteps systemic failures.

"What we need is not reactionary punishment, but a long-term climate resilience strategy," he

stressed.

This isn't the first disaster of its kind. Swat has witnessed repeated flooding, most notably in 2022, when flash floods demolished roads and riverside hotels. Yet, authorities continue to overlook basic preventive infrastructure such as small dams, diversion channels, and robust early warning systems.

"Public alerts arrive too late or not at all," said Dr. Rehman. "And tourists continue to treat rising waters as a spectacle, not a threat due to lack of awareness."

Footage from the day of the tragedy showed fami-

lies standing dangerously close to the riverbanks, unaware of the looming danger. This behavior, according to Dr. Rehman, reflects not only a lack of individual judgment but also a failure of public communication and safety.

Flash floods, he explained, are not just bigger versions of regular floods. They are fast, violent, and unforgiving triggered by steep terrain, deforestation, and unplanned development.

"They cannot be controlled with a few sandbags. What's needed is large-scale afforestation, smart engineering of

bridges, long-term planning, and widespread behavioral change."

He said Pakistan contributes less than 1% to global carbon emissions, yet it ranks among the most climate-vulnerable nations. From melting glaciers to shifting monsoon patterns, the impact is increasingly visible and increasingly deadly.

"But we continue to treat each disaster as an isolated incident," he said. "The Swat tragedy could have been avoided had we truly learned lessons from the 2022 floods devastations in Kalam."

Dr. Rehman urged the

government to prioritize climate resilience at a national level not just during emergencies. He called for investment in early warning systems across all flood-prone districts, construction of small reservoirs and diversion channels and launching multilingual public awareness campaigns.

He underscored the need for strict enforcement of safety protocols, especially during tourist seasons, integration of climate education into school curricula and national discourse and decisive action against encroachment in River beds.

"These are not optional upgrades," he emphasized.

"They're urgent necessities. Every delay costs lives."

The loss of 18 lives in Swat is not just a natural disaster but a consequence of policy failure, environmental neglect, and public complacency. "These people didn't die because of water alone—they died because of neglect," Dr. Rehman said.

He urged the nation to treat this as a turning point, not another forgotten story or headline.

"We owe that much to the victims—and to every citizen unknowingly standing in the path of the next flood."



In brief

Explosives recovered Syed Waliullah Shah

NOWSHERA: The police have recovered an explosive materials from a motor car in Nowshera. The suspect has been arrested, and a case has been registered against him. An investigation has been initiated to determine the source and intended use of the explosives. During a search of the motor car, the police recovered 1400 sticks of explosive materials, 6 bundles of safety fuses (black in color), and 800 detonators. The alleged culprit identified as Usman Ali resident of Shangla, has been taken into custody. A case has been registered against the suspect, and an investigation has been started to gather more information about the explosives. The police team was conducting a Naka Bandi (checkpoint) when they spotted the suspicious motor car coming from Peshawar. The police are investigating the case to determine the source of the explosives and the intended use.

Welfare projects to be prepared F.P. Report

KOHAT: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Law Aftab Alam Advocate has directed the authorities concerned to prefer the public welfare projects while devising the developmental strategy so that maximum people can benefit from them. He gave these directions while presiding over a meeting on developmental projects at the office of the Deputy Commissioner Kohat on Saturday. The meeting beside others, was attended by the Members of the Provincial Assembly Shafi Jan and Daud Afridi, Deputy Commissioner Kohat Abdul Akram Chitrali and the authorities concerned. The meeting made phase-wise review in detail of the proposed, new and ongoing schemes and certain important decisions were taken in this respect. All those projects of public interest including provision of clean drinking water, improvement of drainage system, construction and repair of roads and other infrastructure projects, were discussed in the meeting which were aimed to improve the basic facilities and life standard of the common man.

Flash flood: Public appealed F.P. Report

KOHAT: Commissioner Kohat Division Syed Motasim Billah Shah, has in light of the directions of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government, asked the public to take immediate precautionary measures in the rainy season particularly in view of the possibility of a flash flood in the Indus River after the flood in the Swat River and directed the relevant district administration to ensure advance emergency safety and precautionary measures. Commissioner Kohat warned, due to the flood in the Swat River, there is a strong possibility of a flash flood passing through Khushalgarh and other rural areas and places on the banks of the Indus River within the limits of Kohat Division in the next 5 to 6 hours, which may pose a threat to human lives and property in nearby populations. He strictly directed all the Deputy Commissioners, DPOs and Rescue 1122 to make immediate announcements in the riverside areas, alert the public through mosques and provide timely awareness of possible dangers. Rescue 1122 has specially been given directions to keep a close eye on the situation and be fully prepared to deal with any emergency.

Siraj demands activation of Koto Hydropower Project

Haleem Asad

LOWER DIR: Former Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) Pakistan chief Sirajul Haq expressed grave concern over the inordinate delay in the completion of the Koto Hydropower Project in Lower Dir, despite the passage of a decade and massive expenditure.

Addressing an emergency press conference at Ahya-ul-Uloom, Balambhat, accompanied by JI Lower Dir chief Maulana Asadullah, former MPA Saeed Gul, former tehsil nazim Imranuddin, JI district general secretary Shoaib Ahmad, party spokesperson Sher Bahadur, Noorul Wahab Pacha, Engineer Yaqoobur Rahman, and Youth President Atiqur Rahman, Sirajul Haq said that despite spending over Rs14 billion on the project, the people of the region were still living in darkness.

He termed the delay in the 40.8-megawatt Koto project as "criminal negligence" and demanded its immediate activation. The project, launched in 2015 under the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Energy Development Organization (PEDO), was originally scheduled for completion by 2019.

Sirajul Haq said that the Koto Hydropower Project is not only vital for Lower Dir but also holds immense importance for the entire Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. "It has the potential to meet local electricity needs and supply surplus energy to the national grid, generating substantial revenue," he said. He stressed that had the project been



completed on time, the region could have been free from load-shedding and seen significant industrial development. He blamed the delay on sheer government incompetence and warned that further delay would no longer be tolerated.

He called upon the concerned authorities to resolve all technical and administrative issues immediately and ensure the project starts generating electricity without any further holdup. The former JI chief revealed that the project was expected to yield an annual revenue of Rs2 billion and could fully cater to Dir's power needs. He also demanded that the region be given a fair share in power royalty.

Public and social circles also backed Sirajul Haq's demand, urging the government to take prompt action so the long-delayed project can finally benefit the people of Lower Dir.

Swat River incident: Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa North chief Inayatullah Khan has blamed the provincial government and district administration of Swat for the tragic deaths of over 15 tourists swept away by a flash flood in the Swat River near Fizagat

completed on time, the region could have been free from load-shedding and seen significant industrial development. He blamed the delay on sheer government incompetence and warned that further delay would no longer be tolerated.

HR activist concerns over growth in population

F.P. Report

BANNU: Prominent human rights activist and member of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), Advocate Mian Mahmood-ur-Rehman, has voiced serious concerns over unchecked population growth, increasing traffic congestion, sidewalk encroachments, and violations of building laws in Bannu city.

In a media briefing, the High Court advocate warned that without immediate reforms, the urban problems facing Bannu could spiral into a full-blown crisis. "The city's population has reached nearly two million, yet there is no sustainable strategy in place for urban planning, traffic management, or provision of essential public services," he noted. Calling for urgent traffic reforms, he emphasized the enforcement of a one-way traffic system to reduce daily traffic jams and accidents.

He slammed commercial encroachments on sidewalks, terming them a gross violation of citizens' fundamental rights by forcing pedestrians onto busy roads. He also pointed to a critical lack of parking spaces in new commercial buildings, causing added pressure on already burdened roads. "Parking should be made mandatory in all future constructions, and strict action should be taken against current viola-

tions," he urged.

Advocate Mahmood-ur-Rehman reiterated the provincial government's existing policy of relocating intra-city transport terminals outside the city, lamenting that it has seen no implementation so far. He proposed that a central bus terminal be established on Kohat Road, with separate stands designated for other routes.

He also demanded the removal of traffic barriers on Jumma Khan Road and relocation of sandbags to widen the road and improve vehicle flow. Highlighting the social consequences of administrative apathy, he remarked, "Minor disputes turning deadly are a direct result of the failure of institutions to deliver timely justice."

As a long-term solution, he proposed a city-wide jirga system composed of military representatives, elders, and the public, to help resolve community issues and restore trust between citizens and institutions.

Meanwhile, senior JUI-F leader and former Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly, Zahid Akram Khan Durrani, has expressed profound sorrow and outrage over the Swat tragedy, where 18 precious lives were lost in a flash flood, terming it a "national catastrophe" that has exposed the gross incompetence and criminal negligence of the government.

Speaking to the media during a gathering at the residence of party leader Malik Abrar Khan, Durrani said that the victims waited for help for three long hours, but government departments remained in deep slumber. "There is no value for human life left in this province anymore. Corruption, nepotism, and hollow claims have become the hallmarks of the rulers," he stated.

He criticized the government for failing to improve rescue and emergency systems during its 12-year-long tenure. "Now, as dozens of families mourn their loved ones, the government is hiding behind statements instead of taking responsibility," he lamented. He further described the government's apathy towards sensitive, flood-prone regions like Swat as shameful. "For hours, victims cried for help—no helicopters, no rescue teams arrived. When everything had been swept away, then came the realization."

Zahid Akram Durrani demanded a high-level inquiry to identify and punish the real culprits behind the disaster. "In other countries, such incidents result in resignations from top officials, but here, scapegoats are made out of lower-tier officers like Assistant Commissioners and ADCs," he said, adding that this is not justice but an attempt to shield the actual offenders.

Police arrest 2 for harassing woman F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: The Lower Dir police on Saturday claimed to have arrested two individuals after a disturbing video went viral on social media showing a woman being harassed in public.

According to the First Information Report (FIR) registered at the Balambhat police station, the incident occurred on a link road to Madina Colony in the limits of Balambhat police station. The video footage shows a woman being followed and harassed by two men in broad daylight. The accused attempted to intimidate and harass the woman in a public place, which sparked outrage after the video surfaced on social media.

Upon receiving the video, District Police Officer (DPO) Abdul Salam Khalid took immediate notice and directed the concerned police officials to take swift action. Subsequently, the police, led by SHO Rahim Gul Khan, launched a search operation and arrested the two accused identified as Karamat Shah and Muhammad Shah, both residents of Samar Bagh, currently living in Qaziabad Balambhat. The accused were also presented to the media at Balambhat police station.

A case has been registered under sections 279, 354, 509, 511, and 34 of the Pakistan Penal Code. The suspects were presented before a magistrate and are now under investigation.

In a statement, the DPO emphasized that no one would be allowed to harass or violate the dignity of women in any part of the district. He reiterated the police's commitment to ensuring women's safety and warned that similar swift action would be taken against anyone involved in such acts in the future.

Meanwhile, a youth identified as Zuvaid Khan S/O Bacha Islam, a resident of Amirabad Chakdara was killed when his motorcycle met a fatal road accident at Chakdara here on Saturday. The deceased was later laid to rest at his ancestral graveyard.

BJE office bearers vote for KP cabinet F.P. Report

BUNER: Nine members of the District Judiciary Employees Association cabinet participated in the elections held in Daggar to form the provincial cabinet and voted in favor of the candidates of their choice on Saturday.

Haider Ali Khan MA LLB Grade 17 of the District Courts served as the Presiding Officer for the elections and completed the process with transparency. On this occasion, District Judiciary Employees Association General Secretary Abdul Qayum Khan and Presiding Officer Haider Ali Khan told the media that the elections process was completed fair free and transparent in a peaceful environment.

According to the procedure, the results will be signed and sent to the province in a sealed envelope with a covering letter, where the names of the successful candidates will be announced after the results from all the districts are collected.

Kundi slams KP govt over tourism negligence

F.P. Report

HARIPUR: Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Faisal Karim Kundi on Saturday said that Pakistan must take ownership of its challenges and find solutions through self-reliance. He emphasized that in response to recent Indian aggression, Pakistan not only delivered a robust military response but also secured significant victories on the diplomatic front.

Speaking as the chief guest at a ceremony organized by the Haripur Chamber of Commerce and Industry to honor the Pakistan Armed Forces, Governor Kundi stated that India had faced failures on all fronts. He credited the leadership of PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari for the effective representation of Pakistan's stance at the international level, calling it a landmark moment for the country's foreign diplomacy.

Governor Kundi said the recent episode of Indian hostility was a significant test for Pakistan, one that the armed forces answered with valor and decisiveness. He praised their

courage and termed the collective success as both a military and diplomatic victory.

He also noted with pride that for the first time in the country's history, a Pakistani Field Marshal was hosted by the President of the United States — an event he described as one of the biggest diplomatic accomplishments to date. He added that the entire Pakistani nation, as well as the broader Muslim world, stands proud of the country's brave armed forces.

During his address, the governor also revealed that he had proposed to the federal government the issuance of Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) cards to the families of martyrs from the armed forces, police, and Levies. The initiative, he said, would ensure that these families receive sustained financial assistance.

Praising the business community's contribution to the economy, Kundi recognized traders as essential stakeholders in national development. He assured the attendees that the government was actively engaging with relevant authorities to address the

business community's ongoing challenges.

Turning to tourism, Governor Kundi described Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as a province rich in tourism potential, particularly in religious tourism. However, he pointed out that tragic incidents such as the recent Swat accident have discouraged both domestic and foreign tourists. He urged the provincial government to ensure proper facilities in tourist areas and implement effective safety measures to restore confidence among visitors.

Criticizing the lack of infrastructure development in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the governor remarked that for the past 12 years, the province had seen nothing but political slogans. In light of the Swat tragedy, he called for the resignation of the Chief Minister, holding the provincial leadership accountable for the failure to protect tourists.

Governor Kundi concluded by reaffirming the need for practical action over rhetoric and emphasized the importance of national unity in addressing Pakistan's internal and external challenges.

Suspension of power affects efficiency of DHQ hospital

F.P. Report

LANDI KOTAL: Reducing of timing of electricity supply from twenty hours to four hours round the clock has suffered competency of Headquarter Hospital, Landi Kotal and the ailing segments of the tribal society are compelled to get treatment from the health centers in Peshawar, Jirga members said.

Convened and headed by Tehsil Chairman Haji Shah Khalid, a representative Jirga was held in the Chairman office that was attended by tehsil head of Jamat-e-Islami (JI) Murad Hussein Afridi, Awami National Party (ANP) Landi Kotal chapter General Secretary Jabbar Afridi, Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam, Fazal Rehman (JUI-F) tehsil Ameer Maulana Aqib, social activist Banares Khan, Akhtar Ali, Aftab Shinwari, Khayal Madar and number of coun-

cilors and political workers.

Speaking on the occasion Tehsil Chairman Haji Shah Khalid and others said that the DHQ Hospital was on the verge of bankruptcy as it had to pay two hundred million rupees arrears in form of electricity consuming bill. Due to suspension of electricity, Operation Theatre, X-rays, Ultrasound and other equipment were no longer functional and in emergency, the doctors examined patients in torch light, they regretted.

The jirga flayed TESCO for what they said was an inhuman act of suspension of power supply to the health center that multiplied miseries of the residents. They added that a special financial package for power consumer bill payment had been regularly reserved in the monthly budget for the health center but had not been paid for unknown reasons.

They expressed their regret over the misusing of the hospital resources and said the health officials besides outsiders resided in the bangles and quarters of the hospital harshly utilized electricity without paying a penny in form of electricity bill. A particular committee was also constituted to formulate future strategy to resolve issues in the hospital.

In a press release to the media persons, the participants demanded of the Secretary Health, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) Director General Health KP and other highup to take notice of the issue and adopt all necessary steps to resume uninterrupted power supply to the hospital. It is to be stated here that TESCO has reduced electricity supply timing to four in twenty hours to DHQ, Hospital Landi Kotal because of two hundred million rupees of arrears.

TEF, district govt sign MoU

Saqib Mushtaq

LODHARAN: Tareen Education Foundation (TEF) and the District Government Khanawal have signed an MoU through which TEF will invest Rs. 80 million to upgrade computer and science labs in five government high and higher secondary schools across District Khanawal.

This investment fulfills the commitment made by TEF's founder, Mr. Jahangir Khan Tareen, during the inauguration of the Computer and Science Lab at Khanawal Public School & College University (on 21st April, 2025).

The MoU was signed by Mr. Akbar Khan (CEO, TEF)



and Dr. Salma Suleman (Deputy Commissioner, Khanawal). Also present were Mr. Ghulam Mustafa (ADCG, Khanawal), Mr. Fayyaz Ahmed Sandhu (CEO Education, Khanawal), and Mr. Muhammad Yaqoob

(Program Manager, TEF). This initiative reflects TEF's steadfast commitment to enhancing educational infrastructure and equipping students with essential digital and scientific skills for the future.

Drowning of 18 tourists in Swat: A tragic failure of KP govt

SWAT (APP): On a bright summer morning, the stunning riverbanks of Swat turned into a site of devastation after its gushing water swept away 18 tourists one after another in a jiffy amid hopelessness. What began as a peaceful breakfast outing for a group of tourists quickly turned fatal as sudden flash floods swept away 18 lives including women and children while the authorities and locals watched helplessly.

In what is being called one of the deadliest tourist tragedies in Swat's recent memory, the victims, mostly from Punjab and Mardan, found themselves trapped in rising waters of the Swat River. Caught without warning, without rescue, and without a chance, they were consumed by the river one after another. Their cries for help echoed unanswered as precious minutes turned to hours.

Eyewitness accounts tell a

story not just of nature's fury, but of official neglect. "It was a disaster waiting to happen," said Ahmad Khan, who watched in horror from the riverbank. "There were no warning signs, no safety teams, and no one to tell them they were in danger." Swat, long hailed as the "Switzerland of Pakistan", has become a summer hotspot for domestic tourists. Yet, the infrastructure to handle this growing influx especially in the face of extreme weather remains critically inadequate.

This failure to anticipate, prepare for, or respond to flooding by the district administration, PDMA and Rescue 1122 has triggered a nationwide outcry. The Pakistan Meteorological Department had issued warnings of heavy rain and potential flooding across upper Swat. But those warnings seemingly evaporated into bureaucratic silence. No alerts reached the tourists.

No visible emergency protocol was triggered.

"The KP Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) didn't issue a single public warning for the tourists," claimed Ahmad. "Why were these people allowed near the riverbed at all, especially after the monsoon alert?" The answers remain buried beneath layers of mismanagement. According to residents and environmental experts, unregulated construction in and around the river often in clear violation of safety norms has narrowed the riverbed, exacerbating flood velocity.

Hotels, houses, and restaurants continue to mushroom dangerously close to the waterline with little or no oversight from authorities. Criticism of the provincial government, particularly the PTI-led administration in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, has been fierce. Opposition leaders

are calling this not just a tragedy, but "manslaughter by incompetence."

"There's a difference between a natural disaster and criminal negligence," said Hamza Khan, PML-N's President in Nowshera. "The KP government failed at every level—no alerts, no rescue readiness, no access roads, no equipment. And now 18 lives are gone." Rescue 1122 and district officials arrived late. With water levels rising rapidly and no proper access routes, locals tried to mount rescue efforts themselves but were overpowered by the ferocity of the river.

The bodies of majority victims were recovered slowly over a 24-hour period, a grim testament to the poor emergency response system. Following a national outcry, the provincial government scrambled to assign blame. Chief Minister's orders led to the suspension of multiple

officials, including the Assistant Commissioners of Babuzai and Khwazakhela, the ADC Relief, and the local head of Rescue 1122. An inquiry committee, led by the Chief Minister's Inspection Team, has been formed to investigate the incident and identify systemic failures.

Compensation of Rs 1 million per victim has been announced. But for the grieving families, no amount of money can replace what was lost. "This could've been prevented. My brother would still be alive if someone had warned them," said one bereaved relative near the riverbank, clutching a photograph.

This is not the first time tragedy has struck Swat. In 2022, flash floods devastated the region, killing dozens and displacing thousands. Yet, little has changed. Infrastructure upgrades have been minimal. Emergency

response remains sluggish and under-equipped. And the booming tourist economy has continued to outpace investment in safety.

Environmental experts warn that climate change will only intensify such events. Without urgent and systemic reforms including better early warning systems, enforcement against illegal construction, and properly trained emergency services Swat may see more such horrors. Swat's rivers, valleys, and mountains draw tourists by the thousands, but if the government fails to act decisively, these natural wonders will become death traps.

This tragedy has cast a long shadow over KP's vision of tourism-led development. Safety, not just scenery, must be at the core of that vision. Until then, the River Swat will remain a place not just of beauty, but of sorrow.



MADRID: In a small but powerful protest, a group of parents gathered at the gates of a primary school in Granada, Spain to remember Gaza's child victims.

Parents gather at school gates to remember Gaza's child victims

MADRID: Sometimes there have been as few as two or three people, sometimes as many as 15. But no matter the number, every morning for the past few weeks at the Jose Hurtado primary school in the Spanish city of Granada, a group of parents have dropped off their kids, then silently gathered nearby behind two simple but powerful pro-Gaza banners: "No more dead children" and "Against Genocide."

"It started when a fictional video, set in 2040, came through one of our parents' WhatsApp groups, about how Gaza was destroyed. And in it children ask their mums and dads – what did you do during the genocide?" Mar Domech, who helped the protest get started, told Al Jazeera. "I began saying – instead of re-sending the video, let's actually do something, a bit like during the pandemic when people used to applaud hospital staff at eight every night. And the 15 minutes before the kids went into class and the 15 minutes just after suited the majority of us parents the best."

The protest format is simple. A single line of demonstrators hold up two long banners next to a tall school wall and make sure they keep out of the way of passers-by. There is no shouting or chanting. But that these are clearly school parents caring about children dying – many of them of the ages of their own children – gives their show of support extra resonance. The school's location on a

busy arterial street near central Granada means their message reaches a wide audience.

"We don't want to upset anybody, but we just can't look away when so many children are dying and the laws need to be upheld," said Domech. "What's happening there is genocide and we have to oppose this, whoever the victims are." After almost two years of Israeli attacks, Gaza is home to the highest number of child amputees per capita. More than 17,000 children have been killed. And according to Save the Children, more than 930,000 children in Gaza – nearly every single child – are now at risk of famine.

The failure of more parents to join their show of solidarity is treated with a mixture of disappointment, resilience and not a little wry humour by the dozen or so "regulars", like when they recall when two plainclothes police officers arrived to check their IDs. It just so happened that day only two pro-Palestine parents were present, but, as Domech recalled with a laugh, thanks to the police turning up, it seemed like the number of protesters had abruptly doubled.

In any case, the limited response has done nothing to stop their determination to continue. One woman passes by most days and stops to take a photo to send to a friend in Palestine. Some of the cars or tourists on buses going up to the nearby medieval Alhambra monument honk

and wave in support.

The morale boosts are important, as well as the parents' conviction that even this relatively tiny but tenacious protest matters. "I couldn't stand the idea of simply being an onlooker any more, what's going on is so atrocious," said Alberto, another parent. "I'm just pleased that we've kept going, too. I'm studying for civil service exams so time-wise I can be flexible, but it's not straightforward to do this every day when you're working or have other commitments. However, I think it's fundamental we do it."

Spain is among a small group of European nations that has consistently shown support for Palestine and criticised Israeli actions in Gaza and the occupied West Bank. Together with Ireland and Norway, in May 2024, Spain recognised the Palestinian state and last year it expressed support for the genocide case against Israel submitted by South Africa in the International Court of Justice.

After the European Union's latest report on Gaza was published this week, Spain was the one country that called directly for suspension of the EU-Israel Association Agreement, while its foreign minister demanded an arms embargo. As for the Granada school gates protest, "We'll go on with it once term restarts in September", said Domech, "although hopefully that wouldn't be necessary". — Aljazeera

Mistakenly deported man Kilmar Abrego Garcia to remain in jail for now

MARYLAND: A Salvadoran national whose mistaken deportation spurred national outcry in the United States will remain in jail for now, as lawyers discuss how to prevent him from being removed from the country a second time.

Kilmar Abrego Garcia was set to be released from pre-trial custody without having to post bail. He is being held in detention in Nashville, Tennessee, on criminal charges of human smuggling. The administration of President Donald Trump had sought to stop his release, deeming him to be a flight risk. But US District Judge Waverly Crenshaw upheld a magistrate judge's earlier decision finding that Abrego Garcia was eligible to walk free.

However, in an unexpected twist, lawyers on both sides argued that, if Abrego Garcia were released, he risks being taken into the custody of Immigration and Customs

Enforcement (ICE) for a second deportation. That would deprive Abrego Garcia of the chance to defend himself against the charges, which he has denied. And lawyers for the government argued that it would also scuttle their criminal case against him.

Judge Crenshaw noted in a written decision that, since it is the government's choice whether or not to deport Abrego Garcia, the situation appeared to be a case of the executive branch doing "injury on itself". "If deported, the Government argues, the Department of Justice will be deprived of the opportunity to pursue its criminal charges against Abrego," Crenshaw wrote. But, he added, "it is the Executive Branch's decision that places the Government in this predicament."

Ultimately, it was decided that Abrego Garcia would remain in custody while lawyers sparred over whether they could prevent

Abrego Garcia's deportation if he were released to await trial. Abrego Garcia appeared at the hearing wearing an orange jail-issued T-shirt and a headset to listen to the proceedings through a Spanish interpreter.

It was the latest chapter in an ongoing fight between Abrego Garcia and the Trump administration over whether he would be allowed to stay in the US. According to his lawyers, Abrego Garcia fled El Salvador as a teenager to avoid gang violence, arriving in the US around 2011. He has lived for more than a decade in Maryland, where he and his American wife are raising three children. In 2019, a judge granted him a protection order that barred his removal from the US.

But on March 15, Abrego Garcia was swept up in the immigration raids being conducted as part of President Trump's mass deportation campaign. He

and more than 200 other Venezuelans and Salvadorans were accused of being gang members, and they were deported to El Salvador. Many of the men were sent to the Centro de Confinamiento del Terrorismo, or CECOT, a maximum-security prison for those accused of terrorism. But advocates for the deported immigrants have argued that many of their clients had no criminal records and were in the process of seeking legal immigration status in the US.

Advocates have also pointed out that ICE has provided scant evidence against some of the deported individuals, in some cases appearing to arrest people based solely on their tattoos. The Trump administration, however, has designated Latin American gangs like MS-13 and Tren de Aragua as "foreign terrorist organisations" and sought to crack down on their presence in the US. — Aljazeera

Trump admn sues Maryland court system over deportation rulings

WASHINGTON: The administration of United States President Donald Trump has filed an extraordinary lawsuit against the Maryland district court system and its federal judges, accusing them of having "used and abused" their powers to stymie deportations.

The complaint was lodged. In its 22 pages, the administration accuses Maryland's federal courts of "unlawful, anti-democratic" behaviour for placing limits on Trump's deportation policies. Fifteen district judges are named among the defendants, as is a clerk of court, one of the administrative officials in the court system.

The complaint advances an argument that Trump and his allies have long made publicly: that the

president has a mandate from voters to carry out his campaign of mass deportation — and that the courts are standing in the way. "Injunctions against the Executive Branch are particularly extraordinary because they interfere with that democratically accountable branch's exercise of its constitutional powers," the lawsuit reads.

It seeks an immediate injunction against a recent ruling from Chief Judge George Russell III, who was appointed by former President Barack Obama. Russell had issued a standing order that would automatically take effect each time an immigrant files a petition for habeas corpus — in other words, a petition contesting their detention. The chief judge's order prevents the Trump administration from deport-

ing the immigrant in question for a period of two business days after the petition is filed. That time frame, Russell added, can be extended at the discretion of the court.

The idea is to protect an immigrant's right to due process — their right to a fair hearing in the legal system — so that they have the time to appeal their deportation if necessary. But the Trump administration said that Russell's order, and other orders from federal judges in Maryland, do little more than subvert the president's power to exercise his authority over immigration policy. "Every unlawful order entered by the district courts robs the Executive Branch of its most scarce resource: time to put its policies into effect," the lawsuit argued.

Trump's immigration

policies have faced hundreds of legal challenges since the president took office for his second term in January. Lawsuit admits as much, citing that fact as evidence of judicial bias against Trump's immigration agenda. "In the first 100 days of President Trump's current term, district courts have entered more nationwide injunctions than in the 100 years from 1900 to 2000, requiring the Supreme Court to intervene again and again in recent weeks," the lawsuit said. The Supreme Court has upheld the right to due process, writing in recent cases like JGG v Trump that immigrants must be able to seek judicial review for their cases. But critics have argued that other recent decisions have undermined that commitment. — Aljazeera

Gunmen kill 11 at religious festival in Mexico

MEXICO CITY: A gun attack during a religious celebration in central Mexico has left 11 people dead and at least 20 others injured in violence-plagued Guanajuato state, local officials have confirmed.

The shooting erupted in the city of Irapuato, authorities said, during festivities marking the Nativity of John the Baptist. Witnesses described terrible scenes of panic and chaos as partygoers fled the gunfire. "It was chaos. People put the wounded into their cars and rushed to hospital to try to save them," one witness told the news agency AFP, speaking anonymously due to safety concerns.

Footage shared online shows the moment gunfire rang out as people danced and celebrated. Screams can be heard as the crowd scattered in panic. Bloodstains and bullet holes were still visible at the scene. Among the dead were a 17-year-old, eight men, and two women, according to the Guanajuato state prosecutor's office.

In a statement, Irapuato's local government called the attack a "cowardly act" and said security forces are hunting those responsible. Psychological support is being offered to affected families. President Claudia Sheinbaum condemned the attack as "deplorable" and said an investigation had been launched. At her daily news conference, Sheinbaum referred to the shooting as a "confrontation", without elaborating on details.

Guanajuato Governor Libia Dennis also denounced the attack, offering condolences to the victims' families and pledging justice. While Guanajuato is known for its industrial growth and colonial-era tourism hubs, it has notoriously become renowned as Mexico's most violent state in recent years. Authorities blame much of the bloodshed on an ongoing turf war between the Santa Rosa de Lima gang and the powerful Jalisco New Generation cartel.

Government figures show Guanajuato recorded more than 3,000 homicides last year — the highest in the country. Since Mexico launched its so-called war on drugs in 2006, more than 480,000 people have been killed in criminal violence, with more than 120,000 listed as missing. — Aljazeera

Death toll landslide in Colombia rises to 11

COLOMBIA: At least 11 people have been killed and 15 remain missing after a landslide in the city of Bello in Colombia's northwest, according to authorities.

Evacuation orders and rescue efforts continue a day after the landslide, with government officials warning that heavy rains pose an ongoing threat to the area around Medellin, Colombia's second-largest city. "We continue to support emergency and rescue work in Bello, where 11 people have sadly been reported killed, at least 15 are missing, and more than 1,500 people are in shelters," Medellin Mayor Federico Gutierrez said in a social media post.

Floodwaters overwhelmed local waterways during the early morning hours while residents were asleep. A wave of mud surged through Bello, a crowded community in the hills above Medellin, burying about a dozen homes, sweeping away cars and leaving behind piles of debris. Rescue workers have used dogs, drones and other means to search for the missing. Shelters have been set up in local schools and community centres.

Heavy rains pose especially high risks for makeshift homes built into the hillsides, which can become unstable during periods of sustained rainfall. It is often the country's poorer residents who live in these danger zones, many of them having fled conflict in Colombia's rural areas for the relative safety of a city. The Medellin town hall also issued evacuation orders for Villatina, also on the outskirts of Medellin, stating that 23 buildings would be demolished due to the risk of possible collapse. — Aljazeera

US sanctions Mexican banks

WASHINGTON: The United States has imposed sanctions on three Mexican banks, alleging they had been used to launder money for drug cartels. The US Department of the Treasury tied the banks — CIBanco, Interam Banco and Vector Casa de Bolsa — to the cross-border trafficking of the deadly synthetic drug fentanyl. It accused them of playing "a longstanding and vital role in laundering millions of dollars on behalf of Mexico-based cartels and facilitating payments for the procurement of precursor chemicals needed to produce fentanyl".

The sanctions are part of a wider pressure campaign by the administration of US President Donald Trump against Latin American gangs, criminal networks and drug traffickers. That campaign has included designating several groups as "foreign terrorist organisations" and using tariffs to pressure Mexico's government to increase enforce-

ment of irregular traffic across the border.

In a statement, the Treasury Department said the banks were the first to be targeted under new pieces of legislation — the Fentanyl Sanctions Act and the FEND Off Fentanyl Act — passed to expand its ability to target money laundering related to opioid trafficking. The sanctions would block transfers between the targeted Mexican banks and US banks, although it was not immediately clear how far-reaching the limits would be.

In a statement, Secretary of the Treasury Scott Bessent accused the banks of "enabling the poisoning of countless Americans by moving money on behalf of cartels, making them vital cogs in the fentanyl supply chain". But Mexico's Secretariat of Finance and Public Credit responded to the sanctions by saying it had yet to receive conclusive evidence justifying them.

"We want to be clear: If

we have conclusive information proving illicit activities by these three financial institutions, we will act to the fullest extent of the law," the Finance Ministry said. "However, to date, we have no information in this regard." CIBanco did not immediately respond to the allegations. The US Treasury Department accused it of being connected to money laundering by the Beltran-Leyva Cartel, the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG) and the Gulf Cartel. Interam, which is also accused of having connections to the CJNG cartel, also did not respond.

Meanwhile, the brokerage firm Vector, which was linked to money laundering by the Sinaloa Cartel and Gulf Cartel, said the US claims tying its operations to drug traffickers were false. "Vector categorically rejects any accusation that compromises its institutional integrity," the company said in a statement, adding that it would cooperate to clarify the situation. — Aljazeera

US to stop funding global vaccine alliance Gavi

WASHINGTON: Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F Kennedy Jr has announced that the United States will no longer contribute to Gavi, a global health programme that has vaccinated more than one billion of the world's poorest children.

In a video that aired at a Gavi fundraising event in Brussels, Kennedy said the group had made questionable recommendations around COVID-19 vaccines. He also raised concerns about the diphtheria-tetanus-whole cell pertussis vaccine, known by the acronym DTPw, though he provided no evidence to support those fears. "I call on Gavi today to re-earn the public trust and to justify the \$8bn that America has provided in funding since 2001," Kennedy said in the video.

Kennedy added that Gavi should consider all available science before investing in vaccines. "Until that happens, the United States won't contribute more," he said. The details of the video were first reported by the publication Politico and later by the news outlet Reuters. Gavi said in a detailed statement that safety was one of its top priorities and that it acts in line with World Health Organization recommendations.

The statement also indicated that Gavi has full confidence in the DTPw vaccine, which it credits with having helped to cut child

mortality in half in the countries it supports since 2000. "The DTPw vaccine has been administered to millions of children around the world for decades, and is estimated to have saved more than 40 million lives over the past 50 years," the statement notes.

The administration of US President Donald Trump has previously indicated that it planned to cut US funding for Gavi, representing around \$300m annually, as part of a wider pullback from international aid. Advocacy groups called on the US to reverse its decision. "Kennedy claims that Gavi ignored science are entirely false," nonprofit consumer advocacy organisation Public Citizen wrote in a statement.

"Gavi's recommendations are grounded in global evidence and reviewed by independent experts. His suggestion otherwise fuels the same disinformation that has already led to deadly measles outbreaks and the resurgence of vaccine-preventable diseases, including polio." A longtime vaccine sceptic, Kennedy has upended the US medical establishment since taking office in February. He has raised questions about possible ties between autism and vaccines, though numerous studies have shown there is no link.

Earlier this month, Kennedy fired all 17 members of the expert panel on vaccines at the Centers for Disease Control and

Prevention (CDC), known as the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP). Created 60 years ago, the committee serves as an independent government body to review data and make recommendations about who should get vaccines. Those recommendations, in turn, can affect which vaccines health insurance plans may cover.

Of Kennedy's initial eight replacement members, about half have advocated against vaccines. The newly revamped committee met for the first time, under intense scrutiny from medical experts worried about Americans' access to life-saving shots. But already, conflicts are starting to simmer in and around the panel.

Ahead of the two-day gathering, government scientists prepared meeting materials calling vaccination "the best protection" during pregnancy — and said most children hospitalised for COVID-19 over the past year were unvaccinated. That advice, however, conflicts with Kennedy's. The health secretary already announced COVID-19 vaccines will no longer be recommended for healthy children or pregnant women, and his new advisers are not scheduled to vote this week on whether they agree. COVID-19 remains a public health threat, resulting in 32,000 to 51,000 US deaths and more than 250,000 hospitalizations since last fall, according to the CDC. — Aljazeera

US lawmaker denies charges

NEW JERSEY: United States Representative LaMonica McIver has pleaded not guilty in a criminal case stemming from a visit to an immigration facility, saying the charges are an effort by the administration of President Donald Trump to "intimidate" her.

McIver entered her plea at a hearing. She faces charges of assaulting, resisting, impeding and interfering with federal officials during a May 9 congressional oversight visit to an immigrant detention centre in New Jersey. "They will not intimidate me. They will not stop me from doing my job," she said outside the courthouse in Newark.

The Trump administration has previously threatened to arrest and charge Democratic lawmakers over immigration-related issues. But McIver and her supporters have underscored that Congress members have a right to inspect immigration facilities.

Democrats have also characterised such charges as a baseless effort to discourage criticism and oversight of the administration's aggressive approach to immigration enforcement. Two of the three counts faced by McIver carry maximum sentences of eight years in prison, while the third is a misdemeanour charge that carries a maximum sentence of one year in prison. A trial is set for

November 10. McIver was charged by interim US Attorney Alina Habba, who was appointed to the Trump administration after previously representing the president as a personal lawyer in his court cases during the period between his two terms.

A video shared by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) shows McIver in a jostling crowd of protesters and officers outside the Delaney Hall detention facility in New Jersey. Her elbow appear to push into an officer, though it is unclear whether this was intentional. The criminal complaint against her alleges that she "slammed" an agent and tried to grab him.

A video shared by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) shows McIver in a jostling crowd of protesters and officers outside the Delaney Hall detention facility in New Jersey. Her elbow appear to push into an officer, though it is unclear whether this was intentional. The criminal complaint against her alleges that she "slammed" an agent and tried to grab him.

Earlier this month, Trump mused publicly about arrest-

ing California Governor Gavin Newsom after protests erupted in Los Angeles over immigration raids. "I would do it if I were Tom," Trump said, referencing his border czar Tom Homan, who had raised the possibility of such arrests. "I think it's great." Then, on June 12, during a protest-related news conference, federal agents also handcuffed and temporarily detained Senator Alex Padilla of California after he was forced to the ground.

Padilla had interrupted the conference to ask the speaker, DHS Secretary Kristi Noem, a question. DHS stated afterwards that Padilla had not identified himself, even though a video of the incident shows him clearly doing so. It also said the senator had "lunged" towards Noem, an allegation he disputes. In a statement, Padilla described his actions as an exercise of "his duty to perform Congressional oversight of the federal government's operations". While federal law states that members of Congress have the authority to inspect immigrant detention centres and cannot be blocked from entering, DHS issued guidelines earlier this month stating that the agency has sole discretion over who enters immigration enforcement field offices. It also said it would start requiring 72 hours of advanced notice before lawmakers visit. — Aljazeera

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Trump, death of multilateralism

LAST week's meeting of Group of Seven leaders in Canada had high hopes from six of the exclusive multilateral club. But they failed to realize that the US - not just US President Donald Trump - no longer sees value in large and exclusive multilateral groupings like the G7, the Group of 20, East Asian Summit, the UN and its related organizations such as the World Health Organization, the World Trade Organization, and the Human Rights Council. Instead, Washington views the US' comparative advantages being best achieved through an American leader who understands that the currency of international relations in the 21st century is not multilateralism but comprehensive national power. This does not exclude "minilateral" groupings such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue between the US, Australia, India, and Japan; or the AUKUS security partnership between Australia, Britain, and the US or the "Squad" (Australia, the Philippines, the U.S., and Japan), all of which are smaller groups of like-minded countries that can make decisions quickly, divert resources efficiently, and not be hobbled by the ungainliness of larger multilateral organizations.

These macro-trends in international affairs have transformative consequences for Japan and the rest of America's allies. Whether you are Tokyo or Ottawa, Canberra or Seoul, you must calculate your relationship with the US based on the equation that you can no longer rely on the US prioritizing the collective good as its calculus for its national interests; i.e., that the peace, security and prosperity of US allies brings security to the US. In the new post-liberal hegemonic order, the US cannot be guaranteed to act in the best interest of its allies and partners if it does not tangentially align with Washington's natural interests. To navigate this new reality, Tokyo and other US allies must first demonstrate that they are doing everything in their power to help themselves and that by helping themselves they are also helping the US.

In this new context, critics of Trump will argue that his transactional diplomacy and MAGA (Make America Great Again) foreign policy is a form of gangsterism or a "protection racket" forcing allies to pay for their security. This criticism, while not without merit, fails to acknowledge that Obama, Trump 1.0 and Biden all made similar requests of allies to enhance their defense spending and shoulder a greater share of the security burden. In fact, every post-Cold War US president has made the same demand.

The dirty secret among many US allies is that they know they have been delinquent in terms of defense spending. Even Japan - despite former Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's commitment to raise defense spending to 2% of gross domestic product by 2027 in the 2022 National Security Strategy - remains ambiguous about its security commitments toward Taiwan and to friends in the South China Sea such as the Philippines and Vietnam as they face gray-zone operations from China.

Even more disconcerting, upon learning of US efforts to eliminate Iran's nuclear-weapon producing capabilities, instead of supporting the US outright, Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba underscored the importance of de-escalating the situation while stressing that Iran's nuclear development must be "blocked." His comments embodied the Japanese axiom of *kusai mono ni futa wo suru*, hoping the problem will go away by sweeping it under the rug instead of supporting the US' efforts to rid the world of another nuclear-armed state.

The recent G7 meeting in Canada demonstrated to members that President Trump's attendance was not about the opportunity to have dialogue with G7 members together, rather it was about the opportunity to meet key counterparts bilaterally including Japan, India, and Australia. Washington is seeking serious partners to shape an international order integrum, that place between the dead post-World War II order created by the US and a new multipolar international order in which the US no longer has absolute dominance.

According to a recent Goldman Sachs report, the new international order that is emerging will have China and India as the largest economies by 2075, followed by the US, Indonesia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Egypt and Brazil. Japan will fall from the fourth to the 12th largest economy. In this new era, the US and its allies can ill afford to have uncommitted partners to comprehensively deal with the "rise of the rest" - a term coined by Fareed Zakaria in his book "The Post-American World and the Rise of the Rest." As Tsinghua University's Yan Xue Tong has written, China, along with other authoritarian states, "will work hard to shape an ideological environment conducive to its rise and counter Western values."

Multilateral groups like the G7 continue to demonstrate that they are not able to act decisively and with concentrated resources to deal with global challenges including the Israel-Iran crisis, armed conflicts between India and Pakistan, the Ukraine-Russia war, or even pandemics like COVID-19. Given their poor track record, how would they deal with a Taiwan contingency, a further escalation of gray-zone tactics in the South China Sea or in the Himalayan Plateau?

As the disorder of the postwar international order manifests, Japan and other US allies need to understand that the US sees the currency of international relations in the 21st century not as multilateralism but as comprehensive national power. This means working with the US in committed minilateral relationships. This includes demonstrating sustained commitment to their own defense and US security priorities through concrete actions and financial commitments, attending NATO summits, and investing heavily in minilateral partnerships.

Clearly, Trump's most recent "big win" on this front was the NATO leaders' joint statement on Wednesday committing to raising defense spending to 5% of GDP. Similarly, at every opportunity, Japan and other US allies need to be at the table - not on the menu - as Washington attempts to deal with the new geopolitical realities that the "rise of the rest" and a multipolar world will bring. Fortunately, strategic thinkers in Japan and former leaders such as the late Prime Minister Abe Shinzo already understood this reality by investing in the Free and Open Indo-Pacific framework in an effort to create a multipolar Indo-Pacific region that pulls the center of the region's economic influence away from China towards a series of poles that maximize strategic autonomy, attenuate the power of Beijing, and anchor the US into the region with benefits to the US.

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As the new Syrian regime gains legitimacy, it is pushing Russia out

Nikita Smagin

THE new Syrian authorities are rapidly moving toward international recognition beyond their regional neighbors. Keen to limit the influence in Syria of the previous regime's allies Iran and Russia, even the United States and the European Union have lifted most of the sanctions earlier imposed on Damascus.

The normalization of relations with the West could cancel out the remaining arguments in favor of cooperation with Moscow for the new Syrian leader Ahmad al-Sharaa and his entourage. The growing number of incidents at its military bases indicates that Russia is already being gradually squeezed out of Syria. It was clear from the very beginning that the Islamist al-Sharaa, who overthrew Bashar al-Assad, would not be an international pariah. Turkey played a huge role in forming the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham movement that took power in January.

After its victory, Ankara predictably started actively establishing cooperation with the new leaders in Damascus. By the summer of 2025, yesterday's Islamic militants counted dozens of countries as their international partners, from Middle Eastern monarchies to the United States and the European Union. Al-Sharaa's chief supporters are the Persian Gulf monarchies. Riyadh and Doha have already paid off Damascus's \$15 million debt to the World Bank, paving the way for the possibility of new loans. They also said they are ready to pay the salaries of Syrian civil servants, which could result in Syria becoming partly dependent on the Gulf monarchies.

By the beginning of spring, the EU had suspended some sanctions. In March, Germany reopened its embassy in Syria after a thirteen-year absence. The real breakthrough for the new Syrian government, however, was US President Donald Trump's tour of the Middle East, during which he met with al-Sharaa in Saudi Arabia.

Trump not only shook hands with a man who until recently had a \$10 million US bounty on his head, but also announced his intention to lift sanc-

tions against Damascus. The EU soon followed his example, and most Western sanctions against Syria were removed in May.

Despite having propped up the Assad regime for many years, Moscow was among the first to establish contact with the Syrian militants once that regime collapsed. This approach is driven by pragmatic interests. First and foremost, the Kremlin has a vested interest in keeping its Khmeimim air base and the naval hub in Tartus, since they play a key role in Russian logistics throughout the Middle East and Africa. Russia's presence in Syria is also important within a broader context for potential bargaining with the United States or as leverage in relations with Turkey and Israel, not to mention Russia's overall authority in the Middle East.

At first, the new Syrian authorities were also reluctant to sever relations with Moscow, even though it had given refuge to al-Assad after he fled the country. They gave initial security guarantees for Russia's military bases, and al-Sharaa himself spoke about the importance of the partnership with Russia. Having seized power by force, Syria's new rulers were wary of throwing away any international contacts - especially with Russia, which, if it so desired, could try to sabotage the establishment of the new regime in Damascus. Even at an early stage, however, the Syrian authorities made it clear that they still had grievances against Moscow. They called on Russia to "heed the mistakes of the past" and hinted at the need for compensation.

The first test of the renewed Russian-Syrian relations came in March, when Damascus suppressed the Alawite uprisings in Latakia. Although Moscow did allow some locals into its bases, it did not openly interfere in the developments, and its reaction was generally acceptable to al-Sharaa. However, now that the Syrian authorities no longer lack international recognition, Moscow's potential value for Damascus has decreased.

Today, Syria's main sponsors are the Gulf countries and Turkey, while Russia stopped sending food supplies immediately after al-Assad's fall.

The lifting of Western sanctions makes cooperation with Moscow even more problematic for Damascus, since Russia itself remains heavily sanctioned. Syria effectively needs to choose whether to cooperate with Moscow or the West. It is quite clear that Russia is currently unable to compete with Western countries as a source of aid for reconstruction and investment. Last, but certainly not least, there is little love lost between members of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham themselves, who form the backbone of the new government, and Moscow. Russian aircraft bombed the militants for years. It was Russia's intervention in 2015 that extended al-Assad's rule for another decade. Accordingly, the majority of the Syrian leadership would be only too happy to see Russia wind up its presence in the country. It is merely a question of how quickly it can be forced out and what the cost will be.

The Syrian authorities are already gradually curtailing their interaction with Russia. At the start of 2025, Damascus canceled a management contract for the port of Tartus that had been signed with Moscow back in 2019. In May, Syria found a replacement: Dubai Ports World, which agreed to invest \$800 million in the facility. Another recent example is Syria's decision to stop printing its national currency in Russia. As soon as it was announced that sanctions would be lifted, Damascus promptly made arrangements to print its money in Germany and the UAE.

There is a similar story with the Syrian infrastructure projects in which Russian businesses were involved. Back in the winter, the new authorities held an opening ceremony for a water treatment plant in Latakia that had been built by the Russian company Vodstroj under the previous government. That government had not yet paid for it, and given the current situation, the new one clearly does not intend

to do so. There are many more such examples, but the Russian side, for image reasons, prefers not to make them public. Moscow can forget about its investments in local infrastructure and various projects involving Russian companies. Not only will they not be seeing any returns, but al-Sharaa will most likely ask the Kremlin for compensation again.

A similar fate awaits trade between Moscow and Damascus. In March, Russia resumed delivering oil to Syria, followed by grain in April. The Syrian authorities still need those supplies, which is why they agreed to their resumption. However, that is unlikely to last long: Syria is due to be reconnected to the SWIFT international payment system, to which Russia does not have access. It is unlikely that Damascus will deem that gray schemes to import Russian goods are worth risking Syria's reintegration into the global financial system. The biggest tensions, however, are over the fate of the Russian bases. At the same time as news broke about the lifting of Western sanctions, there were reports that the Syrian authorities had tightened security checks of military personnel entering and leaving Russian facilities. At the end of May, the Khmeimim base was attacked, resulting in at least two fatalities on the Russian side. The Syrian authorities claim it was a "personal initiative" by several militants.

It is possible that the Syrian authorities will adopt the tactics of pro-Iranian forces that have carried out drone and missile strikes against US facilities in Syria and Iraq to try to get the United States to leave the region. Drones have been shot down over Russian military bases in Syria on multiple occasions this year. The fatal attack on Khmeimim in May might not be the last. Al-Sharaa has shown himself to be a pragmatic leader, so there is no reason to expect Damascus to exhibit excessive haste in ending its cooperation with Russia. But it will be increasingly difficult for Moscow to maintain its presence in Syria.

The Moscow Times

Germany needs to attract migrant workers

Chris Reiter & Will Wilkes

FRIEDRICH Merz's government has sent a clear message to anyone thinking about coming to live in Germany: don't. Yet its message to those who want to come to Germany to work is: we need you. This might sound like a contradiction, but it is a revival of the thinking that drove the "guest worker" programme of the post-war boom years. Between 1955 and 1973, West Germany sought to rebuild its economy by attracting labour, mainly from Turkey but also from Italy, Portugal and Yugoslavia. Yet it did so without giving much consideration to the human needs of the people coming.

Repeating that experiment, and the social tensions it created, at this moment would be even worse. The Wirtschaftswunder (economic miracle) fuelled record growth and labour shortages. Now, Germany's economy is in recession, but it desperately needs people to fulfil basic public services. Above all, it needs them to help finance its mounting pensions bill. Given that Germany has also become ground zero for Europe's heightened sensitivity around immigration after the backlash that followed Angela Merkel's open-door policy towards Syrian refugees a decade ago, it's worth paying attention to how Berlin navigates the issue. So far, Merz is providing a masterclass in what not to do. On the one hand, the conservative chancellor is fuelling rightwing narratives that suggest migration is a threat to the country. On the other, he speaks as the voice of German business and pleads for more foreign workers.

"We need skilled immigrants as drivers of progress," Merz said this month, at a ceremony to honour the contributions of Özlem Türeci and U'ur 'ahin - the Turkish immigrants behind Covid vaccine pioneer BioNTech. He added that anti-immigration "ideologies" were a threat not just to Germany's prosperity "but even worse, their narrow-mindedness threatens the future of our liberal order". But his government has sent exactly the kind of signal he claims to decry. Germany has continued with a new policy of rejecting asylum seekers at its borders, despite a court order calling it unlawful and a violation of EU law. The border rejections standoff comes despite a dramatic decline in refugees - up to April 2025, the figures were down by nearly half from the previous year. Another leg of Merz's anti-migration strategy is to put an end to "turbo naturalisation", which allows newcomers the opportunity to apply for a German passport after as little as three years in select cases. Crossing the border as an irregular migrant can be an act of desperation, and at times opportunism. Getting a German passport requires legal residency at the very least, but also involves various hurdles and a significant amount of paperwork.

The fast-track procedure is even more discretionary and reserved for people that exhibit "exceptional integration efforts", such as speaking German at an advanced level, consistently paying taxes and taking part in the community, for example by volunteering at local charities or sports clubs. Eliminating that route, which only opened in June 2024, will have very little impact. Last year - when a rush to take advantage of

the new process might have been expected - only about 7% of people receiving German citizenship had an accelerated application, according to federal statistics agency Destatis. But Merz's moves reinforce the narrative that Germany is being overwhelmed by newcomers. The approach bolsters the far-right AfD - a close second in the polls - which has called for the deportation of thousands of people, including some with migrant backgrounds who hold German citizenship.

Controlling entry is legitimate, but such grandstanding policies fuel xenophobic sentiment and don't allay the worries of anxious citizens. Also, the political dividends are limited. While the fevered discussion around migration has kept it as the top issue for Germans, only 38% of people ranked it as one of their three main concerns, which is four percentage points lower than in April, according to an Ipsos survey. Economic concerns such as inflation and poverty/inequality are the other top concerns. The harder-to-face reality is that Germany could use all the help it can get. With older Germans heading into retirement by the millions over the coming decade, the country must welcome a net 400,000 newcomers each year to keep things balanced and shoulder the rising cost of pensions. But this isn't the postwar era, where Germany can sign agreements with poorer countries and expect thousands to arrive. There's global competition for qualified workers, and Germany is at a disadvantage because of its language and its reputation for being unwelcoming.

That's a legacy from the mismanaged Gastarbeiter (guest worker) programme, when Germany had neither a plan for how to integrate the people it lured for work, nor the desire to do so. It also reflects a national identity left narrow and underdeveloped due to its Nazi past. The former footballer Mesut Özil, born in 1988 to a Turkish guest-worker family in Germany's Ruhr Valley, never felt fully accepted. Though he played a starring role in Germany's 2014 World Cup win, he said: "When we win, I'm German; when we lose, I'm a foreigner."

His story shows how acceptance is out of reach for many. And it's not isolated. According to a recent study by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, between 2015 and 2022, 12 million people migrated to Germany. The study also said that, in the same period, more than 7 million migrants left again. The main reasons were difficulties feeling part of German society. The next blow could be looming. According to a study by Germany's Institute for Employment Research, a quarter of migrants in the country - around 2.6 million people - are considering packing up and leaving.

Germany's self-imposed isolation will lead to a slow erosion of the labour force unless it is urgently addressed. Revising the narrative around migration to recast it as part of the solution would be a good starting point. But the political class hardly looks ready. As Markus Söder, the conservative premier of Bavaria, recently told the rightwing media outlet NtUS: "Of course we need immigration-unfortunately."

The Guardian

Nato has just surrendered Ukraine to Putin

Samuel Ramani

THIS week's Nato summit in the Hague was marred by a tragic irony. Donald Trump achieved a major diplomatic victory as his calls for increased European defence spending converted into reality. The final summit declaration text announced Nato's commitment to spending 5 per cent of its budget on defence and articulated its ironclad support for the Article 5 collective defence clause.

While the US president's big win should have enhanced Europe's sense of security against the Russian threat, the Nato summit left the alliance's eastern flank with a feeling of grave unease. Trump's inflammatory comments on the ambiguity of Article 5 left the Baltic States questioning whether Nato would confront Russia's intensifying array of hybrid threats.

The sense of betrayal in Ukraine was even more palpable. The Nato final summit

declaration's refusal to condemn Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and Volodymyr Zelensky's marginal presence encapsulated the alliance's growing Ukraine fatigue. While Mark Rutte, the Nato secretary-general, repeated the age-old trope about Ukraine's irreversible path towards alliance membership, his words felt hollower than ever before.

The Nato summit's dismissal of Ukraine's concerns is emblematic of an alarming broader trend. After more than three years of attritional war with Russia, Ukraine finds itself lacking the manpower and weaponry to triumph. During their inflammatory Oval Office meeting with Zelensky, Trump warned that Ukraine was "running low on soldiers" and JD Vance, his vice-president, railed against forced conscription on the Ukrainian streets.

The Ukrainian president responded to these taunts by reversing his long-standing

opposition to mobilising Ukrainians aged 18-24. The up-tick in voluntary new recruits has not solved the problem. Russia's incremental military triumphs around Pokrovsk were enabled by a shortage of Ukrainian defenders and morale in the Ukrainian army's ranks is dipping due to frictions between the rank-and-file and senior command over tactics. Combat injuries are afflicting Ukraine's most experienced servicemen and leaving their rookie replacements vulnerable to Russian human wave attacks.

As Trump continues to signal his aversion to opened military assistance to Ukraine, war materiel supplies are poised to dry up further. As Russia's drone and missile barrages against Kyiv intensify, Ukraine is prioritising Patriot air defence systems in its US procurements and is side-lining its past pleas for more sophisticated

offensive weapons. The prospects of the US transferring Tomahawk cruise missiles or aircraft that could fully neutralise Russia's Su-35 advanced stealth fighter jets are remote.

For now, Ukraine can rely on the largesse of its European allies to compensate for some of these shortfalls. Germany has received permissions from the US to transfer 125 long-range artillery rockets and 100 Patriot air defence missiles to Ukraine. Vladimir Putin's threats against Germany over the Taurus long-range missiles suggests that Friedrich Merz, its chancellor, might finally be breaking with his predecessor Olaf Scholz's die-hard restraint. The Netherlands recently transferred the last of its 24 pledged F-16 jets to Ukraine and Norway is mulling a doubling of F-16 deliveries to Ukraine's air force.

European countries are

also playing a critical role in strengthening Ukraine's domestic arms industry. At the Nato summit, Britain announced plans to fund joint drone production initiatives with Ukraine and Germany built on its recent pledge to invest 5 billion in Ukraine's long-range missile production capacity.

These promises are music to Zelensky's ears but are not a panacea for Ukraine's equipment woes. Ukraine's domestic arms industry cannot develop fast enough to neutralise North Korea's military assistance to Russia and Europe's depleted militaries need to supply Ukraine by ordering new weapons from the US. As Russia launches a multi-pronged offensive against Donetsk, Kharkiv and Sumy, Ukraine is unable to meet its urgent war materiel needs.

Despite these negative headwinds, Ukraine's unbreakable patriotism and tactical ingenuity can slow Russia's advance. Ukrainian

Armed Forces Commander Oleksandry Syrskyi's declaration that Ukraine has stopped Russia's offensive in Sumy and the Operation Spiderweb attack on Russian strategic bombers encapsulate these invaluable traits.

Russia's unwillingness to de-escalate the war despite staggering casualties and frustratingly slow gains suggests that Ukraine cannot rely on resolve alone. This realisation is turning Ukrainians who idolised Western economic and democratic institutions into cynics, and damaging Ukraine's long-term prospects of integrating into the Trans-Atlantic security orbit.

While Trump and Rutte hailed defence spending increases that should increase Nato's long-term resilience, the Nato joint declaration's marginalisation of Ukraine undoes many of the benefits of the system. Long-term security is impossible if we surrender to Russia in Ukraine.

In Altai Republic, a Kremlin-backed government reform aids tycoons

Leyla Latypova

REGIONAL deputies in Russia's republic of Altai on Tuesday passed a controversial law scrapping the two-tier system of local self-government. The El Kurultai regional parliament's swift decision came just days after around 4,000 residents joined in a rare public act of defiance to protest the reform and demand the resignation of the republic's head Andrei Turchak. "I think [the parliament's decision] is yet another reflection of how the authorities truly regard us," prominent Altaian political activist and human rights defender Aruna Arna said in a video address published shortly after the vote.

"We need to keep acting. This is just the beginning. We need to fight for our [rights]," she added. Located in southern Siberia in a tri-border area with Kazakhstan, Mongolia and China, Altai is Russia's least populous ethnic republic with just over 221,500 residents. Altaians, a Turkic ethnic group indigenous to the region, comprise 33.9% of the population, while Russians account for 56.6%, according to official statistics. The region's third-largest ethnic group, Kazakhs, make up 6.2%. Despite its modest population, Altai has a vast territory of over 92,000 square kilometers - roughly the size of Hungary or Portugal.

Most of the republic is covered by the mountain range of the same name, which was inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1998. This picturesque mountainous landscape, which carries a sacred significance for its Indigenous inhabitants, has made the republic a popular destination for domestic tourism in Russia. Over 2.7 million tourists visited the republic of Altai in 2024, according to statistics maintained

by local officials. This number is expected to grow by another 7% this year. The republic's high tourism potential has put it on the radar of Kremlin-linked investors and tycoons, who have flocked there over the past decade in hopes of cashing in. Moscow investors not only drove up land prices, making them virtually inaccessible for purchase by locals, but also appropriated the land using legally dubious schemes. Like most other Indigenous groups inhabiting modern Russia's territory, Altaians are denied indigeneity within the Russian legal system. Yet many of them still maintain a way of life that is largely dependent on direct access to land, including subsistence farming and animal herding. This means that Moscow's attempt to buy off local lands is existential for thousands of locals and their Indigenous livelihoods.

After the republic's previous leader Oleg Khorokhordin allegedly clashed with financial giant Sberbank, one of the region's primary investors, Moscow appointed veteran St. Petersburg-born technocrat Andrei Turchak as his replacement despite his lack of experience or personal ties in the republic. Turchak fell from grace with his new constituents less than one year into his tenure by enacting unpopular constitutional amendments that removed the mention of the region's "territorial integrity" from its foundational legal document. His move reignited fears that the government might be preparing legal grounds for a possible merger of the republic and the neighboring Altai region into a single federal subject - a move that was already attempted in the 2000s, leading to mass protests. Despite their nearly iden-

tical names, the republic of Altai and the Altai region have little, if anything, in common. With a land area of nearly 168,000 square kilometers, the Altai region has over 2 million inhabitants, over 93% of whom are ethnic Russians. The potential merger of the two regions, therefore, would dramatically alter the standing of Indigenous Altai peoples, making them a small minority in the new majority Russian region. It would also deprive them of an array of benefits guaranteed by the status of a republic, which include special status for the Altai languages and funding of projects dedicated to the preservation of said languages and Indigenous cultural traditions.

In an interview with The Republic Speaking podcast, Altaian lawyer Aysura warned that the potential merger of the two regions would trigger "mass layoffs of government workers" in the republic of Altai, leaving thousands without jobs. The merger would also result in "infrastructural losses" for the republic of Altai's residents by drying up funding for local projects, said Aysura, who withheld her surname. Though the local government reform, which essentially eliminates the rural settlement tier, seems to be a far less radical move than a merger of two federal subjects, its consequences for the republic's predominantly rural population will be no less noticeable. The reform would essentially do away with the municipalities in rural settlements of the republic, merging them into larger entities.

As a result, hundreds of people who were directly elected to represent their rural communities would be pushed out of politics, fostering "political depopulation"

and making it increasingly difficult for residents of rural localities to defend their interests within the government system. In a passionate address to thousands of protesters on Saturday, human rights defender Arna called the residents' fight against the reform "the final battle" and hailed villages as the region's beating heart. The republic's capital, Gorno-Altaysk, with just over 65,000 inhabitants, is its only city, meaning the majority of the republic's residents live in villages scattered across the vast mountainous region. "Today we are also talking about a possible dismissal of Turchak," Arna said in the speech, the video recording of which has been shared in blogs and news outlets far beyond the republic. "We all know who he really is. He is someone whom we didn't elect. He is a person appointed to [rule] us," she added as the crowd roared in approval. "We need to tell the Kremlin that we don't want to have people appointed [to govern the republic], we want our own people in the government." Saturday's rally in the republic of Altai marked the second-largest regional protest in wartime Russia after the 2024 Baymak movement in Bashkortostan. A report released by the Interior Ministry put the number of protesters in Gorno-Altaysk at 1,000, while observers on the ground estimated a turnout of around 4,000 people.

After the event, its participants published a resolution outlining ambitious plans to dismiss regional deputies who voted in favor of the controversial reform and instituting an all-out boycott of United Russia. Even so, the chances that this small but brave nation could stop the political forces and big business trying to swallow their region whole look very slim at best.

'Big beautiful bill' will impose huge costs on disabled individuals

Allison Wohl

UNTIL my son Julian was born with Down syndrome in 2009, I knew nothing about the ways that disabled Americans depended on programs like Medicaid to provide the kinds of services and supports they need to live full lives in their communities. As I got more involved in advocating for him, I learned about the troubling history of discrimination that consigned disabled Americans to a life of abuse, neglect and institutionalization. I also learned about courageous individuals who created the disability rights movement that catalyzed the legislation, regulations and Supreme Court cases that changed the lives of millions of Americans with disabilities.

The more I learned, the prouder I became that we lived in a country that invested in people with even the most significant disabilities. It underscores a belief system that investing in everyone's future exemplifies what it means to be American. Had my son been born in the early 1970s like I was, physicians would have encouraged us to institutionalize him, hiding him away from society. Sen. Robert F. Kennedy (D-N.Y.) visited the infamous Willowbrook State Developmental Center in New York in 1965 and, horrified by the inhumane conditions in which he found its residents living, famously described it as a "snake pit." The subsequent lawsuit on behalf of Willowbrook residents accelerated the pace of deinstitutionalization, providing support for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities to live in their communities. The 1980s ushered in a new era of Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services, which allow disabled individuals to receive supports and services in their own homes, living among their families, friends and neighbors - allowing them to be part of the fabric of their communities. People with disabilities would now have freedoms that the rest of us take for granted: to make choices, to be independent and to live life like everyone else.

As the House budget reconciliation bill makes its way through the Senate, the GOP insists that people with disabilities will not be

hurt by proposed Medicaid cuts - and, in fact, that the bill does not cut Medicaid but "strengthens" it. This is patently false. Despite claims that this bill only focuses on "waste, fraud, and abuse," the proposed cuts will devastate the nearly 7 million seniors and people with disabilities who receive these services through Medicaid waivers - as well the 700,000 people on waiting lists for these benefits. (The cuts would trigger reductions in Medicare amounting to

funding for nursing homes. The devil is in the details of this bill. Lowering the federal share of payments to a state for Medicaid services significantly decreases the amount of funding that a state has available. Additionally, proposed limitations on provider taxes (which states levy on providers like hospitals and nursing homes) are more severe in the Senate bill, and new administrative requirements would decimate state Medicaid budgets that are critical for funding disability services. It's a one-two punch: slashing

This is patently false. Despite claims that this bill only focuses on "waste, fraud, and abuse," the proposed cuts will devastate the nearly 7 million seniors and people with disabilities who receive these services through Medicaid waivers - as well the 700,000 people on waiting lists for these benefits. (The cuts would trigger reductions in Medicare amounting to about \$490 billion over 10 years).

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In addition to the direct loss of federal funds from the largest cut in Medicaid history, there is a second and even more significant impact of the GOP bill that will further impair states' ability to support disabled Americans. Under the legislation, states would have no choice but to drastically reduce or eliminate Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services. These critical services - personal care assistance, employment supports, transportation, day programs, home modifications and other services - help people with disabilities avoid being placed in institutions.

Without these services, people with disabilities would face a stark choice: have family members leave the workforce to provide them unpaid assistance or be placed in nursing homes, which are significantly more expensive than Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services. These services are cost effective because they reduce both the financial and human costs of institutionalization; proposed reductions in Medicaid would also slash

federal funding while making it impossible for states to fill the gap.

Imperfect as our system for supporting people with disabilities is, no other country has one. Supporting Americans like my son to live their lives as independently as possible is what makes this country great. Helping him to be an employee, a customer, a neighbor and a taxpayer requires investment by both state and federal partners. If the GOP budget plan is enacted, however, it will undermine decades of progress and devastate this system. Cutting short future opportunities for millions of disabled Americans will exact enormous financial costs to individuals and their families. But there are also moral costs. Disabled Americans are our friends, neighbors and family members who contribute to our communities and our lives. It is immoral to leave them behind on a quest to cut taxes for corporations and the wealthiest among us. Congress must take a wiser and more compassionate approach and stop its destruction of our country's social safety net. My son's future - and the futures of disabled Americans - hangs in the balance.

NATO breathes sigh of relief after tiptoeing around Trump at Summit

Charlie Hancock

THE NATO leaders' summit was tailor-made for Donald Trump, with a truncated schedule and a headline defense spending commitment secured in advance so the US president could arrive having already secured something of a victory. While Trump's remark that NATO's collective defense clause was open to interpretation set teeth on edge before he touched down on Dutch soil, he left saying he saw the alliance differently, having seen the "love and passion" that European NATO leaders showed for their countries during discussions.

Heads of state affirmed their commitment to treat an attack on one member as an attack on all and pledged to raise their levels of defense spending to 5% of GDP, up from 2%, by 2035. This figure was split into two categories: 3.5% on core defense requirements such as the armed forces, and an additional 1.5% to build national resilience by upgrading national infrastructure and their manufacturing base.

A European defense official, speaking anonymously to The Moscow Times in order to discuss matters freely, said there is an additional document that sets out what kind of spending will contribute toward the 1.5% target. But the document's wording was watered down to allow Spain, which spends the lowest share of its GDP on defense out of any NATO member state, to spend below 3.5% provided it meets the updated capability requirements set out on June 5. Multiple leaders expressed frustration with Madrid, though Belgium and Slovakia have signaled they might also struggle to reach the new benchmark.

Rutte told reporters on Monday that Spain had not secured an opt-out from the targets, but had a different interpretation of how much it would need to spend to reach its new targets. "I have always had the highest respect for Spain's contribution to NATO," he said. "The fact is that Spain thinks it can achieve those targets on a percentage of 2.1%. NATO is absolutely convinced Spain will have to spend 3.5% altogether."

The details of those capability targets are still under wraps. Lithuanian Foreign Minister K?stutis Budrys called for some of them to be made public, pointing to Europe's empty stockpiles of ammunition and air defense. "[What NATO has is to] is known for Russians. So from whom are we hiding it? From our societies?" Budrys said. Budrys' Polish counterpart, Radek Sikorski, was less certain. "I'll have to think about that. We should have some secrets in NATO," he told The Moscow Times.

As well as the new spending commitments, the summit saw the signing of a new defense industrial plan to ramp up defense industry across the alliance and create jobs. Speaking to journalists, Secretary General Mark Rutte said it would include the production of thousands of tanks and armored vehicles and millions of rounds of artillery munitions to build up stockpiles to deter Russia from a possible attack. He also announced a planned five-fold increase in air defense capabilities. Many European countries have depleted their stocks by donating their missile systems and ammunition to Ukraine, which has

been forced to use up these supplies to defend its cities and infrastructure from nightly Russian missile and drone attacks.

The resulting holes are expensive and time-consuming to fill, thanks to supply chain bottlenecks affecting manufacturers. Speaking at a press conference at the end of the summit, Trump signaled support for sending more Patriot missile systems to Ukraine. "We're going to see if we can make some available. They are very hard to get. We need them too. We are supplying them to Israel and they are very effective," he said. But the US president offered no details about Washington's support for Ukraine. "We'll see what happens," he said when asked whether the US would add to the \$8 billion pledged by NATO members for this year.

Trump and Volodymyr Zelensky both gave a positive assessment of their one-on-one meeting on Wednesday afternoon, with Trump saying the Ukrainian president "couldn't have been nicer" and Zelensky describing the exchange as "good" and "substantive." But although Zelensky said that the two men discussed Kyiv buying US air defense systems, Trump vaguely promised "to see if we can make some available," adding that Washington was also supplying Israel with them. In a departure from the past three summits since Russia's full scale invasion of Ukraine, the final summit declaration did not condemn Moscow for its aggression. And despite the insistence by Rutte that Ukraine's bid for membership remains "irreversible," the statement avoided any mention of Kyiv's push to join

after Trump ruled it out. The European defense official denied that the watered-down wording was an effort to appease the US, which in February sided with Moscow to reject a UN resolution condemning Russia's actions and supporting Ukraine's territorial integrity.

"The summit was not about Russia. The summit was about NATO, our own defense posture [and] our own defense capabilities. This was our main focus and the only focus, to be honest," the official told The Moscow Times. Moscow's shadow loomed over the conference nonetheless. Rutte reiterated that Russia remains "the most significant and direct threat facing this alliance" and noted that intelligence agencies like Germany have assessed that Russia could test NATO's unity by 2030. "There is great worry in many circles of NATO ... that between three, five, seven years from now, Russia will be able to successfully attack us if we do not start investing today," Rutte said.

NATO has also assessed that Russia can keep fighting in Ukraine at its current pace through at least 2027, an anonymous senior official from the alliance told the BBC's Russian service at the summit. John Foreman, the British defense attaché in Moscow from 2019 to 2022, said he believed the summit was a success because there were no major meltdowns or surprise statements from Trump. "If we looked at the summit last year, the threat of Trump was like an orange asteroid on the horizon, with a question of whether Trump would remain committed to NATO," he told The Moscow Times. The answer to that question, for now, remains yes.

Central Asia, China eyeing a better future

Xu Wenhong

THE second China-Central Asia Summit, which concluded in Astana on June 17-during the pomegranate blossom season - was especially important because the Kazakhstan capital is where President Xi Jinping proposed the Silk Road Economic Belt, which together with the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road makes up the Belt and Road Initiative, in 2013.

In January 2022, during the video summit on the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the five Central Asian countries, the six countries agreed to upgrade the China-Central Asia cooperation mechanism to the level of heads of state. Accordingly, in May 2023, the first China-Central Asia Summit was held in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, the starting point of the ancient Silk Road. To demonstrate their commitment to and expectations from the mechanism, the heads of state jointly planted six pomegranate trees in the "China-Central Asia Friendship Forest". Two years later, the six pomegranate trees have not only grown but also are spreading their fragrance.

China and the Central Asian countries have always had close and friendly relations. And since the first summit in 2023, they have been guided by the China-Central Asia spirit, which has helped boost cooperation guided by the six countries' leaderships and yielded common benefits. In fact, multilevel cooperation between China and the Central Asian countries has entered a new phase, with the historical allegories of "envoys keeping each other in sight on the roads" and constant streams of merchants traversing the Silk Road routes once again

becoming reality.

Fast-moving modern vehicles, including trains, traveling between China and the Central Asian countries, echo the sound of the caravans on the ancient Silk Road in the new era. The number of sister cities between China and the Central Asian countries now exceeds 100 pairs. Working together to build a closer community with a shared future for China and Central Asia is the common wish of all sides, and this is gradually becoming reality.

However, the world today is not peaceful. The bugles of war have been blowing across some regions. China and its five Central Asian neighbors have maintained peace and stability, because they believe that only in a peaceful, stable, good-neighboring and friendly environment can countries focus on economic development and modernization, and improve people's well-being. And only when countries in a region adopt a win-win attitude and strengthen cooperation can they focus on developing common large-scale projects such as the newly started construction of the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan Railway.

Based on their win-win attitude over the past 30 years, China and the five Central Asian countries agreed to work together to unlock the full potential of cooperation in the trade, production capacity, energy and transportation sectors, and create new growth points in fields such as financing, agriculture, poverty reduction, green and low-carbon development, healthcare and digital innovation.

In today's complicated world, various forces and events have been emerging at a rapid pace. Therefore, China and the Central Asian

countries must continue to enhance mutual understanding and firmly support each other on their respective core interests. And while welcoming investors to participate in the development of the region, they should resolutely resist any interference by outside forces, and combat the "three evils" of terrorism, separatism and extremism.

Friendships between countries are formed through trade and commercial communication, but they flourish when their peoples engage in heart-to-heart communication in the pursuit of building a shared future. If the countries of the region recognize that they share a common future, no force can stop them from maintaining peace, promoting common prosperity and sharing a happy life.

Although anti-globalization sentiments have been rising in some parts of the world, the historical trend of economic globalization is irreversible, and conflicts avoidable. That's why China and the Central Asian countries have agreed to continue making new achievements, respecting the sovereignty of all countries, pursuing common development and maintaining regional peace and stability. China and the five Central Asian countries have all established comprehensive strategic partnerships, signed cooperation documents on the joint promotion of the Silk Road Economic Belt, and committed to jointly building a community with a shared future for mankind at the bilateral and multilateral levels.

As for the second China-Central Asia Summit, its most significant achievement was the signing of the treaty of permanent good-neighborness and friendly cooperation by the six heads of state, marking a new beginning in China-Central Asia relations.

EU stances on Israel-Iran tension

Valeria Giannotta

WITH the recent US involvement in the Iran-Israel conflict and the resulting regional spillover, there is widespread fear within the international community of further escalation. To some extent, international concerns reflect discordant national stances. Indeed, in a climate of extreme polarization, both politically and in public opinion, the West - and more specifically Europe - finds itself fragmented and marginalized. Despite the convergence on the urgent need to restore diplomatic dialogue and resume peace negotiations to avoid a new escalation of violence, the gulf between the states defending Tel Aviv and Washington's intervention and those calling for an immediate de-escalation is significant.

Beyond the common exhortation "to all parties to exercise maximum moderation, and to avoid any act of retaliation to find a diplomatic solution for regional stability and global security," the EU is quite divided. At the onset of Israel's attack on Iran, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen effectively endorsed Israel and its right to exist. On X, she said: "I spoke with President Herzog about the escalation. I reiterated Israel's right to defend itself and protect its people." A few days before the US intervention, this statement created a significant watershed within the European bloc, drawing harsh criticism from

several European diplomats who denounced the lack of consensus within the EU and questioned the appropriateness of issuing such a unilateral declaration.

EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas called the situation "dangerous," adding that "diplomacy remains the best path forward." She also reiterated: "Iran must not be allowed to develop a nuclear weapon, as this would pose a threat to international security. I urge all parties to step back, return to the negotiating table and prevent further escalation." Antonio Costa, the European Council president, taking a more moderate approach, expressed deep concern: "I am deeply alarmed by the news coming from the Middle East. I call on all parties to show restraint and respect for international law and nuclear safety," he added. "Diplomacy remains the only way to bring peace and security to the Middle East region. Too many civilians will once again be victims of further escalation," he said.

However, the ongoing debate in Europe pivots on the legitimacy of the Israeli action aimed at preventing Iran's nuclear program, a point endorsed by many, but discussed by others. Regarding the leaders' declarations, the main European capitals seem to be quite aligned. Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's Italy, as also declared by Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani, supports Israel's right to self-

defense and the urgency of preventing Iran from possessing an atomic bomb. Italy also declares itself against suspending the EU Association Agreement with Israel and ready to contribute to the mediation and resumption of the negotiations that the US and Iran have started directly with the mediation of Oman. However, Rome is aware that the American attack on Iran's nuclear facilities changes the scenario and that it may cause a much broader crisis, potentially affecting various American interests in the region. Although French President Emmanuel Macron had preliminarily been in contact with Netanyahu, siding on Israel's right to guarantee its own security and stressing that France will take part in operations to protect and defend Israel in the event of further reprisals conducted by Tehran, before the upcoming NATO summit he said "there is no legal framework" for American intervention. On the other hand, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz strongly confirmed Israel's "right to defend itself" and said "the US was right to bomb Iran." Even British Prime Minister Keir Starmer praised the US for taking action to reduce Iran's nuclear threat.

France, Germany, and Britain - the so-called "coalition of the willing" - aimed to arise as mediators in the conflict. In the attempt to revive negotiations on the Iranian nuclear issue, the day before the

US intervention in Iran, they called a meeting in Geneva with Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas. In this spirit, the goal was relaunching diplomacy and emerging from the marginal position where the EU has been sadly confined for too long. As a matter of fact, Europe faces new challenges such as instability and migration flows; this is a very crucial topic in Brussels' agenda. It is worth mentioning that without any doubt, those issues would not easily disappear even if there is regime change in Iran.

However, the European Union stance is consistent with the assumptions of the recent G7 reading: "We affirm that Israel has the right to defend itself. We reiterate our support for Israel's security. We also affirm the importance of protecting civilians. Iran is the main source of instability and terror in the region. We have always been clear that Iran will never have a nuclear weapon." However, the rising tension in Middle East - which once again sees Israel as the perpetrator of violence - has made it evident that Europe is becoming fragmented by exposing Europe's weakness in finding its own diplomatic space and a common stance pivoting on a genuine interpretation of international law. Given the unpredictability of the American administration, the EU could in fact set itself up as a vocal actor of its founding principles, but unfortunately once again Brussels shows a persistent inconsistency.



ISLAMABAD: CEO of Pakistan International Airline AVM Amir Hayat taking to Deputy Prime Minister/Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar.

Pakistan Chemical Expo 2025: HCSTSI delegation participated

HYDERABAD (APP): On the special directives of Acting President Ahmed Idrees Chohan, a high-level delegation of the Hyderabad Chamber of Small Traders and Small Industry (HCSTSI), led by Vice President Shan Sehgal, actively participated in the "Pakistan Chemical Expo 2025 held at Karachi Expo Centre".

The delegation visited various stalls at the expo and held detailed meetings with representatives of leading national and international companies from the chemical, packaging, waste management, energy and allied industrial sectors. These industry leaders expressed their keen interest in collaborating with HCSTSI and assured their intention to visit Hyderabad and engage with Chamber in the near future.

Speaking on the occasion, Vice President Shan Sehgal stated that international-standard events like the Pakistan Chemical Expo play a vital role in promoting industrial growth, fostering research

and development, facilitating technology transfer and creating valuable business linkages.

He emphasized that Hyderabad was the second-largest commercial hub of Sindh, home to thousands of active business units across sectors such as chemicals, pharmaceuticals, plastics, cold beverages, food processing and construction. In light of this, such exhibitions and expos are urgently needed in Hyderabad to support local industrial advancement.

Shan Sehgal strongly advocated for the organization of dedicated B2B exhibitions and roadshows in Hyderabad, specifically for the chemical and allied industries. He highlighted that such initiatives would provide local manufacturers and traders with direct access to new business opportunities and innovative technologies.

The Chamber delegation briefed participating companies about the performance, facilities, and investment potential in Hyderabad. They formally

invited them to expand their networks and establish operations in the city.

The leadership of the Chamber lauded the Pakistan Chemical Manufacturers Association (PCMA) for organizing a highly successful and purposeful event. They especially appreciated the efforts of PCMA Chairman Haroon Ali Khan, FPCCI President Atif Ikram Shaikh, and all other organizers for providing a strong platform for meaningful industrial and commercial interaction.

In conclusion, Vice President Shan Sehgal urged the Government of Sindh and the Federal Ministry of Industries & Production to ensure the organization of such large-scale industrial expos in Hyderabad, enabling the business community from interior Sindh to be better integrated into the national economic framework.

The delegation also included Convener of Chamber's Chemical & Dyes Committee Samar Jafri and Muhammad Tahir from the Chemical Association.

Pak stands out globally as most improved economy

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan stands out globally as the most improved economy in terms of reduction in sovereign default risk, as measured by CDS-implied probability.

As per the latest data posted by Bloomberg Intelligence, Pakistan leads the world in sovereign risk improvement and tops global EM rankings.

Pakistan topped Global EM Rankings in Default Risk Reduction, as the country has recorded the largest drop in sovereign default risk globally over the last 12 months.

Default probability down from 59 percent to 47 percent, a massive 1,100 basis points improvement.

This marks the sharpest decline among major emerging markets, ahead of Argentina (-7%), Tunisia (-4%), and Nigeria (-5%).

In contrast, countries like Turkey, Ecuador, Egypt, and Gabon have seen their default risks rise.

This sharp decline in Pakistan's risk signals renewed investor confidence—fueled by macro-economic stabilization, structural reforms, successful IMF engagement & timely debt repayments, besides improved credit outlooks by S&P, Fitch, and others.

This is a resounding signal to global investors: Pakistan is not only back on the map—it is moving forward with stability, credibility, and reform at its core.

Banks to remain closed on 1st July

LAHORE (APP): All banks and financial institutions will remain closed for public transactions on July 1 due to a bank holiday.

According to SBP sources here, banks will remain closed for public transactions on Tuesday, July 1, 2025. Furthermore, a notification issued here stated that employees of banks/development finance institutions and microfinance banks would come to the office as usual.

Gold falls by Rs5,000

LAHORE (APP): The price of gold per tola has fallen by thousands of rupees.

According to Sarafa Association sources, in gold markets across the country, gold per tola has become cheaper by Rs 5,000, with 24-carat gold falling to Rs 351,000 at the local level.

Furthermore, the price of 10 grams of gold in bullion markets has fallen by Rs 4,287 to Rs 3,925. In the international market, gold per ounce has fallen by \$53 to \$3,290.

Indonesia, Pakistan to deepen ties in agriculture, academia, trade: Envoy

FAISALABAD (APP): Charge d' Affaires of the Embassy of Indonesia Rahmat Hindiarta Kusuma on Saturday said that bilateral ties between Indonesia and Pakistan in agriculture, academia and trade sectors would be strengthened to benefit from each other's experiences and fight the common challenges.

He visited the University of Agriculture Faisalabad and called on UAF Vice Chancellor Prof Dr Zulfiqar Ali, deans and directors.

He stressed the need to enhance the people to people contact that will bring the both nations closer.

He said that Pakistani

students were studying in Indonesia and his country was providing ample opportunity of scholarships from which Pakistani students should get benefited.

He said that we should also enhance research collaboration and faculty students exchange programs for betterment in the agricultural field.

He also hailed the steps being taken on the part of UAF for agricultural sector.

UAF Vice Chancellor Prof Dr Zulfiqar Ali said that strengthened relations would help get benefit from each other experiences and meet the challenges of the modern era.

He said that the food security was one of major concerns. He said that 40 percent of our population is malnourished.

He said that UAF was the first university in Pakistan to start the Human Nutrition and Dietetics degree program.

He said that under International partnership, the university was housing Chinese Confucius Institute, the language and culture exchange center; International Seed Testing Lab; the Pak-Korea Nutrition Center (PKNS), Center for Advanced Studies and others.

He briefed about various high-yielding wheat, mai-

ze, cotton, sugarcane, mango, okra, soybean, backyard poultry, and others varieties developed by UAF scientists, contributing to national food security.

He said that the establishment of language center would break down the language barrier and promote mutual understanding among the people of both countries. Indonesian language courses can be started in UAF with collaborations, he added.

He also visited expo center, Center for Advanced Studies and Pak Korea Nutrition Center and lauded the UAF products and knowledge exchange.

Strengthening Educational Assessment: AKU-EB concludes capacity building project with BAEC

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Aga Khan University Examination Board (AKU-EB) has successfully concluded a capacity development and technical support project for the Balochistan Assessment and Examination Commission (BAEC), carried out under the Balochistan Human Capital Investment Project. Funded by the World Bank and implemented through the Project Management Unit (PMU) of the Government of Balochistan, the initiative marks a significant step toward improving assessment quality and learning outcomes in the province.

The project brought together professionals from BAEC and the Bureau of Curriculum to build institutional capacity in designing and conducting large-scale, sample-based assessments.

The consultancy aimed to embed principles of validity, reliability, fairness, and contextual relevance in Balochistan's assessment systems. The initiative was structured into four carefully designed phases, each focusing on a different aspect of developing and conducting high-quality examinations and assessments.

These phases emphasized experiential learning, in-situ engagement, and real-life connectivity between theory and practice.

As a key outcome, the project produced a comprehensive Assessment Framework and Background Questionnaire for Grades IV and VIII. These tools are designed not only to guide BAEC's system-wide



assessments but also to enhance classroom-level teaching, learning, and assessment practices across Balochistan.

"At AKU-EB, we believe that access to quality education begins with fair and meaningful assessment," said Dr Naveed Yousuf, CEO of AKU-EB. "This project reflects our deep commitment to work with public partners to strengthen education systems from within. We are proud to support BAEC in developing tools that are not only technically robust but also responsive to the diverse realities of Balochistan's learners."

Speaking at the closing ceremony, Professor Dr. Anjum Halai, Vice Provost at the Aga Khan University, emphasized the broader educational impact of the initiative and said, "Assessments and evaluation in education when designed well, create a wash-down effect that

improve teaching and classroom practices. Through AKU-EB's evidence-based, context-sensitive approach to assessment, we are not only building capacity but transforming how education is experienced across national curriculum based schools in Pakistan. This collaboration with BAEC is a strong example of how strategic public private partnerships can lead to meaningful change."

The event was attended by Ms. Raheela Hameed Khan Durrani, Minister of Education, Balochistan, as the Chief Guest. She appreciated the collaboration between AKU-EB and BAEC, describing it as a strong model of institutional partnership. She noted that the introduction of modern tools and digital technologies would bring greater transparency to examinations and strengthen institutional capacity. She expressed the government of Balochistan's full

support to take the initiative forward and acknowledged it as a model for the future. She shared that the entire education team in Balochistan is keen to serve the cause of education and is committed to improving learning outcomes across the province.

Participants expressed appreciation for the hands-on, applied nature of the project. One of them noted:

"It is not just theoretical knowledge-this project enabled us to experience and connect theory with practice. We were able to see the translation of validity, reliability, transparency, and accountability in a real-life situation appropriate for the context of Pakistan."

By fostering technical expertise and context-sensitive practices, this partnership between AKU-EB and BAEC sets a strong precedent for sustainable, evidence-based education reform in the region.

US stocks back at records on US-China trade progress

NEW YORK (AFP/APP): Wall Street stocks finished at fresh records Friday as US-China trade progress restored the market to its heights prior to a spring swoon brought by President Donald Trump's tariffs.

Both the S&P 500 and Nasdaq finished at all-time highs following a roller-coaster session that included a stint in negative territory after Trump announced he was breaking off trade talks with Canada, rupturing a series of largely positive headlines on trade.

Earlier, European stock markets also rose, with the Paris CAC 40 leading the way, boosted by a rise in luxury stocks.

The records reflect improved sentiment, with the Iran-Israel ceasefire adding to positive movement on trade compared

with the spring.

"There is hope in the market, there may be some over-optimism around some things," said Jason Schenker of Prestige Economics. "But there was a lot of optimism."

Friday's session was not without volatility. US stocks opened higher and were solidly positive through early afternoon when Trump blasted Canada's digital services tax in a social media post that called the country "very difficult" to trade with.

But after slipping into the red, both the S&P 500 and Nasdaq returned to positive territory, finishing with gains for both indices and ending at records.

Tom Cahill, chief investment officer at Ventura Wealth Management said

other trade news developments in recent days had been positive, including Washington and Beijing's confirmation on finalizing a framework to move forward on trade.

"The news has been incrementally more positive since April on the trade front," Cahill said.

The S&P 500 last hit a record in February, but began to come under pressure thereafter as Trump began to sharpen his rhetoric on trade. This culminated with Trump's April 2 "Liberation Day" vow to implement steep new levies on trading partners.

Trump has since suspended the most onerous elements of his trade overhaul, while still implementing the biggest US tariffs imposed in decades.

That has raised concerns

about inflation. The personal consumption expenditures price index climbed 2.3 percent last month from a year ago, according to data released Friday.

This was in line with analyst expectations and a slight acceleration from April's 2.2% increase.

But Cahill said the tariffs have thus far not resulted in significant inflationary pressures, raising hopes about Federal Reserve easing.

"Now the market is starting to anticipate a Fed rate cut in September," said Cahill, who also pointed to a boom in artificial intelligence investment as a driver of equity market momentum.

"Overall the backdrop is supportive of equity prices and I think they will drift higher," Cahill said.

Huawei launches smart Hybrid energy system

ISLAMABAD (APP): Huawei Digital Power Pakistan has officially launched its Residential Hybrid Energy System, a smart and sustainable solution aimed at transforming how Pakistani households manage electricity.

Unveiled at the "Huawei Powering Pakistan – Advancing Energy Through Innovation" event in Karachi, the system is designed specifically for local needs and offers a reliable, intelligent way to reduce electricity bills, ensure backup power during outages, and manage energy use more efficiently said a news release.

The new solution includes Huawei's advanced Hybrid Inverters (models SUN2000-5-12K-MAP0

and SUN2000-12-25K-MB0), which convert solar energy into usable electricity while seamlessly managing battery backup through the LUNA2000 Lithium-ion Battery Packs. Available in 7kWh, 14kWh, and 21kWh capacities, these battery packs store excess solar power for use during nighttime or grid failures.

Integrated with the SmartGuard Safety Device, the system also enhances overall safety and monitors energy consumption in real time via a user-friendly mobile app.

Pakistani families stand to benefit significantly from this innovation, particularly those areas struggling with unreliable power supply and rising energy

costs.

The system not only ensures continued electricity during load shedding but also allows households to track and optimize their energy usage, while advanced lithium battery technology and built-in safety features promise longer lifespan and dependable performance.

Designed for quick installation and backed by local support, the hybrid system represents a major step toward clean, resilient, and future-proof home energy solutions.

In addition to the product launch, Huawei also announced the introduction of its Installers Rewards Program in Pakistan. This initiative allows certified installers to earn points and unlock exclusive rewards for each successful system installation, further encouraging the nationwide transition to solar energy.

"This launch reflects our commitment to building a fully connected, intelligent Pakistan," said JinYu – Managing Director at Huawei Digital Power. "By empowering families to take control of their energy, we're laying the foundation for a cleaner, more resilient future."



ISLAMABAD: A vendor selling Cherries along roadside on his cart setup.

US inflation edges up as Trump renews criticism

WASHINGTON (AFP/APP): The US Federal Reserve's preferred inflation measure logged a mild uptick Friday while spending weakened, triggering another tirade by President Donald Trump against the central bank chair for not cutting interest rates sooner.

"We have a guy that's just a stubborn mule and a stupid person," Trump told an event at the White House, referring to Fed

Chair Jerome Powell. "He's making a mistake."

With Powell's term as Fed chief coming to an end next year, Trump hinted at his choice of successor: "I'm going to put somebody that wants to cut rates."

The president's remarks came after government data showed the personal consumption expenditures (PCE) price index climbing 2.3 percent last month from a year ago in May.

This was in line with analyst expectations and a slight acceleration from April's 2.2 percent increase, but still a relatively mild uptick.

Excluding the volatile food and energy sectors, the PCE price index was up 2.7 percent, rising from April's 2.6 percent uptick, the Commerce Department's report showed.

But consumer spending declined, after Trump's fresh tariffs in April

dragged on consumer sentiment. PCE dropped by 0.1 percent from the preceding month, reversing an earlier rise.

While Trump has imposed sweeping tariffs on most US trading partners since returning to the White House in January – alongside higher rates on imports of steel, aluminum and autos – these have had a muted effect so far on inflation.

This is in part because

he held off or postponed some of his harshest salvos, while businesses are still running through inventory they stockpiled in anticipation of the levies.

But central bank officials have not rushed to slash interest rates, saying they can afford to wait and learn more about the impact of Trump's recent duties. They expect to learn more about the tariffs' effects over the summer.



In brief

India inflict record loss on England

TRENT BRIDGE (Agencies): Smriti Mandhana scored a stunning century as India inflicted England's heaviest T20 defeat by runs with a comprehensive 97-run triumph at Trent Bridge. The opener blitzed 112 from 62 balls for her maiden T20 international hundred as India posted 210-5 on a flat surface in the series opener. It was the second-highest total England have conceded in the format and they had no answer to the class of Mandhana, who struck 15 fours and three sixes in a remarkable innings. The 28-year-old left-hander put England under pressure from the off and, with number three Harleen Deol contributing a rapid 43 from 23 balls, helped India post their second-highest T20I total. It was a stark reminder of the work England still have to do following the encouraging T20 and one-day international series sweeps of the West Indies to kick-off the new era under coach Charlotte Edwards. That feeling was only amplified as the home side lost four wickets in the first seven overs of the chase, captain Nat Sciver-Brunt providing the only resistance. The game was long gone by the time Sciver-Brunt was eventually dismissed for 66 off 42 balls as England slumped to 113 all out with India left-arm spinner Shree Charani taking 4-12 on debut. A five-match series gives England plenty of time to try and put things right but there is plenty to be addressed before Tuesday's second T20 at Bristol.

Australia beat WI in first Test

B A R B A D O S (Agencies): Josh Hazlewood claimed five wickets as Australia wrapped up an emphatic 159-run victory against West Indies in the first Test in Barbados. West Indies lost all 10 of their second-innings wickets in the evening session on day three of the contest as Australia showed their ruthlessness to close out the match with two days to spare. Set 301 for victory, the hosts' response had started promisingly as they overcame the early loss of Kraig Brathwaite to reach 47-1 with John Campbell and Keacy Carty at the crease. However, Hazlewood swung the momentum Australia's way as he ran through the West Indies top order during a characteristically controlled spell which saw four wickets fall for just nine runs. From 56-5 it was always going to be an uphill struggle for West Indies, even though Justin Greaves (38 not out) and Shamar Joseph (44) provided some late entertainment. Hazlewood removed Jomel Warrican to finish with 5-43 before Nathan Lyon bagged two wickets in the final over of the day, after play had been extended by 30 minutes, to seal the win. Earlier, Australia had made a battling 310 in their second innings after Alex Carey had top scored with a punchy 65. The tourists had resumed the day on a precarious 92-4 but Travis Head and Beau Webster made gritty scores of 61 and 63 before Carey batted smartly with the lower order as Joseph took 5-87. The Test was Australia's first since the World Test Championship final defeat by South Africa and represents the start of their cycle that runs until 2027.

Pakistan defeat Chinese Taipei in Girls Netball C'ship

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan continued its winning momentum in the Asian Youth Girls Netball Championship 2025 by defeating Chinese Taipei 56-32 in their second group match at the Jeonju Hwasan Gymnasium, Jeonju-si, South Korea on Saturday. According to information received here, the Pakistani side put up a commendable performance, with notable contributions from Leya Raza Shah, Alisha Naveed, Summayya Safdar, Haleema, Sarina Hussain, Jasmine Farooq, Farah Rasheed, Amani and Parisa. Chairman of the Pakistan Netball Federation Mudassar Arain, President Sameen Malik, and Secretary General Muhammad Riaz congratulated the team on their back-to-back victories, including the earlier emphatic win against Saudi Arabia.



With this victory, Pakistan now stand at the top of Pool-B in the ongoing championship. The team will face hosts Korea in their third group match on Sunday (June 29), followed by fixtures against Japan on June 30 and Maldives on July 1.

A total of eleven teams are participating in the championship, which has been divided into two

groups. Group-A comprises Malaysia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Hong Kong, and India, while Group-B includes Pakistan, Chinese Taipei, Japan, Korea, Maldives, and Saudi Arabia.

The Asian Youth Girls Netball Championship 2025 is being held under the auspices of the Asian Netball Federation and will continue until July 4.

Badminton players clash in semi-finals of SNGPL tournament

WAH CANTT (APP): The SNGPL All Pakistan Badminton Tournament has reached its exciting final stages, with top players locking horns in the semi-finals at the Pakistan Ordnance Factories (POF) Sports Complex in Wah. The tournament has witnessed thrilling matches, and the semi-final lineups are now confirmed across all major categories, local correspondent of APP reported this from Wah

Cantt on Saturday.

According to the details, in the Men's Singles, Pakistan's top-ranked players, including Muhammad Ali Larosh, Irfan Saeed, Azeem Sarwar, and Murad Ali, will compete for a spot in the finals. The Women's Singles semi-finalists include Ghazala Siddique, Mahoor Shahzad, Alja Tariq, and Ammarah Ishtiaq, who will battle it out for a

chance to lift the trophy.

The Men's and Women's Doubles categories feature talented pairs, promising exciting matches.

The grand finals of the tournament are scheduled for June 30, 2025, and the players are gearing up for an intense competition. With the best players in action, the tournament is expected to showcase high-quality badminton, and the crowd can look forward to thrilling matches.

Multan wrestler to represent Pakistan at World Police & Fire Games 2025

F.P. Report

MULTAN: Sub-Inspector, Sports Officer, and internationally acclaimed wrestler Furqan Khan Pehlwan from Multan Police will represent Pakistan Police in the upcoming World Police & Fire Games 2025, to be held in Birmingham, Alabama, USA.

This mega international event brings together police, firefighters, and security personnel worldwide to compete in various sports disciplines. Furqan Khan Pehlwan will participate in the wrestling event, proudly raising the flag of the Pakistan Police on the global stage.

His historic participation is a reflection of the visionary leadership of Inspector General of Punjab Police Dr. Usman Anwar. Additionally, I, G South Punjab Muhammad Kamran Khan, Regional Police Officer Multan, Sohail Chaudhry, and City Police Officer Multan Sadiq Ali Dogar, are com-



mitted to providing opportunities to Punjab Police officers not only in professional service but also in fitness, sports, and international representation.

Furqan Khan's remarkable achievement is a matter of great pride not only for Multan Police but for

the entire Punjab Police force. He is emerging as a role model for youth, representing a perfect blend of athleticism, discipline, and patriotism.

We extend our best wishes and prayers to Furqan Pehlwan for his success.

Fraser-Pryce qualifies for World Championships

KINGSTON (AFP): Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce punched her ticket to a ninth World Championships with a third-placed finish in the 100m at the Jamaican national athletics trials on Friday.

Fraser-Pryce, a three-time Olympic gold medallist and 10-time world champion, clocked 10.91sec to finish third in the women's 100m final and secure a berth for the World Championships in Tokyo in September.

Tina Clayton won her first national title in a personal best of 10.81 with reigning 200m world champion Shericka Jackson second in 10.88.

Tia Clayton, twin sister of Tina, was fastest in the semi-finals but pulled up with an apparent injury in the final.

Fraser-Pryce won her first world championships medal at Osaka in 2007 -- a silver in the 4x100m relay -- before going on to win 10 world titles, five of them in



the 100m. In front of a large turnout that included treble world record holder Usain Bolt, she delivered when it mattered most.

"It's been a long journey," Fraser-Pryce said after the final. "But it was not about making the team, it was about celebrating the journey and I am grateful for those who have been part of the journey.

"It takes strength and resilience to have made it so far, but it was always a joy and privilege to represent

Jamaica and I hope I will leave a legacy of inspiration to every girl who has a dream for achieving more."

In the men's 100m final, Paris Olympics silver medallist Kishane Thompson delivered a blistering 9.75sec (wind .8m/sec), his personal best making him the sixth-fastest performer in history.

Only Justin Gatlin (9.74), Asafa Powell (9.72), Yohan Blake (9.69) Tyson Gay (9.69) and world record-holder Bolt (9.58) have gone faster.

The 23-year-old, who was beaten by just 0.005sec by Noah Lyles in the 100m final at the Paris Games, sliced two hundredths off his previous career best of 9.77 set in June of 2024.

Oblique Seville shrugged off concern over a tight hamstring to finish second in 9.83 and Ackeem Blake was third in a personal best of 9.88.

Sri Lanka crush Bangladesh in second Test to seal series

COLOMBO (AFP): Sri Lanka completed a thumping innings and 78-run victory over Bangladesh before lunch on day four of the second Test in Colombo on Saturday, wrapping up the two-match series 1-0.

Resuming the day on a precarious 115-6, the visitors still trailed by 97 runs and needed a minor miracle to avoid an innings defeat. Any hopes of a rear-guard were dashed almost immediately.

Left-arm spinner Prabath Jayasuriya, under the pump after a wicketless outing in the first innings, struck gold with the fifth ball of the morning as Litton Das edged behind to wicket-keeper Kusal Mendis for 14.

With that scalp, the last recognised batter was back in the hut and Bangladesh's house of cards came tumbling down soon after, all out for 133.

It was a clinical all-round performance by hosts Sri Lanka, who walked away with crucial World Test Championship points.

None of the visiting batters managed to cross fifty in the match — a far cry from the first Test in Galle, which ended in a draw when captain Najmul Hossain Shanto hit twin centuries.

Bangladesh had won the toss on a docile



Colombo pitch but squandered the advantage, bundled out for 247.

Sri Lanka replied in commanding fashion, piling on 458 to take a hefty 211-run lead.

The foundation was laid by a masterclass from opener Pathum Nissanka, who crafted a fluent 158 — his second successive century in the series — while Dinesh Chandimal chipped in with a polished 93.

The pair added 194 runs for the second wicket, putting the game firmly in Sri Lanka's control.

Bangladesh threatened briefly when the second new ball brought them three quick wickets, but Kusal steadied the ship with a counterattacking 84, ensuring the hosts didn't let

the momentum slip.

Nissanka, who was declared man of the match, said he was "very pleased with the effort".

"It feels good to contribute. I am now the senior opener with Dimuth Karunaratne retired and I try to do my best for the team," he said. Bangladesh captain Shanto called it a "very disappointing game".

"We played really well in Galle but we were not up to the mark here," he said.

"The way we batted in the first innings is when things went wrong for us. A total of 247 was not good on this pitch.

"No harm with the decision to bat first. But the way we got out was very disappointing. One good thing was the way our

bowlers kept fighting.

"That will be one positive we will take from this series."

The two sides will now shift focus to the limited-overs leg of the tour, with three one-day internationals and three T20s.

Brief scores: Bangladesh first innings: 247 all out in 79.3 overs (Shadman Islam 46, Mushfiqur Rahim 35, Sonal Dinusha 3-22, Asitha Fernando 3-51)

Sri Lanka first innings: 458 all out in 116.5 overs (Pathum Nissanka 158, Dinesh Chandimal 93, Kusal Mendis 84, Taijul Islam 5-131)

Bangladesh second innings: 133 all out in 44.2 overs (Mushfiqur Rahim 26, Prabath Jayasuriya 5-56).

Wimbledon offers Djokovic 'best chance' to make Grand Slam history

LONDON (AFP): Novak Djokovic admits Wimbledon offers him the "best chance" to make history as he chases a record-breaking 25th Grand Slam title in the twilight of his glittering career.

Djokovic is dreaming of putting an exclamation point on his incredible career by becoming the most successful singles player in tennis history.

The 38-year-old has been tied with Margaret Court on 24 Grand Slam titles since winning his most recent major prize at the 2023 US Open.

With Wimbledon champion Carlos Alcaraz and world number one Janik Sinner emerging as the sport's dominant forces by winning the last six Grand Slams between them, Djokovic believes his most realistic hope of a historic 25th title lies on the lush lawns of south-west London.

"I would probably agree that Wimbledon could be the best chance because of the results I had, because of how I feel, how I play in Wimbledon, just getting that extra push mentally and motivation to perform the best tennis at the highest level," Djokovic told reporters at the All England Club on Saturday.

Djokovic lost to Alcaraz in the 2023 and 2024 Wimbledon finals and has failed to make the title



match in any of his last three Grand Slams.

After losing to Sinner in the recent French Open semi-finals, Djokovic arrives at Wimbledon in the unusual position of no longer being regarded as the All England Club title favourite. The Serb would draw level on a record eight men's Wimbledon singles titles with Roger Federer if he wins the grass-court tournament for the first time since 2022.

But Djokovic, who won his 100th tour-level title in May in Geneva, has been dogged by questions about when he will retire since fulfilling his long-held desire for Olympic singles gold in Paris last year. He hinted after the French Open in June that he might not return to Roland Garros and was coy about a potential Wimbledon farewell.

'You're always hunting'

"Whether it could be my last dance, I'm not sure, as I'm not sure about Roland Garros or any other Slam that I play next," he said.

"My wish is to play for several more years. I would love to be healthy physically and also mentally motivated to keep on playing at the highest level. That's the goal, but you never know at this stage." After battling for years with Federer, Rafael Nadal and Andy Murray, Djokovic is the last of that star quartet still playing.

The former world number one has been usurped by Alcaraz and Sinner over the last two years and he is happy to admit his only remaining goal is to make Grand Slam history.

"In a sense you're always hunting because you're always going for the titles -- in my also privileged position -- the records and more history," he said.

Norris secures pole at Austrian GP with stunning last-lap effort

SPIELBERG (AFP): Lando Norris delivered a superb final flying lap in his McLaren on Saturday to end Max Verstappen's run of domination in qualifying at the Red Bull Ring by claiming pole position for the Austrian Grand Prix.

The 25-year-old Briton clocked an outstanding lap in one minute and 3.971 seconds to outpace nearest rival Charles Leclerc of Ferrari by 0.521 seconds, with McLaren team-mate and championship leader Oscar Piastri third. Norris, who is 22 points behind Piastri in the drivers' title race, erased any hangover from his collision with Piastri in Canada two weeks ago with a thrilling demonstration of his speed and talent.

"It was a good lap, that's for sure," said Norris. "I guess that just little bit by little bit, I was able to get more time. Q1 was good, but I knew there were a few places I could get more time and I did what I planned to do."

Verstappen had taken pole position at the Red Bull-owned circuit in the Styrian Alps for the last five F1 races before Norris succeeded and seized his first pole in Austria, his third of the season and 12th of his career.

Team-mate Piastri was disappointed and frustrated. "I had (Pierre) Gasly spin at the first corner so I didn't even open my second lap. Lando's been very quick all weekend so it would have been a tough challenge, but we had the pace to be on the front row."

"We can still have a good race from there and we are not here to come home third." Verstappen's last lap was stymied by a yellow flag waved when Gasly spun in his Alpine, leaving him, like Piastri, unable to clock a flying



lap time. He finished seventh.

Leclerc said: "I'm very pleased. It's been a long time since we started on the front row and it's been a difficult season overall, but the team has kept pushing. "We brought some new parts this weekend which for sure made a difference. We know we have a better car in the race than in qualifying so I hope we can put more pressure on the McLarens." Leclerc's Ferrari team-mate and seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton was an encouraging fourth ahead of Mercedes' George Russell, Liam Lawson of Racing Bulls, four-time champion Verstappen of Red Bull and Gabriel Bortoleto of Sauber.

Italian rookie Kimi Antonelli was ninth in the second Mercedes and Gasly 10th.

'Worse than before'

The session began in hot conditions with temperatures of 32 (air) and 48 (track) indicating hard work for tyres. After a frantic finale, in which Russell recovered from the drop zone to 11th, it was Aston Martin's Lance Stroll,

Esteban Ocon of Haas, Red Bull's Yuki Tsunoda, Carlos Sainz in the second Williams and Sauber's Nico Hulkenberg who were eliminated.

McLaren, led by Norris, set the pace. The entire field was separated by less than a second with the Red Bulls of Verstappen and Tsunoda, sixth and 18th, only 0.25 seconds apart. It was Sainz's third consecutive Q1 exit. The track temperature touched 50 at the start of Q2 with Ferrari leading the way on used softs as Norris established his supremacy again before a trackside grass fire prompted a red flag stoppage, Hamilton having run wide there at turn 10.

Verstappen was unhappy with his car's reaction to the heat. "No grip, it's worse than before," he reported. "I don't know what to say!" After six minutes, the action resumed with only four to go as Norris and Piastri set the pace ahead of Leclerc while two-time champion Fernando Alonso of Aston Martin, Williams' Alex Albon, Racing Bulls rookie Isack Hadjar, Franco Colapinto of Alpine and Oliver Bearman of Haas missed out.



In brief

DG RDA directs to resolve issues of Housing Society

RAWALPINDI (APP): Director General (DG) Rawalpindi Development Authority (RDA), Kinza Murtaza, on Saturday, directed the Water and Sanitation Agency (WASA) to install tubewells in the Gulraiz Housing Society to resolve the water issue. Presiding over a meeting to review issues of the society, she emphasized that the installation of tubewells was a sustainable solution to resolve water supply issues affecting the residents of the housing scheme. The DG RDA further directed the Managing Director of WASA to assess the feasibility of rainwater harvesting as a potential solution in the area. In addition to the water issue, she directed the removal of encroachments in the area to safeguard legal property rights and ensure proper land use. She highlighted the importance of clearing unauthorised structures and restoring rightful ownership to affected residents. Furthermore, the DG RDA directed the Planning Wing and the Land Department RDA to conduct a comprehensive survey of the area. The survey will explore the availability and planning of essential public services and infrastructure, including mosques, graveyards, schools, roads, and hospitals, she added.

ANF recovers 27 kg drugs

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF), conducting four operations across the country, recovered as many as 27.430 kilograms of drugs worth more than Rs 11.9 million and arrested three suspects, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman on Saturday. He informed that 500 grams of hashish, 276 grams of ecstasy pills and 200 grams of weed were recovered from the possession of two accused near Samangali Road, Quetta. The arrested accused confessed to selling drugs to students of educational institutions. During another operation, 34 grams of weed were recovered from a parcel sent from the UK to Sialkot at the courier office in Chaklala Garrison, Rawalpindi. As many as 4 kg of heroin were recovered from an accused near Ravi Toll plaza, Lahore. Similarly, 22.420 kgs of ice hidden for smuggling were recovered in the Dalbandin area of Chagai. Cases have been registered against the arrested suspects under the Narcotics Control Act, and further investigations are underway.

CPO takes notice of murder incident

RAWALPINDI (APP): City Police Officer (CPO) Rawalpindi Syed Khalid Mehmood Hamdani on Saturday has taken notice of a double murder incident in the Jatli area and directed Superintendent of Police Saddar to submit a detailed report. SP Saddar Muhammad Nabil Khokhar, along with Assistant Superintendent of Police Gujjar Khan and a police team, reached the crime scene to investigate the matter. A suspect has been taken into custody. According to preliminary investigation, the accused allegedly killed a man a day earlier and then murdered his wife the following night, reportedly in the name of honor. Police are gathering evidence and securing all relevant material from the area. The bodies of both victims have been shifted to a nearby hospital for postmortem. The police spokesman said that a fair and thorough investigation would be conducted and the accused would be punished according to law.

India isolated at SCO Summit: Masood Khan

ISLAMABAD (APP): "India's attempts to portray itself as a victim of terrorism have backfired. The world is now witnessing the true face of the extremist Hindutva regime — one that exports violence, fuels division, and violates international law," said Sardar Masood Khan, Former President of Azad Jammu & Kashmir, in an exclusive interview with a TV network News.

He was speaking in the context of India's diplomatic isolation at the recent Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Summit, where New Delhi's narrative failed to find endorsement among key regional powers.

He emphasized that the SCO operates through consensus, and any member state's disagreement results in the exclusion of that viewpoint from the final declaration. "India's positions were not accepted by Russia, China, Iran, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and others," Khan noted, adding that this development reflected growing international awareness of India's destabilizing role in the region.

India, he explained, sought to anchor its case around the SCO's long-standing principles of combating terrorism, separatism, and extremism. However, this posturing was met with firm resistance, given that India's ruling party itself represents religious extremism and ideological fascism.

"The Bharatiya Janata Party's government thrives on extremism and exclusion. Its policies are inherently extremist, and its credentials on combating terrorism are discredited by its own conduct," he said.

He further referenced credible international documentation, most recently from Canada, which implicated India in transnational interference and terrorism. "The assassination of Canadian citizen Hardeep Singh Nijjar on Canadian soil and the exposure of Indian agents in the United States show that New Delhi has crossed red lines," Masood Khan remarked.

"When India levels false accusations against Pakistan, it is like the thief scolding the police. The world is no longer buying

their story."

He underlined that while India speaks of the incompatibility between Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs) and terrorism, it is India in fact portraying. "Their doctrines are dangerous and their intentions clear — India seeks to dominate the region through fear and force," he added.

Khan praised Pakistan's measured diplomacy and firm stance at the SCO, stating that member states stood with Pakistan because they recognized the facts on the ground and rejected India's fabrications. "India failed to sell its narrative, and instead, exposed itself as a destabilizing actor," he asserted.

The former President concluded by reaffirming Pakistan's commitment to peace, stability, and responsible statecraft. He urged the government to continue exposing India's disinformation campaigns, promote factual narratives.

The interview was widely viewed and appreciated across policy and academic circles for its clarity of message and robust articulation of Pakistan's position.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Science and Technology Khalid Hussain Magsi meets British delegation led by Mr. Cromac Dreelan.

Pakistan recognized globally as a responsible nation: Magsi

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Science and Technology, Khalid Hussain Magsi has said that the international community recognizes Pakistan as a responsible and peace-loving nation, committed to regional stability and global cooperation.

He expressed these views during a meeting with a high-level delegation from the British High Commission in Islamabad.

The delegation was led by Mr Cromac Dreelan, Head of Strategic Engagement and Understanding, and included Ms Huda Ikram, Senior Political Adviser, and Mr. Ismail Khan, Principal Adviser (Foreign Affairs).

During the meeting, both sides exchanged views on enhancing mutual cooperation in science, technology, innovation, and education. Minister Magsi emphasized that the Pakistan-UK relationship is anchored in mutual respect and trust, and reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to working with the international com-

munity for peace and sustainable development.

Highlighting Pakistan's constructive diplomacy and growing global engagement, the Minister noted that the confidence of the world in Pakistan is strengthening, as the country's peaceful stance and diplomatic approach gain appreciation on international platforms.

Addressing ongoing international crises, Minister Magsi strongly condemned the brutal Israeli attacks on innocent civilians in Gaza.

He urged the United Kingdom to take a more active and principled stand in stopping these atrocities and ensuring respect for international humanitarian law. "The world cannot remain silent in the face of such grave human rights violations," he said.

On regional tensions, particularly with India, the Minister reiterated that Pakistan's sovereignty is non-negotiable. He affirmed that the armed forces of Pakistan are fully committed to defending the

nation's territorial integrity and responding resolutely to any external threats.

Referring to the Kashmir dispute, Minister Magsi said the issue has once again gained prominence on global forums.

He stressed that Pakistan will continue to raise its voice for the Kashmiri people and work for lasting peace in the region in partnership with the international community.

Mr Cromac Dreelan appreciated Pakistan's stabilizing role in the region and commended the country's leadership for guiding it toward technological progress and constructive international engagement. He reaffirmed the United Kingdom's commitment to strengthening scientific and educational ties with Pakistan.

The meeting concluded on a positive note, with both sides expressing their resolve to expand bilateral cooperation and work together on shared goals related to peace, innovation, and sustainable development.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Interior Mohsin Naqvi visiting 24/7 NADRA Mega Center. —APP Photo

Hard work key for success: Asma Butt says F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: A renowned writer, director and Chief Executive of Dolphin Communication, Asma Butt said that hard work never goes in vain, if the intention is pure, the goals are easy. The people of Pakistan are rich in talent, who only need guidance in a positive direction, the day is not far when the youth and women of Pakistan will make Pakistan famous internationally based on their talent.

She said this while attending the inauguration ceremony of the innovative products of a leading private company in Gujranwala as a special guest. In her address to the participants, Asma Butt said that like other cities of Pakistan, the soil of Gujranwala is also rich in talented people. Be it literature and art or crafts, the people of Gujranwala are full of talent. I am very grateful to Malik Shafaqat Ali who invited me as a special guest and honored me. I am proud of the people and artists of Gujranwala, this is my own city. She added that we all have to work together to make Pakistan a great state.

Fake cops arrested in kidnapping case, hostage rescued

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police on Saturday apprehended three suspects for impersonating police personnel and recovered a kidnapped individual during a swift and well-coordinated operation in the Bani Gala area. An official told APP that the suspects identified as Khalid Mahmood, Muhammad Zafar and Jameel Ahmad were arrested after they allegedly abducted a citizen while posing as law enforcement officers.

He said the police recovered a snatched vehicle, handcuffs, police uniforms, face masks, a wireless set, weapons, ammunition, and the car used in the crime.

He said the prompt and effective response by the police team was appreciated by Deputy Inspector General (DIG) of Police Muhammad Jawad Tariq. DIG Tariq said further investigation is underway, and stern action will be taken against those threatening the lives and property of citizens. He said, "Those who attack the safety and dignity of our citizens will be dealt with an iron hand."

Mohsin Naqvi pays surprise visit to NADRA Mega Center

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi paid a surprise visit to the 24/7 NADRA Mega Center located in Blue Area here Saturday and reviewed the facilities being provided to citizens at the center.

During his visit, the interior minister interacted with citizens who had come to the Center for the processing of their CNICs and other documents. He inquired about the time it takes for the services being provided at the center. The citizens expressed satisfaction with the facilities available at the Mega Center, stating, "We no longer have to wait for

long; our turn comes quickly now." They thanked Mohsin Naqvi, saying, "The staff is also very cooperative and conditions have significantly improved since you have started taking personal interest in the matter."

The interior minister appreciated the shift in charge and staff of the NADRA Mega Center and encouraged them to work with even more dedication. He also lauded the performance of NADRA Chairman Lt. General Muhammad Munir Afsar and his team.

He visited the waiting area and various counters, personally speaking to cit-

izens and listening to their concerns.

He also issued on the spot instructions to resolve issues related to CNICs of the citizens.

The federal minister also inspected the modern self-service machine, entered a CNIC number, and used fingerprint verification to review the automated system. He remarked, "It is heartening to see that citizens no longer face delays here. The system operating without queues is commendable." He added that the government would continue to take steps to create ease for citizens at every level.

CDA seals illegal buildings in Zone-V

ISLAMABAD (APP): Capital Development Authority (CDA) sealed multiple commercial and under-construction buildings in Zone-V of Islamabad on Saturday, as part of its ongoing enforcement drive under the Islamabad Building Control Regulations-2020 (amended 2023).

The Directorate General of Building & Housing Control (B&HC), supported by CDA Enforcement, ICT administration, and police personnel, led the operation under direct instructions from the Federal Minister for Interior and Narcotics Control and Chairman CDA.

According to a CDA statement, the action targeted properties operating without approved building plans and in violation of planning bylaws. The crackdown included the sealing of Wasna Palace Marquee, a prominent wedding venue, for func-

tioning without CDA approval.

Additionally, 14 illegal commercial structures under construction in Jinnah Gardens Society (Federal Employees Cooperative Housing Society) — specifically in Touseef Commercial and Shaheen Commercial Blocks — were sealed. Two more buildings along Japan Road in Mouza Gagri met the same fate for failing to comply with legal requirements.

CDA teams also served three stop-work and regularization notices in the same area, warning violators to cease operations and regularize their properties or face legal consequences.

"These structures were found guilty of operating without submitting building plans, engaging in unauthorized commercial activity, and failing to pay mandatory government fees and penalties," the

press release stated. Officials, under police and magisterial cover, sealed the sites and posted warning notices on the premises.

A CDA spokesperson reaffirmed the Authority's "zero-tolerance policy" toward illegal construction, adding: "We urge the public, builders, and developers to avoid starting any construction without proper approval. This is vital to ensuring Islamabad's planned and lawful urban development."

The Authority also warned potential investors and property buyers to verify approvals and legal status before making purchases to avoid financial or legal risks.

The CDA has signaled that similar enforcement actions will continue across the capital in a bid to restore planning integrity and uphold building regulations.



ISLAMABAD: Children putting their lives in risk by experiencing bicycle one wheeling at G-7 area. —APP Photo

PHA completes magnificent horticultural work at Chandni Chowk

RAWALPINDI (APP): As per the special instructions of Director General Parks and Horticulture Authority (PHA) Rawalpindi Ahmed Hassan Ranjha, magnificent horticultural work has been completed by PHA to enhance the beauty of Chandni Chowk.

Colorful plants, beautiful flowers and excellent constructions for decoration at Chandni Chowk have become the center of attention of the public.

In addition, beautiful design embroidery on the walls under the Metro Bus Bridge is also presenting breathtaking views. PHA has been well received by the public for the beautification of Chandni Chowk.

DG PHA Rawalpindi also gave special instructions to the concerned staff to improve the beauty of various places under Chandni Chowk flyover and maintain a lush environment.

PHA Rawalpindi's special plan to enhance the beauty of the city. The aim of the efforts is to promote a healthy and green environment in the city, to create awareness among the public about keeping the environment clean, along with providing the citizens with the best recreational, green and clean environment, which is also among the priorities of PHA.

While talking about making the horticulture work at Chandni Chowk more effective, promoting a

green environment and enhancing the beauty of the chowk, DG PHA Ahmed Hassan Ranjha said that PHA is taking special steps to enhance the beauty of Rawalpindi according to the vision of the Punjab government.

He further said that they want to provide a beautiful and green environment to the people of Rawalpindi. They are determined to make Rawalpindi the most beautiful city in Punjab. By highlighting the importance of tree plantation and green plants, the effects of severe weather can be dealt with. They want the cooperation of the public in maintaining the beauty and green environment of the city.

Iranian team visits border

KABUL (Amu TV): As the number of Afghan migrants expelled from Iran continues to surge, a delegation of Iranian diplomats, led by Alireza Bigdeli, the acting head of Iran's embassy in Kabul, visited the Dogharoon border crossing to observe the return process firsthand. The Iranian Embassy in Kabul announced via social media that the delegation met with several returning Afghan migrants at the border and was briefed on the latest conditions surrounding their return.

Two arrested in Helmand

KABUL (Pajhwok): Two individuals have been arrested in southern Helmand province in connection with the forced marriage of a seven-year-old girl to a 45-year-old man in exchange for money, an official said on Saturday. Saif-ul-Islam Khyber, spokesman for the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, wrote on his X that the young girl had been married off by her father to a 45-year-old man for a sum of money.

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

Flour, sugar, gold prices down in Kabul

KABUL (Pajhwok): The prices of Kazakh flour, sugar and gold declined in Kabul during the outgoing week, market sources said on Saturday.

Food items

Zmarai Safi, head of the Food Traders' Association, said the price of a 49-kg sack of Kazakh fell from 1,500afis to 1,450afis and a 49-kilogram bag of Indian sugar also decreased from 2,550afis to 2,500afis.

The price of a 24-kg bag of Pakistani rice remained unchanged at 2,600afis. A 16-litre bottle of Malaysian cooking cost 1,700afis, the same rate as last week's.

He added one kilogram of African black tea accounted for 400afis and the

same amount of Indonesian green tea for 350afis.

Hamid Sufizada, a retailer at Dahna-i-Bagh market, put the retail price of a 49-kg bag of flour at 1,500afis, a 24-kg bag of rice at 2,650afis and a 49-kg sack of sugar at 2,550afis.

A 16-litre bottle of cooking oil cost 1,750afis, he said, adding one kilogram of black tea accounted for 400afis and the same quantity of green tea for 450afis.

Fuel

A worker at the Ahmadyar pump station told Pajhwok Afghan News the rate of one litre of petrol remained stable at 64afis, and the diesel price stayed unchanged at 68afis.

He added the price of one kilogram of liquefied

gas cost 58afis.

Afghani vs dollar

Haji Mohammad Husain, owner of the Sadaqat Money Exchange Service, said one US dollar was traded at 70afis and 1,000 Pakistani rupees at 240afis against their previous week's rates of 71.30afis and 245afis.

The spike in the afghani value is essentially linked to periodic dollar auctions by the central bank.

Gold down

Mohammad Fawad, a jeweller in Timor Shahi area, said the price of one gram of Russian gold declined from 4,800afis to 4,700afis and the same amount of Arabian gold decreased from 6,100afis to 6,000afis.

Afghanistan reaches self-sufficiency in production

KABUL (Pajhwok): The office of the Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs says as many as 6,000 industrial factories are officially operating across the country, helping Afghanistan achieve full or partial self-sufficiency in production of 130 different items.

In a post on X handle, the Economic Office noted these factories produce 570 different types of goods, including flour, oil, salt, medicine, iron, cement, steel, chemical products and other goods.

It said around 135,000 citizens are directly employed in these factories.

According to the office, industrialists across the country have been provided with facilities such as land and access to necessary raw materials.

Additionally, necessary measures have been taken to curb the smuggling of factory inputs, import tariffs on raw materials and machinery have been reduced or waived and higher tariffs imposed on items that are produced domestically.

To further strengthen the national industry, exhibitions have been organised both domestically and internationally, the deputy prime minister office concluded.

Flash floods in Maidan, Logar leave damages



MAIDAN (Amu TV): Heavy rainfall and flash floods swept through Maidan Wardak and Logar provinces of Afghanistan over past 24 hours, causing extensive damage to homes, farmland and roads, according to local sources and Taliban officials.

In Logar, residents reported that flooding followed intense overnight rains, submerging wide areas across several districts. Local sources told Amu TV that the floods destroyed "thousands of acres of farmland, hundreds of residential homes, electricity infrastructure, and public roads."

The scale of destruction in Logar has yet to be formally addressed by Taliban officials, but eyewitness accounts describe the flooding as among the most severe in recent memory.

In Maidan Wardak Province, the Taliban governor's office confirmed that multiple districts — including Nerkh, Chak, Sayedabad, and Daimirdad — were impacted. While no fatalities were reported, a statement from the Taliban governor's office said that numerous roads

had been blocked, cutting off access to several areas.

Similar flash floods were also reported in Khost Province, where local residents cited heavy financial losses, though details on the extent of damage remain limited.

These events come amid broader concerns about Afghanistan's vulnerability to climate shocks.

With little infrastructure in place to mitigate such disasters, flash floods have become a recurring threat in rural provinces, particularly during the summer rainy season.

88,000 Afghan refugees deported from Iran

KABUL (Khaama Press): Over 88,000 undocumented Afghan migrants were deported from Iran in one week, the IOM reports, warning of urgent humanitarian and funding needs.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) reported that between June 18 and June 26, a total of 88,308 undocumented Afghan migrants were deported from Iran to Afghanistan. The surge in forced returns has sparked growing humanitarian concerns at the Afghanistan border.

According to the IOM's June 28 update, only 11 percent of these returnees received any form of humanitarian assistance due to limited resources. The organization called for urgent funding to meet basic protective and humanitarian needs for the most vulnerable.

The report also noted that 55 percent of the returnees during the week were forcibly deported, and 64 percent of them

were traveling as families—highlighting the heavy impact on women and children.

A significant increase from the previous week was observed, when 32,844 individuals returned between June 10 and June 17.

Earlier data from the World Health Organization (WHO) showed that over 71,000 migrants were returned from both Iran and Pakistan between June 1 and June 15, underscoring the scale and continuity of expulsions.

Both agencies warned of the dire health and protection challenges that await returnees at overcrowded and under-resourced border areas.

In Iran, government officials have escalated efforts to expel undocumented Afghan nationals. New directives were issued declaring all lease agreements with Afghan refugees void, and landlords were warned against providing shelter. Iranian

police have also been reported to detain migrants in several provinces, especially after the end of the 12-day conflict between Iran and Israel.

Meanwhile, in Pakistan, similar crackdowns have resumed.

Authorities have increased identity checks and detentions of Afghan refugees, especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan.

Human rights groups have raised alarms over mass arrests and deportations, often involving families with no time to prepare or legal recourse.

Both the IOM and WHO have appealed to the international community to urgently provide funding and political support to manage the worsening refugee crisis.

With deportations accelerating and border services overwhelmed, Afghan returnees face increasing risks of poverty, homelessness, and poor health conditions.

Norway donates over \$4 million to Afghanistan

KABUL (Khaama Press): Norway has donated over \$4 million to Afghanistan through a UN fund, aiming to support vital humanitarian services for millions facing crisis and hardship.

Norway has contributed \$4.25 million to support humanitarian efforts in Afghanistan, according to the United Nations' Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan. The announcement was made on Friday, June 27, underscoring the importance of continued international support.

The UN trust fund emphasized that such financial contributions are essential to expand both emergency and long-term life-saving services across the country. The fund continues to call on other international donors to sustain their commitments. More than 22 million people in Afghanistan will require humanitarian assistance in 2025. This staggering figure highlights the worsening crisis and the urgency for global response.

The UN had previously launched an appeal for aid to address critical needs in Afghanistan, particularly in sectors such as food security, healthcare, and education. The appeal comes amid growing concerns about the sharp rise in poverty and vulnerability under the current conditions.

OCHA reports that humanitarian aid has dropped by 40% since US funding cuts began, severely affecting aid delivery to millions of Afghans. This reduction has directly impacted food distribution, healthcare access, and livelihood programs. Recent assessments by the WFP indicate that one in five Afghan nationals faces crisis-level food insecurity. Families are often forced to reduce meal portions or skip meals entirely due to rising prices and aid shortfalls.

Climate and Disaster Management: Afghanistan and Russia strengthen cooperation

KABUL (BNA): Mullah Nooruddin Turabi, the head of Afghanistan's National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA) met with the Russian Consul General in Kabul to discuss cooperation on climate change, risk management, and humanitarian assistance.

During the meeting, Mullah Nooruddin Turabi highlighted the urgent need for cooperation in addressing both natural and human-made disasters. He emphasized the importance of establishing robust political, economic, and religious ties with other nations as a key achievement for Afghanistan.

The discussion covered essential topics such as food and non-food assistance, emergency response strategies, and capacity-



building initiatives. Mullah Turabi assured that any concerns raised by foreign representatives would be addressed according to established principles.

Ruslan Usmanov, the

Russian Consul General, reaffirmed Russia's commitment to strengthening bilateral relations and noted the existence of a specialized agency in Russia dedicated to emer-

gency situations.

He expressed optimism about fostering cooperation between this agency and Afghanistan's National Disaster Management Authority.

Kabul authorities call for cleanliness in recreational areas

KABUL (TOLONews): Recreational areas in Kabul, including Qargha and Paghman, are popular destinations for families from the capital and other provinces during holidays. Despite their natural beauty and importance for citizens' mental well-being, concerns have been raised about the neglect of cleanliness and environmental damage by some visitors.

Hamza, a resident of Kunar province, traveled with his brother to Qargha after a busy week. He and his companions were upset to see that some visitors had thrown their trash into the water and scattered it around the recreational area.

Hamza said, "People who come here for leisure should clean up after themselves and collect every-

thing they discard."

Mohammad Rafiq, a resident of Kabul, stated, "Unfortunately, some people don't respect order or cleanliness. They throw garbage on flowers and greenery and don't clean up. My message to my fellow citizens is to follow the rules."

Managers of other parks and recreational gardens in Kabul also complain about visitors' disregard for cleanliness and the damage children do to flowers and tree branches.

Azim, the manager of Paghman's public garden, said, "This area should be clean, with no trash. People should not pick the flowers or fruits. Everyone touches everything, and adults must tell their children not to do that. Our city is our home."

"Trash bins have been

placed here by the municipality, and we should use them. We must not throw garbage where we eat and sit. We need to maintain cleanliness. When we bring children to these places, we shouldn't let them pick the flowers, because if each child takes one flower, none will be left," said Ahmad Mir, a resident of Laghman.

Meanwhile, the spokesperson for the Kabul governor mentioned awareness programs aimed at promoting proper use of recreational spaces.

The Kabul municipality reported that more than 140 parks are currently operational in the city. The spokesperson called on visitors to cooperate in preserving these public areas.

Mohammad Basharat,

spokesperson for the Kabul governor, said, "Provincial authorities and Kabul Municipality have always tried to spread awareness about the proper use of recreational areas. The goal is to increase public awareness and promote responsible and principled use of public property."

Nematullah Barezai, the municipality's spokesperson, also said, "We always ask our dear citizens to cooperate with Kabul Municipality and to develop a sense of ownership toward the city. That is the direction we are working in."

Recreational areas hold special significance for residents of any city or country. Maintaining their cleanliness is not only a matter of ethics but also a crucial part of social life.

No market, no access: Babaji locals struggle amid economic hardship

HELMAND (TOLONews): Local residents in Babaji district of Helmand province are facing serious challenges due to the lack of a market and essential services.

They are urging relevant authorities to address these issues, stating that many people, because of economic hardship, are unable to travel to Lashkargah city to meet their daily needs.

Shafiuallah, a resident of Babaji, said: "Our shops

are made of mud, and due to the poor economic situation, we can't build modern ones. There is no business here because there's no market."

Sharifuallah, another resident of Babaji, said: "Our leaders must take action, build a market for us, and provide basic facilities. We rely entirely on Lashkargah for everything, and it's very difficult for us. We urge the authorities to take this issue seriously."

Mir Ahmad, also from Babaji, said: "A market should be built in Babaji like in other areas, so people can overcome these problems. People are currently facing major difficulties because essential goods are not available here."

Local officials, however, say efforts are underway to establish a market in the center of Babaji district.

Abdul Qayum Hasani, the deputy district governor of Babaji, said: "We've

raised this issue with the ministry and proposed that, along with the market, a district office building should also be constructed. We've been assured that a market will be built to meet the people's needs."

Babaji district, located north of Lashkargah, the capital of Helmand province, was officially added to the administrative structure of the province after the Islamic Emirate came to power.

150 athletes compete in qualifiers

GHAZNI CITY (Pajhwok): A Kung Fu selection competition featuring 150 athletes has commenced in southern Ghazni province, an official said on Saturday.

Speaking at the opening ceremony, Bilal Mujahid, Head of Olympic, Physical Education and Sports in Ghazni, said that athletes from clubs across the provincial center and all districts are participating in the tournament.

The primary objectives of the competition are to select the top 20 players for the provincial team, promote awareness of Kung Fu as a sport, and foster a supportive environment for athletes.



The event is divided into four age-based categories: children, teenagers, youth, and adults. Shah Moham-

mad, one of the participating athletes, told Pajhwok Afghan News: "The Sports Authority should build

standard gymnasiums for us and provide opportunities to participate in international competitions."

Residents of Ghar Moshak in trouble as only clinic closed

HERAT CITY (Pajhwok): Residents of Ghar Moshak village in Zindajan district of western Herat province say the only health centre in their area has been out of operation for the past five months, leaving them without access to even the most basic health services.

Ghar Moshak, located in Zindajan and accessible only by rough, unpaved roads, is one of several remote areas where, according to locals, the sole healthcare facility has ceased functioning.

Officials attribute the closure to the suspension of international aid.

Mohammad Younis, a resident of the village, told Pajhwok Afghan News that maternal and infant mortality rates had risen since the health centre became inactive. He explained that most villagers could not afford high costs of private healthcare and transporting patients to Herat city, the provincial capital, cost over 3,000 afghanis—well beyond the financial means of most families in Ghar Moshak.

The village, home to around 250 families and central to several neighbouring settlements, has witnessed a sharp rise in

maternal and newborn deaths due to the absence of midwives, poor road conditions, and the long distance to the nearest functioning health centres.

In many cases, patients—particularly women and infants—die on the way to Herat or nearby districts.

Sanaullah, a man suffering from a respiratory illness, said he must travel dozens of kilometres on rough, winding roads just to receive a basic injection.

Speaking in a laboured voice, he said: "I can barely breathe. I suffer from a respiratory condition and need

regular medication and injections. Now I have to travel to the district centre. I can't afford the transport fare, so most of the time I go without treatment and just endure the pain."

He added that the presence of the health centre had previously made life easier, but given the worsening economic situation, he can no longer afford any medical care.

He called on government officials to restore healthcare services in the village.

Local elders said more than 20 surrounding villages had previously benefited from the Ghar Moshak

health centre, but now nearly 10,000 people have been left without access to medical services.

Mohammad Awaz, a member of the village council, said that due to the absence of midwives and a functioning clinic, a woman lost her baby just this week, and many other women are experiencing serious complications during childbirth.

He added that in the past, residents of both nearby and distant villages would bring their patients to the centre for treatment. Now, however, they are forced to travel to Herat city and seek

care at private hospitals—an option that is both financially and physically burdensome.

Doctors at private hospitals in Herat have also reported a surge in patient numbers following the closure of several public health centres in rural areas.

Dr Abdul Ghiyas Hakim, a physician at one such hospital, said patient numbers had previously been low but have significantly increased over the past six months.

He noted that many patients are facing severe financial difficulties, with large numbers unable to

afford medicine or the cost of diagnostic tests.

In response, officials at the Herat Public Health Department confirmed the closure of several health centres in the province and said efforts are underway to restore services in affected communities.

Dr Ghulam Mohammad Hanafi, head of the department, said that six health centres have ceased operations due to the withdrawal of international funding, leaving nearly 100,000 people without healthcare access.

He added that three other centres are partially

functional, with volunteer doctors providing limited services.

According to Hanafi, the department is working to ensure that healthcare becomes accessible again to deprived populations, and 22 new centres are expected to be launched in the near future.

Earlier, the World Health Organization (WHO) had reported that, following the suspension of financial aid from the United States, 420 health centres across Afghanistan had been forced to shut down, affecting more than 3.05 million people in 30 provinces.



TEHRAN: Mourners gathered in Islamic Revolution Square (Enghelab Square) to attend funeral ceremony.

Top commanders, scientists killed by Israel Iran holds state funeral in Tehran

TEHRAN: Tens of thousands of people have lined the streets in Iran's capital, Tehran, as the country held a funeral service for military commanders, nuclear scientists and some civilians killed in Israeli attacks earlier this month.

State TV showed footage of people donning black clothes, waving Iranian flags and holding pictures of some of the dead in the ceremony that started at 8am (04:30 GMT) on Saturday. Images from central Tehran showed coffins draped in Iranian flags and bearing portraits of the deceased commanders in uniform.

Israel launched the assault on its main regional rival on June 13, killing several senior military and scientific officials, and bombing military sites and nuclear facilities across the country. Iran responded with missiles attacks on Israel. The Israeli bombardment continued for 12 days, with key ally the United States joining the conflict to carry out strikes on three nuclear sites last weekend. In retaliation for the US attacks, Iran launched a wave of missiles at a US military base in Qatar.

Both Israel and Iran claimed victory in the war that ended with a ceasefire on Tuesday, with Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei downplaying the US strikes, claiming Trump had "exaggerated events in unusual ways", and rejecting US claims that Iran's nuclear programme had been set back by decades. The coffins of the Guard's chief General Hossein Salami, the head of the Guard's ballistic missile programme, General Amir Ali Hajizadeh, and others were driven on trucks along the capital's Azadi Street as people in the crowds chanted: "Death to America" and "Death to Israel".

Salami and Hajizadeh were both killed on the first day of the war, which Israel said was meant to destroy Iran's nuclear programme. Mohammad Bagheri, a major-general in Iran's Revolutionary Guard, as well as top nuclear scientist Mohammad Mehdi Tehrani were also killed in Israeli attacks.

Saturday's ceremonies were the first public funerals for top commanders since the ceasefire, and Iranian state television reported that they were for 60 people in total, including four women and four children. Authorities closed government offices to allow public servants to attend the ceremonies. The state funeral comes a day after US President Donald Trump launched a tirade on his Truth Social platform, blasting Khamenei for claiming in a

video address that Iran had won the war.

Trump also claimed to have known "EXACTLY where he (Khamenei) was sheltered, and would not let Israel, or the US Armed Forces... terminate his life". He claimed he had been working in recent days on the possible removal of sanctions against Iran, but he dropped it after Khamenei's remarks.

Hitting back at Trump on Saturday, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said on X: "If President Trump is genuine about wanting a deal, he should put aside the disrespectful and unacceptable tone towards Iran's Supreme Leader." Al Jazeera's Resul Serdar, reporting from Tehran, said Araghchi's remarks were "a most expected reaction" to Trump's social media posts. "Many Iranian people regard him [Khamenei] as chiefly a religious leader, but according to the constitution, he's not only that – he's the political leader, he's the military leader – he's simply the head of state in Iran," he said.

Serdar also said Khamenei's position is not just the top of a hierarchy, but a divine role in Shia political theology. "Not only in Iran, but across the world, we know there are a significant number of Shia who look for his guidance," Serdar said. "Anyone who knows that would be meticulously careful not to publicly criticise him, and particularly not to accuse him of lying." There was no immediate sign of Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, in the state broadcast of the funeral. Khamenei, who has not made a public appearance since before the outbreak of the war, has in past funerals held prayers for fallen commanders over their coffins before the open ceremonies, later aired on state television.

During the 12 days before the ceasefire, Israel claimed it killed about 30 Iranian commanders and 11 nuclear scientists, while hitting eight nuclear-related facilities and more than 720 military infrastructure sites. Iran fired more than 550 ballistic missiles at Israel, most of which were intercepted, but those that got through caused damage in many areas and killed 28 people, according to Israeli figures.

The Israeli attacks on Iran killed at least 627 civilians, Tehran's Ministry of Health and Medical Education said. After the US strikes, Trump said negotiations on Iran's nuclear programme for a new deal were set to restart next week, but Tehran denied there were plans for a resumption. — Aljazeera

Putin says Russia plans to cut military spending

MOSCOW (Reuters): President Vladimir Putin said that Russia was looking to cut its military expenditure from next year, contrasting that with NATO's plan to ramp up defence spending over the next decade.

NATO allies on Wednesday agreed to raise their collective spending goal to 5% of gross domestic product in the next 10 years, citing what they called the long-term threat posed by Russia and the need to strengthen civil and military resilience. In his first reaction to that move, Putin told a press conference in Minsk that the NATO spending would go on "purchases from the USA and on supporting their military-industrial complex", and this was NATO's business, not Russia's.

"But now here is the most important thing. We are planning to reduce defence spending. For us, next year and the year after, over the next three-year period, we are planning for this," he said. Putin said there was no final agreement yet between the defence, finance and economy ministries, "but overall, everyone is thinking in this direction. And Europe is thinking about how to increase its spending, on the contrary. So who is preparing for some kind of aggressive actions? Us or them?"

Putin's comments are likely to be greeted with extreme scepticism in the

West, given that Russia has massively increased defence spending since the start of the Ukraine war. The conflict shows no sign of ending and has actually intensified in recent weeks, as negotiations have made no visible progress towards a ceasefire or a permanent settlement.

Putin said Russia appreciated efforts by US President Donald Trump to bring an end to the war. "He recently stated that it turned out to be more difficult than it seemed from the outside. Well, that's true," Putin said.

Trump said this week that he believed Putin wanted to find a way to settle the conflict, but Ukraine and many of its European allies believe the Kremlin leader has no real interest in a peace deal and is intent on capturing more territory. Putin said Russian and Ukrainian negotiators were in constant contact, and Moscow was ready to return the bodies of 3,000 more Ukrainian soldiers. Russia is seeing a sharp slowdown in economic growth as the budget comes under pressure from falling energy revenues and the central bank is trying to bring down inflation.

Russia hiked state spending on national defence by a quarter in 2025 to 6.3% of gross domestic product (GDP), the highest level since the Cold War. Defence spending accounts for 32% of total 2025 federal budget expenditure. Defence plants have been working round-

the-clock for the past several years, and the state has spent heavily on bonuses to attract soldiers to sign up and on compensation for the families of those who are killed.

Putin acknowledged that Russia had paid for the military spending increase with higher inflation. The finance ministry raised the 2025 budget deficit estimate to 1.7% of gross domestic product in April from 0.5% after reducing its energy revenues forecast by 24%, and it plans to tap into fiscal reserves this year to balance the budget. The next draft budget is due to appear in the autumn.

Kremlin says Estonia's readiness to host nuclear-capable NATO jets threatens Russia: The Kremlin said that Estonia's stated readiness to host NATO allies' US-made F-35A stealth jets, capable of carrying nuclear weapons, posed a direct threat to Moscow.

Estonian Defence Minister Hanno Pevkur told the Postimees news outlet that Estonia – which borders Russia and is a rotating base for NATO jets tasked with protecting Baltic airspace – was ready to host nuclear-capable jets if necessary. "If some of them, regardless of their country of origin, have a dual-use capability to carry nuclear weapons it doesn't affect our position on hosting F-35s in any way," the outlet cited him as saying. "Of course we are ready to host our allies." — Aljazeera

SC verdict in judges' transfer case challenged

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Five judges of the Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Saturday challenged the Supreme Court (SC) verdict in the judges' transfer case.

In an intra-court appeal filed in the SC through their counsel Munir A. Malik, the judges prayed to the court to declare the verdict given by a five-member constitutional bench in the case null and void. The judges also requested the apex court to suspend the ruling until their appeal was decided. A five-member constitutional bench of the Supreme Court (SC), headed by Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar, had on June 19, 2025 declared the transfer of judges to the Islamabad High Court (IHC) constitutional. The bench pronounced the short verdict by three judges to two.

However, Justice Naeem Akhtar Afghan and Justice Shakeel Ahmad differed with the majority decision. Earlier, the bench reserved its decision on the petitions filed against the transfer of judges to the Islamabad High Court (IHC) after the lawyers concluded their arguments.

During the hearing, counsel for the former prime minister and PTI founder Imran Khan, Idrees Ashraf, said that the judges were transferred on political grounds, which was unconstitutional. He further said there existed a conflict between Article 175 and Article 200 of the constitution. He argued that a judge could not be transferred permanently to fill a vacant seat.

Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar remarked that the Judicial Commission did not have any power to transfer a judge. Justice Naeem Akhtar Afghan asked whether any judge had been transferred under Article 200 in the past. Attorney General for Pakistan Mansoor Usman Awan replied there existed no such precedent.

He further said that the role of the president and the prime minister in the transfer of judges was limited. "The chief justices also have a say in the matter," he said, and added, "Hence in this case, mala fide intent cannot be proved." Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar said that a complete procedure for the transfer of judges had been laid down in Article 200.

19 killed in Egypt road accident

CAIRO: A truck has collided with a minibus carrying workers on a road in Egypt, killing 19 people, most of them teenage girls, according to local officials. The collision occurred as the workers were heading to work on a regional road in the city of Ashmoun in the Nile Delta province of Menoufia, north of the capital Cairo.

The truck collided with the minibus as it carried the labourers to their workplace from their home village of Kafr al-Sanabsa, according to the state-owned newspaper, Akhbar al-Yaum. Most of the workers were teenagers – two of them just 14 – according to a list of the names and ages published by the state-owned daily, Al-Ahram. Egyptian media has dubbed the crash victims "martyrs for their daily bread". — Aljazeera

Tarar assails KP admn

— says Swat tragedy marks death of PTI's 12-year governance in KP

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar on Saturday said the tragic drowning of tourists in Swat marked the death of the governance system established during the 12-year rule of the PTI in KP.

Addressing a news conference, along with Barrister Aqeel Malik, State Minister for Law and Justice, the minister held the PTI government in KPK responsible for the tragedy which is mourned by the entire nation. He said despite the availability of modern equipment in 2025, the provincial government had failed to rescue stranded tourists that shows the quality of infrastructure which has been compromised to the lowest level during the PTI government.

"This is not the death of tourists, rather it is the death of PTI's governance system," he added. The minister expressed deep sorrow over the Swat incident, where stranded tourists including women and children could not be rescued despite being visible and only a few hundred feet away from safety.

A single rescue attempt was made after hours had passed, using a makeshift boat, he lamented, asking where was the helicopter used by the PTI founder and the Chief Minister of KPK in their travels. Instead of owning responsibility, the provincial government suspended a DC, he said, adding "the real accountability lies with the CM, who refused to provide camps for the victims."

"The irony is that while dead bodies were being recovered, the CM had the audacity to say, its not my job to provide camps. If that is not your job, then tell us what is," he said. "Is it not your job to save lives or maintain law and order or restore Lady Reading Hospital or to establish universities," he said asking



whether the job of KP Chief Minister is to attack Islamabad, humiliate people, and follow orders from Adiala jail.

"I want to ask the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, who has set up a camp office in Adiala Jail whether the people of KPK give you a mandate to work from Adiala," he asked, comparing it to the work-from-home routine during the COVID days. He demanded to know why the PDMA, which receives millions from the provincial budget, did not perform. "If you cannot run rescue operations, at least have the decency to remain silent. Or just shut down the PDMA."

Citing examples of efficient governance, the minister recalled how Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, as former Chief Minister of Punjab, ensured maximum deployment of rescue resources during tourist seasons in Murree. "Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz has now taken that even further, deploying modern technology and infrastructure upgrades. She has also successfully completed an anti-encroachment drive across all districts even before disasters happen."

"In contrast, the PTI government wakes up only after tragedies. They now talk about anti-encroachment drives. Where were these measures before the deaths occurred," he said. He accused PTI of creating the illusion of performance by staging attacks in Islamabad rather than building systems that serve the public. "Your governance would have been acknowledged had you established a robust rescue network in key tourist areas," he said. "Instead, you chose optics over outcomes."

The minister also questioned the scapegoating of the Deputy Commissioner, pointing to broader systemic corruption in KPK, particularly the recent Kohistan scandal now under NAB investigation. "The fault lies with the entire government that is why the whole PTI system deserves suspension, not just a DC." In response to a question, the Minister emphasized that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif remains committed to democratic engagement. "The PM shook hands with the Leader of the Opposition in the National Assembly which reflects his vision which is for unity, not division."

60 killed in Israeli strikes in Gaza

Israeli strike on Lebanon kills one

GAZA STRIP (AP): At least 60 people were killed across Gaza by Israeli strikes, health workers said Saturday, as Palestinians face a growing humanitarian crisis in Gaza and ceasefire prospects inch closer. The strikes began and continued into Saturday morning, among others killing 12 people near the Palestine Stadium in Gaza City, which was sheltering displaced people, and eight more living in apartments, according to staff at Shifa Hospital, where the bodies were brought.

More than 20 bodies were taken to Nasser Hospital, according to health officials. A strike midday Saturday killed 11 people on a street in eastern Gaza City, and their bodies were taken to Al-Ahli Hospital. The strikes come as US President Donald Trump says there could be a ceasefire agreement within the next week. Taking questions from reporters in the Oval Office, the president said, "we're working on Gaza and trying to get it taken care of."

An official with knowledge of the situation told The Associated Press that Israel's Minister for Strategic Affairs Ron Dermer will arrive in Washington next week for talks on Gaza's ceasefire, Iran and other subjects. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak to the media.

Talks have been on again off again since Israel broke the latest ceasefire in March, continuing its military campaign in Gaza and furthering the Strip's dire humanitarian crisis. Some 50 hostages remain in Gaza, fewer than half of them believed to still be alive. They were part of some 250 hostages taken when Hamas attacked Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, sparking the 21-month-long war. The war has killed over 56,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not distinguish between civilians and combatants. It says

BEIRUT (AFP): An Israeli strike on southern Lebanon killed one person on Saturday, the Lebanese health ministry said, the latest attack despite a ceasefire between Israel and Iran-backed Hezbollah. In a statement, the health ministry said that an "Israeli enemy" drone strike on a car in Kunin, south Lebanon, killed one man in a preliminary toll. The Israeli military did not immediately comment on the incident. The attack comes a day after Israel killed a woman and wounded 25 other people in strikes across the country's south.

Lebanon's state-run National News Agency reported that the woman was killed in an Israeli drone strike on an apartment in the city of Nabatiyeh. Israeli military spokesman Avichay Adraee said on social media that the army "did not target any civilian building." The attacks included a "wave of successive heavy strikes" in the Nabatiyeh region which injured seven people, according to the NNA. The Israeli military said it "identified rehabilitation attempts made by Hezbollah beforehand and struck terror infrastructure sites in the area." Adraee said the civilian building "was hit by a rocket that was inside the (fire and defense array) site and launched and exploded as a result of the strike." Israel has repeatedly bombed its northern neighbor despite the November ceasefire that aimed to end over a year of hostilities with Hezbollah. Under the ceasefire deal, Hezbollah was to pull its fighters back north of the Litani river, some 30 kilometers (20 miles) from the Israeli border, leaving the Lebanese army and United Nations peacekeepers as the only armed parties in the region. Israel was required to fully withdraw its troops from the country but has kept them in five locations in south Lebanon that it deems strategic.

more than half of the dead were women and children. There is hope among hostage families that Trump's involvement in securing the recent ceasefire between Israel and Iran might exert more pressure for a deal in Gaza. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is riding a wave of public support for the Iran war and its achievements, and he could feel he has more space to move toward ending the war in Gaza, something his far-right governing partners oppose.

Hamas has repeatedly said it is prepared to free all the hostages in exchange for an end to the war in Gaza. Netanyahu says he will only end the war once Hamas is disarmed and exiled, something the group has rejected. Meanwhile hungry Palestinians are enduring a catastrophic situation in Gaza. After

blocking all food for 2 1/2 months, Israel has allowed only a trickle of supplies into the territory since mid-May. Efforts by the United Nations to distribute the food have been plagued by armed gangs looting trucks and by crowds of desperate people offloading supplies from convoys.

Palestinians have also been shot and wounded while on their way to get food at newly formed aid sites, run by the American and Israeli backed Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, according to Gaza's health officials and witnesses. Palestinian witnesses say Israeli troops have opened fire at crowds on the roads heading toward the sites. Israel's military said it was investigating incidents in which civilians had been harmed while approaching the sites.

Trump hopeful for Gaza truce

WASHINGTON (AFP): US President Donald Trump voiced optimism about a new ceasefire in Gaza, as criticism grew over mounting civilian deaths at Israeli-backed food distribution centers in the territory. Asked by reporters how close a ceasefire was between Israel and Hamas, Trump said: "We think within the next week, we're going to get a ceasefire."

The United States brokered a ceasefire in the devastating conflict in the waning days of former president Joe Biden's administration, with support from Trump's incoming team. Israel broke the ceasefire in March, launching new devastating attacks on Hamas, which attacked Israel on October 7, 2023.

Israel also stopped all food and other supplies from entering Gaza for more than two months, drawing warnings of famine. Israel has since allowed a resumption of food through the controversial US- and Israeli-backed Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, which involves US security contractors with Israeli troops at the periphery.

United Nations officials said the GHF system was leading to mass killings of people seeking aid, drawing accusations from Israel that the UN was "aligning itself with Hamas." Eyewitnesses and local officials have reported repeated killings of Palestinians at distribution centers over recent weeks in the war-stricken territory, where Israeli forces are battling Hamas militants.

The Israeli military has denied targeting people and GHF has denied any deadly incidents were linked to its sites. But following weeks of reports, UN officials and other aid

providers denounced what they said was a wave of killings of hungry people seeking aid. "The new aid distribution system has become a killing field," with people "shot at while trying to access food for themselves and their families," said Philippe Lazzarini, head of the UN agency for Palestinian affairs (UNWRA).

"This abomination must end through a return to humanitarian deliveries from the UN including @UNRWA," he wrote on X. The health ministry in the Hamas-controlled territory says that since late May, more than 500 people have been killed near aid centers while seeking scarce supplies. The country's civil defense agency has also repeatedly reported people being killed while seeking aid.

"People are being killed simply trying to feed themselves and their families," said UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. "The search for food must never be a death sentence." Medical charity Doctors Without Borders (MSF) branded the GHF relief effort "slaughter masquerading as humanitarian aid."

That drew an angry response from Israel, which said GHF had provided 46 million meals in Gaza. "The UN is doing everything it can to oppose this effort. In doing so, the UN is aligning itself with Hamas, which is also trying to sabotage the GHF's humanitarian operations," the foreign ministry said. Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu rejected a report in left-leaning daily Haaretz that military commanders had ordered troops to shoot at crowds near aid distribution sites to disperse them even when they posed no threat. Haaretz said the military advocate

general, the army's top legal authority, had instructed the military to investigate "suspected war crimes" at aid sites. The Israeli military declined to comment to AFP on the claim. Netanyahu said in a joint statement with Defense Minister Israel Katz that their country "absolutely rejects the contemptible blood libels" and "malicious falsehoods" in the Haaretz article.

Gaza's civil defense agency told AFP 80 Palestinians had been killed by Israeli strikes or fire across the Palestinian territory, including 10 who were waiting for aid. The Israeli military told AFP it was looking into the incidents, and denied its troops fired in one of the locations in central Gaza where rescuers said one aid seeker was killed. Civil defense spokesman Mahmud Bassal told AFP six people were killed in southern Gaza near one of the distribution sites operated by GHF, and one more in a separate incident in the center of the territory, where the army denied shooting "at all."

Another three people were killed by a strike while waiting for aid southwest of Gaza City, Bassal said. Elsewhere, eight people were killed "after an Israeli air strike hit Osama Bin Zaid School, which was housing displaced persons" in northern Gaza. Meanwhile, Hamas's armed wing, the Ezzedine Al-Qassam Brigades, said they shelled an Israeli vehicle east of Khan Yunis in southern Gaza. The Al-Quds Brigades, the armed wing of Hamas-ally Palestinian Islamic Jihad, said they attacked Israeli soldiers in at least two other locations near Khan Yunis in coordination with the Al-Qassam Brigades.