

Bushra Bibi's son arrested
F.P. Report

PAKPATTAN: The son of former First Lady Bushra Bibi and Khawar Maneka opened fire on a domestic employee, leaving the teenaged servant severely injured. The firing incident occurred at Khawar Maneka's residence in the village of Peer Ghani. As per the report, Musa Maneka lost his temper during a verbal altercation with 17-year-old employee Ali Bahadur.



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ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif being briefed on measures regarding recent monsoon rains and floods at National Emergencies Operations Centre.

PM directs NDMA to prepare disaster management plans

Saqib Mushtaq

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday directed the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) chair and federal ministers for climate change and planning to join heads with the provinces for developing a comprehensive disaster management plan based on the lessons learnt from this year's devastating rains and cloudburst events.

The prime minister visited the National Emergencies Operation Centre (NEOC) at the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) headquarters, where he was briefed on the country's monsoon situation, disaster response efforts, and the increasing intensity of weather patterns. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif commended NDMA's efforts and lauded the role of modern technology and skilled human resources at the Authority. He said, "NDMA always provides an encouraging environment, and it is because of its modern infrastructure and highly capable team. This is my second visit here, and I am pleased to see the dedication."

The prime minister highlighted recent cloudbursts and heavy downpours in Chakwal, Lahore, Islamabad, and hilly areas, acknowledging the severity of weather conditions. He remarked that while southern parts of the country saw less rainfall impact, the northern and central regions continue to face significant risk. PM Shehbaz appreciated the provincial governments for their response, especially Punjab under Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz, for their effective disaster handling and coordination with NDMA and PDMA's, resulting in comparatively fewer losses.

He also prayed for those who lost their lives and wished a swift recovery

for the injured, while stressing the need for proactive preparations. "As projections show increased cloudburst activity, we must prepare accordingly. The federal government and NDMA must maintain close coordination with provinces," PM Shehbaz said. The prime minister pledged full support from the PM Office in procuring necessary disaster response equipment and emphasized the importance of federal-provincial cooperation in strengthening human resources, capacity building, and equipment for rescue and relief operations.

"Pakistan contributes minimally to global greenhouse gas emissions but ranks among the top ten most climate-vulnerable countries. This is a challenge, but also an opportunity to build a climate-resilient nation, especially in agriculture and infrastructure." The Prime Minister also thanked the Information Minister for public awareness efforts and directed that such initiatives be scaled up nationwide.

With an urgent call for unified national response and long-term climate adaptation, PM Shehbaz Sharif concluded his visit by reiterating the federal government's commitment to protecting lives, property, and infrastructure in the face of intensifying climate challenges. During the briefing, Chairman NDMA Lieutenant General Inam Haider Malik informed the Prime Minister that this year's monsoon intensity is 60-70 per cent higher than last year, and averaging 65 per cent more than anticipated across the region. Traditionally limited to eight to nine spells, the current monsoon season has already seen two to three additional spells, he added.

So far, he said 178 lives have been lost and around 500 people injured due to rain-related incidents. While last year's projections had indicated

rising impacts in northern Punjab, Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), Islamabad, and upper Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), this year the brunt has shifted towards lower and upper Punjab, Islamabad, and AJK, with the trend expected to persist for the next 3 to 4 weeks. General Inam further noted that four to five more monsoon spells are expected, with the current third spell, beginning on June 26, coming to a close. The NDMA has maintained active coordination with provincial departments and Chief Secretaries to implement early warning systems and mitigation measures, he added.

According to the NDMA, future monsoon seasons will likely begin two weeks earlier, and with increased severity. The coming seven days will remain critical for Punjab, AJK, and northern KP. Federal Ministers Dr Musadik Masood Malik, Prof Dr Ahsan Iqbal and Attaullah Tarar were also present on the occasion.

Shehbaz directs for preparing plan to provide easy loans to farmers: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif directed the relevant authorities to present a policy framework for the provision of easy loans to the farmers for medium and small scale agriculture activities.

Priority should be given to providing modern agricultural facilities to farmers owning less than 12 acres of land, the prime minister said while chairing a review meeting on planning for agricultural development and agri-financing. The prime minister directed to prepare and present a comprehensive plan by the end of this month for providing farmers with easy loans and introducing a system in the agri-financing sector aligned with modern requirements.

(Continued on Back Page)

Torrential rains claim 63 lives in Punjab

F.P. Report

LAHORE: A rain emergency has been declared across Punjab after heavy downpours wreaked havoc, claiming 63 lives in the province over the past 24 hours. In a message on social media platform X, Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz said that due to the stormy rains and flood situation, a rain emergency has been declared in various parts of the province.

She stated that government institutions are working with dedication and tireless efforts, and the administration has been directed to keep the public informed through sirens and announcements. Maryam Nawaz appealed to the public to fully cooperate with institutions and follow safety guidelines, stressing that protecting lives and property is the top priority.

The authorities have urged citizens to avoid unnecessary travel, stay away from power lines and open manholes. The Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) Punjab has released a comprehensive report detailing the human and infrastructural losses caused by ongoing monsoon rains across the province. According to the report, monsoon-related incidents have resulted in 103 deaths and 393 injuries across Punjab so far this season. Additionally, 128 houses were damaged, and six livestock animals perished due to the relentless rains.

In the last 24 hours alone, 63 people lost their lives and 290 others were injured. The highest number of fatalities was reported in Lahore (15 deaths), followed by Faisalabad (9), Okara (9), Sahiwal (5), and Pakpattan (3). PDMA spokespersons stated that most of the fatalities were caused by the collapse of old and dilapidated building structures. Citizens are strongly urged to take precautionary measures during the rainy season,

especially those residing in structurally weak homes.

Director General PDMA confirmed that, under the directives of Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz, all injured individuals are being provided with top-quality medical care. He also assured that financial compensation will be extended to the families of the deceased in accordance with government policy. The report also warned of continued heavy rainfall across the province on Thursday and highlighted a flood alert due to rising water levels in rivers and streams.

Meanwhile, downpour in Rawalpindi has caused urban flooding and triggered a dangerous rise in water levels in Nullah Leh, prompting authorities to sound flood sirens at Gawalmandi Bridge and place all emergency services on high alert. According to WASA and district administration officials, water levels at the Gawalmandi point of Nullah Leh have surged to 15 feet, nearing the critical threshold of 20 feet. If this limit is crossed, evacuation of nearby residential areas will be initiated. At the Katarian Bridge, the water level has already reached 16 feet.

Due to continuous rainfall, low-lying areas across the city have been submerged, leaving hundreds of residents trapped in their homes with no immediate possibility of evacuation. Two persons – one of them a child – died after roof of a house collapsed in record-breaking 423ml downpours in Chakwal and its adjoining areas, with PDMA widespread rain forecast in parts of the country, media reported.

Due to the rain, flooding conditions emerged in many areas. A flood emergency was imposed in Chakwal, Kallar Kahar, and Choasidan Shah. Rescue operations were carried out in various areas. According to Rescue 1122, evacuation of citizens continued. Water entered buildings and

houses everywhere in the city. In heavy rain, two people, including a child, died when roof of a house collapsed. Officers of all relevant agencies, including Chakwal DC, Wasa and Rescue were instructed to remain in the field, with arrangements in hospitals to deal with any emergency. The Pakistan Army successfully carried out a helicopter rescue operation, saving the lives of individuals stranded in floodwaters caused by relentless monsoon rains across Punjab.

Amid rising flood conditions in multiple regions, the military swiftly launched emergency rescue operations to assist affected citizens. One such mission was conducted near Chakri Road, Rawalpindi, where a family had taken refuge on the rooftop of their home in Ladian village after being surrounded by floodwaters. The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) has predicted heavy rainfall across the country in the next 24 hours.

According to an NDMA spokesperson, Rawalpindi and Islamabad are likely to experience intermittent heavy rain for the next 24 to 48 hours, which may lead to a possible rise in water levels in Nullah Lai and flooding in low-lying areas. The spokesperson further stated that heavy rainfall is also expected in Lahore, Chakwal, Attock, Jhelum, Khushab, Sargodha, Gujrat, Gujranwala, Faisalabad, Sialkot, Narawal, Okara, Kasur, Sheikhupura, and Hafizabad. Due to the risk of intense rain, there is a possibility of urban flooding and overflow in rivers and streams in these cities.

Record 427 millimeters of rain, recorded in Chakwal and its suburbs in only 10 hours, led to flooding prompting the district administration to declare a rain emergency, while the death toll in rain-related incidents in the country during the entire monsoon season rose to 149.

Rain exposes 'Paris of Pakistan', says Saif

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Advisor to the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for Information and Public Relations, Barrister Dr. Saif, has said that Lahore is once again flooded, yet the so-called Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz is busy silencing critics instead of solving problems. He said that criticizing a "Form-47" Chief Minister has now become a crime. When a common citizen pointed out the reality, he was arrested and forced to record a statement in her favor – a move that completely backfired.

Barrister Dr. Saif said that instead of forcing people to praise her, Maryam Nawaz should learn to accept criticism and focus on improving her performance. Arresting a citizen just for criticizing the condition of Lahore after the rain and forcing him to record a video statement is an insult to democracy.

He added that even in the worst martial law days, such tactics were not used. During their recent visit to Lahore, Chief Minister Ali Amin Khan Gandapur and the KP cabinet saw the terrible state of the city's roads themselves. He said that due to the smell and filth, it has become difficult for people to even breathe in Lahore. Just a few hours of rain have exposed the reality behind Maryam Nawaz's claims of turning Lahore into "Paris."

Barrister Dr. Saif said Maryam Nawaz should take advice from Ali Amin Khan Gandapur on how real development is done. Despite being in power many times, the Sharif family has failed to improve Lahore. He said that giving relief to the public has never been their priority.

He added that Maryam Nawaz's TikTok videos tried to show that Punjab has become like London or Paris, but a few hours of rain exposed her false claims. The flooded streets and broken roads are proof of her failed promises. After the rain, people can't even leave their homes, with sewage overflowing and diseases spreading. Meanwhile, the form 47 Chief Minister sits safely in her glass palace, watching as people suffer.

Trump's visit to Pakistan not confirm

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Foreign Office spokesperson Shafqat Ali Khan has said that he is not aware of any possible visit by US President Donald Trump to Pakistan. Speaking to the media, he said that he was unaware of any such visit.

Earlier, reports had emerged suggesting that President Trump was expected to arrive in Islamabad on September 18, during which he would meet Pakistan's political and military leadership. According to a British news agency, if confirmed, this would mark the first visit by a US president to Pakistan in two decades. The agency also reported that President Trump is scheduled to visit the United Kingdom from September 17 to 19 at the invitation of King Charles.

11 PTI workers remanded

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: An Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) on Thursday extended the physical remand of 11 PTI workers arrested in Sangiani protest case.

ATC Judge Tahir Abbas Supra extended the physical remand of 11 PTI workers for four days. The accused were presented in the court by the police after completing their 3-day physical remand. Ali Bukhari, Sardar Muhammad Shubhishek Khan, and other lawyers appeared in the court on behalf of the accused.

Two sisters killed
F.P. Report

KARACHI: In a deadly incident in the metropolis, two women lost their lives and three others were injured when the roof of a residential building collapsed in the overcrowded inner-city Lyari area on Thursday. The unfortunate incident comes less than two weeks after a multi-storey residential building collapsed in the same area, killing 27 and injuring several others.

Dar, Afghan FM agree to remain engaged

Agreement on Pakistan, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan railway project signed in Kabul

KABUL (APP): Deputy Prime Minister/ Foreign Minister (DPM/FM), Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar on Thursday met with Acting Afghan Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi, where both leaders agreed to remain engaged to achieve full potential of regional economic development, including through realization of trans-regional connectivity projects.

The two sides called for strengthened efforts to maintain the momentum in bilateral relations and to expand cooperation in trade, transit and security domains to the mutual benefit of both peoples, a DPM's Office news release said.

Meanwhile, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, and Afghanistan have signed a Framework Agreement on the Joint Feasibility Study for the Uzbekistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan (UAP) Railway Project, marking a significant step toward regional connectivity and economic integration.

The signing ceremony took place in Kabul on Thursday, during a visit by Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, who represented the country at the trilateral

engagement. In a statement shared on X (formerly Twitter), Dar announced the signing and extended congratulations to all three nations. He specifically highlighted the agreement on the Naibabad-Kharlachi rail link, a critical segment of the broader UAP Railway Corridor.

"I congratulate the people and governments of Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Uzbekistan on the signing of the Framework Agreement on the Joint Feasibility Study for the Naibabad-Kharlachi rail link under the UAP Railway Corridor," Dar wrote. He also thanked the foreign ministers of Uzbekistan and Afghanistan for their continued support and collaboration, emphasizing that all sides remained closely engaged throughout the negotiation process to finalize the agreement. The UAP Railway Project is aimed at improving trade, connectivity, and economic cooperation between Central and South Asia by providing a vital transportation corridor through Afghanistan.

Pakistan, EU deepen strategic security, trade ties

BRUSSELS (APP): The European Union (EU) and Pakistan Thursday held the 10th Political Dialogue in Brussels covering key issues regarding EU-Pakistan bilateral cooperation, as well as regional and international issues, including multilateral cooperation.

However, both sides agreed to deepen dialogue and discussions on security-related issues. The EU and Pakistan reaffirmed their commitment to the implementation of Strategic Engagement Plan (SEP) signed in 2019. Both sides aim to further deepen cooperation in all areas covered under the SEP. The two sides reiterated their resolve to continue close engagement under the GSP+ framework, a Ministry of Foreign Affairs news release said.

They acknowledged the meaningful cooperation on various aspects of migration, aiming to hold the

third Comprehensive Migration and Mobility Dialogue later in 2025. Besides bilateral cooperation, both sides also exchanged views on regional and global issues.

The EU and Pakistan acknowledged the importance of multifaceted cooperation on security matters, including counter-terrorism and counter-narcotics. They condemned all forms of terrorism. Both sides agreed on the need for efforts based on dialogue and diplomacy in order to solve contentious issues and underscored the importance of upholding international law and the sanctity of international agreements/treaties.

The parties exchanged views on the situation in Ukraine as well as Jammu and Kashmir. Both sides stressed the need to find peaceful solutions to conflicts, in full respect of the principles of international

law and the UN Charter. They agreed on the urgent need to improve the humanitarian situation in Gaza. Both sides called for the resumption of a ceasefire, and expressed support for initiatives that contribute to a just, lasting, and comprehensive peace in Palestine in accordance with the two-state solution.

The two sides reaffirmed their aspiration to convene the 7th Strategic Dialogue in 2025, underscoring its importance in strengthening Pakistan-EU cooperation. They agreed to hold the next Political Dialogue meeting in 2026 in Islamabad. The EU delegation was headed by Olof Skoog, Deputy Secretary General of the European External Action Service and the Pakistani delegation by Amna Baloch, Foreign Secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan.



KABUL: Deputy Prime Minister, Senator Ishaq Dar exchanging views with Actig Interior Minister of Afghanistan, Sirajuddin Haqqani.

PA session convened for oath-taking on reserved seat

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A session of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Provincial Assembly has been scheduled for July 20 at 9:00 a.m. to administer oath to the members elected on reserved seats.

The Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Faisal Kareem, approved the summary sent by the Chief Minister in this regard. The session has been specifically called to fulfill the constitutional requirement of swearing in the newly nominated members on reserved seats.

According to official sources on Thursday, the Governor Secretariat had earlier instructed the Chief Minister to send a summary for convening the assembly session, based on the direc-

PML-N gives minority reserved seat to JUI-F

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Pakistan Muslim League (N) and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (F) have reached a mutual understanding regarding the minority seat instead of draw. Engr Amir Muqam, Federal Minister said that the decision was made through consultation between Prime Minister of Pakistan Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, JUI-F Central Ameer Maulana Fazlur Rehman, and both parties. Federal Minister and President of PML-N Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Engineer Amir Muqam in a statement here Thursday said that his party withdrew from the draw, and the seat was given to Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (F). He said despite being the major opposition party, PML-N is making a sacrifice by agreeing to unopposed senate elections in order to eliminate allegations of vote-buying in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. He said now the ball is in the court of the ruling party.

tions issued by the Supreme Court and a formal letter from the Election Commission. The move marks an important step toward completing the constitutional formation of the provincial legislature.



KARACHI: A view of dilapidated condition of building in city as Sindh Government announced action against old buildings.

Rhine-Ruhr 2025 FISU World University games opens

Pakistani contingent of 40 takes part with full spirit

Shahid Afridi

BERLIN: The Rhine-Ruhr 2025 FISU World University Games officially kicked off last evening with a vibrant and emotional opening ceremony at the Schauinsland-Reisen-Arena in Duisburg. The sold-out stadium filled with over 20,000 spectators came alive with thunderous applause, powerful emotions and a shared spirit as the games were declared open.

A 40-member Pakistani contingent is actively participating in the event. The students from Pakistan currently in Germany will compete in athletics, judo, taekwondo, swimming, table tennis and archery in both men's and women's categories. The delegation is being led by Director General Sports of the Higher Education Commission (HEC), Javed Ali Memon, while Director Sports of Peshawar University, Bahre Karam is also accompanying the team.

During the opening ceremony contingents from various countries took part in



the march-past creating a mesmerizing scene as the arena lit up with the colors of flags from around the world.

Over the next 12 days around 8,000 student-athletes from more than 2,000 universities across the globe will compete for medals. Of these approximately 1,500 athletes will compete in Berlin where a separate brief opening ceremony was held at the office of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia.

One of the most emotional moments of the ceremony occurred

when 1972 Olympic champion and 1970 Universiade gold medalist Heide Ecker-Rosendahl entered the stadium with the torch. She was welcomed with a standing ovation and passed the torch to six prominent athletes Sonja Greinacher, Sarah Wellbrock, Max Hartung, Mathias Mester, Nico Schlotterbeck and Alexander Wieczerszak. Together they lit the flame of the 2025 World University Games marking the official commencement of the global sporting event.

Investigation deepens into death of actress Humaira Asghar

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The mysterious death of actress and model Humaira Asghar, found deceased in her flat in the Defense area of Karachi, has prompted a thorough investigation by local authorities. The Provincial Police, led by DIG South Asad Raza, have included the actress's former housekeeper, building management, and watchman in their probe, as all were reportedly in contact with Asghar until October 2024.

According to investigators, Asghar's former housekeeper left her employment earlier in 2024. The absence of CCTV cameras outside and around the flat has led authorities to focus on questioning these individuals to gather more information. The police have also taken possession of

three keys to the main door of the flat, all found inside the residence, which was double-locked from the inside.

Preliminary findings suggest that Asghar may have been facing financial difficulties. Her last commercial shoot was in September 2024, and she was actively seeking work in October. However, an examination of her bank account, a current account with a private bank, revealed a balance of over Rs 398,000, with regular withdrawals of Rs 25,000 to Rs 50,000 via ATMs. This has led investigators to question earlier assumptions of financial distress.

Significant evidence was uncovered during the investigation, including utility bills and house rent slips up to May 2024, found inside the flat. Clothes were discovered in the wash-room tub of the room where Asghar's

body was found, next to the bedroom, with signs indicating they had been washed prior to her death. The balcony door in the same room was open, and the washroom window in the adjacent room was also ajar, possibly allowing the smell of the decomposing body to escape.

DIG Asad Raza noted that the body's odor suggested it had been decomposing for 5 to 40 days. The flat next to Asghar's had been vacant for an extended period, and her neighbors were absent during this time, which may explain why the smell went unnoticed. The watchman reportedly called Asghar three days after the suspected date of the incident, October 7, 2024, but received no response. A friend also attempted to contact her after that date, to no avail.

Obituary



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Haji Taj Ghafoor Khan, retired Deputy Secretary of the Home Department Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, passed away and was laid to rest on Thursday in Peshawar. He served with honesty and dedication, earning deep respect during his long civil service career.

He was the elder brother of Haji Parvez Akhtar (retired accountant, C&W Mardan) and father of Sartaj Anwar, Zartaj Anwar, and Muhammad Asif. He was also the uncle of Master Humayun Khan and maternal uncle of Dr. Abdul Ahad Yousafzai. The Qul will be held at Takht Bhai Public Park.

PPP women's wing meeting held

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Women's Wing Karachi has pledged to raise its voice for women's rights in the city. The group held its inaugural meeting at the Peoples Secretariat, presided over by President Dr. Shahida Rehmani.

Elected officials from every district of the Karachi Division attended the meeting. Dr. Rehmani conveyed well-wishes from the party leadership, including President Asif Ali Zardari, Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, and Women's Wing President Faryal Talpur. The message expressed good wishes for the new members and reiterated the commitment to addressing the challenges faced by women in Karachi.

Dr. Rehmani described the newly elected members as valuable assets to the PPP. She pledged to continue the struggle for women's empowerment, reflecting the vision of Bhutto Zardari and Talpur for the city. General Secretary Shaheena Sher Ali affirmed that the organization would strengthen its structure to extend the party's platform to the grassroots level. Deputy Information Secretary Syeda Tahseen Abidi declared that Karachi supports the PPP and that the political group truly represents its citizens.

Sindh govt starts preparations for 'Battle of Truth' drive



F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Sindh government has intensified preparations for organizing various events across the province in connection with the "Battle of Truth" campaign and Independence Day, August 14.

The Sindh government held a high-level meeting to ensure that the August 14 Independence Day celebrations across the province are magnificent, unique, and memorable. The meeting was chaired by Sindh Senior Minister and Provincial Minister for Information, Transport, and Mass Transit, Sharjeel Inam Memon.

Provincial Ministers Syed Nasir Hussain Shah, Saeed Ghani, Muhammad Bakhsh Mehar, Syed Zulfiqar Shah, Mayor of Karachi Murtaza Wahab, and other senior government officials were in attendance. Also present were Secretary Education Zahid Abbasi, Secretary Information Nadeem-ur-Rehman Memon, Secretary Aqaf and Zakat Mureed Hussain Rahmoon, Secretary Local Government Dr. Waseem Shamshad Ali, Secretary Transport Asad Zamin, Secretary Sports Munawar Ali Mahesar, and Secretary Women Development Abdul Rashid Zardari. The mayors of Hyderabad, Sukkur, Larkana, Mirpurkhas, and Shaheed Benazirabad joined the meeting via video link.

The sole agenda of the meeting was the celebration of August 14, which was discussed in terms of organizing events on a focused yet extensive scale in a centralized and distinctive manner. Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon announced that Independence Day events would commence from August 1 and will continue until August 15-or maybe the entire month of August.

He repeated that Operation Banyan Marsus has to be incorporated in the celebrations, branding province-wide has to be conducted, and there has to be a grand and central program per district. He also included that branding should be a part of fisheries rallies, family festivals, shopping malls, and malls. The atmosphere should be covered with festival colors through illumination and national songs. There would be an advisory on branding in shopping malls and malls. National flags should be hoisted on government vehicles, public transport, and prominent public places. Additionally, a continuous tree plantation campaign should be launched. He also proposed that the main event be held at the Quid-e-Azam's mausoleum in Karachi. During the meeting, Minister for Energy, Development, and Planning Syed Nasir Hussain Shah emphasized that the Independence Day celebrations should be dignified and impactful to further promote the spirit of national unity and patriotism among the people. He added that the achievements made under Banyan Marsus are a shining example of the protection and development of the beloved homeland and must be prominently highlighted before the public.

Syed Nasir Hussain Shah stressed that full public participation should be ensured in the celebrations, and the younger generation must be educated about national history and the sacrifices made for the country. He suggested organizing special programs, cultural exhibitions, seminars, and torch relays as part of the national festivities. The celebrations, he said, should be rich and impactful, with a strong focus on highlighting the sacrifices made during Banyan Marsus. Minister for Labor and Local Government Saeed Ghani emphasized that the celebrations should be carefully planned, taking into account the expected rains and the observance of Chehlum. He suggested that messages from national heroes and prominent personalities be shared with the public, blood donation camps be organized, and a uniform dress code be implemented across all educational institutions.

Speaking at the meeting, Minister for Sports, Youth Affairs, and Agriculture Muhammad Bakhsh Mehar said that celebrations and narrative-building campaigns should begin immediately. He announced that there would be two-day sporting competitions, such as cricket, hockey, badminton, volleyball, taekwondo, and local sports like Kodi Kodi and Malakhara. He also stated that cycle racing to Mazar-e-Quaid and the dispatch of video messages would begin from today. He informed the meeting that the Sindh government would organize a marathon in Karachi on August 10, whereas a cycle race and a dinky kart race would be organized on August 14. The August 14 dinky kart race would run from Neti Jetty Bridge to Frere Hall, whereas the cycle race would run from Frere Hall to Mazar-e-Quaid, according to Sardar Muhammad Bakhsh Mehar.

Sports Minister Muhammad Bakhsh Mehar further added that a marathon would be organized from Nishan Pakistan to Do Darya along the Karachi beach. He further stated that various sporting events-like cricket, football, boxing, throwball, athletics, badminton, and taekwondo-would be organized at 97 locations in 30 districts of Sindh.

Sardar Muhammad Bakhsh Mehar said that cultural games have also been specially included in these events, featuring games such as Kabaddi, Malakhara, volleyball, Vanjh Vati, and Gali Danda. He added that separate events will be organized for special children, ensuring that the celebrations bring joy to every community and that the spirit of Independence Day is celebrated grandly across the province.

Speaking at the meeting, Minister for Culture and Tourism Syed Zulfiqar Shah said that trucks and buses should be branded with Independence Day themes, and a specially branded Independence Train should run from Karachi to Thar. He also suggested assigning the responsibility of tree plantation to the union councils, tehsil, and district administrations. Mayor Karachi Murtaza Wahab expressed his full readiness to cooperate with every department for the Independence Day celebrations. He stated that Karachi's parks and other public spaces would be made available for the events and urged all Pakistanis to proudly display the national flag on their homes and vehicles.

Murad inaugurates SPSC Computer-Based Testing Lab

F.P. Report

HYDERABAD: In a significant step towards modernising recruitment processes, Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah inaugurated the newly established Computer-Based Testing (CBT) Lab at the Sindh Public Service Commission (SPSC), equipped with 500 tablets, boasting a remarkable daily testing capacity of 2,000 candidates, making SPSC the first institution in the province to implement computer-based testing.

This innovative approach aims to enhance transparency, minimise human error, and provide instant results. At the inauguration ceremony, which was hosted by Chairman SPSC Mohammad Waseem and attended by Provincial Ministers Sharjeel Inam Memon and Jam Khan Shoro, the Chief Minister unveiled the plaque and participated in a mock test, achieving an impressive score of 18 out of 20. Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon also took and passed the mock test. The immediate display of the test results underscored the efficiency of the new system.

Addressing the inauguration ceremony, Chief Minister Murad Shah commended the SPSC for its commitment to a transparent and merit-based recruitment system, stating, "SPSC's modern system is exemplary. It is crucial to appoint the most capable individuals to improve our public institutions." He further praised the initiative to digitise the examination process, describing it as a commendable move towards enhancing recruitment procedures and ensuring meritocracy.

Murad Shah also visited the under-construction SPSC Secretariat Complex, where he was briefed on the project's progress by Secretary Works Nawaz Soho. The complex, which has an estimated cost of Rs. 2,517.430 million, has thus far utilised Rs. 2,257.242 million. For the fiscal year 2025-26, an additional Rs. 258.400 million is required, and Mr Shah instructed relevant authorities to release these necessary funds promptly.

The new complex will feature a basement, ground floor, and five additional floors, housing various facilities including offices, an auditorium, a library, a cafeteria, and a prayer area. The digital library will accommodate 300 candidates simultaneously, while the dedicated auditorium on the third floor will facilitate examinations, programs, workshops, and training sessions, reducing reliance on external venues.

Expressing satisfaction with the construction progress, Mr Shah directed that the project be completed without delay, emphasising that such infrastructure improvements are vital for strengthening institutions and maintaining transparency in recruitment processes. In addition to the inauguration, the Chief Minister received a briefing on SPSC's performance and administrative reforms, noting that over 100 employees have been promoted under the current administration, alongside enhancements in salaries and office decor. He acknowledged the historical challenges faced by SPSC and praised Chairman Mohammad Waseem for his dedication and transparent leadership.

"I want the best officers in every provincial department, and that can only happen through a strong and transparent Commission," he asserted, directing SPSC to expedite testing for doctors, engineers, and other professionals. Chief Minister Murad Shah, in conclusion, remarked, "The establishment of the CBT lab is a major step towards transparency and efficiency," reinforcing his commitment to improving public service recruitment across the province.

Work on new road projects to be started on both banks of Pinyari Canal: Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah has stated that measures to improve urban management in the city, including removing illegal encroachments by eight-storey buildings along Auto Bhan Road, have been taken and clarified that approvals for those buildings were granted during previous administrations, not under the

current leadership.

Accompanied by Provincial Ministers Sharjeel Inam Memon and Jam Khan Shoro, as well as Mayor Kashif Shoro, just after visiting the rain-affected areas of Hyderabad, the chief minister addressed a press conference at the Mayor's office. Shah revealed that three more areas in Hyderabad still face similar issues with unauthorised construction, which are yet to be addressed. "We are fully aware of who contributed to the deterioration of this city," he remarked, hinting at previous governments' negligence.

The CM expressed confidence that a noticeable difference in Hyderabad's urban landscape will soon be visible due to the focused efforts of the current administration and the newly elected PPP mayor. He reaffirmed that the trust of the people will be honoured through genuine and lasting development.

The Chief Minister said, "Hyderabad is a low-lying district and relies entirely on pumping stations for drainage, as water cannot be drained by gravity. Electricity outages during rainfall worsen the situation." The CM mentioned that he had already instructed HESCO to maintain power supply during rain and commended the Hyderabad Municipal Corporation, elected representatives, and district administration for their effective response.

Mr. Shah stated that some areas still have standing water, but pumping efforts are ongoing. He also recalled his familiarity with the city, saying, "I've known Hyderabad closely since 2005-2006 when I travelled through the city in a boat during monsoon." Murad Shah emphasised that cleanup efforts were underway, low-lying areas still had water accumulation, and pumping stations and sewerage drains were being cleared. He added that the Hyderabad administration even operates the railway department's pumping stations.

Road Projects: The chief minister announced that Auto Bhan Road Phases I and II will be completed by the end of July. Phase III will be finished by February next year. A Ring Road is also

being developed to connect three flyovers, and the scheme is nearly complete.

Discussing upcoming projects, the CM said work is ongoing on filter plants in Latifabad No. 4 and Qasimabad. New ADP projects are also underway near Hala Naka, and Niaz Stadium has been rehabilitated by the Sindh government.

PSL matches: The CM shared that discussions have been held with PCB Chairman Mohsin Naqvi to host PSL matches in Hyderabad next year. Wheelchair Cricket Asian Championship matches will be held in Karachi and Hyderabad. Six international teams are scheduled to play at Niaz Stadium in September 2025, and a new public park, D Park, will be inaugurated in August. "We cannot stop rain, but we can ensure immediate drainage. Even developed countries face similar challenges, as seen recently in New York and New Jersey."

Hyderabad a Top Priority: Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah reaffirmed his government's commitment to the development of Sindh's second-largest city. He emphasised that Hyderabad holds a central place in the Pakistan People's Party's (PPP) development agenda.

"Hyderabad is the second biggest city in Sindh, and its people have placed their trust in the PPP," the CM said. He praised the people of Hyderabad for their continued support and trust in the PPP leadership, especially in the recent local body elections, which led to the appointment of a PPP Mayor.

Murad Shah stated that despite limited financial resources, the PPP government considers Hyderabad a top priority. "Resources may be limited, but serving the people of Hyderabad remains our foremost responsibility," he said.

Visit: The Chief Minister inspected various key areas, including Civil Lines, Thandi Sarak, Auto Bhan Road, pumping stations, and the railway underpass to assess the post-rain situation. He also visited low-lying areas such as Fatah Chowk, Makki Shah Road, and Qazi

Qayoom Road in Qasimabad.

During the briefing, the Commissioner informed that a cloud-burst on July 14 resulted in 107mm of rain in just one hour. Latifabad received 91mm, and Qasimabad recorded 55mm of rainfall. The CM was told that 90 percent of the rainwater was drained within 10 hours. The CM instructed the administration to speed up work on under-construction roads and ensure immediate drainage of water from remaining areas. Shah expressed sorrow over the death of a citizen during the downpour and directed officials to prioritise public safety and rapid rehabilitation.

Abdul Sattar Edhi Flyover and Pinyari Canal Projects: CM Murad Shah also visited the under-construction Abdul Sattar Edhi Flyover, where he directed concerned authorities to accelerate construction activities. He was briefed about the new road projects being constructed on both banks of the Pinyari Canal, which together cost Rs. 2200 million.

The right bank road will be 7.40 km long, stretching from Hyderabad Bypass to Ganghara Mori, and the left bank road will be 9.80 km long, running from Phuleli Mori Regulator to Ganghara Mori to Hyderabad Bypass. These roads aim to reduce traffic congestion and enhance the city's infrastructure and aesthetics. The CM emphasised ensuring timely and quality completion of the projects with proper monitoring and transparency. Murad Shah also pointed out the challenges posed by encroachments in the construction of Abdul Sattar Edhi Road and called for resolving these issues.

Murad takes stern notice of 3 tragic incidents in Nawabshah, Lyari, Khairpur: Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah has expressed deep sorrow and concern over three separate tragic incidents that occurred in Lyari, Nawabshah, and Khairpur. Taking immediate notice, he directed the concerned authorities to take strict action and ensure justice for

the victims.

Lyari building collapse: Expressing deep grief over the loss of lives caused by the collapse of a dilapidated building in Lyari, Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah directed that the injured be provided with the best possible medical care. He also sought a comprehensive report from the Commissioner Karachi and instructed the Sindh Building Control Authority (SBCA) to take swift action against dangerous structures in the city. "All hazardous buildings must undergo a structural audit and be vacated without delay," he said, adding that human lives are invaluable and no negligence in this regard would be tolerated.

Commissioner Karachi Hassan Naqvi told the CM that on his instructions, 42 dilapidated buildings have been vacated and work on others was in progress. Nawabshah firing incident: The Chief Minister strongly condemned the incident of firing over a land dispute in Nawabshah that resulted in the death of six individuals. Calling it "intolerable," he ordered the Inspector General of Police to submit a detailed report and ensure the immediate arrest of those involved.

"No one is above the law. Strict action must be taken against the perpetrators," he said. The Chief Minister also expressed heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families and assured them of justice. Khairpur road accident: Chief Minister Murad Shah also expressed sorrow over the tragic road accident in Khairpur, where a passenger van overturned, resulting in the death of four people and injuries to ten others.

Offering condolences to the families of the deceased, he instructed the administration to provide quality medical treatment to the injured and sought a detailed report from the Commissioner Sukkur. According to initial reports, the accident occurred near Miskeenpur on the National Highway due to a tyre burst. The Chief Minister directed the district administration to extend all possible support to the affected families.



PESHAWAR: Federal Minister and President of PML-N Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Engineer Amir Muqam talking to media after meeting with JUI-F delegation.

Steps taken for welfare of masses: Pir Musavir

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Special Assistant to the Chief Minister on Forests, Environment, Wildlife, and Climate Change, Pir Musavir Khan has said that practical measures are being taken for the development, prosperity, and welfare of the people of the province, and all available resources are being utilized for this purpose.

He stated that the timely completion of development projects is the government's top priority.

He expressed these views on Thursday during a meeting with people from of the province at his office in Peshawar. On this occasion, people informed the Special Assistant about their issues, upon which he issued immediate instructions to the concerned authorities.

Speaking to the public on this occasion, Special Assistant Pir Musavir Khan said that, in line with the vision of founding chairman Imran Khan and under the leadership of the Chief Minister, the process of reforms in government departments is ongoing, and public services are being delivered at their doorstep.

He said that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has a public-oriented government, and his office will always remain open for resolving people's problems.

The Special Assistant urged the public to actively participate in the ongoing monsoon tree plantation campaign across the province, as its success is only possible through public cooperation. He emphasized that the promotion and protection of forests is our collective responsibility of all of us.

KP launches first forest carbon credit mapping report

PESHAWAR (APP):The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) government has officially launched the province's first Forest Carbon Credit Mapping Report in a landmark event held at the Chief Minister's House in Peshawar.

Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur formally unveiled the report during a special ceremony attended by senior government officials and partner organizations.

According to official details, the mapping — carried out using advanced technology — has identified ten potential forest-based carbon credit projects spanning 2.2 million hectares across the province.

These projects have the capacity to absorb more than 400 million tons of carbon and are expected to generate an estimated \$4 billion in revenue. Additionally, the initiatives could create up to 50,000 green jobs.

Speaking at the event, CM Gandapur hailed the mapping as a historic step in the province's forestry sector.

He praised the KP Forest Department and partner institutions for their contributions, saying, "This mapping will lay the foundation for the province's participation in the global carbon credit market and provide access to innovative financial tools such as green finance."

He emphasized that the initiative represents a comprehensive model for KP's environmental, economic, and social development.

Gandapur noted that KP's forests constitute 46% of Pakistan's total forested area and have the potential to absorb 50% of the country's carbon emissions.

He stated that the province could earn up to \$100 million annually through carbon credit markets. The current provincial government, he said, is taking serious measures to fully utilize this potential.

He also called on the public to actively participate in forest conservation, encouraging citizens to plant trees on unused lands and around their homes.

"Government efforts alone are not enough; the people must also play their part in protecting and expanding our forests," he concluded.

Minister visits Revenue Academy

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Minister for Revenue and Estate, Nazir Ahmad Abbasi, visited the Revenue Academy in Hayatabad, Peshawar on Thursday. On this occasion, Senior Member Board of Revenue (SMBR) Javed Marwat and Director Land Records Basharat Hussain also accompanied him. The provincial minister inspected various offices and departments of the Revenue Academy, including the Project Director Computerization of Land Records (Settled Districts), classrooms, and IT labs. During the visit, the Project Director gave the revenue minister a detailed briefing on the ongoing process of computerization and settlement of land records in the province. At the conclusion of the visit, Minister Nazir Ahmad Abbasi gave instructions and shared his suggestions for the improvement of the revenue system in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

UN Women launches Digital startup roundtable

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: With the support of the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), UN Women Pakistan launched the first event of its Digital Startup Roundtable Series in Islamabad. The event convened thought leaders, innovators, policy experts, development partners, and aspiring young women entrepreneurs to explore the transformative power of digital skills in driving women's economic empowerment.

Under the Digitalization for Women's Economic Empowerment (D4WEE) project, the roundtable served as a dynamic platform for collaboration, dialogue, and innovation. The event aligned with the shared vision of UN Women and KOICA to promote gender equality and inclusive development through technology and entrepreneurship.

It focused on the unique challenges and opportunities faced by young women in Pakistan's digital ecosystem and emphasized the importance of fostering an enabling environment for their participation and leadership in the tech sector.

"In today's rapidly evolving digital economy, leaving women behind is not an option," said Jacqui Ketunuti, Deputy Country Representative, UN Women Pakistan. "We are working towards a future where young women shape the tech landscape, lead innovations, and take their ideas from local to global. But vision alone is not enough - we call on all partners to step up, invest in women, open doors to mentorship, and amplify every voice. Only then can we unlock the full potential of Pakistan's digital future."

Echoing this sentiment, the Sodam Baek, Deputy Country Director, KOICA Pakistan emphasized KOICA's long-term commitment to promoting sustainable development through inclusive innovation in these words, "KOICA is committed to investing in projects that empower women and promote sustainable development. Our collaboration with UN Women is rooted in our belief that technology, when made accessible and inclusive, can be a powerful equalizer. Through this partnership, we aim to equip young women with the tools they need to succeed in the digital economy."

Adding a national perspective, Sayyed Ahmad Masud, National Incubation Centre Islamabad highlighted the importance of women's participation in shaping the country's digital future.

"Digital skills are the cornerstone of progress in today's world. By empowering women to embrace technology, we are not only enabling individual success but also fostering national growth. Women's participation in the digital sector is vital to Pakistan's future," he stated.

The event featured two key thematic sessions addressing barriers and opportunities for women in the digital economy. The first session focused on policy and infrastructure, bringing together policymakers, digital experts, and development practitioners to discuss the structural challenges that limit women's access to technology. Participants explored ways to strengthen digital infrastructure, integrate gender-responsive indicators into national e-governance reforms, and expand access in underserved regions.

The second session centered on mentorship and market access, offering a collaborative space to brainstorm strategies for supporting women-led startups. Discussions emphasized the importance of mentorship, business development services, access to finance, and procurement opportunities. Speakers shared practical insights on how to connect women entrepreneurs with both local and international markets and called for ecosystem stakeholders to actively support underrepresented women in tech.

The Digital Startup Roundtable Series is organized as part of the KOICA-funded Digitalization for Women's Economic Empowerment (D4WEE) project, which aims to enhance the participation of women aged 18 to 35 in the technology sector through digital skills training, mentorship, and private sector engagement. Implemented across Lahore, Faisalabad, Multan, Mardan, Peshawar, and Swabi, the project seeks to bridge the digital divide in Pakistan and ensure women have equal access to opportunities in the country's evolving digital landscape.



Court confirm former DG Health's interim bail

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: The Anti-Corruption Court Peshawar has confirmed the interim bail of former Director General (DG) Health, Dr. Shaukat Ali, and restrained the Anti-Corruption department from arresting him, on Thursday.

Dr. Shaukat Ali's lawyer, Babar Khan Yousafzai, argued that the had not benefited from the alleged dual employment and double salary of doctors at the DHO office in Dir. He claimed that Dr. Shaukat Ali had refused to bypass merit in the supply of medicines to government hospitals, which led to a mafia turning against him.

The court was informed that an inquiry had been conducted, which found that the companies involved had not made the supplies. The counsel Babar Khan Yousafzai advocate also stated that Dr. Shaukat Ali had obtained a stay order from the High Court, but the Anti-Corruption department had still registered a new case against him.

After hearing the arguments, the court confirmed Dr. Shaukat Ali's interim bail and restrained the Anti-Corruption department from arresting him. The court noted that the allegations against Dr. Shaukat Ali seemed to be part of a political vendetta.

The senior prosecutor for the Anti-Corruption department argued that the FIR was registered based on an inquiry, and if Dr. Shaukat Ali was innocent, it would be proven during the trial. Therefore, the prosecutor requested the court to dismiss the bail application.

PHC directs govt to rebuilt Swabi police station

The Peshawar High Court (PHC) has directed the provincial government to rebuild the Swabi Police Station, which was destroyed in a bomb blast.

The court disposed of the petition after issuing the directives, on Thursday.

A bomb blast occurred at the Swabi Police Station in September 2024, resulting in casualties and damage to the building. Despite the passage of 10 months, the police station has not been rebuilt.

The petitioner's lawyer, Muhammad Hamdan, argued that the absence of a functional police station violates Articles 3, 4, and 9A of the Constitution. He stated that police officials are currently operating from separate quarters without proper office space, which compromises their ability to provide security to citizens.

PHC divisional bench comprising Justice Waqar Ahmad and Justice Sadiq Ali, directed the Inspector General of Police and other respondents to rebuild the police station with modern facilities on an emergency basis. The court disposed of the petition after issuing the directives.

PHC orders police to produce son for torturing father

The Peshawar High Court (PHC) divisional bench comprising of Justice Sahibzada Asadullah and Justice Farah Jamshed has directed the police to arrest a son accused of assaulting his father and produce him before the court on 21 July.

The father, Hidayatullah, appeared before the court and alleged that his son demanded money from him, and when he refused to give more money, his son assaulted him, resulting in injuries. The father requested the court to punish his son and send him to jail.

Justice Sahebzada Asadullah observed that a parent can better address their child's issues and expressed concerns about the potential consequences of sending the son to jail.

Despite this, the court directed the police to arrest the son and produce him before the court on 21 July.

PAF contingent arrives in UK to participate in RIAT-2025

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Contingent of the Pakistan Air Force comprising state-of-the-art JF-17 Thunder Block-III fighter aircraft and the C-130 Hercules transport aircraft, has landed at the Royal Air Force Base Fairford, United Kingdom, to participate in the prestigious Royal International Air Tattoo - 2025.

PAF's participation in RIAT, one of the world's largest military airshows, underscores Pakistan Air Force's commitment to showcasing its professional excellence, operational capability and the indigenous strength of its aviation industry. Adding to the operational significance of this international deployment, Pakistan Air Force's JF-17 Thunder Block-III fighters executed successful Air-to-Air Refuelling operations enroute to United Kingdom with the support of a PAF IL-78 aerial refuelling tanker. The intricate refuelling operation demonstrated PAF's long-range operational capabilities and the proficiency of its air and ground crew in conducting extended operations beyond national borders. JF-17 Block-III is an EASA Radar and Long Range BVR equipped 4.5 generation multi-role fighter aircraft which is capable of undertaking wide variety of combat missions bolstering airpower application in the face of contemporary challenges thereby strengthening national security. There is a palpable sense of enthusiasm across the United Kingdom following the recent Pakistan India conflict, as aviation enthusiasts and defence observers were eagerly looking forward to the arrival of the Pakistan Air Force's JF-17 Thunder Block-III.

The aircraft's combat-proven capabilities and operational excellence have garnered significant global attention, making its appearance at RIAT a highly anticipated highlight in the aerospace and defence community.

In line with RIAT's annual tradition of themed artistic displays, PAF C-130 Hercules has been adorned with an exclusive livery inspired by this year's theme, "Eyes in the Skies." The captivating design symbolizes vigilance, situational awareness and the technological edge maintained by modern air forces in ensuring global security. The striking artwork is expected to be a center of attraction, reflecting Pakistan Air Force's creativity and operational heritage.

The participation of PAF's advanced fighter aircraft and artistically painted C-130 Hercules in RIAT-2025 is aimed at fostering mutual understanding, sharing aviation experiences and enhancing PAF's image as a modern, technologically advanced air force contributing to global peace and security.



Plant for Pakistan: A green shield against floods, climate change

PESHAWAR (APP): For many Pakistani youth, government employment remains a dream but for 26-year-old Abdul Qadar, a graduate from Peshawar, turning to plants proved to be more than just a livelihood rather became a mission of climate resilience and economic sustainability. "I applied for several government jobs after graduation, but lack of professional experience held me back," he told APP at his bustling nursery in Tamab Farm, a hub of plant trade in Peshawar.

"The pain of unemployment, especially for a married man like me, was unbearable. But with support from my father, I started this nursery business in 2019 and never looked back."

With two trucks unloading thousands of ornamental and fruit plants brought in from Pathoki, Punjab province, Qadar's nursery is thriving, particularly during the monsoon season when demand for the greenery soars in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

"This is the peak season as the government and private buyers, NGOs, even farmers and local government representatives, all want saplings for monsoon plantation," he said, highlighting his preference for the government clients due to better profit margins compared to the general public.

But the nursery business was not without risk. Torrential rains, flash floods, and plant diseases can wipe out months of efforts of the plants sellers. "We faced huge losses during the 2022 floods and struggled hard to recover," he recalled. "Floodwaters of river Bara damaged my nursery, and many precious plants were destroyed."

The recent flooding in Swat has become a recurring threat not just to plant nurseries, but to human lives, land, and livelihoods. The recent River Swat's tragedy that claimed lives of 18 tourists on a broad day light may have been averted if whopping plantations made in Kalam, Bahrain and Oshu valleys.

Hussain Khan, a local landowner at Nowshera lost two kanal of fertile land to the River Kabul during floods. "It was devastating for my family," he said. "Now I have planted Shisham, Poplar and other canopy trees on my lands to control soil erosion and protect it from the River."

KMU conducts allied health entry test

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR :Khyber Medical University (KMU), Peshawar, successfully conducted the first Centralized Admission Test in indoor halls for admissions into Pharm-D, Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT), BS Nursing, and various Allied Health Sciences programs.

The test was held simultaneously across 17 centres of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Islamabad. A total of 10,150 male and female candidates appeared in the test, reflecting not only the growing trust of students and parents in KMU but also a rising awareness and interest in the diverse fields of Allied Health Sciences.

The test was conducted at multiple examination centers across different districts. In Peshawar alone, four centers accommodated a total of 3,500 candidates, while 135 students appeared from the KMU Institute of Health Sciences in Islamabad. Additionally, 412 candidates participated from Hazara, 1,524 from Swat, 573 from Lower Dir, 306 From Malakand, 95 from Haripur, 430 from Swabi, 525 from Bannu, 374 from Kohat, 282 from Dera Ismail Khan, 176 from Kurram (Parachinar), and 658 from Chitral. On this occasion, Vice Chancellor KMU, Prof. Dr. Zia Ul Haq, stated that the overwhelming participation of candidates reflects that the younger generation is no longer confined to traditional medical professions alone, but is increasingly drawn to fields like Pharmacy, Physiotherapy, Nursing, and other Allied Health Sciences.

He emphasized that the healthcare system is a comprehensive structure where all supporting disciplines hold equal significance and play a vital role in building an effective healthcare delivery system. Prof. Dr. Zia Ul Haq further announced that a second centralized admission test will be organized next month for those students who, for any genuine reason or technical difficulty, could not participate in the first test. The goal is to ensure equal opportunities for all talented and interested candidates. He also shared that the results of the current test will be announced within the next two to three days and will be available on KMU's official website: <http://cat.kmu.edu.pk>. The transparent and well-organized execution of the admission test has been widely appreciated by students, parents, and academic circles alike.

The arrangements and facilities provided at the exam centers were termed satisfactory, reflecting KMU's administrative efficiency and professional capability. This initiative is a significant step toward enhancing the quality of health education in the province, attracting talented youth to modern scientific disciplines, and laying the foundation for a robust and integrated healthcare system in the future.





In brief

Milk vendor shot killed
Syed Waliullah Shah

NOWSHERA: A milk vendor, Fazal Amin, was shot dead inside his shop in Hakimabad, Nowshera, in front of his brother, son, and nephew. The suspects, Abdul Rab and his son Hars, fled the scene after committing the crime. According to the FIR lodged by the victim's brother, Wazir Khan, the incident occurred when Abdul Rab and his son Hars arrived at the shop and opened fire on Fazal Amin, causing fatal injuries. The motive behind the murder is reportedly an old rivalry. The police have started investigating the case, and efforts are being made to apprehend the suspects. The victim's family members were present at the scene but were unable to intervene due to being unarmed.

Protest against power cuts
F.P. Report

SHANGLA: The residents of Shangla District have taken to the streets to express their frustration and anger against the prolonged and excessive power outages plaguing their area. Despite generating 85 megawatts of electricity from the Khan Khwar Dam, Shangla faces power outages exceeding 12 hours, causing immense difficulties for the residents. The situation is further aggravated by the fact that Shangla only requires 6-7 megawatts of electricity to meet its local needs. Residents are struggling to access clean water due to the lack of electricity, which affects the functioning of water supply systems. The power outages have brought local businesses to a standstill, causing significant economic losses. The lack of electricity has also affected the local agriculture, with thousands of kanals of agricultural land lying barren. The residents of Shangla are demanding that the authorities take immediate action to address the power crisis. The residents want an end to the discriminatory treatment meted out to Shangla, ensuring that the district receives its fair share of electricity. The residents urged the authorities to upgrade the existing power infrastructure to ensure a stable and reliable power supply. The residents are urging WAPDA and other relevant authorities to review their policies and ensure that Shangla receives its rightful share of electricity.

Honor killing rocks Bolan

BOLAN (PPI): Two individuals, a male and a female, were fatally shot in an apparent honor killing in the Goth Azmat Bhag area of Bolan, within the jurisdiction of the Levies Station Bhag on Thursday. Levies officials reported the victims were shot and killed. Their remains were transported to a local hospital for medico-legal procedures and subsequently released to their families. The Bhag Police Station is currently investigating the incident.

Section 144 imposed in Dadu
F.P. Report

HYDERABAD: The Commissioner has imposed section 144 around examination centers in district Dadu from July 22 to August 11, 2025. According to a handout issued on Thursday, during this period, entry of the general public will be restricted in the mentioned area, and only candidates with valid admit cards and authorized staff will be allowed access.

GOC Kohat hosts Kurram, Hangu tribesmen jirga



F.P. Report

KOHAT: A high-level Grand Jirga was held at Tall Scouts Headquarters on the law and order situation in Kurram and Hangu districts which besides the GOC 9-Div Kohat Major General Zulfiqar Ali Bhatti, Commissioner Kohat Division Syed Motasim Billah Shah, Commandant Tall Scouts, Deputy Commissioners and DPOs of Kurram and Hangu districts, was also attended by the civil and military officers, elders of various tribal, Ulama and political and social figures of both the districts.

Detailed discussions were held on the establishment of law and order in the region, mutual harmony and a joint

action plan against miscreants in the Jirga.

On this occasion, the elders while expressing their full confidence in the state institutions, assured all kinds of support and announced to stand by the state for the establishment of lasting peace in the region. GOC Kohat, in his address that it is the need of the hour for the people and the state institutions to be on the same page for the establishment of peace. He declared that the miscreants will not be allowed to succeed in their nefarious intentions under any circumstances.

The Commissioner Kohat while referring to the developmental works raised by the elders, said that the

provincial government is spending huge amounts on various developmental projects in these districts and many important projects have been put forward in the FY 2025-26.

He, however said that a peaceful environment is must to bring the development works to a logical end and the executing institutions and contractors can continue their work without any fear or danger. He said that the elders have a very crucial role in this regard and the government must be fully supported. At the end, emphasis was placed on establishing lasting peace in the region, further strengthening development initiatives and inter-district cooperation.

Terrorists blew up gas pipeline in Lakki Marwat

F.P. Report

LAKKI MARWAT: Terrorists blew up a gas pipeline with a homemade bomb in the Torwah area of Lakki Marwat district. Police said that an improvised explosive device (IED) planted along the pipeline exploded at midnight, damaging the gas infrastructure and halting supply to Punjab. Police personnel and bomb disposal squad experts reached the site and launched an investigation.

Meanwhile, students, civil society activists and employees of the forest and revenue departments planted more than six hundred

fruit saplings in a day on the premises of Akram Khan Durrani School and College in Bannu on Wednesday. Deputy Commissioner Muhammad Fahim inaugurated the mass plantation activity by sowing a citrus plant.

Additional assistant commissioners Faridullah and Nawab Khan and divisional forest officer Shah Fahad also took part in the plantation activity. The deputy commissioner said on the occasion that the southern district with fertile land had various opportunities for tree plantation drives.

"It is the responsibility of every citizen to take

proper care of fruit plants to prevent them from being withered", he maintained. He called upon youths to take active part in the tree plantation campaign and grow more and more fruit and indigenous plants in their respective areas.

"This year the district administration with support of the forest department is sowing fruit plants on the special directives of the provincial government", he added, saying that the tree plantation drives will make the district clean, green and pollution-free, besides providing people with a healthy and environment-friendly environment.

Monsoon preparedness review meeting held

F.P. Report

TOBA TEK SINGH: In line with Punjab Chief Minister's relief vision, a meeting of the District Emergency Board was held at the DC Office Committee Room to review preparedness for monsoon rains and potential flood scenarios.

The session was chaired by Deputy Commissioner Muhammad Naeem Sandhu and attended by heads of district departments, while assistant commissioners from all tehsils joined via video link. During the meeting, the District Emergency Officer of Rescue 1122 gave a detailed briefing on the current monsoon situation and the agency's operational readiness.

Officials from municipal bodies briefed on drainage operations, deployment of machinery and emergency preparedness. It was informed that monsoon camps have been established across all tehsils and desilting of stormwater drains has been completed. All disposal stations in the district are currently functional. The DC instructed that standby generators be ensured at all disposal sites to prevent any disruption in drainage during power outages.

He emphasized the constant presence of staff and machinery at underpasses to avoid inconvenience to commuters during heavy rainfall. The SDO of the Irrigation Department confirmed that the water level in River Ravi remains normal and there is no imminent threat of flooding. Meanwhile, the WAPDA SDO briefed the forum on power supply continuity and load management plans during rains. The Deputy Commissioner directed all departments to launch a public awareness campaign to prevent inci-

dents of electrocution during the monsoon season.

Representatives from Rescue 1122, Municipal Services, Health, WAPDA, Irrigation, Communication & Works (C&W), Civil Defence, Agriculture, Environment and Information departments were present at the meeting. DC Muhammad Naeem Sandhu instructed all departments to remain on high alert, strengthen interdepartmental coordination, and ensure field presence, stating that the district administration is fully prepared to tackle any emergency and provide timely relief to the public.

Senior lawyer Rana Azam new book launched: District bar association applauded its senior member, a well known intellectual and writer advocate Rana Azam in launching ceremony of his book "Relevance of Marxism in present scenario: Ideological debate in Pakistan and global south" held in bar room.

Speakers including the DBA president Mehr Rab Nawaz Daduana emphasised on importance of combating terrorism, feudalism and inhuman character of capitalism. They said Toba Tek Singh is a district that is known for struggle of left wing workers for the rights of workers and peasants which continued in 1960s and early 1970s and was named as Leningrad of Pakistan where a Bengali leader, Moolana Bahshani had presided historic peasant conference in the undivided Pakistan just a year before starting the unfortunate military operation in former East Pakistan that proved the final nail in the dismemberment of the country.

The speakers said that we have gathered here today to congratulate our district's

esteemed member, advocate Rana Azam, on writing a valuable research book.

They said Rana Azam, a son of Toba Tek Singh, has brought immense pride to all of us. The secretary Bar Jamil Khan Mahota also praised the author and said that by compiling diverse topics and writing a book on philosophy, politics, and sociology in a simple and understandable language, has done a great service to all of us. Speakers said that our district has always been a hub of political movements.

Lawyers have not only led the freedom movement but have also challenged oppressive forces in Pakistan at every step. They said Rana Azam is counted among those individuals who have worked tirelessly for the poor and underprivileged sections of society and have made selfless contributions to democratic struggles. This book is a shining example of theory and practice, and not just the Bar Association but the entire district of Toba Tek Singh is proud of Rana Azam.

The book covers topics such as Marxism, revolution, and party building, as well as the reconstruction of the mind, the descent of knowledge, the class character of Pakistani politics, the civilization of the Indus Valley, and women's rights.

Rana's analysis of Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Balochistan reveals the positive and negative aspects of our society that are essential to understand. The book discusses how feudalism has affected certain regions, how tribalism has hindered social development, and how small landholding areas have progressed. Rana has presented a masterful analysis of the issues facing the nation.

Sahiwal Teaching Hospital inspected

F.P. Report

S A H I W A L : Commissioner Sahiwal Division Dr. Asif Tufail made a surprise visit to Sahiwal Teaching Hospital, conducted a detailed inspection of the general emergency, blood bank, surgical emergency, medical emergency, orthopedic ward and medicine store.

He also met the patients and took information about the provision of free medicines. He also obtained information from the relatives of the patients about the medical facilities, availability of medicines and the attitude of the staff. The provision of free medicines to every patient coming to the hospital should be ensured in every case.

The Punjab government is focused on providing better treatment facilities to the patients. No laxity or negligence will be tolerated in the provision of free medicines. On the special instructions of Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz, the best medical facilities are being provided to the citizens.

The Punjab government is spending a huge amount of money to provide medical facilities. The Commissioner also directed the staff to treat the patients with good manners and further improve the standard of cleanliness of the hospital. The presence of senior doctors in the OPD should also be ensured. The administration is fully mobilized to strengthen the public health system.

Meanwhile, Deputy Commissioner Shahid Mahmood made a detailed visit to the newly constructed Pakpattan Road early in the morning and reviewed the water situation, drainage arrangements and road quality along the road after the recent rains.

On this occasion, Exxon Highway Muhammad Ramzan and SDO Muhammad Tahir were also present with him. Deputy Commissioner Shahid Mahmood directed the concerned officers to take immediate and effective steps to protect the newly constructed road from rainwater. He said that the drainage system should be made active on both sides of the road so that water does not accumulate during rain and the traffic flow is not affected. He also inspected the parts of the road that were affected during the PECAP project and ordered immediate rehabilitation there.

Moreover, District Police Officer Sahiwal Rana Tahir Rehman Khan said that two major incidents of robbery were foiled last week, in which two dangerous robbers were arrested in an injured condition, while two policemen were seriously injured.

While engaging in an encounter with the robbers, Sub-Inspector Akram Khan was injured in the limits of Harappa police station, while the second encounter took place in the limits of Ghala Mandi police station, where Constable Abid Ali was injured. DPO Sahiwal further said that the District Sahiwal Police is always on high alert regarding law and order in the city and the protection of lives and property of citizens, and the first priority is to eliminate criminal elements. The Sahiwal Police is utilizing all its resources to make.

F.P. Report

KOHAT: District Monitoring Officer (DMO) Right to Public Services (RTPS) Commission Kohat Tashfeen Israr has said that the RTPS Act gives citizens the legal right to get service from the government institutions within their stipulated time. This Act not only promotes institutional accountability but also empowers the common man.

He expressed these views during an interview in a special live program of Pakhtunkhwa Radio Kohat hosted by the Engineer Muhammad Sadiq while

Monsoon plantation drive kicks off at Bannu University

F.P. Report

BANNU: In compliance with the directives of the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the formal inauguration of the plantation campaign in Bannu Division was held at the University of Science and Technology Bannu, in collaboration with the Forest Department. Commissioner Bannu Division Captain (R) Khalid Mehmood presided over the ceremony. Under this campaign, thousands of valuable fruit-bearing trees will be planted across the division.

Addressing the ceremony, Commissioner Bannu Division termed tree plantation a national responsibility and urged every citizen, particularly students, to plant trees under their own names and ensure their proper care, watering, and nurturing. He suggested to the university administration that students whose trees grow well and healthily should be rewarded with extra marks in examinations to practically promote awareness of plantation.

The Commissioner further said that this was his first official visit to Bannu University, and he was

pleased to begin it with such an important national cause as plantation. He appreciated the efforts and enthusiasm of the Forest Department, university administration, and students, and paid rich tribute to their dedication.

On this occasion, Vice Chancellor of the University of Science and Technology Bannu, Professor Dr. Muhammad Jahanzeb Khan, highlighted the religious and scientific importance of plantation. Quoting a blessed saying of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH): "If doomsday is upon you and you hold a sapling in your hand, plant it." He urged the students to play a key role in promoting plantation not only within the university but also throughout society.

District Forest Officer Shah Fahad Khan shed light on the plantation targets for the Bannu Circle and informed the participants that more than 23,000 fruit-bearing trees are planned to be planted across the district during the current monsoon season. He also gave a detailed briefing on the environmental and economic bene-

fits of plantation.

The ceremony was attended by Deputy Commissioner Bannu Muhammad Faheem Khan, Professor Dr. Sultan Mehmood, Professor Dr. Mushtaq Ahmad, Dr. Amir Nawaz Khan (Incharge Clean and Green University), Director Quality Enhancement Nek Dara Jan, Director P&D Muhammad Nawaz Khan, Director Administration Hazrat Ameen, Deputy Director Academics Dr. Bashir Ahmad, Director Admissions Dr. Nasir Gul, Deputy Director Admin Umar Daraz Khan, Conservator Forests Muhammad Siddiq, CEO WSSC Muhammad Imran Khan, Assistant Commissioner Allah Nawaz Khan, Incharge Media Cell UST Bannu Ubaidullah Khan, along with various government officers and a large number of students.

At the conclusion of the event, the participants actively contributed to this national campaign for environmental protection by planting saplings of orange, fig, pomegranate, olive, mango, mulberry, lemon, black plum, plum, and guava.

AWKUM Board of Trustee meeting held

F.P. Report

MARDAN: The meeting of the Board of Trustees of Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan works for the welfare of the employees and it needs to be made more active. The decisions of the Board of Trustees meeting were discussed in the meeting. The extension was made while the establishment of group insurance and employee retirement benefits were discussed. Officials of the State Life Insurance Company also gave a detailed briefing in the meeting. In the meeting, the Board of Trustees presented a report on the funds and their utilization to the Vice Chancellor of the university, on which the participants expressed satisfaction and appreciated the achievements of Abdul Wali Wali Khan University.

In the meeting, the Vice Chancellor of the University and other members discussed many important issues related to the University and gave suggestions and instructions for the development and improvement of the University. On this occasion, Professor Dr. Azam, Professor Dr. Muhammad Tahir, Director of Finance Dr. Faizan, Additional Director of Finance Saim Sohail, Professor Dr. Anwar Hussain, Hassan Khan Registrar, Dr. Tariq Mehmood, Dr. Ali Khan, Abdul Samad, Naseer Khan, Afzal Humayun were present. Addressing the meeting, Vice

Chancellor Prof. Dr. Jamil Ahmed said that the Board of Trustees of Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan works for the welfare of the employees and it needs to be made more active.

The decisions of the Board of Trustees meeting were discussed in the meeting. The extension was made while the establishment of group insurance and employee retirement benefits were discussed. Officials of the State Life Insurance Company also gave a detailed briefing in the meeting. In the meeting, the Board of Trustees presented a report on the funds and their utilization to the Vice Chancellor of the university, on which the participants expressed satisfaction and appreciated the achievements of Abdul Wali Wali Khan University.

DC visits central Jail Mardan: The newly appointed Deputy Commissioner Mardan, Wasif Rehman, paid a visit to Central Jail, on Thursday. On this occasion, Additional Deputy Commissioner (Finance & Planning) Syed Fahad Iftikhar and Superintendent Central Jail Mardan

Waseem Khan, also accompanied him.

The Deputy Commissioner inspected various sections of the jail and reviewed the facilities being provided to the inmates, including food, sanitation, medical care, and rehabilitation activities. He directed the jail administration to ensure the protection of prisoners' fundamental rights and to utilize all available resources to make the jail a true reformative institution.

Later, Deputy Commissioner Wasif Rehman formally inaugurated the Monsoon Plantation Campaign by planting a sapling. Speaking on the occasion, he said that trees are vital for the survival of life. Plantation is not only a means of environmental protection but also lays the foundation for a safer Pakistan for future generations. He urged the public, students, and government institutions to plant as many fruit-bearing trees as possible in line with the provincial government's directives and to actively support the administration in making this national campaign a success.

LUMS delegation visits Tareen farms

F.P. Report

LODHRAN: A 12-member delegation of faculty and students from Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS) visited the Ali Tareen Farms for an educational tour. The delegation included former LUMS Vice Chancellor Dr. Syed Zahoor Hassan, team lead Dr. Shakeel Sadiq Jajja, and other participants.

The General Manager of Ali Tareen Farms, Asim Nisar Bajwa, briefed the delegation and stated that Jahangir Khan Tareen has mechanized and modernized agriculture. He explained that due to the use of modern technology introduced by Tareen, there has been a significant improvement in crop yield, quality, and overall effi-



ciency. He further said that Jahangir Tareen successfully transformed barren land in Lodhran into fertile agricultural land. If this model is adopted elsewhere, barren lands across the country can be turned productive, leading to excellent crop yields.

The LUMS delegation was also given a detailed briefing by the Ali Tareen Farm management on mod-

ern agricultural technologies, advanced machinery, mango and other crop cultivation, and innovative irrigation methods.

During their field visit, the LUMS team witnessed the practical application of modern farming technology and appreciated Jahangir Tareen's progressive approach and use of innovation in agriculture.

KP govt's RTPS Act empowers common man

F.P. Report

Sabir Sattar assisted him.

During the interview, the District Monitoring Officer highlighted the "Right to Service Act 2014" and the notified services provided under it and discussed in detail the timely and transparent delivery system of public services. He mentioned the issues related to the RTPS Commission based on public interest and also highlights the transparency, merit-based appointment and grievance redressal system.

Tashfeen Israr, while answering the live questions of the citizens in the program, not only given necessary infor-

mation but also provided them with an opportunity to convey their complaints and concerns directly to the concerned authorities. He urged the citizens to take advantage of the RTPS Act and file complaints at the designated forums in case of non-delivery or delay in government services. The aim of these special broadcasts of Pakhtunkhwa Radio is to inform the public about this important revolutionary law of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government, to raise awareness among them about their rights and to promote transparency and accountability in public services.



DHAKA: Security forces throwing tear gas cans and sound grenades to disperse Awami League supporters loyal to ousted leader Sheikh Hasina, who attempted to disrupt a rally being held by the new student-led National Citizens Party in Gopalganj, Bangladesh.

Lee orders new investigation team to look into deadly 2022 crush

SEOUL: South Korean President Lee Jae Myung has ordered the setting up of a new investigation team, involving police and prosecutors, to look into the deadly Halloween crowd crush that killed 159, mostly young people, in 2022, his spokesperson said. Lee's move to launch a new probe came as he met the bereaved families of victims from recent major disasters, including the Halloween crush in Seoul's Itaewon district, his spokesperson Kang Yu-jung told a briefing.

Lee, who took office in June, has promised to make the country safer and to prevent any repeat of the disasters in recent years that have often been blamed on the inadequate response by authorities. The president said the new investigation team would work alongside a special commission that was launched in September last year to look into the case, according to the spokesperson. At the meeting with Lee, Song Hae-jin, a representative for the families of the crush victims, said police records and information regarding the government's response to the disaster had been withheld from the special commission.

During his meeting with the bereaved families, Lee bowed deeply as he apologized for any failures by authorities. "As the head of the state, I would like to formally apologize on

behalf of the government for failing to fulfill its responsibility to protect the lives and safety of the people, and for the many people who lost their lives as a result," he said as some relatives wept. - CNN

Meanwhile, on 3 June 2025, South Korea's presidential elections saw Lee Jae-myung from the Democratic Party claim victory, which resulted in him being sworn in the following day. He secured around 49.6% of the votes, defeating Kim Moon-soo of the People Power Party, who conceded after trailing not far behind, securing 41.2% of the votes. Voter turnout was notably high at nearly 80%, marking the highest outcome since 1997. The election followed a period of significant political turmoil: former President Yoon Suk-yeol had declared martial law in December 2024, accusing the opposition of pro-North Korean activities. However, the National Assembly unanimously overturned the martial law, prompting Yoon to revoke it the next day. On 14 December 2024, Yoon was suspended from office by a majority vote in the assembly, including members of his party, and his impeachment was unanimously confirmed on 4 April 2025. Lee has now taken office amid a highly polarised and unstable political climate in South Korea.

In June 2025, President Lee

pledged to "mend the scars of division and conflict" by promising to lead the nation towards peace and prosperity; he also vowed to re-establish dialogue with North Korea to ease military tensions and foster cooperation on the peninsula. The president has outlined some key objectives, as part of his winning speech: restoring democracy and accountability after the martial law episode, revitalising the economy and improving living standards, and protecting citizens' safety. He also addressed the pressing economic challenges posed by rising global protectionism, including steep tariffs on South Korean exports under US President Donald Trump's administration, and promised to support middle- and low-income households struggling with the cost of living. Moreover, the president reported that the government is also focused on expanding offshore wind and phasing out coal, with an aim to raise renewables' share to 40% by 2035. The country's current target is a 40% emissions reduction by 2030 below 2018 levels (32% without forestry and overseas cuts). The latest energy plan, 'Basic Plan for Long-Term Electricity Supply and Demand', which was announced in February 2025, seeks to quadruple clean energy capacity from 30GW in 2023 to 121.9GW by 2038. — Agencies

Why did Israel bomb Syria? A look at Druze and violence in Suwayda

DAMASCUS: Israel has launched a series of intense strikes on Damascus, Syria's capital, intensifying a campaign it says is in support of an Arab minority group. Syria, strongly condemned Israeli attacks, denouncing the strikes as a "dangerous escalation." The Ministry of Foreign Affairs accused Israel of pursuing a "deliberate policy" to "inflamm tensions, spread chaos and undermine security and stability in Syria". The strikes killed three people and injured 34, according to Syrian officials.

Israel carried out a series of air strikes on central Damascus, hitting a compound that houses the Ministry of Defence and areas near the presidential palace. The Israeli military also struck targets in southern Syria, where fighting between Druze groups, Bedouin tribes, and Syrian security forces has continued for more than four days. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, more than 250 people have been killed in Suwayda province during the clashes.

Israel, which already occupies the Syrian Golan

Heights, says its operations aim to protect the Druze minority - whom it considers potential allies - and to strike pro-government forces accused of attacking them. Syria rejected this and called the attack a "flagrant assault". The main attacks focused on central Damascus: the Defence Ministry, military headquarters and areas surrounding the presidential palace. Additional strikes were carried out further south. Syria's Defence Ministry headquarters: The compound was struck several times, with two large strikes about 3pm (12:00pmGMT), including its entrance, causing structural damage and smoke rising visibly over the city.

"Israeli warplanes [were] circling the skies over the Syrian capital," Al Jazeera's Zeina Khodr said, reporting from Damascus. "There was panic in the city," she added. Near the presidential palace (Umayyad Square): Strikes also hit areas immediately around the presidential palace in central Damascus. Another air strike landed near the presidential palace in Damascus. In a post on social media, Israel said "a

military target was struck in the area of the Syrian regime's Presidential Palace in the Damascus area". In the south: Israeli drones also targeted Syria's city of Suwayda, a mainly Druze city close to the border with Jordan. Israel's air strikes followed days of deadly clashes in Suwayda between Syrian government forces and local Druze fighters. The violence began with tit-for-tat kidnappings and attacks between Druze fighters and local Bedouin tribes. When government troops intervened to restore order, they ended up clashing with Druze groups - and, in some cases, reportedly targeted civilians. The Druze, a small but influential minority in both Syria and Israel, are seen in Israel as loyal allies, with many serving in the Israeli military. A ceasefire declared quickly collapsed, and fighting resumed the next day. Suwayda's Druze appear divided. One leader, Yasser Jarbou, declared that a ceasefire had been agreed with the Syrian government. Another, Hikmat al-Hijri, rejected any ceasefire. And many Druze in Syria do not want Israel to

intervene on their behalf. Israel has its own considerations and has been attempting to expand its control in southern Syria since the fall of President Bashar al-Assad in December. Israel has shunned any attempts to come to a security agreement with Syria and has instead repeatedly bombed the country this year. Many analysts believe that Israel would prefer a weak Syria over a country it believes could potentially threaten it should it grow strong.

Israel, citing a commitment to protect the Druze and prevent hostile forces from gaining ground near its borders, warned it would escalate its operations unless Syrian troops withdrew from Suwayda. The province sits near both the Israeli and Jordanian borders, making it a key strategic zone. "This is a significant escalation," Khodr, Al Jazeera's correspondent, said. "This is the Israeli leadership giving a very, very direct message to Syria's new authorities that they will intensify such strikes ... if the government does not withdraw its troops from southern Syria." — Aljazeera

US citizen says he was jailed for three days after immigration raid

CALIFORNIA (Reuters): A US citizen and Army veteran who works as a security guard at a California cannabis farm said that US officials arrested him during an immigration raid last week and held him for three days without explanation.

George Retes, 25, told reporters he was manhandled by federal agents who broke his car window, damaged his vehicle and sprayed him with tear gas during the raid, when immigration officers were confronted by throngs of angry protesters in Camarillo, about 50 miles (80 km) northwest of Los Angeles. He said he was

released. "I told them everything - that I was a citizen, I worked there, and they didn't care. They still never told me my charges, and they sent me away. They sent me to a place in downtown L.A. without even telling me what I was arrested for," Retes told reporters in a video press conference organized by the United Farm Workers labor union.

"They took two officers to kneel on my back and then one on my neck to arrest me, even though my hands were already behind my back and I was covered in OC (oleoresin capsicum) spray," Retes said. The raid was

part of an intensified immigration crackdown launched by the administration of President Donald Trump in June. Protesters regularly appear at immigration raids in the Los Angeles area, demonstrating their opposition to the government's display of force. Immigrant rights groups have said the raids have periodically ensnared US citizens and legal permanent residents. Tricia McLaughlin, a spokesperson for the Department of Homeland Security, confirmed in a statement that Retes was arrested, released and has not been charged.

"The US Attorney's

Office is reviewing his case, along with dozens of others, for potential federal charges related to the execution of the federal search warrant in Camarillo," McLaughlin said. Retes, who said he works for a security company contracted by the Glass House cannabis farm, said he missed his daughter's third birthday while in jail and he was planning to sue the federal government. "It doesn't matter if you're an immigrant, it doesn't matter the color of your skin. ... No one deserves to be treated this way," Retes said. "I hope this never happens to anyone ever again."

SL envoy calls on Pakistani Ambassador

F.P. Report

ABU DHABI: Her Excellency Dr. Arusha Cooray, the newly appointed Ambassador of Sri Lanka to the United Arab Emirates, paid a courtesy call on Ambassador Faisal Niaz Tirmizi at the Embassy of Pakistan in Abu Dhabi today.

The meeting was held in a spirit of goodwill, during which matters of mutual cooperation were discussed. Both ambassadors expressed their commitment to strengthening bilateral relations and enhancing collaboration in various fields.

USAID food for nearly 30,000 hungry kids to be destroyed

WASHINGTON: Food intended to feed 27,000 starving children in Afghanistan and Pakistan will soon be incinerated in the wake of President Donald Trump's closure of the United States' aid agency. A senior US official said nearly 500 tonnes of high-energy biscuits, to be used as emergency food for malnourished young children, expired this month while sitting in a warehouse in Dubai.

Under questioning by lawmakers, Michael Rigas, the deputy secretary of state in charge of management, tied the decision to the dismantling of the US Agency for International Development (USAID), which closed its doors on July 1. "I think that this was just a casualty of the shutdown of USAID," Rigas said, adding that he was "distressed" that the food went to waste. Aid officials managed to save 622 tonnes of the energy-dense biscuits in June - sending them to Syria, Bangladesh and Myanmar - but 496 tonnes, worth \$793,000 before they expired this month, will be destroyed, according to two internal USAID memos reviewed by Reuters, dated May 5 and May 19, and four sources familiar with the matter. The wasted biscuits will be sent to landfills or incinerated in the United Arab Emirates, two sources said. That will cost the US government an additional \$100,000, according to the May 5 memo verified by three sources familiar with the matter. Trump has said the US pays disproportionately for foreign aid, and he wants other countries to shoulder more of the burden.

His administration announced plans to shut down USAID in January, leaving more than 60,000 tonnes of food aid stuck in stores around the world, Reuters reported in May. The food aid stuck in Dubai was fortified wheat biscuits, which are calorie-rich and typically deployed in crisis conditions where people lack cooking facilities, "providing immediate nutrition for a child or adult", according to the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP). Senator Tim Kaine, a Democrat, said lawmakers had specifically raised the issue of the food with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio in March. In May, he promised lawmakers that no food aid would be wasted.

"A government that is put on notice - here are resources that will save 27,000 starving kids, can you please distribute them or give them to someone who can? "Who decides, no, we would rather keep the warehouse locked, let the food expire, and then burn it?" Rigas said that the US remained the world's largest donor, and he promised to learn further details about the biscuits. "I do want to find out what happened here and get to the ground truth," he said. The US is the world's largest humanitarian aid donor, amounting to at least 38 percent of all contributions recorded by the UN. It disbursed \$61bn in foreign assistance last year, just over half of it via USAID, according to government data. The Trump administration notified Congress in March that USAID would fire almost all of its staff in two rounds on July 1 and September 2, as it prepared to shut down. In a statement on July 1 marking the transfer of USAID to the State Department, Rubio said the US was abandoning what he called a charity-based model and would focus on empowering countries to grow sustainably. — Aljazeera

World-first IVF trial reduces risk of babies inheriting diseases

LONDON (AFP): Eight healthy babies have been born in the UK using a new IVF technique that successfully reduced their risk of inheriting genetic diseases from their mothers, the results of a world-first trial said. The findings were hailed as a breakthrough which raises hopes that women with mutations in their mitochondrial DNA could one day have children without passing debilitating or deadly diseases on to the children.

One out of every 5,000 births is affected by mitochondrial diseases, which cannot be treated, and include symptoms such as impaired vision, diabetes and muscle wasting. In 2015, Britain became the first country to approve an in-vitro fertilisation (IVF) technique that uses a small amount of healthy mitochondrial DNA from the egg of a donor -- along with the mother's egg and father's sperm. Some have called the result of this process "three-parent babies", though researchers have pushed back at this term because only roughly 0.1 percent of the newborn's DNA comes from the donor. The results of the much-awaited UK trial were published in several papers in the New England Journal of Medicine. Out of 22 women to undergo the treatment at the Newcastle Fertility Centre in northeast England, eight babies were born. The four boys and four girls now range from under six months to over two years old. The amount

of mutated mitochondrial DNA -- which causes disease -- was reduced by 95-100 percent in six of the babies, according to the research.

For the other two newborns, the amount fell by 77-88 percent, which is below the range that causes disease. This indicates the technique was "effective in reducing transmission" of diseases between mother and child, one of the studies said. The eight children are currently healthy, though one had a disturbance of their heart's rhythm which was successfully treated, the researchers said. Their health will be followed up over the coming years to see if problems arise.

Nils-Goran Larsson, a Swedish reproductive expert not involved in the research, hailed the "breakthrough". The new technique offers a "very important reproductive option" for families affected by "devastating" mitochondrial diseases, he added. Mitochondrial donation remains controversial and has not been approved in many countries, including the United States and France. Religious leaders have opposed the procedure because it involves the destruction of human embryos.

Other opponents have expressed fears it could pave the way for genetically engineered "designer babies". An ethical review carried out by the UK's independent Nuffield

Council on Bioethics was "instrumental" in conducting the new research, the council's director Danielle Hamm said. Peter Thompson, head of the UK's Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority which approved the procedure, said only people with a "very high risk" of passing on a mitochondrial disease would be eligible for the treatment.

Ethical concerns have also been raised over the use of mitochondrial donation for infertility in Greece and Ukraine. French mitochondrial disease specialist Julie Stefann told AFP that "it is a question of the risk-benefit ratio: for a mitochondrial disease, the benefit is obvious". "In the context of infertility, it has not been proven," she added. Oxford University reproductive genetics expert Dagan Wells observed that "some scientists will be a little disappointed that so much time and effort has, so far, only led to the birth of eight children". Among the children being closely monitored are three that showed some signs of what is known as "reversal", which is still little understood.

It is "a phenomenon where the therapy initially succeeds in producing an embryo with very few defective mitochondria, but by the time the child is born the proportion of abnormal mitochondria in its cells has significantly increased," he explained.

Bangladesh police clash with pro-Hasina activists

DHAKA (AFP): Bangladesh security forces clashed with supporters of deposed Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, leaving at least three people dead and many injured. Violence broke out in the southern town of Gopalganj when members of Hasina's Awami League tried to disrupt a rally by the National Citizens Party (NCP), which is made up of students who spearheaded the unrest that toppled the leader last year.

TV footage showed pro-Hasina activists armed with sticks attacking police and setting vehicles on fire as NCP leaders arrived at the new party's "March to Rebuild the Nation" programme commemorating the uprising. Monoj Baral, a nurse at the Gopalganj District Hospital, told the news agency AFP that three people were killed. Local media, including the English-language Daily Star, said that four had died. One of the dead was identified by Baral as Ramjan

Sikdar. The other two were taken away from the hospital by their families, said Baral. Authorities imposed an overnight curfew in the district. Bangladesh's interim leader Muhammad Yunus, who replaced Hasina three days after her overthrow last year, said that the attempt by the former leader's supporters to foil the NCP rally was "a shameful violation of their fundamental rights". "This heinous act ... will not go unpunished," said a statement from the Nobel Peace Prize laureate's office.

Hasnat Abdullah, an NCP coordinator, said rally attendees took refuge at a police station after being attacked. "We don't feel safe at all. They threatened to burn us alive," he told AFP. Bangladesh has been in political turmoil since Hasina was toppled nearly a year ago. Hasina, who fled to India following a student-led uprising last August, faces several charges. This month, she

was sentenced in absentia to six months in prison for contempt of court by the country's International Crimes Tribunal (ICT). Gopalganj is a politically sensitive district because the mausoleum of Hasina's father, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, is located there. Rahman, the country's founding president, was buried there after he was assassinated along with most of his family members in a military coup in 1971. Hasina would go on to contest elections from the constituency. The NCP march was launched on July 1 across all districts in Bangladesh as part of its drive to position itself as a new force in Bangladeshi politics. The country's political landscape has been largely dominated by two dynastic families: Hasina's Awami League party and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party of former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia. Yunus has said an election will be held in April next year.

Air India crash probe focuses on actions of plane's captain

NEW DELHI (Reuters): A cockpit recording of dialogue between the two pilots of the Air India flight that crashed last month indicates the captain cut the flow of fuel to the plane's engines, the Wall Street Journal reported. The newspaper cited people familiar with US officials' early assessment of evidence uncovered in the investigation into the June 12 crash in Ahmedabad, India, that killed 260 people.

The first officer, who was flying the Boeing 787 Dreamliner, asked the more experienced captain why he moved the fuel switches to the "cutoff" position seconds after lifting off the runway, the report said. The two pilots involved were Captain Sumeeet Sabharwal and First Officer Clive Kunder, who had total flying experience of 15,638 hours and 3,403 hours, respectively. India's AAI, Directorate General of Civil Aviation, Ministry of Civil Aviation, Air India and two unions representing Indian pilots did not immediately respond to Reuters' requests for comment on the Wall Street Journal report. Boeing declined to comment. A preliminary report into the crash released by India's Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB) said the fuel switches had switched from run to cutoff a second apart just

after takeoff, but it did not say how they were flipped. Almost immediately after the plane lifted off the ground, closed-circuit TV footage showed a backup energy source called a ram air turbine had deployed, indicating a loss of power from the engines.

One pilot was then heard on the cockpit voice recorder asking the other why he cut off the fuel. "The other pilot responded that he did not do so," the report said. Without fuel flowing to the engines, the London-bound plane began to lose thrust. After reaching a height of 650 feet, the plane began to sink. The fuel switches for both engines were turned back to run, and the airplane automatically tried restarting the engines, the report said. But the plane was too low and too slow to be able to recover, aviation safety expert John Nance told Reuters.

The plane clipped some trees and a chimney before crashing in a fireball into a building on a nearby medical college campus, the report said, killing 19 people on the ground and 241 of the 242 on board the 787. In an internal memo, Air India CEO Campbell Wilson said the preliminary report found no mechanical or maintenance faults and that all required maintenance had been carried out. The

AAIB's preliminary report had no safety recommendations for Boeing or engine manufacturer GE.

After the report was released, the US Federal Aviation Administration and Boeing privately issued notifications that the fuel switch locks on Boeing planes are safe, a document seen by Reuters showed and four sources with knowledge of the matter said. The circumstantial evidence increasingly indicates that a crew member flipped the engine fuel switches, Nance said, given there was "no other rationale explanation" that was consistent with the information released to date. Nonetheless, investigators "still have to dig into all the factors" and rule out other possible contributing factors which would take time, he said. Most air crashes are caused by multiple factors, and under international rules, a final report is expected within a year of an accident.

The Air India crash has rekindled debate over adding flight deck cameras, known as cockpit image recorders, on airliners. Nance said investigators likely would have benefited greatly from having video footage of the cockpit during the Air India flight. Air India has faced additional scrutiny on other fronts after the crash.

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Zelensky tries to woo public and Trump with new cabinet

UKRAINE will get its first new prime minister of the war on Thursday, as President Volodymyr Zelensky tries to wrestle wartime defence spending into shape and win over both Donald Trump and a war-weary public with fresh-faced leadership, reported Reuters. Yulia Svyrydenko, 39, the only candidate for the post, is expected to take over a reshuffled cabinet, tasked with scaling up a fledgling arms industry and breathing life into an economy kept afloat by Western lenders.

Zelensky's choice of a young economist well known in Washington reflects the importance of repairing relations with the Trump administration after Zelensky's disastrous White House visit in February. Svyrydenko's outgoing predecessor, Denys Shmyhal, is meanwhile likely to shift to the job of defence minister, a sign of the importance Kyiv now places in building up the capacity of its defence industry as the best chance of fending off Russia.

But with Zelensky still relying on a small handful of close allies to make his biggest reshuffle of the war, the moves could disappoint Ukrainians who want to see a wider talent pool at the top, it was reported by Reuters. Svyrydenko, with a more prominent public profile than Shmyhal, has already played a role in shoring up ties with the United States and was one of Kyiv's main negotiators in reaching a deal that gives Washington preferential access to swathes of Ukraine's mineral wealth. Her nomination sends a signal to Washington that Kyiv is prioritising the relationship, said political analyst Mykola Davyduik.

"For us, it's a partnership that's not just about money but about values, about joint projects and generally about our common movement forward together," he said, summing up how he saw Zelensky's thinking.

Shmyhal, 49, was Ukraine's longest-serving prime minister. Moving him to the defence ministry, a demotion on paper, gives Zelensky an experienced technocratic economist in a job that oversees the bulk of Ukraine's state cash flow. The 2025 budget allocates 2.23 trillion hryvnias \$53.2 billion — about 26% of Ukraine's gross domestic product — for defence spending. The ministry has faced public criticism over poor organisation and procurement problems as Ukraine struggles to fend off a bigger and better-armed Russian military. "This is a ministry that practically since the beginning of the war has suffered from a lack of systemic management," said Hlib Vyshlinsky, head of the Centre for Economic Strategy in Kyiv. He described Shmyhal's appointment as "an extremely good step".

Economically, Kyiv faces the tough challenge of finding money to finance its ballooning budget deficit as foreign aid is set to diminish but defence spending continues to grow. Officials have said Ukraine would need about \$40 billion in international financing in 2026 and could face a shortfall of about \$19 billion. Maintaining stability will only become more difficult as the war drags on, complicated by a lack of effective policymakers, said opposition lawmaker Andrii Osadchuk.

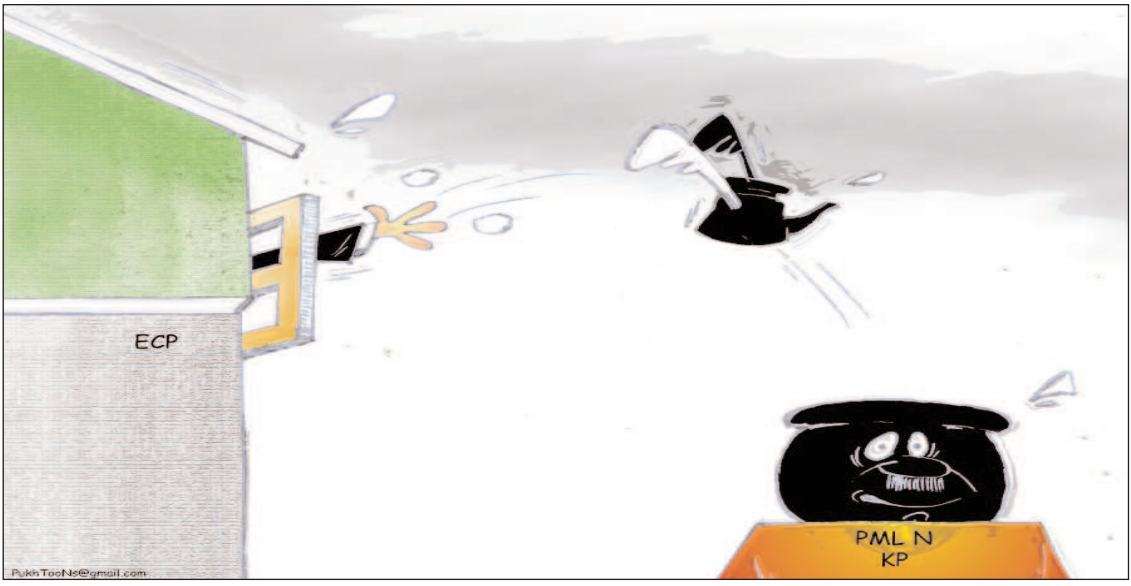
"Unfortunately, it is increasingly difficult for Zelensky and his coalition to add new, bright people to ministerial positions," said Osadchuk, of the Holos party, adding it could lead to "stagnation" in the executive branch. Earlier this month, Shmyhal's cabinet came under fire from businesses and civil society for rejecting the candidacy of an economic security chief who had been unanimously backed by an internationally supervised committee.

Other opposition lawmakers have criticised what they describe as Zelensky's reliance on an ever-smaller band of close loyalists.

"Zelensky's short bench of personnel has long since turned into a stool on which maybe five or six managers fit," wrote lawmaker Iryna Herashchenko, a member of Zelensky rival Petro Poroshenko's party, on Wednesday. "The only innovation (in Svyrydenko's appointment) is that a female manager has been added." Elections are prohibited while the country is under martial law, a principle widely accepted within Ukraine given the difficulty of staging a vote while millions of people are displaced and cities are under bombardment and occupation.

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How climate change is devastating Mediterranean

Dr. Majid Rafizadeh

THE Mediterranean region has been engulfed by a wave of wildfires unlike anything seen in recent history. From the lush hills of southern Türkiye to the coastal mountains of Syria and from the sun-drenched countryside of France to Greece, vast stretches of land have gone up in flames.

Dense forests and wildlife reserves have been destroyed. Hundreds of homes and businesses have been reduced to ash. Thousands of people have been displaced and dozens have lost their lives, while emergency services are pushed to their limits, battling fires day and night in conditions made worse by soaring temperatures and dry, gusty winds.

The scale and speed of the devastation are unprecedented — and they are not accidental. These fires are not just a tragic coincidence of weather and chance. They are the direct, undeniable consequence of a world whose climate is changing rapidly and dangerously.

The Mediterranean basin has been identified by climate scientists as one of the most vulnerable areas in the world to the impacts of global warming. The region has already warmed by more than 1.5 degrees Celsius compared to preindustrial levels — higher than the global average — and it is warming at a rate approximately 20 percent faster than the rest of the planet. This temperature rise has led to longer, more intense heat waves, reduced rainfall, prolonged droughts and lower soil moisture — all of which create the ideal conditions for wildfires to ignite, spread and burn uncontrollably.

If no serious action is taken, the consequences for the Mediterranean — and indeed the world — will be catastrophic. The ecological damage alone is staggering: centuries-old forests and diverse ecosystems are

being erased in days. Plant and animal species that have survived in delicate balance for millennia are being wiped out by fire. Soil fertility is also being destroyed, increasing the risk of floods and landslides once rain returns. The economic costs are equally daunting. Tourism, which makes up a major portion of gross domestic product in countries like Greece, Italy and Türkiye, suffers severe blows as travelers avoid fire-stricken areas. Agriculture, already reeling from drought, loses even more ground as farmland turns to ash. And the long-term health effects on populations exposed to smoke and heat cannot be underestimated — respiratory diseases, heat strokes and other medical emergencies are on the rise across the region. If wildfires of this scale continue to occur — or worse, increase in frequency and intensity — we will be looking at a future marked by constant crisis. Millions could become climate refugees, forced to abandon their homes in search of safer areas. Governments will struggle to maintain basic services under the pressure of repeated evacuations and reconstruction costs. Entire industries may collapse and, with them, the livelihoods of millions of people. The Mediterranean could transition from a cradle of civilization and cultural tourism into a zone of devastation and abandonment.

So, what must be done? Mediterranean nations must first acknowledge the scale of the threat and act with urgency. Governments need to invest in reforestation programs using fire-resilient species, establish effective land management strategies that include the clearing of deadwood and brush, and develop national early warning systems that alert communities to rising fire risks. These systems should

include satellite data, ground-based sensors and communication networks that reach even remote villages. Urban planning also needs a complete overhaul. Building codes must be adapted to climate realities, especially in wildfire-prone zones. Emergency services need more funding, more training and more equipment — including the latest fire-fighting aircraft and surveillance technology. Public awareness campaigns should be launched to educate residents about fire prevention and emergency preparedness. Climate adaptation should not be a side policy. It must be at the core of national security and development strategies.

But the burden of addressing this crisis cannot fall solely on the shoulders of Mediterranean nations. Climate change does not respect borders. It is a global challenge and it requires a global response. The international community must come together to support fire-stricken countries, not just with sympathy, but with resources, technology and policy coordination.

International aid organizations should establish rapid deployment units specifically trained for climate-related disasters. Universities and research institutions should collaborate across borders to develop better fire prediction models and drought management tools.

Wealthy nations, especially those in the Global North, have a moral responsibility to lead this effort. These countries are historically the largest contributors to greenhouse gas emissions. Their industries, economies and lifestyles have driven the very conditions now consuming the Mediterranean in flames. Justice demands that they help shoulder the cost of adaptation, mitigation and recovery.

Financial support is critical. Mediterranean countries, many of which are already struggling with debt and inflation, need grants rather than loans. They need access to international climate funds without the red tape and political obstacles that so often delay urgent help. Moreover, global powers should facilitate the transfer of green technology, including renewable energy solutions, which can help these countries reduce their own emissions and become more resilient to climate shocks. Every fire that is prevented, every square mile of forest that is saved, is a victory. Climate cooperation is not charity — it is self-preservation.

The fires currently burning in the Mediterranean are not just natural disasters. They are warnings. They are the Earth's way of screaming that something is profoundly wrong with the balance we have disrupted. They tell us what is to come if we continue down this path of inaction, delay and denial. In a sense, the Mediterranean is the canary in the coal mine. What is happening there today could happen elsewhere tomorrow — in California, in Australia, in the Amazon or in Central Africa. The climate crisis is global and the Mediterranean's pain is humanity's alarm bell.

In conclusion, the unprecedented wildfires sweeping across Türkiye, Syria, France and beyond are not isolated incidents. They are a direct result of human-driven climate change and they signal a dangerous new era in which fire becomes not an exception, but a permanent feature of Mediterranean life. Without immediate and coordinated action — both regionally and globally — the devastation will continue and the cost will grow higher with every passing year. The time for warnings is over and the time for action is now.

Gulf states' flourishing ties

Khaled Abou Zahr

IN recent years, hardly a week has gone by without a visit or announcement involving a country in Central Asia or the South Caucasus and a Gulf state. The pace of engagement between these regions is accelerating across diplomacy, business and security.

Last week, the UAE's AD Ports Group and Kazakhstan Railways announced the launch of operations for GulfLink, a joint venture with long-term ambitions in the Central Asian logistics landscape. Earlier this year, Uzbekistan introduced a visa-free regime for Gulf nationals, further deepening regional ties. On the political front, Kazakhstan has hosted a long-running Syrian peace dialogue. Meanwhile, the UAE is now taking on one of the most sensitive issues in the South Caucasus: hosting peace talks between the Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders.

This stronger engagement is a sign of greater involvement by Gulf countries and the increased agency of powers in both regions. There is no doubt that the South Caucasus and Central Asia have been zones of great Russian political influence. Despite the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, Russia has been able to maintain strong political influence over both areas. This is evident in times of specific crisis and has been achieved through the continuation of security alliances, political patronage and conflict mediation.

Some Westerners tend to forget that this influence dates back to long before the Soviet regime and will probably continue in a different form. This is a point that Gulf countries understand well; they have not tried to

interfere but rather to develop broader relationships that benefit both sides. The Gulf has become an essential strategic corridor for both regions.

The wider region presents a complex geopolitical landscape to navigate. It is like playing three-dimensional chess and dodegball simultaneously. Indeed, from Türkiye, Russia, China and the US, influence comes from all directions. Each power has its own strategic interests, history and economic agenda.

China has played a big role through its powerful economy, as symbolized by infrastructure and energy investments under its Belt and Road Initiative. Türkiye pushes forward with strong cultural and linguistic ties, especially in Central Asia — with the dominance of Turkish television series being a good sign. Meanwhile, the US remains engaged through security cooperation, development aid and energy diplomacy. In short, local governments must skillfully balance external relationships to preserve their autonomy and advance their national interests. In that sense, Gulf countries have come to be recognized as proposing a much more balanced relationship. By putting forward economic development and collaboration on strategic geopolitical and security interests, it is clear their approach is more cooperative and less domineering than those of the other parties.

Gulf states have proven that their focus is much more on building beneficial partnerships that help strengthen both sides on the economic, cultural, political and security levels. The nature of this

engagement, combined with the growing international influence and reach of the Gulf countries, has given the actors in Central Asia and the South Caucasus a valuable broadening of their maneuvering space. While they do not present a full alternative, and probably never will, they help to balance the influence of larger powers.

In a way, the Gulf countries have been able to present a new political approach of dynamic neutrality, which allows them to speak and collaborate with all the powers that face each other. This is very clear in their Central Asian and South Caucasus policies.

It is impossible to look at these two regions only through the economic and soft power lens. The importance of logistical routes and massive lands with competing projects has a major impact on each country's defense. This also applies to the large powers. Hence, changes in global challenges have translated into shifting alliances. With the war in Ukraine and stronger, more competitive regional defense industries, Russia's dominance through the Collective Security Treaty Organization faces challenges.

Countries are diversifying their partnerships. Armenia, which has historically relied on Russian military support, is perhaps reconsidering this in the wake of recent conflicts, especially as Azerbaijan's close alignment with Türkiye has proven extremely efficient. In Central Asia, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan balance Russian security ties with growing Chinese influence and cautious Western

engagement. Ongoing border tensions in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan add to regional instability.

On that front, Gulf countries have a different approach. Although logistics and energy are the main focus of their collaboration, Saudi Arabia and the UAE have begun exploring deeper security ties, including intelligence sharing, joint training exercises and counterterrorism cooperation on a bilateral level. These efforts aim to address some of the most difficult issues in Central Asia, specifically, which affect all actors. These are best described as transborder security threats, such as radicalization, trafficking and cybercrime, which affect both regions.

The Gulf Cooperation Council states' approach tends to have the same spirit as its economic collaboration, always focusing on partnerships and capacity-building that benefit both sides in a balanced manner.

One essential area where the Gulf states could provide support to diffuse the greatest risk amid shifting power dynamics is in resolving potential border conflicts, which are often linked to ethnic tensions. This challenge is not unique to the South Caucasus and Central Asia but arises from changes in the world order that allow for more adventurous approaches. This is something the Gulf countries have demonstrated an ability to manage effectively.

Failing to resolve historical issues of poorly demarcated borders could trigger a domino effect of military clashes amid competing influences and bring all economic advances to a halt, making this an important issue where the Gulf can play a valuable role.

Sacred boundaries: Alcohol and the Islamic vision of society

Muhammad Mohsin Iqbal

THE matter of alcohol consumption and its trade in an Islamic state demands grave and contemplative consideration. Islam, as a complete code of life, addresses not only the spiritual elevation of man but also the preservation of his physical, moral, and social wellbeing. At the heart of this discourse lies the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him), which leave little ambiguity regarding the status of intoxicants in a Muslim society.

The Qur'anic approach to the prohibition of alcohol was gradual and filled with divine wisdom. Initially, the Qur'an acknowledged the presence of both benefit and harm in wine and gambling. In Surah Al-Baqarah (2:219), Allah says: "They ask you concerning wine and gambling. Say: In them is great sin and [some] benefit for men, but the sin of them is greater than their benefit." This verse invites the intellect to weigh the moral and societal cost of intoxicants and lays the foundation for future prohibition.

The next command came in Surah An-Nisa (4:43): "O you who believe! Do not approach prayer while you are intoxicated until you know what you are saying..." This guidance, though not a full prohibition, created a consciousness among believers that intoxication impaired reason, especially in the divine presence.

Finally, the complete and decisive prohibition is declared in Surah Al-Ma'idah (5:90-91): "O you who believe! Intoxicants and gambling, sacrificing to stones, and divination by arrows are abominations of Satan's handiwork. So avoid them that you may be successful. Satan only

desires to cause enmity and hatred among you through intoxicants and gambling and to hinder you from the remembrance of Allah and from prayer. So, will you not then desist?" These verses combine legal prohibition with the underlying philosophy: that intoxicants are a tool of Satan to sow discord and distance man from his Creator. The Sunnah of the Prophet (peace be upon him) reinforces and elaborates upon these commandments. He said, "Every intoxicant is Khamr, and every Khamr is haram (forbidden)." (Sahih Muslim). The Messenger of Allah also declared, "Whatever intoxicates in large amounts, a small amount of it is also forbidden." (Sunan al-Tirmidhi). This hadith eliminates the loophole often sought by those who claim moderation, as even a sip is condemned if the substance in quantity leads to intoxication. Moreover, the Prophet (peace be upon him) pronounced a curse upon all who are associated with intoxicants. In a narration found in Sunan Abi Dawood, he said: "Truly, Allah has cursed Khamr (intoxicants): the one who produces it, the one who produces it, the one for whom it is produced, the one who drinks it, the one who serves it, the one who sells it, the one who buys it, the one who squeezes it, the one who carries it, and the one to whom it is carried." This comprehensive proscription signifies that in an Islamic society, the entire chain of alcohol production and trade is deemed unlawful. The harm caused by intoxicants is not merely

spiritual but manifests visibly in social decay. Alcohol consumption impairs the intellect, weakens the sense of accountability, and opens the door to a multitude of sins - including violence, indecency, neglect of duties, and public disorder. Countless reports across the world associate alcohol with road accidents, domestic abuse, moral corruption, and even suicide.

Islam, in its foresight, endeavors to protect five primary objectives: religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property. Alcohol poses a threat to all five. It compromises faith by distancing one from prayer, it endangers life by causing accidents and health crises, it destroys intellect - the very distinction of mankind - and often leads to the ruin of families and wealth.

Nonetheless, some may argue that alcohol trade yields economic benefit. In secular societies, it generates revenue, provides employment, and supports hospitality industries. However, Islam's ethical economy prioritizes lawful sustenance and societal wellbeing over profit alone. What benefit is wealth that comes at the cost of broken homes, diseased bodies, and corrupted hearts?

Similarly, liberal arguments for individual freedom fall short in the Islamic paradigm. Islam does not deny personal liberty, but it binds it within moral and divine boundaries. In an Islamic state, the law reflects not just public opinion but divine guidance. True freedom is not the license to indulge in self-harm but the ability to live righteously in accordance with divine wisdom.

Furthermore, Islamic history offers examples of just implementation. After the final prohibition, the companions of Islam, in its foresight, endeavors to protect five primary objectives: religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property. Alcohol poses a threat to all five. It compromises faith by distancing one from prayer, it endangers life by causing accidents and health crises, it destroys intellect - the very distinction of mankind - and often leads to the ruin of families and wealth. Nonetheless, some may argue that alcohol trade yields economic benefit. In secular societies, it generates revenue, provides employment, and supports hospitality industries. However, Islam's ethical economy prioritizes lawful sustenance and societal wellbeing over profit alone. What benefit is wealth that comes at the cost of broken homes, diseased bodies, and corrupted hearts?

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destroyed their wine, and the streets of Madinah flowed with it. Their obedience and trust in divine command became the foundation for a healthy and morally upright society. Social advantages of this prohibition are numerous. A sober community is more productive, less violent, and spiritually conscious. It nurtures responsible citizens, stable families, and a culture where honor, clarity of thought, and modesty prevail. The youth are safeguarded from addiction, and public safety is ensured.

However, enforcing prohibition must be handled with wisdom. An unprepared society may resist or fall into clandestine practices. Thus, reform must begin with education, da'wah, and moral persuasion. Laws must reflect the spiritual readiness of the people, as was exemplified by the Prophet himself, who laid years of groundwork before implementing full prohibition.

In conclusion, the Islamic view on alcohol is deeply rooted in divine revelation and prophetic wisdom. It balances the spiritual, moral, and social dimensions of life. While recognizing worldly temptations and superficial benefits, Islam calls upon the believer to choose purity over indulgence, order over chaos, and divine pleasure over transient gratification. In the vision of an Islamic state, the prohibition of alcohol is not merely a legal statute but a testament to the pursuit of a higher, more sacred civilization.

Trump’s angry, erratic behavior explains his lowball poll numbers

DONALD Trump’s wild and whirling day showed why most Americans disapprove of him and think he’s ignoring their key issues — and why his most loyal supporters will never desert him.

The president’s incessant assaults on the national psyche mean everyone has become a little numb to his shocking style of politics. But even for him, Wednesday was a reckless ride, on which he only sparingly addressed the voter concerns that sent him back to the White House.

Trump ignited more speculation he may fire Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell after a Tuesday meeting at which he polled lawmakers about what he should do, CNN reported.

Ousting Powell would be the most overt attempt by a modern president to interfere in the Fed’s role of setting interest rates and could tip the global economy over a cliff. It might also be the riskiest power grab yet of Trump’s expansive second term, since it would traumatize markets by obliterating an assumption that made the US the world’s most powerful economy — that presidents don’t emulate developing world dictators by cooking the books for political gain.

Trump later insisted it was “highly unlikely” he’d dismiss Powell after markets shuddered. But given his volatile nature and obvious desire to exact revenge on an official who has refused to bow to his autocratic impulses, few will take such assurances to the (central) bank.

Meanwhile, in an extraordinary outburst on Truth Social, Trump blasted some of the most vocal MAGA personalities as “weaklings” over their criticism of his administration’s refusal to throw open files on the late convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein. Trump’s defensiveness supercharged a furor simmering for more than a week — and is likely to spur more claims he’s got something to hide and to encourage Democratic calls for more transparency.

In seeking to defuse a conspiracy, Trump created a new one, nonsensically accusing Democrats of being behind the storm — even though Epstein was charged with sex trafficking by Trump’s own first-term Justice Department. “Their new SCAM is what we will forever call the Jeffrey Epstein Hoax, and my PAST supporters have bought into this ‘bullsh*t,’ hook, line, and sinker,” Trump wrote on Truth Social. These two dramas — which are hardly what keeps most voters awake at night — encapsulate the exceptional and often dangerous aspects of Trump’s unique presidency. He’s looking for a Fed chief who will throw caution to the wind and slash interest rates in pursuit of fast growth. As with his obsession with tariffs, which similarly affronts economic orthodoxy, Trump is itching to implement a risky pet theory that many experts predict would court disaster. This is more in keeping with the whims of a king than a conventional president who respects democratic norms. After all, Powell is praised by many economists for doing the impossible — taming the worst inflation crisis in 40 years without setting off a recession or surging unemployment. But unlike the Fed chief, whom he appointed in his first term, Trump acts on hunches. If he gets this wrong and ignites contagion in the financial markets, the savings and livelihoods of millions could be on the line. The Epstein case is extraordinary in its own way, since Trump, the most prolific spinner of conspiracy theories in modern politics, is now trapped in a firestorm of innuendo and falsehoods that he helped to create. He’s getting payback for long seeding extreme distrust for government in his movement — which he’s exploited to build a personal power base on a foundation of voter grievance.

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Stephen Collinson

to a democracy when facts and truth are trashed and the legitimacy of government is destroyed because a substantial community doubts everything it’s told.

The president’s dramatics obscure some political wins

As often happens, Trumpian cacophony obscured some more significant victories for the president, including his expanding demolition job on the federal government — a core campaign goal. The White House on Wednesday was still celebrating a Supreme Court ruling that will allow it to push ahead with the gutting of the Education Department with mass firings.

Dismantling the agency has been an elusive GOP priority going back to

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Ronald Reagan. Trump also made progress on another longtime goal that other Republican presidents couldn’t get done as a bill withdrawing federal funding for public broadcasting moved closer to a vote.

At the White House, Trump also signed the HALT Fentanyl Act, which passed Congress with bipartisan majorities. The measure strengthens penalties for traffickers, although critics warn it could counterproductively lead to the incarceration of addicts.

The president presided over a ceremony that featured relatives of Americans who tragically died after taking the drug. The compassion he showed underscored why he’s so loved among his grassroots base.

The plague of fentanyl is especially resonant with Trump’s supporters in rural areas of red states, which have paid a terrible price in the opioid epidemic. The president recog-

nized the pain such drugs are causing for droves of American families by putting it at the center of his campaigns — probably more than any other politician.

The flow of fentanyl across the southern border means this issue intersects with another primary Trump cause that is popular with his voters — hard-line immigration policy. His attentiveness to public opinion in this area helped unify and expand the working-class coalition that twice won the White House.

These voters believe they have a president who listens to them.

A new CNN poll sheds light on Trump’s tempestuous presidency

Trump’s frenetic day helps explain some of the findings of a new CNN/SSRS poll released

The poll also adds texture to the current turbulence in MAGA world over Epstein, which began when Attorney General Pamela Bondi hinted that new information reinforced claims that the accused sex trafficker was murdered in prison and that authorities had a list of his famous clients. Last week, however, her Justice Department released a memo saying there was no incriminating evidence about any client list and that Epstein took his own life.

For all the fury among MAGA media stars, the CNN/SSRS findings show that Trump’s standing with Republicans is rock-solid at 88%.

Of course, even limited falloff of enthusiasm among the most radical members of the Trump base could still hurt Republicans in close races in next year’s midterms. And MAGA podcasters keen to monetize the fury of activists will keep fanning the flames of the Epstein controversy.

But there is clearly still massive support for Trump among tens of millions of grassroots Republicans across the country.

More worryingly for Trump, he’s underwater on many of the current questions most voters worry about. Normally, this would be a sign of a presidency in deep trouble. Second-term presidents

on Wednesday. His willingness to take huge risks with the economy, his obsession with sideshows like the Epstein case, and his habit of acting for a minority of the country means he’s put a ceiling on his own poll numbers.

In the CNN poll, Trump’s approval rating was largely unchanged from the spring, at 42%. But less than a year after an election that turned in part on frustration about the cost of groceries and housing, only 37% of those polled say Trump is concentrating on the right issues — down 6 points from March.

Neither a MAGA freak-out around Epstein nor a melodrama over Powell was at the top of voters’ concerns in 2024.

More worryingly for Trump, he’s underwater on many of the current questions most voters worry about. Normally, this would be a sign of a presidency in deep trouble. Second-term presidents

Dr. Abdel Aziz Aluwaisheg

rights should be applied nonselectively, in a universal, objective manner and without double standards or patronization.

At the same time, they called for respect for the principles of sovereignty and noninterference, as in

Mahathir was called upon to serve again as prime minister in 2018, after the country was wracked with the 1Malaysia Development Berhad (IMDB) scandal, one of the largest money laundering and embezzlement schemes in recent memory. Mahathir’s leadership helped steady the country during that turbulent time and, in October 2019, he launched the Shared Prosperity Vision 2030, a sequel to his successful Vision 2020. He remained in office until early 2020, when he resigned after his government lost its parliamentary majority. During his illustrious near-seven-decade political career, he shifted party affiliation several times and has continued to wield considerable influence. Although he is held in high regard in Malaysia and abroad, he has experienced his share of controversies and crises. Besides his ambitious and aggressive growth-oriented economic policies, which were largely successful, he prioritized the empowerment of the Malay ethnic majority, who were sidelined in the early days of modern economic development. He also adopted a tough policy against drug abuse and trafficking. Malaysia was a British colony for more than 100 years and a member of the Commonwealth, but Mahathir was fiercely independent. Together with Lee Kuan Yew and other Asian leaders, they advanced the idea of “Asian values” as an alternative to dictates on governance, politics and human rights, which privileged only Western notions on these matters.

In 1993, the Bangkok Declaration on human rights was adopted to codify the idea of Asian values. It reaffirmed commitment to the principles of the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as that human rights are universal, interdependent and indivisible. However, they stressed that human

the UN Charter. While Western nations focused mainly on civil and political rights, Asian nations put greater emphasis on economic, social and cultural rights and, in particular, the right to economic development, as stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

In social organization, instead of Western ideas focused on individualism, Asian values privileged social harmony and the collective well-being of the community, loyalty and respect toward figures of authority.

This approach manifested itself in Malaysia’s resistance to polarization between the US, China

who dip this low typically endure rough years leading up to their White House exit.

Trump is a unique case, however. His current approval numbers are in a range that is typical for his entire time in the White House. His willingness to push his powers to the limit — and sometimes beyond the law and the Constitution — and pliant GOP majorities in Congress mean that he’s less reliant on building public support for his priorities than more conventional presidents.

Still, he still seems to be doing the opposite of what most voters want. His biggest-ever domestic triumph — the just-passed “One Big Beautiful Bill Act,” which contains much of his second-term domestic agenda — is opposed by 61% of Americans. And his approval among independents is an anemic 32%.

These numbers may send a chill into the hearts of vulnerable Republican lawmakers running in swing districts in next year’s midterm elections. And they contextualize a new effort by Texas Gov. Greg Abbott to require the redrawing of the state’s congressional map in an apparent effort to boost the GOP’s chances of clinging onto its narrow House majority.

The poll also adds texture to the current turbulence in MAGA world over Epstein, which began when Attorney General Pamela Bondi hinted that new information reinforced claims that the accused sex trafficker was murdered in prison and that authorities had a list of his famous clients. Last week, however, her Justice Department released a memo saying there was no incriminating evidence about any client list and that Epstein took his own life.

For all the fury among MAGA media stars, the CNN/SSRS findings show that Trump’s standing with Republicans is rock-solid at 88%.

Of course, even limited falloff of enthusiasm among the most radical members of the Trump base could still hurt Republicans in close races in next year’s midterms. And MAGA podcasters keen to monetize the fury of activists will keep fanning the flames of the Epstein controversy.

But there is clearly still massive support for Trump among tens of millions of grassroots Republicans across the country.

Israel has turned Gaza’s summer into a weapon

Qasem Waleed

THIS summer in Western Europe, there is constant talk of “unprecedented heatwaves”. According to the media, authorities are working hard to help people cope with and protect themselves from the adverse effects of sweltering temperatures.

As someone in Gaza, it is hard not to be grimly amused by this panic.

After all, as temperatures began to rise, my homeland – at least what remains of it – has been transformed into an open-air furnace.

Now, in the middle of another hot, humid Mediterranean summer, we don’t even have the bare minimum to shield ourselves from the heat. I read report after report advising Europeans to stay indoors, stay hydrated, use sun cream and avoid strenuous outdoor activity. Meanwhile, we in Gaza have no homes, no water, no shade and no escape.

We cannot “limit outdoor activity” because everything we need to survive is outside: water trucks that may come twice a week if we’re lucky, food distributions, firewood to scavenge. We cannot “stay hydrated” because water is scarce, rationed and often polluted. And sunscreen? We would sooner find medicine on Mars.

Summer in Gaza used to be a season of joy with beach days, courtyard gardens, a breeze under the trees. But the ongoing Israeli onslaught has turned it into a season of torment. The beaches are blockaded. The courtyards are rubble. The trees are ash. Israel has flattened most of Gaza, turning soil into dust, parks into deserts and cities into graveyards. Gaza is now a shadeless city.

The heat itself has become a silent killer. But Gaza’s deadly summer is not natural. It is not just another consequence of climate change either. It is Israel’s making. The endless bombing has created greenhouse gas emissions and thick layers of dust and pollutants. Fires burn unchecked. Garbage piles rot in the sun. Farmland is razed. What was once a climate crisis is now climate cruelty, engineered by military force.

The irony is bitter: Europe blames its heatwaves on a meteorological “heat dome”, a bubble of trapped hot air. But Israel has trapped us in another kind of dome: overcrowded nylon tents that act like ovens in the sun. These camps are not shelters – they are slow-cooking chambers. They trap heat, stink, fear and grief. And we, the displaced, have nowhere else to go.

There were still deliveries of aid. We could still cook. But since March 2 when Israel blocked humanitarian aid again, we have descended into engineered starvation.

The United States and Israel now stage a grotesque theatre called the “Gaza Humanitarian Foundation” to distribute flour. They place sacks of flour inside metal cages as if we are livestock. People are forced to queue for hours under an open sky, stripped of shade and dignity. Soldiers scream at them to take off their hats, lie face down on blazing asphalt, crawl for food. After all that, you might still leave empty-handed – if you’re not shot first.

They have lowered the bar of our existence. We no longer ask for safety or

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collapse into more heat. The nights offer no mercy. With most of Gaza’s population now crammed near the coastline, the tents radiate heat back at each other. Unlike the earth, they do not cool after sunset. They store the suffering. I feel my neighbours’ breath, their sweat, their sorrow as if the heat itself is contagious. Insects swarm us in waves, drawn to the warmth. My mother and sister swat them away as if they were the bombs we can still hear in the distance.

Living in a tent for a second summer should make it easier. It doesn’t. It makes it worse.

Last summer, after being displaced from our home in eastern Khan Younis, we at least had some food variety.

shelter. We ask only: Do we have enough food to last the day?

Israel has combined every tool of deprivation: heat without shade, thirst without water, hunger without hope. There is no electricity to run desalination or pumping stations. No fuel to chill the little water that comes. No flour, no fish, no markets. For many of us, this summer could be our last.

This is not a climate crisis. This is weather used as a weapon – a war waged not only with bombs and bullets but also with heat, thirst and slow death. Gaza is not just burning – it is being suffocated under a man-made sun. And the world watches, calls it a “conflict” and checks the forecast.

Mahathir turns 100 as Malaysia comes of age

DR. Mahathir Mohamed, Malaysia’s pre-eminent statesman and one of the most influential world leaders of his time, turned 100 on July 10. He served as prime minister for much of the country’s post-independence history and his influence has extended beyond Malaysia. His wife, Siti Hasmah binti Mohammad Ali, celebrated her 99th birthday on July 12. They have been married for 69 years.

Although he has had episodes of ill health, the physician-turned-politician is still active; he drove himself to his birthday celebration and bicycled for an hour after the event, before getting tired. Asked recently about the secret of his longevity and mental alacrity, he said: “I do some exercise. I exercise my mind through reading, writing, talking, discussion, debates ... You have to keep your body and mind active.”

Malaysia got its independence from Britain in 1957 and Mahathir has been in politics almost since then. He served as Malaysia’s prime minister from 1981 to 2003, engineering a remarkable economic transformation, turning his country from a predominantly mining and agriculture-based economy to a robust multi-sector economy with an emphasis on manufacturing and services. In 1991,

Malaysia adopted its Vision 2020 plan, with the aim of becoming a self-sufficient industrialized nation by 2020. For two decades under Mahathir’s premiership, economic growth soared, with Malaysia’s gross domestic product growing from \$25 billion to more than \$110 billion, a remarkable feat, with low inflation.

Mahathir was called upon to serve again as prime minister in 2018, after the country was wracked with the 1Malaysia Development Berhad (IMDB) scandal, one of the largest money laundering and embezzlement schemes in recent memory. Mahathir’s leadership helped steady the country during that turbulent time and, in October 2019, he launched the Shared Prosperity Vision 2030, a sequel to his successful Vision 2020.

He remained in office until early 2020, when he resigned after his government lost its parliamentary majority. During his illustrious near-seven-decade political career, he shifted party affiliation several times and has continued to wield considerable influence. Although he is held in high regard in Malaysia and abroad, he has experienced his share of controversies and crises.

Besides his ambitious and aggressive growth-oriented economic policies, which were largely successful, he prioritized

the empowerment of the Malay ethnic majority, who were sidelined in the early days of modern economic development. He also adopted a tough policy against drug abuse and trafficking.

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In 1993, the Bangkok Declaration on human rights was adopted to codify the idea of Asian values. It reaffirmed commitment to the principles of the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as that human rights are universal, interdependent and indivisible. However, they stressed that human

the UN Charter. While Western nations focused mainly on civil and political rights, Asian nations put greater emphasis on economic, social and cultural rights and, in particular, the right to economic development, as stated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

In social organization, instead of Western ideas focused on individualism, Asian values privileged social harmony and the collective well-being of the community, loyalty and respect toward figures of authority.

This approach manifested itself in Malaysia’s resistance to polarization between the US, China

and Russia, and its forging of closer ties with other Asian and Muslim countries. It was reflected in its defense policies under Mahathir’s leadership. Malaysia diversified its defense partnerships and undertook significant

of education and dealing effectively with ethnic and cultural diversity, as he has said in recent interviews.

However, he has become disillusioned with electoral politics, saying that “democracy has failed.” He is especially critical of fragmentation in multiparty systems and the need for coalition governments, saying recently: “There should be only two parties. When two parties contest each other, one or the other can win, then you can have a strong government.” When you have multiple, smaller groups, you “cannot achieve the kind of majority needed to form a

Centre in Port Dickson.

Since leaving office in 2020, Mahathir has remained active and engaged in Malaysian politics. He remains optimistic about the country’s future, as long as it is “stable and well managed,” including through maintaining a high level

of education and dealing effectively with ethnic and cultural diversity, as he has said in recent interviews.

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government.”

He also sees a reversal when it comes to values. “Our modern civilization has failed ... We have gone back to becoming very primitive with our civilized values,” he said.

He applies that to geopolitics as well, singling out Israel’s war on Gaza and the failure to stop it as a global “moral failure.” “Normally, it should be that when you see such injustice, like genocide, you must do something to stop it. But here, we are unable to stop it,” he recently said, blaming Western powers, especially the US, for this failure, which is a mark of a “collapse of the civilization of the West” and loss of credibility. But he also laments disunity and a lack of effective opposition to this failure, especially when it comes to the issue of Palestine.

Malaysia’s economic development trajectory has been impressive. Upon its independence from Britain in 1957, about 52 percent of its population was living below the poverty line. The Malay majority and other indigenous groups had higher rates of poverty compared to immigrants who were brought to the country during the colonial rule. Its wealth and income have grown tremendously since then. GDP rose from less than \$2 billion in 1961 to \$437 billion in 2024, while per capita GDP grew more than elevenfold, from less

than \$1,200 in 1961 to more than \$14,000 in 2025. Only 6 percent now live below the poverty line.

Its social indicators went from extremely low in 1961 to a new ranking placing it in the “very high human development” category, according to the UN Human Development Index of 2023, taking into account improvements in life expectancy, health, education and income.

Malaysia has also become a magnet for tourists, reflecting significant improvements in its infrastructure and governance. In the first quarter of 2025, it welcomed more than 10 million international tourists, overtaking Thailand, a more traditional tourist destination.

Politically, Malaysia has become an important regional power. This was evident in its successful recent organization of several summits at the same time: the annual Association of Southeast Asian Nations summit, an ASEAN-China summit, an ASEAN-GCC summit and the first ASEAN-GCC-China summit. The political statements coming out of these gatherings, especially the ASEAN-GCC-China trilateral meeting, testified to the independent path the country has taken.

Malaysia owes much of its prosperity today to Mahathir’s pioneering vision.



SCCI calls off strike after successful talks with govt

— business community opposes harsh taxation measures in Finance Act

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry has postponed the province-wide strike after successful talks with the government over certain budgetary measures introduced through Finance Bill 2025-26.

Fazal Moqem Khan, president of the chamber in his statement on social media platform here on Thursday stated that the country-wide strike was scheduled to be observed on July 19 (Saturday), against five key measures incorporated into the feder-

al budget for the current fiscal year, along with 32 anomalies in the Finance Act, particularly Sections 37A, 37B and 21 (S), it claims, grant the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) arbitrary arrest powers.

On July 14, he said SCCI formally made an announcement through a media conference to fully support the countrywide strike on July 19.

The very next day, the federal government invited representatives of all trade bodies for negotiations.

He said Federal Minister Finance Muhammad Auranzeb, Prime Minister's

Special Assistant Senator Haroon Akhtar, Prime Minister's Coordinator Rana Ehsan Afzal and other senior officials held a meeting with members of the business community.

Therefore, he said the business community has postponed the strike till August 15 after government assurance to address all grievances and problems within a month.

He made it clear that traders will strongly protest, if the government didn't resolve issues as per commitment till Aug 15.

It is pertinent to mention here that a committee was

formed under Prime Minister's Special Assistant Haroon Akhtar Khan to address the business community's reservations.

The SCCI chief said the committee is expected to conduct detailed consultations over the next 30 days and present a consensus-based, practical solution to the federal cabinet.

Fazal Moqem said that the government had given assurance that traders' concerns regarding transactions will be addressed, and efforts will be made to ensure that the business community does not face unnecessary difficulties.



ISLAMABAD: CEO of Suzuki Motor Company Pakistan meeting with Coordinator to Prime Minister on Commerce Rana Ihsaan Afzal.

Exercise conducted at Gilgit Airport

F.P. Report

GILGIT: A Full Scale Airport Emergency Exercise (FSAEE) was successfully conducted on Thursday at Gilgit Airport under the supervision of the Airport Manager. The exercise began with a comprehensive briefing, outlining key emergency protocols and the importance of inter-agency coordination.

The objective of the exercise was to evaluate the preparedness and operational efficiency of all stakeholders in the event of a real-time emergency. Representatives from the armed forces, airport functionalities, law enforcement, firefighting units, intelligence, civil aviation partners, and the district administration actively participated in the drill.

The exercise was officially observed by representatives from security, intelligence, and rescue agencies, showcasing unified commitment to aviation safety. This joint effort significantly strengthened inter-agency collaboration and enhanced the overall emergency response framework at Gilgit Airport.

Output of LCVs, vans, jeeps increased

ISLAMABAD (APP): The production of Light Commercial Vehicles (LCVs), vans and jeeps in the country has witnessed 74.60 percent increase during the fiscal year 2024-25 against the output of last fiscal year.

As many as 36,807 LCVs, vans and jeeps were manufactured during July-June (2024-25) as compared to the production of 21,080 LCVs, vans and jeeps during July- June (2023-24), according to official data by Pakistan Automobile manufacture Association (PAMA).

During the period under review, the production of trucks also rose from 2,204 units to 4,366 units, showing an increase of 98.09 percent while the production of buses increased by 89.97 percent, going up from 419 units to 796 units.

However, the production of farm tractors decreased by 35.56 percent from 45,821 units last year to 28,607 units during the period under review.

The production of cars increased to 111,402 units during this year from 79,594 units during last year.

total realized value of Rs 865.126 billion at 11.08% rate of return.

Meanwhile, SBP also conducted Shariah Compliant Mudarabah based Open Market

Operation for 8-day tenor. The central bank received 3 bids offering Rs 37.392 billion at rate of return ranging between 11.13% to 11.15%. SBP accepted the entire amount at 11.13% rate of return.

and accepted an amount of Rs 865.126 billion against 11 bids while another Rs 37.392 billion were injected through Shariah Compliant OMO.

The central bank, for the Reverse Repo Purchase, received 13 quotes for 8-day tenor cumulatively offering Rs 1,011.846 billion at the rate of return ranging between 11.04% to 11.12%. Out of them, SBP accepted 11 bids with a

SBP injects over Rs902 billion in market

KARACHI (APP): The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), Thursday, injected Rs 902.518 billion through Reverse Repo Purchase and Shariah Compliant Mudarabah based Open Market Operations (OMO) to maintain the liquidity in the market.

The central bank conducted the Open Market Operation, Reverse Repo Purchase (Injection) for 8 day tenor on July 17, 2025

and accepted an amount of Rs 865.126 billion against 11 bids while another Rs 37.392 billion were injected through Shariah Compliant OMO.

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Seminar on mung bean production held

BAHAWALPUR (APP): An awareness seminar on mung bean production was jointly organised by Arid Zone Research Institute Bahawalpur and Pakistan Agriculture Research Council, here on Thursday.

Prof Dr Tanveer Hussain Turabi, Dean, Faculty of Agriculture and Environment, the Islamia University of Bahawalpur (IUB) attended the seminar as the chief guest. Dr.

Hamid Nawaz Bhatti attended the event as the guest of honor and shared his experience. Agricultural researchers and scientists, farmers and students participated in the seminar.

The topic of the seminar was to introduce the current crop mung bean under the limited water regime in South Punjab, especially in the Cholistan desert of Bahawalpur division. Prof. Dr. Tanveer Hussain

Turabi emphasized the need to conduct research and join efforts with farmers to reduce the risk of mung bean production and food security in water scarcity and sandy soil environments.

Organizing Director Arid Zone Research Institute Bahawalpur and his team appreciated the valuable services of the chief guest regarding mung bean production.

Pakistan losing red chilli export market due to outdated farming and drying methods

ISLAMABAD (INP): Pakistan ranks among the top four chilli-producing countries in the world, with strong potential to become a major global player in its exports. With its unique chilli varieties, rich natural flavour, and diverse industrial applications, the crop represents a big opportunity for foreign exchange earnings.

"Red chilli is more than just a spice, it is an economic opportunity," said Muhammad Rizwan, adviser to Concave Agri, an agri-tech solutions and services company. "Pakistan's climate, land, and traditional knowledge make it highly suitable for chilli farming, but we need to modernise our systems to realise its full export potential," he said.

"Chillies thrive in warm, humid, rain-fed

areas and perform best in well-drained sandy or clay soils. Pakistan's agro-climatic conditions support chilli cultivation across all four provinces. However, Sindh province dominates the sector, contributing around 85% of the country's chilli production, with the remainder coming from Punjab, Balochistan, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa," Rizwan said.

Sindh is also home to Asia's largest red chilli trading market, located in Kunri, Umerkot district. The town is internationally known for producing Dundicut red chillies, alongside other varieties such as Maxi, Desi, and Nageena. These chillies are exported in different forms, including fresh, green, stalk-less, and as powdered spice.

According to the Pakistan Economic Survey 2024-25, chilli was cultivated on 55,000 hectares, producing over 191,000 tonnes, showing a slight decrease from the previous year's 218,000 tonnes, despite a nearly similar cultivation area of 56,000 hectares.

"The red chilli sector is full of promise, but problems are being faced at every stage, from the farm to the export terminal," Rizwan said. "If we address these hurdles, especially in post-harvest handling, Pakistan can easily increase its global share," he added.

Pakistan's chilli exports are currently limited by aflatoxin contamination, poor storage conditions, and outdated farming methods. Aflatoxins are toxic compounds produced by

moulds such as Aspergillus flavus, which thrive in decaying vegetation, grain, and soil.

After harvesting, most chillies in Pakistan are dried in the open air, exposing them to dust and fungal spores. "Drying chillies directly on the ground and storing them in dirty old bags invites contamination," Rizwan explained. "This not only damages quality but makes our exports unacceptable in key markets."

Due to high aflatoxin levels, many European countries have placed bans on chilli imports from Pakistan. Despite increased cultivation and growing world demand, the chilli sector continues to suffer from issues like limited farmer training, unbalanced use of fertilizers and pesticides,

and a lack of modern irrigation. Most chilli farmers are smallholders, who lack access to loans, certified seeds, or modern inputs.

Even with these limitations, Pakistan contributes about 4% to 5% to the global chilli supply, ranking fourth after India, China, and Thailand. The country's chilli powder is considered of high quality, but international competition is fierce, especially on price and safety standards.

According to Volza, a global trade intelligence platform, Pakistan exports chilli to over 50 countries. Its major export destinations include Sri Lanka, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, which collectively account for 68% of Pakistan's chilli exports. Other significant

markets include the United States, Canada, Kuwait, Oman and Bangladesh, Volza said.

"Pakistan's chilli can compete in all the markets, but only if we ensure it meets international hygiene and quality standards," Rizwan said. "We need to invest in post-harvest technologies, better storage, and farmer education," he suggested.

To modernise the sector, the CPEC has identified chilli farming as a priority area. Under this initiative, Chinese companies are working to introduce improved seeds, advanced research, and precision farming methods to increase yields on smaller plots, particularly for export to China.

"There's huge potential under CPEC to modernise

chilli production," Rizwan noted. "With joint ventures, we can set up export hubs and upgrade our processing facilities to meet global standards," he added.

He emphasised that boosting chilli exports requires a comprehensive strategy: promoting disease-resistant, high-yield varieties; encouraging water-saving irrigation techniques like drip systems; and offering farmers training in safe drying, storage, and pest control.

"If farmers form cooperatives, they can access better inputs and sell their product at higher prices," he said. "We also need to support small and medium enterprises to produce value-added chilli products like sauces and powders that have rising global demand."

to manage global complexity. By combining our global network strength with local understanding, we enable clients to access markets, manage risk, and streamline their currency transactions. Our FX solutions are designed to meet the needs of fast-growing, globally connected businesses."

The event reflects the Bank's broader commitment to support high-impact sectors and help clients capture growth opportunities across borders. By bringing together market experts and clients, Standard Chartered continues to foster meaningful dialogue around innovation, resilience, and global expansion.

Standard Chartered connects IT sector with global growth

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Standard Chartered Bank hosted a focused client engagement event in Karachi, bringing together leading technology and IT-enabled service providers to explore strategic approaches to managing cross-border growth.

The discussion focused on how tailored foreign exchange (FX) solutions can support businesses in navigating international markets with greater confidence and efficiency.

Pakistan's tech exports are one of our most promising economic stories and we're only scratching the surface.

The IT sector has emerged as a key contribu-

tor to national exports, with global demand for software development, back-office support, and digital services continuing to grow.

Standard Chartered is uniquely positioned to support this growth. With a presence in over 50 markets, the Bank offers deep market insight, end-to-end FX execution capabilities, and competitive pricing-enabling clients to optimise their global operations and reduce transaction friction.

Commenting on the event, Saadya Riaz, Head of Wealth and Retail Banking said "Technology companies in Pakistan are reaching new international frontiers, and we're proud to support them with the tools and insights they need

‘Empowering Innovation: Roadmap for Startups’

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) on Thursday launched its report, "Empowering Innovation: Roadmap for Startups", as a follow-up to the inaugural Pakistan Startup Summit 2024 held in Karachi last year.

The event was attended by a diverse group of stakeholders, including policy-makers, entrepreneurs, investors, and thought leaders.

The report builds on the summit's discussions and incorporates feedback from various stakeholders, outlining key challenges and opportunities in Pakistan's startup ecosystem.

It also highlights regulatory measures introduced by the SECP to support startup growth. Additionally, the report provides a forward-looking roadmap with actionable recommendations for regulators, government bodies, financial institutions, entrepreneurs, and investors.

SECP Commissioner Zeeshan Rehman Khattak thanked participants for their valuable contributions and reiterated the SECP's

commitment to fostering innovation by bridging the gap between regulators and startups.

He emphasized the importance of collaboration among all stakeholders to drive sustainable growth. Participants also agreed on the need for regular consultations between startups, investors, and regulators to address emerging challenges and refine policies based on real-time feedback.

The full report is now available for public access on the SECP's official website.

US stocks finish higher

NEW YORK (AFP/APP): Wall Street stocks finished higher Wednesday, overcoming a mid-session swoon after US President Donald Trump denied plans to fire Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell.

Major equity indices had moved suddenly negative following reports that a dismissal could be imminent, but they recovered quickly once Trump ruled out firing Powell -- for now.

Trump, who has bitterly attacked the Fed chair for months, said such a move was "highly unlikely" and that "I'm not talking about that" when asked if he would fire Powell.

All three major US indices finished the rollercoaster day higher, with the tech-focused Nasdaq ending at a third straight record.

"It's very clear that the market wants to go higher," said Adam Sarhan of 50 Park Investments, who described investor reaction to Trump's mixed messaging on Powell as typical of a bullish tilt.

"Every time we get bad news thrown at it, the market shrugs it off and continues to rally, including today," Sarhan said.

The Powell drama also jolted the Treasury and currency markets. The dollar retreated against the euro and other major currencies,

although it recovered some of its losses after Trump denied he would fire Powell.

Lost & Found

I Tilawat Shah S/o Syed Farid Ullah Shah real owner of TOY-OTA REVO Model 2021, Unregistered. Chassis # GUN126R5545293, Engine # 1GD0962347, original sale invoice # 90938647 and sale certificate # 0090938647001 issued by Indus motor company in the name of Waqar Ahmad lost on 16.07.2025 in Peshawar circle near Police Station Sharki. If anyone finds please return it to Customer Relations Indus Motor Company plot # NW2/1/P-1 port qasim authority Karachi Phone. 080011123. Regards. Tilawat Shah S/o Syed Farid Ullah Shah. Address: Mohallah Garhi Sherard, Peshawar. CNIC NO:17301-7100199-5

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Fury 'in gym' and wants to fight Usyk again: Warren



LONDON (BBC): Tyson Fury will not be in the ring this year but he wants to fight Oleksandr Usyk again, the British heavy-weight's promoter Frank Warren says.

Fury, 36, announced his retirement from boxing in January after losing twice against the WBA, WBC and WBO champion Usyk - who fights Daniel Dubois

in an undisputed heavy-weight bout at Wembley on Saturday.

But two-time heavy-weight champion Fury - who retired in 2022 before returning six months later - has hinted at a return.

"I spoke to him [Fury] over the weekend about boxing. He won't fight this year," Warren told the 5 Live Boxing podcast.

"He's got this Netflix second series coming but he's in the gym. He's in it for his wellbeing, physically and mentally. It keeps him in a good place."

Earlier this month, Fury took to social media to announce plans for a trilogy bout with Ukrainian Usyk at Wembley Stadium in April. "He's got that mentality that he's in the gym and he

needs to do something," Queensberry boss Warren, who also promotes Dubois, added.

"He's made it clear he wants to fight Usyk."

Warren, who has promoted Fury since his comeback to boxing in 2018 after a two-year hiatus from the sport, dismissed suggestions the Morecambe fighter will take a tune-up fight.

If Fury - who has a record of 34-2-1 - does return, the long-mooted fight with Anthony Joshua or a match-up against Dubois could also be possible.

"He had some tough fights against [Deontay] Wilder. A fight I don't think he was right for against [Francis] Ngannou and then the two tough fights against Usyk," Warren said.

"He's controlled most of the fights he's been in but he's not getting any younger. Knowing him, he'll want to go straight in."

SACA graduate Nikhil Gorantia signs professional deal with Surrey

LONDON (ESPNcricinfo): Nikhil Gorantia, the 23-year-old right-hand batter, has become the latest graduate of the South Asian Cricket Academy (SACA) to achieve professional status, after signing a multi-year, full-time contract with Surrey.

Gorantia has impressed for Surrey's second XI this season, having been part of SACA since 2023, while also joining the relaunched MCC Young Cricketers Programme this year.

He has previously represented Essex Second XI, for whom he made a double-hundred against Yorkshire in 2022, and Northumberland. He is due to link up with Surrey's first-team squad this week as he begins training.

"I'm delighted to sign my first professional contract at Surrey," Gorantia said. "I'm incredibly proud that my hard work over the past few years with SACA, Durham University, club cricket and the MCC

Young Cricketers has been rewarded with a contract at the biggest club in the country."

SACA was founded by Dr Tom Brown in 2022 as a means to provide a second chance to British-Asian cricketers who had missed out on county cricket's traditional pathways. The programme has produced a range of notable players in recent seasons, including Worcestershire's prolific batter, Kashif Ali, and Jafer Chohan, the Yorkshire legspinner who featured on England's white-ball tour of the Caribbean last year.

"I'd like to particularly thank the South Asian Cricket Academy for keeping me in the professional mix over recent years," Gorantia added. "The work they continue to do for young cricketers has been phenomenal."

"I'm looking forward to getting around the group and learning from the wealth of experienced

players and coaches at the club." Born in Cambridge, Gorantia was part of the Cambridgeshire set-up from U10s to U15s before being part of the Essex age group system and Academy until 2022.

He recently graduated from Durham University with a degree in Chemistry and played for the universities cricket team. While at university, he also played for South Northumberland Cricket Club in Newcastle before moving to Sawston and Babraham in the East Anglian Premier League this summer.

Alec Stewart, High Performance Advisor at Surrey, said: "Nik has shown good potential and has earned this opportunity after impressing in the Second XI this season, not just with Surrey but what he has achieved for other county Second XIs."

"Not every journey to a professional contract is seamless. Nik's a shining example of how hard work

and patience can be rewarded. The guidance and coaching he has received from SACA, who help with opportunities for young cricketers, has been exceptionally important."

"The reemergence of the MCC Young Cricketers programme, along with Durham University, gave Nik the opportunity to receive quality coaching alongside his studies."

Brown, Co-founder and Managing Director at SACA, added: "Nik has worked incredibly hard to get this opportunity and everyone at SACA is so pleased for him. He's a shining example of how the programme works; his talent and his work rate have never been in doubt and he's shown that he deserves this chance at Surrey."

"On his debut for SACA back in 2023, you could tell straight away what a quality cricketer he was and we're so proud to see him take that next step in his journey."

Man Utd make third bid for Brentford's Mbeumo

MANCHESTER (BBC): Manchester United have made a third bid for Brentford forward Bryan Mbeumo that could be worth up to £70m.

The offer is understood to be an initial £65m, with £5m in additions.

Brentford are yet to discuss the offer.

United have remained confident about getting Mbeumo and had been hopeful of adding the

Cameroon international to Ruben Amorim's squad before they head to the US on Tuesday for three pre-season games.

Although they have been strongly linked with Chelsea forward Nicolas Jackson and Aston Villa goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez in recent days, it has always been the priority at Old Trafford to get the Mbeumo deal done in time for Amorim to work with him in the

Chicago, where United will largely be based for their 13-day trip.

The 25-year-old scored 20 Premier League goals last season and a number of clubs were interested in him, including Tottenham, now managed by former Brentford boss Thomas Frank.

However, Mbeumo's preference was to join United.

Brentford's other main goal threat, striker Yoane

Wissa, is the subject of interest from Newcastle.

Last season Amorim repeatedly spoke about United's failure to convert their chances.

Their 44 Premier League goals was their worst return in a domestic campaign since they were relegated in 1973-74. United have signed forward Matheus Cunha and defender Diego Leon in the summer transfer window.



BRISBANE, AUSTRALIA - JULY 17: Connelly Lemuelu of the Dolphins is tackled by Zac Laybutt of the Cowboys during the round 20 NRL match between Dolphins and North Queensland Cowboys at Suncorp Stadium, on Thursday, in Brisbane, Australia.

Pak cueists qualifies for IBSF World Masters Snooker semis

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistani cueists Muhammad Asif and Hasnain Akhtar has qualified for the semifinals of masters and U17, of the IBSF World Masters, U17, U21 & Men 6Red Snooker

Championships 2025, respectively at Manama, Bahrain.

According to details, in the Master quarterfinal, Asif beat Habib Sabah (Bahrain) 4-0 (68(68)-8, 57-37, 68(68)-8, 40(40)-

8). Earlier in the Pre quarterfinals, Asif defeated Mohamed Shehab (UAE) 4-2 (56-68, 21-72, 57-21, 80(80)-0, 68-45(43), 68-58).

In U17 quarterfinals, Hasnain outplayed

Krzysztof Czapnik (Poland) 3-1 (1-78(57), 92(46)-1, 67(60)-45, 58-16). Earlier in the Pre quarterfinals he beat Mutasim Al Saadi (Oman) 3-0 (75-41, 56(37)-31, 81-06).

Danish qualifier Olesen, world number 354, sets pace at Portrush

PORTRUSH, Northern Ireland (Reuters): World number 354 Jacob Skov Olesen of Denmark shot a serene four-under-par 67 to take the early British Open first-round lead in tough conditions at Royal Portrush on Thursday.

The 26-year-old left-handed qualifier eagled the 12th hole and picked up four birdies before a bogey at the last left him joint top of the leaderboard alongside China's Li Haotong and England's Matthew Fitzpatrick.

After early sunshine on the Dunluce Links, heavy rain made life difficult for the players but England's Matthew Jordan returned a three-under-par 68.

Dane Nicolai Hojgaard,

who went out in the first group of the day, compiled a solid 69 to finish at two under.

"I had to grind pretty hard to shoot a score today," he said. "I felt like I squeezed the most out of it, and sometimes those days are really nice to have."

Former U.S. collegiate player Olesen, who turned professional last year having made his Open debut at Troon as an amateur, sank a 40-foot birdie on the tough opening hole and reached the turn in 35. He rolled in his eagle at the 12th before a chip-in at the 15th gave him the outright lead.

Veteran American Phil Mickelson, the 2013 Open champion, rolled back the years with a one-under 70,

including a spectacular par-save when he holed out from a greenside bunker at the par-three third.

"That bunker shot that buried in the lip, and then to make it, it was obviously a lot of luck. It was crazy. I was just trying to save bogey, and I got lucky," the 55-year-old said.

Former world number one Lee Westwood, 52, also began well with a two-under 69 while Spain's Sergio Garcia was three under after seven holes as the old guard shone.

Defending champion Xander Schauffele began in steady fashion with two birdies and two bogeys in his first 14 holes while playing partners Jon Rahm

and U.S. Open champion JJ Spaun were at one under towards the end of their rounds.

World number one Scottie Scheffler was one under and 2019 Portrush champion Shane Lowry was level par after 14 holes.

Northern Ireland's Rory McIlroy is among the late starters as he bids for a second Claret Jug in the company of England's Tommy Fleetwood and American Justin Thomas.

Ireland's Padraig Harrington, twice Open champion, had struck the first tee shot of the tournament in cloudy conditions. Brighter weather and light winds were forecast for the later afternoon.

Stokes' long bowling spells v India a great sign for England, says Root



LONDON (Reuters): Ben Stokes' lengthy bowling spells against India in the third test shows the England all-rounder has full confidence in his

body after coming through injury layoffs, batter Joe Root said.

The England captain bowled 44 overs at Lord's, the most of any bowler in

the match, and took five wickets to guide the hosts to a 22-run victory and 2-1 lead in the five-match series. He contributed 44 and 33 runs and was

named player of the match.

The 34-year-old underwent a successful operation on a torn hamstring in December before undergoing a physical fitness programme during which he lost 10 kg.

"He's just desperate to be the man and make things happen," former skipper Root told BBC Sport.

"Incredible effort to be able to do that. I was just panicking that he wasn't going to make it through the game after a couple of bad injuries but he clearly trusts his body now."

"It's a great sign for us moving forward. I mean it really is isn't it, because that's back to his best."

The fourth test begins on July 23 at Old Trafford.

Simone Biles, Saguon Barkley clean up at ESPYs

LONDON (Reuters): Simone Biles took home two ESPY Awards, including her second Best Female Athlete honor, on Wednesday night at ESPN's annual awards show surveying the world of sports.

Biles also received the award for Best Championship Performance for her gold medal-winning showing in the Olympic gymnastics all-around event.

NBA Most Valuable Player Shai Gilgeous-Alexander beat out Shohei Ohtani, Josh Allen and Saguon Barkley for Best Male Athlete. But Barkley ended the night with three trophies, including the one for Best NFL Player.

His Philadelphia Eagles were honored with the Best

Team award, and the running back also won Best Play for his backwards hurdle of a Jacksonville Jaguars defender last fall.

Comedian Shane Gillis hosted the program and delivered an uneven monolog that left him wishing he could take back certain jokes. Cracks at President Donald Trump, Aaron Rodgers and Bill Belichick's girlfriend got laughs, but he was caught mispronouncing Diana Taurasi's name and got an uncomfortable reaction for a line about Caitlin Clark's treatment in the WNBA.

"When Caitlin Clark retires from the WNBA, she's going to work at a Waffle House so she can continue doing what she loves most: fist-fighting

Black women," Gillis joked.

At the end of his monolog, Gillis said, "Well, I see a lot of you don't like me and that's OK. That's it for me. That went about as well as we all thought it was going to go."

Clark later received the Best WNBA Player award following her Rookie of the Year campaign in 2024. It was Clark's third straight year with at least one ESPY, following back-to-back years winning in the Best College Athlete, Women's Sports category.

Biles was named Best Female Athlete in 2017 following her dominant Olympic performance in Rio de Janeiro the year before. She received the honor once again after col-

lecting gold medals at the 2024 Paris Games in the all-around, vault and team competitions.

The Olympics had a wide impact on the list of ESPY winners. Team USA rugby star Ilona Maher won Best Breakthrough Athlete, a bit of an upset in a category that included No. 1 NBA draft pick Cooper Flagg and Pittsburgh Pirates phenom Paul Skenes.

Maher helped the U.S. take home bronze in rugby sevens at the Paris Games. Her personality and messages about body positivity helped vault her into the national consciousness, and she appeared on "Dancing with the Stars," finishing runner-up. She became the first rugby player to win an ESPY.



LONDON, ENGLAND: Dev Sahni speaks to the media during the 'Undisputed' press conference at Wembley Stadium on Thursday in London, England.



In brief

ANF recovers 107 kg drugs

ISLAMABAD (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) conducting five operations across the country recovered 107.415 kgs drugs worth more than Rs 11.2 million and apprehended four accused. According to an Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) Headquarters spokesman, in an operation at Sialkot International Airport, Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) recovered 950 grams ice from the possession of a Bahrain-bound passenger. In another operation near Islamabad Motorway Toll Plaza, 1.2 kg hashish was recovered from 2 suspects. At Bacha Khan International Airport, 265 grams ice drug was recovered from a passenger's trolley bag travelling to Karachi while from Yaru area in Pishin, 50 kgs Hashish hidden for smuggling was recovered. In 5th operation conducted in Churbandar area of Pasni, 40 kgs Hashish & 15 kgs ice drug hidden for smuggling were recovered. Separate cases have been registered against the accused under the CNS Act, the spokesperson informed.

ICT Police nab three dacoits

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police, Kohsar Police Station team has arrested three wanted members of a notorious snatcher gang involved in multiple street crimes and snatching incidents across the capital. A public relations officer told APP on Thursday that the arrested suspects were identified as Ahmed Sabbir, Imran Ullah, and Nageeb Ullah. The police team recovered snatched motorbikes, a laptop, several mobile phones, cash, a car, and illegal weapons from their possession. The public relations officer said cases had already been registered against the accused, and further investigation is currently underway. The public relations officer said that Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Operations Muhammad Shoaib Khan had directed officers to intensify operations against criminals and ensure all necessary measures are taken to safeguard the life and property of citizens. The public relations officersaid criminal elements will not be allowed to disrupt the peace of the federal capital.

303,500 cusecs water released

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Thursday released 303,500 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 357,700 cusecs. According to the data released by Indus River System Authority (IRSA), the water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1530.00 feet which was 128.00 feet higher than the dead level of 1402.00 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 223,900 cusecs and 197,600 cusecs, respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1186.70 feet, which was 136.70 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 37,900 cusecs and 10,000 cusecs, respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 250,800, 201,700, 353,000 and 256,800 cusecs, respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 35,000 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 34,400 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.

Intermittent rain continues in ICT

— drainage operations underway

ISLAMABAD (APP): Intermittent rainfall continued across Islamabad on Thursday, prompting the district administration to intensify drainage efforts in several low-lying areas to prevent urban flooding.

According to the spokesman of ICT administration here, various parts of the federal capital witnessed light to heavy showers throughout the day, leading to water accumulation in some areas. The Islamabad administration has mobilized sanitation teams across the city to ensure quick drainage of rainwater, particularly in areas prone to flooding.

He said that the assistant commissioners are actively supervising the drainage operations on the ground. The teams, equipped with heavy machinery, have been deployed to clear water from low-lying localities where waterlogging was reported after the rainfall.

“Sanitation teams are working continuously to ensure smooth drainage of

rainwater, and assistant commissioners are overseeing these operations directly,” the spokesman stated.

The district administration has also put in place a monitoring system for the city's stormwater drains. Officials are regularly inspecting the condition of these drains to prevent any blockages that could exacerbate flooding risks in vulnerable areas. The spokesman further advised residents to stay vigilant and immediately report any emergency situations related to water accumulation or flooding to the administration. “We are monitoring the situation round the clock, and citizens are requested to inform us promptly in case of any emergency,” the official added.

Weather-related alerts have been issued, and the district administration is coordinating with relevant agencies to ensure swift action in case of further rainfall. The city's control rooms remain active to respond to any complaints

or requests for assistance from residents.

In recent days, the capital has been experiencing a monsoon spell, increasing the pressure on the drainage infrastructure. City officials have urged residents to cooperate with the administration by avoiding dumping waste into stormwater drains, which can cause blockages and disrupt the drainage process.

The ICT administration reiterated its commitment to mitigating the impact of rain on the city's infrastructure and ensuring that normal life is not disrupted. However, officials acknowledged that continuous monitoring and public cooperation are key to effectively handling the situation.

Citizens can contact the district control room or the offices of their respective assistant commissioners to report any drainage or flooding issues in their areas. The administration has assured timely response to all complaints received through these channels.

Monsoon rains:

CDA Chairman directs high alert response

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Chairman Capital Development Authority (CDA) and Chief Commissioner Islamabad, Muhammad Ali Randhawa, on Thursday directed all field teams to remain on high alert as heavy monsoon rains continue to lash the federal capital.

Randhawa emphasized the need for maximum field presence by joint teams of CDA, Emergency and Disaster Management, Metropolitan Corporation Islamabad (MCI), and the district administration. “All teams must remain in the field and provide every possible assistance to citizens,” he stated in a news statement.

Personally supervising field operations, the CDA

Chairman said that his top priority is ensuring uninterrupted traffic flow on all major roads in Islamabad. “Necessary measures must be taken so that citizens do not face any inconvenience during the rains,” Randhawa stressed.

He instructed the sanitation and environment departments to keep personnel and machinery stationed near stormwater drains (nullahs) for continuous monitoring.

“Ensure that all water channels are clear and any obstruction to the flow is immediately removed,” he directed.

Highlighting the importance of underpasses and other vulnerable locations, Randhawa called for unin-

terrupted drainage in these areas. “It must be ensured that there is no water accumulation anywhere in the city,” he said.

The CDA Chairman also ordered intensified monitoring in low-lying areas and directed the CDA administration to maintain strict vigilance. “There should be no negligence. All officers must remain present in the field to ensure an effective monitoring system,” he said.

He encouraged citizens to report emergencies or complaints through CDA's helpline 16 or the district administration's number 1334. “All complaints must be resolved immediately—without any delay,” Randhawa added.

Evacuations from low lying areas launched

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi Administration on Thursday, began evacuating people from low-lying areas that were flooded due to heavy rain, which had been pouring over the twin cities for more than 15 hours.

The district administration sounded sirens to warn residents about the flooding caused by the heavy rain.

The water level in Leh Nullah was rising and currently measured about 21 feet at Katarian and 20 feet at Gawalmandi.

According to the Pakistan Meteorological Department, over 230 mm of rain had fallen in the twin cities, a spokesman for WASA Rawalpindi said.

Because of the weather, the deputy commissioner declared a one-day holiday in Rawalpindi district and

asked people to stay at home unless absolutely necessary.

He urged citizens to cooperate with the teams from the Water and Sanitation Agency (WASA), Rawalpindi Waste Management Company, and the administration, and warned them to avoid going near water in low-lying areas.

Rainwater had collected at many spots on Murree Road, especially at Committee Chowk underpass, Murree Chowk, Banni Chowk, Jamia Masjid Road, Iqbal Road, and other city roads, causing traffic disruptions.

A WASA spokesman said their staff, along with heavy machinery, was working hard to drain water from roads and low-lying areas.

All resources were being

used for drainage, with operations personally supervised by WASA Managing Director Saleem Ashraf.

The spokesman added that Punjab Minister for Housing Bilal Yasin and Secretary Housing Noorul Amin Mengal were in constant contact with the WASA managing director.

According to the Pakistan Meteorological Department, rain measurements included 132 mm at Saidpur Village, 164 mm at Golra (near E-11), 185 mm at Bokra (CTTI I-12), 152 mm at PMD (H-8/2) in Islamabad, and 158 mm at Shamsabad (RAMC). In Rawalpindi, 235 mm was recorded at Katcheri (near Chaklala), 196 mm at Pirwidahi, 220 mm at Gawalmandi, and 200 mm at New Katarian.

F-14/15 Housing Scheme: FGEHA considering price revision

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Federal Government Employees Housing Authority (FGEHA) is considering price revision of the Housing Scheme PHASE VII (F-14/15). The scheme was launched in 2015 after getting formal approval from the Prime Minister of Pakistan on May 1, 2015, official spokesperson of FGEHA informed APP on Thursday.

He acknowledged that the price revision of plots in Sectors F-14 and F-15 was under consideration and the authority was diligently working to determine the pricing for these sectors.

“Currently, the consultation and decision-making process is ongoing which includes the signing of construction agreements, the developer commencing work, and payments to landowners. The authority is meticulously developing

a proper schedule for each plot within Sectors F-14 and F-15,” he informed.

Talking to APP, Director Administration of FGEHA stated that any information concerning pricing or installment plans would only be officially provided to allottees after approval by the Executive Board. The pricing and assessment for these sectors would be determined with the interests and financial well-being of the allottees in mind, to ensure the swift development of these sectors. Approval of the PC-I (Planning Commission-I) was also anticipated very soon.

“The delay in the completion of the F-14/15 project is due to court cases that began in 2016. These cases were conducted in three phases in these sectors. In November 2024, some of the cases were resolved; however, the rest are still

ongoing in the High Court, and the final decision is pending. Despite this, we are moving forward with the development work, and have also opened the transfer process for plots for some of the allottees,” he informed.

“The public and allottees can be assured that the Housing Authority will complete its work on these sectors promptly and will soon share positive news,” he assured.

According to official documents, the scheme offered plots in three sizes—50x90, 40x80, and 35x70—to members of Category-I, Category-II, and Category-III, respectively. The total number of plots is 6,746, of which 2,457 are reserved for registered members of Category-I (BPS 20–22), 2,259 for Category-II (BPS 18–19), and 2,030 for Category-III (BPS 16–17).



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Atta Tarar giving away certificate to a participant at passing out ceremony of 41st Specialized Training Programme at ISA.

ICT Excise Links number plates to vehicle owners

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Excise and Taxation Department of Islamabad has decided to issue vehicle number plates based on ownership rather than the vehicle itself for improving vehicle registration and transfer processes.

Director Excise Islamabad, Bilal Azam, announced that under the new system, number plates will remain linked to the registered owner instead of the vehicle. When a vehicle is sold or transferred, a new registration number will be issued to the buyer by the Excise Department.

According to the notification issued by the Director General of Islamabad Excise and Taxation, this decision will apply to both existing and future vehicle registrations. Vehicle numbers issued before the notification will also be subject to the new rules.

The policy states that when a vehicle owner sells their vehicle, they will be required to return the registration number to the Islamabad Excise Department. However, the seller will have the right to retain their number for up to one year without using it on any vehicle.

Bilal Azam clarified that if the number remains unused for more than a year, it will be cancelled by the department. This condition is part of the efforts to regulate and manage vehicle numbers systematically while ensuring that the ownership record remains updated and traceable.

The Excise Department emphasized that this step is designed to streamline the vehicle registration system and make it easier to track vehicle ownership.

The notification formalizes the implementation of the ownership-based number plate system, which is expected to bring clarity and efficiency to vehicle transfers within Islamabad.

IIUI, Alkhidmat Razi Hospital sign MoU

ISLAMABAD (APP): The International Islamic University Islamabad (IIUI) and Alkhidmat Razi Hospital Rawalpindi have signed MoU to provide quality inpatient and emergency healthcare services to university employees, their dependents, and parents.

Under the agreement, the hospital will offer services in general medicine, pediatrics, gynecology, surgical consultation, discounted lab tests, and 24/7 emergency care. The collaboration also includes health awareness and preventive campaigns benefiting the broader IIUI community, including students.

Speaking on the occasion, IIUI Vice President (Administration & Finance) Prof Dr Abdul Rehman said the MoU is a major step toward staff welfare and institutional healthcare.

“Access to timely and quality healthcare is fundamental to employee well-being,” he added. Director Administration Dr Inam-ul-Haq said the partnership also focuses on awareness, adding, “We aim to reduce hesitation in seeking medical care through health education for all age groups.”

41st STP passing-out ceremony: Tarar distributes certificates

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar on Thursday distributed certificates among the officers of the Information Group during the 41st passing-out ceremony of the Specialized Training Programme (STP) held at the Information Services Academy.

In his address, the minister Tarar congratulated the officers on completing their training and emphasized the critical role of professional communicators in shaping public discourse and strengthening national institutions.

Director General of the Information Services Academy, Imrana Wazir, in her welcome remarks, highlighted the importance of professional training in

national development. She said modern communication is not merely a tool but a cornerstone of effective governance and public service delivery.

Imrana said that the training was designed to equip officers with strategic communication skills aligned with contemporary demands of the information ecosystem.

She said the participants were given exposure to key national information institutions, including the Associated Press of Pakistan (APP), Directorate of Electronic Media and Publications (DEMP), Pakistan Television (PTV), Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation (PBC), and Cyber Wing, enabling them to understand the practical dynamics of state media.

She added that the officers were also trained in digital media strategies, countering misinformation, crisis communication, and promotion of national narrative through evidence-based messaging.

Training Coordinator Rabia Habib briefed the audience about the structure and academic components of the programme, and mentioned the contributions of trainers including Assistant Professor Junaid Ghouri.

Certificates were awarded to Syeda Hafsa Ijaz, Saeeda Shakeel Awan, Yumna Rehman Mujtabai, Mina Alam, Noor Mahad Shaikh, Shah Faisal, Muhammad Kamran, Pakiza Saddique, Muhammad Ibrahim, Zulfiqar Ali, and Junaid Ahmed.

Ex-SHO granted interim bail in death case

ISLAMABAD (APP): The District and Sessions Court of Islamabad on Thursday approved the interim bail of former Station House Officer (SHO) Shaukat Mehmood in the case of a suspect's death in Tarnol police lockup.

The court also issued a notice for a written response from the prosecution. The case was heard by District and Sessions Judge Nasir Javed Rana.

During the proceedings on Shaukat Mehmood's pre-arrest bail application, the court granted interim bail until July 19 against surety bonds worth Rs 50,000. The judge also

asked the prosecution to submit a reply and summoned arguments at the next hearing.

Shaukat Mehmood, along with other police officials, is nominated in the case of citizen Nauman's alleged custodial death, which occurred inside the Tarnol police station. At the time of the incident, Shaukat Mehmood was serving as the SHO of the concerned police station. Following the incident, he was suspended from his position.

Initially, the Tarnol police had registered the case against the accused officials. After the post-

mortem report confirmed that Nauman had been subjected to torture, the case was transferred to the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) for further investigation.

The FIA then registered a new case against the suspects, including charges of murder and torture under relevant sections of the law. Four police officials are already in FIA custody on a four-day physical remand as part of the ongoing investigation.

The court is set to review the case further in the next hearing, where arguments on Shaukat Mehmood's bail request will be presented.

Rain, floods disrupt power supply

ISLAMABAD (APP): Widespread rainfall and floodwaters on Thursday disrupted power supply and damaged the distribution system across the Islamabad Electric Supply Company (IESCO) region, with Rawalpindi City Circle, Chakwal Circle, Jhelum Circle, and adjoining areas among the hardest hit.

According to IESCO spokesperson, the downpour and overflowing seasonal streams led to the collapse of 43 high-tension (HT) poles and 7 low-tension (LT) poles, causing complete power outages on several feeders including Shahpur Syedan, Basharat, Tharpal, Jhand Khan, Mort,

Hasnot, New Sangoi, I-14/3, Officer Colony, and Ameer Hamza Colony.

In addition, rainwater entered residential areas in various localities, prompting the company to temporarily suspend power supply in affected zones as a precautionary measure to ensure public safety in accordance with established safety protocols.

The situation has also led to a rise in feeder and transformer faults, along with an increase in individual consumer complaints across the IESCO region.

IESCO Chief Executive Muhammad Naem Jan has placed all operational wings—including con-

struction, GSO, and GSE formations—on high alert, instructing officers and technical staff to remain in the field for rapid response. A central control room in Islamabad is monitoring restoration efforts around the clock.

Despite operational difficulties posed by wet terrain and standing water, field teams are actively engaged in efforts to install new poles, wires, and transformers in affected areas.

The company reaffirmed its commitment to restore electricity at the earliest possible time while ensuring safety standards are maintained.

RDA issues notice

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi Development Authority (RDA) has issued a show cause notice to a private company for marketing an illegal housing scheme on social media.

According to the RDA spokesman, the Metropolitan Planning and Traffic Engineering (MP&TE) Directorate issued notice to M/s Future Development Holding Pvt. Ltd for advertisement/marketing on the social media of an illegal housing scheme, Capital Smart City Phase-III, located near Thallian

Interchange M-2, Tehsil Rawalpindi, on the directions of the Director General(DG), RDA, Kinza Murtaza.

The DG, taking notice, warned the general public to avoid illegal housing schemes and not to get involved in the scam of any illegal housing society.

Moreover, the sponsors were also warned to stop immediately the marketing of their unapproved/illegal housing scheme and should contact RDA for getting NOC / approval of the scheme as per law; other-

wise, strict legal action will be taken against them.

RDA Spokesman said MP&TE Directorate RDA had sent letters with request /information to the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) Rawalpindi, Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) Islamabad, Cyber Crime Islamabad, SNGPL Islamabad, The District Collector Rawalpindi, District Council Rawalpindi, about illegal advertisements of private housing schemes on social media, WhatsApp, YouTube and other apps of internet facility.

Police seize weapons

GHAZNI (BNA): The Counter-Terrorism Police have seized a large cache of weapons and ammunition in Ghazni. Over the past four months, the Counter-Terrorism Unit of the Ghazni Provincial Police Command has conducted extensive operations across various areas of the city and its districts. The confiscated items include: 21 Kalashnikov rifles, 21 pistols, 8 hunting rifles, 2 PK machine guns, A substantial quantity of light and heavy ammunition, Additional military equipment.

UN stresses urgent action

KABUL (Pajhwok): UN-Habitat has raised concerns over Kabul's worsening water crisis, warning that urgent action is required to address the issue. UN-Habitat said, "Kabul is facing an unprecedented water crisis. Water levels have dropped significantly, putting six million residents at risk." The agency emphasized that tackling the crisis will require large-scale investment, strong collaboration, and increased public awareness around water use and management.

Kabul hosts trans-Afghan signing, trilateral talks

KABUL (Pajhwok): The foreign ministers of Uzbekistan, Pakistan, and Afghanistan will hold both bilateral and trilateral meetings in Kabul on Thursday, the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced.

During the visit, the three countries are also expected to sign a feasibility study agreement for the major Trans-Afghan Railway project.

The Trans-Afghan Railway is a strategic infrastructure initiative that will run from Uzbekistan through Afghanistan to Pakistan, covering a total distance of 780 kilometers.

The project is valued at approximately five billion US dollars. Its initial field survey was completed in the solar year 1401 (2022/2023).

In a statement, the MoFA said that high-level delegations led by the foreign ministers of Uzbekistan and Pakistan are scheduled to arrive in Kabul today. They will participate in both bilateral and trilateral discussions.

The visiting delegations also include Uzbekistan's Minister of Transport and Pakistan's Minister of Railways, the statement added.

According to the ministry, the first event will be a trilateral political consultation meeting hosted by the Afghan Foreign Minister.

"The meeting will focus on strengthening political understanding, fostering dialogue, and addressing key issues among the three nations. On behalf of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, the Afghan Foreign Minister will present his views on political cooperation, economic partnerships, and regional stability."

Later in the day, the three sides will sign a feasibility study agreement for the Trans-Afghan Railway project during a ceremony at the Presidential Palace.

The agreement will be signed by the Afghan Minister of Public Works, the Uzbek Minister of Transport, and the Pakistani Minister of Railways.

Following the signing ceremony, the delegations will hold bilateral meetings with various senior leaders of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, the ministry added.

1,200 young trainees graduate from training



KABUL (BNA): The Ministry of National Defense has proudly announced the graduation of 1,200 young recruits from the Shurab Training Center, part of the 215th Azm Army Corps located in Helmand province of Afghanistan.

In a statement released today, Wednesday the Ministry highlighted that these recruits completed a rigorous three-month course encompassing military, professional, and ideological training.

The graduation ceremony was marked by a special event attended by a delegation from the Ministry, led by Mawlawi Taj Mohammad "Rahbar", along with Chief of Staff of the 215th Azam Army Corps, Mullah "Zubair", and Commander of the Shurab Training Center, Mawlawi Ehsanullah "Obaidah". The event also saw the participation of respected scholars, tribal elders, and various officials.

During his address, Mawlawi Ehsanullah "Obaidah" emphasized the importance of respecting elders and taking responsibilities seriously.

He urged the new recruits to honor the sacrifices of martyrs and to treat their fellow citizens with kindness. He also encouraged the graduates to effectively apply their training in real-life situations.

Uzbekistan's FM in Kabul for trilateral talks

KABUL (Amu TV): Uzbekistan's foreign minister, Bakhtiyor Saidov, arrived in Kabul on Thursday afternoon at the head of a high-level delegation to participate in a trilateral meeting with officials from the Taliban and Pakistan.

In a statement, Taliban-run Arg palace said the talks are part of ongoing diplomatic engagement between the three sides and will focus on expanding regional cooperation.

Taliban chief minister Mohammad Hassan Akhund is expected to meet with Saidov during the visit.

The agenda includes discussions on strengthening bilateral ties, with particular emphasis on infrastructure and transit initiatives — including the proposed regional railway line through Afghanistan, which has drawn interest from both Uzbekistan and Pakistan as a potential trade corridor.

Govt urged to pave way for child returnees' education

GHAZNI CITY (Pajhwok): A number of families who recently returned to southern Ghazni province from Pakistan have urged the caretaker government and relevant organizations to provide education opportunities for their children.

Officials assure efforts are ongoing to facilitate access to education for child returnees.

According to reports, UN findings indicate that since September 2023, nearly three million Afghan refugees have returned to the country — many of them forcibly deported — and the influx from Iran and Pakistan continues daily.

Shah Mohammad, who returned to Ghazni four months ago, told Pajhwok Afghan News that besides the lack of shelter and other challenges, he was deeply concerned about the education of his six children.

"Due to old age, I cannot work anymore. All my hopes are now tied to the education and bright future of my children," he said. "We appeal to the government, aid agencies and all charitable organisations to create opportunities for our children to study."

Another returnee, Mohammad Sarwar, also urged the officials concerned to prioritise education of returning children and ensure they were enrolled in schools across the country.

"I have six children. They missed out on education due to displacement, but now we want them to study in their own homeland," he said. Similarly, 14-year-old Aziz Ahmad, who recently returned from Pakistan with his family, said he hoped to resume his education in Afghanistan.

"I want the government to help us study and learn to read and write, so we can serve our country in the future," he said.

Meanwhile, a woman named Ashrafi said she suffered mental stress due to constant worry about her children's lack of education and hoped that learning opportunities would be made available soon for her children.

Mohammad Amin Ibrahimzoy, a civil society activist in Ghazni, said the government should be fully prepared to support child returnees in all areas, particularly education, which he described as a top priority.

Meanwhile, Director of Refugee and Repatriation Maulvi Matihullah Arab told Pajhwok that around 12,000 children of returning families will be enrolled in schools under the guidelines of the Islamic Emirate.

Education Director Maulvi Nasir Ahmad Hussaini also said the exact number of returnee children from Pakistan was not yet clear, but official letters have been sent to local authorities in both cities and districts to collect accurate data. He noted that throughout this year, in coordination with the Refugees Department, many children have been tested and introduced to schools.

"We've also instructed schools in the centre and districts to identify returnee children in their areas and ensure they are enrolled," he said.

Efforts were ongoing, he added, to ensure access to education for returning families and to provide the necessary support.

Since the start of the forced deportations from Pakistan and Iran, around 4,000 families have returned to Ghazni, with the total members of individuals reaching thousands.

Trade between Afghanistan, Tajikistan increased

KABUL (Ariana News): New data from Tajikistan's Statistics Agency shows a significant rise in trade volume between Afghanistan and Tajikistan in the first five months of 2025.

According to the report, bilateral trade reached nearly \$40 million, marking a 31.1% increase compared to the same period in the previous year. During this time, Tajikistan exported approximately \$32 million worth of goods to Afghanistan, while importing \$8 million from its southern neighbor.

Tajikistan's main exports to Afghanistan include electricity, construction materials, cement, coal, mineral fertilizers, and food products. Meanwhile, Afghanistan exports agricultural products such as figs, raisins, and cotton to Tajikistan, along with carpets and precious or semi-precious stones.

Despite strained political relations between the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan and the government of Tajikistan, economic cooperation between the two countries has continued. Tajikistan remains the only neighboring country that has not accepted IEA diplomats at the Afghan embassy in Dushanbe.

Nevertheless, officials from the Islamic Emirate have stated that dialogues are underway to improve political relations between Kabul and Dushanbe.

Naghlo solar power project reaches 70% completion

KABUL (TOLONews): The Naghlo solar power generation project in Kabul, with a capacity of 22.75 megawatts, has reached 70% completion.

This solar energy project, which has cost over \$18 million, is being jointly developed by a Turkish company and an Afghan company.

Abdul Qayum, a representative of the contracted company, said: "Around 70% of the project has been completed, and over 200 people are currently working here."

An official from the state-owned power utility, Breshna Company, stated that upon completion, the project will supply electricity to nearly 23,000 households in Kabul, Laghman, and Nangarhar provinces of Afghanistan.

Faridullah Sharafmal, Head of Investment Coordination at Breshna Company, said: "We expect to start using the electricity from this project within four months. It will help alleviate electricity shortages and ease power issues for residents in Nangarhar, Laghman, and Kabul."

According to Sharafmal, in order to protect the environment, the company has prioritized the generation of clean energy.

He added: "Breshna Company has placed renewable energy at the top of its agenda, and for this reason, we have contracted several solar projects with the private sector."

Fitrat denies pursuit of Afghans after UK data leak

KABUL (Pajhwok): In response to reports of a data leak by the United Kingdom involving Afghan nationals, the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) says that its general amnesty decree ensures the safety of all individuals, and no one has been arrested, killed, or pursued due to their past actions.

In recent days, several British media outlets have reported that the UK Ministry of Defence accidentally disclosed sensitive information about former Afghan collaborators. The leaked documents reportedly contain details on approximately 19,000 Afghans who previously worked with British forces.

The Daily Telegraph claimed that the leak has led to an increase in efforts to locate and track down these individuals within Afghanistan.

Responding to these claims on Thursday, Hamdullah Fitrat, deputy spokesman for the IEA, issued a statement rejecting the reports as false and baseless.

He asserted that such rumors are being spread deliberately to intimidate the individuals involved and to create fear among their families.

Fitrat emphasized that the IEA's supreme leader has issued a general amnesty for all, providing them with full protection.



"No one has been arrested, killed, or pursued for their past actions," he said.

He clarified: "The claim that certain individuals are being targeted following the disclosure of their names is completely inaccurate. The intelligence agencies have no reason to track individuals who have already been granted amnesty. All relevant records about them already exist within the Ministries of Defense, Interior, and Intelligence. We do not rely on documents leaked by the British."

Fitrat added: "No retaliatory actions are being taken by the Islamic Emirate. No individual or authority has the right to pursue, harass, or harm anyone for their previous affiliations."

Kazakh mining firm begins exploration in Afghanistan

KABUL (TOLONews): A Kazakh company named Kazakhmys Barlau has begun exploration operations in Afghanistan's mining sector.

The company has described Afghanistan as a promising location for mineral extraction and stated that the country possesses high-purity reserves of lead and zinc.

At the same time, the Ministry of Mines and Petroleum, referring to the close ties between Kabul and Astana, says that Afghanistan has vast mineral reserves and that Kazakhstan has the capacity to invest in these resources.

Homayoun Afghan, spokesperson for the Ministry of Mines and Petroleum, said: "Kazakhstan, on the one hand, maintains good relations with the Islamic Emirate, and on the other, Kazakh companies have sufficient capacity in the mining sector. Afghanistan holds extensive mineral reserves and is working with major companies to ensure Afghan minerals are extracted in a standard manner and processed within the country."

Meanwhile, some economic experts say that foreign investment in the mining sector could contribute to the country's economic growth, job creation, and infrastructure development.

Abdul Nasir Reshtia, an economic analyst, said: "Whenever the political problem is resolved and Afghanistan is officially recognized by the international community, there is no doubt that the world, regional countries, and neighbors will seek to invest in Afghanistan. Overall, they are waiting for this issue to be resolved."

Qotbuddin Yaqubi, another economic expert, said: "Given the capacities present in both Afghanistan and Kazakhstan, this partnership could play a vital and effective role in the exploration, extraction, and processing of Afghan minerals."

This comes as Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, President of Kazakhstan, in a meeting with his special envoy for Afghan affairs, emphasized the expansion of bilateral engagement with Islamic Emirate officials.

Kazakhstan and Afghanistan have signed a memorandum of understanding on the basic principles for the construction and operation of a railway line linking Central Asia to South Asia.

Etisalat distributes 17.5 tons of food aid to Afghan returnees

KABUL (Khaama Press): Etisalat distributed 17.5 tons of food aid to Afghan returnees at Islam Qala, supporting families during their resettlement process.

As part of its corporate social responsibility, Etisalat Afghanistan has provided food assistance to Afghan families returning from Iran.

The company stated in a press release that it had distributed over 17.5 tons of food packs to more than 750 returnee families at the Islam Qala border, offering crucial support during their transition.

The aid operation was carried out in coordination with local authorities to ensure transparency. Each pack contained essential staples tailored to family needs.

This effort follows previous Etisalat distributions at Torkham and Spin Boldak borders, benefiting returnees from Pakistan with similar food assistance.

Etisalat's CCO, Abdullah Gaber, reaffirmed the company's humanitarian mission, stating, "Our duty goes beyond connectivity; we stand with the people of Afghanistan in tough times."

"At Etisalat, we believe our responsibility extends beyond connectivity," said Abdullah Gaber, Etisalat Afghanistan's CCO "We are committed to supporting the Afghan people in times of need."



In addition to food aid, Etisalat provided free SIM cards and set up a support booth at the border. The company also upgraded local towers to 4G to enable faster, more reliable communication for returnees.

Etisalat continues to empower Afghanistan communities through vital services, network expansion, and social impact programs, maintaining a strong presence in every province.

A subsidiary of e& Group, Etisalat launched operations in 2007. With over 7 million subscribers and investments exceeding \$400 million, it leads in innovation and coverage across Afghanistan.

ber of returnees in Herat city, especially in Maulana Park, calling life in such conditions difficult and urging immediate transfer to Kabul.

Meanwhile, the transfer of returnees is aimed at reducing overcrowding in terminals inside the city.

Ahmad Shah Abdali, a member of the refugees transfer committee in the 12th district, confirmed the presence of returnees in Maulana Jami Park and added, "Our team is working to ensure the process of transferring migrants is carried out in an orderly manner. Currently, migrants are shifted to their provinces after a short period of time. Temporary facilities have been provided for them by people, traders and government."

Recently, as the number of returnees increases, special measures have been taken to manage this crisis, facilitate the admission process, and provide immediate services at Islam Qala border by government, public and aid agencies.

Two days ago, the deputy prime minister for administration said half a million Afghan migrants returned to Afghanistan from Iran in June this year.

Currently, more than 30,000 Afghan migrants are forcibly deported via Islam Qala port on a daily basis and over 10,000 through Silk Bridge in Nimroz province.

Displaced refugees in Herat demand transfer to home provinces

HERAT CITY (Pajhwok): Hundreds of residents in western Herat province have launched "Sympathy and Cooperation Caravan" campaign to transport returnees from Islam Qala port to Herat city for free amid widespread deportations from Iran.

Every day, a large number of returnees are evacuated directly to Kabul from Islam Qala port, but some returnee families temporarily relocated to Maulana Jami Park, seek government's cooperation to shift them to their home provinces.

Haroon, a returnee from Iran and a resident of central Parwan Province, said he has been staying in Maulana Jami Park for the last three days. He asked the government to provide transportation facilities to evacuate him and hundreds of other returnees to their provinces.

He thanked officials and Herat people for their warm welcome and said: "It would be better if a more systematic program were organized for the refugees and they were transferred from their point of origin to the center of the country or, if possible, to their provinces."

Reza, another returnee from Iranian city of Varamin, who spends his days and nights in Maulana Park with his family, also called on the government to cooperate in their transfer to the center and to free

them from the situation of spending days and nights in the park.

"A large number of families have settled in this area, the green and humid space of the park is not suitable for families, and day-to-day life is difficult in these conditions. We urge the government to think of a solution for us as soon as possible", he added.

According to Juma Khan, another returnee, they have been given 10,000afs in cash aid, but if there is no cooperation in transferring them to northern Takhar province, they will no longer be able to pay the travel expenses.

He expressed concern about the increasing number of returnees in Herat city, especially in Maulana Park, calling life in such conditions difficult and urging immediate transfer to Kabul.



RAWALPINDI: Children trying to move to safer place along with their luggage in a flooded street during heavy monsoon rains.

Fire at Iraq mall kills 69, PM orders probe

BAGHDAD (Reuters): A massive fire in a hypermarket in al-Kut city in southern Iraq has left at least 69 people dead and 11 others missing, the city's health authorities and two police sources told Reuters on Thursday.

Reuters' footage of the aftermath of the overnight fire showed the blackened exterior of "Corniche Hypermarket" building, with rescue teams and security forces still at the site. Videos verified by Reuters showed firefighters spraying water on the blazing building overnight and people climbing from the roof with the help of rescue teams.

"We have more bodies that have not been recovered still under fire debris," city official Ali al-Mayahi said. The cause of the fire was not immediately known, but an initial police report suggested that the fire had first erupted on the floor where perfumes and cosmetics are sold. "Raging fires trapped many people inside the mall, and everyone was desperately trying to find a way out," said Ali Al-Zargani, whose house is next to the market building and who entered the premises after the fire had subsided.

"I saw the charred bodies of children and women lying on the ground — it was a horrifying scene." While some of the bodies were prepared for burial, with mourners weeping and praying over the coffins, the remains of more than 15 severely burned victims required DNA testing for identification, a Reuters witness said. As rescuers combed the smoke-charred building for more bodies, Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani ordered an immediate investigation to "uncover any shortcomings", his office said in a statement.

A statement from his office called for national mourning. The provincial governor said initial results from an investigation would be announced within 48 hours, the INA state news agency reported. "We have filed lawsuits against the owner of the building and the mall," INA quoted the governor as saying.

A lack of safety measures in Iraq has led

to large death tolls in fires. In 2023, more than 100 people were killed after a fire swept through a crowded wedding hall in a northern town. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif expressed sorrow over the casualties in the incident. In an X post, he wrote: "Deeply saddened by the tragic fire in al-Kut, Iraq, that has caused tragic loss of lives of innocent people. My heartfelt condolences to the families who lost their loved ones in this tragedy." "May the injured recover swiftly. Pakistan stands in solidarity with the people of Iraq in this hour of grief," he concluded.

Moataz Karim, 45, hurried to the mall at midnight, only to be met with the devastating news that three of his relatives were missing. Hours later, he identified two relatives despite their charred bodies, one of whom had only begun working at the shopping centre three days ago. "There is no fire extinguishing system," he said in anger, as he waited for further news outside the forensic department.

Safety standards in Iraq's construction sector are often disregarded, and the country, whose infrastructure is in disrepair after decades of conflict, is often the scene of fatal fires and accidents. Fires increase during the blistering summer as temperatures approach 50 degrees Celsius. In September 2023, a fire killed at least 100 people when it ripped through a crowded Iraqi wedding hall, sparking a panicked stampede for the exits.

In July 2021, a fire in the Covid-19 unit of a hospital in southern Iraq killed more than 60 people. The governor declared three days of mourning in Wasit province. "The tragedy is a major shock ... and requires a serious review of all safety measures," he said. Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani ordered a "thorough probe" into the fire to identify "shortcomings" and prevent further incidents. Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, Shia Islam's highest authority in Iraq, offered condolences to the victims' families.

Court grant remand to Ayub in Kohistan scam

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: The main accused, Ayub, in a multi-billion rupee scandal in Kohistan has submitted a plea bargain request to the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) for Rs. 3.45 billion.

According to NAB sources, the accused had previously submitted a request, but it was rejected due to the amount being too low. The accused's National Bank account in the Dasu branch showed a transaction of Rs. 3.45 billion. The Accountability Court Peshawar had directed NAB to implement the plea bargain. The accused is willing to pay the amount in three installments, and NAB has agreed to this proposal. NAB is likely to approve the plea bargain request soon.

Meanwhile, the Accountability Court Peshawar granted NAB a 7-day physical remand of the accused, Ayub. During the hearing, the NAB prosecutor informed the court that Ayub is a key accused in the Kohistan mega corruption case and needs to be interrogated further.

PHC disposes off petition

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A divisional bench of Peshawar High Court (PHC) comprising of Justice Sahibzada Asadullah and Justice Farah Jamshed has disposed of a petition regarding the oath-taking of members elected to reserved seats after the Election Commission of Pakistan wrote a letter to the Chief Justice, authorizing him for nomination to administer the oath, on Thursday.

Justice Sahebzada Asadullah observed that after the Election Commission's letter, the court no longer has jurisdiction to hear the matter. The court suggested that the Advocate General could challenge the Election Commission's letter if they have any objections.

The petition was filed by members of various political parties, including the Pakistan Muslim League (N) and the Pakistan Peoples Party, seeking the court's direction for oath-taking. The Election Commission has written a letter to the Chief Justice under Article 255(2) of the Constitution, authorizing him to administer the oath to the newly elected members.

Forest carbon credit mapping report unveiled

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: As a landmark initiative towards unlocking access to global green finance, the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has unveiled the province's first-ever Forest Carbon Credit Mapping Report. The launching ceremony was held here at Chief Minister's House with Chief Minister Ali Amin Khan Gandapur as chief guest. The report, developed with the support of the SEED programme, identifies ten potential forest-based carbon credit projects across 2.2 million hectares of land in the province. Collectively, these projects have the potential to sequester over 400 million tons of carbon, with an estimated revenue generation of four billion dollars and the creation of 50,000 green jobs.

Speaking at the occasion, Chief Minister Ali Amin Khan Gandapur termed the launch of the Forest Carbon Credit Mapping as historic milestone for the forestry sector in the province. He extended appreciations to the Forest Department and partner institutions for this remarkable achievement. He emphasized that the mapping initiative lays the foundation for the province's participation in international carbon credit markets and opens new avenues for accessing innovative green financial resources. The Chief Minister noted that this mapping effort represents a comprehensive model for environmental, economic, and social development in the province.

He further stated that Khyber



Pakhtunkhwa province has been blessed with natural resources, and forests are one of its most vital assets, now recognized globally as an industry. He said, unfortunately serious efforts were not made in the past to harness these invaluable resources. However, during the previous years under the PTI government, significant progress has been made in the forestry sector, as per the vision of the party's patron in chief, Imran Khan. The Chief Minister noted that the global community has acknowledged and appreciated the achievements made under Imran Khan's vision for forest development and environmental sustainability.

Highlighting the province's existing forest potential, the Chief Minister shared that there has been a six percent increase in forest cover over the last decade. Currently, forests in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa account for 46 percent of the country's total forest area and have the capacity to sequester 50 percent of the national carbon stock. He added that the province is projected to earn

up to 100 million dollars annually through carbon credits. The government is committed to utilizing the province's forestry resources for economic stability and the well-being of its people. Serious steps are being taken to fully capitalize on the province's carbon credit potential.

Ali Amin Khan Gandapur also mentioned that the provincial government is actively working to increase its carbon credit stock by reducing industrial and environmental pollution. There are vast opportunities to further expand forest areas across the province, and the government is making continuous efforts toward this goal. He emphasized that government's efforts alone cannot yield desired results without active public participation. He called upon the citizens to play their part in promoting and protecting forests. Appealing to the public, the Chief Minister urged people to plant as many trees as possible, especially on unused lands and around their homes. He concluded by saying that with collective efforts, the dream of a "Green Khyber Pakhtunkhwa" can become a reality.

UK to lower voting age to 16 in landmark electoral reform

LONDON (Reuters): The British government announced on Thursday that it plans to give 16- and 17-year-olds the right to vote in all UK elections, marking a major overhaul of the country's democratic system.

The government said the proposed changes, which are subject to parliamentary approval, would align voting rights across the UK with Scotland and Wales, where younger voters already participate in devolved elections. "We are taking action to break down barriers to participation that will ensure more people have the opportunity to engage in UK democracy," Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner said in a statement.

Turnout at the 2024 general election was 59.7%, the lowest at a general election since 2001, according to a parliamentary report. According to the House of Commons library, research from countries that have lowered the voting age to 16 shows it has had no impact on election outcomes, and that 16-year-olds were more likely to vote than those first eligible at 18. Labour, whose popu-

larity has fallen sharply in government after being elected by a landslide a year ago, had said it would lower the voting age if elected.

The reforms would also expand acceptable voter ID to include UK-issued bank cards and digital formats of existing IDs, such as driving licences and Veteran Cards. To tackle foreign interference, the government said it also planned to tighten rules on political donations, including checks on contributions over £500 (\$670) from unincorporated associations and closing loopholes used by shell companies. Labour ministers insist the change is intended to "modernise our democracy", while aligning general elections with the existing voting age for elections for the devolved regional parliaments in Scotland and Wales.

Other planned changes include introducing automated voter registration — which is already used in Australia and Canada — and making UK-issued bank cards an accepted form of ID at polling stations. It follows changes to the electoral law introduced by the previous

Conservative government, which required voters to show a photo ID. The Electoral Commission found that the rule led to around 750,000 people not voting in last year's election.

Harry Quilter-Pinner, executive director of the Institute for Public Policy Research think tank, called the changes "the biggest reform to our electoral system since 1969", when the voting age was lowered to 18. He noted that lowering the voting age and introducing automated voter registration could add 9.5 million more people to the voter rolls. "Our democracy is in crisis, and we risk reaching a tipping point where politics loses its legitimacy," he added, backing the changes.

The main Conservative opposition, however, accused Labour of inconsistency as 16 and 17-year-olds will still not be able to stand as election candidates, buy lottery tickets or alcohol, or get married. "This is a brazen attempt by the Labour Party whose unpopularity is scaring them into making major constitutional changes without consultation," the party's communities spokesman Paul Holmes said.

Sharaa says protecting Druze citizens is 'our priority'

DAMASCUS/CAIRO (Reuters): Syria's interim President Ahmed Al-Sharaa said on Thursday that protecting Druze citizens and their rights is "our priority," as Israel vowed to destroy Syrian government forces attacking Druze in southern Syria.

In his first televised statement after powerful Israeli air strikes on Damascus on Wednesday, Sharaa addressed Druze citizens saying "we reject any attempt to drag you into hands of an external party." "We are not among those who fear the war. We have spent our lives facing challenges and defending our people, but we have put the interests of the Syrians before chaos and destruction," he said.

He added that the Syrian people are not afraid of war and are ready to fight if their dignity is threatened. Israel's airstrikes blew up part of Syria's defense ministry and hit near the presidential palace as it vowed to destroy government forces attacking Druze in southern Syria and demanded they withdraw. The attacks marked a significant Israeli escalation against Sharaa's Islamist-led administration. They came despite his warming ties with the US and his administration's evolving security contacts with Israel. Describing Syria's new rulers as

barely disguised jihadists, Israel has said it will not let them move forces into southern Syria and vowed to shield the area's Druze community from attack, encouraged by calls from Israel's own Druze minority. The US said the fighting would stop soon. "We have engaged all the parties involved in the clashes in Syria. We have agreed on specific steps that will bring this troubling and horrifying situation to an end tonight," Secretary of State Marco Rubio said on social media.

The United Nations Security Council will meet on Thursday to address the conflict, diplomats said. "The council must condemn the barbaric crimes committed against innocent civilians on Syrian soil," said Israel's ambassador to the UN, Danny Danon. "Israel will continue to act resolutely against any terrorist threat on its borders, anywhere and at any time." The Syrian Network for Human Rights said 169 people had been killed in this week's violence. Security sources put the toll at 300. Reuters could not independently verify the tolls.

Reuters reporters heard warplanes swoop low over the capital Damascus and unleash a series of massive strikes on Wednesday afternoon.

Columns of smoke rose from the area near the defense ministry. A section of the building was destroyed, the ground strewn with rubble. An Israeli military official said the entrance to the military headquarters in Damascus was struck, along with a military target near the presidential palace. The official said Syrian forces were not acting to prevent attacks on Druze and were part of the problem.

"We will not allow southern Syria to become a terror stronghold," said Eyal Zamir, Israel's military chief of staff. Sharaa faces challenges to stitch Syria back together in the face of deep misgivings from groups that fear Islamist rule. In March, mass killings of members of the Alawite minority exacerbated the mistrust. Druze, followers of a religion that is an offshoot of Islam, are spread between Syria, Lebanon and Israel. Following calls in Israel to help Druze in Syria, scores of Israeli Druze broke through the border fence on Wednesday, linking up with Druze on the Syrian side, a Reuters witness said. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the Israeli military was working to save the Druze and urged Israeli Druze citizens not to cross the border.

PM directs NDMA to prepare disaster management plans

(Continued from Page 1)

He said development of Pakistan was linked to the development of agriculture sector and value addition of the agri-products. He stressed that a framework should be presented to provide farmers with easy loans for modern agricultural equipment, artificial intelligence, and quality seeds.

Comprehensive planning should also be carried out for small-scale industrial machinery access, aimed at processing farmers' produce into exportable goods, the prime minister stressed. He pointed out that the government was accelerating reforms' process to provide farmers with modern agricultural equipment, quality seeds, artificial intelligence, better water use, on-farm small industries, and other facilities.

Steps are also being included in the reforms for providing farmers with necessary facilities and training for increasing exports through processing of agricultural produce, he added. On the occasion, a detailed briefing was given on ongoing agricultural reforms, the performance of the

Agricultural Development Bank Limited, and the loans being provided to farmers.

Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, Federal Ministers Ahad Khan Cheema and Rana Tanveer Hussain, Advisor to the Prime Minister Muhammad Ali, Ministers of State Bilal Azhar Kiani and Abdul Rehman Kanju, Special Assistant Haroon Akhtar, Governor State Bank Jameel Ahmed, Chief Coordinator Musharraf Zaidi, and other senior officials attended the meeting.

Premier directs third-party validation to ensure transparency in public welfare projects: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif directed to ensure third-party validation for transparency in public welfare projects, especially those related to clean water, electricity, communications, and education.

He emphasized the importance of maintaining high standards in completed and near-completion projects through independent validation. Chairing a review meeting regarding the development projects of the current fiscal year, the prime minister

instructed that delayed projects must be completed as soon as possible. He said that the construction of high-quality educational centers like Danish Schools in Gilgit-Baltistan, Azad Jammu & Kashmir, and all provinces was a top priority of the government.

The prime minister added that educational institutions were a vital part of the current fiscal year's development plans, aimed at providing international-standard education and training to children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, ensuring equal development opportunities. He highlighted that water reservoirs were crucial for national integrity, and several projects were currently under construction to this end. He noted that the establishment of technology parks in Karachi and Islamabad will make Pakistan a significant economic hub for information technology both in the region and globally.

He emphasized that the development of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) was a key component of the government's economic vision for the

country. During the meeting, the prime minister was briefed on the completed development projects as well as those currently underway in the current fiscal year.

The briefing informed that multiple projects across the country in sectors such as communications, IT, water reservoirs, electricity, educational institutions, and hospitals had been completed, and work on new projects was progressing rapidly. The meeting was attended by Minister for Planning and Development Dr. Ahsan Iqbal, Minister for Economic Affairs Ahad Khan Cheema, Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar, and senior officials from relevant institutions.

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif formed a task force to ensure the provision of clean water to the residents of Islamabad and Rawalpindi, to prevent the contamination of existing water reservoirs from sewage, to supply water to Islamabad from various dams, and to establish an integrated water supply system from these dams.

The task force will be headed by

Interior Minister Syed Mohsin Raza Naqvi and will include members from the Capital Development Authority (CDA), Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA), Punjab Irrigation Department, and other relevant institutions. Chairing a review meeting on the clean water supply system in Islamabad and surrounding areas here, the prime minister directed CDA to present a comprehensive plan with regard to recharging underground water reservoirs using rainwater.

A system should also be developed to prevent contamination of Rawal Dam due to sewage from adjacent settlements and drains that flow into the dam, the prime minister said directing to swiftly establish a waste-water treatment system to treat sewage discharged from illegal and informal settlements. He also instructed to establish a water supply system soon to deliver the approved quota of water from Tarbela, Khanpur, and other dams to households in Islamabad.

The committee should finalize the formation of a Water Board for Islamabad and adjoining areas with-

out delay, the prime minister stressed. The meeting was attended by Federal Ministers Syed Mohsin Raza Naqvi, Mian Muhammad Moeen Wattoo, and other senior officials.

The meeting was presented proposals of the task force that was formed to ensure provision of clean water in Islamabad. The meeting was told that a supply system was being established to deliver the agreed quota of water from Rawal, Tarbela, and Khanpur dams to Islamabad.

Proposals and plans for the construction of several dams in surrounding areas and their water supply systems to Islamabad were also presented in the meeting. The prime minister was briefed on the proposed establishment of a Water Board and its responsibilities. The board will manage current and future water resources, the distribution mechanism of water to households, allocation of water among stakeholders, and other related operations. The CDA also gave a progress review on steps taken to prevent contamination of water reservoirs due to sewage discharge from informal settlements in Islamabad.