

ATC summons Omar Ayub
F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: An Anti-Terrorism Court on Wednesday summoned the absent accused on next hearing in a case against PTI leaders and workers pertaining to the arrest of October 4. Judge Tahir Abbas Sapra heard the case regarding the matter. During the hearing, Sardar Muhammad Masroof Khan Advocate, Zahid Bashir Dar and other lawyers appeared in the court on behalf of PTI workers.

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ISLAMABAD: British High Commissioner, Jane Marriott called on Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

Pakistan's death toll from monsoon devastation tops 250

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Torrential monsoon rains continue to wreak havoc across Pakistan, with the nationwide death toll rising to 252 after 10 more people lost their lives on Wednesday, according to the National Disaster Management Authority's (NDMA) data.

Punjab remains the worst-hit province with 139 deaths and 477 injuries, followed by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (60 deaths) and Sindh (24 deaths). The casualties also include 16 in Balochistan, 6 in Islamabad, 5 in Gilgit-Baltistan, and 2 in Azad Jammu and Kashmir. The primary cause of deaths is the collapse of houses (143 fatalities), followed by flash floods (41), drowning incidents (36), lightning strikes (13), electrocution (12), and landslides (4).

One of the most harrowing incidents occurred at Babusar Top, where a cloudburst led to a deadly flash flood, sweeping away a family attempting to rescue a three-year-old boy, Abdul Hadi. Among the

deceased was Dr Mishal, who jumped into the torrent to save the child. The incident claimed five lives, including four tourists, while rescue teams continue to search for 15 others missing in the area. Landslides and flooding have led to the closure of the Karakoram Highway, leaving thousands of travellers stranded.

Vehicles heading to and from Gilgit-Baltistan are stuck at Oshaar Nala Dasu on both sides of the route. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has expressed grief over the loss of life and property and has instructed authorities to expedite rescue efforts, especially for restoring the Karakoram Highway and Babusar-Chilas routes.

He has also directed for shelter and food to be arranged for stranded travellers. In Diamer, local residents living in mud houses devastated by the Babusar Thak Nala flood have also suffered severe losses. Despite their hardships, they actively assisted in rescue efforts, providing food and temporary shelter to stranded tourists with the help of police and district

administration. Across Punjab, urban flooding was reported in multiple cities. In Jhelum, heavy rainfall turned a cricket stadium into a pond, while flash floods in Attock brought stormwater into residential areas.

In Hafizabad, residents were instructed to evacuate with livestock amid flood threats from the Chenab River. Lahore received 108mm of rain, further straining drainage systems. In Azad Kashmir, flash floods and landslides have disrupted access in multiple areas including Samahni, Jhelum Valley, Neelum Valley, Leepa, Bagh, Poonch, Bhimber, and Sudhnoti. Two rivers flooded due to a cloudburst, sweeping away a bridge and cutting off communities. In Islamabad, a father and son who were swept away in a flash flood remain missing, with only parts of their vehicle recovered so far. Rescue operations have expanded from a local housing society drain to Kak Pul, facing added challenges due to ongoing rain and rising water levels in the River Sawan.

Gandapur inaugurates KP's first state-of-the-art food testing laboratory

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: In a major step towards food safety and public health in the province, Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Khan Gandapur on Wednesday inaugurated the province's first state-of-the-art "Provincial Food Testing Laboratory and Centre for Research" in Hayatabad, Peshawar.

Established at a cost of Rs 905 million, the facility is the first of its kind static food testing laboratory in the province, equipped with advanced machinery and modern testing capabilities. Officials stated that the laboratory will provide scientific analysis of food quality and detect adulteration using cutting-edge equipment.

The lab encompasses specialized sections in food microbiology, food chemistry and nutritional analysis, pesticide residue detection, and mycotoxin analysis. It also includes capabilities for heavy metal analysis, dairy, meat, and edible oil testing, as well as sensory evaluation. Designed under one roof, the facility comprises eight dedicated sub-laboratories and is integrated with an online reporting system and a modern Management Information System (MIS).

The lab has the capacity to test nearly 1,500 parameters across more than 100 food items and meets international ISO standards. It can detect harmful chemicals like aflatoxins and formalin, and microbial contaminants including salmonella, listeria, E. coli, and mold. Additionally, it allows testing for heavy metals in water and beverages, and performs comprehensive nutritional profiling including fat, protein, moisture, ash content, and calorific value.

Speaking to the media on the occa-

sion, the Chief Minister said the facility aligns with the vision of Imran Khan, under which the provincial government is committed to delivering quality public services and improving public health.

He added that the lab is capable of identifying antibiotic residues in dairy and meat products and offers halal certification services. This includes verification of halal meat and detection of harmful or prohibited animal sources. Over 20 Food Authority offices across the province will serve as sample collection points, while a digital traceability system will allow easier public access and transparency.

The Chief Minister lauded the timely completion of the project and directed authorities to ensure that the lab's systems are regularly updated and aligned with emerging technological trends. He stressed that food adulteration is a serious crime and those involved are enemies of public health, warning that no leniency will be shown in this regard.

The Chief Minister said that only food items approved by this laboratory would be allowed for sale in the market, adding that other departments and government agencies would also benefit from the facility's services.

Reiterating his government's commitment, he said the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government is determined to ensure the availability of safe and healthy food to its citizens and will make no compromises on public health. He termed the establishment of the modern food testing laboratory and research centre a landmark development that will significantly enhance the province's food safety regime.

CM visits EOC of PDMA, preparedness: Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali

Amin Khan Gandapur visited the Provincial Disaster Management Authority's (PDMA) Emergency Operation Centre in Peshawar to review the preparedness amid the ongoing monsoon-induced flood situation. Chief Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and senior officials were also present on this occasion.

The chief minister was briefed by PDMA officials on river flow levels across the province, damages caused by recent heavy rains, the status of the early warning system, and emergency response mechanisms in place. Officials informed that the PDMA helpline is functional 24/7, with a coordinated system active at the district level to ensure effective inter-agency response. Continuous monitoring of river discharges is underway, and early warnings are relayed promptly to district administrations wherever needed.

Rescue equipment and relief supplies have been positioned across districts, and all previously blocked roads have now been cleared except for two. The CM was told that 60 fatalities have been reported across the province due to rain-related incidents, while 35 homes have been completely destroyed and another 212 partially damaged. Compensation payments for these losses have been disbursed to respective deputy commissioners.

Gandapur directed that fresh damage reports be collected from all districts and any pending compensation payments be released without delay. He stressed strict vigilance on river flows and ordered immediate post-monsoon clearance of encroachments along rivers and canals, as well as removal of any barriers obstructing water flow.

Iran ready for war with Israel, will not halt N-plan: Pezeshkian

TEHRAN: Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian has said his country is prepared for any war Israel might wage against it, adding he was not optimistic about the ceasefire between the countries, while confirming Tehran is committed to continuing its nuclear programme for peaceful purposes.

Pezeshkian made the comments in an exclusive interview with Al Jazeera aired on Wednesday, one of his first since the end of the 12-day conflict with Israel last month, in which the United States intervened on Israel's behalf, launching strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities. The comments come as Western nations say they are seeking a solution to Iran's ongoing nuclear ambitions in the wake of the conflict, amid reports that strikes on its nuclear facilities were less damaging than claimed by Washington.

"We are fully prepared for any new Israeli military move, and our armed forces are ready to strike deep inside Israel again," Pezeshkian told Al Jazeera. Iran was not relying on the ceasefire that ended the 12-day war to hold, he said. "We are not very optimistic about it," said Pezeshkian. "That is why we have prepared ourselves for any possible scenario and any potential response. Israel has harmed us, and we have also harmed it. It has dealt us powerful blows, and we have struck it hard in its depths, but it is concealing its losses."

He added that Israel's strikes, which assassinated leading military figures and nuclear scientists, and damaged nuclear facilities, had sought to "eliminate" Iran's hierarchy, "but it has completely failed to do so". More than 900 people were killed in Iran, large numbers of them civilians, and at least 28 people were

killed in Israel before a ceasefire took hold on June 24.

Pezeshkian said Iran would continue its uranium enrichment programme despite international opposition, saying the development of its nuclear abilities would be carried out "within the framework of international laws". "[US President Donald] Trump says that Iran should not have a nuclear weapon and we accept this because we reject nuclear weapons and this is our political, religious, humanitarian and strategic position," he said.

"We believe in diplomacy, so any future negotiations must be according to a win-win logic, and we will not accept threats and dictates." He said the claim from Trump "that our nuclear programme is over is just an illusion".

"Our nuclear capabilities are in the minds of our scientists and not in the

10 arrested in Swat student murder case

Shafi Ullah

MINGORA: The Swat police have arrested 10 individuals, including a madrasa nazim, in connection with the brutal murder of a 12-year-old student and violence against children at an unregistered madrasa in the Chalyar area of Khwaza Khela. The police are still on the hunt for two more key suspects.

During the raid, the police recovered sticks and chains from the madrasa, which were allegedly used to torture the students. The Assistant Commissioner Khwaza Khela has officially sealed the madrasa. District Police Officer (DPO) Swat Muhammad Umar Khan confirmed that two cases have been registered against the accused. One case is related to the murder of the 12-year-old student, while the other is related to physical violence against other children in the madrasa.

The madrasa has been closed down for being unregistered and illegal. Around 160 children studying in the madrasa have been handed over to their parents. The DPO announced that a list of unregistered madrasas is being compiled across the district, and strict action will be taken against them.

The DPO emphasized that cruelty and violence against children will not be tolerated under any circumstances, and those involved will be brought to justice according to the law. He also mentioned that action has been taken in another incident of child abuse in a madrasa in Gulkada, where two accused have been arrested.

Meanwhile, Hundreds of locals in Khwaza Khela staged a protest, blocking the main Kalam-Mingora highway to all traffic, demanding justice for a recent murder. The protesters are calling for the inclusion of more individuals in the FIR. After late-night negotiations, authorities assured the protesters that the accused would be swiftly apprehended and brought to justice. The protesters have given the administration two-day deadline to meet their demands, failing which they will continue their protest.

CJCSC attends Int'l Industry Fair

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: General Sahir Shamshad Mirza, NI (M), Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (CJCSC), attended the 17th International Defence Industry Fair (IDEF-2025) at Istanbul, Türkiye, a globally renowned event that highlights cutting-edge innovations and advancements in the defence sector.

On the sidelines, CJCSC held separate meetings with General (Retd) Yasar Guler, Minister of National Defence of Türkiye, Colonel General Hasanov Zakir Asgar Oglu, Minister of Defence of Azerbaijan, Mr Gurbanov Agil Salim Oglu, Deputy Minister of Defence Azerbaijan and General Metin Gurak, Chief of Turkish General Staff.

PM for full autonomy of Privatization Commission

— hails FBR reforms, calls for time-bound actions to sustain progress

Saqib Mushtaq

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shahbaz Sharif on Wednesday directed the authorities to ensure that the Privatization Commission would be given full autonomy as per the law to eliminate red tape and unnecessary elements during the denationalisation process of the state-owned enterprises (SOEs).

The prime minister chaired a review meeting on progress of privatization of SOEs here at the Prime Minister's Office, a PM Office news release said. PM Sharif underlined that the privatization of loss-making national enterprises was essential for the improvement and development of the country's economy, whereas it was the government's top priority to carry out the privatization process effectively, comprehensively and efficiently.

The prime minister had directed the quarters concerned to make sure that all legal steps and transparency requirements should be fulfilled in the privatization

of selected enterprises. "Illegal occupation of valuable land of national institutions is unacceptable under any circumstances. However, every possible precaution should be taken in the disposal of valuable land owned by national institutions during the privatization process," he emphasised.

PM Shehbaz Sharif in his special directives during the meeting underlined that the phased privatization targets of the aforementioned institutions should be set according to the economic environment of the market so that the national exchequer could be protected from possible losses at all costs.

"All decisions should be implemented fully and effectively. I will regularly monitor the progress of the ongoing work in the Privatization Commission. Moreover, the consultation of professional experts and international standards should be maintained in the privatization process and restructuring of institutions," the prime minister said. During the meeting, the prime minister was briefed on the progress of privatization of institutions

included in the privatization list in 2024. The Commission officials briefed that the phased privatization of selected institutions was designed keeping in view the legal, financial and sectoral requirements.

Moreover, phased privatization of selected institutions would be completed within the stipulated time frame as per the cabinet-approved program and the denationalisation of all institutions included in the privatization list, including PIA, power transmission companies (Discos), would be completed in accordance with the set economic, institutional and administrative targets. Federal Ministers Sardar Owais Khan Leghari, Ahad Khan Cheema, Chairman Privatization Commission Muhammad Ali, Minister of State for Finance and Railways Bilal Azhar Kayani and other relevant government officers and senior officials attended the meeting.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif also chaired a high-level

(Continued on Back Page)

Lower Kurram and Sadda tribes sign peace pact

F.P. Report

SADDA: The tribes of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Lower Kurram and Sadda regions signed a peace agreement on Wednesday for a year in a jirga held at the Sadda Frontier Corps Fort that was attended by many local notables.

Kurram DC Ashfaq Khan, who chaired the jirga, told media that after a long law and order situation in the district, the efforts of the administration, security forces, police and tribal leaders brought positive results and "a peace agreement was

signed between the local tribes of Lower Kurram and Sadda for a year." The jirga was held at Sadda FC Fort between prominent tribal chiefs of the Ahle Sunnat and Tori Bangash tribes, including the participation of the additional DC, officers of the Security Forces Police and assistant commissioners.

DC Khan said the tribal elders inked the agreement in the light of the Kohat agreement, and all conditions of that agreement were to be considered. He said the tribal leaders declared the move a "milestone for regional stability" and hoped for

progress and long-standing peace. They also applauded the security forces, police and administration's role and acknowledged their efforts, he added.

The residents of Topki, Sameer, Gosar, Amal Kot, Gharbena, Sangena, Kandezar, Mengak, Tangay, Manda, Marokhel and the suburbs of Lower Kurram and from Sadda, Kochi, Sateen, Shasho, Darani, Per Qayum, Sakhi Ahmad Shah, Mala Kaly, Chakai Kaly, Jan Haji Kaly, Malak Mulajan Kaly, Arawaly, Marokhel, Lower Mandori and adjacent areas signed the agreement unanimously.



PESHAWAR: Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ali Amin Gandapur being briefed about monsoon damages and losses during his visit to Emergency Operation Centre of PDMA.



Federal minister visits K-IV project

LAHORE (APP): Federal Minister for Water Resources Mian Muhammad Mueen Wattoo visited Greater Karachi Bulk Water Supply Scheme (K-IV Project) and reviewed the ongoing development works on the Project.

Ms Rana Ansar, Parliamentary Secretary for Water Resources, Syed Nasir Hussain Shah, Sindh Provincial Minister for Energy, Planning and Development, Nehal Hashmi and Chairman WAPDA Naveed Asghar Chaudhry also accompanied him. Member Water Syed Ali Akhtar Shah, GMPD K-IV Project Amir Mughal and representatives of the Consultants and the Contractors were also present, according to WAPDA spokesman here Wednesday.

The federal minister visited in detail various key work fronts, which included intake structure and pumping stations being constructed at Keenjhar lake, water conveyance system consisting of pressurized pipeline from Keenjhar to Karachi as well as water reservoirs and filtration plants in suburbs of Karachi.

During the visit, the federal minister was briefed by the project team about the site-wise progress achieved so far, remaining works and timelines for their completion. It was briefed that construction work on all components of the project is in progress at a satisfactory pace. Overall physical progress stands at 63 per cent, while a sum of Rs 86.4 billion has so far been spent on construction of the Project. Phase-I is planned to be completed in 2026, provided the required funds are made accordingly.

Speaking on the occasion, the federal minister expressed satisfaction over the pace of work and reiterated the federal government's full support for the Project. K-IV is a vital scheme for supplementing water supplies to Karachi to meet water requirements for the urban use. We are committed to ensuring completion of K-IV at the earliest, as it is one of the priority projects of the Ministry of Water Resources, he added. The minister emphasized the need for enhanced coordination among all stakeholders to remove bottlenecks for smooth implementation of the project. He also directed the consultants and the contractors to adhere to the quality standards stipulated for the Project.

The K-IV Project is a critical infrastructure initiative aimed at addressing Karachi's acute water shortage by providing an additional 650 million gallons per day (MGD) water to Karachi from Keenjhar lake. The Project is planned to be completed in two phases. At present, WAPDA is constructing Phase-I of to supply 260 MGD water to Karachi.



LAHORE: An aerial view of WASA employees monitor and for assist traffic and pedestrians on a rain-flooded street during a heavy monsoon downpour in the Provincial Capital. —APP Photo

CM reviews post-flood situation at Nankana Sahib

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif visited flood-affected areas of Nankana Sahib to assess the post-flood situation and review ongoing relief and development efforts.

During her two-and-a-half-hour tour, the chief minister visited both urban and rural parts of the district, meeting residents and overseeing rehabilitation measures on ground.

To protect the region from future flood damage, CM Maryam Nawaz announced the construction of two flood drains in Nankana Sahib. She also ordered the expedited completion of road infrastructure and other development projects in the area.

The CM directed the preparation of a comprehensive beautification plan for Nankana Sahib within two weeks and instructed that funds be released without delay. She further announced an increase in the number of electric buses for the district and reaffirmed her commitment to making Nankana Sahib a model city.

CM Maryam Nawaz also issued directives for improving urban safety by ensuring zebra crossings and signboards near schools, controlling the price of roti, and expanding the num-

ber of clinics-on-wheels. She called for the upgrading of the city's entrance roads and shoulder lanes. Villages including Dafar Khokhran will be included in the Model Village Scheme, she added. During her visit to Jasrani Mor, the CM inspected flood-hit homes and farmland. She also launched the distribution of relief goods in Miranpur village, where PDMA is providing flood-affected families with emergency kits, mosquito nets, and clothing.

CM Maryam Nawaz personally interacted with the victims, shook hands with women, and assured them of government support. An elderly woman offered prayers for her well-being after the CM announced the development of a model village.

Later, she toured Dholar Chowk, Gurdwara Jann Asthan Chowk, DPS Chowk, Berry Chowk, Chungi Chowk, Railway Road, Peer Ahmad Shah Road, and Mananwala Phatak. A large crowd gathered on her arrival, and she warmly interacted with children, giving them sweets and speaking to them with affection.

CM Maryam Nawaz also held a meeting with parliamentarians from Nankana Sahib at the Deputy

Commissioner's Office, where she received a detailed briefing on the flood's impact and ongoing projects. The briefing revealed that 1,525 acres of land were submerged due to overflowing rivers and canals, affecting 22 villages. Over 20,000 encroachments were removed, 1,194 special persons received Himmatt Cards, and CM directed an increase in the number of beneficiaries under this scheme.

Additionally, 788 loans have been issued under the Apni Chhat, Apna Ghar housing project, with 400 houses currently under construction. The district has also distributed 176 green tractors on subsidy, and 20 tractors were provided free to wheat farmers. Relief efforts also included assistance to 267 livestock owners, the issuance of 1,715 minority cards, and inclusion of 242 agricultural tube wells in the solar energy scheme.

The CM instructed authorities to provide compensation to farmers who suffered crop damage and financial aid to residents whose mud houses collapsed during the floods. She strongly warned that land grabbing would be considered a failure on the part of the relevant Deputy Commissioner and Commissioner.

PML-N announces boycott of APC called by KP govt

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) has announced its decision to boycott the All Parties Conference (APC) convened by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provincial government.

According to MPA Malik Tariq Awan, the party has decided not to attend the APC, which was called by Chief Minister Sardar Ali Amin Khan Gandapur. "We will not be part of this conference," he stated, that the PML-N made the decision after mutual consultation with the party's central leadership. Malik Tariq Awan criticized the provincial government's handling of the security situation, saying, "Law and order in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is deteriorating rapidly. This APC is nothing more than a farce."

Saleem Khan appointed as Member Information Commission

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Former Director General Public Relations Information Department, Government of Sindh Muhammad Saleem Khan has been appointed as a member of the Sindh Information Commission.

Information department has issued a notification in this regard. It may be recalled that Muhammad Saleem Khan and Noor Mohammad Dayo Advocate were approved to be nominated as members of the Sindh Information Commission in the meeting of provincial cabinet on July 8. The tenure of Mohammad Saleem Khan as member Sindh Information Commission will be 3 years.

137 constables promoted

LAHORE (APP): The Lahore Police on Wednesday promoted 137 constables to the rank of head constable in a move aimed at improving operational efficiency and enhancing professional development within the force.

The promotions were approved by the Departmental Promotion Board chaired by DIG (Administration) Imran Kishwar. SSP (Discipline) Muhammad Kashif Aslam and SP (Headquarters) Munazza Karamat were also part of the board.

According to a police spokesperson, a total of 123 constables from the C-1 Wing and 14 from the C-2 Wing were promoted. The promoted personnel serve in different divisions, including operations, investigation and security.

Capital City Police Officer (CCPO) Lahore Bilal Siddique Kamyana congratulated the promoted officers and expressed confidence in their abilities to perform their new duties with diligence. He stated that timely promotion is a fundamental right of every police employee and contributes to improving institutional performance.

DIG Imran Kishwar urged the newly promoted head constables to fulfill their duties with greater responsibility and professionalism. He stressed the importance of capacity building and encouraged the officers to complete their mandatory training for future advancement.

Sharjeel: Sindh govt fully mobilized against rain emergency

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Sindh Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon stated that the Sindh government is completely mobilized against the recent rains and the broader impact of climate change in the country. The recent rains have caused severe damage in the north, whereas Sindh has faced torrential rains and damaging floods repeatedly since 2010 and has gained rich experience in coping with such emergency scenarios. If any other province requires assistance, the Sindh government stands ready to provide all possible support.

Addressing a press conference in Karachi, Sindh Senior Minister and Provincial Minister for Information, Transport, and Mass Transit Sharjeel Inam Memon said that the administration, under the leadership of Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah, is fully alert, with all necessary machinery available around the clock. He stated that, on the instructions of Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, all party workers and leadership are standing with the people, and public service remains the top priority. He also assured full coordination and support from the Sindh government in light of the recent visits by the Governor of Punjab.



Sharjeel Inam Memon strongly condemned the unfortunate incident in Balochistan, stating that those involved in the killing of innocent people must be given the strictest punishment. He added that the Pakistan Peoples Party strongly denounces such acts of violence and stands in solidarity with the victims. He stated that the Pakistan Peoples Party is currently the largest party in the Senate and is actively playing its role in promoting peace, stability, and development at the federal level.

Sharjeel Inam Memon stated that, to address the challenges faced by the business community, the Sindh government has launched an online one-window operation aimed at eliminating red tape. He said that this is a golden opportunity for business in Pakistan, and the Sindh government is making every effort to provide all possible facilities to industrialists and traders.

He said that strict action has been taken regarding the recent building collapse incident in Karachi. Out of 61 extremely dangerous buildings, 59 have already been evacuated. Immediate action is being taken against illegal constructions, and several such structures have been demolished. He added that the Sindh government is providing six months' rent to affected tenants to ensure they do not face hardships. He appealed to the public to promptly report any illegal constructions, as they pose a serious threat to human lives—something that cannot be tolerated under any circumstances.

Sharjeel Inam Memon said that mega projects in Karachi are progressing rapidly. The Jam Sadiq Bridge is expected to be completed and opened to the public by August, while construction work is also underway on Shahrah-e-Bhutto. The Yellow Line and Red Line BRT projects are nearing completion. He said that work is being prioritized in the areas where the public is facing inconvenience. The Sindh Chief Minister is holding regular meetings on the K-4 project, which is also expected to be completed soon.

Sharjeel Inam Memon said that while the punishment of a political leader is not a cause for celebration, attacks involving arson and the siege of state property are absolutely unacceptable. He condemned the setting fire to the People's Bus Service, ambulances, and Quid-e-Azam's house, calling it the worst form of terrorism. He emphasized that it is the state's responsibility to bring such perpetrators to justice in accordance with the law.

He said that the mastermind behind the May 9th arson attack is currently in Adiala Jail. While he kept his own children abroad, he took children from ordinary families onto the streets and used them against the state. This is not politics but terrorism, which must be stopped at all costs.

Sharjeel Inam Memon further stated that, for the first time in history, action has been taken against senior government officials involved in illegal constructions. Many constructions were carried out without approved plans, and following surveys, action is being taken against those responsible. Legal proceedings are underway against builders found violating the law to ensure that no one is allowed to jeopardize human lives in the future.

He also said that, as far as MQM is concerned, the acceptance by the public is before everyone's eyes. Now they resort to other methods, at times calling upon Ajrak, and at times calling upon the cause of the language among others, and attempting to incite people to hate in hopes that someone will respond with hateful words and thus gain political sympathy.

Sharjeel Inam Memon declared that we have made up our minds not to play on their ground. Their true face has been revealed before the people. When such leaders like Afaq Ahmed Sahib sometimes stand up, announce big rallies, but retreat at the last moment, the people should consider who is the actual well-wisher of them.

He said that the true character of Karachi was evident between 1940 and 1980. After 1986, the situation began to change, institutions were weakened, and the city was engulfed in turmoil. The problems Karachi faces today stem from decades of political maneuvering and institutional failures. We are committed to addressing the issues that impact the daily lives of the people.

Murad approves new corridor of Shahrah-e-Bhutto from Qayumabad to East Wharf

F.P. Report

KARACHI: In a significant move to enhance Karachi's infrastructure, Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah has announced the development of a new corridor along Shahrah-e-Bhutto, extending from Qayyumabad to Karachi Port.

"This initiative aims to facilitate efficient port traffic access to the Motorway and is expected to be a game-changer for the country's logistics and transportation network,"

The meeting, held at CM House, was attended by Local Government Minister Saeed Ghani, Karachi Mayor Barrister Murtaza Wahab, Special Assistant to CM on Investment Qasim Naveed, Chief Secretary Asif Hyder Shah, Chairman P&D Board Najam Shah, Karachi Commissioner Hassan Naqvi, Secretary Local Government Waseem Shamshad, Secretary Transport Asad Zamin, Project Director Niaz Soomro, and other officials. The Chief Minister stressed the importance of this corridor. "Apart from the Link Road, which connects the National Highway with the Motorway, Shahrah-e-Bhutto's new corridor — from Qayyumabad to Port — will cater to the port traffic to the Motorway," he stated.

The Chief Minister said that the entire Shahrah-e-Bhutto from Korangi Causeway to Kathore would be opened to the public by the end of December 2025. The Link Road connecting National

Highway to Motorway, catering the industrial areas such as Port Qasim Landhi and Korangi traffic will also be opened shortly.

Mr Shah highlighted the urgency of constructing the critical stretch from Karachi Port to Qayyumabad, which will provide direct and seamless access to the Motorway for port traffic.

A private firm has reportedly submitted a proposal for the project under a Design-Finance-Operate-Transfer (DFOT) model, which outlines a 16.5-kilometre road segment from Jam Sadiq Interchange to Karachi Port, including a 10.4-kilometre elevated section towards the port. The proposed construction will connect Qayyumabad to Boat Basin, and further to Ziauddin Chowranghi and East Wharf.

In addition to the corridor plans, a traffic study has already been conducted in line with the Chief Minister's earlier directives. He mentioned, "Shahrah-e-Bhutto will serve as a main artery, equally feasible for heavy and light traffic, with interchanges designed to facilitate nearby housing areas."

The Chief Minister has instructed the PPP Unit to swiftly acquire No Objection Certificates (NOCs) from all relevant federal and provincial organisations, as well as to conduct an environmental study without delay. Reiterating the government's commitment to improving Karachi's infrastructure, Mr Shah pointed out that work on the Red Line BRT infrastructure has been expedited, alongside redesign

efforts for the Sohrah Goth roundabout aimed at alleviating traffic congestion.

The Chief Minister concluded by assuring the public that once these development projects are completed, they will not only enhance accessibility but also transform the overall look and functionality of the city, ultimately benefiting its residents.

This ambitious project is part of the broader strategy by the Sindh government to modernise Karachi's transport infrastructure, which is expected to significantly improve trade and commerce activities in the region, thereby boosting the local economy.

LARMS : CM reviews land record digitalisation progress

•Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah, presiding over another meeting of Land Administration & Revenue Management Information System (LARMISS), directed the Board of Revenue (BoR) to integrate the e-Mutation system with the e-Registration system and expedite the progress on the e-transfer system to improve service delivery.

The meeting, held at CM House, was attended by Mayor Karachi Murtaza Wahab, Chief Secretary Asif Hyder Shah and Members Board of Revenue Omar Farooq Bullo and Saleem Baloch, and Secretary-cum-Director LARMISS Saifullah Abro and others.

The CM said that LARMISS was established to provide citizens with computerised access to land

records and related services throughout the province. With 27 dedicated People's Service Centres (PSCs) across district headquarters and a comprehensive online platform via the Board of Revenue's official website, the system ensures easy access to vital land information.

The CM was told that Modern IT infrastructure supports daily operations, while a state-of-the-art Data Centre located at Revenue House Clifton, Karachi, serves as the central repository for digitised land records. Moreover, a Disaster Recovery Centre (DRC) in Hyderabad guarantees service continuity during emergencies.

The digitisation process, which commenced in 2010 with the scanning of old records from 1985 to 2010, secures Forms VII-A, VII-B, and Form II collected from all Mukhtiar offices.

LARMISS has further expanded its capabilities by offering digital access to government offices and statutory bodies for land title verification. It may be noted, the introduction of e-Registration services at PSCs has enhanced service delivery, with plans underway for the integration of an e-Mutation system.

Furthermore, the Board of Revenue Sindh is collaborating with Sukkur IBA University on the development of an "E-Transfer of Property System," which aims to secure revenue records through blockchain technology, thereby making property transactions more accessible and user-friendly.



PESHAWAR: Deputy Speaker Suriya Bibi, with Speaker Babar Saleem Swati chairing the meeting of the Standing Committee No. 1 on Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business, Privileges, and Implementation of Government Assurances.

High-Level meeting on sanitation and urban services held

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A key meeting was held on Wednesday in Peshawar under the chairmanship of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Minister for Local Government, Arshad Ayub Khan, to review sanitation and the provision of urban services across various cities of the province. The meeting was attended by Secretary Local Government Saqib Raza Aslam, Chief Executive Officers of Water and

Sanitation Services Companies (WSSCs) from Peshawar, Mardan, Abbottabad, Swat, and Bannu, along with other relevant officials.

During the meeting, representatives from the WSSCs highlighted issues such as staff shortages and other administrative challenges. The Minister Local Government attentively listened to these concerns and assured that a detailed assessment of the required workforce would be carried

out and necessary steps taken. Arshad Ayub Khan directed all representatives of the WSSCs to regularly submit monthly performance reports. He issued instructions that the door-to-door garbage collection service must be made functional within two days. Furthermore, he emphasized that the organizations should move toward self-sufficiency and adopt smart solutions.

He also stressed the need to establish better coordina-

tion and an integrated system among all institutions and boards working under the Local Government, in order to enhance service delivery and prevent resource wastage. The Minister stated that providing clean and organized urban facilities to the public is a top priority. "We need to find solutions that are not only effective but also sustainable. Performance, modernization, and institutional harmony are the keys to success," he concluded.

Standing committee holds meeting to finalize amendments

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A crucial meeting of the Standing Committee No. 1 on Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business, Privileges, and Implementation of Government Assurances was held at the Conference Room of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly. The meeting was chaired by Deputy Speaker Suriya Bibi, with Speaker Babar Saleem Swati and the Minister for Law and Parliamentary Affairs also in attendance.

Members of the Provincial Assembly who participated in the meeting included Taj Tarand, Ifikhar Ullah Mashwani, Muhammad Rashad Khan, Mushtaq Ahmad Ghani, Abdul Salam Afridi, Khalid Khan, and Muneer Ahmad Lughmani.

From the Assembly Secretariat, Acting Secretary Muhammad Mahir, Special Secretary (Administration) Syed Wiqar Shah, Additional Secretary Inam Ullah Khan, Naem Durani, and other relevant officers were present. The Assembly's legal drafter also participat-

ed in the proceedings.

The purpose of the meeting was to conduct a detailed review of the Assembly's Rules of Procedure and to finalize necessary amendments. The draft rules were presented digitally on-screen, and members provided their suggestions and opinions on each clause during the session.

Following thorough deliberation, several important amendments were finalized through consensus.

Speaker Babar Saleem Swati appreciated the

efforts of the committee members and the Assembly Secretariat, stating that reforms in the rules are the need of the hour and will further enhance the transparency, efficiency, and functionality of the Assembly's proceedings.

Deputy Speaker Suriya Bibi, while expressing her views, said: "Improving the Rules of Procedure not only streamlines the legislative process but also plays a vital role in strengthening democratic institutions. The committee's thoughtful deliberations are commendable."

Govt arranges climate change summer camp for Christians youth

PESHAWAR (APP) A group of Christian community youth leaders and students, under the banner of Christian Students Fellowship (CSF), participated in a three-day summer camp focused on climate change and capacity building in the scenic region of Galiyat.

The event was organized with the support of the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, particularly the Director General of the KP Culture and Tourism Authority, who played a key role in encouraging youth participation.

The camp, organized jointly by Christian Students Fellowship Peshawar and the Hum Log Organization, aimed to raise awareness among young people about the pressing issue of climate change and to build their capacity for environmental leadership.

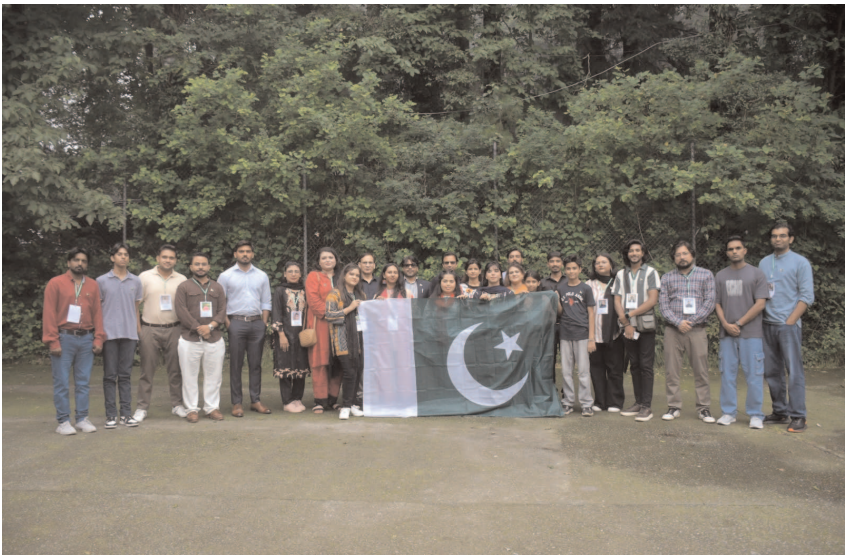
The training and ses-

sions were facilitated by experts from the Pakistan Partner Initiative (PPI), including Asher Shahzad, Augustin Jacob, Imran Munir, and Dr Meraj Aleem, who led a range of interactive and insightful discussions throughout the camp.

Augustin Jacob, a well-known social leader and Chairman recognized for his ongoing support to the youth of KP, played a leading role in arranging the event and motivating participants.

Participants expressed gratitude to the organizing

partners and the government for providing them the opportunity to explore Pakistan's beautiful tourism sites while also learning about the effects of climate change and how to take effective action to mitigate future environmental damage.



PHC extends Former DG Health Services status quo

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: The Peshawar High Court (PHC) has granted relief to Dr. Shaukat Ali, the former Director General Health Services, by extending the interim order and restraining any action against him, including arrest, in connection with the cases and inquiries registered against him, on Wednesday.

PHC divisional bench comprising of Justice Ijaz Anwar and Justice Fahim Wali heard the petitions filed by Dr. Shaukat Ali. His lawyers informed the court that Dr. Shaukat Ali was appointed as a Medical Officer in 1991 and rose through the ranks

to become the Director General Health Services.

During his tenure, he introduced various new initiatives in the health department, which were appreciated by the provincial government on several occasions, the lawyer stated.

However, differences arose between Dr. Shaukat Ali and the Chief Minister over a transfer, which led to the initiation of inquiries against him. The inquiries were started in relation to a tender worth Rs. 4 billion for medicines and medical equipment. Despite Dr. Shaukat Ali's request for evidence to support the allegations, no documents were provided to him.

Dr. Shaukat Ali's

lawyers argued that despite his retirement on June 9, a show cause notice was issued to him on June 12, 2025, for termination from service, which is not permissible under the law. The inquiry committee's report itself stated that the supply was not made by the relevant firms, and therefore, it is unclear what fault Dr. Shaukat Ali bears.

PHC observed that the law is clear that once an employee retires, no disciplinary action can be taken against him, even if an inquiry is pending. The court also noted that the provincial government is accusing the federal government of filing cases against PTI on political grounds, while doing the

same in its own province.

PHC granted Dr. Shaukat Ali's request for protective bail and restrained the authorities from arresting him. The court also issued a notice to the police department, as the petitioner's lawyer had made them a party to the case. The Additional Advocate General informed the court that there were two inquiries against Dr. Shaukat Ali in the Anti-Corruption department.

PHC orders CCPO to submit inquiry report against SHO Badh Bhir

The Peshawar High Court (PHC) has adjourned the hearing of an inquiry filed by PTI leader and Member National Assembly, Shandana

Gulzar, against SHO Badhber Abdul Ali, alias Gabbar. The court has allowed the petitioner to submit additional documents and directed the CCPO Peshawar to provide an inquiry report, on Wednesday.

PHC two-member bench comprising Justice Ijaz Anwar and Justice Fahim Wali heard the case. The court directed the CCPO Peshawar to provide an inquiry report and, if necessary, will be summon him again.

The CCPO Peshawar, Muhammad Qasim Khan, informed the court that SSP Traffic Haroon Rashid is conducting the inquiry and will submit the report once it is complete. The counsel Mozzam

Butt Advocate, requested the court to allow him to submit additional documents, including FIRs registered against SHO Abdul Ali in Charsadda and Swabi. The court granted the request and allowed the petitioner to submit the documents.

PTI leader Shandana Gulzar had filed a petition alleging that people in her constituency are going missing, and FIRs are not being registered. She also alleged that SHO Abdul Ali is abducting people, arresting youth, and entering homes to take away women.

PHC has adjourned the hearing to allow the petitioner to submit additional documents and for the CCPO Peshawar to pro-

vide an inquiry report.

PHC grants protective bail to former lawmaker Rabia Basri

The Peshawar High Court (PHC) has granted protective bail to former PTI lawmaker Rabia Basri, allowing her to appear before the relevant courts without fear of arrest, on Wednesday.

PHC two-member bench comprising Justice Ijaz Anwar and Justice Fahim Wali heard the petition. The court directed Rabia Basri to appear before the relevant courts and face the cases registered against her. The court also disposed of the writ petition after granting her protective bail.

The counsel Alam Khan Adinzai, informed the

court that Rabia Basri was unable to appear before the court due to illness. He argued that the petitioner wanted to appear before the relevant courts in connection with the cases registered against her after the November 24 protests, but feared arrest. He requested the court to grant protective bail to enable his client to seek relief from the relevant courts.

The Additional Attorney General informed the court that two cases were registered against Rabia Basri by the federal government. The court granted protective bail after considering the arguments and the Additional Attorney General's response.

CS directs expedited modernization of 121 industrial training centres

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Chief Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Shahab Ali Shah, chaired a high-level meeting to review the progress of the Good Governance Roadmap across multiple departments, including Education, Health, Social Welfare, Higher Education, and Tourism. The meeting was convened to assess departmental action plans, set timelines, and ensure effective implementation of reforms aimed at improving service delivery and institutional performance in the province.

As part of the roadmap for the Elementary and Secondary Education Department, 1,500 low-performing public schools have been identified for outsourcing to the private sector with the objective of enhancing academic performance and management efficiency. Key milestones set for the year include the successful organization of

four provincial-level sports competitions, ensuring the availability of 100 percent infrastructure and furniture in schools, and achieving at least 90 percent teacher attendance across the board.

During the meeting, it was informed that the Education Monitoring Authority is actively monitoring the implementation of the roadmap to ensure timely and result-oriented interventions.

The roadmap for the Social Welfare Department was also reviewed in detail. It was shared that efforts are underway to strengthen seven existing Dar-ul-Amans across the province. These initiatives include procurement of necessary equipment and enhancement of human resources to ensure better protection and support services for vulnerable women. In addition, modernization of 121 Industrial Training Centres is in progress to provide youth with relevant skills and establish linkages with

local markets for employment opportunities. Simultaneously, the revamping of 15 Special Education institutes is ongoing to improve the quality of services for children with special needs.

In the Higher Education sector, the roadmap identifies 57 low-performing public colleges for outsourcing in order to enhance teaching quality and academic standards. The Health Department also presented its plan, under which 58 Type-D hospitals will be outsourced to improve healthcare delivery in remote areas. Furthermore, a biometric attendance system is being introduced in both Primary and Secondary Healthcare facilities, with the target of achieving full attendance among doctors, midwives, and paramedics. The system is expected to be fully operational by the end of this month.

For the Tourism Department, the roadmap outlines a range of impact-

ful initiatives. These include the deployment of Rescue 1122 ambulances at key tourist destinations, implementation of effective waste management and sewerage systems, development of a real-time tourist footfall dashboard, and restoration of prominent heritage sites. Additionally, plans are in motion to introduce audio guide systems in museums and engage vloggers to promote tourism in the province both domestically and internationally.

Chief Secretary Shahab Ali Shah, while appreciating the progress made so far, emphasized the importance of a focused and detailed review process for all sectors to ensure the timely execution of development interventions. He directed the concerned authorities to report progress on a quarterly basis so that the intended outcomes of the roadmap translate into tangible benefits for the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Free treatment under Sehat Card Programme 8 transplants and implants completed in just two months

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Advisor to Chief Minister on Health, Ihtisham Ali, has stated that the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government is firmly committed to providing free and quality healthcare to its citizens through the flagship Sehat Card programme.

He revealed that more than PKR 37 billion were spent on the treatment of citizens under this initiative in the previous financial year, while a record PKR 41 billion has been allocated for the current fiscal year.

According to Ihtisham Ali, every rupee of this substantial allocation is

being spent on ensuring free healthcare services so that no citizen is deprived of treatment due to financial constraints.

He further added that the "Sehat Transplant & Implant Card" has now been formally integrated as a regular feature of the Sehat Card programme, bringing new hope to patients battling life-threatening conditions.

In just the past two months, a total of 48 successful transplants and implants have been carried out under this initiative, with an overall expenditure of PKR 118 million.

Providing further details, the Health Advisor stated 23 kidney trans-

plants were conducted at a cost of approximately PKR 45 million while 4 liver transplants were performed, costing around PKR 25 million.

He added that 21 children received cochlear implants, bringing joy to families at a total cost of PKR 48 million.

He emphasized that these life-saving services are available in both public and private hospitals across the province to ensure no patient is left untreated or forced to travel far for care.

Ihtisham Ali said "Alhamdulillah! The dream of PTI's founding leader, Imran Khan, to provide free and quality

healthcare to the common man is now becoming a reality."

He termed this initiative a new beginning under the dynamic leadership of Chief Minister Ali Amin Khan Gandapur, marking another revolutionary step in the healthcare sector.

Concluding his statement, the Health Advisor remarked: "This is just the beginning. Our mission is to ensure that every citizen of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has access to all levels of healthcare - from basic to the most complex - without any financial burden. We are committed, we are active, and we will not allow any delays in this journey of public service."

Alkhidmat Launches Phase-II of Bano Qabil in Malakand

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Alkhidmat Foundation announced the launch of Phase II of its Bano Qabil IT Program in Malakand Division, aimed at equipping thousands of youth with free digital skills.

Addressing the media at Peshawar Press Club, Inayatullah Khan, Patron-in-Chief of the Bano Qabil Program and former Senior Provincial Minister, shared details alongside Fazal Mahmood, President Alkhidmat KP North, Dr. Khalid Farooq, General Secretary, and Noor-ul-Wahid Jadoon, Provincial Media Manager.

As part of Phase II, the entry test in Malakand Division will be held on August 31 at Kabal Ground, Swat, to select candidates for enrollment in the free IT courses.

In Phase I of the program, over 1,200 male and female students successfully completed three-month training across 16 IT courses. A certification

ceremony will be held in this regard.

Inayatullah Khan said, "Bano Qabil has become a recognized brand for IT education and self-employment adding that JI Chief Hafiz Naemur Rehman had pledged to train one million youth across Pakistan over five years, providing them with

digital skills to achieve dignified employment. He noted that over 11,000 students in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have already benefited from the program, many of whom have overcome financial challenges through freelancing and digital careers.

Highlighting the country's current economic cri-

sis and rising unemployment, he stressed that 65% of the population is youth, many of whom are leaving Pakistan in search of work. He urged the government to support skill-based programs like Bano Qabil, calling it "an urgent need of the hour" to curb unemployment and retain talent within the country.





In brief

Tehsil Council passes budget F.P. Report

BUNER: Tehsil Council Daggar have unanimously approved the budget of Rs 669,068 for the year 2025/2026 on the third day of the budget session. The session was held on Wednesday at the TMA office in Daggar, under the chairmanship of Convener Imran Khan. The meeting was attended by Chairman Haji Rozi Khan, TMO Zahoor Ahmed Khan, in-charge Sadaqat Khan, male and female members of the council. In the meeting, members Haji Dost Muhammad Khan, Irfan Ali, Maulana Zia-ur-Rehman Bakht Faraz Khan actively participated in the discussion and severely criticized the PTI leadership for not releasing the PFC award by the provincial government in four years term. However, all the members have jointly appreciated the performance of TMA Daggar in these four years term and said that within limited resources, every possible help and cooperation has been provided on the call of each village chairman and they have been honored in the constituencies. In the meeting, Village Council Gokand Chairman Irfan Ali, said that due to the heavy rain in Bar Gokand, there was a flash flood that was swept away a mother and daughter were from house.

Consultative meeting held F.P. Report

TAKHTBAHI The Chairman Tehsil Council Takhtbhai, Hafiz Muhammad Saeed, held a consultative meeting with the heads of various government departments in Mardan district to discuss ways to improve departmental performance and take effective measures to protect the tehsil from floodwaters and address public issues. The meeting was held at TMA Takhtbhai and attended by SDO Irrigation Mardan Aziz Khan, Sub-Engineer Shah Fahad, SDO Public Health Engineering Department Mohsin Iqbal, Sub-Engineer Public Health Mazhar Ali, Assistant District Zakat Office Ata Ur Rehman, Tehsil Municipal Administration Officer Rahman Sher, and Member of JUI Central Supreme Council Haji Dost Muhammad Darwish. During the meeting, Chairman Hafiz Muhammad Saeed emphasized that it is the primary responsibility of government departments to promptly address public issues related to their departments. He stressed that any negligence or lack of attention from government departments can create significant problems for the public, and therefore, such negligence will not be tolerated.

ADC holds Khuli Katcheri F.P. Report

KARAK: The Additional Deputy Commissioner Karak (G) held "Kuli Katcheri", on the computerization of land records at the Service Delivery Center (SDC) Karak on Wednesday. It beside others, was also attended by the Tehsildar SDC, Gardawar and all other SDC staff. The people present on the spot, submitted their written complaints regarding computerization of land records, on which the Tehsildar was directed to check the records and submit a report at the earliest. The ADC on the complaint about encroachment on rain drains/algadas, said that all the Assistant Commissioners are already engaged in an indiscriminate operation to remove illegal encroachments from the rain drains/algadas.

Polio workers in Landi Kotal flay DDM policy



F.P. Report

LANDI KOTAL: Polio supervisors and field workers in Landi Kotal disapproved Direct Disbursement Mechanism (DDM) policy, announced by the provincial government, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and World Health Organization (WHO) to pay the front-line polio eradication workers.

In a protest rally held at Bacha Khan Chowk, main Landi Kotal bazaar on Tuesday, dozens of the polio workers rejected the

policy and said it was economic killing of thirteen hundred polio workers in Khyber.

The concerned department should pay them their arrears besides extend their contract for six months, they added and asked for granting of martyr package to them. They insisted to reinstate them on the positions of polio workers permanently and bestow them all their legal rights.

They demanded the health department and WHO to revisit the policy and resume the previous

procedure of monthly payment to them. The protesters threatened that till acceptance of their demands; their boycott of the polio campaign would be continued and would initiate protest sit-in at Pak-Afghan highway to get their rights.

As per the WHO, the policy will directly benefit the workers by receiving their payment on time besides DDM allows the government and other stakeholders to closely monitor progress during the polio eradication drive.

Prof Dr Abdul Khaliq Jan: A dedicated scholar

F.P. Report

TIMERGARA: Prof Dr Syed Abdul Khaliq Jan, a self-made individual, is ambitious to work for his own people instead of serving abroad, despite repeated offers of jobs from around the world. Currently, he serves as Associate Professor and Chairman of the Department of Chemistry at Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University, (SBBU) Sheringal in Upper Dir. He also holds the positions of Director of ORIC (Office of Research, Innovation and Commercialization) and Pro-Vice Chancellor, and has previously served as Acting Vice Chancellor of the university.

Born on February 9, 1979, in the village of Bann in Lower Dir district, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Dr Khaliq Jan has consistently demonstrated a passion for education and academic excellence. He began his educational journey at Government Primary School Banar, completed his middle school from Tor

Qila, matriculated from Government High School Munda, and earned his FSc from Degree College Timergara. He pursued a BSc from the prestigious Jahanzeb College, Swat, followed by an MPhil from the University of Peshawar and a PhD from the University of Karachi.

Furthering his academic credentials, Dr Khaliq Jan completed a post-doctoral research fellowship at the Chinese Academy of Sciences' Eco-Environmental Research Centre in China, focusing on photo-photolysis.

Dr Khaliq Jan began his professional career in education on January 25, 2007, as an SST at Government Middle School Tor Qila. In April the same year, he was promoted to SSO at Government High School Mian Kallay. By August 2007, he joined the then sub-campus of University of Malakand in Sheringal—now Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University—as a lecturer. He became an Assistant Professor in the Department of Pharmacy in

2011, and later transitioned to the newly established Department of Chemistry as an Associate Professor.

Over the years, he has held several important academic and administrative positions, including Director ORIC in 2018, Chairman of the Chemistry Department from 2020, and Pro-Vice Chancellor from 2022. He is also engaged in advanced research focusing on the extraction of medicinal oils from various plants.

Despite his humble and friendly nature, Dr Khaliq Jan is known for his unwavering commitment to teaching, research, and fulfilling institutional responsibilities. He firmly believes that the intellectual, spiritual, and ethical training of the youth is essential to meeting global challenges.

Although he has received job offers from several universities abroad, Dr Khaliq Jan remains devoted to his mission: transforming Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University, Sheringal into one of the top ten universities in the world.

PESCO intensifies crackdown against electricity thieves

F.P. Report

PABBI: In a concerted effort to mitigate line losses and enhance revenue recovery, the Nowshera City Division of Peshawar Electric Supply Company (PESCO) has intensified its campaign against electricity thieves and defaulting consumers.

Sub-Divisional Officer (SDO) Pabbi Ihsan Ullah Khan led the operation in collaboration with the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) and local police forces, augmented by the technical staff of Pabbi No. 1 Sub-Division. The operation, which spanned multiple locations including Pushton Ghari, Choki Drab, and Pabbi City, aimed to curb the rampant menace of electricity theft and non-payment of dues by consumers.

During the course of the operation, 15 individuals were apprehended red-handed for indulging in electricity theft, and First Information Reports (FIRs) were lodged against them at

the Pabbi Police Station. Furthermore, 20 defaulting consumers had their electricity connections severed due to outstanding arrears amounting to Rs. 3,540,200. Notably, some defaulters, whose outstanding dues totaled Rs. 725,200, made immediate payments to avoid disconnection.

The operations were characterized by meticulous planning and execution, with the technical staff playing a pivotal role in identifying and disconnecting defaulters, while the FIA and police provided crucial support in apprehending electricity thieves. This multi-agency approach has been instrumental in the success of the operation and demonstrates the effectiveness of inter-institutional collaboration in combating these challenges.

PESCO remains steadfast in its resolve to protect the integrity of the power distribution system and ensure that all consumers fulfill their payment obligations.

The public is urged to cooperate with PESCO in its efforts to eradicate electricity theft and support the utility's initiatives aimed at improving service delivery and reducing power outages.

In conclusion, PESCO's crackdown on electricity thieves and defaulting consumers is a significant step towards enhancing the sustainability and efficiency of the power distribution system in the region. The utility's commitment to taking stringent action against those who seek to undermine the system through theft and non-payment is a testament to its dedication to providing reliable and uninterrupted power supply to the public.

PESCO appeals to the public to report any instances of electricity theft or meter tampering to the nearest PESCO office or through the official complaint mechanism. Together, we can work towards a more efficient and reliable power distribution system.

Senator Dilawar a beacon in politics Fazal Haq

MARDAN: Senator Haji Dilawar Khan, who was elected on technocrat seat on a JUI ticket, belongs to Mardan. He is a prominent industrialist of the country. He has previously been a senator on the technocrat seat and retired in early 2024 after completing six years of his election to the Senate.

After that, he has emerged as a candidate on the technocrat seat on the JUI ticket. Haji Dilawar Khan belongs to a respected family of Mardan. He resides in Khan Qila, a densely populated area of the city in Par Hoti. He is a post-graduate in history and archaeology and has been associated with various industries for the past several decades. Thus, he has extensive experience in finance, tax system, improving the business environment and facilitating investment.

Haji Dilawar Khan was considered one of the active members in the Upper House in the previous era. He was the head of the Independent Group in the Senate and was not only considered one of the trusted associates of the then Chairman Senate Sadiq Sanjrani, but he was also the creator of introducing several bills in the Upper House. He highlighted many important issues in the Senate and presented bills for legislation on many occasions.

Haji Dilawar Khan paved the way for the return of dozens of families in the UK who were stranded abroad on Afghan passports. He was also the chairman of several committees in the Senate. He convened a committee of important figures of the time to investigate the famous antiquities theft case of the Peshawar Museum and uncovered many important secrets. Haji Dilawar Khan became the center of attention of the national and international media when he presented a resolution regarding the postponement of the February 2024 elections.

Haji Dilawar Khan has carved a unique place for himself in the country's parliamentary system. He was re-elected as a senator on a JUI ticket in the July 21 Senate elections, securing 54 votes on the Technocrat seat.

PST terms inflation as govt incompetence F.P. Report

LARKANA: Pakistan Sunni Tehreek (PST) held meeting at the Divisional Office, Menhalabad Colony, against inflation and increasing unrest, on Wednesday.

PST Sindh Senior Provincial Leader Maulana Ali Nawaz Qasmi, Divisional General Secretary Shamsuddin Sirohi, District President Hafiz Madad Ali Qadri, along with activists and representatives of civil society participated in large numbers. Addressing the meeting, Maulana Ali Nawaz Qasmi, Shamsuddin Sirohi and others protested and said that the current government has sunk the country's ship, while on a daily basis, the prices of common household items including petrol, electricity, gas are being increased, and the people of Pakistan are being forced into poverty, but unfortunately, the rulers do not see their own luxuries, which we strongly condemn.

They further said that unrest is burning in every city and area of Sindh, especially Larkana district has been left at the mercy of criminals. Where the law and order situation is deteriorating day by day, when even the senior police officials of Larkana cannot protect their own policemen, then how will they protect the public, when the police officials are busy giving protocols to corrupt officers and political thugs.

KKKUK celebrates successful MPhil thesis defenses

F.P. Report

KARAK: Khushal Khan Khattak University Karak (KKKUK) is proud to announce the successful completion of MPhil vivas for its first cohort of Physics scholars. Muhammad Danyal Zarin, Hassan Khan, and Adnan Khan successfully defended their theses, marking a significant milestone for the Department of Physics.

The vivas were conducted under the expert supervision of Dr. Abdul Hakim Shah and Dr. Fida Rehman. The rigorous evaluation process included distinguished external examiners: Dr. Ikhtisham Mehmood from the University of Haripur, Dr. Sajid Khan from Kohat University of Science and Technology (KUST), and Dr. Muhammad Imran from the



University of Science and Technology (UST) Bannu. Their invaluable insights and thorough assessments contributed to the high standards of the defenses.

Professor Dr. Tahir Khalily, Vice Chancellor of Khushal Khan Khattak University Karak, extended his heartfelt congratulations to the successful scholars and lauded the dedicated efforts of the Department of Physics. "This achievement is a testament to the hard work of

our students and the unwavering commitment of our faculty," said Dr. Khalily. "It underscores our university's growing reputation as a center for excellence in scientific research and higher education."

The successful defenses by Muhammad Danyal Zarin, Hassan Khan, and Adnan Khan pave the way for their future contributions to the field of Physics and set a high bar for upcoming MPhil candidates at KKKUK.

Tribesmen kills three in attempt to abduction

F.P. Report

WANA: In a dramatic overnight encounter, an attempted abduction by militants of the outlawed Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) was thwarted in the Azam Warsak area of Lower South Waziristan. The attackers, who targeted the residence of a prominent tribal elder, were met with fierce resistance from local tribesmen, resulting in the death of three militants.

According to reports, heavily armed members of the banned TTP stormed the home of respected tribal leader Malik Sardar Ali Karey Khel in an apparent bid to abduct him. However, the attackers were repelled by the swift and courageous response of Malik Sardar's family and members of the Karey Khel tribe.

During the exchange of fire, three militants linked to the TTP were killed. Two of the deceased were identified as Zia-ur-Rehman and Haider Wazir, reportedly affiliated with the Rehmatullah Wazir-led faction of the group. The third, yet to be formally identified, is said to belong to the Suleman Khel tribe of Lower South Waziristan.

The failed attack has sparked outrage across the region. In a strong show of unity, a large number of

Karey Khel tribesmen rushed to Malik Sardar Ali's residence to express solidarity. Tribal elders declared the assault an attack on the collective honor and dignity of Waziristan.

The Karey Khel tribe has called upon the government and security forces for urgent support and protection, warning that such attacks threaten not only individuals but the region's fragile peace. They appealed to all tribes across Waziristan to stand united against terrorism.

In a related development, the Waziristan Trade Union announced the closure of Rustom Bazaar in Wana in protest against the incident, underscoring the business community's alarm over the deteriorating security situation.

Meanwhile, sources claim that local TTP commander Rehmatullah has requested a ten-day period from tribal elders to investigate whether his operatives were involved in the failed raid. It is important to note that large swathes of Lower South Waziristan remain under the influence of banned outfits like TTP and TTP-G, making state presence and enforcement extremely challenging in the area.

ANP leader under-construction house targeted:

In a disturbing incident underscoring the fragile security situation in South Waziristan, the under-construction residence of senior Awami National Party (ANP) leader and former provincial assembly candidate Taj Muhammad was targeted in a midday mortar attack.

According to eyewitnesses and local sources, two mortar shells were fired from an unknown direction. One shell struck the boundary wall of the building, while the second landed inside the courtyard but fortunately did not detonate. At the time of the attack, several laborers were present and engaged in construction work, but no injuries or loss of life were reported.

Preliminary investigations suggest the possibility of a personal feud behind the attack. Sources indicate that an individual may have launched a rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) at a rival, which missed the intended target and instead hit Taj Muhammad's house, causing minor structural damage.

While no group has claimed responsibility for the attack, the incident has once again highlighted the growing volatility and unchecked proliferation of heavy weaponry in parts of South Waziristan.

Thieves steal equipment from cell phone tower

Syed Waliullah Shah

NOWSHERA: Unknown thieves have stolen valuable equipment worth millions of rupees from a Ufone tower in the Khysera area of Nowshera. The theft has disrupted the communication network, leaving Ufone subscribers in the area unable to make or receive calls.

According to local residents, this is not the first time that the Ufone tower in the area has been targeted by thieves. Similar incidents have occurred in the past, where thieves have stolen valuable equipment and other materials from the tower.

Police have registered a case against unknown thieves and formed a team to investigate the matter and arrest the culprits. The theft has caused significant inconvenience to Ufone subscribers in the area, who are struggling to stay connected.

The local residents have expressed frustration and disappointment over the lack of security measures in place to prevent such

incidents. The police are working to identify the culprits and bring them to justice.

Teachers promoted in 2013 deprived of increments: In Nowshera, a number of teachers who were promoted to the 15th scale in 2013 are still awaiting their increments. According to the promotion rules, these teachers were entitled to two annual increments, but they have only received one increment so far.

Despite the Finance Department's clarification that these teachers are eligible for two increments and arrears, local officials, including Deputy District Education Officer Shahjahan and Accounts Officer Idris Hashmi, are refusing to implement the decision.

According to reports, teachers who have political connections or influential backers have had their files processed and received their arrears, while others are still waiting. Many teachers have become frustrated and have approached the courts for relief. The case is still pending, with the

latest hearing scheduled for July 18 being postponed due to the judge's absence, and a new date set for October.

The Account Officer, Nowshera, had sought clarification from the Finance Department, which responded in writing that the increments are a legitimate right of the teachers.

However, Shahjahan and Idris Hashmi continue to refuse to sign off on the increments. Interestingly, Idris Hashmi has advised teachers to present the Finance Department's letter in court to support their case, but in practice, he is creating obstacles to the implementation of the decision.

The teachers are demanding that their files be processed without further delay and that all teachers receive their legitimate rights without discrimination. The teachers' community is expressing serious reservations about the situation and questioning the silence of elected representatives, particularly former Minister Khaliq ur Rehman, MNA and MP.

Coal miner killed due to accumulation of toxic gas

F.P. Report

SHANGLA: A miner named Haider Ali, son of Raham Zar, a resident of Charhuno village, Union Council Kuz Kana in district Shangla, tragically lost his life while working at Shah Kot Lease No. 02 coal mine. The incident occurred due to the accumulation of toxic gas (commonly known as "Sanda") in the mine, leading to suffocation.

Rescue teams rushed to the scene immediately and initiated a rescue operation, which was still ongoing at the time of reporting. According to officials, more time was needed to retrieve the deceased's body.

Once the body was recovered, it was bathed and shrouded according to local traditions and sent to his native village, where Haider Ali was laid to rest in the presence of hundreds of tearful mourners.

Senate election in KP concluded due to Dr. Ibad proposed formula: PML-N: Leader of the Opposition in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly, Dr. Ibad Ullah, demonstrated remarkable political maturity and foresight as his proposed formula for the 2025 Senate elections was successfully implemented amid deep political rifts and tensions within the ruling party.

Despite growing divisions

among government members and an atmosphere of uncertainty, Dr. Ibad Ullah put forward a balanced and pragmatic solution, which was accepted by the House. The resulting outcome — 6 senators elected from the ruling PTI and 5 senators from the opposition benches — aligned exactly with his proposed formula.

Parliamentary observers and party leaders from both sides have appreciated Dr. Ibad Ullah's role,

noting that such inclusive and solution-oriented leadership is vital for strengthening democratic institutions and ensuring political stability. In a momentous gathering held at his ancestral home in Puran, Engineer Amir Muqam Federal Minister for Kashmir Affairs, Gilgit-Baltistan and SAFRON, and Provincial President of the Pakistan Muslim League — warmly received congratulatory visits from residents

across Shangla on the election of his son, Niaz Ahmad Khan, as Member of the Senate of Pakistan.

A large number of constituents visited the minister's residence to extend their felicitations. Amid celebrations, Minister Muqam took the opportunity to engage with visiting delegations, listened attentively to public concerns, and issued on-the-spot directives for resolution of various community issues.



GAZA STRIP: Palestinians carrying sacks of flour unloaded from a humanitarian aid convoy.

More than 100 NGOs warn ‘mass starvation’ spreading across Gaza

GAZA (AFP): More than 100 aid organisations warned on Wednesday that "mass starvation" was spreading in Gaza ahead of the US top envoy's visit to Europe for talks on a possible ceasefire and an aid corridor. Israel is facing mounting international pressure over the catastrophic humanitarian situation in the Palestinian territory, where more than two million people face severe shortages of food and other essentials after 21 months of conflict, triggered by Hamas's attack on Israel.

The UN said that Israeli forces had killed more than 1,000 Palestinians trying to get food aid since the US- and Israel-backed Gaza Humanitarian Foundation started operations in late May -- effectively sidelining the existing UN-led system. A statement with 111 signatories, including Doctors Without Borders (MSF), Save the Children and Oxfam, warned that "our colleagues and those

we serve are wasting away". The groups called for an immediate negotiated ceasefire, the opening of all land crossings and the free flow of aid through UN-led mechanisms. It came a day after the United States said its envoy Steve Witkoff will head to Europe this week for talks on Gaza and may then visit the Middle East. Witkoff comes with "a strong hope that we will come forward with another ceasefire as well as a humanitarian corridor for aid to flow, that both sides have in fact agreed to," State Department spokeswoman Tammy Bruce told reporters. Even after Israel began easing a more than two-month aid blockade in late May, Gaza's population is still suffering extreme scarcities. Israel says humanitarian aid is being allowed into Gaza and accuses Hamas of exploiting civilian suffering, including by stealing food handouts to sell at inflated

prices or shooting at those awaiting aid. In their statement, the humanitarian organisations said that warehouses with tonnes of supplies were sitting untouched just outside the territory, and even inside, as they were blocked from accessing or delivering the goods. "Palestinians are trapped in a cycle of hope and heartbreak, waiting for assistance and ceasefires, only to wake up to worsening conditions," the signatories said. "It is not just physical torment, but psychological. Survival is dangled like a mirage," they added. "The humanitarian system cannot run on false promises. Humanitarians cannot operate on shifting timeliness or wait for political commitments that fail to deliver access." UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said that the "horror" facing Palestinians in Gaza under Israeli military attack was unprecedented in recent years. The head of

Two Russian soldiers needing medical care

MOSCOW (Reuters): Two Russian soldiers in need of medical care were handed over by Ukrainian authorities to be returned home, the Russian Defence Ministry said. A ministry statement on Telegram said the two servicemen were handed over and taken to Belarus, one of Moscow's closest allies, on Russia's western border. They were receiving treatment in Belarus and would soon return to Russia, it said.

The statement said the action was undertaken on the basis of agreements reached at the second of two direct meetings aimed at ending the conflict last month between Russian and Ukrainian representatives. The two meetings in Istanbul resulted in agreements to return prisoners of war and remains of fallen soldiers, but made little progress towards an end to the more than three-year-old conflict. Large exchanges have taken place since the two meetings. A third meeting was due to be held on Wednesday in the Turkish city.

Macron-Merz to hold talks on NATO

BERLIN (AFP): French President Emmanuel Macron is to meet German Chancellor Friedrich Merz in Berlin on Wednesday to discuss NATO security, the US-EU trade row and other key issues. Macron and Merz, who took power in May, have been at pains to boost the bilateral partnership at the heart of the European Union as US President Donald Trump has rocked transatlantic ties.

"The most important message is: the Franco-German couple is back at work," the French presidency said ahead of Macron's planned dinner with Merz. Paris and Berlin, along with London and Warsaw, have pushed efforts to support Ukraine against Russia and build up the defence capabilities of NATO's European member states. But while Paris has signalled a willingness to send peacekeeping troops to monitor a possible Ukraine ceasefire, Berlin has so far voiced no plans to contribute. Merz and Macron were also expected to discuss the trade dispute with the United States after Trump threatened 30-percent tariffs against the EU if no deal is reached by August 1. "In the tariff dispute with the USA, we are now approaching the decisive phase," Merz said, urging "a fair and reliable agreement with low tariff rates" that strengthens the transatlantic market.

The two leaders also have to discuss bilateral stumbling blocks, from a joint defence project to energy and trade policy. There has been disagreement over a combat aircraft to be made jointly with Spain. Merz has objected to the idea of a greater leadership role for France while expressing confidence an agreement can be reached. The head of French defence company Dassault, Eric Trappier, suggested that the viability of the project was in doubt. "We have to question the effectiveness of a project which is run by three countries ... where there isn't one real leader but three," he told a press conference. Another tricky area is energy, where France relies heavily on nuclear power, which Germany has decided to phase out as it shifts to solar and wind power. Paris wants Berlin to commit to "technology neutrality" and effectively classify nuclear energy as climate friendly.

Germany's previous government of the Social Democrats and Greens rejected this, but Merz's centre-right CDU/CSU may be more open to the idea. In a joint newspaper article in May, both leaders pledged a "restart in energy policy" and "equal treatment at the EU level for all low-emission energies". Another area of discord has been an EU trade deal long in the works with South America's Mercosur bloc. While Germany strongly favours it, France has expressed fears it will badly impact its farming sector. French sources said a way forward is emerging, and that an additional protocol could add a "robust safeguard clause for agriculture". Merz will welcome Macron at 6:30 pm (1630 GMT) at Villa Borsig, the former residence of the commander of the post-war French occupation troops on the outskirts of Berlin.

Deadly air force jet crash

Bangladesh students demand accountability

DHAKA: Hundreds of protesters have rallied in Bangladesh to demand accountability after an air force fighter jet crashed into a Dhaka school, killing 31 people, including 25 students. The children, many aged under 12, were about to return home from class on Monday when the Bangladesh air force jet crashed into their school and burst into flames. The military said the plane had suffered mechanical failure.

Students from the school and others from nearby colleges protested as two government officials visited the crash site, demanding an accurate death toll and shouting, "Why did our brothers die? We demand answers!" Elsewhere in the capital, hundreds of protesting students, some of them waving sticks, broke through the main gate of the federal government secretariat, demanding the resignation of the education adviser, according to local TV footage.

The protesting students called for those killed and injured to be named, compensation for families, the decommissioning of what they said were old and risky jets, and a change in air force training procedures. Police fired tear gas and used sound grenades to disperse the crowd, leaving about 80 students injured. Jamuna TV, a Bangladeshi station, reported.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police Deputy Commissioner Talebur Rahman said he did not have information on the number of injured, the Reuters news agency reported. The stu-

dents have several demands, said Al Jazeera's Tanvir Chowdhury, from the site of the crash at Milestone School and College.

"They're asking the government to accurately list the name of the people who died and also those who are injured; they want an exact figure -- the number of people who are in the hospital. They also want compensation and a public apology," Chowdhury said. "They also want the air force to get away from old aircraft and to change their training procedures." The military said in a statement that 31 people had died and 165 had been admitted to hospitals in the city. The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare said 68 remained in hospital, and the condition of 10 of them was critical.

A statement from the press office of Muhammad Yunus, the country's interim administrator, said that the government, the military, school and hospital authorities were working together to publish a list of named victims. It also said the air force will be told not to operate training aircraft in populated areas. Rescue workers continued to scour the charred buildings for debris as distressed residents of the area looked on.

"The whole nation is mourning. This is something [that's] never happened in this country," said Al Jazeera's Chowdhury. Some parents were inconsolable. Abul Hossain broke down as he spoke about his nine-year-old daughter, Nusrat Jahan Anika, killed in the crash. "I took her to school yesterday

morning like every day. I had no idea it would be the last time I would be seeing her," Hossain told Reuters. She was buried on Monday night.

Rubina Akter said her son Raiyan Toufiq had a miraculous escape after his shirt caught fire when he was on a staircase. "He sprinted to the ground floor and jumped on the grass to douse it," Akter told Reuters. "He tore his shirt and vest inside, which saved him from severe burns." Smriti, an 11th-grade student at the school, told The Associated Press news agency that her eardrums felt they were "about to burst" when the plane crashed.

"I saw some children lying with their limbs spread out, some of their lifeless bodies scattered around. Can you save them? Tell me, will they ever be able to return to their parents' arms again?" she asked. The jet had taken off from a nearby airbase on a routine training mission, the military said. After experiencing mechanical failure, the pilot tried to divert the aircraft away from populated areas, but it crashed into the school campus.

The pilot, flight lieutenant Mohammed Toukir Islam, was among those killed. It was his first solo flight as he was completing his training. The incident comes as neighbour India is still grappling with the world's worst aviation disaster in a decade after an Air India plane crashed into a medical college hotel in Ahmedabad last month, killing 241 of the 242 people on board and 19 others on the ground. — Aljazeera

Japan PM plans to resign after election debacle

TOKYO (AFP): Having done a trade deal with US President Donald Trump, Japan's prime minister will soon announce his resignation, reports said Wednesday, after his latest election debacle left his coalition without a majority now in both houses of parliament.

The reports said Shigeru Ishiba had conveyed his intention to step down to those close to him, following the announcement Wednesday of a US-Japan trade deal. Upper house election was calamitous for Ishiba's centre-right Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which has governed almost continuously since 1955.

Voters angry at inflation turned to other parties, notably the "Japanese first" Sanseito, whose "anti-globalist" drive echoes the agenda of populist movements elsewhere. Ishiba plans to vacate the top job by the end of August, the Mainichi daily reported. The Yomiuri newspaper

said he would announce his resignation in July but did not give details of when he would leave office. These and other reports said calls for the 68-year-old to depart had grown louder within the LDP since the results of the upper house election.

But he communicated his decision after striking a trade deal with Washington that cut a threatened 25-percent tariff to 15 percent ahead of an August 1 deadline. In the election, the LDP and its junior partner Komeito fell three seats short of retaining a majority. It came only months after Ishiba's coalition was forced into a minority government in the more powerful lower house, in the LDP's worst result in 15 years. Ishiba won the party leadership in September, on his fifth try, to become the 10th LDP prime minister since 2000 -- all of them men.

Since the October snap lower house election, the ruling coalition has been

forced to bargain with opposition parties to pass legislation. After years of stagnant or falling prices, consumers in the world's fourth-largest economy have been squeezed by inflation since Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine. In particular, the price of rice has doubled, while resentment has also lingered over an LDP funding scandal. "I really hope things will get better in Japan, but the population is declining, and I think living in Japan will get tougher and tougher," Naomi Omura, an 80-year-old from Hiroshima, told AFP in Tokyo on Wednesday. "It is disappointing that Japan cannot act more strongly" towards the United States" but "I think it was good that they agreed on a lower tariff", she said. Tetsuo Momiyama, an 81-year-old Tokyo resident, said Ishiba "is finished already". "It's a good timing for him to go," Momiyama said.

Pacific nation ponders taking asylum seekers from US

PALAU (AFP): The United States is looking to send asylum seekers to the sparsely populated volcanic isles of Palau, the small South Pacific nation said Wednesday. Scattered about 800 kilometres (500 miles) east of the Philippines, tropical Palau has long been one of the United States' closest allies in the Pacific.

Palau President Surangel Whippis Jr last week received a request from Washington to accept "third-country nationals seeking asylum in the United States", his office said in a statement. Whippis' office told AFP on Wednesday the proposal was still under consideration by the nation's powerful Council of Chiefs, an advisory body of traditional leaders. "A meeting was held last week. So far no decision has come out of that meeting," a spokesman said. US President Donald Trump campaigned on a promise to expel millions of undocumented migrants, saying the country had been "inundated" by unwanted arrivals. He signed an

executive order in January -- titled "Protecting the American People Against Invasion" -- that suspended admissions for countless refugees seeking haven in the United States. Key details of the proposed deal between Palau and the United States were not immediately clear, such as how many asylum seekers it would cover, or what Palau may get in return.

"Based on the most recent draft agreement, Palau would have full discretion to decide whether or not to accept any individuals, and all actions would be consistent with our constitution and laws," the Palau president's office said in a statement. US Ambassador Joel Ehrenreich was present at a meeting of senior officials to discuss the request, according to photos published last week by the Palau president's office. The United States has reportedly considered dispatching asylum seekers to the likes of El Salvador, Libya and Rwanda. With some 20,000 people spread

across hundreds of volcanic isles and coral atolls, Palau is by population one of the smallest countries in the world. The Pacific microstate could find it difficult to deny Washington's request. Palau gained independence in 1994 but allows the US military to use its territory under a longstanding "Compact of Free Association" agreement. In return, the United States gives Palau hundreds of millions of dollars in budgetary support and assumes responsibility for its national defence.

The United States Embassy in Palau did not respond to an AFP request for comment. Since coming to power in 2021, Whippis has overseen the expansion of US military interests in Palau. This has included the ongoing construction of a long-range US radar outpost, a crucial early warning system as China ramps up military maneuvers in the Taiwan Strait. Palau is one of the few remaining countries to recognise Taiwan's claim to statehood.

Columbia University suspends, expels nearly 80 students over Gaza protests

COLUMBIA: Columbia University in the United States has imposed severe punishments, including expulsion, suspension from courses and revocation of academic degrees, on dozens of students who participated in protests against Israel's war on Gaza.

The student activist group Columbia University Apartheid Divest (CUAD), which has called for the school to cut all financial ties with Israel, said in a statement that nearly 80 students have now been either expelled or suspended for up to three years over their involvement in anti-war protests. Columbia said in a statement that its latest punishment of students relates to "disruption of Butler Library in May 2025 and the encampment during Alumni Weekend in spring 2024".

"Disruptions to academic activities are in violation of University policies and rules, and such violations will necessarily generate

consequences," the university wrote. The CUAD group said the university's sanctions on students "hugely exceed precedent for teach-ins or non-Palestine-related building occupations". "We will not be deterred. We are committed to the struggle for Palestinian liberation," the group added. The pro-Palestinian student encampments at Columbia University in 2024 helped ignite a global movement against Israel's unrelenting war on Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. The protest sites were eventually broken up when Columbia University allowed hundreds of New York City police officers on campus, leading to dozens of arrests. Despite the university's harsh crackdowns, student protesters occupied the Butler Library during final exams in May this year, demanding divestment from companies linked to the Israeli military and expressing solidarity with

Palestinians in Gaza.

Columbia University's Judicial Board confirmed it issued expulsions, suspensions and degree revocations after what it called a disruption during "reading period". It did not say how many students were expelled but said that this was "the final set of findings from that period". The Ivy League university is in negotiations with US President Donald Trump's administration to restore some \$400m in federal funding. The Trump administration cut funds to the New York City-based institution over what it claimed were failures to "meaningfully protect Jewish students against severe and pervasive harassment". Columbia's acting president, Claire Shipman, a former trustee, was booed by students during a May graduation ceremony for her role in cracking down on pro-Palestinian protests. Fellow Ivy League institu-

tion Harvard University, which has also been targeted with billions in funding cuts by the government, has pushed back against pressure to change its policies by taking the Trump administration to court.

The latest disciplinary measures announced by Columbia against students came as Israel's siege on the Gaza Strip continued to cause widespread starvation, with at least 15 people, including a six-week-old baby, dying from hunger and malnutrition within a 24-hour period, according to health officials. Mahmoud Khalil, the Columbia University protest leader targeted for deportation by the Trump administration, met with lawmakers in Washington, DC, more than a month after he was released from immigration custody in Louisiana, where he was being held amid a pledge by the US president to deport pro-Palestinian activists. — Aljazeera

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The Gaza Humanitarian Foundation is a deadly shambles

WHEN it was first established, in February, the main selling point of the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation was that it was the best of bad options. The foundation's masterminds, Israel and the US, argued that using private security contractors to hand out aid parcels from stations inside Israeli military zones would be safer and prevent them from being intercepted by Hamas.

Global aid organisations condemned the plan for flying in the face of international law and humanitarian principles. But Israel's government had already banned UNRWA, the UN relief agency for Palestinians, from operating inside Gaza, and either restricted the entrance of aid groups to scale their operations or stopped them altogether. For Gaza's two million civilians, suffering one of the world's most acute humanitarian crises, the only available alternative to the GHF experiment was certain mass starvation.

The experiment has failed. Since the GHF sites opened, more than 700 Palestinians have been killed approaching them or waiting in the queue – many of them, if not most, allegedly by the Israeli military. Some of the deaths have been attributed to stampedes, others to Hamas fighters and several to GHF security contractors themselves.

Some GHF contractors have come forward to the international media, which is barred by Israel's military from reporting freely in Gaza, to speak out about some of their colleagues' alleged conduct. The most appalling allegations describe behaviour that, if proved, would be criminal – treating guard towers at aid sites more like snipers' nests from which to pick off vulnerable Palestinians. In a statement on Monday, Philippe Lazzarini, UNRWA's Commissioner-General, described the GHF sites as "a sadistic death trap".

Incidents at GHF sites reflect a broader pattern of Palestinian civilians being targeted near aid delivery points throughout Gaza. The bloodiest yet occurred on Sunday, when 93 people were allegedly killed by the Israeli military while approaching a food bank near Gaza City. One eyewitness told The National Israeli forces fired "from all directions" as civilians approached an aid lorry with their hands raised.

The GHF says shooting incidents at its sites, for which it denies responsibility, should not overshadow the organisation's work. It claims to have delivered as many as half a million meals a day.

Even this figure, however, is underwhelming in comparison to the UN-backed meal delivery system, which delivered just over one million meals a day through a network of 180 kitchens in April, before new access restrictions imposed by Israeli authorities cut this figure down by 70 per cent.

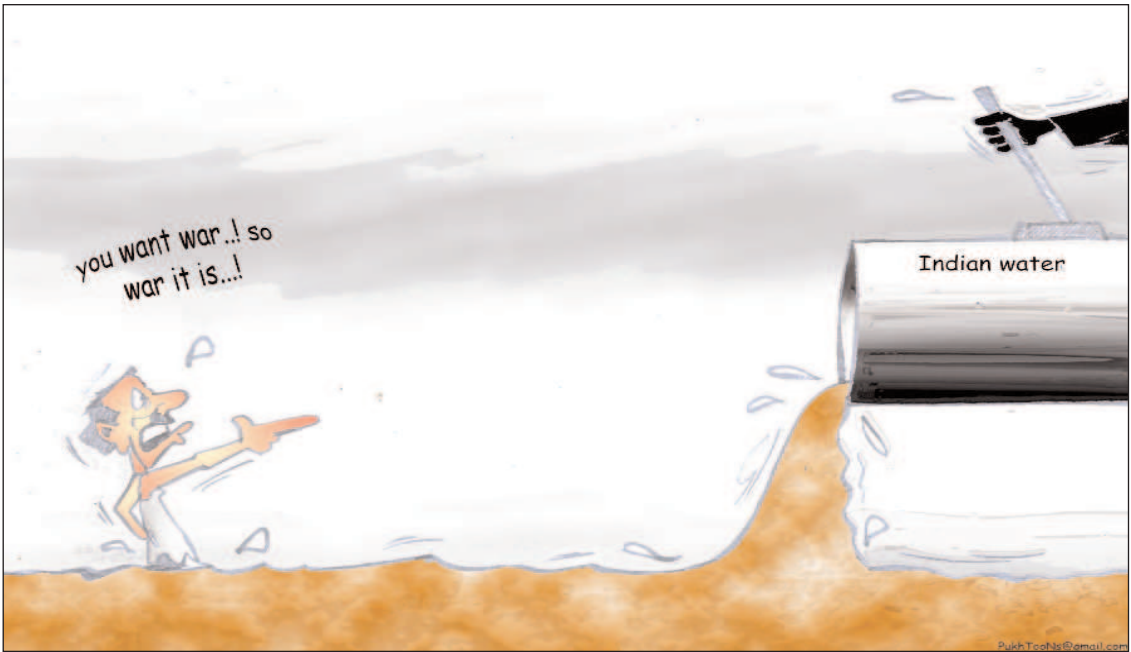
Denying access to food, whether through restrictions or terrorising people queueing for aid, is a war crime – a point that has been made repeatedly by Michael Fakhri, the UN's special rapporteur on the right to food. Twenty-eight countries, including Britain and France, have now condemned Israel's aid policy as dangerous and destabilising.

On Sunday, talks began in Cairo between Israel, the US and several Arab countries on resuming aid airdrops to Gaza – an imperfect but far safer delivery method than the one in place now. In truth, the UN system for aid delivery, designed and implemented by seasoned humanitarians with global funding and oversight, is the only truly effective and morally acceptable one.

Allowing Israel to set the terms for aid distribution has achieved little other than bolstering a perception that it has no intention of stopping the systematic starvation of Palestinians.

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Yes, The New York Times is committing genocidal journalism

Belén Fernández

THE Israelis certainly owe Bret Stephens a favour. Yesterday, The New York Times opinion columnist took to the pages of the United States newspaper of record to promote his latest deranged argument, headlined: "No, Israel Is Not Committing Genocide in Gaza".

Never mind that numerous global institutions, ranging from various United Nations bodies to Amnesty International, have determined that Israel is committing just that. These are organisations that hardly throw the G-word around lightly, but Stephens knows better. And he will tell us why.

In the very first paragraph of his Times intervention – which should perhaps come accompanied by a trigger warning for readers prone to aneurysms – Stephens demands defiantly: "If the Israeli government's intentions and actions are truly genocidal – if it is so malevolent that it is committed to the annihilation of Gazans – why hasn't it been more methodical and vastly more deadly?"

It would seem, of course, that the Israeli military's near-comprehensive conversion of much of the Gaza Strip into rubble – via the bombardment of homes, hospitals, schools, and everything else that can be bombed – would be rather "methodical". As for the perceived insufficient deadliness of Israel's ongoing "actions", Stephens cites the official Palestinian death count of "nearly 60,000" in less than two years, and wonders why there are "not, say, hundreds of thousands

of deaths".

He goes on to proclaim that "the first question the anti-Israel genocide chorus needs to answer is: Why isn't the death count higher?"

Among the many questions that Stephens himself needs to answer, meanwhile, is why he thinks slaughtering 60,000 people is no big deal. As of November 2024, Israel had killed at least 17,400 children in Gaza – but even this is apparently not "malevolent" enough. Furthermore, according to a study published in the Lancet medical journal more than one year ago, the true death toll in Gaza was already potentially set to exceed 186,000. How's that for "hundreds of thousands"?

In lieu of waiting for an answer from the "anti-Israel genocide chorus", Stephens presents his own, which is that "Israel is manifestly not committing genocide." Citing the UN genocide convention's definition of the term as the "intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, as such", Stephens proceeds to announce that "I am aware of no evidence of an Israeli plan to deliberately target and kill Gazan civilians."

Objectively speaking, this is the equivalent in terms of ludicrousness of claiming that there is no evidence of a plan by the operators of a chicken slaughterhouse to deliberately end the lives of the poultry therein. You don't kill 17,400 children in 13 months by accident; nor do you repeatedly bomb hos-

pitals and ambulances if you aren't, you know, deliberately aiming to kill civilians.

But it's not just about bombs. Forced starvation is genocide, too. And on that note, another question Stephens might answer is how intentionally depriving a population of two million people of the food and water that is necessary for human survival does not constitute an "intent to destroy" that group. Yesterday alone, Gaza health officials reported that at least 15 Palestinians had starved to death, including four children.

Since the end of May, more than 1,000 Palestinians have also been killed while trying to procure food from the so-called Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF). This diabolical outfit, backed by Israel and the US, not only concentrates large numbers of starving Palestinians in a single location for easier mowing down by the Israeli army, but also furthers Israel's US-backed vision of forcibly expelling the surviving Palestinian population.

While Stephens does deign to mention the "chaotic food distribution system" in Gaza, he insists that "bungled humanitarian schemes or trigger-happy soldiers or strikes that hit the wrong target or [Israeli] politicians reaching for vengeful sound bites do not come close to adding up to a genocide."

And yet in his war on the use of the G-word in the Gaza context, Stephens refuses to acknowledge that Israel itself has been a

genocidal endeavour from the get-go. Zionists were well aware of the need to dispense with the majority of the Indigenous population of Palestine even before the formal creation of the state of Israel on Palestinian land in 1948, a process that entailed mass killing and the destruction of hundreds of villages. Some three-quarters of a million people were made refugees.

Since then, Israel has continued on what is fundamentally genocidal footing, working to disappear the Palestinians both physically and conceptually – as exemplified in the late Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir's famous assertion that the Palestinians "did not exist". Indeed, Israel's existence as a Jewish settler-colonial state is predicated on the very "intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, as such".

Anyway, forget history and reality. Stephens warns us that, if the word genocide "is to retain its status as a uniquely horrific crime, then the term can't be promiscuously applied to any military situation we don't like".

Speaking of promiscuity, the Israeli military has long been in bed with The New York Times and a host of other US corporate media outlets, which do their best to sanitise Israeli atrocities as self-defence. But as Israel now continues to carry out a uniquely horrific crime in Gaza with the firm backing of the global superpower, Stephens's genocidal journalism is also uniquely horrific.

Will PLO elections serve the people or the status quo?

Hani Hazaimeh

IN a surprising political development, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas on Saturday announced that elections for the Palestinian National Council – the legislative body of the Palestine Liberation Organization – will be held before the end of 2025. This is the first time such a step has been taken since the council's inception in Jerusalem in 1964. The announcement, made through the official Palestinian news agency Wafa, stipulates that 350 representatives will be elected: two-thirds from within the Occupied Territories and one-third from the diaspora.

On the surface, this declaration may appear like a long-overdue democratic revival. But its timing raises critical questions. Why now? Why in the midst of the most brutal and prolonged war on Gaza since 1948 – a war that has claimed the lives of more than 38,000 Palestinians and displaced more than 2 million? What purpose do elections serve when a large portion of the Palestinian people is either starving, under bombardment or buried under the rubble of their homes?

One cannot separate Abbas' announcement from the broader political landscape. The PLO has long suffered from a legitimacy crisis. For years, the Palestinian Authority has governed parts of the West Bank under Israeli occupation, while Hamas has controlled Gaza since the 2006 legislative elections – ironically, the last time a national vote took place. That rift has rendered

Palestinian politics fractured and paralyzed, with no clear roadmap for unity, nor for meaningful resistance.

By calling for PNC elections now, Abbas may be aiming to reassert the relevance of the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people – especially at a time when many in Gaza, and even some in the diaspora, feel alienated from traditional political institutions. The decision also seems designed to counter growing criticism from both inside and outside Palestine that the PA has become increasingly disconnected from the realities on the ground. With Gaza engulfed in suffering and resistance rising to the forefront of regional and global discourse, the PLO leadership likely feels pressured to project a sense of political dynamism – even if symbolic.

Yet symbolism, in this context, may not be enough. What Palestinians need now is not just elections but transformation. They need leadership that reflects the reality of occupation, resistance and survival under siege. They require an inclusive democratic structure that transcends bureaucratic reshuffling and provides a unified vision for liberation. They need leaders who understand that credibility is not restored at a ballot box alone – but through action, sacrifice and standing firmly with their people, especially in Gaza.

The criteria for PNC membership, as outlined by Abbas – namely, com-

mitment to the PLO's political program and international legitimacy – may also be a double-edged sword. While they may ensure some ideological cohesion, these stipulations risk excluding key factions like Hamas and Islamic Jihad, both of which, regardless of political position, represent significant segments of Palestinian society and have borne the brunt of the current Israeli assault. Any elections that reinforce old divisions rather than healing them may only perpetuate the fragmentation that has plagued Palestinian politics for decades.

Furthermore, the war in Gaza continues to rage with horrifying intensity. According to UN estimates, more than 90 per cent of homes in Gaza have been damaged or destroyed. Hundreds of thousands of people are on the brink of starvation. In this context, how realistic – or ethical – is it to talk about elections? What guarantee is there that Gazans will be allowed to participate freely and fairly in a vote, when their cities lie in ruins and their internet and electricity are regularly cut off?

There is also the question of diaspora representation. The announcement that one-third of PNC seats will go to Palestinians abroad is significant, as it nods to the historical breadth of the Palestinian cause. However, ensuring meaningful participation from refugee communities in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Europe and the Americas will require extraordinary logistical, legal and diplo-

matic coordination – something the PA has consistently struggled to deliver in the past.

Let's be clear: Palestinian elections are long overdue. Democratic renewal is essential – not just for optics, but for survival. The Palestinian people are not just victims of military aggression; they are active agents of their own future. They deserve a voice and they deserve leadership that does not treat elections as a mere rubber stamp, but as a tool for genuine change.

However, if these elections are held merely to polish the fading image of the PLO without addressing the root causes of Palestinian disunity and institutional paralysis, they may backfire. They may reinforce the perception that the leadership in Ramallah remains detached from the daily struggles of Palestinians in Gaza, in refugee camps and under occupation in the West Bank.

At this critical hour, Palestinians need more than announcements. They need justice. They need an end to the siege on Gaza, accountability for war crimes and a bold, united political front capable of speaking for all Palestinians, in all places. If the planned elections for the PNC can be a step toward that future – one that includes every voice, prioritizes resistance and breaks with the stagnation of the past – then perhaps they will be worth the effort.

But if not, then this may be yet another performance in a political theater long disconnected from the suffering of its own audience.

UK data leak highlights West's flawed Afghanistan project

Mohamed Chebaro

THE reverberations of the Western forces' withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 keep on being felt in many nations, years after Taliban turned the page on 20 years of failed attempts by the US, UK, NATO and others to democratize the country.

The recently exposed leak of data about thousands of Afghans who had worked with British forces presents several unanswered questions, as well as billions of pounds in costs. Then there is the vetting process that remains less than comprehensive, to say the least, and open to abuse, especially as the Taliban have repeatedly claimed that they have not pursued or targeted those who cooperated with the pro-Western regime in Kabul or its many Western allies.

So, is it possible that the Afghans have been overexaggerating the level of threat to their safety for other reasons? Or has the West again been a victim of its over-sensitivity to the protection of human rights, freedom of expression and women and other minorities from potential abuse by regimes such as the Taliban?

In less than a month's time, on Aug. 15, it will be four years since Kabul fell back into the hands of the Taliban. The US-led Western troops' pullout, negotiated by the first Trump administration and executed by the Biden administration, ended up being one of the most chaotic and humiliating withdrawals since American troops pulled out of Vietnam. Whatever the reasons behind the speedy collapse of the pro-Western government in Kabul, it showed once more that the Western efforts to supplant democracy and nation-building were flawed from the beginning. The story for the UK of repatriating Afghans who had worked with its forces began then and continued under different Conservative governments. But the 2022 data leak did not come to public attention until a high court judge this month lifted a gagging order that was put in place in 2023, when the breach first came to light. In brief, the story goes back to February 2022, when the personal data related to nearly 19,000 Afghans who had applied to be repatriated to the UK after the Taliban seized power was leaked. The Conservative government under Rishi Sunak first learned of the breach in August 2023, when some of the details appeared on Facebook.

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and freeloading. And though human rights groups routinely speak of threats to some people who dwelled in the public sphere, from security to education and women's rights, the dangers faced by those asking for asylum and evacuation remain unclear.

Afghanistan is no different to any other nation that has frequently suffered internal strife and wars between its various ethnic and religious constituents. The rush to leave the country as the Western troops withdrew was a natural reflex for humans fearing the worst or sensing an opportune moment to change their lives.

As a reporter who covered various parts of the Afghan story, it was possible to notice a trait of Afghans holding the stick from the middle and never burning their bridges with any clan that could be a foe. If anything, the UK data leak highlighted how a poorly-thought-out intervention and poorly executed state-building project, followed by a poorly orchestrated withdrawal, caused damage to the West's standing and reputation. Such poor efforts at the craft of state-building were especially likely to fail in a uniquely tribal and linguistically and ethnically diverse country such as Afghanistan.

Institutionalizing the cryptocurrency frontier

CRYPTOCURRENCIES have long existed in a legal and financial gray zone — praised as disruptive innovations, dismissed as speculative bubbles and often relegated to the periphery of serious capital markets. That era is over. New US federal regulation of digital assets, especially stablecoins, signals a shift from speculation to mainstream investment. Legislation known as the Genius Act is one of three cryptocurrency bills currently advancing in Washington with President Donald Trump's support.

This is not merely a regulatory footnote. It is a structural turning point. For the first time since the publication of Satoshi Nakamoto's white paper in 2008, the debate in Washington is no longer about whether to regulate crypto, but how — and, more importantly, who gets to define the rules. With bipartisan momentum and political backing from figures such as Trump, the US is stepping decisively into a global contest over digital financial infrastructure.

The implications are material, especially for investors and financial institutions recalibrating their exposure to a space once seen as fringe. Since the collapse of FTX, the crypto industry has not only recovered market capitalization but has also ramped up lobbying efforts, poured capital into US elections and achieved a legislative milestone that provides regulatory clarity for dollar-backed stablecoins. The new framework mandates full reserve backing with short-term, Treasury-like instruments and places oversight in the hands of state or federal regulators. What was once dismissed as internet play money is now being granted legal standing and policy legitimacy.

This clarity matters. It creates a regulatory perimeter in which US-based issuers like Circle can scale and in which institutional finance can enter without reputational or compliance risk. The regulatory moment resembles the Telecommunications Act of 1996, which sought to modernize laws for an internet-driven world. Like that law, today's crypto framework is racing to catch up with technological reality — aiming to open the gates to competition while preserving systemic resilience.

Major players such as Citigroup and JPMorgan are not just taking notice, they are moving in. Citigroup CEO Jane Fraser has pointed to rising client demand for “multi-asset, multi-bank, cross-border, always-on” payment solutions — characteristics that programmable, blockchain-based money can deliver. JPMorgan and Citibank are developing deposit tokens: bank-backed digital instruments designed to retain institutional control while mimicking the benefits of stable-

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Stablecoins are already testing the limits of monetary sovereignty, with the potential to rival traditional payment networks in speed and reach. And like the Eurodollar, their evolution may define a generation of financial innovation — unless they are absorbed by the incumbents first.

Yet crypto-native firms are outpacing the

Dr. John Sfakianakis

banks. Circle has soared in valuation. Coinbase, benefiting from its stablecoin partnership, has seen record highs. The market is voting with capital. The era of programmable money is not coming — it is already underway.

For serious investors, this presents both an opportunity and a challenge. Regulation is no longer a threat to crypto. It is a prerequisite for scale. Just as the Securities Acts of the

coin issuers fail — the possibility of future taxpayer bailouts. Their skepticism is not without merit. But their remedy — regulatory inaction or outright prohibition — risks pushing innovation into unregulated offshore zones and ceding global leadership to more agile jurisdictions. Critics argue the legislation introduces more risk than reward. After all, the US already has a functioning payment system — it is called the dollar and, for most purposes, it works just fine. So why reinvent

the wheel? For much of crypto's existence, its real-world use case — beyond underground transactions and speculative fervor — has remained elusive. While tokenization promises faster, more efficient payments, the volatility of most cryptocurrencies has made them a poor substitute for fiat money. They are not reliable stores of value and, thus, not viable as everyday currency.

Stablecoins attempt to square this circle by pegging themselves to the dollar, offering price stability without sacrificing speed. Most do so by backing their tokens with low-risk reserves like Treasury bills, effectively functioning as digital wrappers for existing US assets. Europe's Markets in Crypto-Assets framework is more than consumer protection. It is strategic industrial policy. By offering a unified

1930s laid the foundation for modern capital markets, today's digital asset legislation seeks to institutionalize a new financial layer — without stifling its underlying dynamism. That historical moment transformed Wall Street; this one could do the same for the blockchain economy. Still, this will not be a clean transition. A single token can be a governance tool, a medium of exchange and a speculative asset — simultaneously. Decentralized exchanges mimic brokerages but lack centralized accountability. Applying legacy legal frameworks to these hybrids is like regulating aviation with maritime law.

Critics, especially among Democrats like Elizabeth Warren and Maxine Waters, have raised red flags. They worry about insufficient consumer protections, the potential for systemic risk and — should stable-

regulatory passport across the EU, it provides clarity, scale and first-mover advantage. While the US squabbled over jurisdiction, Europe built the infrastructure. Other jurisdictions — Singapore, the UAE and even Hong Kong — have embraced similar clarity. China has gone its own route with a state-backed digital yuan. The US, long caught in agency turf wars, is finally catching up — but only just.

This is not merely a new asset class. It is an emerging economic architecture. In countries like Argentina and Nigeria, crypto offers escape from monetary dysfunction. In Ukraine, it became a wartime financing tool. In the US, stablecoins increasingly serve as the foundation for faster, cheaper and programmable transactions.

This is not peripheral experimentation. It is foundational infrastructure.

Congress' move signals a shift in political perception: crypto is no longer an anarchic subculture but a matter of financial strategy and sovereign control. But this shift is not without its complications. Trump's vocal support of crypto — and financial ties to digital asset ventures — raises uncomfortable questions about transparency and influence. The intersection of public policy and private gain in the digital asset space will require vigilant scrutiny.

Nonetheless, the legislation, despite its imperfections, marks a belated but necessary leap forward. Without regulatory clarity, the US risks becoming a bystander to innovations it helped pioneer. With it, it has a credible chance to shape — not just respond to — the financial infrastructure of the 21st century.

As of now, the total crypto asset market exceeds \$4 trillion, driven by altcoin gains and positive regulatory developments. Options markets suggest growing investor confidence in continued upward movement.

For institutional investors, this is no longer a niche curiosity or a speculative side bet. It is a rapidly institutionalizing frontier. The verdict on crypto is not yet settled. But the idea that it can be ignored has been definitively laid to rest.

The law has entered the ledger. The market has taken note.

The orchid ethos illuminates a turbulent world

THE Global Civilizations Dialogue Ministerial Meeting held last week in Beijing under the theme " Safeguarding Diversity of Human Civilizations for World Peace and Development", along with side events such as the ceremony for the Orchid Awards for promoting cultural exchanges, signifies a high point of China's endeavor to champion mutual learning among civilizations. The initiatives are a distinct ray of hope in today's tumultuous global landscape.

As noted by Irina Bokova, former UNESCO director-general and recipient of the second Orchid Awards for Lifetime Honorary Award, 2025 is a "year of commemorations": the 80th anniversary of the victory in the World Anti-Fascist War, as well as the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (1931-45), and the founding of the United Nations.

Yet top Chinese diplomats, including Foreign Minister Wang Yi and China's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Fu Cong, have invoked a potent metaphor to describe a worrying situation: the obsession with power politics has unlocked a "Pandora's box" of the law of the jungle, fueling chaos across the world. This warning reflects fears that the world risks regressing to prewar conditions.

On one front, conflicts continue to rage in Europe and the Middle East, claiming lives daily. On another, tariff and trade wars escalate in battlefields devoid of gunpowder smoke. The global political and economic orders face unprecedented uncertainty, with fragility and turmoil being more acute today than at any point in the past eight decades.

"In a world where transformations and turbulences are interwoven and humanity stands at a new crossroad, there is an ever-pressing need for civilizations to transcend estrangement through exchanges, and to transcend clashes through mutual learning," said President Xi Jinping in his congratulatory letter to the ministerial meeting.

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Zhou Shuchun

tures necessitate bridge-building, and heightened global instability calls for civilizational strength.

Fundamentally, both geopolitical clashes and economic confrontations stem from zero-sum logic and a jungle-law mindset. "Since wars began in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed" — the maxim inscribed on the stone stele in multiple languages at the UNESCO Headquarters — is often cited to elucidate the bond between global peace and human civilization.

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security, advocates a worldview aligned with humanity's collective interests.

"All things flourish without harming one another; paths unfold without conflicting" — that has always been a foundational tenet of Chinese culture. Yet when voiced during eras of weakness, such appeals to harmony, though morally just, often rang hollow in the past. Today, China's vigorous advocacy for cultural dialogue carries unprecedented resonance, offering the world singular significance.

Fortress Europe's African victims

Adekeye Adebajo

EUROPEANS may be horrified by the new US administration's draconian immigration policies, which include snatching people off the streets and deporting them without due process. But the EU's decade-long crackdown on irregular African migration — targeting people who are fleeing conflict, climate disasters and poverty attempting to reach Europe by sea in flimsy boats — is equally appalling. Worse, the European Commission is seeking to double down on this approach: a leaked proposal for the next long-term budget cycle calls for conditioning development aid for African countries on meeting migration-reduction targets.

Africans comprise a fairly large share of the EU's irregular migrants, with West and Central African countries accounting for about one-third of those arriving in the first half of 2024.

At least 11 million African-born migrants reside in Europe — more than double the number living in Asia and North America — where they boost the labor force and ease the economic pressures caused by a rapidly aging local population.

But many Europeans treat migrants who arrive in small boats as a security threat, criminalizing

their entry and scapegoating them for broader societal problems. After millions of Syrian, Afghan and Iraqi refugees fled to the bloc in 2015-16, the EU began strengthening "Fortress Europe." Some countries, including Greece, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia, built external border fences, while others, like Germany and the Netherlands, have reintroduced border controls.

Efforts to secure the bloc have included violent pushbacks against refugees and migrants at external borders — a violation of international human rights law — and partnerships with third countries to curb flows. According to Amnesty International, the EU's externalization policy, coupled with Italy and Malta's hostility to rescue ships, were responsible for 721 migrant deaths in the Mediterranean between June and July 2018.

More recently, several European rescue organizations blamed the deaths of 3,000 people in the Mediterranean in 2023 partly on an EU decree enacted that year that severely restricted their response capacity.

There is a stark divide between how European and African governments view this issue. From Sweden and Poland to Italy and Germany, far-right populist parties have surged in popularity by stoking anti-immigrant sentiment, which

has pushed many mainstream European politicians to embrace xenophobic policies.

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ernments of responsibility for their actions: poor governance, political exclusion and development failures have contributed to the migration surge. The lack of economic

opportunities, in particular, has forced many young Africans — the continent has the world's youngest population, with 70 percent in sub-Saharan Africa under the age of 30 — to flee to wealthier countries.

But instead of using its

economic might to bolster growth and support job creation in Africa, the EU poured 500 million (\$586 million) into its 2016 Migration Partnership Framework, a new way of engaging with source countries to reduce migration. The resulting partnerships with Ethiopia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Senegal subordinated development aid to migration goals. This heavy-handed approach, particularly the EU's obsession with negotiating the forced return of African migrants and pushing its own interests, failed to stem the flow of people, alienated African governments and undermined the bloc's human rights and development principles.

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Now, the Commission has its sights on hardening this negative-incentive structure and applying it more widely.

To be sure, overall migrant arrivals in the EU declined by about 20 percent in the first five months of 2025.

But this decline came after years of human rights abuses by the EU's third-country partners, which were effectively bribed to slow the movement of people. In 2024, the European Court of Auditors criticized the bloc's 5 billion Emergency Trust Fund for Africa for failing to address the human rights risks involved in subcontracting migration policy to autocratic regimes. That same year, more than 2,000 African migrants died while trying to reach Europe.

The behavior of these regimes is reprehensible. But the cruelty on display within the bloc is no less shocking.

Frontex, the EU's border control agency, was reportedly involved in covering up hundreds of illegal pushbacks in the Aegean Sea. Polish border guards forced migrants back into Belarus, where they were beaten and raped. Last year, three Egyptian teenagers froze to death after Bulgarian officers reportedly obstructed their rescue near the Turkish border. Many Sudanese asylum seekers continue to be held illegally in Greek prisons.

Dialogue among Civilizations".

While achieving lasting peace involves complex theories and practices of international relations, cultural cognition and civilizational outlook remain pivotal.

In 1966, British scholar Martin Wight posed a seminal question: "Why is there no international theory?" He argued that unlike political science, international politics lacked "progressive interpretation" because it addresses an anarchic society — a mere "theory of survival" on a "recurring process" without teleological improvement.

Chinese modernization explores new civilizational paradigms, and likewise, the Global Civilization Initiative, alongside initiatives on global development and

On one front, conflicts continue to rage in Europe and the Middle East, claiming lives daily. On another, tariff and trade wars escalate in battlefields devoid of gunpowder smoke. The global political and economic orders face unprecedented uncertainty, with fragility and turmoil being more acute today than at any point in the past eight decades. "In a world where transformations and turbulences are interwoven and humanity stands at a new crossroad, there is an ever-pressing need for civilizations to transcend estrangement through exchanges, and to transcend clashes through mutual learning," said President Xi Jinping in his congratulatory letter to the ministerial meeting. A consensus emerged that greater divergence demands deeper listening, sharper social fractures necessitate bridge-building, and heightened global instability calls for civilizational strength. Fundamentally, both geopolitical clashes and economic confrontations stem from zero-sum logic and a jungle-law mindset. "Since wars began in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed" — the maxim inscribed on the stone stele in multiple languages at the UNESCO Headquarters — is often cited to elucidate the bond between global peace and human civilization. Over the past decade, China has established itself as a proponent and leader of civilizational dialogue. In 2014, President Xi first proposed the concept of "mutual learning among civilizations" at the UNESCO Headquarters. In 2019, he addressed the Conference on Dialogue of Asian Civilizations in Beijing. In 2023, following the proposal of Global Development Initiative and the Global Security Initiative, he put forward the Global Civilization Initiative, presenting a systematic Chinese perspective on civilization.

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The EU's current approach is ineffective and inhumane; its proposal to use foreign aid as a stick is even more so. To address the source of African migration, European policymakers must understand why young people embark on this perilous journey. A 2019 report by the UN Development Programme, based on interviews with 1,970 African migrants from 39 nations, conducted across 13 EU member states, found that they were typically educated above the average levels in their home countries and had held steady jobs there. But only 38 percent said they had earned enough "to get by."

Unable to fulfill their ambitions in Africa, and with many facing war and repression, these young people looked to Europe for opportunity and safety.

Reducing migration from Africa requires contributing generously to its development, not funding third countries — many of them ruled by repressive regimes — to harden borders by any means. The EU has cynically chosen the latter approach, eroding its moral standing.

If the bloc wants to portray itself as a global force for good following America's retreat from the world stage, it must pursue migration policies that reflect our shared humanity, rather than self-interest.



SCCI calls for simplifying visa process, exchange of delegations — to improve Pak-Malaysia trade ties

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry president Fazal Moqeem Khan called for simplifying business visa issuance process, exchange of trade delegations, unlocking potentials and organising a single country exhibition to enhance Pak-Malaysia economic and trade relations.

SCCI chief said Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is a lucrative destination for foreign investors and invited Malaysian businessmen to make investment in oil, gas, hydropower generation, tourism and other potentials of the province.

He was speaking to members during the visit of the Higher Commissioner of Malaysian in Pakistan Muhammad Azhar Bin Mazlan to the chamber house on Wednesday.

On the occasion, a multimedia documentary was played, which highlighted Khyber Pakhtunkhwa potentials in diverse sec-

tors, as well as the origin of the chamber, its objectives, facilitation services to the business community and other initiatives.

SCCI senior vice president Abdul Jalil Jan, vice president Shehryar Khan, members of the chamber's executive committee Safiullah Khan, Adnan Nasir, Ashfaq Ahmad, Sultan Muhammad, Gul Zaman and Bakht Mir Jan Khan Durrani, former senior vice president Imran Khan Mohmand, Hसनain Sheraz, Sherfarzand, Affaf Ali Khan, Qurat Ul Ain, Naeem Qasmi, Sikandar Iqbal, Rashid Iqbal Siddiqui, Mushtaq Ahmad, Shahzad Qaiser, Saddar Gul, SCCI Secretary General Muqtasid Ahsan, Fazal e Wahid, Ishtiaq Muhammad Paracha, importers and exporters were present in the meeting.

Fazal Moqeem Khan said immense investment opportunities are available in oil, gas, minerals, hydropower generation, tourism, honey, pharmaceutical and other important

sectors in KP and called upon Malaysian businessmen to take full advantage by making investment through joint ventures.

Accompanied by First Secretary of High Commission of Malaysia in Pakistan, Mohammad Zulassri Bin Rosdi, the Malaysian diplomat Azhar Bin Mazlan in his keynote remarks and replying to various queries of the participants said that his country gave much importance to improve trade and economic relations with Pakistan.

Mazlan acknowledged that countless investment opportunities exist in Pakistan, especially Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and stressed the need for fully exploiting these investment avenues through mutual collaboration.

The diplomat said they want to engage and facilitate the business community of the both countries to further enhance bilateral trade and economic relations.

Mazlan mentioned the huge investment opportuni-

ties available in multiple sectors in Malaysia, especially oil, gas, palm oil and asked KP businessmen to invest in these potential sectors.

He said his country offers special concessions and incentives for attracting foreign investment. He said Malaysia has introduced Eco-system for determining the Halal food products.

It is a great time for Pakistan and Malaysia to unlock the potentials on both sides to boost up bilateral trade volume between the two countries, the envoy asserted.

Mazlan emphasized it is highly essential to have proactively engagement between business communities of the both countries.

He assured the removal of complications and all irritants and smooth/swift issuance of visas to the business community.

By concluding he raised the slogan Malaysia-Pak Dosti Zindabad (Long Live Malaysia - Pakistan Friendship).



PESHAWAR: President Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry Fazal Moqeem Khan presenting a Chamber's shield to Higher Commissioner of Malaysian Muhammad Azhar Bin Mazlan.

Gold prices increase by Rs3,700 at Rs364,900

ISLAMABAD (APP): The price of 24 karat per tola gold increased by Rs.3,700 and was traded at Rs.364,900 on Wednesday as against its sale at Rs.361,200 the previous day. All Pakistan Sarafa Gems and Jewelers Association reported.

The prices of 10 grams of 24 karat also increased by Rs.3,171 to Rs.312,842 from Rs.309,671 whereas that of 10 grams of 22 karat gold went up by Rs.2,917 to Rs.286,782 from Rs.283,865.

However, the rates of per tola and ten gram silver increased by Rs46 and Rs.39 to Rs.4,081 and Rs.3,498 respectively.

The price of gold in the international market increased by \$37 to \$3,424 from \$3,387, whereas that of silver increased by \$0.46 to \$39.34 to \$38.88, the Association reported.

ICCI to hold industrial exhibition

ISLAMABAD (APP): President of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) Nasir Mansoor Quraishi on Wednesday said that ICCI would organize an international level industrial exhibition in the federal capital in September.

The exhibition will be significant for local industrialists, in whom 80 stalls from small and large sectors will be set up; it will prove to be a milestone for the country's economy, Nasir Mansoor Quraishi told APP here Wednesday.

Replying to a question, he said that ICCI would soon establish the state-of-the-art 'Exhibition Centre' in Islamabad and declared it a milestone for the business community of the federal capital.

This modern state-of-the-art exhibition centre in the federal capital would not only be of significance for the traders of Islamabad but would also be a central place for regional and international trade and industry, the President of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI), he said.

The Expo Centre in the federal capital was the need of the hour, which would be completed as soon as possible and also gives an opportunity to the industrialists to showcase their products. The President ICCI said that an international exhibition would be held in Islamabad in coming September, for which he and his team were trying to finalize the program.

Nasir said that this exhibition centre would have four large halls full of modern facilities, where industrialists would showcase their industrial goods to international buyers and diplomats, which would increase Pakistan's exports and develop the domestic economy.

"Our team has taken several structural steps to modernize the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry, including bringing the chamber to e-commerce and automation."

The President said that institutional productivity is of utmost importance in the modern world, and "We want to enhance the ICCI capacity on the modern lines. He said that without productivity and competitiveness, there is no concept of institutions, for which the ICCI is being developed on international standards.

SBP awards banks for promoting financial literacy among farmers

F.P. Report

KARACHI: State Bank of Pakistan, Banking Services Corporation (SBP BSC), held an award ceremony on Wednesday at SBP Karachi, to recognize top-performing banks for their exemplary contributions to the Agriculture Finance Literacy Program (AFLP).

Launched in 2023, AFLP is a flagship initiative developed by SBP BSC with support from the SBP's Agriculture Credit and Financial Inclusion Department (AC&FID). The program aims to enhance financial awareness among farmers - particularly new-to-bank, female, and underserved segments - about formal credit systems and making

informed borrowing decisions.

During its second year, AFLP demonstrated strong nationwide outreach with 6,326 awareness sessions conducted. These sessions helped connect over 105,000 new-to-bank farmers with the banking system, including 10,740 female farmers. Moreover, 3,297 sessions were held in underserved districts, strengthening outreach in less-accessible areas. To ensure quality and consistency, over 400 sessions were physically monitored by SBP BSC field offices.

The program also led to significant results on the ground. Over 18,000 farmers availed agricultural loans following their participation in awareness ses-

sions, with total disbursements exceeding Rs. 21.47 billions. The conversion ratio improved notably from 4% in Year 1 to 17.12% in Year 2, reflecting the effectiveness of the program in turning awareness into financial action.

Executive Director SBP, Syed Samar Husnain, while addressing the ceremony, congratulated the awarded banks and praised their dedication and field-level efforts. He emphasized, "Financial inclusion begins with awareness - not just access - and literacy is the key to converting that awareness into action."

Senior officials attended the event from SBP and SBP BSC, representatives from the banking industry, and field staff.

Egypt envoy proposes, Pak-Egyptian bilateral PTA

ISLAMABAD (APP): Dr. Ihab Mohamed Abdelhamid Hassa, Ambassador of Egypt to Pakistan on Wednesday proposed the establishment of a Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) between Pakistan and Egypt to facilitate smoother trade relations.

Rana Ihsaan Afzal Khan, Coordinator to the Prime Minister on Commerce, held a meeting with the Ambassador of Egypt to discuss avenues for enhancing bilateral trade between Pakistan and Egypt, said a press release issued here on Wednesday.

The Ambassador observed that despite the two countries collectively representing a significant share of the global Muslim population, the existing trade

volume remained low.

He emphasized the need to strengthen trade relations and apprised that he had already met with chairmen of various chambers of commerce in Pakistan to explore possible collaborations.

To institutionalize cooperation, the Ambassador recommended signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) and its Egyptian counterpart, as well as the formation of an Egypt-Pakistan Business Council focusing on sectors including spices, pharmaceuticals, surgical instruments, and food products.

The Ambassador recommended signing a Memorandum of Understanding

between Pakistan Ministry of Commerce and its Egyptian counterpart, along with the formation of an Egypt-Pakistan Business Council focusing on key sectors including spices, pharmaceuticals, surgical instruments and food products.

The Coordinator to the Prime Minister on Commerce assured that the Ministry of Commerce would extend full support for these initiatives and facilitate measures aimed at enhancing trade linkages between the two countries.

The meeting reaffirmed the Ministry of Commerce's commitment to fostering stronger trade relations with Egypt and underscored its resolve to create an enabling environment for exporters and investors.

‘Port Verse’ launched — to modernize maritime trade operations

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chief Executive Officer of Pakistan Single Window (PSW), Syed Aftab Haider here Wednesday said that a state-of-the-art Maritime Single Window platform PortVerse has been launched to promote digitization and streamline maritime trade.

The PSW launched the platform in collaboration with the Ministry of Maritime Affairs, with an objective to automate port operations, reduce costs and delays, and bring transparency and efficiency in line with international standards.

Talking to APP, Aftab termed the launch of the 'Single Window' system as a transformative development aimed at streamlining and digitizing trade processes in Pakistan, emphasizing that the initiative was revolutionizing the import and export landscape by making it faster, more transparent, and highly integrated.

The PortVerse integrated digital system is designed to automate and centralize the arrival and departure processes of vessels at Pakistani ports, bringing them in line with international standards set by the International Maritime Organization (IMO).

"The purpose of PortVerse is to provide a single, automated platform that facilitates ship arrivals, departures, and related regulatory procedures," said Haider. "This will enhance transparency, save time and costs, and improve overall

operational efficiency."

The platform connects key stakeholders including port authorities, customs, immigration, port health, and shipping agents and allow them to deliver coordinated, high-quality services. Built on advanced technology and interoperability, PortVerse promotes better coordination between government institutions and the private sector.

Haider highlighted that the implementation of PortVerse and the broader Pakistan Single Window initiative aligns with Pakistan's obligations under the World Trade Organization's Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA). Since its full activation in 2022, PSW has automated and streamlined all import, export, and transit-related approvals under a unified digital framework.

As of now, 23 commercial banks, 29 government agencies, and the complete Pakistan Customs data system are integrated with PSW. Additionally, over 32 regulatory bodies that issue licenses, permits, and NOCs for various goods are now part of the PSW network — significantly enhancing both transparency and speed in the approval process.

Haider pointed out that before PSW, traders had to spend days obtaining clearances from multiple departments. Now, these services are accessible through a single digital platform, reducing the clearance time

from several days to just a few hours. The system has led to a significant reduction in paperwork, corruption, and procedural delays.

He also noted that the platform provides secure access to historical records, with data as far back as 2011 readily available and easily updatable. "PSW is also helping document previously unregulated sectors, such as construction and communication companies, contributing to greater formalization of the economy," he said.

Pakistan's progress in digital trade facilitation is being recognized globally. Recently, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) countries have invited Pakistan to take a leadership role in developing Single Window systems across the Islamic world. Moreover, Pakistan has improved its score by 5 percentage points in the Global Digital Trade Facilitation Index since 2023.

Currently, over 300 highly trained professionals are working at PSW, including more than 250 IT specialists. The organization operates independently and professionally, without reliance on traditional government perks such as official vehicles or chauffeurs.

CEO Aftab Haider praised the collective efforts of public and private sector partners, attributing the success of the initiative to effective collaboration and strategic use of modern technology.

Al Baraka Bank selects PTCL for colocation primary Data Center

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Pakistan Telecommunication Company Limited (PTCL) and Al Baraka Bank Pakistan Limited have signed an agreement for the provision of primary Data Center colocation services at PTCL's Tier-III Data Center facility. PTCL will provide Al Baraka Bank Pakistan Limited with a secure and reliable Data Center environment equipped with modern infrastructure, platform solutions, and managed security services.

Asif Ahmad, Group Chief Business Solutions Officer, PTCL and Ufone 4G, and Muhammad Atif Hanif, Chief Executive Officer, Al Baraka Bank Pakistan Limited, signed the agreement during a ceremony held at the Bank's Head Office in Karachi.

Shahid Sumar, Chief Information Officer, Al Baraka Bank Pakistan Limited, Syed Muhammad Saqib, Head of IT Infrastructure, Al Baraka Bank Pakistan Limited, Basharat Qureshi, Group VP Enterprise, PTCL & Ufone 4G, Sayyed Imran Bukhari, Group VP B2B



Strategy, PTCL & Ufone 4G, Saleem Ullah Baig, Group VPDC Ops, PTCL & Ufone 4G, and Umar Farooqi, Group Director Enterprise, PTCL, were also present on the occasion, along with other officials.

During the signing ceremony, Asif Ahmad, Group Chief Business Solutions Officer, PTCL and Ufone 4G, said, "We are pleased to enter a partnership with Al Baraka Bank Pakistan Limited to support them in their information technology and digital transformation vision. As the national carrier of Pakistan, PTCL

aspires to be at the forefront of assisting leading organizations in their efforts to adopt cutting-edge technology solutions to drive the national digital agenda."

On the occasion, Muhammad Atif Hanif, Chief Executive Officer, Al Baraka Bank Pakistan Limited, stated, "We are pleased to sign this agreement with PTCL as our trusted partner for Data Center facility as part of the Bank's technology transformation strategy. This partnership represents a major step forward in enhancing our infrastruc-

ture and strengthening our approach to data and platform management. By leveraging PTCL's expertise, we aim to improve security, reduce time-to-market, and deliver a digitally empowered financial experience to our customers and partners."

PTCL continues to deliver best-in-class ICT and security services to organizations across various industries in Pakistan. This agreement reflects the growing momentum in adopting digital solutions that enable a modern, customer-centric banking ecosystem.

Tokyo's Nikkei leads Asian rally after Japan-US trade deal

HONG KONG (AFP/APP): Tokyo stocks surged Wednesday after Japan and the United States finally hammered out a trade deal to slash Donald Trump's tariffs, including those on the crucial car sector.

Investors were also cheered by news that Washington had reached agreements with Indonesia and the Philippines, stoking optimism that other countries will also follow suit.

Despite a lack of deals ahead of Trump's August 1 deadline, equity markets have been on the march in recent weeks on optimism that governments will eventually get over the line.

Investor sentiment in Tokyo had been subdued as Japanese trade envoy Ryosei Akazawa travelled

seven times to Washington since April in a bid to persuade Trump to scrap the levies.

But the US president announced Tuesday a "massive" deal lowering tariffs on some Japanese goods to 15 percent, down from the threatened 25 percent.

Tokyo also cut a deal to reduce tolls on its autos -- a sector accounting for eight percent of Japanese jobs -- to 15 percent, compared, with 25 percent for other countries.

"Japan will invest, at my direction, \$550 Billion Dollars into the United States, which will receive 90% of the Profits," Trump said on social media.

He did not provide details on the investment

plan, but claimed the deal "will create Hundreds of Thousands of Jobs."

With car shipments deal in the bag, Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba said: "We are the first (country) in the world to reduce tariffs on automobiles and auto parts, with no limits on volume."

Akazawa wrote on social media: "Mission accomplished."

However, he later said the 50 percent levies on steel and aluminium were not part of the deal.

Traders poured back into the market, pushing the Nikkei up more than three percent to a one-year high thanks to soaring automakers.

Toyota rocketed more than 14 percent, Mitsubishi

13 percent and Nissan jumped more than eight percent.

"With the reciprocal tariff rate at 15 percent, our base case view that tariffs should have a limited direct impact for most industries in Japan is unchanged," said Lorraine Tan Morningstar's director of equity research in Asia.

"The key risk remains the indirect impact of slower global demand given ongoing tariff uncertainty."

The yen strengthened to 146.20 per dollar -- compared with close to 148 Tuesday but it lost some weight after a top Bank of Japan official indicated it was not in any rush to hike interest rates. However, analysts were cautious over the agreement.



In brief

Three Pak climbers summit Gasherbrum-I

ISLAMABAD (APP): Three Pakistani climbers have successfully reached the summit of Gasherbrum-I (8,080m), depicting the country's growing mountaineering community, Alpine Club of Pakistan (ACP) said on Wednesday. Among them, Abid Baig of Hunza achieved the remarkable feat of soloing the 11th highest peak in the world on July 20 without supplementary oxygen or Sherpa support in pure alpine style, a rare accomplishment in modern high-altitude climbing. "Climbing an 8,000er solo and without oxygen is an extraordinary display of endurance and mountain spirit," said Karrar Haidri, Vice President of the ACP. Mehboob Ali and Abbas Ali from Arandu village in Shigar Valley summited as part of the Elite Exped team, led by Nepali mountaineering icon Nirmal Purja, popularly known as Nims Dai. On the ascent, they were joined by Sheikhha Asma Al Thani of Qatar's royal family. "This is a proud moment for Pakistan," Haidri said. "Climbers from both the north and south of the Karakoram have proven their world-class skill, resilience and determination." All climbers are reported safe and have begun their descent to Base Camp, till filing of this report.

Messi, Alba risk ban

LOS ANGELES (AFP): Lionel Messi and Inter Miami teammate Jordi Alba could face a suspension after withdrawing from Major League Soccer's All-Star game, multiple US media reports said on Wednesday. Argentina superstar Messi and Alba had been due to start for a combined MLS team which will face a squad representing Mexico's Liga-MX in Austin on Wednesday. However US media reported on Wednesday both Messi and Alba had pulled out of the squad. No reason for the withdrawal was given and it could mean Messi and Alba are given a one-game ban unless they have a valid reason for withdrawal, such as an injury. The duo's participation in the exhibition game had been under a cloud after Miami coach Javier Mascherano indicated at the weekend he wanted Messi and Alba to rest. "The players are called up, I'd prefer they rest, but it's not my decision," Mascherano said. "I know how important the All-Star Game is, and as far as I know, there's no decision from the club - everything continues as normal." Both Messi, 38, and Alba, 36, have a history of recent injury problems while Inter Miami has faced a gruelling schedule which included participation in the recent FIFA Club World Cup. MLS did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Sinner reappoints fitness coach Ferrara

LONDON (Agencies): World number one Jannik Sinner has reappointed fitness coach Umberto Ferrara, with whom he parted ways following the investigation into his positive tests for a banned substance. Ferrara and physiotherapist Giacomo Naldi left the Italian's team last August, five months after Sinner returned two positive tests for clostebol. "Umberto has played an important role in Jannik's development to date, and his return reflects a renewed focus on continuity and performance at the highest level," a statement from Sinner's team read.

Russell's sparkling farewell in vain as Australia sprint to T20 win

KINGSTON (AFP) : Andre Russell struck a sparkling 36 off 15 balls in his final innings before retirement on Tuesday but could not save the West Indies from losing the second Twenty20 international against Australia in Kingston.

The 37-year-old all-rounder was unable to script a fairytale farewell to his glittering T20 career, but departed to a standing ovation on his home Sabina Park ground after hitting four trademark sixes and two fours.

Batting at number seven in his 85th and last T20 international, Russell's cameo, plus a late flurry from Gudakesh Motie (18 off nine balls) added to 51 from opener Brandon King enabled the hosts to score 172-8 off their 20 overs.

But a record 131-run stand by Josh Inglis, who made 78 not out, and Cameron Green (56 not out) saw Australia race to an eight-wicket win with more than four overs to spare.

It was Australia's highest third-wicket partnership in Twenty20 internationals and, aided by six dropped catches by West Indies fielders, gave the visitors a 2-0 lead in the five-match series.

Inglis hit seven fours and five sixes while Green was barely more sedate, clearing the ropes four times and stroking three fours in his second consecutive fifty.

"I didn't want to finish on a losing note," said Russell, whose spectacular final knock had briefly thrilled his hometown crowd.

"I enjoy seeing the ball go over the ropes," he added.

"As a kid you dream about playing here. Thanks to all the fans who came out to support me."

Russell, who was given a guard of honour before the match by both teams, played just one Test match.

It was as a Twenty20 specialist that he made his name, winning the T20 World Cup twice with the West Indies in 2012 and 2016.

A more than lively seam bowler, Russell's free-scoring late-order batting and athletic fielding saw him sought after by T20 leagues around the world.

He has been with Kolkata Knight Riders in the IPL since 2014, scoring more than 2,400 runs.



Andre Russell of West Indies is given a guard of honour before his final appearance for the West Indies in Kingston.

Ex-Captain calls for promotion of hockey at grass-roots levels

PESHAWAR (APP): Former Captain Pakistan Hockey Team, Olympian, Rahim Khan has called for promotion of hockey at school level to restore the glory of the nation in its national sports.

Speaking at the Sports Heroes Awards ceremony held here at Nishtar Hall, the other day, the renowned hockey player attributed the current decline of hockey in the country to the lack of the patronage of the sports at the grassroots level.

He emphasized that without structured and consistent hockey activities in schools, colleges, and universities, it is impossible to revive the national sport or reclaim Pakistan's lost status on the international stage.

"In the past, hockey was used to flow in the veins of Pakistanis, but over time, we have drifted away from our national sport. If we want to attract youth back to hockey, the first step is

to revive it at the school level by developing infrastructure, appointing qualified coaches, and organizing regular competitions," proposed the former national hockey team.

He expressed disappointment over the lack of concrete steps taken by successive governments to promote hockey, stating that a nation which once dominated the world stage now finds itself missing from global rankings.

"We need a transparent, merit-based system free from political interference to ensure young players can step onto the field with confidence and pride," he added.

Rahim Khan urged federal and provincial sports authorities, especially the Directorate of Sports Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan Hockey Federation, and the Ministry of Education, to integrate hockey into the academic curriculum and ensure that every district

hosts a School Hockey League.

"Unless children get the opportunity to hold a hockey stick from a young age, we won't be able to produce the next Wasim Ahmed, Shahbaz Senior, or Hassan Sardar," he remarked.

Highlighting the challenges faced by aspiring players, Rahim Khan noted that many passionate and hardworking youngsters fail to progress due to the absence of basic facilities, trained coaches, and opportunities.

He proposed the establishment of at least one fully-equipped hockey academy in every zone, division, and district, where children can receive regular training under professional guidance.

He concluded by calling on all stakeholders to play their due role in bringing hockey back to life in Pakistan, starting from the grassroots level and building up towards national pride.

Ahsan qualifies for Snooker C'ships semis

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistani cueist Ahsan Ramzan has moved into the semifinals of the IBSF World Masters, U17, U21 & Men 6Red Snooker Championships 2025 at Manama, Bahrain.

According to details, in the U21 quarterfinal, Ahsan Ramzan (Pak) beat Mayur Garg (India) 4-0 (103(58)-42(32), 82(35)-0, 56-39, 74(48)-23).

In the U21 Last 16 Round Result, Ahsan Ramzan beat Hasnain Akhtar (Pak) 4-1 (70-54, 107(99)-0, 0-72(60), 106(69)-32, 64(37)-6).

In 6 Red Last 30 Round Result, Firas Kamil Shaba (Iraq) beat Muhammad Asif (Pak) 4-3 (35-20, 29-42, 8-36, 4-49(48), 54(35)-1, 38-34, 39(30)-22); Shahid Aftab (Pak) beat Chau Hon Man (Hong Kong) 4-2 (25-41, 52-12, 56(35)-0, 36-28, 1-51, 44(44)-9); Ahsan Ramzan (Pak) beat Ayaan Iqbal (Scotland) 4-3 (2-39, 54-0, 29-30(30), 29-10, 31(31)-17, 4-62, 44(38)-0).

In 6 Red Last 16 Round Result, Firas Kamil Shaba (Iraq) beat Shahid Aftab (Pak) 4-3 (25-10, 1-48, 13-36, 49-27, 2-41(35), 41-2, 49(45)-9); Aditya Mehta (India) beat Ahsan Ramzan (Pak) 4-3 (25-37, 17-47, 37-27, 50(45)-2, 0-50, 49-4, 71(71)-0). Meanwhile all Pakistan players have exited from 6 Red of the championship.

Pakistan to feature in World Jr Padel C'ship

ISLAMABAD (APP): For the first time in history, Pakistan will participate in the World Junior Padel Championship, scheduled to take place in Spain from September 29 to October 4 this year. According to Muhammad Mateen, President of the Pakistan Padel Federation, the country is gearing up for the mega event, with players from 40 countries expected to participate in the extravaganza.

To select the best players for the World Championship, the Naveena Steel National Junior Padel Championship 2025 will be held from July 31 to August 3 at Maidan KMC in Karachi. The championship will feature boys and girls from across the country, competing in three age categories including Under-14, Under-16, and Under-18. The tournament will be played under the rules of the International Padel Federation (FIP) and Padel Asia.

The final matches will take place on August 3, followed by a concluding ceremony where cash prizes, medals, and certificates will be awarded to the winning players.

The Organizing Committee of the Naveena Steel National Junior Padel Championship 2025 will meet on July 27 to finalize all arrangements for the event.

The top players from the championship will be selected to represent Pakistan in the World Junior Padel Championship in Spain.



VALENCE: Jonathan Milan of Italy and Team Lidl - Trek - Green Sprint Jersey celebrates at finish line as stage winner.

Milan wins Tour stage 17 in wet sprint finish

VALENCE (Agencies): Jonathan Milan claimed his second victory of this year's Tour de France by winning a wet sprint finish on stage 17.

A bunch sprint was expected on the 160.4km stage from Bollene to Valence and with 4km remaining, the peloton caught the final rider from a four-man breakaway.

Rain was pouring for the final 30km and Milan's sprint rivals Tim Merlier and Biniam Girmay were involved in a crash just inside the final kilometre.

Milan then proved too strong for Jordi Meeus as the 24-year-old Italian strengthened his grip on the green jersey for points classification leader.

The Lidl-Trek rider stretched his lead by 61 points to give him a 72-point advantage over reigning champion Tadej Pogacar.

Wearing the yellow jersey, Pogacar crossed safely in the peloton and there was no change in the top 10 of the general classification standings - so the three-time Tour winner maintains his overall race lead of four minutes 15 seconds.

"We still have some tough days that await us, the climbs," said Milan. "But at the moment, we've had a lot of fun, and I'm really happy with how it's going."

"We'll keep fighting for the intermediate [sprints] and on the last day for the stage, but we'll see how it goes. We have a bit more distance with the points and I'm a bit more relaxed, but I will keep fighting."

Wednesday's stage could be the final opportunity for

sprinters to triumph this year - as Sunday's finale in Paris, which traditionally favours the fast men, features the Montmartre climb shortly before the finish so it could scupper their chances.

Milan, who is making his Tour debut having previously won the green jersey twice on the Giro d'Italia, had already claimed his maiden Tour win on stage eight. But with Pogacar closing on him in the points race, Lidl-Trek were caught out on Tuesday as Milan was out of position to contest the intermediate sprint.

This time, they ensured he was at the front of the peloton for the sprint, claiming 11 points after the breakaway, and the team helped Milan recover as he was dropped on the first of two categorised climbs.

The Lidl-Trek riders then played their part to reel in the lead group, from which Jonas Abrahamson attacked with 12km to go, only to be caught by the peloton with 4km remaining.

The wet conditions made for a treacherous finish and although Milan avoided the crash, it put some of his rivals out of contention as he sprinted to the line.

"This is a really fantastic team victory and I have to thank them from the bottom of my heart," Milan added.

"I survived with the help of my team-mates. Without this, I would not be here. They delivered me in the best position [for the finish]." The battle for the yellow jersey is set to continue on Thursday with the first of two gruelling mountain stages in the Alps.

Stage 17 results
Jonathan Milan (Ita/Lidl-Trek) 3hrs 25mins 30secs
Jordi Meeus (Spa/Red Bull-Bora-Hansgrohe) Same time
Tobias Lund Andresen (Den, Picnic PostNL)
Arnaud de Lie (Bel/Lotto)
Davide Ballerini (Ita/XDS Astana)
Alberto Dainese (Ita/Tudor)
Paul Penhoet (Fra/Groupama-FDJ)
Yevgeniy Fedorov (Kaz/XDS Astana)
Clement Russo (Fra/Groupama-FDJ)
Jasper Stuyven (Bel/Lidl-Trek)
General classification after stage 17
Tadej Pogacar (Slo/UAE Emirates-XRG) 61hrs 50mins 16secs
Jonas Vingegaard (Den/Visma-Lease a Bike) +4mins 15secs
Florian Lipowitz (Ger/Red Bull-Bora-Hansgrohe) +9mins 3secs
Oscar Onley (GB/Picnic PostNL) +11mins 4secs
Primoz Roglic (Slo/Red Bull-Bora-Hansgrohe) +11mins 42secs
Kevin Vauquelin (Fra/Arkea-B&B Hotels) +13mins 20secs
Felix Gall (Aut/Decathlon-AG2R La Mondiale) +14mins 50secs
Tobias Johannessen (Nor/Uno-X Mobility) +17mins 1sec
Ben Healy (Ire/EF Education-EasyPost) +17mins 52secs
Carlos Rodriguez (Spa/Ineos Grenadiers) +20mins 45secs.

India suffer Pant blow in fourth Test against England

MANCHESTER (AFP): India suffered a potentially major setback when Rishabh Pant retired hurt on the first day of the fourth Test against England at Old Trafford on Wednesday before they reached stumps on 264-4.

Left-arm spinner Liam Dawson had earlier marked his first Test in eight years with the key wicket of Yashasvi Jaiswal after England captain Ben Stokes went against history by opting to bowl first.

No team winning the toss and bowling first has ever won a Test at Old Trafford. But lively pace-man Stokes led from the front with 2-47 in 14 overs as he again proved the pick of England's attack this series. India, 2-1 down after three Tests, must win in Manchester if they are to keep alive their hopes of winning the five-match campaign.

The tourists, however, will have to make history of their own as they have never managed to win in nine previous Tests at Old Trafford. India got through the first session without losing a wicket only for three batsmen to be dismissed before tea.

The recalled Sai Sudharsan, dropped on 20, twice hooked fast bowler Jofra Archer for four in the evening session before Pant launched Brydon Carse for a superb straight six.

But the aggressive Pant was hurt when attempting an audacious reverse sweep off a yorker-length delivery from paceman Chris Woakes. England appealed for lbw but a review revealed wicketkeeper Pant had got an inside edge before the ball deflected onto his right foot.

Pant, who had made 37 off 48 balls, eventually limped into a buggy before being driven off the field, with India then 212-3.

Soon afterwards Sudharsan fell for a well-made 61 when a top-edged swivel pull off a short ball from Stokes flew straight to Carse at long leg. Bad light ended play for the day at 1721 GMT, even though the floodlights were on and England were bowling spin at both ends.

Jaiswal and fellow opener KL Rahul had previously defied difficult conditions and testing bowling from Woakes and Archer to take India to 78-0 at lunch. But Rahul had added just six more runs to his interval score of 40 when, trying to force Woakes off the back foot, he edged to Zak Crawley at third slip, leaving India 94-1.

Jaiswal late-cut Carse for four to go to 49 before completing a 96-ball fifty.

Dawson glad to 'do a job' Dawson, recalled after 21-year-old off-spinner Shoaib

Bashir suffered a series-ending finger injury during England's thrilling 22-run win in the third Test at Lord's, did not bowl before lunch.

But the 35-year-old, playing his first Test since 2017, needed just seven balls to strike on Wednesday when Jaiswal pushed forward defensively to a good-length delivery and edged to Harry Brook at first slip.

"What you say today was what you get, not amazing but I do a job for the team," the modest Dawson told Sky Sports after ending the day with 1-45 in 15 overs. He added: "I'm not getting any younger, so just try and enjoy it and take each day as it comes."

New batsman and India captain Shubman Gill, who had accused England of contravening "the spirit of cricket" with their time-wasting tactics during an ill-tempered match at Lord's, was greeted with a chorus of boos from spectators as he walked out to the middle.

But none of the ill-feeling between the teams in London was evident in Manchester on Wednesday. Gill's brief stay ended when he was lbw for 12 playing no shot to opposing captain Stokes following a vociferous appeal from the all-rounder.

He reviewed, but to no avail,



Rishabh Pant leaves the field on a medical cart after hurting his foot.

with India now 140-3. His early exit means Gill has scored just 34 runs in his past three innings after scoring three hundreds in the first two Tests.

India selected paceman

Jasprit Bumrah again after previously announcing he would only play three Tests in the series. The policy was aimed at protecting the world's top-ranked bowler following a back injury.

Bumrah missed the second Test in Birmingham, which India won, but returned for the dramatic match at Lord's. The fifth and final Test takes place at the Oval, starting on July 31.



In brief

PHA completes horticultural work

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Parks and Horticulture Authority (PHA) has completed magnificent horticultural work to enhance the beauty of the site under the Murree Road 6th Road Flyover. According to the PHA spokesperson, colourful plants, beautiful flowers and excellent constructions for decoration have become the centre of attention of the public. She said that Director General PHA, Ahmed Hassan Ranjha, had instructed the relevant staff to improve the beauty of various places under the flyover and maintain a lush environment. PHA was utilising all resources to decorate and beautify the parks and green belts across the city, aimed to provide the best recreational facilities to the public, she said and added that the PHA cultivated seasonal flowers on different city roads, which presented charming sights. She said that the authority was also taking special measures to protect the plants and flowers from the effects of ongoing heavy rains, while standing water was also being removed from the parks. Highlighting the importance of plantation, she urged the residents to plant more trees during the ongoing season, as plantation was vital to tackling climate change and promoting a green environment.

IRSA releases 522,400 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Wednesday released 522,400 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 583,300 cusecs. According to the data released by 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 358,200 cusecs and 357,800 cusecs, respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1193.45 feet, which was 143.45 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 68,800 cusecs and 8,000 cusecs, respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 346,100, 248,3300, 208,700 and 208,700 cusecs, respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 43,800 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 90,200 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.

21 outlaws nabbed

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Police arrested 21 outlaws during various operations conducted by Sabzi Mandi, Shams Colony, Khanna, Nilore, Phulgran, and Shahzad Town police station teams. A public relations officer told APP that 10 individuals involved in different criminal activities were apprehended. Police recovered 403 grams of ice, 60 bottles of wine, four pistols with ammunition, and several daggers from their possession. Cases have been registered against the accused, and further investigations are underway. He said that in a separate campaign targeting proclaimed offenders and absconders, police teams arrested six criminals from different areas. He said the operations were carried out under the special directions of Inspector General of Police (IGP) Islamabad Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi, as part of an ongoing crackdown against crime and criminal elements to maintain peace in the federal capital. Islamabad Police remains fully committed to protecting the lives and property of citizens and ensuring public safety, adding that no one will be allowed to disrupt the peace, he concluded.

Pakistan not ready for any water crisis: Sherry

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chairperson of Senate Standing Committee on Climate Change, Senator Sherry Rehman, convened the committee meeting on Wednesday to address the alarming scale of climate-induced disasters and Pakistan's growing vulnerability to extreme weather events.

The committee took serious note of the monsoon devastation, outdated disaster response infrastructure, and rapid groundwater depletion that is exacerbating the country's water crisis, said a press release.

Senator Rehman underscored that from June 26 to July 22, Pakistan has already lost 242 lives, while 598 people have been injured due to heavy monsoon rains. "Just in the past 24 hours, 21 people have died, and 6 were injured. This is not a one-off tragedy—this is climate

change in motion, and Pakistan is ranked number one in climate vulnerability," she stated.

She condemned the unplanned construction on natural waterways, citing Saidpur Village and DHA Rawalpindi as examples where negligence led to lives lost and infrastructure destroyed. "We cannot call this a natural disaster anymore. That absolves us of responsibility. These are human-induced disasters fueled by poor planning and inaction in the face of climate change," she remarked.

Senator Rehman noted that search operations are still underway for a father and daughter swept away in DHA Rawalpindi. She stressed that tourist activity must be restricted in Gilgit-Baltistan, where emergency conditions continue.

Sherry Rehman noted that no

ministry could provide a map of Pakistan's groundwater extraction on any scale. Groundwater extraction and water scarcity were on the agenda of the Senate Standing Committee for Climate Change. The Water Resource Ministry was also struggling with answers on surface water consumption per capita, as well as how many tube wells we have working in the country for agriculture, and how many are recharging. No ability to map the scale of usage for irrigation or normal consumption.

She noted, "For a country that has been declared water scarce by the U.N. this year, no evidence of harvesting water in PSDP or other planning, especially while we go through a torrential monsoon. It was a totally fragmented and inadequate response."

Senator Rehman further

pointed out that Pakistan lacks a modern early warning system, despite the UN Secretary-General's repeated calls to treat early warning as a basic human right. "We are still using a 1912 model to issue warnings. Meanwhile, the rest of the world is using real-time, AI-enabled systems," she said.

Officials requested that the Senate Committee issue directions to the provinces to strengthen their early warning efforts, to which Senator Rehman assured full cooperation, stating that directives would be issued to both provincial and district administrations.

Groundwater depletion was another key concern. She stated, "Provinces must be told how many tube wells they are allowed to install. The number has increased so dramatically

that groundwater is vanishing at an alarming rate." Officials informed the committee that Pakistan had 0.16 million tube wells in 1975–76, which grew to 1.39 million by 2017–18. In comparison, other South Asian countries have city-level systems to monitor groundwater decline, they noted.

"We are still relying on 2022 data—we need 2025 groundwater status updates," emphasized Senator Rehman. She directed all provinces to present up-to-date reports on groundwater conditions in the next meeting.

She also expressed deep concern that no action is being taken to conserve rainwater, and no meaningful work is being done on recharge wells, a basic tool for climate adaptation. "The world is prioritizing this, but in Pakistan, we are stuck in in-

tia," she added. "There's no current status on water storage; institutions are merely engaging in dialogue while the ground realities worsen."

Senator Rehman noted that land in Balochistan and Chitral has already turned barren, and that provinces face acute water shortages after every monsoon.

Sherry Rehman directed that in the next meeting, provinces must bring updated figures and plans regarding groundwater recharge, tube well regulation, and rainwater harvesting.

The meeting was attended by Senators Bushra Anjum Butt, Falak Naz, Syed Waqar Mehdi, and Shahadat Awan. Also present were senior officials from the Ministry of Climate Change and Environmental Coordination, the Ministry of Water Resources, and the Federal Flood Commission.



ISLAMABAD: Chairman Senate, Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani, meets with the Ambassador of Nepal to Pakistan, H.E. Ms. Rita Dhital, in Federal Capital. —APP Photo

Overseas Pakistanis top priority of incumbent regime: Aun Chaudhry

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister of State for Overseas Pakistanis Aun Saqlain Chaudhry was called on by Pakistan's High Commissioner to the United Kingdom, Dr. Mohammad Faisal.

The meeting focused on Pakistan-UK bilateral relations, mutual cooperation and the challenges faced by overseas Pakistanis.

Dr. Faisal briefed the State Minister on the current state of bilateral ties and apprised him of the issues, concerns and needs of the Pakistani residents residing in the United Kingdom.

He also informed about the activities of his august office and facilities being extended to the Pakistani community residing in the UK.

During the meeting, Aun Chaudhry underscored the importance of overseas Pakistanis, calling them a valuable national asset who have consistently played a constructive and commendable role in the country's progress, said a press release here on Wednesday.

He stated that the Prime Minister of Pakistan highly appreciates the contributions of the overseas community and is taking con-

crete measures to address their concerns and ensure the provision of necessary facilities.

State Minister for Overseas Aun Choudhary reaffirmed the Government's commitment to prioritizing the resolution of overseas Pakistanis' issues. He emphasized that all available resources will be utilized to ensure their comfort, protection, and full support. The meeting concluded on a positive note, with both dignitaries expressing their commitment to enhancing mutual cooperation and strengthening bilateral ties further.

Crackdown underway against sugar mafia

RAWALPINDI (APP): About 39 persons were arrested during crackdown against the sugar mafia carried out on the instructions of Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz across the Rawalpindi Division in last 24 hours for violating the notified sugar rate of Rs 173 per kilogram.

A total of 139 violations of the notified sugar rate were reported, with a fine of Rs 761,000 imposed, two first information reports (FIRs) registered and 33 points of sale sealed across the division, a DPR news release said on Wednesday.

According to the breakdown, 64 violations were found during the checking in the Rawalpindi District, with 25 accused nabbed, Rs 542,500 fine imposed, two FIRs filed and 28 points of sale sealed.

Similarly, in the Attock District, a fine of Rs 89,000 was imposed on 22 violations, 10 accused arrested and two points of sale sealed. In the Jhelum District, a total of Rs 44,000 fine was imposed and five points of sale were sealed on 26 violations.

Likewise, during inspections in the Chakwal District, eight accused were fined a total of Rs 64,000, while Rs 21,500 fine was imposed on 19 persons found involved in violation of the notified sugar rate and one arrested.

Meanwhile, Commissioner Rawalpindi Engineer Amir Khattak directed the deputy commissioners to ensure the sugar mills to sell the commodity at the notified rate and maintain its supply chain.

He vowed that the sugar mafia would not be allowed to exploit the public, directing that the crackdown should be intensified on those violating the notified rate.

"All magistrates should be directed to take indiscriminate action against shopkeepers selling sugar at high rate along with the prices of essential commodities while in the field," the commissioner said in his directive to the DCs. Those charging more than the notified rate of sugar should be arrested, he added. He also instructed the DCs to ensure the availability of all the quality essential items at counters.

Amir Muqam chairs meeting for strengthening Jirga system in KP

ISLAMABAD (APP): A high-level meeting of the committee was held under the chairmanship of Federal Minister for Kashmir Affairs, Gilgit-Baltistan and SAFFRON Engineer Amir Muqam for strengthening the Jirga system and civil administration in the merged tribal districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The meeting was attended by Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Karim Kundi, Federal Minister for Law and Justice Azam Nazir Tarar, Minister of State for Interior Talal

Chaudhry, Secretary Kashmir Affairs Zafar Hassan, Special Secretary Interior Dawood Baraich, Secretary Overseas and former Chief Secretary Shakeel Durrani and IG Police Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and senior officials of various ministries, said a press release on Wednesday.

The committee is neither preparing any new draft of constitutional amendment, nor is the merger of the former FATA being abolished, nor is the revival of FCR under consideration.

All the rumours spread in this regard are baseless.

The sole objective of the committee is to formulate recommendations regarding the provision of prompt justice to the people of the merged districts, their development and prosperity, and ensuring their participation.

Since the merged districts are part of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, these recommendations will be sent to the provincial government so that the merged districts can be provided with facilities at par with other areas.

Dutch envoy bids farewell, reaffirms human rights partnership with Pakistan

ISLAMABAD (APP): Her Excellency Henny Fokel de Vries, Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Pakistan, held a farewell meeting with Federal Minister for Human Rights Senator Azam Nazeer Tarar, marking the conclusion of her diplomatic tenure in the country.

During the meeting, the Federal Minister warmly welcomed the outgoing ambassador and praised her pivotal role in enhancing bilateral relations and fostering deeper cooperation between Pakistan and the Netherlands. He particularly appreciated her con-

tributions to promoting dialogue on human rights and advocating for the protection of minority communities during her tenure.

Senator Tarar reaffirmed Pakistan's strong commitment to upholding human rights as enshrined in the Constitution and aligned with international obligations. He also briefed the Ambassador on Pakistan's ongoing initiatives aimed at countering intolerance and promoting social cohesion.

In response, Ambassador de Vries thanked the Government of Pakistan for its support and hospitality

throughout her assignment. She lauded the constructive and consistent engagement on key human rights issues and reaffirmed the Netherlands' continued support for programs that promote inclusion, tolerance, and democratic values in Pakistan.

The meeting concluded on a cordial note with an exchange of warm wishes. Senator Tarar extended his best regards to the Ambassador for her future endeavors and expressed optimism for sustained collaboration between both nations in advancing shared values and human rights globally.

ANF recovers over 738 kg drugs; arrests 12 accused

ISLAMABAD (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting 11 operations across the country managed to recover over 738 kg drugs worth more than over Rs 253 million and arrested 12 drug traffickers during two days.

According to an ANF Headquarters spokesperson, in an operation at Allama Iqbal International Airport, cargo shed, 300 grams opium was recovered from a parcel booked for Canada.

In second operation at Faisal Bus Terminal near Islamabad, 2.5 kgs heroin, 2.4 kgs hashish, & 1 kg ice were recovered from the possession of three suspects.

ANF recovered 56 kgs hashish from a vehicle checked near University

Road, Peshawar, and a drug trafficker was arrested.

In 4th operation near Garh Mor Road, Muzaffargarh, 7 kgs ice was recovered from two suspects, traveling in a truck while in an operation near DG Khan Road in Loralai, 168 kgs heroin hidden for smuggling was recovered.

In an operation against drug traffickers near Toll Plaza Road, Mansehra, 18 kgs hashish was recovered from a vehicle and a drug smuggler was rounded up.

The spokesperson informed that in an operation, 2 kgs hashish and 7 kgs suspicious material were recovered from a parcel sent to Karachi at a Cargo Office in Rawalpindi.

Near RCD Road, Hub, 24

kgs hashish was recovered from a vehicle and two accused arrested while in an operation near RCD Road, Hub, 64.8 kgs hashish was recovered from the secret cavities of a vehicle. ANF also arrested an accused during the operation.

In a raid at a warehouse located on Adam G. Dawood Road, Karachi, 384 kgs potassium permanganate was recovered from the possession of a person.

In 11th operation on National Highway, Hyderabad, 2 kgs opium was recovered from a passenger bus and a drug smuggler was arrested. The spokesperson informed that separate cases have been registered under the CNS Act against the accused.

RDA moves to enforce robust water-saving policies

RAWALPINDI (APP): Director General Rawalpindi Development Authority (RDA) Kinza Murtaza on Wednesday directed officials to implement robust water conservation strategies, especially within clusters of Private Housing Schemes (PHS).

Presiding over a meeting to address pressing issues concerning water shortage, rainwater harvesting, wastewater recycling, and sewage treatment systems, she emphasized the enforcement of Right of Way (ROW) regulations for rivers.

Additionally, the DG RDA issued strict instructions to immediately halt pollution of local water bodies by private housing developers.

She highlighted the urgent need for all housing schemes to install and maintain proper sewage treatment systems and comply with environmental regulations. The DG warned that strict legal action will be taken against any schemes found violating these directives, reinforcing RDA's commitment to environmental stewardship and sustainable urban growth.

These initiatives aim to safeguard local water resources, which are facing increasing stress due to rapid urbanisation and unregulated water consumption. Developers have been instructed to integrate sustainable practices, including rainwater harvesting, wastewater recycling, and the installation of

water-efficient systems in all residential developments.

She said, "This is not just about compliance, it's about securing our future. Water is a critical resource, and we must act now to protect it for the generations to come."

The meeting concluded with a strong consensus on the need for collaborative action between public authorities, developers, and residents to protect natural resources and ensure sustainable urban planning in the region.

The meeting was attended by the representatives from the Army Information Cell, Rawalpindi Cantonment Board, Chaklala Cantonment Board and others.

6 killed, 18 wounded

KABUL (Pajhwok): Six individuals have been killed and 18 others injured as a result of a coalmine collapse in Karkar area of northern Baghlan province, police said on Wednesday. In a statement, the provincial police headquarters quoted Maulvi Abdullah Hamid head of Northern Coal Company as saying the incident occurred due to a sudden collapse of third shaft of Karkar coalmine. He said six people lost their lives and 18 others were injured in the incident.

The Frontier Post

Muharram 28, 1447 — Thursday, July 24, 2025

5 schools get new buildings

KABUL (Pajhwok): Construction work has been completed on five school buildings at a cost of 55 million afghanis in Ghazni province, an official said on Wednesday. Funded by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, the buildings had been executed in Andar and Giro districts of the province, said Education Director Maulvi Nasir Ahmad Hussaini. He said the buildings amounted for 55 million afghanis and took six months to complete.

Muttaqi talks refugees' repatriation with Qatari official



KABUL (Pajhwok): Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs Maulvi Amir Khan Muttaqi and a Qatari official have discussed the imminent deportation of more Afghan asylum seekers from Germany and the situation of other returnees. He assured that Afghan diplomats in Germany would provide transparent consular services to Afghan residing in the European country.

Muttaqi held a phone conversation with Dr. Mohammed bin Abdulaziz Al-Khulaifi, Minister of State at Qatar's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) said.

A statement from the ministry said the two sides discussed bilateral ties between Kabul and Doha, return process of 18 Afghan asylum seekers from Germany, the remaining phases of this process and

the recent wave of refugee returns to Afghanistan.

Muttaqi described relations between Afghanistan and Qatar as growing and thanked Qatar for its cooperation in the recent negotiations and progress with the German government.

He said that with the help of humanitarian organizations, they would be able to help repatriated Afghans from Germany resume a normal life in the country.

He also gave assurances that Afghan diplomats in Germany would provide transparent consular services to Afghans and that future discussions would progress positively.

For his part, the Qatari minister also said that Afghanistan holds a special place in Qatar's foreign policy. He described the recent progress in facilitating cooperation between Afghanistan and Germany

as significant. He promised that the Qatari government would continue playing a constructive role in the upcoming phases of this process.

He added that his country was closely monitoring the recent wave of refugee returns to Afghanistan and is working with the relevant bodies to help the Afghan government manage the situation.

This development comes as a reliable source from the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs told Pajhwok on Monday night that two Afghan diplomats, Nibrasul Haq Aziz and Mustafa Hashimi, have arrived in the German capital, Berlin.

According to reports, Germany has confirmed that it will accept the two consular representatives sent by the Islamic Emirate to facilitate the technical aspects of repatriating Afghan refugees labelled as "criminals."

This follows last week's deportation of 81 Afghan asylum seekers from Germany. The German Interior Ministry stated that the deported individuals had committed crimes in the country.



Official visit by UK envoy highlights engagement efforts

KABUL (TOLOnews): The United Kingdom's Special Envoy for Afghanistan, Richard Lindsay, visited Kabul for the first time and held meetings with officials of the Islamic Emirate as well as a number of Afghan citizens.

Following the trip, he wrote on X: "Just returned from my first visit to Kabul as UK Special Envoy. Met a range of Afghans including Taliban ministers, and discussed issues including health, and returnees from Iran and Pakistan. Afghanistan will only move forward through inclusive dialogue and engagement."

Reacting to the visit, Ahmad Khan Andar, a political analyst, said: "The Islamic Emirate must strengthen its political, economic, and diplomatic relations with all neighboring, regional, and global countries, especially the world powers. The recent remarks of the UK's special envoy at the end of his trip are very important for fostering friendly political and diplomatic relations between Afghanistan and the United Kingdom."

This visit took place while the UK is among the countries that have not yet recognized the interim government of Afghanistan. However, it has expressed willingness for limited engagement in order to facilitate aid delivery and manage migration and terrorism-related crises.

Fazl-ur-Rahman Oria, another political analyst, said: "Diplomatic relations with the UK will be elevated, and Afghan diplomats will initially be accepted at a lower level in the UK. This will also impact Europe and Western countries, as they often follow the UK's policies."

Idris Mohammadi Zazai, another analyst, expressed the following view: "The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan has realized that it must maintain direct and structured political, strategic, and diplomatic relations with all countries, including the West."

It is worth noting that earlier, the acting Minister of Refugees and Repatriation, in a meeting with the UK's chargé d'affaires to Afghanistan and several British diplomats, stated that the IEA had addressed the world's concerns regarding Afghanistan. He emphasized that Western countries, including the UK, should no longer delay in recognizing the IEA.

Paktika residents build school

PAKTIKA (Amu TV): Local residents in Paktika province have constructed a school building using their own funds.

The school, located in the Zamari Kot area of Yusuf Khel District, was funded entirely by local youth, community elders, and migrants originally from the region, residents said. With the new structure in place, hundreds of students are expected to benefit from improved learning conditions.

Many schools in Paktika still lack permanent buildings, forcing students to study in makeshift shelters or open spaces. Local sources say the absence of proper infrastructure continues to hamper education.

The effort comes at a time when the Taliban have banned girls from attending secondary schools and universities nationwide — a policy in place since the group returned to power in August 2021. Girls are barred from schooling beyond sixth grade, despite mounting pressure from Muslim-majority countries and leading Islamic scholars who have urged the Taliban to reverse the decision.

Kazakhstan pledges to accept IEA's envoy: FM

KABUL (Amu TV): Amir Khan Muttaqi, the Taliban's acting foreign minister, said that Kazakhstan has agreed to accept their ambassador, marking what he described as a step forward in their diplomatic outreach.

Speaking at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' annual report session in Kabul on Wednesday, Muttaqi also listed the appointment of Taliban envoys to Russia, Turkey, and Pakistan over the past year as key achievements. He praised Russia's acceptance of the Taliban ambassador as "a rare and significant step" in strengthening ties with regional powers and noted that diplomats had also been introduced to Germany, Norway, India, and Indonesia.

Muttaqi said the Taliban now operate 29 political missions abroad—up from 17 last year—including offices handling passport services. He reiterated their commitment to what he called a "balanced, economy-driven foreign policy" and said the Taliban were ready to engage with all nations based on mutual respect and shared interests.

"We remind all countries that the Islamic Emirate is prepared to engage constructively with the world," he said, referring to the Taliban's self-declared government.

According to the Taliban foreign ministry, the Taliban coordinated nearly 100 overseas visits by its



delegations last year and hosted officials from neighboring countries, regional powers, the United Nations, and other international organizations.

However, only Russia has formally recognized the Taliban rule, nearly four years after they returned to power. Other governments have withheld recognition, citing conditions such as respect for human rights—especially the rights of women and girls—counterterrorism commitments, and the formation of an inclusive government.

In the same press conference, Muttaqi dismissed global criticism of the Taliban's human rights record as "pretext and excuse," claiming that human rights are being upheld in Afghanistan. He referenced civilian casualties under the former West-

ern-backed government, though many of those deaths resulted from Taliban attacks during that period.

His remarks came as Taliban authorities have reportedly detained dozens of women across Kabul in recent weeks for not wearing what the Taliban consider proper Islamic dress or for appearing in public without a male guardian. The Taliban continue to bar women and girls from attending secondary school and university and from working in most sectors.

The event also drew attention for the way it was covered: during the live broadcast of the press conference by the Taliban-run national television station, the voices of at least two female journalists were muted as they posed questions to Muttaqi. The broadcast continued with-

out interruption after the women finished speaking.

The censorship appears to align with a Taliban edict issued last year under the Law on the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, which labels a woman's voice as "awrah," or something to be concealed.

Human rights organizations and Afghan citizens have increasingly criticized international engagement with the Taliban, warning that growing diplomatic contact risks legitimizing a government that systematically excludes women and suppresses dissent.

Despite the Taliban's assertions of normalcy and openness, they remain internationally isolated, and their claims of progress are met with skepticism by much of the global community.

228 new standards approved by Afghan authority in one year

KABUL (TOLOnews): Over the past year, the National Standards Authority has taken significant steps toward improving the quality of goods and services by drafting more than 220 new standards and closely monitoring factories and imported consignments.

Officials from this authority stated during the "One-Year Achievements of Emirate Institutions" program that their main focus has been on standardization and the development of related regulations. According to them, 228 standards were developed over the past year, and new standards will be established in the coming year based on the country's needs.

Waheed Ahmad Badri, Chief of Staff of the National Standards Authority, said: "Over the past year, the authority approved 228 standards and experimental procedures through four official meetings. In the field of quality control and verification, 52,795 samples of construction materials, textiles, leather, and electrical equipment were evaluated at central and border facilities across the country."

The agency's deputy added that, during this period, in addition to monitoring the activities of 80 domestic manufacturing factories, samples from over 80,000 imported consignments were also examined by the authority's equipment.

Of these, 51 consignments were identified as low-quality and were rejected and returned.

Mohammad Asif Qanit, Deputy Head of the National Standards Authority, said: "To ensure compliance with standards, the activities of 80 manufacturing companies in the center and provinces were monitored. Furthermore,



323 samples of construction materials, 50 textile samples, and 176 electrical equipment samples were sent to the authority's central laboratory, while 52,237 other samples were sent to laboratories based at border points."

The program also emphasized that the authority has expanded its relations with regional and international standardization organizations, leading to the exchange of global knowledge and expertise.

Mohammad Hamed, Head of Planning and Policy at the authority, stat-

ed: "In the interest of strengthening continuous cooperation with international and regional organizations, the draft agreements for technical cooperation with the Technical Studies Institute of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and the National Standards Organization of the Islamic Republic of Iran were finalized last year."

According to the officials, the National Standards Authority generated 435 million Afghanis in revenue over the past year, which has been transferred to the state treasury.

Urgent support needed for deportees from Iran: Minister

KABUL (BNA): Mawlawi Abdul Rahman Rashid, the Deputy Minister of Refugees and Repatriation, highlighted the urgent need for assistance for migrants being deported daily from Iran. In a recent meeting with Ms. Izoura Mutya Maskan Tia, Deputy and Acting Head of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Afghanistan, Rashid emphasized the critical situation faced by these returnees.

According to a statement from the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation, the meeting centered around the numerous challenges encountered by those returning from Iran, particularly regarding their immediate needs for food, shelter, and successful reintegration into their home communities.

Rashid called for enhanced cooperation from IOM, requesting expanded support for transportation,



shelter provision, employment opportunities, and reintegration services for the deportees.

In response, Ms. Tia acknowledged the funding difficulties IOM has faced since the start of the year. However, she assured that the organization, in partnership with international

donors, continues to provide support at the borders and is actively working to increase assistance for returnees.

Despite the growing number of deportees, Tia affirmed that IOM and its partners are committed to enhancing their operations. She mentioned plans to

share returnee statistics with donors to encourage additional support. Furthermore, some donors have expressed interest in aiding returnees after their relocation, with IOM aiming to create job opportunities and small businesses for those equipped with vocational skills.

UN: Taliban interference undermined aid operations

KABUL (Amu TV): The operational environment for humanitarian agencies in Afghanistan has become "severely constrained" due to increasing interference and violence by the Taliban, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said in a new report.

According to OCHA, incidents of violence and interference affecting humanitarian work in June rose by 13 percent compared to May, and by 35 percent over the same period in 2024. The data underscores what the agency described as a deteriorating climate for aid operations in the country.

The report documents three cases of violence against humanitarian personnel, assets, and facilities during June alone. Among them, two aid workers were detained by Taliban forces while facilitating a meeting for female relief workers.

From January to June

2025, a total of 100 humanitarian personnel — including 31 women — were detained by Taliban authorities, the report states. Many of these incidents were linked to the activities of Taliban's Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice.

"These arrests and threats continue to pose serious risks to the safety, security, and psychological well-being of humanitarian staff," the report said. It also noted 13 incidents explicitly related to gender, disproportionately affecting women working in humanitarian operations.

OCHA further reported seven incidents involving movement restrictions, most of them occurring at Taliban checkpoints, which led to the cancellation or delay of planned missions.

In addition to human interference, OCHA cited environmental conditions — including heavy rainfall — as contributing to reduced

access and operational delays in affected regions.

The agency said that Taliban interference remained a significant obstacle to humanitarian delivery throughout the past month. Reported challenges include delays or complications in signing memorandums of understanding, interference in beneficiary selection and staff recruitment, demands for staff lists and sensitive data, taxation of cash assistance, enforcement of dress codes, and restrictions on both female participation in humanitarian work and female beneficiaries' access to aid.

According to the report, 87 percent of all access-related incidents recorded in June were attributed to the Taliban.

OCHA warned that such interference is severely undermining the ability of aid organizations to reach people in need, particularly women and vulnerable populations.

Afghanistan, Uzbekistan strengthen energy cooperation



KABUL (BNA): Dr. Abdul Bari Omar, CEO of Da Afghanistan Breshna Sheklat (DABS), held a video conference with Jurabek Mirzamuhammadov, Uzbekistan's Minister of Energy, to discuss crucial electricity-related issues.

During the meeting, Dr. Omar emphasized the importance of Afghanistan and Uzbekistan as neighboring and friendly nations. He highlighted that joint eco-

nomic cooperation could serve as a strong foundation for future developments, further solidifying the ties between the two countries.

Minister Mirzamuhammadov expressed his support for expanding economic cooperation, reaffirming Uzbekistan's commitment to fostering collaboration with Afghanistan. The discussions brought both parties closer to reaching agreements on multiple key

issues, which are anticipated to be finalized soon.

Currently, Afghanistan imports electricity from several countries, including Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Iran, demonstrating the regional interdependence in energy resources. The strengthening of ties with Uzbekistan is expected to play a crucial role in Afghanistan's energy security and economic development.

339,000 Afghans returned from Iran in 12 days: UN

KABUL (Amu TV): Some 339,000 Afghans returned from Iran to Afghanistan in the first 12 days of July alone, bringing the total number of returnees this year to more than 1.1 million, United Nations spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric said on Tuesday, warning of growing humanitarian pressures at the borders and in already

strained communities.

More than 60 percent of those returning are families, and 43 percent are children under the age of 18. The United Nations spokesman said the rise in unaccompanied and separated children is particularly alarming.

He said that to address the sharp increase in needs, the UN has released \$10

million from its Central Emergency Response Fund to scale up lifesaving assistance, with a focus on vulnerable groups — especially women and children — as they arrive and begin resettling.

"The new arrivals also bring further pressure on already very vulnerable host communities," said Dujarric.



ISLAMABAD: Outgoing Ambassador of Austria, Mrs. Andrea Wicke, called on President Asif Ali Zardari, at Aiwan-e-Sadr.

Israeli strikes kill 21 in Gaza as hunger deepens

GAZA (AP): Israeli strikes in Gaza killed at least 21 people late Tuesday and early Wednesday, health officials said, as hunger worsened among Palestinians struggling to live under the weight of the 21-month war.

Desperation is mounting in the Palestinian territory of more than 2 million. An official familiar with the negotiations said Wednesday that special envoy Steve Witkoff planned to head to Rome for talks with an Israeli official as the US tries to reach a ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas.

Experts say Gaza is at risk of famine because of Israel's blockade and nearly two-year offensive. A breakdown of law and order has led to widespread looting and contributed to chaos and violence around aid deliveries. More than 1,000 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli forces since May while trying to get food in the Gaza Strip, mostly near aid sites run by an American contractor, the UN human rights office said Tuesday.

More than 100 human rights groups and charities signed a letter published Wednesday demanding more aid for Gaza and warning of starvation. More than 59,000 Palestinians have been killed during the Israel-Hamas war, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which is part of the Hamas-run government and staffed by medical professionals. Its count doesn't distinguish between militants and civilians, but the ministry says that more than half of the dead are women and children. The UN and other international organizations see it as the most reliable source of data on casualties.

An official familiar with ceasefire negotiations between Israel and Hamas said a top adviser to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Ron Dermer, was traveling to Rome to meet US special envoy Steve Witkoff on Thursday to discuss the state of the talks. The official spoke Wednesday on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the sensitive negotiations.

US officials said Witkoff planned

to head to Europe this week. The State Department spokesperson said he was headed to the Middle East in a sign that momentum may be building toward a deal. The Iranian-backed Houthis in Yemen attacked two ships, the Magic Seas and the Eternity C, on July 6 and 9, killing some of their crew and detaining others, Human Rights Watch said in a statement.

The militia has been launching missile and drone attacks against commercial and military ships in the region in what the group's leadership has described as an effort to end Israel's offensive against Hamas in the Gaza Strip. HRW, however, said the Houthis' attacks on the two vessels "violates the laws of war applicable to the armed conflict between the Houthis and Israel."

"The Houthis have sought to justify unlawful attacks by pointing to Israeli violations against Palestinians," said Niku Jafarnia, HRW's Yemen and Bahrain researcher. Jafarnia called for the Houthis to end all attacks on ships that don't take part in the Israeli-Hamas war and immediately release detained crew members.

Dr. Marwan Al-Hams, acting director of Gaza's field hospitals and the health ministry's spokesman, was detained by Israeli troops earlier this week in the Palestinian territory. Alaa Al-Sakafi, head of Addameer, a Palestinian rights group, told The Associated Press Wednesday that lawyers have not been allowed to see Al-Hams. His detention in a southern Israel prison was extended until the end of the month, Al-Sakafi said. He said Al-Hams suffered from a gunshot wound in his leg, which he sustained during his detention in Gaza's southern city of Rafah on Monday.

Israel has not commented on Al-Hams' detention. The Israeli military said in a statement Wednesday that forces were operating in Gaza City, as well as in northern Gaza. It said without elaborating that in Jabaliya, an area hard-hit in multiple rounds of fighting, an air strike killed "a number of" Hamas militants.

Troops struck roughly 120 targets

throughout Gaza over the past day, including militant cells, tunnels and booby-trapped structures, among others, the military said. More than half of those killed were women and children, health authorities said.

One Israeli strike hit a house Tuesday in the northwestern side of Gaza City, killing at least 12 people, according to the Shifa Hospital, which received the casualties. The dead included six children and two women, according to the Health Ministry's casualty list. Another strike hit an apartment in the Tal Al-Hawa area in northern Gaza, killing at least six people. Among the dead were three children and two women, including one who was pregnant. Eight others were wounded, the ministry said.

A third strike hit a tent in the Naser neighborhood in Gaza City late Tuesday and killed three children, Shifa Hospital said. The Israeli military said it struck an Islamic Jihad militant in the strike that killed 12, saying the incident was under review because of reports of civilian casualties. It had no immediate comment about the other strikes.

Israel blames Hamas for civilian casualties because the militants operate from populated areas. In the letter issued Wednesday, 115 human rights and charity groups warned of a dire situation pushing more people toward starvation. They said they were watching their own colleagues, as well as the Palestinians they serve, "waste away."

The letter slammed Israel for what it said were restrictions on aid into the war-ravaged territory. It lamented "massacres" at food distribution points, which have seen chaos and violence in recent weeks as desperation has risen. "The government of Israel's restrictions, delays, and fragmentation under its total siege have created chaos, starvation, and death," the letter said. The letter called for aid to be scaled up as well as for a ceasefire. "Israel says that it has allowed the entry of thousands of trucks since May and blames aid groups for not consistently delivering goods.

9 suspects in Kohistan scam offer to return looted funds

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: Almost nine suspects involved in the Kohistan corruption scandal have submitted applications for play bargain to the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) offering to return the looted funds. According to NAB sources, the suspects have expressed their willingness to return the money and have submitted applications for play bargain.

The applications have not been sent to the NAB chairman yet, and will be presented before the accountability court after the chairman's approval. NAB has also conducted a probe into the properties of the arrested suspects, revealing that most of them own shopping malls, bungalows, and other properties worth millions of rupees in Islamabad.

A contractor named Ayub, one of the suspects, has offered to return Rs. 3.45 billion in three installments. NAB sources say that the applications will be sent to the chairman, and after approval, the process will begin, and a report will be submitted to the accountability court.

However, NAB is still investigating the details of the embezzled funds to determine the extent of each suspect's liability. Until this is determined, the applications will not be sent to the NAB's chairman.

The Kohistan scandal is estimated to be worth Rs. 40 billion, and eight suspects have been arrested so far. NAB has recovered Rs. 25 billion in the form of luxury cars, bungalows, and flats, and has also frozen cash worth millions of rupees. Newly elected Senator Azam Swati is also involved in the case and has been obtained protective bail.

ATC rejects bail of alleged facilitators in suicide attack

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: The Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) Peshawar has rejected the bail pleas of three suspects accused of facilitating the suicide bomber who attacked a police van in the premises Chamkani police station. The suspects, identified as Irfan, Naezeb, and Noor Draz, were arrested for allegedly providing logistical support to the bomber, on Wednesday.

According to the prosecution, the suspects helped the bomber to obtain a Pakistani identity card and provided him with accommodation in Peshawar. The bomber, who was from Azerbaijan, carried out the attack on May 11, killing several police personnel, including Sub-Inspector Laiq Zada.

The court, after hearing the arguments, rejected the bail pleas of the suspects. The prosecution presented evidence, including identity cards and other documents, which suggested that the suspects had links with the banned terrorist organization, Daesh (Islamic State [IS]).

The defense lawyer argued that the suspects had no connection with the attack and that they should be granted bail. However, the court was not convinced by the defense's arguments and rejected the bail pleas.

UK flays Israeli aid system as 'inhumane'

NEW YORK: The UK sharply criticized Israel's humanitarian conduct in Gaza during a high-level UN Security Council debate on the Middle East peace process on Wednesday, describing the Israeli aid system as "inhumane, ineffective, dangerous and fueling instability."

Speaking at the council's open debate, UK Ambassador to the UN Barbara Woodward called for an immediate ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, saying that the suffering of Palestinian civilians and the continued holding of hostages by Hamas since Oct. 7 "must end now." She said: "The IDF is shooting at desperate Palestinian civilians on an almost daily basis. Hamas is exploiting this disorder." She called on Israel to stop such attacks, hold perpetrators accountable and work with the UN to implement a more effective aid delivery system that complies with international humanitarian law. = Arab News

Zardari stresses strong Pakistan-Austria ties

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The outgoing Austrian Ambassador to Pakistan, Mrs. Andrea Wicke, paid a farewell call on President Asif Ali Zardari at Aiwan-e-Sadr on Tuesday. The meeting was marked by warmth, goodwill, and a shared commitment to further deepening bilateral ties between Austria and Pakistan.

Also present during the meeting was Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi, reflecting the significance attached by Pakistan's leadership to the enduring and growing relationship with Austria. President Zardari lauded Ambassador Wicke for her dedicated service and her instrumental role in fostering cooperation between the two countries. He appreciated her active engagement across a range of sectors, particularly in promoting people-to-people contact, enhancing trade ties, and exploring new areas of collaboration during her diplomatic tenure in Islamabad.

In his remarks, President Zardari reiterated that Pakistan values its long-standing relationship with Austria and looks forward to further expanding the scope of cooperation in multiple domains. "Austria is a key partner in Europe, and we consider our relationship as both friendly and constructive," he said. He particularly emphasized the untapped potential in

trade and economic collaboration, noting that both countries could benefit from deeper commercial engagements. President Zardari pointed out that Pakistan offers diverse investment opportunities in tourism, information technology, energy, and infrastructure. "We have vast potential in the tourism sector, particularly alpine tourism, and Austria's expertise in this field is well-recognized worldwide," he said, inviting Austrian investors to explore opportunities in Pakistan's northern mountainous regions.

Speaking on the IT sector, President Zardari highlighted the remarkable growth of Pakistan's tech industry and its expanding pool of young and skilled professionals. He suggested that Austrian tech firms could greatly benefit by tapping into Pakistan's human capital. "Our youth are highly talented in software development, AI, and digital services. Austrian companies can benefit from outsourcing and collaboration in this space," the President added. Ambassador Andrea Wicke expressed her gratitude to the government and people of Pakistan for their hospitality and cooperation during her tenure. She stated that her experience in Pakistan had been immensely rewarding and that she would continue to advocate for stronger Austria-Pakistan relations

even after completing her assignment.

She acknowledged the shared interests and aspirations of the two countries and said Austria was keen to see more business-to-business and cultural exchanges with Pakistan. "Austria values its friendship with Pakistan and is eager to see more Austrian companies explore the Pakistani market," she added. Ambassador Wicke also praised the beauty and diversity of Pakistan's landscapes, expressing admiration for the country's potential as a tourist destination. She echoed the President's views that Austria and Pakistan could collaborate meaningfully in the tourism and hospitality industries.

At the conclusion of the meeting, President Zardari congratulated Ambassador Wicke on the successful completion of her diplomatic mission in Pakistan and conveyed his best wishes for her future endeavors. He hoped that the cordial relations between the two nations would continue to flourish under her successor. The farewell meeting not only celebrated the achievements of the outgoing envoy but also opened a new chapter of optimism for stronger Austria-Pakistan ties in trade, investment, technology, and tourism. It underscored the mutual desire to translate diplomatic goodwill into tangible cooperation that benefits both nations.

Six FC personnel injured in Bannu terrorist attack

F.P. Report

BANNU: Six Frontier Constabulary (FC) personnel were injured in a terrorist attack on a security checkpoint in the border area of Takhti Khel, Bannu district, on Wednesday.

According to the Bannu Police, militants opened

fire on the FC post but were repelled due to the immediate response by security personnel, forcing the attackers to flee. The injured officials were shifted to the Combined Military Hospital (CMH) in Bannu for medical treatment.

Police have launched a

search operation in the area to trace the suspects. The attack is the latest in a growing wave of militant violence targeting law enforcement in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, particularly Bannu, following the collapse of a ceasefire with the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).



ISLAMABAD: Sardar Sherbaz Satazkai, tribal elder and primary suspect of killing of couple over 'honour' in court for hearing.

PM for full autonomy

(Continued from Page 1)

review meeting on the ongoing reforms in the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR), lauding the progress made so far while stressing the need for sustained and time-bound efforts to overhaul the tax system in line with modern requirements. Terming the recent improvements in the tax machinery as "encouraging," the prime minister emphasized that reforms must lead to the creation of a sustainable, digitized, and facilitative tax system, a Prime Minister's Office news release said. "We have achieved important milestones, but more dedicated efforts are required," he said.

The prime minister directed the FBR to accelerate digital transformation, restructure its digital wing with a clear roadmap, and enhance enforcement to curb the informal economy. He also stressed the importance of stakeholder consultation in the reform process, particularly with businesses, traders, and taxpayers. He reiterated that improving the tax system should contribute to boosting national revenue while reducing the tax burden on the common citizen.

The meeting was briefed that as a result of the reforms and enforcement measures, the tax-to-GDP ratio saw a historic rise of 1.5% in FY2025 compared to FY2024. Moreover, the

number of income tax return filers surged from 4.5 million in 2024 to over 7.2 million by June 30, 2025. FBR officials reported significant progress under the faceless customs clearance system, which increased revenue and is expected to reduce clearance times from 52 hours to just 12 hours within the next three months.

In the retail sector, tax collection increased by Rs. 455 billion compared to the previous year, driven by the integration of point-of-sale systems and stricter enforcement. The meeting was also informed that reforms had led to a 2.16% reduction in the weighted average tariff on imports, thereby lowering raw material costs and benefiting local industries.

To enhance the transparency of the faceless system, a new mechanism has been introduced, enabling case hearings through video link for timely resolution. The Prime Minister welcomed proposals for further reforms and directed officials to submit a time-bound plan with actionable targets by next week. He also appreciated the efforts of FBR officials and officers involved in the reform process. Federal Ministers Attaullah Tarar, Ahmad Cheema, Azam Nazeer Tarar, Chairman FBR, and senior officials were present during the meeting.

Shehbaz expresses satisfaction over Pak-UK

bilateral cooperation: Prime Minister Shehbaz Wednesday expressed satisfaction at the positive trajectory of bilateral cooperation between Pakistan and the United Kingdom.

He said the recently held trade talks between the two countries would lead to mutually beneficial opportunities for both sides. British High Commissioner to Pakistan Jane Marriott called on the prime minister at the Prime Minister's House, PM Office Media Wing said in a press release.

The prime minister said Pakistan was also cooperating closely with the UK at the UN Security Council, where Pakistan currently held the monthly Presidency. He welcomed the UK Government's recent decision to resume PIA flights to and from the UK, which he said, would go a long way in alleviating the hardships faced by the British Pakistani community as well as enhancing people-to-people exchanges.

He particularly appreciated the role of the High Commissioner in this regard. The regional situation in South Asia and the Middle East was also discussed. The Prime Minister expressed his appreciation for the UK's role in de-escalation of tensions during the Pakistan-India stand-off and reiterated that Pakistan was ready for a meaningful dialogue with India on all outstanding issues.

Delegation led by Saif departs for China

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A high-level twelve-member delegation led by Barrister Dr. Muhammad Ali Saif, Advisor to the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Information and Public Relations, has arrived in China. The delegation held key meetings with the IRCRA (International Research Council for Religious Affairs) team and Chinese diplomats at the Chinese Embassy prior to their formal visit.

The delegation includes prominent political and religious figures such as Provincial Minister for Religious Affairs Sahibzada Adnan Qadri, Minister for Social Welfare Syed Qasim Ali Shah, Provincial Chairman of the Qaumi Watan Party Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Sikandar Hayat Khan Sherpao, Director General of the Islamic Research Institute Dr. Zia ul Haq, Vice President of Darul Uloom Karachi Maulana Zubair Ashraf Usmani, Head of Jamia Ahsan-ul-Uloom Maulana Anwar Shah, Spokesperson of Wifaq ul Madaris Maulana Abdul Quddus Muhammadi, Maulana Usama Ajmal, Maulana Muhammad Ahmad, Syed Shah Faisal, Haji Muhammad Abrar, and other respected scholars and leaders.

This official visit has been organized at the invitation of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs under the Religious Diplomacy Program facilitated by IRCRA. Owing to its success and growing influence, this initiative has gained global recognition. This year's delegation is uniquely comprised of both political and religious leaders, reflecting a broader vision for mutual cooperation.

'Honour killing': Remand of tribal chief extended

F.P. Report

QUETTA: An anti-terrorism court (ATC) in Quetta on Wednesday extended the physical remand of tribal leader Sardar Sherbaz for 10 more days in connection with the killing of a couple who were shot dead ahead of Eid ul Adha for so-called honour.

The woman, identified by police as Bano Bibi and the man, Ehsan Ullah, were both shot dead on the orders of a local tribal jirga for honour in Dagari, situated on the outskirts of the provincial capital. The incident gained attention after a video circulating on social media last week sparked outrage in Pakistan after it showed a couple being shot dead in Dagari.

Sherbaz was produced before the court today following the completion of his two-day remand. During the hearing, police sought more time for further interrogation, which the court approved and handed him over to the Serious Crimes Investigation Wing (SCIW). According to post-mortem examinations, the woman was shot seven times and the man nine times. The autopsies were carried out at the Dagari coal mine

graveyard. A case was also registered against suspects on the state's complaint at Quetta's Hanna-Urak Police Station.

According to the FIR, the case was registered under Sections 302 (murder), 149 (unlawful assembly), 148 (rioting while armed with a deadly weapon), 147 (rioting) of the Pakistan Penal Code and the Anti-Terrorism Act, 1997. Addressing the press conference two days ago, Balochistan Chief Minister Sarfraz Bugti confirmed that 11 suspects had been arrested in the case so far, with more raids underway to apprehend others.

He had said that none of the accused would be spared, adding that the man and woman were not married to each other and each had five to six children. Bugti had assured that the state stands with the victims and efforts will be made to ensure punishments through the due legal process. "We took action even before the video went viral," he had said, adding that the DSP concerned had already been suspended.

A day ago, the Balochistan Assembly unanimously passed a joint resolution condemning the

murder of a man and a woman in the Digari area near Quetta, reportedly carried out in the name of "honour." The resolution was presented by Deputy Speaker Ghazala Gola on behalf of the members of the Women Parliamentary Caucus, including provincial ministers and assembly members Raheela Hameed Khan Durrani, Dr. Rubaba Khan Buledi, Shahnaz Umrani, Shahida Rauf, Farah Azeem Shah, Salma Bibi, Umm-e-Kulsom, and Safia Bibi, media reported.

The resolution denounced the tragic incident, describing it as a horrifying example of the continued misuse of the concept of "honour" to justify the killing of innocent individuals — particularly women. "Such acts are not only condemnable and shameful but also an assault on the peace and stability of society as a whole," the resolution stated. It emphasised that honour killings have no connection to Baloch cultural values, provincial or national traditions, or any religious or moral principles, calling them entirely inhumane and contrary to both legal and ethical standards.

Turkiye calls for end to 'bloody war' at new round of Russia-Ukraine talks

ISTANBUL: Russia and Ukraine have begun a new round of talks in the Turkish city of Istanbul, but the Kremlin suggested there was little hope of a breakthrough more than three years into the war.

Negotiators met for the first time in seven weeks on Wednesday, with Moscow under growing pressure from US President Donald

Trump to agree a ceasefire or face tough new sanctions. Opening the meeting, Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said he hoped the parties would make progress based on documents they exchanged at their last encounter in June in order to "end this bloody war as soon as possible".

"The ultimate goal here is, of course, a ceasefire that

will pave the way for peace," Fidan said. Ukraine wants the meeting to lay the ground for a summit between presidents Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Vladimir Putin that it sees as the key to any potential breakthrough. "Ukraine has consistently advocated for a leaders' meeting. We were ready for it yesterday. We are ready today. — Aljazeera