

Six people dead in mishap
F.P. Report

MUZAFFARGARH: A tragic road accident near Langer Sarai in Muzaffargarh resulted in a collision between a passenger bus and a trailer, leaving six people dead and eighteen injured. According to a police spokesperson, the deceased include two men, two women, and two children, while the bus driver also lost his life in the accident.



@thefrontierpost

First national English daily published from Peshawar, Islamabad, Lahore, Quetta, Karachi and Washington D.C

www.thefrontierpost.com

Vol. XXXIXII

No. 156

Regd. No. 241

MUHARRAM 10 1447 -- SUNDAY, JULY 06 2025

PESHAWAR EDITION

12 PAGES

PRICE. 30

Trump says there could be a Gaza deal next week

WASHINGTON: President Donald Trump said it was good that Hamas said it had responded in "a positive spirit" to a US-brokered Gaza ceasefire proposal. He told reporters aboard Air Force One there could be a deal on a Gaza ceasefire by next week but that he had not been briefed on the current state of negotiations.

Hamas said it has given a "positive" response to the latest proposal for a ceasefire in Gaza but said further talks were needed on implementation. It was not clear if Hamas' statement meant it had accepted the proposal from Trump for a 60-day ceasefire. Hamas has been seeking guarantees that the initial truce would lead to a total end to the war, now nearly 21 months old. Trump has been pushing hard for a deal to be reached, and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is due to visit the White House next week to discuss a deal. The Hamas statement came as Israeli airstrikes killed 15 Palestinians in Gaza early Friday, while a hospital said another 20 people died in shootings while seeking aid.

The UN human rights office said it has recorded 613 Palestinians killed within the span of a month in Gaza while trying to obtain aid. Most were killed while trying to reach food distribution points run by an Israeli-backed American organization, while others were massed waiting for aid trucks connected to the United Nations or other humanitarian organizations, it said. Trump said Tuesday that Israel had agreed on terms for a 60-day ceasefire in Gaza, during which the US would "work with all parties to end the war." He urged Hamas to accept the deal before conditions worsen. In its statement late Friday, Hamas said it "has submitted

its positive response" to Egyptian and Qatari mediators.

It said it is "fully prepared to immediately enter into a round of negotiations regarding the mechanism for implementing this framework." It did not elaborate on what needed to be worked out in implementation. A Hamas official said the ceasefire could start as early as next week but he said talks were needed first to work out how many Palestinian prisoners would be released in return for each freed Israeli hostage and to specify the amount of aid that will enter Gaza during the truce. Hamas has said it wants aid to flow in greater quantities through the United Nations and other humanitarian agencies. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he wasn't authorized to discuss the response with the press.

The official also said that negotiations would start from the first day of the truce on a permanent ceasefire and full withdrawal of Israeli troops from Gaza in return for the release of remaining hostages. He said that Trump has guaranteed that the truce will be extended beyond 60 days if needed for those negotiations to reach a deal. There has been no confirmation from the United States of such a guarantee. Previous rounds of negotiations have run aground over Hamas demands of guarantees that further negotiations would lead to the war's end, while Netanyahu has insisted Israel would resume fighting to ensure the destruction of the militant group.

"We'll see what happens. We're going to know over the next 24 hours," Trump told reporters on Air Force One late Thursday when asked if Hamas had agreed to the latest framework for a ceasefire. Officials

at Nasser Hospital in Khan Younis said at least three Palestinians were killed Friday while on the roads heading to food distribution sites run by the Israeli-backed the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation in southern Gaza.

Since GHF began distributions in late May, witnesses have said almost daily that Israeli troops open fire toward crowds of Palestinians on the roads leading to the food centers. To reach the sites, people must walk several kilometers (miles) through an Israeli military zone where troops control the road. The Israeli military has said previously it fires warning shots to control crowds or at Palestinians who approach its troops. The GHF has denied any serious injuries or deaths on its sites and says shootings outside their immediate vicinity are under the purview of Israel's military.

On Friday, in reaction to the UN rights agency's report, it said in a statement that it was investigating reports of people killed and wounded while seeking aid. It said it was working at "minimizing possible friction between the population" and Israeli forces, including by installing fences and placing signs on the routes. Separately, witnesses have said Israeli troops open fire toward crowds of Palestinians who gather in military-controlled zones to wait for aid trucks entering Gaza for the UN or other aid organizations not associated with GHF. On Friday, 17 people were killed waiting for trucks in eastern Khan Younis in the Tahliya area, officials at Nasser Hospital said. Three survivors told the AP they had gone to wait for the trucks in a military "red zone" in Khan Younis and that troops opened fire from a tank and drones. — Arab News



KHANKENDI: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, President of Türkiye Recep Tayyip Erdogan and President of Azerbaijan İlham Aliyev holding hand in solidarity showing strongly brotherly ties between three countries in Azerbaijan.

Field Marshal pays rich tribute to Capt. Karnal Sher Khan



F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir, NI (M), Chief of Army Staff, Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee, Chief of Air Staff, Chief of Naval Staff and the Armed Forces of Pakistan solemnly commemorate and pay heartfelt tribute to Captain Karnal Sher Khan Shaheed, Nishan-e-Haider, on the occasion of his 26th martyrdom anniversary.

During the Kargil conflict in 1999, Captain Karnal Sher Khan Shaheed, a symbol of unwavering courage and patriotism, sacrificed his life while defending the motherland with unparalleled valor. He remains an eternal source of inspiration for the Armed Forces and the nation.

His gallant actions in the face of overwhelming odds embody the finest traditions of the Pakistan Army. Demonstrating outstanding leadership and extraordinary bravery, Captain Karnal Sher Khan Shaheed led from the front and made the ultimate sacrifice while defending the country's sovereignty.

Captain Karnal Sher Khan Shaheed's supreme sacrifice reflects the spirit of selflessness and devotion to duty that defines Pakistan Armed Forces. His legacy continues to live in the hearts of the people of Pakistan and serves as a guiding light for our future generations. We salute our hero and reaffirm our resolve to defend the homeland against all threats. On this solemn day, the Armed Forces renew their pledge to uphold the values of loyalty, courage, and honor that Captain Karnal Sher Khan epitomized.

Kundi briefed on law, order

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Governor KP Faisal Karim Kundi on Saturday visited the Central Police Command and Control Center at Kohati Gate in connection with security arrangements for Muharram-ul-Haram.

During the visit, senior police officials briefed the Governor on the overall security system in place for the central Muharram processions in Peshawar city. The Governor was informed about the live monitoring of processions through CCTV cameras and the comprehensive security measures deployed across sensitive locations.

PM says inclusive rural development priority

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said the government continued to prioritize inclusive rural development as a key pillar of national progress.

In a message on the occasion of World Day for Rural Development observed on July 6, he said, "In line with the Sustainable Development Goals, we are focusing on transforming rural livelihoods through targeted investments in agriculture, education, healthcare, infrastructure, skills training, and environmental sustainability."

"On this important day, Pakistan joins the international community in observing the World Day for Rural Development. We take this opportunity to acknowledge the invaluable contributions of our rural population and reaffirm our commitment to their well-being and development," he remarked. He said, "Representing nearly two-thirds of our population, Pakistan's villages and farmlands not only nourish our people but also uphold our centuries old values of resilience, cooperation, and tradition. It is in these fields, orchards, and small towns that the spirit of Pakistan truly thrives." "Significant strides have been made from expanding rural road networks and improving water and sanitation access, to empowering women and promoting climate-smart farming practices. These efforts reflect our resolve to ensure that no part of Pakistan is left behind," he said adding, "On this day, we renew our pledge to uplift our rural citizenry; supporting them as equal partners in shaping a stronger, more equitable, and prosperous Pakistan."

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif urged the nation to take guidance from the life and character of Imam Hussain (RA) to overcome internal and external challenges and keep Pakistan on the path of peace, unity and progress.

In a message on the occasion of Ashura 1447 AH, he said, "Ashura is a profound and instructive day in the history of Islam, which gives us the great lesson of patience, sacrifice and standing firm on principles. This day will continue to illuminate the conscience of humanity till the Day of Judgment." "The battle that took place on the battlefield of Karbala on the 10th of Muharram Al-Haram is not an ordinary battle, but an eternal message for the entire world," he remarked. He said,

"The grandson of the Prophet, Hazrat Imam Hussain (RA), along with his family and devoted companions, sacrificed their lives for the sake of truth, justice and religion, but did not bow down to falsehood."

"This great sacrifice of his reminds us that protecting principles and standing firm on the truth requires great courage and unwavering faith. The martyrdom of Imam Hussain (RA) makes it clear as day that the true spirit of Islam lies in human dignity, justice, mercy, principledness and freedom," he asserted.

The prime minister said, "The incident of Karbala teaches us that although the path of truth is difficult, it is the path that leads to the pleasure of Allah Almighty, satisfaction of hearts and eternal welfare. The message of the Supreme Imam is not limited to his time, but is a universal message, which even today convinces us that a Muslim stands for the truth, supports the oppressed, and supports justice in all circumstances." He said, "Today, when our nation is facing many challenges. Be it the economy, society or national unity, we need to take guidance from the life of Imam Hussain (RA) more than ever."

"We have to adopt qualities such as honesty, tolerance, patience, sacrifice and principledness in our national life. From individual attitudes to state policies, if we chart our course in the light of Karbala, Pakistan can become a welfare, just and self-reliant state that not only represents the aspirations of its people but also sets an example for the world," he remarked. He said, "The great sacrifice of Hazrat Imam Hussain (RA) is the mutual asset of the entire Muslim Ummah. We should make this sacred message a source of unity, and make our society a cradle of love, tolerance and goodwill."

He said, "Today on the Day of Ashura, let us pledge that we will make truth and honesty our motto in our lives. We will raise our voice against oppression and try to give our homeland the same peace, justice and dignity that is reflected in the bright character of Sayyiduna Imam Hussain (RA)." "I pray that Allah Almighty keeps Pakistan on the path of peace, unity and progress, and protects Pakistan from internal and external tribulations and grants it stability, and gives us the knowledge and wisdom with which we can move towards a bright and dignified future. Amen," he concluded.

Karachi building collapse death toll rises to 22

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The death toll from the tragic collapse of a five-storey residential building in Karachi's Lyari area has reached 22, including seven women and a child, as rescue operations continue to locate survivors trapped under the rubble.

The incident took place on Friday in the Baghdadi area of Lyari, bringing down the entire structure and causing damage to adjacent buildings. Rescue teams have so far pulled out 10 survivors from the debris.

Emergency response teams—including Rescue 1122, police, and Rangers—reached the scene promptly and launched relief efforts. Heavy machinery is being used to clear the rubble and aid search operations. Among the bodies transferred to Civil Hospital were 55-year-old Hoor Bibi, 35-year-old Waseem, 21-year-old Prantik son of Harsey, and 28-year-old Prem son of unknown. Fatima, wife of Babu, succumbed to injuries, during treatment at Civil Hospital. The bodies

of a 25-year-old woman, a 30-year-old man, and a 7-year-old child remain unidentified.

Sources confirm that 14 bodies were recovered by late Friday night, while another eight were pulled from the debris on Saturday. With each recovered body, grief and anxiety have deepened among local residents, many of whom remain at the site in search of their missing loved ones. The operation in-charge from Rescue 1122 Sindh reported that around 70% of the rescue work has been completed. However, he warned that it may take several more hours to finish, and there is a strong possibility that more individuals remain trapped.

Deputy Commissioner South, Javed Nabi, confirmed that the rescue operation could take an additional 7 to 8 hours. He stated that relief efforts have been further accelerated to maximize the chances of saving lives. "The building had been declared dangerous three years ago, and a formal notice was issued just one and a half months ago,"

the DC revealed.

He also disclosed that 22 extremely hazardous buildings still exist in Lyari, while 16 such buildings have already been vacated. Action is underway to evacuate the remaining structures. "Operations will be carried out against all unsafe buildings, especially in the Old City area," Nabi said. "We are also inspecting other aging structures throughout the city and working on a comprehensive strategy to prevent similar tragedies in the future."

Karachi Mayor Murtaza Wahab visited the site of the collapsed building in Lyari's Baghdadi area and said that the rescue operation is underway. He stated that Rescue 1122, KPT, and district administration teams are actively participating in the operation. Wahab mentioned that the rescue operation will take some more time to complete. So far, seven people have been reported dead in the tragic incident, and teams are working to recover those trapped under the rubble.

Six terrorists killed in Punjab

F.P. Report

BAHAWALPUR: The Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) and Punjab Police on Saturday conducted joint operations in Taunsa and Bahawalpur, killing six Indian-backed terrorists.

In Taunsa Sharif, five militants were gunned down in a joint raid carried out near the Jadai Wali area in the jurisdiction of Vahowa Police Station. The CTD and local police launched the operation after receiving intelligence reports about the presence of militants plotting attacks.

Eight more terrorists were seriously injured in the exchange of fire. Dera Ghazi Khan's District Police Officer (DPO) Syed Ali rushed to the site to oversee the post-operation security measures. A clearance operation followed the shootout to flush out any remaining suspects in the area.

Meanwhile, in a separate operation in Bahawalpur, another terrorist was killed while three of his accomplices managed to slip away during the raid. Authorities are hot on their trail and efforts to track them down are ongoing.

A CTD spokesperson said the team acted just in the nick of time and nipped a major terror plot in the bud. A large cache of bullets and hand grenades was recovered from the slain terrorist. A case has been registered, and further investigation is in full swing.

Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi has praised the Punjab Police and the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) for successfully eliminating five terrorists linked to "Fitna-e-Hindustan" near Taunsa. In his statement, Naqvi said, "Once again, Punjab Police and CTD have sent five terrorists of Fitna-e-Hindustan to hell through a successful operation."

Notice

ON account of Ashura, the offices of The Frontier Post will remain closed on Sunday (6-7-2025). Therefore, there will be no issue on Monday (7-7-2025).



PESHAWAR: Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ali Amin Gandapur talking to media persons.

Gandapur says his govt in KP is stable

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ali Amin Gandapur, has stated that his government is stable and that no member is going anywhere, adding that the Governor of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa cannot harm us in any way.

While speaking to the media in Peshawar, Gandapur said, "Those who think they can bring a no-confidence motion are welcome to try — the reality will become clear." He added that if the budget hadn't been passed, the government would have fallen, and the blame would have been

entirely their own. He accused opponents of celebrating prematurely, and claimed it was propaganda from within their own ranks suggesting the budget shouldn't be presented — followed by an uproar when it was passed.

The CM also revealed that he is approaching the court regarding reserved seats, based on his nomination papers. He clarified, "I am not an independent candidate; I am a member of PTL. I never identified as an independent on my nomination papers — I clearly wrote PTI as my party."

Speaking about the Swat River incident, Gandapur

said that the bereaved family from Daska is demanding a government job, but noted that a Punjab domicile does not qualify one for government employment in KP. Instead, he announced that the family would be given Rs 20 lakh (2 million) per person, totaling Rs 20 million in compensation, and they were also advised on how to invest the amount in a business.

He also stressed the importance of resuming trade with Afghanistan, and criticised the contradiction in national behavior: "We chase foreign citizenship for ourselves but are unwilling to grant it to Afghans," he remarked.

July 5: A dark chapter in Pakistan's history: Bilawal

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has labeled the July 5, 1977 military coup as the darkest day in the country's history, declaring it a moment when democracy was ambushed and the nation plunged into darkness.

In a post on social media platform X, Bilawal stated that July 5 sowed the seeds of hatred and division through dictatorship—effects still evident in

Pakistan's political, social, and national consciousness.

"It is time we move beyond hatred, chaos, and personal rule, and instead embrace unity, tolerance, and constitutional supremacy," he said. He added that democracy must prevail to secure a peaceful and progressive future for coming generations.

PPP Vice President and Senator Sherry Rehman also marked July 5 as a "Black Day," recalling the ousting of Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's democratically

elected government as a blow to the hopes of the people. She noted that Bhutto had laid the foundation for a dignified and nuclear Pakistan, and the consequences of his removal continue to affect the country to this day.

Sherry emphasised the sacrifices of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Benazir Bhutto for democracy and people's rights. She asserted that PPP under Asif Ali Zardari and Bilawal Bhutto remains committed to constitutional supremacy and democratic ideals.



LAHORE: A large number of mourners attending the procession of 9th Muharram-ul-Haram. Muharram ul Haram is the mourning month in remembrance of the martyrdom (Shahadat) of Hazrat Imam Hussain (AS).

Ghusal ceremony of Hazrat Data Ganj Bakhsh's (RA) shrine held

LAHORE (APP): The 982nd Annual Ghusal Mubarak Ceremony of the shrine of revered Sufi saint Hazrat Al-Shaikh Al-Syed Ali Bin Usman Al-Hajveri (RA), widely known as Hazrat Data Ganj Bakhsh, was observed with great religious devotion and reverence, here on Saturday.

The ceremony began with the recitation of the Holy Quran, followed by soul-stirring Naat recitations by renowned Naat khawans. The traditional ghusal of the shrine was performed with rosewater, accompanied by Chadar Poshi and the laying of floral wreaths. Special prayers were offered for the peace, prosperity, and stability of Pakistan.

Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Ishaq Dar attended the ceremony as chief guest. He was accompanied by Provincial Ministers Chaudhry Shafay Hussain, Bilal Yaseen, and other dignitaries, including the CCPO, departmental secretaries, and prominent religious leaders.

Officials briefed him on key development projects underway at Data Darbar, including traffic management upgrades, extension of the various parts of the Darbar, and architectural enhancements inspired by the umbrella-style canopies of Masjid-e-Nabawi.

Later, talking to the media, Ishaq Dar expressed his deep respect for the spiritual and cultural legacy of Hazrat Data Ganj Bakhsh (RA). He commended the Punjab government, particularly Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif, for approving and facilitating ongoing expansion projects at the shrine. He informed that the development work, including the shrine's internal height enhancement and improved circulation space, is progressing rapidly and is being sponsored by the Madina Foundation.

"Our collective aim is to complete these projects before next year's Ghusal ceremony," he stated.

Ishaq Dar recalled that the first major expansion of the shrine took place in 1999 under former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, which doubled its area. He added that the ongoing initiatives aim to triple its capacity to better accommodate devotees.

The Deputy Prime Minister credited former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's tenure from 2013 to 2016 for economic stability, stating that Pakistan had become the 24th largest economy with inflation at a historic low of 2 percent, and growth at 6 percent. He said that the current government under Prime

Minister Shehbaz Sharif is working diligently to revive the economy and restore investor confidence.

He noted that Pakistan's recent diplomatic and defense successes have earned it global respect. "Pakistan has been elected as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for two years and assumed its presidency this month," he informed, adding that the country is playing a constructive role in regional peace, including support for the Iranian people during recent Israeli aggression.

To a question regarding coalition politics, he dispelled rumors of any rift with the PPP. "They are our allies, and we have full support from them. We are committed to implementing the signed agreements between PML-N and PPP in letter and spirit," he assured.

To another query, Ishaq Dar said the country was on the brink of default in 2022 but was steered away from crisis due to difficult decisions taken by the PDM government. "Our reserves have now reached \$14.5 billion as of June 30. Inflation has decreased significantly, and interest rates have come down by half," he added.

CM lauds Police, CTD for crushing terror plot

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Chief Minister (CM) Maryam Nawaz Sharif has congratulated Punjab Police and the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) for their successful intelligence-based operation near Taunsa, in which five terrorists affiliated with the banned outfit Fitnat-ul-Hindustan were killed.

In a statement issued here on Saturday, the CM said, "Praise is due to Punjab Police and CTD for their exemplary professionalism in neutralizing five terrorists." She paid tribute to the courage, dedication and swift action of the law enforcement personnel involved in the operation.

CM Maryam Nawaz said that the Punjab government was committed to eradicate terrorism from the province, adding that the pursuit of terrorists will continue relentlessly.

The nefarious designs of our enemies will be crushed with full force. She emphasized that such successful operations send a strong message to anti-state elements that Pakistan will not tolerate any threat to its peace, stability and national security.

Hurriyat delegation meets Saeed Ghani

KARACHI (INP): A delegation of the All Parties Hurriyat Conference-AJK chapter met Sindh's Provincial Minister for Labour, Information, and Human Resources, Saeed Ghani, in Karachi.

The delegation included Advocate Parvez Ahmed Shah, Syed Yousuf Naseem, Raja Khadim Hussain, Zahid Ashraf, and Sheikh Abdul Majid.

They praised PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari for raising the Kashmir issue boldly during his recent diplomatic tour, calling it a continuation of the legacy of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Benazir Bhutto.

The Hurriyat leaders invited Saeed Ghani to participate in the "Bunyan-um-Marsus" rally on July 8, marking the martyrdom anniversary of Burhan Muzaffar Wani. They congratulated him on the successful operation," describing the rally as a tribute to Kashmiri martyrs and the Pakistan Army. Saeed Ghani thanked the delegation and reaffirmed PPP's continued political, moral, and diplomatic support for the Kashmiri cause.

PFA seals 24 beverage units

LAHORE (APP): The Punjab Food Authority (PFA) special enforcement teams have sealed 24 beverage units and discarded thousands of litres of unsafe drinks during a large scale inspection drive launched in connection with Ashura.

PFA Director General Muhammad Asim Javaid told media on Saturday that food safety teams inspected 720 beverage, water and juice units. A total of 24 units were sealed over violations of food safety laws while 216 units were fined Rs5.419 million. Moreover, 228 units were issued improvement notices due to unhygienic practices.

The DG said that food safety teams discarded 7,400 litres of juice and beverages over 1,000 litres of water and more than 80kg of expired chemical ingredients. These included prohibited and expired substances being used in drinks meant for sabels. He added teams found serious violations such as poor hygiene conditions, insect infestation and lack of medical certificates of food handlers. He added that mixtures prepared with banned and expired ingredients were also recovered and discarded on the spot.

The DG added that inspections are being carried out in two shifts daily by specially deployed Muharram food safety teams. He said that checking of sabels and langar points near majalis and roadside camps is underway, along with public awareness efforts. He has requested public to play its role in ensuring safe food by reporting violations on PFA helpline 1223.

Lanjar directs for foolproof security on 9th Muharram

KARACHI (APP): Sindh Home Minister Ziaul Hassan Lanjar has directed the Sindh Police and other Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs) to ensure foolproof security on the occasion of 9th Muharram ul Haram on Saturday.

He said that 9th Muharram should be made safe and peaceful under foolproof and extraordinary measures.

The Home Minister Ziaul Hassan Lanjar said that Police, Rangers and other law enforcement agencies should ensure all security matters in collaboration. He said that continuous contact should be made possible with the organizers of Majlis, small and large processions of Muharram.

He said that he establishment of watchtowers and deployment of snipers

on selected high-rise buildings on the routes of the main procession should be ensured.

The role of ulema and scholars should also be ensured in all measures for a peaceful and safe Muharram, he said adding that any negligence or carelessness in providing security to citizens returning home from the gatherings and processions will be unacceptable.

Speaker terms 5th July 1977 as darkest day in Pakistan's history

KARACHI (APP): Speaker of Provincial Assembly (PA) of Sindh Syed Awais Qadir Shah on Saturday said that July 5, 1977, was the darkest day in Pakistan's democratic history.

On this day, dictatorship ambushed the people's mandate and derailed the country from the path of democracy.

He said that the ousting of the democratically elected government of Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the leader of the people, marked a tragic turning point in Pakistan's democratic journey.

The Speaker said that in the night of 5th July, the Constitution was suspended, Parliament silenced, and the will of the people crushed. The era of dictator Zia-ul-Haq was the beginning of extremism, sectarianism and terrorism in Pakistan, he said adding that dictatorship laid the foundations of Kalashnikov culture, drug proliferation, and ideological division in the country.

The Speaker said that the dictator Zia oppressed pro-democracy forces, imprisoned them, silenced their voices, and

imposed restrictions on the media.

The land of Sindh has always symbolized resistance against dictatorship, he said, adding that Shaheed Bhutto was eliminated through judicial murder, but his ideas remain alive even today.

He said that the tragedy of 5th July reminds us that safeguarding democracy is the responsibility of every generation.

He further said that Pakistan's future lies in democracy, parliamentary supremacy, and the rule of the Constitution.

Mushaal slams India for suppressing religious freedom in Kashmir

ISLAMABAD (INP): Kashmiri freedom leader Yasin Malik's wife and human rights activist Mushaal Hussein Mullick has strongly criticised the Indian government, accusing the Modi regime of deliberately targeting religious freedom in occupied Kashmir.

In her statement, Mushaal Mullick condemned the imposition of curfews on Ashura processions, the imprisonment of youth, and the criminalisation of mourning rituals (azadari) in the region. She said that the Modi government is attempting to suppress the memory of Karbala

by banning religious gatherings during the holy month of Muharram.

"Raising the voice of mourning in Kashmir has become a punishable offense under Modi's India," she said.

"By obstructing Ashura processions, the Indian government has committed a grave violation of human dignity during one of the most sacred months in Islam."

Mushaal emphasised that the freedom to practice religion is a fundamental human right, but this right has been revoked in occupied Kashmir under the current Indian administration.

"Modi's religious oppression is no longer hidden from the world," she added.

She highlighted the curfews and heavy security on Ashura as clear indicators of systemic discrimination against Muslims and other minorities in India.

She called on the international community, including the United Nations and global human rights organizations, to take notice of the restrictions on religious freedom in Kashmir and to take concrete steps toward granting Kashmiris their right to self-determination.

CS reviews Muharram security, arrangements

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Chief Secretary (CS) Zahid Akhtar Zaman visited the central control room of the Home Department here on Saturday to review the security and monitoring mechanisms in place for Muharram processions and gatherings across the province.

During the visit, the Chief Secretary connected via video link with control rooms established in various districts and received briefings regarding the head and tail positions of ongoing processions. He emphasized the importance of constant vigilance and instructed all control rooms to remain fully alert.

He also directed the district administrations and police to remain present in the field and to monitor the situation continuously.

"The Government of Punjab, under the guidance of the Chief Minister, has made unprecedented arrangements to ensure peace and order during Muharram," said the Chief Secretary. "All major processions and religious gatherings are being monitored through CCTV cameras to ensure public safety."

The CS also inspected the Social Media Monitoring Cell (Cyber Patrolling Cell) of the Home Department. Home Secretary Dr. Ahmad

Javed Qazi briefed him on the department's cyber surveillance operations. He mentioned that over 1,500 suspicious social media accounts have been reported so far, leading to the arrest of more than 100 individuals for spreading hate content and inciting violence.

Dr. Qazi briefed that live monitoring is underway for over 37,000 Majalis and more than 9,800 processions across the province.

To support the police in maintaining law and order, 59 companies of the Pakistan Army and 79 companies of Rangers have been deployed throughout Punjab.

Five arrested after 13 lions found in illegal custody

LAHORE (APP): The Punjab wildlife department, on the special directive of Punjab Chief Minister (CM) Maryam Nawaz Sharif, has launched a large-scale crackdown across the province against individuals illegally keeping lions without valid licenses.

This operation, conducted under a strict zero-tolerance policy, has already produced significant results.

According to official sources, inspections were carried out at 22 locations in various districts of Punjab since 10:00 AM yesterday. As a result, the Wildlife Department has taken 13 lions into custody, five individuals have been arrested, and five First Information Reports (FIRs) have been registered.

Two additional operations were currently underway.

In Lahore, four lions were recovered, four individuals were arrested, one premises was sealed and three FIRs were lodged. In Gujranwala, four lions were seized and one FIR was currently under process.

Faisalabad saw the recovery of two lions, the sealing of one premises and one FIR nearing completion. Meanwhile, in Multan, three lions were recovered, one person was arrested and two FIRs were registered.

Senior Minister Marriyam Aurangzeb strongly condemned the illegal trade and keeping of wild animals, declaring it unacceptable and a serious threat to public safety.

"Illegally keeping lions is not only a violation of the law but also a grave risk to society," she said.

She stressed that the government will not tolerate any unlawful wildlife possession and emphasized that enforcement of wildlife laws will be strict and indiscriminate.

The public has been urged to report any illegal ownership or trade of wild animals, especially lions, by calling the Wildlife helpline 1107, so immediate action can be taken.

Marriyam Aurangzeb added that the Punjab government was fully committed to ensuring the strict enforcement of wildlife protection laws and will continue its operations against all those involved in illegal wildlife activities.

3,000 personnel deployed for Muharram security

ISLAMABAD (APP): Inspector General of Police (IGP) Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi has finalized a comprehensive security plan for the central 9th Muharram procession, deploying over 3,000 personnel from district police, Special Branch, and Traffic Police.

The procession will be monitored through the Safe City Command Centre, more than 3,000 CCTV cameras, and mobile command and monitoring units.

A public relations officer told APP on Saturday that surveillance of the entire procession route will be carried out via the Islamabad Safe City infrastructure, which includes more than 3,000 high-resolution CCTV cameras strategically placed across the route. Additionally, mobile command and monitoring units have been deployed, equipped with live feed capabilities and advanced communication systems to assist field officers.

He informed that the route has been completely cordoned off using barbed wire and protective barricades. A three-layer security shield has been formed around the main procession to prevent any unauthorized access and ensure the safety of participants.

IG Rizvi highlighted that sniper commandos will be deployed on rooftops along the procession path to observe and neutralize any potential threats, while teams from the Bomb Disposal Squad will sweep and clear the route using modern detection equipment.

He warned that a strict ban has been imposed on the use of private drones in and around the procession to prevent surveillance gaps or unauthorized activity.

The IG Rizvi further explained that specialized teams from the Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD), along with personnel from Rangers and district police, will secure the front and rear sections of the procession. He noted that lady police officers and female volunteers will manage security checks at female entry points, ensuring respectful and secure access for women participants.

Martyrs' families deserve jobs: WAPDA Union

PESHAWAR : Chairman of All Pakistan WAPDA Hydro Electric Workers Union Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Haji Muhammad Iqbal, Secretary General Noorul Amin Haidarzaai, Deputy Chairman Shafiullah, and Secretary Information & Broadcasting Gohar Ali Gohar, while giving an exclusive interview to a TV channel, stated that the patience of the union has reached its limit. The union may announce a province-wide protest at any time. They further emphasized that after the security forces, WAPDA is the only institution where hundreds of employees across the coun-

try sacrifice their lives annually in the line of duty due to electrical accidents. They urged the government to officially recognize WAPDA workers who die in such accidents as martyrs and to grant them the same state-sponsored benefits as those given to the martyrs of the security forces. To prevent accidents and protect the lives of field staff from electrical hazards, urgent recruitment is needed in the three power distribution companies of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. They also highlighted that the Supreme Court decision on October 18, 2024, regarding the recruitment of employees' sons is not

applicable to DISCOs (distribution companies), because in WAPDA, the recruitment of employees' sons is not under the Prime Minister's package but is based on a mutual agreement between the CBA (Collective Bargaining Agent) Union and the WAPDA Authority. Therefore, they demanded that the children of martyrs be recruited without delay in the three companies of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, that employees recruited on lump-sum contracts be regularized, and that the wages of part-time employees be increased according to the government-announced wage rates.

CM pays tribute to Hazrat Imam Hussain (a.s.) on Ashura

KARACHI (APP): Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah, on the occasion of Ashura, paid heartfelt tribute to Hazrat Imam Hussain (a.s.) and the martyrs of Karbala.

Murad Shah emphasised that Hazrat Imam Hussain (a.s.)'s sacrifice was pivotal

for the preservation of Islam and the reformation of the Muslim Ummah.

He highlighted that the message of Hazrat Imam Hussain (a.s.) is a timeless beacon of truth, resilience, and resistance against oppression, inspiring generations to uphold justice

and stand against tyranny.

On the solemn day of Ashura, Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah commemorated the unparalleled sacrifice of Hazrat Imam Hussain (a.s.) and his 72 companions, who laid down their lives for the triumph of truth.



KARACHI: Mourners offer Dua after Zohr prayer during the 9th Muharram-ul-Haram procession. Muharram ul Haram is the mourning month in remembrance of the martyrdom (Shahadat) of Hazrat Imam Hussain (AS).



Processions of 9th Muharram concludes peacefully

PESHAWAR (APP):The mourning processions of 9th Moharram was peacefully concluded in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province on Saturday evening.

To pay glowing tributes and homage to Hazarat Imam Hussain (RA) and their companions for supreme sacrifice in Karbala for supremacy of Islam, the 9th Muharram mourning processions and Taziya were taken out in provincial capital besides other districts of KP amid tight security arrangements on Saturday morning and concluded peacefully later in the evening.

The central mourning procession which was taken out from Hussainia Hall Peshawar Cantonment has passed through its traditional routes before culminated at the same Imambargh.

Mourners recite Nouwah Khawani, and uses self-flagellation on the occasion.

The entry points of sad-r bazaar in Peshawar, was sealed off and heavy contingents of law enforces, deployed to keep watch on movement of the people.

Close Circuit Cameras

were installed at prominent places that thoroughly monitored by the law enforcers to take prompt steps in case any eventuality.

Ambulance of Rescue-1122 alongwith private ambulances of Edhi, Al-Khidmat service, performed duties to deal with any unpleasant incident and in case of any injures during mourners self-flagellations.

City Police Chief Qasim Khan and Commissioner Peshawar Riaz Meh-sud besides Deputy Commissioner also visited the Saddar bazaar and reviewed the overall security arrangements for 10th Asura Moharram.

They expressed satisfaction over the security arrangements for Asura Moharram and directed the officials to further tighten security to avoid any untoward incident.

The mourning processions in other districts including high sensitive Hangu, Kohat, D.I.Khan, Mansehra and other parts of the province were also concluded peacefully.

The local administration with consent of residents

and religious leaders, devised a comprehensive plan for highly sensitive Hangu and Kohat for Asura Muharram to maintain law and order, and prevent any untoward incident on the occasion.

The religious scholars highlighted sacrifices of Hazrat Imam e Hussain (RA) and his companions for supremacy of Islam.

Due to heightened security concerns, mobile phone services have been suspended on the 9th and 10th of Muharram.

The city's BRT service has also been halted for two days.

Over 10,000 police and security personnel have been deployed in Peshawar. Additionally, a two-day ban has been imposed on the entry of Afghan refugees into the city. Major roads, including Qissa Khwani Bazaar, Khyber Bazaar, Circular Road, and GT Road, have been shut down for security purposes.

The local authorities in all three cities have urged the public to cooperate with security forces and avoid unnecessary movement to ensure peaceful observance of the religious rituals.



PESHAWAR: A large number of mourners attending 9th Muharram Zuljinah procession passes through Sadar Road.

Imam Hussain and his loyal companions give sacrfrices for supremacy of Islam

PESHAWAR (APP): Governor of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Faisal Karim Kundi, here Saturday said that the supreme sacrifice of Hazrat Imam Hussain (A.S.) and his loyal companions was a great example presented for the glory of Islam, preservation of religion, and upholding of truth and justice.

In his message on the eve of Youm-e-Ashura (10th Muharram 1447 Hijri), Governor Faisal Karim Kundi stated that the sacrifice of the grandson of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), Hazrat Imam Hussain (A.S.), and his faithful companions was a timeless example that will be remembered until the end of time.

He said that the message of Imam Hussain (A.S.) was a guiding light for all of humanity, teaching us the true spirit of patience, perseverance, loyalty, bravery, and faith.

He added that Ashura teaches us to stand firm against falsehood, to remain steadfast in truth, and to never hesitate in making any sacrifice in this path.

The message of Karbala is that no matter how great the trials, we should never bow before tyranny and oppression, and must always stand with the oppressed. This is part of true faith, and it is in this that lies our success in both this world and the Hereafter.

The Governor of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa said that the blood of the martyrs of Karbala bears witness that truth is eternal, while falsehood is destined to perish.

He said Ashura reminds us to keep the spirit of sacrifice alive in our lives and to always follow the teachings of the Holy Qur'an and Sunnah.

He prayed that may Allah Almighty grant us the ability to follow the teachings of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and grant us the courage to stand with truth and justice.

Kundi terms July 5 Dark Chapter in history

PESHAWAR (APP): The Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Karim Kundi, in a statement marking the anniversary of July 5, 1977, termed the day a dark chapter in Pakistan's democratic history.

He said that on this day, democracy was ambushed, and the country's first democratically elected government led by Quaid-e-Awam Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was ousted through unconstitutional means, marking the beginning of a bleak era.

Governor Kundi said July 5 remains a painful reminder of the moment when the people's right to rule was snatched by force.

He paid tribute to Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto for politically awakening the masses, giving them the courage to live with dignity, and laying the foundations of a strong and self-reliant Pakistan principles that were unacceptable to anti-democratic forces.

He emphasized the continued need to uphold democracy and the supremacy of the Constitution, stating that efforts must persist to ensure no dictator ever dares to trample the public mandate again.

The Governor highlighted the sacrifices of the Pakistan Peoples Party, stating that despite immense losses, the party safeguarded the integrity of the country.

He recalled that after the martyrdom of Benazir Bhutto, former President Asif Ali Zardari united the nation with the slogan "Pakistan Khappay," while PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari's diplomatic and media advocacy during Operation Bunyan al-Mars-oos projected Pakistan's stance with unmatched clarity and resolve on international forums.

PHC dispose of writ Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: The Peshawar High Court (PHC) has disposed of a petition challenging the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government's decision to confer Sub-Registrar powers on Tehsildars in various districts.

A two-member bench comprising Justice Waqar Ahmad and Justice Sadiq Ali Mohammad heard the petition filed by 13 Sub-Registrars, including Habib-ur-Rehman.

The petitioners had alleged that the government's decision to confer Sub-Registrar powers on Tehsildars was unlawful and resulted in the deprivation of their rights.

The Assistant Advocate General informed the court that the provincial government had withdrawn the additional powers of Sub-Registrar from all Tehsildars.

PHC dispose of the petition after government's assurance that the additional powers of Sub-Registrar had been withdrawn from all Tehsildars.

Guar — Pakistan's overlooked crop with tremendous potential

Mashal Rehman

As Pakistan's agriculture struggles under the weight of climate change, water scarcity, and shrinking profit margins for smallholder farmers, the time has come to seriously rethink the crops we choose to cultivate. While major crops like wheat, sugarcane, and cotton dominate policy and public discourse, lesser-known crops with remarkable resilience and economic promise remain largely ignored. Among them is guar, a hardy legume commonly known as cluster bean (Cyamopsis tetragonoloba) quietly grown in the arid zones of southern Punjab, Sindh, and Balochistan.

Guar's importance lies in its low input requirements, adaptability to harsh conditions, and high economic value. It grows well in sandy soils and with limited irrigation; a quality that makes it ideal for areas facing increasing drought frequency and depleting water tables. Its deep-rooted system, short growing season, and heat tolerance allow it to thrive where other crops fail. As a leguminous plant, guar also enriches the soil by fixing atmospheric nitrogen, reducing the need for chemical fertilizers and enhancing the productivity of succeeding crops.

Yet, the real value of guar lies in its seed more specifically, the gum derived from it. Guar gum

is a powerful natural thickener used in a wide range of industries: food processing, pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, textiles, and even the oil and gas sector, where it plays a key role in hydraulic fracturing. This industrial versatility makes guar gum a globally traded commodity, with rising demand across developed and emerging economies. Unfortunately, despite its ideal growing conditions, Pakistan has barely scratched the surface of this market.

India, with similar agro-climatic zones, currently dominates more than 70 percent of global guar gum production and export. It has built an entire industry around guar from high-yielding varieties to local processing plants and global export chains. In contrast, Pakistan continues to treat guar as a secondary crop, often exporting raw seed with minimal value addition. A lack of dedicated processing units, certification systems, and export channels has kept Pakistan out of the high-value guar gum market.

From a research standpoint, the potential is undeniable. Over the years, Pakistani institutions have developed promising guar varieties with improved yields and gum content. However, these remain confined to research farms due to the weak link between public research and private sector investment. Farmers often continue using traditional varieties

with low returns, unaware of the improved lines available. Moreover, without guaranteed buyers or stable pricing, there is little motivation to adopt guar on a commercial scale.

In the broader policy landscape, guar remains almost invisible. It does not figure in national crop zoning strategies, minimum support price schemes, or climate-resilient agriculture plans. This oversight is especially striking given that guar not only conserves water and improves soil fertility but also provides fodder making it a dual-purpose crop for both cropping and livestock systems. In regions where fodder shortages are acute, this trait alone should be reason enough to promote guar more vigorously.

What is needed is a multi-pronged approach: first, recognizing guar as a strategic crop for arid zones, followed by targeted research funding, farmer outreach, seed multiplication, and local processing infrastructure. Public-private partnerships can play a vital role in developing guar gum extraction units and linking growers to industrial buyers. Creating awareness among farmers through training programs, field demonstrations, and media campaigns can also help shift the perception of guar from a marginal crop to a high-value alternative.

At the Agricultural Research Station in Bahawalpur, where I currently serve, we have recently sown promising guar varieties including BR-17, BR-21, BR-22, and Thal Guara in June 2025 to meet the rising demand from farmers. Interest in guar cultivation is steadily increasing due to its economic benefits and its dual role in seed production and livestock fodder. Notably, this institute remains the only dedicated research station in Punjab working exclusively on the improvement and development of the guar crop. The increasing adoption of improved varieties reflects a slow but encouraging shift in farmer behaviour one that deserves institutional support and national recognition.

Guar is not just a crop; it is a climate solution, an economic opportunity, and a way forward for sustainable agriculture in Pakistan's arid and semi-arid regions. At a time when our traditional cropping systems are being challenged by environmental and economic pressures, it is essential to look beyond the usual suspects and invest in alternatives that are both resilient and profitable.

It is time to bring guar out of the margins and into the mainstream. With the right policy focus, value chain development, and farmer-centric support, this neglected crop could become a cornerstone of Pakistan's agricultural resilience and rural prosperity.

(The author is a senior scientist)

Minister honours volunteer in Swat

PESHAWAR (APP): Federal Minister and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa President Engineer Amir Muqam on Saturday met with Muhammad Bilal, a volunteer recognized nationally for his bravery and humanitarian efforts during the recent Swat tragedy.

The minister presented Bilal with a floral garland and commended his selfless service, declaring him a "true hero of the nation." He praised Bilal's swift actions, which saved lives and set an inspiring example.

The Federal Minister Amir Muqam announced that Prime Minister Sheh-baz Sharif will confer a special award on Bilal for his outstanding public service. The federal government will also honor him for his bravery and dedication.

"Such individuals are the pride of Pakistan and deserve recognition," Amir Muqam said, adding that the nation is proud of heroes like Bilal who serve humanity in difficult times.

He criticized the provincial government, blaming its incompetence for the loss of lives and accusing it of misusing resources for political activities instead of public welfare.

"Saving lives was their responsibility, and they failed," he stated.



PESHAWAR: Volunteers serving drinks to mourners during procession at Sadar Road on 9th of Holy Month of Muharram Ul Haram.

Symbol of indomitable courage: Captain Karnal Sher Khan remembered 26 years on martyr's legacy continues to inspire nation

PESHAWAR (APP): Captain Karnal Sher Khan Shaheed (Nishan-e-Haider), one of the most celebrated heroes of the Kargil War, was remembered with profound admiration and respect on his 26th martyrdom anniversary being observed on Saturday.

A shining example of unmatched courage, battlefield leadership, and patriotic zeal, Captain Sher Khan laid down his life while defending the motherland during the 1999 Kargil conflict and was posthumously awarded the Nishan-e-Haider, Pakistan's highest military gallantry award.

The 29-year-old officer of the Sindh Regiment who was posted in 12th Northern Light Infantry (NLI) fought valiantly under extreme conditions at an altitude of 17,000 feet in the Gultari sector along the Line of Control (LoC), inflicting significant losses on the enemy.

"Death was meaningless for this brave young officer, who fought like a lion against both the enemy and the harsh weather," said Brigadier (Retd) Mahmood Shah, a senior defence analyst, while talking to APP.

"His leadership, and heroic performance so deeply impressed the Indian commanders that they formally acknowledged his bravery in a rare citation."

Captain Sher Khan's battlefield heroism compelled a senior Indian Army officer to write a letter of commendation, recognizing his gallantry and recommending he be honored posthumously by Pakistan.

Captain Karnal Sher Khan and Havaladar Lalak Jan, both of the 12th NLI, embraced martyrdom in the Gultari area near Tiger Hill on July 5, 1999. In recognition of their ultimate sacrifice for Pakistan, both were posthumously awarded the Nishan-e-Haider, joining the ranks of the most revered martyrs in Pakistan's military history.

Born on January 1, 1970, in Nawan Kallay, Swabi district, Captain Sher Khan hailed from a family with a legacy of patriotism.

His grandfather participated in the 1948 Kashmir Freedom Movement and had always dreamed of someone from his family joining the armed forces.

It was he who affectionately gave his grandson the title of "Karnal" (Colonel), which later became an enduring part of his name.

After completing his

intermediate education, Sher Khan joined the prestigious Pakistan Military Academy (PMA) Kakul in 1992. He was commissioned into the 27th Sindh Regiment on October 14, 1994, and was later posted to the 12th NLI during the Kargil conflict.

Captain Sher Khan established and defended five vital posts at Gultari under intense enemy fire.

On July 5, 1999, Indian forces, backed by two battalions, launched a massive assault and managed to capture part of one post.

Defying all odds, Captain Sher Khan led a daring counterattack and reclaimed the lost ground, personally engaging the enemy in close combat.

He conducted numerous successful raids, including one where he entered an



Pakistani soldiers and citizens alike.

In tribute to the national hero, a mausoleum was built at his native village where he was laid to rest. A cadet college has also been established in his honor near his hometown in Ismaila, along the Swabi-Mardan Road. Special prayers and Quran Khwani were held on his martyrdom anniversary for the elevation of his soul.

As the nation pays tribute to its valiant son, the best homage lies in serving Pakistan with sincerity, dedication, and unwavering commitment.



In brief

Investigation demanded
F.P. Report

BANNU: A serious financial controversy has erupted over the rental income of 39 shops located within the Qazi Moheb Hockey Stadium in Bannu. The Tehsil Municipal Administration (TMA) Bannu received only Rs. 50,913 as a 20% revenue share, sparking suspicions of large-scale financial mismanagement and corruption. According to official documents, a cheque bearing number 64438968, dated May 16, 2025, was issued via Bank of Khyber in favor of the Tehsil Municipal Officer (TMO) Bannu. This payment is said to represent TMA's 20% share of the total revenue generated by the shops in the stadium premises. However, based on current market rents and commercial property values in the area, experts estimate that the revenue from 39 commercial outlets should amount to millions of rupees monthly. In this context, a 20% share totaling just over Rs. 50,000 appears highly questionable and is being viewed as indicative of serious financial irregularities. Local residents and civil society activists have expressed grave concerns over the situation, suggesting that influential individuals and possibly senior officials may be complicit in underreporting the actual revenue. There are also allegations of collusion between officials of the Sports Department and the TMA, hinting at a deeper nexus of corruption.

30 shepherds rescued
F.P. Report

ATTOCK: Thirty shepherds, along with their families, were successfully rescued from a flooded riverbank area near Shadi Khan village in Attock, rescue officials confirmed on Saturday. According to authorities, the shepherds were grazing their livestock when they became stranded due to the sudden rise in water levels in the Indus River. Rescue teams were dispatched immediately and managed to evacuate all individuals to safety. Officials stated that the increase in river water was caused by ongoing torrential rains and melting snow from the mountains, which have raised water levels in rivers across the country. Several areas are now facing flood-like conditions. Earlier this week, tourists from Sialkot and Mardan lost their lives after being swept away by floodwaters in the Swat River. Authorities have issued repeated warnings urging citizens to avoid low-lying and riverine areas during the current monsoon surge.

Mobile phone service suspended
F.P. Report

QUETTA: Mobile phone and internet services were suspended on Saturday in various cities across the country as part of heightened security measures for the 9th of Muharram-ul-Haram. The 9th of Muharram, observed to commemorate the supreme sacrifice of Hazrat Imam Hussain (RA) and his companions, is being marked with due solemnity and respect nationwide. Cellular and internet services have been suspended in Quetta, Sukkur, Dadu, Jacobabad, Kohat, and other cities. The decision aims to ensure public safety during processions and religious gatherings. According to officials, services will remain suspended until 8:00 PM. Extensive security arrangements have been put in place to prevent any untoward incidents.

Commissioner chairs meeting on law, order

F.P. Report

KOHAT: Commissioner Kohat Division Syed Motasim Billah Shah is active for the peaceful conduct of Muharram-ul-Haram in the entire Kohat Division. He held a high-level meeting in the Hangu District for peaceful holding of the Muharram-ul-Haram.

The meeting beside others, was also attended by the Commandant Thall Scouts Colonel Alamgir Yousafzai, Deputy Commissioner Hangu Gohar Zaman Wazir, DPO Hangu Muhammad Khalid Khan, other officers of the security forces and members of the peace committee as well as Sunni and Shia leaders.

A detailed discussion was held on the current security situation, possi-



ble threats, and arrangements made to maintain peace on this occasion. The meeting was informed that foolproof security arrangements have been made at all sensitive places and a coordinated plan has been prepared for the processions and gatherings of Muharram-ul-Haram.

The Sunni and Shia elders unanimously decided that the situation will not be allowed to deteriorate under any circumstances and sectarian harmony will be maintained. The elders

assured the government and security agencies of their full cooperation and made it clear that every conspiracy to disturb the peaceful atmosphere will be foiled.

During the meeting, deep sorrow and grief was expressed over the martyrdom of the Assistant Commissioner Faisal Ismail, who was martyred in the Bajaur blast, and prayers were also offered for his eternal peace. The participants paid rich tributes to the martyred officer and termed his sacrifice as a matter of pride.

Jirga demands durable peace in Tirah Valley

F.P. Report

TIRAH: A grand jirga convened in Maidan on Saturday demanded sustainable peace and stability in Tirah Valley. Large number of tribesmen of eight sub-tribes of Afridi from across the Valley and from different walks of life participated in the gathering.

Addressing on the occasion speakers highlighted various problems being faced by the dwellers of the Valley and presented a number of suggestions to improve law and order situation in Tirah. They said that the purpose of holding

the jirga was to ensure that people of Tirah were wise and well-mannered and were not ready furthermore to become fuel of an alien war.

The participants supported intelligence base forces operation and refused any displacement or translocation. The locals no longer tolerate forcibly displacement, forces operations and killing of innocent people in Tirah Valley, they opined.

Consistently, an unfamiliar and unwanted war was imposed on them and they were subjected to

unmatched sacrifices and sufferings they added and said they fed up with the insurgency and furthermore did not endorse, purge movement in the name of war against militancy in the area.

The tribesmen of Tirah had awakened for their rights and had decided that they would not stay silent over injustice to be done to them, they remarked. They maintained that dwellers of Tirah Valley would raise a peaceful voice for their rights, identity, land and safety of their lives and would not give up their expression of right.

Evictions, suffering, and urgent need for systemic change

Nazia Naz

IN June 2021, United Nations human rights experts issued a powerful statement condemning the mass evictions of nearly 100,000 people living along Karachi's Gujjar and Orangi nullahs. These demolitions were carried out without proper consultation, compensation, or relocation plans. While that international outcry drew temporary attention, the suffering of those affected has only deepened with time. Even today, thousands of families continue to live in uncertainty struggling every single day to survive with dignity.

Recently, I had the chance to personally meet with some of the victims of this injustice. Their stories are heartbreaking. Entire families are still waiting for justice, living in limbo with no support, no shelter, and no hope. Mothers shared how their children are unable to continue their education due to displacement. Fathers expressed helplessness as they struggle to find work and provide for their families. The trauma is still fresh, and the wounds remain open.

What happened in Karachi is not an isolated event. It is a symptom of a

larger, broken system where the poor are treated as disposable. Entire communities were uprooted with little warning and left to fend for themselves during a global pandemic. Despite some families holding legal leases and utility connections, their homes were bulldozed in the name of development and anti-encroachment drives.

But the question remains: Who defines development? And why does it always come at the cost of the most vulnerable? The people I met are still living in tents, makeshift shelters, or overcrowded rented spaces. Their children have dropped out of school, their health is deteriorating, and their mental well-being is constantly under threat. Every other day brings a new crisis unbearable heat, illness, loss of livelihood, or harassment by authorities. It is not just a housing crisis. It is a crisis of human dignity.

The international community, civil society, and human rights defenders have repeatedly reminded governments that forced evictions without due process are a violation of international human rights law. Yet on the ground, nothing seems to change. The poor continue to be

silenced, criminalized, and pushed into deeper poverty.

This is not just about housing; it is about justice, inclusion, and systemic reform. We must ask ourselves: What kind of society do we want to build? One where concrete buildings replace lives? One where only the privileged have the right to live peacefully?

Real change begins with recognition. Authorities must acknowledge the suffering they have caused and take immediate steps to provide compensation, safe resettlement, and basic services. Laws must be amended to prevent such evictions in the future. Development must be inclusive, participatory, and centered on the rights of people not just infrastructure.

The people who lost their homes in Gujjar and Orangi nullahs are not just statistics. They are fathers, mothers, children, students, workers human beings. And like every other citizen, they deserve to live with dignity, stability, and peace. Until the system begins to treat the poor as human beings worthy of the same rights and respect as anyone else we will continue to see suffering. And that is a collective failure we can no longer afford to ignore.

Two terrorists shot killed
F.P. Report

LAKKI MARWAT: Two terrorists were arrested in an intelligence based operation in Lakki Marwat district. District Police Officer Muhammad Jawad Ishaq told that the police had intensified actions against terrorists across the district on the special directives of RPO Bannu Sajjad Khan to eliminate the menace completely and maintain lasting peace in the region.

He said that a party of Shahbazkhel police station backed by Elite Force commandos and armoured personnel carriers reached the remote rural area on information about the presence of hardcore militants there.

"The cops raided a suspected hideout and captured two terrorists identified as Bilal, a resident of Nawerkhel and Asif Nawaz of Kattakhel", he maintained, adding that the arrested men who were wanted by law enforcement agencies in various terrorism related cases were shifted to the police station. He said that the arrested suspects were among the most wanted terrorists and strenuous efforts were underway for their arrest for a long time. Meanwhile, Inspector General of Police praised Lakki Marwat police for a successful operation against terrorists, saying that police are determined to eliminate terrorism and continue the struggle until lasting peace is established in the entire region.

Boy drowned, two rescued
F.P. Report

BANNU, LAKKI MARWAT: A boy was drowned in a rainwater course while two others were rescued in Karak and Bannu districts.

Rescue 1122 officials said that they dispatched a team of divers to the Kot Banda area of Banda Daud Shah in Karak district when the control room received information that a boy had drowned in a rainwater course. They said that the divers along with a medical team reached the spot and launched a search for the boy.

"The volunteers of civil defence and local residents also took part in the operation", they maintained. They said that the body was pulled out from the water course after five hours long hectic efforts and immediately moved to the Tehsil Headquarters Hospital.

They identified the deceased as Shezad, 12, son of Muhammad Amin resident of Kot Banda and said that the body was handed over to relatives after fulfilling formalities at the hospital. Separately, two young boys were safely rescued from the raging Kurrum River in Bannu. The rescue emergency service officials said that the boys had been trapped in the middle of the river when water level suddenly increased in it.

They said that local residents called out the rescue emergency service for help. "The divers of Rescue 1122 immediately reached the venue and safely recovered the boys from the river", they claimed, saying that both of them were handed over to relatives after the medical team provided them with first aid.

KKKUK concludes 38th emergency syndicate meeting



F.P. Report

KARAK: The Khushal Khan Khattak University-Karak (KKKUK) successfully concluded its 38th emergency Syndicate meeting today, resulting in several important legal and administrative decisions aimed at advancing the university's operations and resolving employee matters.

The meeting, presided over by Vice Chancellor Professor Dr. Muhammad Tahir Khaliy, convened a diverse group of stakeholders, including a representative from the Higher Education Commission (HEC) Islamabad, Vice Chancellor Professor Dr. Jehanzeb Khan of Bannu University, and key KKKUK officials, Registrar Muhammad Rashad Khattak including Treasurer Hafiz Muhammad Ismail Khan, Additional Registrar Abdul Salam, Deputy director audit Farid Jalal, Director QEC Dr Muhammad Anwar, Dr Muhammad Zubair and Dr Shad Muhammad, alongside representatives from various government departments, highlighting the

comprehensive nature of the discussions.

Professor Dr. Muhammad Tahir Khaliy opened the meeting by briefing the Syndicate members on critical university issues. Following the briefing, all participants engaged in detailed discussions, offering their insights and contributing to the decision-making process. The forum collectively lauded the Vice Chancellor's commitment to the university, acknowledging that his efforts would be instrumental in addressing employee concerns effectively.

The Syndicate focused on crucial administrative matters, ensuring that all resolutions were aligned with the university's established rules and regulations. In his closing remarks, Vice Chancellor Professor Dr. Muhammad Tahir Khaliy expressed his gratitude to the Syndicate members for their continued confidence in his leadership. He reiterated his unwavering commitment to promptly resolving all issues faced by university's employees, emphasizing his dedication to the university's overall betterment above personal considerations.

Crimes reduced by 31% in Bahawalpur

Saqib Mushtaq

BAHAWALPUR: District Bahawalpur has achieved a 31% overall reduction in crime during the first half of 2025 compared to the same period in 2024.

According to details, kidnapping for ransom downed 100%, killings reduced to 33%, crime against child 16%, abduction decreased to 17%, Dildacoity 70% downed,

robbery 9%, vehicle snatching 15% and other vehicle theft reduced to 12%.

Moreover, stolen properties upto 21%, arrests 71%, recovery of Crystal Meth 76%, hashish 26%, Opium 88% and cases against Beggars increased to 281%. This remarkable improvement reflects the dedication of the Bahawalpur Police under your leadership. Consistent efforts are



underway to maintain this positive trend.

Employees holidays cancelled in wake of expected heavy downpour

F.P. Report

MARDAN: Deputy Commissioner Mardan has cancelled leaves of all administrative and line department officers and ordered immediate and effective action against both permanent and temporary encroachments on water channels across the district.

He was presiding over a review meeting at the DC Office conference room regarding the provincial government's directives on the ongoing flood situation and anti-encroachment measures. The meeting was attended by ADC Relief Iqbal Hussain Khattak, Assistant Commissioners, officials from Rescue 1122, Irrigation, C&W, TMAs, and other relevant departments.

DC Mardan directed the expansion of flood response teams from two to four, immediate installation of flood warning systems at key locations, deployment of Civil Defence volunteers in vulnerable areas, and provision of life jackets to peo-

ple living near waterways.

He instructed the Agriculture Department to launch awareness campaigns in flood-prone areas for crop and livestock protection and to ensure immediate vaccination of animals.

Rescue teams, TMAs, and the Water and Sanitation Company Mardan (WSSCM) were directed to keep de-watering pumps ready and promptly drain stagnant water in case of urban flooding.

The DC emphasized that departments must report and remove encroachments from land under their jurisdiction without delay. He also ordered daily crackdowns against those involved in artificial price hike. Moreover, Dr. Azmatullah Wazir directed the police to file FIRs and arrest individuals violating Section 144.

VC visits University College for Women: Vice Chancellor Abdul Wali Khan University, Prof. Dr. Jamil Ahmed visited the University College for Women. On this occasion,

the Principal of the college, Dr. Zubaida Parveen, Provost Abdul Samad, and other college staff were present. The Vice Chancellor reviewed different parts of the college and inspected the building arrangements and educational facilities.

On this occasion, the Vice Chancellor said that the purpose of this visit was to review the performance of the college and take suggestions for further improvement. We are committed to further improve our educational institution. We were happy to see the educational activities, facilities and quality of students here and are confident that with our joint efforts, this college will progress further.

The Principal of the college, Dr. Zubaida Parveen said that "We have a PhD faculty in the college and we are working hard for the academic, research and intellectual development of the students. Our aim is to provide students with opportunities to move forward in research along with quality education.

From conflict to cooperation: Russia's recognition of Taliban and its strategic fallout

Rafi Ul Haq

ON July 3, 2025, the Russian Federation became the first country to officially recognize the Taliban government in Afghanistan by accepting the credentials of Taliban-appointed ambassador Gul Hassan Hassan. This diplomatic move marked a dramatic shift in regional geopolitics and global responses to Afghanistan's governance under the Taliban. Though recognition is seen as a symbolic gesture, in this case, it reflects deep historical patterns, strategic calculations, and potentially transformative regional impacts.

Russia's involvement in Afghanistan has roots in Cold War history, especially the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. That conflict, which lasted a decade, ended with a costly withdrawal and left a lasting impact on Russia's foreign policy. Over the following decades, Moscow moved away from military intervention and adopted a more prag-

matic and diplomatic approach. After the collapse of the U.S.-backed Afghan government in 2021, Russia began engaging with the Taliban through informal channels, hosting them in Moscow for negotiations and recognizing their increasing control over the country. The removal of the Taliban from Russia's list of terrorist organizations in April 2025 set the stage for the formal recognition that happened just months later.

A combination of national security concerns and long-term geopolitical goals drives Russia's motives. The main priority is maintaining stability in Central Asia, where Moscow holds significant strategic interests. The threat from ISIS-K and other groups operating from Afghanistan could easily spill into Russia's nearby regions. By establishing direct diplomatic contacts with the Taliban, Russia seeks to create a security partnership that prevents terrorism, reduces drug trafficking, and stabilizes its southern border.

Beyond security, the recognition also serves as a geopolitical

statement. At a time when Russia faces growing isolation from the West due to its actions in Ukraine and elsewhere, it is eager to assert itself as a global power capable of shaping political outcomes beyond its borders. Recognizing the Taliban enables Moscow to counterbalance U.S. and NATO influence and reframe itself as a major player in a multipolar world order, where Western norms no longer dominate international legitimacy.

Economically, Afghanistan offers untapped potential. With vast reserves of lithium, copper, and rare earth metals, the country could become a valuable source of raw materials, especially as global demand for green technologies increases. Russia sees investment opportunities in Afghanistan's mining sector, infrastructure development, and energy transit. The Taliban regime also plays a crucial role in the realization of regional projects like the TAPI gas pipeline and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) extensions. Moscow envisions a Eurasian connecti-

ty network in which Afghanistan becomes a transit hub linking Central Asia with South Asia.

Despite criticism of the Taliban's human rights record, Russia's approach is rooted in constructive engagement rather than isolation. By recognizing the Taliban, Moscow believes it can encourage them to moderate their governance, particularly in areas like women's rights, minority protection, and education. Recognition may also open doors for humanitarian assistance, help release frozen Afghan assets, and support the revival of the country's struggling economy. Economic growth and regional integration, in turn, could reduce the drivers of social unrest, economic fragility, and instability.

The positive and constructive impacts of this recognition are significant. It offers a chance for the Taliban to seek international legitimacy in exchange for adhering to minimum diplomatic norms. It could revive trade and investment, reduce Afghanistan's dependence on illicit economies such as opium

trafficking, and promote cooperation on counterterrorism and border management. For the Afghan people, formal diplomatic relations may lead to development projects, aid programs, and people-to-people engagement that have been absent since the regime change in 2021.

Russia's decision may also influence other countries in the region to follow suit. China, already deeply involved in Afghanistan's mining sector and interested in stabilizing its western province of Xinjiang, may soon take similar steps. Iran, while historically skeptical of the Taliban, shares a long border and security concerns, and may pragmatically engage further if benefits outweigh risks. Pakistan, considered Afghanistan's closest partner, has maintained active relations with the Taliban but has not formally recognized them; now, it may feel compelled to do so. The Central Asian republics, especially Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, are closely aligned with Moscow and may

coordinate their recognition as part of a regional bloc strategy. Qatar and the UAE, having hosted Taliban political offices, may also normalize relations in the interest of diplomatic continuity and business ventures.

Looking ahead, Russia's recognition of the Taliban marks a significant turning point not just for Afghanistan but for the entire region. It signals a notable shift in Moscow's foreign policy, moving away from Cold War-style confrontation toward a more pragmatic, engagement-driven approach rooted in security, economic interests, and regional influence. While the move understandably raises concerns about human rights and inclusive governance, it also presents an opportunity for meaningful progress. If managed with foresight and balance, this decision could foster greater regional cooperation, unlock economic potential, and pave the way for Afghanistan's reintegration into the global community, offering hope for a more stable and connected future after decades of conflict and isolation.



Haiti’s gangs have ‘near-total control’ of capital

UNITED NATIONS (AP): Haiti's gangs have gained "near-total control" of the capital and authorities are unable to stop escalating violence across the impoverished Caribbean nation, senior UN officials warned.

An estimated 90% of the capital Port-au-Prince is now under control of criminal groups who are expanding attacks not only into surrounding areas but beyond into previously peaceful areas, Ghada Fathy Waly, executive director of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, told the UN Security Council.

"Southern Haiti, which until recently was insulated from the violence, has seen a sharp increase in gang-related incidents," she said. "And in the east, criminal groups are exploiting land routes, including key crossings like Belladere and Malpassee, where attacks against police and customs officials have been reported."

Waly said the state's authority to govern is rapidly shrinking as gang control expands with cascading effects. Criminal groups are stepping into the vacuum left by the absence or limited delivery of public services and are establishing "parallel governance structures," and gang control of major trade routes has paralyzed legal commerce, leading to soaring prices for cooking fuel and rice, Haiti's staple food, she said.

UN Assistant Secretary-General Miroslav Jenca told the council "the ongoing gang encirclement of Port-au-Prince" and their strengthened foothold in the capital and beyond is "pushing the situation closer to the brink."

"Without increased action by the international community, the total collapse of state presence in

the capital could become a very real scenario," he warned. Gangs have grown in power since the assassination of President Jovenel Moise in July 2021 and previously were estimated to control 85% of the capital. Haiti has not had a president since the assassination.

A UN-backed mission led by Kenyan police arrived in Haiti last year to help quell gang violence, but the mission remains understaffed and underfunded, with only about 40% of the 2,500 personnel originally envisioned. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' proposal in February to have the UN provide drones, fuel, ground and air transport and other non-lethal support to the Kenya-led mission has languished in the council. In response to the gangs, the UNODC's Waly said there has been a rapid growth in the number and activities of private security companies and vigilante self-defense groups, with some trying to protect their communities while others act illegally and collude with gangs.

"Over the last three months," Jenca said, "these groups reportedly killed at least 100 men and one woman suspected of gang association or collaboration." He said the last three months have also seen an increase in sexual violence by gangs with the UN political mission in Haiti documenting 364 incidents of sexual violence involving 378 survivors just from March to April.

A new report by UN experts covering the period from last October through February said the gangs have exploited political turmoil and the disorganized response to Haiti's security crisis, pointing to compet-

ing political ambitions and allegations of corruption within Haiti's transitional governing bodies that have stymied action. "While the expansion of territorial control brings gangs additional sources of revenue and bargaining power," the experts said, "these attacks are also backed by individuals trying to destabilize the political transition for their own political goals."

One major result is that very little progress has been made toward restoring public security or implementing the roadmap for organizing national elections by February 2026, the experts monitoring an arms embargo on Haiti and sanctions against key gang leaders said in the report to the Security Council. With a weak national police force facing acute tensions in its leadership, an army that needs rebuilding, and the limited ability of the multinational force, the experts warned that the gangs will continue "to have the upper hand unless stronger international support is provided."

As for vigilante groups, the experts said, they "often include local police officers, some of whom actively participate in human rights violations."

The Haitian National Police have also carried out "a worrying number of extrajudicial killings ... with suspected gang members often summarily executed," the experts said, pointing to 281 summary executions by specialized police units in 2024 including 22 women and 8 children. Despite the UN arms embargo on Haiti, gangs continue to obtain more powerful weapons not only from regional civilian markets but from police stockpiles in Haiti and the neighboring Dominican Republic, the experts said.

Fiji says China military base not welcome

SYDNEY (Reuters): Fiji is opposed to China setting up a military base in the Pacific Islands, Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka said, adding that it did not need such a base to project power, as shown by an intercontinental ballistic missile test. Strategically placed between the United States and Asia, the Pacific Islands are a focus of rivalry between Washington and Beijing for security ties.

The islands were trying to cope with a big, powerful China seeking to exert its influence, Rabuka told the National Press Club in the Australian capital, adding that Beijing understood he would lobby other Pacific leaders against such a base. "Pacific leaders in all their recent discussions have tried to go for policies that are friendly to all and enemies to none - and it is a fairly tough course to steer, but it is possible," he added.

The Pacific would feel the impact of any conflict over the Taiwan Strait between major powers, a possibility already being planned for by China and other nations, he said. Fiji opposes establishment of a military base by China, he said, in response to queries on Beijing's security ambitions in a region where it already has a security pact with the Solomon Islands and a police presence in several nations. "If they want to come, who would welcome them?" he said. "Not Fiji." China's embassy in Fiji did not immediately respond to a request for comment, and Beijing has previously ruled out establishing a military base in the Solomon Islands.

China did not need a base to project power, Rabuka added, as Beijing tested an intercontinental ballistic missile in September that flew over Fiji to land in international waters. China showed off its coast guard to 10 visiting leaders of Pacific islands in May, after registering two dozen of its vessels with a regional fisheries commission last year, though it has yet to start South Pacific patrols. China's coast guard would need to "observe our sovereignty, our sovereign waters", Rabuka said. Fiji's cooperation with China to develop infrastructure should not affect how it interacts with Australia, New Zealand and the United States, he added.

To manage strategic competition in the region, Rabuka is trying to build support for an Ocean of Peace treaty to ensure outsiders respect its unity and the "rejection of coercion as a means to achieve security, economic or political advantage". Leaders of the 18 members of the Pacific Islands Forum will consider the pact at a meeting in September.

Mass evacuations

ATHENS: Hundreds of people have been evacuated as a major wildfire continues to burn out of control on the Greek island of Crete. The fire, which has been fanned by gale-force winds, broke out in rugged forested terrain near the municipality of Ierapetra.

The flames have spread rapidly, threatening homes, tourist accommodation, and critical infrastructure, including a fuel station. The fire front now extends over at least 6km, according to emergency services, making containment increasingly difficult. Thick smoke has engulfed the wider area, reducing visibility to near zero in places. Authorities have also ordered the mass evacuation of hotels, rental farms and homes in the Ferma municipality, as the flames approach the area. The operation is underway with the support of the fire service, police and local volunteers. So far, approximately 1,500 people have been evacuated from surrounding settlements and tourist areas and moved to Ierapetra. Around 200 evacuees are being sheltered in the town's indoor sports arena.

Smoke from the fire has stretched as far as Makry Gialos beach, 10km (6 miles) from Achlia in Lassithi where firefighters were battling the blaze. The main road near the settlement of Agia Fotia has been closed by police, who have urged residents and visitors to avoid all non-essential travel due to hazardous air quality, extreme heat, and falling ash. — BBC



GAZA CITY: A Palestinian wounded in an Israeli strike is treated in al-Shifa Hospital.

Russia ramps up its offensive, putting pressure on Ukraine

KYIV (AP): An emboldened Russia has ramped up military offensives on two fronts in Ukraine, scattering Kyiv's precious reserve troops and threatening to expand the fighting to a new Ukrainian region as each side seeks an advantage before the fighting season wanes in the autumn.

Moscow aims to maximize its territorial gains before seriously considering a full ceasefire, analysts and military commanders said. Ukraine wants to slow the Russian advance for as long as possible and extract heavy losses. Kremlin forces are steadily gaining ground in the strategic eastern logistics hub of Pokrovsk, the capture of which would hand them a major battlefield victory and bring them closer to acquiring the entire Donetsk region. The fighting there has also brought combat to the border of the neighboring Dnipropetrovsk region for the first time.

In an effort to prevent Moscow from bolstering those positions in the east, Ukrainian forces are trying to pin down some of Russia's best and most battle-hardened troops hundreds of kilometers away, in the northeast Sumy region. "The best-case scenario for Ukraine," said Russian-British military historian Sergey Radchenko, "is that they're able to stall or stop the Russian advance" in the Ukrainian industrial heartland known as Donbas, which includes the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Then Ukraine

could "use that as the basis for a ceasefire agreement." "There's a better chance for Russia to come to some kind of terms with Ukraine" in the fall when the Russians "see the extent of their offensive," Radchenko added.

While the battles rage, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is waiting to learn whether the Trump administration will support tougher sanctions against Russia and back a European idea to establish a "reassurance force" to deter Moscow. A setback came with the US decision to halt some weapons shipments to Ukraine out of concern over America's own depleted stockpiles. In the Sumy region, Ukrainian forces face a constant barrage of aerial glide bombs, drones and relentless assaults by small groups of Russian infantrymen. They endure the attacks to prevent Russian forces from being moved to other battlegrounds in the eastern Donetsk region. Ukrainian forces intensified their own attacks in Sumy in April and even conducted a small offensive into Russia's neighboring Kursk region to prevent up to 60,000 battle-hardened Russian forces from being moved to reinforce positions in the Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions, Ukraine's top army commander, Gen. Oleksandr Syrskiy, said last week. If those troops had been moved, they could have increased the tempo of Russian attacks across the front line and stretched Ukrainian forces thin.

The strategy did not come without criticism. Commanders who were ordered to execute it complained that it resulted in unnecessary loss of life. Russian forces have penetrated up to 7 kilometers (4 miles) into the northern Sumy region from different directions along the border. Ukrainian forces are determined to keep them there to avoid freeing up Russian forces to fight in the east. So far they have succeeded, locking up to 10,000 Russian troops in the Glushkovsky district of the Kursk region alone, where Ukraine maintains a small presence after being mostly forced out by Russian and North Korean troops earlier in the year. The war's largest battle is being waged in Donetsk as Russia inches toward its stated goal of capturing all of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

Unable to tackle the strategically significant logistical hub of Pokrovsk directly, Russian forces are attempting to encircle the city, a maneuver that requires encroaching on the borders of the Dnipropetrovsk region. Bringing the war to a sixth Ukrainian region would be detrimental for Ukrainian morale and give Russia more leverage in negotiations if its forces manage to carve out a foothold there. Sabotage groups have crossed the border, only to be eliminated by Ukrainian forces. But in time, commanders fear that Russia will advance as Ukraine continues to grapple with severe shortages.

Europe on high alert as surprise early heatwave creeps north

PARIS (AFP): Schools were partially shut in France, iconic monuments closed to tourists, and cities across Europe put on high alert as a record-breaking early summer heatwave spread across the continent. Withering conditions that have baked southern Europe for days crept northward where such extremes are much rarer, with Paris on "red alert" and high temperature warnings issued in Belgium, Switzerland and Germany.

Tens of thousands of people have died in Europe during past heatwaves, prompting authorities to issue warnings for old and young, the sick, and others vulnerable to what experts call a "silent killer". Scientists said it was unusual for such heat to hit Europe this early in the season, but that human-caused climate change from burning fossil fuels was making these once-rare events far more likely. Records have tumbled, with France and Portugal experiencing their highest-ever single-day

temperatures in June, Spain its warmest June, and the Netherlands its hottest opening day of July.

In England, the weather service said it was the hottest June since records began in 1884. The Mediterranean Sea recorded a new June high of 26.01 degrees Celsius, just the latest abnormal marine heatwave in the basin, harming sea life and turbocharging storms. The summit of the Eiffel Tower was shut for a second straight day, and was due to remain closed. In Brussels, the city's Atomium monument, famed for its giant stainless steel balls, was exceptionally shut as temperatures reached 37 degrees Celsius (98 degrees Fahrenheit). Under scorching skies, Paris imposed its first "red alert" in five years, empowering officials to limit or ban sporting events, festivals and school outings for children.

The heat is expected to peak, with Paris facing highs of 38C, but authorities have extended the alert.

Some parks will remain open all night, pools have extended visiting hours, and cooling centres in churches and museums are offering respite from the lack of greenery and concrete surfaces that amplify the heat. "We're living a bit like moles," Nicole, 85, told AFP in the stifling air of her apartment in a tower block in Paris. Across France, the government said it expected nearly 1,350 schools to be partially or completely shut, with teachers complaining that overheated and unventilated classrooms were making students unwell. Authorities are fanning out to check on the elderly, chronically ill and the homeless.

"When it's cold, I add blankets and hats. But when it's hot like this, what can I do? Nothing, just wait for it to pass and hope I don't faint," said Jo, a 55-year-old homeless man in Bordeaux, in southwestern France. As far north as the Netherlands, some regions were placed on the second-highest alert,

with temperatures forecast to reach 38C. Schools in Rotterdam and across West Brabant province adopted "tropical schedules" to ensure students started and finished earlier to avoid the worst of the day's heat. In Germany, temperatures could peak at 40C. In Spain and Portugal, where highs of 46C were recorded in some locations over the weekend, a level of respite was expected, though temperatures could still exceed 40C in parts.

A two-year-old boy died in northeastern Spain after being left in the back of a car parked in the sun, police said. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) said its teams of volunteers had mobilised across Europe to give out water and assist the most vulnerable. "Extreme heat doesn't have to be a disaster: knowledge, preparedness and early action make all the difference," said IFRC spokesman Tommaso Della Longa.

Japan islanders sleepless after 900 earthquakes in two weeks

TOKYO: More than 900 earthquakes have shaken a remote and sparsely populated island chain in southern Japan over two weeks, keeping residents anxious and awake all night. Seismic activity has been "very active" in the seas around the Tokara islands since 21 June, authorities said after a magnitude 5.5 earthquake struck.

There have been no reports of damage and no tsunami warning has been raised but authorities have advised residents to prepare to evacuate if needed. "It's very scary to even fall asleep," one resident told the regional broadcaster MBC. "It feels like it's always shaking." The Tokara area has experienced clusters of earthquakes in the past but the frequency of the most recent tremors has been unusual, according to local

media. Japan is one of the most seismically active nations on Earth, owing to its location on the so-called Pacific Ring of Fire, where many tectonic plates meet. It experiences about 1,500 earthquakes each year.

About 700 people live on seven of the 12 Tokara islands. There are no hospitals on some of these far-flung islands - the nearest is at least six hours by ferry to the prefectural capital, Kagoshima. "You can hear a strange roar from the ocean before the quakes hit, especially at night. It's eerie," Chizuko Arikawa from Akusekijima island told The Asahi Shimbun. "Everyone's exhausted. We just want it to stop," said the 54-year-old, who lives by the sea and runs a cattle farm with her husband.

"After so many quakes, it now feels like the ground is shaking even when it's not,"

said Isamu Sakamoto, 60, head of the local residents' association in Akusekijima. "The quakes start with a jolt from below, then the house sways. It's sickening," he said. In Toshima village, some residents have been sleep-deprived and tired, authorities said, as they urged the media to stop inundating locals with queries. "We ask that you be considerate and not make excessive inquiries or interviews," according to a notice on the village website. Some guesthouses on the Tokara islands have stopped accepting tourists because of the earthquakes, Toshima Village said on its website, noting that they might be used as shelters for locals. This series of tremors come as the country as a whole has been kept on edge by rumours that a massive, deadly quake could soon hit.

The Frontier Post

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Children of war

FOR decades, the world has watched the Palestinian-Israeli conflict unfold via headlines, footage and diplomatic statements. But beneath the geopolitics and shifting battle lines lies a quieter, more devastating tragedy: a generation of Palestinian children growing up amid violence, trauma and deprivation. These are the children of war — a lost generation whose education, mental health and dreams for the future are being systematically shattered.

In Gaza, where Israeli military operations have left entire neighborhoods in ruins, children have been disproportionately affected. According to UNICEF and Save the Children, more than half of Gaza's population is under the age of 18. That means every airstrike, every siege and every blockade hits them the hardest — physically, emotionally and mentally. Thousands of children have been killed, maimed or left orphaned by Israeli operations since Oct. 7, 2023. Many more have witnessed the death of siblings, parents or friends. These are not just statistics — they are young lives permanently scarred.

Education, one of the most fundamental rights of every child, is among the first casualties in such a conflict. Schools in Gaza and the West Bank are often closed for long stretches due to bombardment or military operations. Some are turned into shelters. Others are directly targeted. Since October 2023, hundreds of schools have been damaged or destroyed, and thousands of children have been deprived of safe and consistent access to education. The result is a generation that is increasingly falling behind — not for lack of intelligence or will, but because their environment denies them the tools they need to grow.

Even when the fighting stops — temporarily — the trauma continues. Mental health professionals working in Palestine report staggering levels of post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression and night terrors among children. These are not isolated cases. They are symptoms of a deeply broken context, where childhood has been replaced by fear and resilience is forced, not nurtured. Children draw pictures of tanks and funerals. They play games that mimic escape from drone attacks. Their worldview is shaped by checkpoints, rubble and the haunting sound of air raids.

The long-term consequences of such sustained trauma are difficult to fully comprehend, but early signs are already emerging. Studies have shown that war-affected children are more likely to suffer from behavioral and developmental issues, poor academic performance and emotional withdrawal. The trauma does not just vanish when the guns fall silent — it lingers, passed on silently from one generation to the next.

Yet perhaps the most damning aspect of this tragedy is how invisible these children have become to the international community. The war in Gaza and the broader Palestinian territories is often discussed in terms of ceasefires, security and statehood — rarely in terms of its human toll, particularly on the young. The language of diplomacy too often sanitizes the brutal reality on the ground.

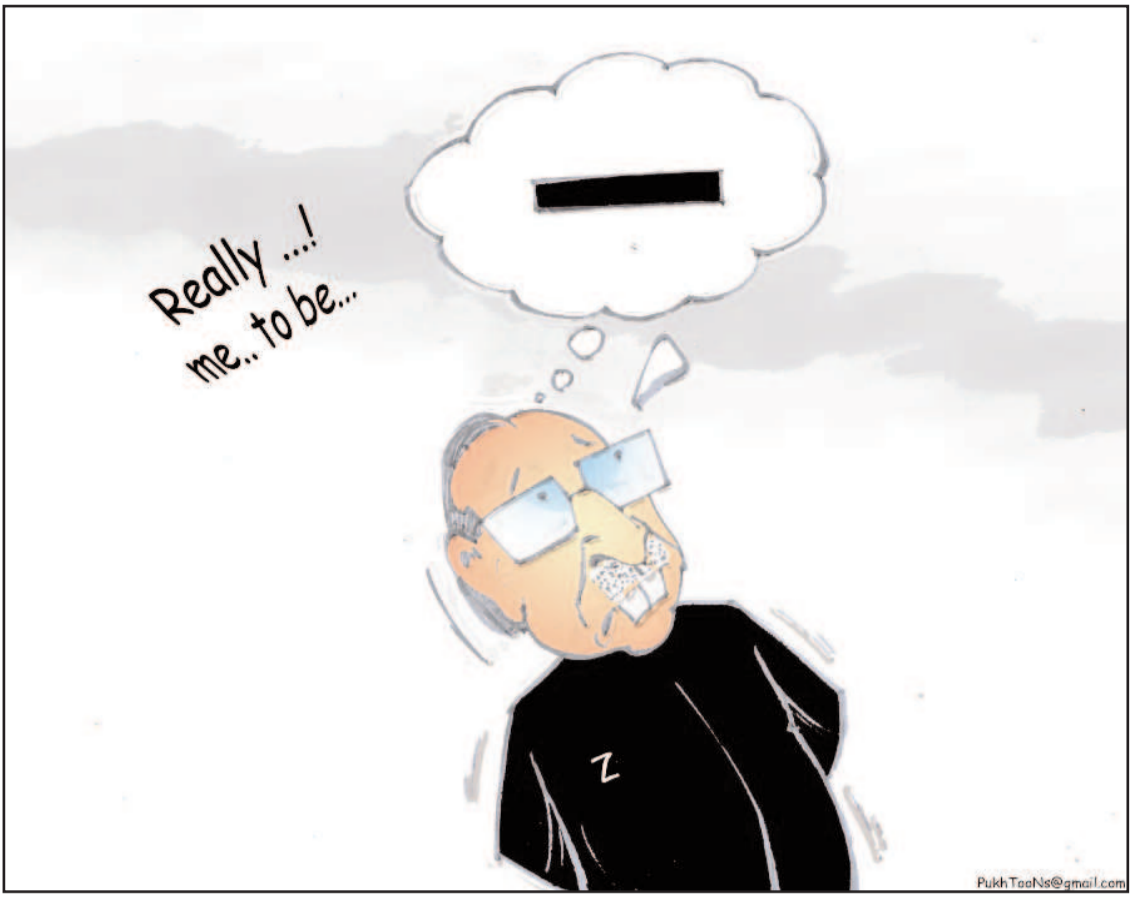
In global forums, the deaths of children are described as “collateral damage,” and the destruction of schools is brushed aside as “unfortunate consequences.” But behind these euphemisms are real human stories — of 10-year-olds who no longer speak, of toddlers who flinch at the sound of thunder, of teenagers who have never known a single day without the threat of war.

There is, of course, no simple solution to the broader conflict. But there is a moral imperative — urgent and universal — to protect children. That means demanding accountability for attacks on schools and civilian infrastructure. It means providing funding for trauma counseling and mental health services in war zones. It means supporting organizations that rebuild classrooms, train teachers and offer safe spaces for learning. It means treating the right to a childhood not as a luxury, but as a cornerstone of any sustainable peace.

We must stop thinking of Palestinian children merely as victims of a political conflict. They are not footnotes to be skimmed over. They are the heart of the story — and if we allow their suffering to continue, we are complicit in the creation of a generation that has known only violence and despair. In every war, there are casualties we can count and others we cannot. The lost innocence of children falls in the latter. Let us not wait for another headline, another outrage, another round of violence. The children of Palestine need more than sympathy. They need solidarity. They need protection. And, above all, they need hope — something far too many of them have been forced to live without.

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Yerevan and Baku now have a shared enemy in Moscow

Nicholas Castillo

HAVING spent much of the last 35 years in conflict with one another, the governments of Armenia and Azerbaijan now have a shared target of hostility: the Kremlin. Recent days have seen the shaky Azerbaijan-Russia relationship engulfed in anger over the deaths of two Azerbaijani citizens in Russian police custody following the arrest of dozens of Azerbaijanis in the city of Yekaterinburg in connection with a 2001 cold-case murder.

Azerbaijani medical examiners have ruled that one of the deaths was caused by injuries inflicted in custody, while the other has been attributed to a heart attack due to post-traumatic shock.

The response from Baku was swift. On June 28, Azerbaijani officials summoned Russia's chargé d'affaires over the incident and the next day canceled a high-level parliamentary visit to Moscow citing “violence against Azerbaijanis.” Azerbaijani security personnel then arrested the remaining employees of Moscow-funded Sputnik Azerbaijan on June 30, the Russian outlet that had been ordered to close several weeks prior.

Baku's State Prosecutor announced on July 1 that it had opened an investigation into what a statement described as the “torture and murder with extreme cruelty of citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan and persons of Azerbaijani origin.” In what would appear to be a retaliatory show of force by Azerbaijan, groups of Russian nationalists in Azerbaijan have been detained on accusations of drug trafficking — a charge that is routinely deployed in cases involving government critics or opponents. Videos released show the arrested Russians forced to walk and crouch in a humiliating manner. Detainees have appeared in court seemingly bearing the marks of beatings. Independent Russian media have identified several of the men as IT professionals who left Russia after the announcement of military mobilization in 2022.

Russia has in turn responded with more detentions, targeting the head of an Azerbaijan-Ural cultural organization.

Azerbaijan's media space has also contributed to the anti-Russia campaign. On June 29, the government-run Azerbaijan Press Agency published an article titled “Same Russia, same scenario: Chauvinism and cruelty,” which connected the killings to the mistreatment of labor migrants and the invasion of Ukraine.

An opinion article on the pro-government Aze.media argued “the massacre orchestrated by Russian security forces in Yekaterinburg cannot be written off as an isolated incident. It is part of a broader pattern of [the] Kremlin's anti-Azerbaijani policies,” going on to connect the incident to the accidental shooting down of a civilian Azerbaijani Airlines (AZAL) flight by Russian air-defense in December 2024.

Indeed, relations between Russia and Azerbaijan have been on edge following Russia's refusal to promptly acknowledge its own fault in the disaster which killed 38 passengers and crew members. Russia's lackluster response was greeted with condemnation by Azerbaijan's strongman President Ilham Aliyev, who went on to cancel his attendance at Moscow's all-important Victory Day parade in May at the last minute.

Next door to Azerbaijan, Armenia-Russia ties have been declining since 2020, when Russia failed to effectively intervene in that year's war between Yerevan and Baku despite a longstanding alliance with Armenia. Further offensives by Azerbaijan in the following years only fuelled Yerevan's pivot away from Russia, with recent years seeing more outreach by Armenia to Europe and the United States.

Meanwhile, in response, Russia ratcheted up media attacks on Armenia's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and his government, leading Armenian elites to accuse Russia of waging “hybrid warfare.” Russia and Armenia's government have squared off this June over the arrests of Russian-Armenian billionaire Samvel Karapetyan and high-profile clergymen over accusations of fomenting a coup plot.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov publicly described the arrest of church officials as “unjustified attacks without any serious grounds,” while Russian propagandist Margarita Simonyan went as far as to describe Pashinyan as the “Antichrist's anus.”

Armenia's Foreign Minister responded by encouraging Lavrov to “refrain from interfering in Armenia's domestic affairs and internal politics.” Armenian officials are now openly advocating for blocking Russian television broadcasts into Armenia. Yet, core to understanding the current dynamic is that while Armenia operates from a position of vulnerability, Azerbaijan confronts Russia from a position of strength.

Since 2020, Azerbaijan has seen a series of events hinting at a rise to becoming a regional power. Chief among these has been the re-acquisition by force of Nagorno-Karabakh by in September 2023, allowing Aliyev to present a total victory to his population in the decades-long conflict with Armenia. Russian peacekeepers stationed in Nagorno-Karabakh did nothing to deter the Azerbaijani offensive that put an end to the long-running Armenian separatist project.

Yet it has not been Baku's victory against Armenia that has likely granted Aliyev greater confidence. In the last few years, Baku has dismantled what little independent media existed in the country, increased its role in global energy markets and trade routes and hosted COP 29 in 2024 in the face of accusations of rights abuses and ethnic cleansing. The years leading up to the airplane crash had seen working, even positive, relations between Baku and Moscow, with the Kremlin's inaction over the Nagorno-Karabakh issue seemingly a recognition of Baku's growing power.

Pashinyan's government, on the other hand, faces increasing vulnerability at home. The government's central promise to constituents since 2023, that through pragmatic negotiations and leaving behind nationalist claims,

Armenia could achieve security and prosperity, has yet to bear fruit. There has yet to be a formal peace treaty with Azerbaijan as Baku pushes maximalist aims — demanding Armenia accept a transit corridor through its territory and modify its constitution.

In an early show of weakness in the run-up to the 2026 national elections, the governing party lost city-wide elections in Armenia's second-largest city, Gyumri, in April.

Russia, additionally, holds a great deal more leverage over Armenia than Azerbaijan. With closed borders with both Azerbaijan and Turkey, Armenia remains reliant on Russia for trade and energy. Russia supplies around 85% of all gas to Armenia and the country's energy infrastructure is largely controlled by Gazprom, giving the Kremlin more coercive cards to play against Yerevan should it see fit.

In contrast, Azerbaijan is more independent in terms of economy and energy security, with its all-important oil and gas sector profiting from Russia's post-2022 isolation.

Ironically, as both Baku and Yerevan governments fall out with Moscow, there seems little prospect that it could force a reconciliation between the two. The seven months since the Azerbaijan airlines have seen notable contact with Ukrainian officials, perhaps in an effort to demonstrate Azerbaijan's agency to Russia. But none of this has improved ties with Armenia.

While Russia's influence in Armenia and Azerbaijan appears to be in decline, the circumstances of the two cases are distinct. In the Azerbaijani case, one can imagine possible off-ramps, such as Russia offering up police to be tried for the killings or a formal apology. Baku seems well-positioned to extract these kinds of symbolic concessions.

In the Armenian case, however, Russia appears to view Pashinyan as a hostile actor and appears interested in removing him. It has several potential mechanisms to pressure Yerevan at its disposal. Time will tell the extent to which Moscow chooses to pursue either course of action.

The Moscow Times

Climate agenda makes West increasingly reliant on China

Khaled Abou Zahr

CHINA and the US last week reached an agreement to alleviate some restrictions on rare earth element exports. Under the plan, China will issue six-month export licenses for key rare earth minerals and magnets, which had been heavily restricted since April. This ban, during a period of trade turbulence, caused global shortages and disrupted many sectors, particularly renewable energy, including electric vehicles, as well as defense at a time of resurging geopolitical and military threats. This agreement will help stabilize supply chains, but it is not a “happily ever after” ending.

The trade tensions are still present. To regain access to rare earth elements, the US agreed to ease certain tech-related export controls and visa restrictions on Chinese researchers. It comes as no surprise that, during the last round of trade tensions, semiconductors and rare earth elements were at the core, as they are both — in different ways — essential to the development of the economy of the future. For now, this deal excludes military-grade materials, which shows China's leverage capacity. China accounts for 70 percent of the world's rare-earth mining and more than 90 percent of the processing, so despite efforts to replace it or find alternative sources, this pressure will continue to weigh on Western economies.

The situation regarding rare earth elements could be blamed on tariff tensions, yet — just like semiconductors — they are becoming a key asset that any country would look to secure for itself. These tensions have highlighted the vital role rare earth elements play in the renewable sector, raising questions about the sustainability of supply in a time of intensifying geopolitical competition.

In short, if Western economies fully transition to a climate-friendly structure, they will become dependent on China. Any supply disruption could severely damage these economies or even halt key sectors — especially in areas like EVs.

There are plans to replace China's supply with sources from allied countries such as Australia. But these still need to be executed, which will take at least a decade, according to several experts in media reports. One might also want to add another decade to account for the likely real-world and geopolitical delays. Moreover, it is not just about mining, as processing facilities must also be built. It is now clear that constructing alternative infrastructure will require even more time, investment and, as with anything in the Western hemisphere, environmental approvals.

Basically, rare earth element processing has significant environmental impacts, including toxic and radioactive waste, water and air pollution, high energy use and land degradation. And so, to power the climate-friendly economy, more pollution seems to be the path forward.

Innovation offers another potential route to build-

ing an independent supply chain, but it is still in its early stages. The same applies to recycling. We can already imagine the debates around this endeavor and, realistically, it may not be achieved by 2040, perhaps not even by 2050.

This state of affairs brings to mind a statement made in 2023 by Greg Hayes, then-CEO of Raytheon, who said the company had “several thousand suppliers in China and decoupling ... is impossible.” This comment, coming from a leader in the defense industry, reveals the depth of Western dependency on China and should be taken seriously. It has also been stated that the entire renewable energy sector is completely dependent on China. Thus, between the climate economy and defense, China has effectively cornered the whole Western hemisphere.

Logically, China has argued that export controls on rare earth elements are necessary to prevent Chinese-made goods from being used for military purposes that threaten its interests. And evidently, Beijing would prefer these elements to be used in the climate economy rather than in weapons systems. Yet, setting aside rising geopolitical threats, how can Europe and the US fully transition to a climate-friendly economy if that means total dependence? What if China's growing economy pushes Beijing to decide it needs to reserve this supply for its own growth? What would Europe and the US do then?

In this potential scenario, how would the West ensure high-efficiency performance in wind turbines, EVs, solar panels and energy storage systems without China? A quick search reveals that elements like neodymium, praseodymium and dysprosium are essential for powerful magnets used in EV motors and wind turbines, while lanthanum and cerium support battery and fuel cell technologies. It does not stop there but rather extends to the entire climate-friendly infrastructure. Indeed, rare earth elements also improve energy-efficient lighting, smart grid electronics and hydrogen systems. Their unique properties make them indispensable for scaling up the clean energy transition.

To be corny, there is a silver lining to this entanglement. It is that, in all logic, each party should seek continued collaboration and avoid escalating tensions. For now, there is no doubt that, in these segments, China has the upper hand, but the West has other sectors it can use as a bargaining chip. Nevertheless, while the West rebalances its supply chain — or at least begins to debate it — it may feel reverse pressure that forces diplomatic concessions in unrelated areas.

It is interesting that, in pursuit of climate ideology, the West has tied its future to China, while in pursuit of financial performance, the defense industry has done the same. Without questioning, the West has allowed China to become the kingmaker in both sectors, perhaps forgetting their true original missions.

Disaster that just passed the US Senate - II

Ezra Klein

Lago anymore. Elon Musk, very famously, is no longer on the inside of the Trump administration. And Trump himself was never truly ideologically bought in. As for JD Vance, I guess he either doesn't care enough to engage or doesn't want to talk to Donald Trump about it. The entire political economy of Trumpism is built on the fact that you don't have a strong policy process. But if a random person can get Donald Trump to like something, he can make the Republican Party do anything he wants - including supporting things like crazy tariffs that they would have never touched at other times. You've mentioned tariffs. That's actually the one economic policy topic where Trump has persistently fought with conventional Republican Party thinking over the course of 10 years now.

That's antithetical to this idea of a more dynamic American economy. AndThe fact that there was a sect of futurists who were so annoyed with Joe Biden that they decided that Trump would be their champion - it never really made sense, especially in light of his profound commitment to trade protectionism. Not just because trade is important on its own terms, but because the debate over trade protection is a question of: Are the costs of economic change worth paying for the benefits of growth and dynamism - or not? Trump has been very clear that as long as the people paying the costs meet a certain Trumpy vision of the kind of person he likes, he doesn't want change. He supported the longshoremen's union in opposing port automation because he has a longstanding personal

relationship with the head of the East Coast dockworkers. And because it's the kind of people he likes - burly white guys. He also likes the coal mining industry. It's very obsolete, but he doesn't want it to be put out of business by change and dynamics. I think one should have known that on some level. But the other thing I would say is that everything with Trump ends up being closer to base line Republican Party politics than it kind of seems at first glance. So Tulsi Gabbard is his director of national intelligence, but we bombed Iran. R.F.K. Jr. is the H.H.S. secretary, but we're still not regulating the fast food industry.

No, we're cutting Medicaid. There are aspects of MAHA that kind of remind me of an Ezra Klein column from 15 years ago. But none of that is actually happening. There's no actual taking on agribusiness concerns or any drive to

transform the food system to make people healthier. There's no aspect of Trumpism that's like: I'm going to take on the stakeholders in conservative politics in a really meaningful way. There's a lot of personalism. He can push the "No tax on tips" idea onto the political agenda, but he's not going to say we're doing that instead of a business tax cut. We're not doing choice-making populism where the Chamber of Commerce says: No, Donald, you can't do that because we need our business tax cuts. It's more of a “yes, and” approach. Trump feels that it all worked out in the first term, and people liked that first Trump economy - Here's the thing about Donald Trump: Everybody knows that he has an incredible intuition for public opinion - what's popular and what's not. Granted, this bill has a lot

(Continued on Page 7)

Disaster that just passed the US Senate - II Who's really to blame for Labour's troubles

(Continued from Page 6)

of bad ideas, but at least it's really popular in polling, right?

[Laughs.] No. No? [Laughs.] The polling is terrible. People really don't like Medicaid cuts. This is a big political transformation of the past decade, that Medicaid has become dramatically more popular. A lot of people have had Medicaid themselves, or they have a friend or family member who's on Medicaid. And they basically like it. This has become a popular program as there has been class realignment. But as rich people become Democrats, they still feel sentimental about the poor. And as poor people become Republicans, they still like having health insurance. This has become really toxically unpopular in a striking way - but it hasn't received much attention. I wouldn't say the dominant story of Trump's first six months in government has been the one "big beautiful bill." It is extremely unpopular. And I'm actually surprised at how unpopular it is, given how little attention it has gotten.

You and I have talked a lot over the years about what gets called populism. The argument is that the big problem for the Democrats is they don't take enough popular positions or abandon enough unpopular positions. One of Donald Trump's strengths is that he's done a bunch of that - moderating on Medicare and Social Security. But there's always been this other question: Even if you are taking a popular or unpopular position, how much attention is that position actually getting? What is politics really about? Is it about your good issues or your bad issues? One of the arguments you've been making about Democrats in the past month or so is that they're not doing enough. Or not succeeding in doing enough to make politics about this bill. Which should not be a crazy thing for politics to be about. This is a \$5 trillion bill - depending on how you count it - that's actually going to be the signature legislation of Donald Trump's term. Walk me through that critique. Is that a problem with the Democrats - or with the media or voters who aren't paying attention? How do you understand the sort of failure of this bill to become the thing we are talking about? It's a mixed bag. On some level, it's just harder to get people engaged in discussions about J.C.T. dynamic scoring and Medicaid eligibility rules - compared to something like our deploying Marines to the streets of Los Angeles. That said, eight years ago, the Affordable Care Act repeal was a really big deal. There were big protests around it, largely because Democrats had built up a health care advocacy infrastructure during the A.C.A. years.

But much of that advocacy has withered over the past few years. Partly because Democrats are more focused on climate change, and partly because the "Medicare for all" wars have become an ugly pain point for people. If you go stand up and say you really want to talk about health care, you're going to get a bunch of people saying we should do Medicare for all. And now you're fighting with people to your left instead of making a point about Republicans. That said, party leaders like Chuck Schumer and Hakeem Jeffries are talking about this a lot. They're constantly pushing to get more people discussing it and encouraging their colleagues in Congress to engage more on the issue. I think a big problem is that the Democratic Party is leaderless at the moment. The leadership they have is held in low regard by their own voters. And there's a lot of interest in factional infighting. For instance, we can have debates about abundance or about Zohran Mamdani. My Twitter feed is national, and there's more debate right now about the New York City mayoral primary than about the actually national "big beautiful bill." Yes, and it's because in a genuine way, Democrats are interested in stories that have implications for factional infighting. I think one of the ironies of this bill is that all Democrats agree on it: Jared Golden, Marie Gluesenkamp Perez and Adam Gray - the most moderate members in the House think it's terrible and are all voting no. The most liberal members also don't like it, so there's nothing to fight about. And Republicans or conservative people are pretty disengaged from it, too. They're not making a lot of noise about it, which I think is tactically savvy on their part. You could call it a failure of the media. I wish the mainstream media would only run articles about the things I think are important. But the reality is we're doing business here. My articles on this subject do not perform as well as my articles on other things that have more juice.

Let me ask you about that. When we were at Vox, we both covered the Trump administration in its first term in their effort to repeal Obamacare. Maybe I'm mistaken, but I remember that being a dominant news story for an extended period. I'm not sure if that's because there was less that happened in the middle of it - like us bombing Iran. I don't know if it was because it was a clearer narrative. I have this view that these massive omnibus bills have become harder for people to talk about because there's just too much going on in them. I think this is actually a problem for Build Back Better, which Democrats had trouble messaging and getting people to think about because it just did 80 different things. I think it was a little bit true with the Inflation Reduction Act. There really does feel like there's a difference between how central the Obamacare repeal effort was in Trump 1.0 and the way attention feels like it slides off this in

Trump 2.0.

I think the analogy to the Biden-era megabills is a good one. At the time, Democrats were claiming to believe that if people were paying a lot of attention to the contents of Build Back Better, they would love it and that there would be this outpouring of public enthusiasm. They were struggling to get attention for a bill that was a very miscellaneous hodgepodge of things. I would say that's probably working in Trump's favor right now. People are having trouble getting their minds around an initiative that's not very popular. There's always this idea that Trump is trying to distract our attention from things. Probably they didn't have a war with Iran for the purposes of distracting our attention from this legislative fight. But that is what happens when you do big, dramatic things on other issues and just kind of say: You know what? I'm going to trust that congressional leaders can get this done without me spending a lot of time driving attention to it. I think that might be a good strategy. During the A.C.A. repeal fight, Trump really pivoted his messaging - talking a lot about the need to get it done and staging big, splashy events with House Republicans. He believed, as presidents tend to - and you've written about this many times over the years - that if a president talks a lot about something, it will make people want to do what the president is saying. But all the evidence shows that's not true.

I think Trump is wisely not talking about this and saying it's party politics. He can convey his opinions to senators without making it a dominant story in the news. At the same time, I've been thinking about how unbelievably uninspired the Democratic messaging is on this. When I was preparing for this conversation, I was watching Chuck Schumer - or Hakeem Jeffries on the House floor, holding up an Elmo puppet. Whether or not the C-SPAN messaging is good or bad, it's just not the kind of thing that breaks through. Democrats have a lot of money in their campaign accounts. You could imagine really slick videos where you're doing the man-on-the-street thing with people who use Medicaid in very Trumpy districts: talking about what Medicaid means to them, what it's done for them and how they would feel if it were slashed to the bone or at these rural hospitals. I'm not saying everything would break through. But it doesn't seem impossible to me that, if you had millions of dollars to message things, you could come up with something that would dramatize what is happening here in ways that might get some attention. Democrats and Republicans seem to have allowed this to become an inside game in Congress, and inside games are not that attractive for people to cover. That hasn't been true, say, on immigration stuff - where Democrats are getting arrested by ICE because they're trying to create mass mobilization events.

I feel like the news media is always thinking about whether this thing will pass. And if it seems they have the votes, the coverage kind of turns down because we mostly cover uncertainty and conflict. But there needs to be something. And it doesn't feel impossible to me to create interesting content about this. It just feels like if everybody is playing by real congressional rules, then the attention goes to the things that do not work that way and have more compelling visuals and mass participation in them. I think that the younger, especially more media savvy and safe district members are not serving their caucus goals very well. They are putting a lot of time into thinking of ways to be creative about the immigration issue and be seen as fighting Trump on the level of tyranny. We had these nationwide "No Kings" protests that were very successful and well organized. It got attention, and there were good visuals. Those could have been "No Medicaid Cuts" protests, but they weren't. We know that the democracy message has fallen flat in the Trump districts. Whereas the health care stuff is shocking to Trump voters. It's new information.

And then if you ask the frontline members what they're most comfortable talking about, it's Medicaid, and it's O.B.B.B.A. But when it comes to immigration, it's more like "eh" on this immigration stuff. I think there is blame to be leveled at Schumer and Jeffries for the lack of creativity in their own messaging, a lack of skill, things like that. But also there are many dimensions of political efficacy. I don't think either of those guys was ever known as viral-video guys. The members who are gaining clout inside the coalition are finding that the way to do it is through advocacy on more postmaterial issues - the kinds of things that are more engaging to Democratic donors. I don't think it's serving the country well or the party all that well, either. When Cory Booker did his talking filibuster, his key message point was about Medicaid and Medicare. Obviously he talked about a lot of things because he was going for 24 hours - Twenty-five.

Twenty-five. But that was the focus. A lot of this goes back to this factional argument. In 2017, Democrats felt more self-confident about the party. They're like: What brings us together is health care, and we're going to talk about that. And now there's a lot of uncertainty, depression and infighting: What brings us together is health care - and that's boring. Let us fight with each other instead. Something I'm taking out of what you're saying or that feels true to me: A lot of what is engaging Democrats and liberals - and, certainly, abundance has been part of this - is a working backward from 2028. I feel Democrats' minds are not even in 2026, in the

midterms. It's in 2028. They're sort of disassociating, in many ways, from this moment.

Zohran Mamdani might be the exception. But people are interested in him not necessarily because they care that much about the New York City mayoralty, but because maybe he represents the future - where the kinds of Democrats that democratic socialists actually want are the ones running the party. People are doing a lot of projecting forward. Mamdani holds forth the possibility that, in the future, Democrats will break with the longstanding bipartisan pro-Israel consensus. And that's interesting. You look at something like the New Jersey gubernatorial primary - it was just a bunch of Democrats running. Mikie Sherrill won. Good for her. I like her. She's against Medicaid cuts. But so is everybody, right? It's just about New Jersey, and therefore people are appropriately not interested unless they happen to live there. But what happens between now and 2028 is important for millions of people. It would be good to get some more focus and some more attention on it, even though it doesn't connect to "blue sky" questions or questions about what the future of Democrats will be.

Everyone agrees that the future of Democrats is that they're going to support progressive taxation and a social safety net. I actually think that's important and the actual foundation. Yes, it's funny - one of the critiques I got over the past couple months that I wasn't expecting was people being like: "Abundance" doesn't talk about things like Medicaid or universal health care. And that supposedly shows you don't care. But it's like: No - I just thought that was settled. I didn't think I needed to edit my support for Medicaid or universal health care. It's a great example. If you had put a chapter in the book where you talked about how Medicaid is good and we should have incremental expansions of health care access, people would have read it and thought: That's a boring chapter. Why is it in the book? It's not good content to reiterate Democratic Party conventional wisdom. But there are millions of people with health care on the line, and it's important to find ways to talk about and get people engaged.

But there's so much investment in: What does this mean for 2028? What are the prospects for generational change in the Democratic Party? That's interesting to people. I've honestly heard more about the David Hogg infighting around the Democratic Party and primarying older Democrats. I've been thinking a lot about the dynamics that sustain attention. You get attention on one thing. There have been plenty of tweets on this or a video or floor speech. But the question of: How do you sustain attention? It requires people arguing about a thing. And the other thing that I think is real here is the dynamics of social media algorithms, which means that people are mainly talking to others within their coalition. And so arguments happening within the coalition are very salient. And then arguments between the coalitions are much less so - there's less engagement between the two sides. The things that they debate become a big deal during an election. But in off times it actually creates this sort of weird dynamic where it's like all the Democrats are against this. You're an attentional merchant. What do you think would make this more salient? What do you think the actual hooks of it are? I do think, obviously, Medicaid cuts and hospital closures are good. Good for getting attention - not that you're super pro Medicaid cuts, right? [Laughs.]

Yes, it's the attention-grabbing part. Republicans and conservatives writ large have been pretty disciplined about not debating this kind of issue in a way that's a little bit challenging to deal with. I do think that it would be helpful to have more of an affirmative agenda on health care, something people could actually talk about and argue over. If you could get people together on the same issue - how we want to make health care more affordable for the American people - because they want to make it less affordable - then you can have a somewhat more focused and structured argument that hopefully gets some people on the right to articulate their opinions about this. Otherwise, it's too easy to sort of let things slide. You raised the point that political media is a very interested in process and in wins and losses. The Republican Senate margin is just big enough that I don't think anybody thinks: This is not going to pass. The question is: What will this be? The House majority is thin, but House moderates have never blocked a bill, as far as I can remember. I'm sure it happened in the 1870s or something, but it has always been Senate moderates who have more independent stature, or are sort of known in their home states. But we're no longer in a mode where Susan Collins, Lisa Murkowski and one other person can block this thing.

Josh Hawley wrote a piece in The New York Times saying that the Medicaid cuts were bad. There's a weirder dynamic here and a more exploitable dynamic than just: Democrats like Medicaid, and Republicans don't. A bunch of the rising populist generation of Republicans think they shouldn't be doing this, and have clearly just been cowed into submission. I think that's right, and it should be a good opportunity for things. I saw, for the first time this week, Medicaid protesters at the Capitol. People in wheelchairs were getting arrested and zip-tied to chairs - to keep the Capitol safe, I guess, from people who can't walk. You know how seri-

ously Donald Trump and the Republicans take the safety of the US Capitol.

The integrity of the US Capitol has always been his top thing. So maybe it's just about to begin now, this mobilization. I think a great thing for Zohran Mamdani to do would be to spend some time talking about a big consensus issue. One thing I've been thinking about is: In whose interest is it to facilitate a lack of factional infighting? And it's the guy who just won the contentious primary. He already won. Now he needs to remind people who didn't vote for him of all the stuff they agree with him about. It's just an amazing revealed insight into how weird the dynamics of political attention are. Because I'm not saying you're wrong - you're right. But it's obvious to both of us that it would be more meaningful for the 33-year-old assembly member who won a New York mayoral primary to really engage on this Medicaid bill than for all of the Democratic politicians who actually hold office and might have a vote. [Laughs.] There's something about the way attention does not accrue to power that's really interesting. Hakeem Jeffries can't get people to pay attention to this, and he's the minority leader in the House.

I agree with you: Zohran Mamdani could. A.O.C. has obviously been messaging about it, but I think she could focus on it more. Attention is just such an unevenly distributed capacity. Yes, and you know this old saw: Dog bites man and man bites dog. Of course the Democratic leaders are saying this is bad. Jimmy Kimmel played an important role in the A.C.A. repeal fight - With his story about pre-existing conditions. Yes. In part because he's not a very political person. So when he decided to talk about something, it was like: Oh, my God, Jimmy Kimmel! I agreed with the point he was making, but it's not like nobody else had ever thought of that in the preceding 10 years of talking about this. [Laughs.]

It was just: You heard from somebody fresh and somebody famous making a really sort of banal point about the importance of those pre-existing conditions regulations. Everybody likes to talk about who is and isn't going on "Joe Rogan." Where's he at on Medicaid cuts? I don't know, and that's interesting. Obviously I hope everybody listens to "The Ezra Klein Show" and talks about this with their friends. Because one of the things about attention in a social media era is we're not passive, helpless victims of the attention economy. We decide to an extent what to pay attention to. What to give hearts on, what to argue about, what to retweet or what to discuss with our friends. Part of the message here is the metamesage. You, the listener, ought to try to increase your personal level of engagement with this topic and with content related to it - rather than being monomanically focused only on factional positioning for the future.

It's good to talk about abundance - I think it's important. It's good to talk about the housing legislation that's pending in California - that's a big one. But we also need to talk about aspects of consensus. I think that's a good place to end. Always our final question: What are three books you'd recommend to the audience? Laura Spinney's book "Proto: How One Ancient Language Went Global." It's about the rise of the Proto-Indo-European language. That's a really good one. "Wuthering Heights," a classic novel that I just finished. I also revisited Paul Starr's classic "The Social Transformation of American Medicine" because I've been trying to get my attention back on the health care issue. Did you really? Or are you just saying you did?

No - I picked it up, and I was reading through it. I wanted to read about the origins of our path-dependent health care system. I will tell you: I did not do a cover-to-cover reread. That book is great. And just while we're discussing old health care books: If anyone wants to read a book about how differently health care and policy processes work - something you and I talk about sometimes when we get together is that it feels like there's no policy process anymore. But David Broder wrote a book about the 1994 health care fight, the Bill Clinton health care fight, called "The System." If you read that book and about how much energy went into the crafting, debating, recrafting and debating and committee members and everything of the Clinton health care bill - and then you think about the insanely slapdash way a giant bill has been put together now: barely debated, with things traded in and out and no serious analysis. I don't want to say it's unserious - because the consequences here are deadly serious. But there's been a real deterioration of the procedural scaffolding and deliberative structure of politics and how we make bills, particularly on the Republican side - although not only. I think people would be more shocked by it than they realize. Yes, because if you read Jonathan Cohn's book "The Ten Year War," about Obamacare, it's not the same committee-driven process from Broder's book. It has become more leadership-driven, but they were still very focused on the actual policy stakes. At critical points, people in the White House say you have to do it this way for boring wonk reasons. And lots of members of Congress really don't want to - they're pushing them on the policy merits really hard. That kind of thing seems completely out the window these days. Matt Yglesias, thank you very much. Thank you.

The Washington Post

SHE is not the first Chancellor to cry in public, and may not be the last. But Rachel Reeves is the first whose tears have moved markets. No sooner had the realisation dawned that she was silently weeping – over a personal sorrow she won't be pushed into revealing, she insisted later, not a political one – as she sat beside Keir Starmer at Wednesday's prime minister's questions, than the pound was dropping and the cost of borrowing rising.

The bond traders who forced out Liz Truss's hapless chancellor still clearly rate her judgment and want her to stay, even if (perhaps especially if) some Labour MPs don't. Yet it is an extraordinary thing to live with the knowledge that a moment's uncontrolled emotion can drive up the cost of a nation's mortgages, just as a misjudged stroke of the budget pen can destroy lives.

The most striking thing about her tears, however, was Starmer's failure to notice. Intent on the Tory benches opposite, the prime minister simply ploughed on, not realising that his closest political ally was dissolving beside him. Though within hours, a clearly mortified Starmer had thrown a metaphorical arm around her, and Reeves herself was back out talking up her beloved fiscal rules as if nothing had happened. But it's the kind of image that sticks: her distress and his oblivion, an unfortunately convenient metaphor for all the times he has seemed oddly detached from his own government.

Quite aside from whatever private grief she is now carrying, Reeves has for years been shouldering an exhausting load. From the start, she and Morgan McSweney, Starmer's chief of staff, did an unusual amount of the heavy lifting on behalf of their oddly apolitical leader – and in government the stakes have only risen. McSweney, a natural fixer now jammed faintly awkwardly into a strategist's role, was once credited with near-mythical influence over Starmer, but for months is said to have been struggling at times to get the boss's ear.

Reeves, meanwhile, has ended up by default running much of the domestic agenda, while Starmer focuses on foreign policy crises and a handful of big issues that passionately exercise him. Since even close aides and ministers complain of never really knowing what he wants, the result is a Treasury-brained government that tends to start with the numbers and work back to what's possible, rather than setting a political goal and figuring out how to reach it.

Perhaps that makes sense to the City, but not to Labour MPs frogmarched through a series of politically toxic decisions with no obvious rationale except that the money's got to come from somewhere. To many of them, Starmer appears at best like a kind

Gaby Hinsliff

of political weekend dad: largely absent from everyday life and reluctant to get involved in political battles, but swooping in at the last minute to issue orders. Complaints of Downing Street dysfunction have been a staple under at least the last four prime ministers, but there's a weakness at the core of this No 10 that is putting the rest of government under undue strain, like a runner trying to push on through an injury who ends up pulling every other muscle in the process.

Since even close aides and ministers complain of never really knowing what he wants, the result is a Treasury-brained government that tends to start with the numbers and work back to what's possible, rather than setting a political goal and figuring out how to reach it. Perhaps that makes sense to the City, but not to Labour MPs frogmarched through a series of politically toxic decisions with no obvious rationale except that the money's got to come from somewhere.

On the left, there is growing talk of trying to force a "reset" in spring, if next year's Scottish and Welsh elections go as badly as they assume: force Reeves out, let radicalism in, fight Reform's emotive rightwing fire with a form of leftwing populism perhaps loosely resembling what the Democrats' Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez or the New York mayoral candidate Zohran Mamdani are doing in the US. It's exactly what the markets fear, judging by their reaction to Reeves' temporary wobble.

But even Labour MPs who'd never go that far are growing restless for change. Just raise taxes, cries this week's New Statesman magazine, echoing a widespread view that the fiscal straitjacket imposed by Reeves is killing the government. I argued for the same thing in the Guardian back in March, and haven't changed my mind. But the political cost of doing so is arguably higher now than it would have been then, when tax rises could plausibly still have been framed as an emergency response to Donald Trump pulling the plug on Europe's defence and forcing Britain to rearm, rather than as an admission that the government can no longer get its spending plans past its own backbenchers.

In their understandable frustration, however, some fail to ask why Reeves holds the iron grip she does: why Treasury thinking isn't more often challenged by No 10. If this government's mistakes often have her fingerprints somewhere on them, then

so do many of its successes. Last week, I was at a housing conference, surrounded by people still euphoric at getting everything they asked for in last month's spending review: unprecedented billions poured into genuinely affordable and social housing – with emphasis thankfully for once on the social – with a 10-year settlement from the Treasury, creating the long-term certainty they need to make it happen.

Angela Rayner fought like a tiger for it, but Reeves made the money happen, and the result will change lives. Children who

would have grown up in grim, frightening temporary accommodation will have safe, permanent homes. Vulnerable people will escape the clutches of unscrupulous landlords and first-time buyers will climb ladders otherwise out of reach. It's everything a Labour government exists to do, but as with so many unseen good things happening – on green energy, say, or transport – the money didn't fall from the sky and won't be there in future if an ageing and chronically unfit population carries on consuming welfare spending or health spending (the next big battleground, judging by the detail of Wes Streeting's 10-year plan) at current rates.

To a frustrated Treasury, this week's rebellion was evidence that Labour MPs don't live in the real world, where hard choices must be faced for good things to happen. But, to the rebels, it's evidence that the Treasury doesn't live in their real world, where vulnerable people struggle with deep-rooted health problems only aggravated by being pushed into poverty, and the Greens as much as Reform are threatening to eat them for breakfast over it. There is some truth in both arguments. But that's precisely why it is ultimately a prime minister's job, and nobody else's, to draw all the threads of the government together: to balance political yin against economic yang, such that neither dominates or bends the project out of shape. Chancellors come and, eventually, even the best go. But sometimes it's only then that you can really tell whether the problem was ever really the chancellor.

Arming Ukraine hits Putin harder than doing anything else

As the world focuses on Iran and admires the overwhelming superiority of US military firepower, the Russian president has comparatively quietly – given that war is a noisy business – expanded his campaign in Ukraine, mounting attacks towards Sumy and Kharkiv, and has made the heaviest yet missile assault on civilian targets. There was a false hope that after the US president apparently secured a ceasefire between Israel and Iran, and a proposed cessation of hostilities between Israel and Hamas, that we would see him turn his mercurial dealmaking urges back towards Ukraine.

Sadly it looks as though nothing could be further from the truth, as the US announces a halt to weapons shipments to Ukraine. With around \$66bn of military hardware already gifted to Ukraine, the US is by a distance the largest and most significant donor, but no more. Whatever excuses the White House uses, nobody really believes that the most powerful military machine ever seen on Earth is genuinely running out of ammunition. This is a sure sign that President Trump

and industrial muscle to easily out-wrestle the Kremlin and make it clear that they can never take Ukraine. Unfortunately, not only has Trump run for the hills over Ukraine but our own Prime Minister, who recently offered bold rhetoric and seemed ready to don his own combat kit and charge the Russian hordes, is now fighting internal battles as his Party's ultra-left try to take this country back to the dark ages.

The legions of Russian propaganda bots are salivating over the news today. Their messaging, coming in torrents, is believed by too many even in this country – just look at the comments section to this piece! But we should not believe them. The tyrant Putin and his rickety petro-state do not have the strength to overcome a united Europe, still one of the economic powerhouses of the world economy. We must be resolute, and clear that we will yield no more. We must replace the ammo that the US wants to keep for its own – for all that giving munitions to Ukraine has proven to be a far more cost effective way of standing Putin off than normal conventional deterrence. Slava Ukraini!

The Telegraph



SMEDA, AIM sign MoU to empower micro enterprises

LAHORE (APP): In line with Prime Minister Muhammad Shahbaz Sharif's inclusive economic vision of promoting grassroots entrepreneurship and financial inclusion, the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA) has signed a landmark Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Akhuwat Islamic Microfinance (AIM) to strengthen micro-enterprise development across Pakistan.

The MoU was formally signed at SMEDA Head Office by Socrat Aman Rana, CEO SMEDA and Dr. Amjad Saqib, Founder and Chairman of the Akhuwat Foundation, here on Saturday.

The ceremony was attended by Federal Secretary for Industries and Production Saif Anjum, Chief Credit Officer AIM Shahzad Akram and Chief Operating Officer of Pakistan Microfinance Network (PMN) Ali Basharat along with senior officials and members of SMEDA's Micro Enterprises Policy & Program Design (MEP&PD) team.

Addressing the gathering, Secretary MOIP Saif Anjum underscored the pivotal role of SMEs in Pakistan's economy, describing them as a cornerstone of resilience, innovation and job creation.

"Micro and small enterprises remain at the forefront of the Prime Minister's economic agenda. A steering committee led by myself has been established to identify and resolve key issues facing the MSME sector, including restructuring SMEDA for greater efficiency," he said.

He praised the MoU as a reflection of the commitment shown by Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif and Special Assistant to the Prime Minister (SAPM) Haroon Akhtar Khan toward empowering SMEs and strengthening Pakistan's entrepreneurial landscape.

He expressed hope that the collaboration between SMEDA and AIM would create a dynamic ecosystem for bridging financing gaps and formalizing micro enterprises across underserved regions.

Earlier, welcoming the

dignitaries, CEO SMEDA Socrat Aman Rana said, "This partnership with Akhuwat is a practical step toward realizing the Prime Minister's dream of an equitable and thriving entrepreneurial environment.

We were committed to enhancing micro-enterprises through targeted capacity building, formalization and improved regulatory support." He lauded the role of SAPM Haroon Akhtar Khan for championing the cause of micro and small businesses at the highest policy levels.

Sharing key statistics, Rana noted that Pakistan's microfinance sector currently serves nearly 12 million active borrowers with a gross loan portfolio of PKR 644 billion, reflecting a 13 percent year-on-year growth.

Notably, 46 percent of borrowers are women, highlighting the sector's inclusive and gender-responsive impact.

The largest financing segments include livestock and poultry (PKR 164 billion), agriculture (PKR 138 billion), and trade and serv-

ices (PKR 144 billion), all critical to Pakistan's rural and semi-urban micro and SMEs ecosystem. However, he observed that significant financing gaps persist, particularly in underserved regions. "This MoU represents a major breakthrough in bridging these gaps and unlocking the full potential of micro-enterprises," he added.

In his address, Dr. Amjad Saqib, Chairman of Akhuwat expressed strong commitment to realizing the shared objectives outlined in the MoU. "We believe this partnership will help micro-enterprises gain easier and enhanced access to interest-free finance across Pakistan, enabling them to play a transformative role in poverty alleviation and employment generation."

Dr. Amjad Saqib also thanked the Prime Minister, SAPM, Secretary MOIP, and CEO SMEDA for their vision and efforts in formulating a sustainable strategy that allows micro-enterprises to benefit from government-led incentives and policy reforms.



HYDERABAD: A vendor displaying handmade toys to attract customers at his roadside setup.

OPEC+ to hike petrol output to 548,000 bpd

LONDON (AFP/APP): Saudi Arabia, Russia and six other key members of the OPEC+ alliance on Saturday said they would further increase oil output in August to 548,000 barrels per day. Analysts had expected the alliance to decide on another output increase of 411,000 bpd -- the same target approved for May, June and July.

The meeting comes after a 12-day conflict between Iran and Israel, which briefly sent prices above \$80 a barrel amid concerns over a possible closing of the strategic Strait of Hormuz, a chokepoint for about one-fifth of the world's oil supply.

The wider OPEC+ group -- comprising the 12-nation Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and its allies -- began output cuts in 2022 in a bid to prop up prices.

But in a policy shift, eight alliance members spearheaded by Saudi Arabia surprised markets by announcing they would significantly raise production from May, sending oil prices plummeting. Oil prices have been hovering around a low \$65-\$70 per barrel.

UK's Octopus Energy weighs \$14b

NEW YORK (Reuters): Britain's Octopus Energy is close to hiring bankers to oversee a 10-billion-pound separation and stake sale of its technology arm Kraken Technologies, Sky News reported on Saturday, citing sources familiar with the matter. A minority stake in Kraken of up to 20% is expected to be sold to external shareholders to help validate the technology platform's valuation, the report said.

The report added that the demerger, expected within the next year, would see Octopus Energy's existing investors given shares in the newly independent Kraken business. A 10-billion-pound valuation for Kraken implies that the whole group, including its retail supply business, is worth around 15 billion pounds or more.

Business community backbone of economy

LAHORE (APP): Federal Tax Ombudsman (FTO) Coordinator Saif Ur Rehman said that the business community serves as the backbone of Pakistan's economy, playing a pivotal role in industrialization, job creation, export promotion and contributions to the national exchequer.

Talking to a delegation of business leaders led by Zahid Iqbal Arain, here on Saturday, he noted that the Federal Tax Ombudsman Dr. Asif Mahmood Jah was firmly committed to addressing the genuine tax-

related grievances of the business community on a priority basis.

Saif Ur Rehman said that the FTO was dedicated to ensuring a transparent, fair and responsive tax environment, critical for fostering trust between taxpayers and tax authorities. "To this end, the FTO has taken multiple initiatives aimed at simplifying tax procedures, resolving complaints swiftly and eliminating instances of harassment or undue delays," he added.

He said that the proactive approach of the FTO

seeks to build a more business-friendly tax system where traders and industrialists can operate with confidence and security. "The FTO office functions as an independent and impartial platform where complaints were resolved efficiently, on average, within a record time frame of 36 days."

This streamlined and transparent process, he added, was expected to strengthen investor confidence and contribute to long-term, sustainable economic growth in the country.

Tax reforms needed to safeguard FDI: Iftikhar

LAHORE (APP): Former President of the SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry Iftikhar Ali Malik has urged the government to revisit Sections 37A and 37B of the Sales Tax Act, 1990, in consultation with key stakeholders, to restore investor confidence and ensure sustainable growth across all industrial sectors.

In a statement issued on Saturday, he emphasized that these controversial provisions, which grant extensive discretionary powers to tax officials, including arrest and prosecution have created an environment of fear and uncertainty among both domestic and foreign investors.

"The business communi-

ty fully supports transparent and fair tax collection mechanisms," he said, "but strongly opposes harassment and undue interference that disrupt ease of doing business and damage industrial productivity."

He warned that unless corrective measures were taken, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) will continue to decline due to arbitrary legal provisions and an unpredictable taxation framework. "Reviving investor trust is essential for achieving economic stability and long-term growth," he added.

He called on the government to prioritize economic reforms that ensure legal protection, policy consis-

tency and a secure business climate.

He advocated for active engagement with chambers of commerce, industrialists and trade bodies to create a more inclusive investor-friendly environment.

He proposed the formation of a joint committee composed of government officials and representatives from business associations to review and suggest necessary amendments to Sections 37A and 37B of the Sales Tax Act.

"Only through participatory and consultative legislation can we establish a tax regime that is fair, predictable, and conducive to economic expansion," he added.

CAT upholds CCP's findings against PREMA

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Competition Appellate Tribunal (CAT) has upheld the findings of the Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) against M/s At-Tahur (Pvt.) Limited, the processors and marketers of PREMA Milk, for engaging in deceptive marketing practices in violation of Section 10 of the Competition Act, 2010.

The case originated from a complaint filed by the Pakistan Dairy Association

(PDA), alleging that PREMA disseminated misleading claims on social media after the Supreme Court's 2016 judgment on milk quality. PREMA's marketing campaign implied that all other dairy products, except PREMA's, were unfit for human consumption-an assertion found to lack reasonable basis and capable of harming competitors' business interests.

Following an inquiry,

CCP concluded that the company had violated Section 10(1), read with Section 10(2)(a), (b), and (c) of the Act.

It imposed a penalty of PKR 35 million and directed PREMA to issue a public clarification about its misleading claims.

While upholding CCP's findings, CAT observed that the penalty amount is excessive and reduced the fine amount from PKR 35 million to Rs 5 million.

Digitalisation vital for transparent, efficient economy, says PFC CEO

LAHORE, Jul 05 (APP): Pakistan Furniture Council (PFC) Chief Executive Officer Mian Kashif Ashfaq has said that digitalisation was the cornerstone of establishing a transparent, accountable and efficient economy.

Chairing a meeting of the PFC Board of Directors here on Saturday, he emphasized that the adoption of modern digital tools and technologies not only enhances transparency in financial transactions but also plays a vital role

in curbing corruption, reducing inefficiencies and facilitating ease of doing business.

He urged the government to give top priority to the digital transformation of key sectors, particularly taxation, trade, and industry, to help bring informal businesses into the formal economic framework. "A digitally driven economy fosters trust and confidence among both domestic and foreign investors, which is crucial for economic growth and long-term sus-

tainability," he added.

Mian Kashif highlighted that digitalisation enables real-time data collection and analysis, allowing for more informed and effective policy-making. He pointed out that such advancements can significantly improve tax compliance and expands the tax base without placing an additional burden on current taxpayers.

While appreciating recent government initiatives in the areas of digital payments and e-commerce

regulation, he called for their swift implementation across all sectors.

He further stressed the importance of robust public-private partnerships to accelerate digital adoption and enhance capacity building, especially at the grassroots level.

"Only through a strong and digitally integrated economy can Pakistan compete effectively on the global stage, boost its exports and unlock its full economic potential," he added.

Pakistan's solar revolution holds key to economic prosperity

LAHORE (APP): Convener of the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) Regional Committee on Food Shahid Imran said that there was no doubt that Pakistan stands to gain substantial environmental and economic benefits from a nationwide shift towards solar energy.

Talking to a delegation of industrialists from South Punjab led by Zia Ur Rehman here on Saturday, he emphasized that with over 300 sunny days a year, Pakistan possesses tremen-

dous potential to harness solar energy on a large scale. "Transitioning to solar power will significantly reduce our reliance on expensive imported fossil fuels, thereby easing the burden on the national exchequer and helping narrow the trade deficit," he said. "Moreover, it offers a sustainable solution to Pakistan's persistent energy shortages, ensuring uninterrupted power supply for households, businesses, and industries."

Shahid Imran noted that a robust solar energy strategy can also uplift rural

communities by enabling off-grid solutions, supporting agriculture and enhancing overall living standards.

"With the right policy framework, financial incentives and public-private partnerships, Pakistan can transform its energy sector and move toward a more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable economy. The time to fully embrace solar energy is now, for the prosperity of our people and the preservation of our planet," he added.

Zia-Ur-Rehman, head of the visiting delegation, highlighted the environ-

mental advantages of solar energy, saying that it provides a clean, renewable alternative to conventional power sources.

"It significantly reduces greenhouse gas emissions, helps combat climate change and improves air quality, thereby lowering health-related costs caused by pollution," he said.

He also noted that the growing solar energy sector holds the potential to create thousands of green jobs, ranging from manufacturing and installation to maintenance and research.

Saudi Arabia posts 4 years of VC growth

RIYADH (Arab News): Saudi Arabia achieved four consecutive years of growth in venture capital relative to its economy, a feat unmatched among its peers, according to a new report.

Between 2020 and 2023, the Kingdom was the only large market in the sample to post uninterrupted annual gains in VC intensity, contrasting with the more episodic deal flow seen across Africa and parts of Southeast Asia, MAGNITT's recently published Macro Meets VC report stated.

While 2024 saw a slight contraction in funding amid global tightening, Saudi Arabia's multi-year upward trend signals a sustained commitment to innovation-led diversification.

The Kingdom is steadily consolidating its position as a model for policy-driven venture capital development in emerging markets as it seeks to diversify its economy in line with the Vision 2030 blueprint.

"Saudi Arabia is becoming the model for long-term, policy-driven ecosystem building," the report notes, highlighting that sovereign limited partners and local funds have been instrumental in buffering the Kingdom from some of the volatility that struck other emerging venture markets.

The MAGNITT data revealed that Saudi Arabia recorded a five-year average VC-to-GDP ratio of 0.07 percent.

Although this figure remains modest compared to more mature hubs like Singapore, its consistent upward movement underscores the growing depth of domestic capital formation.

Beyond the headline ratios, the Kingdom's strategic positioning has also come into sharper focus. Saudi Arabia, along with the UAE, is classified as a "Growth Market"—a designation that reflects not only a sizeable GDP and population but also the rising economic clout of local consumer and enterprise demand.

China's intense EV rivalry tests Thailand's local production goals

BANGKOK (Reuters): Hyper-competition in China's electric vehicle sector is spilling over to its biggest market in Asia, Thailand, as smaller players struggle to compete with dominant BYD (002594.SZ), opens new tab, putting ambitious local production plans at risk.

Neta, among the earliest Chinese EV brands to enter Thailand in 2022, is an example of a struggling automaker finding it difficult to meet the requirements of a demanding government incentive programme meant to boost Thai EV production.

Under the scheme, carmakers are exempt from import duties, but were obligated to match import volumes with domestic production in 2024.

Citing slowing sales and tightening credit conditions, carmakers asked the government to adjust the scheme and the 2024 production shortfall was rolled over into this year.

Neta has said that it cannot produce the required number of cars locally and the government has withheld some payments to the EV maker, said Excise Department official Panupong Sriket, who received a complaint filed last month by 18 Neta dealers in Thailand seeking to recover over 200 million baht (\$6.17 million) of allegedly unpaid debt.

The complaint, a copy of which was reviewed by Reuters, also detailed missed payments by Neta related to promised support for building showrooms and after-sales service.

"I stopped ordering more cars in September because I sensed something was wrong," said Neta dealer-

ship owner Saravut Khunpitiluck.

"I'm currently suing them."

Neta's parent company, Zhejiang Hozon New Energy Automobile, entered bankruptcy proceedings in China last month, according to state media.

Neta and its Chinese parent did not respond to Reuters' requests for comment.

Neta's share of Thailand's EV market peaked at around 12% of EV sales in 2023 when the industry was growing, according to Counterpoint Research data, with BYD having a 49% share that year.

In Thailand, a regional auto production and export hub, Chinese brands dominate the EV market with a combined share of more than 70%.

The number of Chinese EV brands has doubled in the last year to 18, placing pressure on those that lack the reach of BYD, which has taken over from Tesla (TSLA.O), opens new tab as the world's biggest EV maker.

In the first five months of this year, new registration of Neta cars - a proxy for sales - slumped 48.5% from the prior year and its share of EV registrations was down to 4%, according to government data.

"Neta's downturn in Thailand reflects the fragility of second-tier Chinese EV brands both at home and abroad," said Abhik Mukherjee, an automotive analyst at Counterpoint Research.

"Intense price competition and the scale advantages of dominant players have made survival increasingly difficult for smaller companies, particularly in export markets, where margins are slim and robust after-sales support is essential."



India and Bangladesh postpone cricket tour to 2026

NEW DELHI (AFP) — India's six-match white-ball cricket tour of Bangladesh next month has been postponed to 2026, both cricket boards said Saturday.

The series, including three one-day and three T20 matches, had been due to start on August 17 in Dhaka. Political relations between India and Bangladesh have turned frosty since a mass uprising last year in Dhaka topped then prime minister Sheikh Hasina.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) and the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) have "mutually agreed to defer" the series, the statement read.

It said the decision was made "taking into account the international cricketing commitments and scheduling convenience of both teams," without giving further details.

It added that Bangladesh's BCB "looks forward to welcoming India in September 2026," with exact fixtures to be released later.

There is deep anger in Dhaka at the fate of Hasina, who escaped a student-led uprising by helicopter in August 2024 and flew to New Delhi.

Up to 1,400 people were killed between July and August last year, according to the United Nations, when Hasina's government ordered a crackdown on protesters in a failed bid to cling to power.

Elections are expected in early 2026.

Teenage star Andreeva into Wimbledon last 16



LONDON (Agencies): Teenager Mirra Andreeva showed why she is one of the hottest prospects in the sport after moving into Wimbledon's fourth round with a comfortable win.

Seventh seed Andreeva, 18, outclassed American opponent Hailey Baptiste in a 6-1 6-3 victory on Court One.

Russia's Andreeva reached her first Grand Slam semi-final at the French Open last month and is aiming to surpass that on the Wimbledon grass.

She has reached the last 16 for the second time in her career, having previously done the same in 2023.

"Before I played today I told myself, 'Just go out there and do something'," said Andreeva, who is making only her third appearance at the All England Club. "I always expect something from myself but I always try to let myself go and enjoy."

"I feel with every match I play, my level is rising." Showing supreme movement and clinical ball-striking, Andreeva breezed through the opening set in 31 minutes.

Baptiste, ranked 55th in the world, was willed on in the second set by an enthusiastic crowd who wanted to see a true contest.

When Andreeva broke for a 3-1 lead, the result looked a formality. Baptiste instantly broke back to halt Andreeva's progress but lost serve again as the world number seven secured a straight-forward win in one hour and 18 minutes.

Pak players bag 7 medals in Asian Jr Squash C'ships

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan secured a total of seven medals in the 32nd Asian Junior Individual Squash Championships 2025 at South Korea.

Pakistan won two gold medals, two silver medals, and one bronze medal in the main event, and two gold medals in the plate event, said a press release.

M Sohail Adnan (U-13) and Nauman Khan (U-15) won gold medals, Ahmed Rayyan Khalil (U-15) and Mahnoor Ali (Girls U-13) won silver medals, and Abdullah Nawaz (U-19) won a bronze medal.

In the plate event, Yahya Khan (U-17) and M Mustafa (U-13) won gold medals.

In Boys U-15, Nauman Khan (PAK) beat Ahmad Rayyan Khalil (PAK) 12-10, 11-6, 11-2 (3-0).

In Boys U-13, Muhammad Sohail Adnan (PAK) beat Ayaan Dhanuka (IND) 11-5, 11-2, 11-13, 11-6 (3-1).

In Girls U-13, Yin Z (CHN) beat Mahnoor Ali (PAK) 9-11, 11-6, 11-9, 9-11, 12-10 (3-2).

In Plate Events, Boys U-17, Yahya Khan (PAK) beat Chanyoung K (KOR) 11-9, 11-7 (2-0).

In Boys U-13, Muhammad Mustafa (PAK) beat Tse K C (HKG) 11-3, 11-8 (2-0).

Pakistan Squash Federation congratulated all the medalists saying Pakistan Squash is back on track, and winning gold medals in mega events are a great achievement. We are proud of our young squash stars.

Pakistan's women win over Kyrgyzstan in AFC Qualifiers

ISLAMABAD (Monitoring Desk): Pakistan on Saturday achieved a 2-1 victory over Kyrgyzstan in their qualifying match for the 2026 Asian Football Confederation (AFC) Women's Asian Cup, bringing them one step closer to qualifying for the tournament.

The national squad was drawn in Group 'D' of the qualifiers in Jakarta alongside Chinese Taipei, Indonesia and Kyrgyzstan. Pakistan lost their first match of the campaign to Chinese Taipei 8-0 on June 29, but beat hosts Indonesia 2-0 in their second group match this week.

Mariam Mahmood scored her first international goal in the very first minute of the match.

"Layla Aliya won possession at the halfway line and threaded a pass that initially looked to be claimed by Dilnura Abibulla, only for the Kyrgyz Republic custodian (goalkeeper) to drop the ball, allowing Mariam Mahmood to roll it into an unguarded net," said an AFC press release.



Kyrgyzstan scored their only goal of the match when Alina Gaparova scored a low drive into the bottom corner in the 69th minute, the AFC said.

The AFC said that Pakistan's fortunes "depend on the outcome of the later match between Chinese Taipei and Indonesia", which is being played today.

The Pakistan Football Federation (PFF) marked the team's campaign with a lengthy post on Instagram, hailing their overall first-ever outing in the AFC Women's Asian Cup Qualifiers.

"For the first time in history, Pakistan took part in the AFC Women's Asian Cup Qualifiers and what a statement they made," the federation wrote.

"After a tough start against Chinese Taipei, the team bounced back with incredible determination and heart, securing back-to-back victories against Indonesia (2-0) and Kyrgyzstan (2-1). With these wins, they've written a new chapter in Pakistan's football journey."

The PFF called the campaign "a moment of

pride for every supporter of the game", congratulating the team, coaching staff and officials.

Squad: Goalkeepers: Jennah Farooki, Nisha Ashraf, Zeeyana Jivraj; **Defenders:** Aliya Sadiq, Layla Banaras, Maria Khan (captain), Nizalia Siddiqui, Sophia Qureshi; **Midfielders:** Amina Hanif, Azwa Chaudhry, Marsha Malik, Rameen Fareed, Sanah Mehdi, Suha Hirani; **Forwards:** Anmol Hira, Aqsa Mushtaq, Isra Khan, Mariam Mahmood, Nadia Khan, Zehmena Malik, Zulfia Nazir.

PSG ‘dead’ unless they keep improving: Luis Enrique

ATLANTA (AFP): Paris Saint-Germain coach Luis Enrique said Friday his team will keep adapting and improving to pursue future success and if they failed to do so they would be "dead."

The European champions face German giants Bayern Munich on Saturday in the Club World Cup quarter-finals in Atlanta and the Spanish coach said they will not keep relying on the same system.

PSG played an entertaining attacking style with three forward on their way to Champions League glory, but Luis Enrique said one day he would diverge.

"We will change it because teams adapt — in football there is nothing magical," Luis Enrique told reporters. "When you overcome the press, your opponent adapts, when you create superiority in an area, your opponent adapts, there is no magic formula."

"There is no coach who has a system or a move, and that's it, that's the difficulty of modern football, all coaches are prepared, all players are better physically and technically than ever."

"So you adapt, you improvise,



and you become unpredictable for your opponent, or you are dead."

Luis Enrique said playing the same way that led PSG to a first treble this season would not suffice going forward.

"It's not enough to do what we've done this past season in the next, we have to change, we have to improve things," added Luis Enrique.

Bayern Munich beat PSG 1-0 in November in the Champions League group stage, before the French side found their stride and went on to triumph in the competi-

tion for the first time.

"We have a little bit of revenge to take, we know they're a tough team, but we're much stronger than in November," said Ousmane Dembele, who was sent off in Munich.

"A lot has changed — the players have clearly raised their level, I've raised my level too, and we have a lot of confidence. We know what we need to do on the field, we can beat any team."

The 28-year-old is a leading Ballon d'Or contender after a superb campaign, although has only made a brief cameo as a substitute in the Club World Cup thus far.

Dembele suffered a quadriceps injury during the Nations League at the start of June and came on in PSG's 4-0 romp against Lionel Messi's Inter Miami.

The forward said he is now "100 percent" fit but it is up to Luis Enrique whether he starts against Bayern at the Mercedes-Benz Stadium.

"It's not the time to give information to my opponent — we'll see tomorrow," said Luis Enrique.



GONDOMAR: Liverpool's captain Virgil van Dijk and Liverpool's Portuguese soccer player Diogo Jota and his brother Andre Silva, who died in a car crash.

Chelsea edge Palmeiras to reach Club WC semis



PHILADELPHIA (AFP): A late own-goal by goalkeeper Weverton took Chelsea through to the Club World Cup semi-finals on Friday as the Premier League side edged Palmeiras of Brazil 2-1 in a last-eight tie that had been lit up by a moment of magic from young star Estevao Willian.

The teenage Brazil forward, who will join Chelsea after the

tournament, was eager to impress his future employers and his brilliant 53rd-minute finish cancelled out Cole Palmer's opener in Philadelphia.

But a deflected Malo Gusto cross went in off Palmeiras' keeper Weverton in the 83rd minute to take Chelsea through to a semi-final showdown with another Brazilian side in Fluminense.

"In the first half we were in

control of the game and could have scored more than one goal," said Chelsea coach Enzo Maresca, dismissing suggestions his team had been fortunate.

"They started the second half better than us and the dynamic of the game changed, but then in the last 25 minutes we were in control again and I think we deserved to win without being lucky." The scoreline was a

repeat of Chelsea's victory when the teams met in the final of the Club World Cup under the tournament's old guise in 2022.

"Overall Chelsea was better. They have better players and a better coach," admitted Palmeiras coach Abel Ferreira. "They were lucky with the way they scored the second goal but it can happen in football and we need to accept it and move on."

Chelsea will now be fancied to go on and reach the final, with Fluminense standing in their way in the last four at the MetLife Stadium in New Jersey on Tuesday. If not everyone has yet been won over by the tournament, the intensity levels on the pitch are rising as it reaches the business end and there was a big-game atmosphere in Philadelphia.

Lincoln Financial Field was almost sold out, with 65,782 fans in attendance despite much of the city having emptied out for the July 4 holiday and long weekend. This game played out to a backdrop of Independence Day fireworks lighting up the sky over the nearby Delaware River, but there were fireworks on the pitch too.

Independence Day fireworks

Chelsea lit the spark first, going ahead in the 16th minute thanks to a moment of class from England international Palmer.

After drifting into a pocket of space just outside the Palmeiras box, Palmer controlled a Trevoh Chalobah pass on the half-turn, carried on into the area and dispatched a low shot past Weverton. It was the ideal start for Chelsea, who lost to Flamengo when they last faced Brazilian opposition in the same stadium during the group stage.

Maresca added extra Brazilian flavour to the occasion by handing a first start to young midfielder Andrey Santos. With Moises Caicedo suspended, Santos occupied the holding midfield role for Chelsea while Pedro Neto lined up on the right wing, choosing to play despite having to come to terms with the tragic death of his Portugal teammate Diogo Jota on Thursday.

Playing on the right wing for Palmeiras was Estevao, the 18-year-old Brazil prodigy set to join Chelsea in a big-money transfer agreed over a year ago.

He knew this could be his last game for the Sao Paulo side, and Chelsea probably should have

been two ahead before the interval only for Christopher Nkunku to blaze over after being teed up by Palmer. Instead Palmeiras equalised eight minutes into the second half, with Estevao the inevitable scorer.

Positioned inside the Chelsea box to the right, Estevao controlled a pass by Richard Rios and took a touch to get in front of Levi Colwill, another to steady himself, and then surprised goalkeeper Robert Sanchez with an early shot that went in off the bar. Chelsea responded by sending on new signing Joao Pedro for his debut, the Brazilian becoming the 27th player used by Maresca during the tournament.

The Blues pushed in search of a second goal but extra time was looking likely when the Premier League side grabbed a scrappy winner with seven minutes of the 90 to play.

Following a corner played short, Enzo Fernandez found Malo Gusto and his attempted low centre from the left side of the box deflected off the toe of Agustin Giay to surprise Weverton, with the ball striking him on its way in.

Family and football unite to bid Diogo Jota farewell

GONDOMAR (AFP): Liverpool and Portugal forward Diogo Jota and his brother were laid to rest on Saturday in their hometown, just days after the pair died in a car crash that shocked the football world.

Jota, 28, and Andre Silva, 25, were killed on Thursday after their vehicle veered off a motorway in northwestern Spain and became engulfed in flames, a week after the Portugal forward had got married.

Just hours before the accident, Jota had posted a video of his June 22 wedding to partner Rute Cardoso, with whom he shared three children. Football stars joined family and friends at the funeral in his hometown of Gondomar, near Porto and conducted by the bishop of Porto.

A number of teammates from the national side, including Bernardo Silva, Bruno Fernandes, Danilo Pereira and Joao Felix, as well as coach Roberto Martinez attended, though national skipper Cristiano Ronaldo was not present.

Liverpool Virgil van Dijk bore a garlanded wreath of red flowers in the form of a Liverpool shirt bearing Jota's number 20.

Friday evening had seen Van Dijk, several players including Liverpool's Uruguayan international Darwin Nunez and Liverpool coach Arne Slot meet with Jota's family and attend a wake for the deceased brothers. Among those who came to offer their condolences were a childhood friend, Portuguese President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, Prime Minister Luis Montenegro, Jota's agent Jorge Mendes and Porto club president Andre Villas-Boas.

Jota formerly played with Porto. "Football is truly in mourning. Diogo was an icon of the talent Portuguese football represents," said football federation chief Pedro Proenca.

Close family and friends including the parents paid their respects at Friday's wake first, with the grandfather aided by two others to help him enter the chapel. Friday night, British rock band Oasis played their song "Live Forever" in tribute to Jota at a concert in Cardiff marking a return to touring after 16 years.

Mourners arrived carrying wreaths of flowers, some sobbing audibly, before the wake was opened to members of the public. The death of the Portugal international and his brother has triggered an outpouring of emotion in football, and beyond.

Liverpool opened a book of condolences and lowered flags to half-mast, with dozens of supporters laying a sea of flowers, balloons, Jota shirts, and scarves with the message "Rest in peace Diogo Jota," outside Anfield. At the Diogo Jota football academy, close to Gondomar SC where the ex-Porto and Atletico Madrid player took his first steps in the game, well-wishers created a memorial with flowers, scarves, candles and shirts.

"Thank you, Diogo Jota," read a child's handwritten message. Pedro Neves, who was friends with Jota at school in Gondomar, said he "will remember him as someone who was very friendly, very courteous, who loved everyone, who always had a smile on his face."

"He left us too young, it's not fair. But that's how life is sometimes," Neves, 31, told AFP. Former Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp, who brought Jota to the Reds in 2020, has said he was "heartbroken" while the club spoke of an "unimaginable loss."

Slot, who succeeded Klopp last year at Anfield, said everyone associated with the club owed it to Jota to "stand together and be there for one another."

Jota was remembered at the Club World Cup in the United States on Friday, with a one-minute silence held at the quarter-final between Brazil's Fluminense and Saudi Arabia's Al Hilal in Orlando. A minute's silence was similarly held at women's Euro 25 matches.

Portuguese and UK media reported Jota was driving to the northern Spanish port of Santander to take a ferry to England where Liverpool were due to start training on Friday, avoiding a flight on medical advice after a recent lung operation.

**In brief****NPC organizes Niaz-e-Hussaini**

ISLAMABAD (APP): The National Press Club (NPC) on Saturday organized Niaz-e-Hussaini on 9th Muharram to pay glowing tributes and homage to Hazarat Imam Hussain (RA) and their companions for their supreme sacrifice in Karbala for the supremacy of Islam. Talking to APP, Secretary NPC, Nayyer Ali said that NPC held Hussaini Niaz gatherings for journalists and their family members in order to maintain its previous tradition that honored devotion and love for the martyrs of Karbala. Like every year, a number of journalists and their family members participated, which highlighted the respect and emotional connection with the sacrifices of Karbala. NPC President, Azhar Jatoi and Governing Body member Aamir Butt, Naveed Ahmed Sheikh and others were also present. The program was started at 2 o'clock in the afternoon and lasted till 9 at night.

CPO reviews Muharram security

RAWALPINDI (APP): City Police Officer (CPO) Syed Khalid Mehmood Hamdani visited Jatti to review security arrangements for Muharram-ul-Haram. SDPO Gujjar Khan, SHO Jatti, and other police officers were also present during the visit. CPO inspected the preparations and gave instructions to ensure strict implementation of the security plan. He said that the security guidelines and code of conduct from the Punjab government must be followed. Rawalpindi Police is making all out efforts to ensure fool-proof security during Muharram, he added.

RWMC completes arrangements

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi Waste Management Company (RWMC) has completed all the arrangements under a certain cleanliness program prepared for Ashura day processions. Spokesman of RWMC told on Saturday that under the special cleanliness program, all Imambargahas, procession routes and their vicinity were being cleaned regularly from Muharram 1 besides the waste containers were also emptied. He said that mechanical sweeping was carried out and lime powder was being sprinkled, along the main procession route include Iqbal Road, Committee Chowk, College Road, Raja Bazaar, Purana Qila, Pul Shah Nazar Deewan, Imambara chowk and adjacent areas. He told that construction material or debris was also removed from the routes of the procession and its adjacent areas. He informed that sanitary staff would be present until the conclusion of Ashura day processions while the entire operation would be monitored from the central control room. He said that nullahs and drains adjacent to Imambargahas were also being cleared with excavators and heavy machinery keeping in view the Pakistan Meteorological Department heavy rainfalls forecast. The RWMC has deputed additional sanitary workers to maintain cleanliness while all areas would be cleared after the culmination of processions, he added. The spokesman urged the residents to cooperate with the RWMC staff and not throw waste and other materials in drains and the open spaces. He added that the staff had been directed that no negligence would be tolerated.

Maintaining Law & order during Muharram top priority: Mohsin Naqvi

ISLAMABAD (APP): Comprehensive security arrangements have been implemented across the country for the processions and majalis on the 9th of Muharram. Around 2,763 processions and 7,598 majalis are being held today in the Federal Capital, Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan, Sindh, Azad Kashmir, and Gilgit-Baltistan.

Strict security measures have been enforced in 1,129 highly sensitive areas, with continuous monitoring through drones and CCTV cameras.

The Federal Government's central monitoring cell is operational 24/7 and closely coordinating with provincial governments. Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi, Minister of State Tallal Chaudhry, and

Interior Secretary Khuram Agha are personally overseeing the monitoring and coordination processes.

Today 61 majalis and 17 processions are being held in Islamabad, while 3,805 majalis and 1,677 processions in Punjab, 1,207 majalis and 644 processions in Sindh, 939 majalis and 261 processions in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 115 majalis and 11 processions in Balochistan, 1,290 majalis and 111 processions in Gilgit-Baltistan and 181 majalis and 42 processions are being held in AJK.

Law enforcement agencies remain on high alert to maintain law and order. The security plans have been developed in consultation with provincial governments, and zero tolerance will be observed

regarding hate speech or sectarian provocations. Central and provincial control rooms have been activated for real-time coordination and response.

Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi emphasized that religious incitement on social media will not be tolerated under any circumstances. He stressed that maintaining law and order is the top priority, and that law enforcement agencies are fully vigilant to foil the malicious designs of Fitna-e-Hindustan.

He said that, InshaAllah Ashura will remain peaceful through the efforts of the Government and tireless dedication of security forces. He emphasized that the enemy's evil intentions have neither succeeded before nor will succeed this time.

Minister orders probe into deer killing in Margalla Hills

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Climate Change and Environmental Coordination, Dr. Musadik Malik, has strongly condemned the reported killing of a deer in the Margalla Hills National Park after a disturbing video of the incident surfaced on social media, sparking public outrage.

Terming the act "cruel" and "unacceptable," the minister ordered an immediate inquiry and directed relevant authorities to

submit a report on the incident without delay. "Harming wildlife in protected areas is a violation of conservation laws and will not be tolerated," Dr. Malik said in a statement issued by the ministry on Saturday.

The Margalla Hills, part of the Himalayan foothills and home to a rich diversity of flora and fauna, are designated as a protected national park under Pakistani law.

Hunting or harming wildlife in the area is

strictly prohibited under the Islamabad Wildlife (Protection, Preservation, Conservation and Management) Ordinance, 1979.

The Margalla Hills National Park spans more than 17,000 hectares and supports species such as barking deer, leopards, wild boars, and a variety of birds and reptiles.

Wildlife experts warn that repeated violations could endanger the fragile ecosystem and set back conservation efforts.

Metro Bus to remain closed in Multan on 9th Muharram

ISLAMABAD (INP): The district administration of Multan announced to close Metro Bus Service on 9th of Muharram, Saturday, due to security purposes.

The district administration has adopted strict measures to ensure security for Muharram majalis and processions in Multan. Over 147,000 police officers and personnel will be deployed across Punjab to ensure peaceful observance of 9th and 10th of Muharram.

Inspector General of Police (IGP) Punjab, Dr Usman Anwar, said that

Section 144 is being strictly enforced. Activities such as aerial firing, display of weapons, and spreading of hateful content are strictly prohibited, he added, and said that multiple agencies, including the CTD, Special Branch, Traffic Police, Dolphin Squad, and PERU are actively engaged in security operations.

The IG also directed strict implementation of the Loudspeaker Act and an ongoing crackdown on hate speech on social media platforms.

Dr Usman urged all religious communities to

promote interfaith harmony, tolerance, and mutual respect, directing senior officers (RPOs, CPOs, and DPOs) to personally oversee field security operations on Youm-e-Ashura.

In the past 24 hours, Punjab Police registered 20 FIRs and arrested 22 individuals for uploading objectionable or hateful content online. Offending posts were mostly found on Facebook (22 cases), followed by WhatsApp (5) and other platforms (8). In the past five days, 103 cases have been registered and 119 arrests made, the spokesperson added.

Pakistani students proved potential in global tech landscape

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chairman of the Higher Education Commission (HEC), Dr. Mukhtar Ahmed, on Saturday said that Pakistani students have demonstrated remarkable potential in technological advancements, especially during recent conflicts.

Talking to a private news channel, he highlighted that despite limited resources and various challenges, Pakistan's

youth have emerged as some of the best doctors, engineers, and IT professionals in the world.

He shared that 18 Pakistani universities have been ranked among the top 1,000 globally this year which is a significant improvement from just three in 2019.

Dr. Mukhtar admitted that Pakistan's higher education sector still faces several issues, par-

ticularly in governance, funding, and global competitiveness.

He noted that inconsistent budget allocations and a lack of long-term planning continue to hinder progress.

He emphasized the need for increased investment in higher education, including improvements in faculty quality, infrastructure, and the establishment of transparent systems.



ISLAMABAD: A mesmerizing and eye-catching view of Rawal Dam where the surface of the water is covered by floating green weeds, creating a lush, vibrant scene. —APP Photo



ISLAMABAD: Police personal monitoring 9th Muharram procession at Imam Bargah Asna Ashri in G-6. —INP Photo

ANF arrests 7 suspects

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF), conducting 4 operations across the country, recovered as many as 55.678 kilograms of drugs worth more than Rs 9.017 million and arrested 7 suspects, including a woman, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman on Saturday.

He informed that 45 ecstasy tablets were recovered from a suspect near a University area on Japan Road, Islamabad. As many as 850 grams of ice and 2.4 kgs of suspicious powder were recovered from two suspects including a woman near Islamabad Motorway Toll Plaza.

Similarly, 25.2 kgs of hashish were recovered from a vehicle near northern bypass road, Karachi and three accused were arrested. On Multan Road, near Mansoor, Lahore, 19.2 kgs of opium, 2 kgs of heroin and 6 kgs of hashish were recovered from the possession of an accused. Cases have been registered against the arrested suspects under the Narcotics Control Act, and further investigations are underway.

ITP issues special traffic plan

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Traffic Police (ITP) have issued a special traffic plan to ensure smooth vehicular movement and public convenience during the central 9th Muharram ul Haram procession, which will start from and conclude at the main Imambargah in Sector G-6/2 here.

A public relations officer told APP on Saturday that the procession will pass through its designated route, and several roads will remain closed for general traffic during this period to ensure public safety and processional security.

He said Fazl-e-Haq Road, from Polyclinic to Kulsom Plaza, will remain closed for all types of vehicular traffic, and citizens are advised to use Jinnah Avenue from Kulsom Plaza to China Chowk as an alternate route.

He said Seventh Avenue from Daman-e-Koh Chowk to Chand Tara Chowk, including both loops of Blue Area, will also be closed in both directions. Commuters can use Jinnah Avenue, Suharwardy Road, Faisal Avenue, and Margalla Road as alternate options. He said Saddar Road from Iqbal Hall to Melody Chowk will be closed for traffic from both sides. Citizens may use Aabpara and Suharwardy Road as alternative routes.

He said Municipal Road from Lal Masjid to Shohada Chowk and GPO Chowk will remain closed, while Shaheed Millat Road can be used as a substitute route. He said Luqman Hakeem Road from Polyclinic to Iqbal Hall will also be closed during the procession, and Jinnah Avenue will be available as an alternate road.

Chief Traffic Officer (CTO) Captain Syed Zeeshan Haider citizens are urged to avoid illegal parking near the procession routes and to use designated parking areas only. He said traffic police personnel will be deployed along the routes to guide citizens and facilitate the flow of traffic.

Ashura teaches us lessons of sacrifice: Ayaz Sadiq

ISLAMABAD (APP): Speaker of National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq paid rich tribute to the immortal sacrifices of Hazrat Imam Hussain (RA) and his devoted companions, saying that Ashura teaches the values of sacrifice, patience, steadfastness and standing up for truth.

In his message on the occasion of Ashura, he emphasized that the tragedy of Karbala will forever inspire generations to resist oppression and falsehood with bravery and determination.

He said that the grandson of the Holy Prophet (PBUH), Hazrat Imam Hussain (RA), laid down his life for the supremacy of truth and justice.

Ayaz Sadiq said that by embracing the teachings of Imam Hussain (RA)—sacrifice, patience and piety—we can build a peaceful, united, and just society.

He stressed the urgent need for collective efforts to eliminate oppression, injustice, intolerance and division. The Speaker also paid tribute to the martyrs who sacrificed their lives for the protection of the homeland, saying that their sacrifices will be

remembered in golden words throughout history.

He highlighted that the oppressed people of Palestine and Kashmir have been enduring brutality and injustice for decades. Expressing solidarity with the Palestinian and Kashmiri people, he said that supporting the oppressed is our religious and moral duty.

He said that the ongoing brutal terrorism by Israel in Palestine has resulted in the martyrdom of over 60,000 people, with thousands severely injured, including a large number of children, women and the elderly.

Ayaz Sadiq commended the resilience and bravery of the Palestinian people in standing up against Israeli oppression and called upon the international community to play its role in ending the atrocities in Palestine and Kashmir.

The Speaker urged the Muslim Ummah to promote mutual unity and solidarity. He emphasized that Muslims can overcome challenges by following the example of Karbala and fostering unity within their ranks.

Ayaz Sadiq said that setting aside differences

and embracing cooperation and brotherhood is the true path to success. He urged to the public to demonstrate patience, tolerance and fraternity on Ashura and play their role in maintaining peace.

Deputy Speaker of National Assembly Syed Ghulam Mustafa Shah also paid homage to the unforgettable sacrifices of Hazrat Imam Hussain (RA) and his companions, saying that the message of Karbala is not only for Muslims but serves as a guiding light for all of humanity.

He said that by adopting the spirit of sacrifice and selflessness exemplified by Imam Hussain (RA), we can foster brotherhood and build a peaceful and just society. Mustafa Shah said that the event of Karbala teaches us to remain steadfast in truth and justice.

He urged the Muslim Ummah to unite against oppression, injustice and division by embodying the spirit of Hussain (RA).

Mustafa Shah called upon the people to internalize the message of Imam Hussain (RA) in their lives and promote harmony by resolving differences.

Audit report reveals 100% performance of Maryam Clinics

RAWALPINDI (APP): Maryam Nawaz Health Clinics of Murree shine top after being declared with 100% performance in delivering healthcare services. The Special Monitoring Unit (SMU) has conducted a rigorous audit of 30 Maryam Clinics (MNHCS) across 15 districts.

According to the details, MNHC Karor and MNHC Kali Mati, Murree were also among the clinics audited by the special unit, under the directives of CM Maryam Nawaz Sharif. All clinics received a 100% satisfactory rating, showcasing

exceptional healthcare standards during the audit.

Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz and the Deputy Commissioner lauded Dr. Asif Arbab Khan Niazi, CEO Rawalpindi's Health Authority, for the outstanding performance. He was asked for further enhanced facilities, ensuring top-tier medical services for the public.

"This success highlights the effective management and dedication of health officials in delivering accessible, high-quality medical services to residents", said Dr. Asif Arbab

Niazi. He reaffirmed to deploy all resources to meet these expectations, prioritizing community healthcare needs.

SMU's audit assessed operational efficiency, patient care, and staff performance reflecting the Punjab government's commitment to revolutionizing healthcare through the MNHC initiative. "We are committed to come up with the vision of CM Maryam Nawaz Sharif for providing the best possible healthcare services to citizens", reiterated the CEO.

CDA Chairman reviews security for 9th Muharram processions

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chairman Capital Development Authority (CDA), Muhammad Ali Randhawa paid a surprise visit to Markazi Imam Bargah Asna Ashri in G-6 on Saturday to ensure seamless security arrangements for 9th Muharram processions.

Accompanied by senior officials including the Inspector General of Police (IGP), Director Generals of Islamabad Water, Emergency and Disaster Management, the Assistant Commissioner of the area, and representatives from CDA, district administration, and police, the Chairman was briefed on the comprehensive security plan put in place.

The security blueprint, designed under the leadership of Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi, has been implemented in close consultation with the management of Imam Bargah Asna Ashri, officials confirmed. Speaking on the occasion IGP Islamabad said "Foolproof arrangements have been made and are being executed in letter and spirit," adding that the procession began on time, and the route has been fully cleared with heavy police deployment ensuring peace and safety.

Muhammad Ali Randhawa, who also serves as Chief Commissioner and DG

Civil Defence, emphasized his commitment to personally monitor all Muharram processions across Islamabad. "All wings of the police and administration have been directed to remain on high alert and ensure the best possible security measures," he stated.

In addition to law enforcement, departments responsible for sanitation, drainage, water supply, and emergency response—including teams from CDA, Metropolitan Corporation Islamabad (MCI), and the District Municipal Administration (DMA)—have been mobilized to remain stationed along the route of the 9th Muharram procession.

Officials confirmed that surveillance through Safe City CCTV cameras has been activated to maintain strict monitoring throughout the event. Randhawa further directed all relevant civic and administrative units to maintain full coordination for the peaceful and smooth conduct of processions.

The 9th and 10th of Muharram mark significant religious observances for the Shia community, and the government has ramped up efforts in recent years to ensure both security and facilitation during the commemorations in Islamabad.

Child rescued, kidnapper held

KABUL (Pajhwok): A child abducted in eastern Kunar province has been rescued, and a suspect arrested in connection with the kidnapping, the Ministry of Interior said on Saturday. In a statement, the MoI said security forces successfully rescued the child, who had been abducted a few days ago from Chapa Dara district. The rescued child has been reunited with his family, while a suspect taken into custody is currently being interrogated, the ministry added.

AKF’s official killed

BADAKHSHAN (Khaama Press): An official from the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) was killed by unknown assailants in Badakhshan, raising fears of rising sectarian violence in the province. A senior religious affairs official affiliated with the Aga Khan Foundation was killed in Badakhshan province, northeastern Afghanistan, on Friday night, July 5, in the village of Tizab, located in the remote Zebak district, according to reports by local media.

Herat to see major infrastructure boost with 70 new projects

HERAT (TOLONews): Herat Municipality says it will launch 70 development projects across the city this year, with a total cost of nearly 900 million Afghanis.

These projects include the construction of roads, drainage systems, boulevards, city lighting, and green spaces, and will be implemented throughout Herat.

Mohammad Naser Armal, spokesperson for Herat Municipality, told TOLONews: “For the fiscal year 1404, we have planned 70 development and infrastructure projects worth 900 million Afghanis, funded through both the development budget and funds carried over from 1403.”

Some Herat residents have called on the municipality to ensure these projects are implemented with quality and according to standards.

“This is vital for the people of Herat,” said resident Mozaffari. “We welcome the launch of these projects in our city.”

Another resident, Nader Ali Rahimi, said, “The companies should complete these projects with high standards. These developments must be worthy of the people of Herat.”

Contractor companies say daily monitoring is in place to ensure the projects

Major sports facility to be built in Khost

KHOST (TOLONews): A large sports complex worth nearly four million US dollars is set to be built in Khost province.

Officials from the Physical Education Department and the National Olympic Committee laid the foundation stone during a visit to Khost. They announced that the complex will be built by the “Najib Talash Charity Foundation.”

The international-standard facility will be constructed on ten acres of land and will include volleyball, football, and tennis courts, a gym, a standard gymnasium, and a religious school for athletes and sports enthusiasts.

Ahmadullah Wasiq, Head of Physical Education and Sports, emphasized the government’s support for athletes and said this complex would play a significant role in promoting and expanding sports across the country. He also urged other private sector actors to contribute to sports development.

Additionally, Mohammad Yousuf Kargar, president of the Football Federation, said the construction of this complex in Khost presents a valuable opportunity to host both national and international competitions.

This comes as a similar sports complex was planned for Herat under the previous government, but construction was delayed following the political transition in Afghanistan.

Noor Jalal discuss health assistance with Cenk Unal

KABUL (BNA): Mawlavi Noor Jalal Jalali, the Minister of Public Health, met with Cenk Unal, the chargé d’affaires of Turkey, at his office to discuss collaboration in the health sector.

During the meeting, both officials exchanged views on enhancing cooperation between Turkey and Afghanistan, focusing on several key areas. They highlighted the importance of strengthening the capacity of scientific staff and expanding services at Ataturk Hospital.

Discussions also included the establishment of special and essential departments within the hospital, improvements to the country’s medicine system, and the creation of a dedicated section for urgent and needy patients.

Mawlavi Noor Jalal Jalali expressed his appreciation for Turkey’s ongoing support in the health sector and emphasized the potential benefits of further assistance.



Balkh Municipality launch 18 uplift projects



BALKH (BNA): Local officials from the Municipality of Balkh have announced the launch of 18 development projects in Mazar-e-Sharif.

Mayor Hafiz Abdul Rahman Hemat shared details of the initiative during a statement to the Bakhtar News Agency, emphasizing the collaborative spirit under the slogan, “The city is the home of all citizens, and together we can make it prosperous and beautiful.”

The projects are set to transform various areas of the city, featuring the construction of new intersec-

Diesel, gas prices dip in Kabul

KABUL (Pajhwok): The prices of diesel and liquefied gas decreased, while the rate of sugar increased in Kabul market during the outgoing week, market sources said on Saturday.

Fuel: A worker at the Ahmadyar pump station told Pajhwok Afghan News the rate of one litre of petrol remained stable at 64afs, but the diesel price went down from 68afs to 67afs. He added the price of one kilogram of liquefied gas decreased from 58afs to 50afs.

Food items: Zmarai Safi, head of the Food Traders’ Association, said the price of a 49-kilogram bag of Indian sugar surged from 2,500afs to 2,550afs. The price of a 24-kg bag of Pakistani rice remained unchanged at 2,600afs. A 49-kg sack of Kazakh stayed stable at 1,450afs and a 16-litre bottle of Malaysian cooking cost 1,700afs, the same rate as last week’s.

He added one kilogram of African black tea accounted for 400afs and the same amount of Indonesian green tea for 350afs.

Hamid Sufizada, a retailer at Dahnna-i-Bagh market, put the retail price of a 49-kg bag of flour at 1,500afs, a 24-kg bag of rice at 2,650afs and a 49-kg sack of sugar at 2,600afs.

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

Gold: Mohammad Fawad, a jeweller in Timor Shahi area, said the price of one gram of Russian gold remained stable 4,700afs and the same amount of Arabian gold stayed unchanged at 6,000afs.

Taliban restrict Muharram observances in Herat: Sources

HERAT (Amu TV): Taliban have imposed new restrictions on Shiite religious practices in Herat Province during Muharram, the Islamic month of mourning, dismantling mourning tents and removing flags from Shiite neighborhoods, according to local sources and residents.

Witnesses in districts such as Jebrael, Kore Milli and Khate-m al-Anbia said Taliban forces tore down black banners and processional tents used to commemorate Muharram rituals. In several cases, mourners were reportedly harassed, assaulted or detained.

“They came two nights ago and tore down our flags,” said a resident of Jebrael. “Some were ripped apart. They told us not to set up camps or raise flags. Even the water stations were destroyed. A few of my friends were taken away.”

Residents say the installations had been approved in advance through agreements with Taliban authorities. However, security forces reversed those arrangements and issued new directives allowing no more than two flags per mosque.

In Andisha Township, Gozara district, Taliban forces reportedly attempted to remove banners but were stopped by locals and mourners, according to video evidence shared with Amu.

“In our area, they pulled the flags down with force,” said another resident. “In some neighborhoods, people were pressured to remove the flags themselves. We just want to commemorate our religious traditions freely.”

Human rights activists have condemned the restrictions as a violation of religious freedom and the right to peaceful assembly.

“Every person has the right to freely choose and practice their beliefs, including conducting religious ceremonies and peaceful gatherings,” said Hadi Farzam, a human rights advocate.

“Continued violations like these will not only limit religious expression, but risk deepening sectarian and ethnic tensions.”

Taliban have imposed similar restrictions in past years during Muharram. In 2023, authorities removed flags in Herat and reportedly killed a protester. Tensions around Shiite religious expression have persisted since the group returned to power in 2021.

Muharram, and particularly the observance of Ashura on its tenth day, marks one of the most sacred periods for Shiite Muslims.

Herat youth launch drive to support returnees

HERAT CITY (Pajhwok): As the number of Afghan migrants being deported from Iran is increasing, a group of young people in western Herat province has voluntarily launched a campaign “Convoy of solidarity and support”, transporting more than 2,000 returnees from the Islam Qala border to Herat city.

Quddos Khatibi, one of the organisers of the convoy, said that over 300 private vehicles took part in the spontaneous public initiative with great enthusiasm.

According to him, these youths also brought dry bread, drinking water and fruits with them as a small gesture to ease the fatigue of the returnees who had just arrived from Iran.

He added that, during this campaign, more than 2,000 returnees who had recently come back from Iran were transported free of charge from the border area to Herat city, covering a distance of 120 kilometres.

Meanwhile, Mohammad Ismail, a vehicle owner who had gone to Islam Qala to assist the returnees, said that the migrants were in dire condition and called on everyone to offer support as much as they could.

At the same time, officials in Herat said that the Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS) of the province has been providing systematic health and humanitarian services for eight consecutive days at the Islam Qala crossing to meet the urgent needs of the Afghan returnees from Iran.

Speaking to reporters, Maulvi Ahmad Rashid, head of the ARCS representative office in Herat, said that during this operation, hot meals (lunch and dinner) are being prepared and distributed daily for 6,000 returnees.

He added that Red Crescent volunteer teams are actively present at the site, assisting newly arrived returnees with registration, referrals to health centres, and other necessary services.

He further noted that two mobile health teams from the Red Crescent are also operating on-site. In addition to conducting medical check-ups and prescribing medicine for over 200 individuals, they have provided services such as injections, wound dressing, health education, malnutrition assessments, and maternal and child healthcare to hundreds more.

This comes as the forced return of Afghan migrants to the country has increased significantly in recent days. Local sources in Herat reported that, in the past 24 hours alone, over 38,000 Afghan migrants entered the country through the Islam Qala border crossing from Iran.

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Police officers graduate from Ghor police training center

GHOR (BNA): Fifty soldiers from the Battalion of the Ghor Provincial Police Command have graduated after completing a course in professional and ideological training at the training center of the province’s police command.

Mawlavi Abdul Rahman Badri, spokesman for the Ghor Police Command, told Bakhtar News Agency that these forces received two weeks of professional training. The training covered topics such as the structure of the security system, police concepts, guard duties and related responsibilities, discipline, patrol methods, introductions, salutes and honors, military ranks, checkpoints, search techniques, and the legal and humane conduct expected of police officers in their interactions with the public.

The graduated personnel will now take on their duties with greater motivation and understanding and will serve the public in ensuring security.



Women condemn Russia’s recognition of Taliban as legitimization of repression

KABUL (Amu TV): Following Russia’s decision to formally recognize the Taliban rule, women say the Taliban lack domestic legitimacy and that Moscow has endorsed a regime built on suppression.

They argue that, nearly four years since the Taliban returned to power, the group has made no effort to gain the public’s trust, instead intensifying its repression — particularly against women. By granting external legitimacy, critics say, Russia has effectively sanctioned the systematic exclusion of half the population.

The United Human Rights Alliance, a coalition of rights activists, lawyers and civil society leaders, called the move a clear violation of the United Nations Charter and democratic principles. In a statement, the alliance said that Russia’s recognition of a regime that rules through fear and coercion “strips meaning from international commitments to protect civilians, especially women and minorities.”

“Governments that come to power through force, terror, or repression have no legal or political legitimacy,” the statement read. “Official recognition of such regimes not only lacks foundation, but also violates the global responsibility to defend the rights of the oppressed.”

Women across Afghanistan expressed outrage, saying the Taliban’s policies have deprived them of education, employment, and public participation. “We have been barred from school and work for four years,” said a woman in Kabul. “Russia’s decision legitimizes our oppression.”

In Farah Province, another resident warned that normalization should not come at the cost of ignoring human rights. “Any country that engages with this government must confront the reality of daily violations,” he said.

Political analyst Najib-ur-Rahman Shamal said the move is inconsistent with international norms and human rights law. “The Taliban have not been elected and have no mandate from the Afghan people,” he said. “Recognition by Russia goes against UN conventions, particularly those on human rights.”

Human rights advocate Zohal Rad echoed those concerns. “Recognition of the Taliban will not solve Afghanistan’s problems,” she said. “They must earn legitimacy from the people — not through force, and not through foreign validation.”

Russia’s decision stands in stark contrast to the position of most of the international community, which has linked recognition to demonstrable improvements in human rights.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees appeals for urgent global support to Afghan returnees

KABUL (Pajhwok): The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has issued an urgent appeal to the international support to assist more than 1.4 million Afghans returning or forcibly repatriated to Afghanistan so far this year — including over one million from Iran alone.

The UN agency highlighted a dramatic spike in daily returnees from Iran after June 13, with the highest number recorded on July 1, when over 43,000 people returned. This is a stark increase from January to June average of 5,000 arrivals per day. From Pakistan, a rapid increase was seen in numbers in April, with nearly 150,000 people returning that month.

It said: “Our teams are at the borders, receiving and assisting streams of exhausted, hungry, and scared people every day. Staff and structures are absolutely inundated.

“UNHCR has deployed additional staff, and we are providing essential relief items, hot meals and emergency financial assistance to help meet immediate needs. But amid funding constraints, and given the scale and pace of returns, we will not be able to sustain support for more than a few weeks.”

The report added these returns were part of a complex protection crisis. UNHCR is concerned that returns are happening in extremely difficult conditions, and that many are not voluntary. Many people who returned said that they felt compelled to leave, as they saw fellow Afghans being deported. Returnees who arrived in Afghanistan in recent months have been sharing concerning stories of increased restrictions, harassment and discrimination.

The report called it part of a broader, worrying regional trend. Refugee-hosting countries have issued return orders with deadlines for Afghans to depart, or face deportation. Since these announcements, the situation for Afghans in bordering countries has deteriorated quickly.

Immense challenges lie ahead for returnees, from accessing documentation, housing healthcare and education, to rebuilding their lives in a country they do not know. It is particularly worrying as returns are highly concentrated in just a few areas. Returns mark the start of a difficult journey in a country facing multiple, overlapping crises, and struggling to recover after four decades of instability. For women and girls in particular, life in Afghanistan brings

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extreme restrictions.

UNHCR urges countries in the region to ensure that returns to Afghanistan are voluntary, safe, and dignified. Forcing or pressuring Afghans to return risks further instability in the region, and onward movement towards Europe.

UNHCR calls on the international community to urgently and substantially increase funding — to meet both critical needs at the border upon arrival, and provide longer-term assistance to help returnees settle in Afghanistan.

UNHCR’s response in Afghanistan this year is only funded at 28 per

cent of a required \$216 million.

The global community must not turn away from the people of Afghanistan at this pivotal time and should stand with them to restore hope, and give them a fighting chance of recovery, stability and prosperity.

Earlier this month, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) revealed that more than 256,000 Afghan migrants had returned from Iran during June alone.

IOM also reported that a lack of funding has severely affected its ability, and that of its partners, to deliver essential aid services.

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More than 700 Palestinians killed seeking aid in Gaza

GAZA (AP): More than 700 Palestinians have been killed trying to get food in the Gaza Strip over the past few weeks, according to new figures from the Gaza Health Ministry, spurring renewed condemnation of a contentious United States and Israeli-backed aid scheme.

The Health Ministry said on Saturday that at least 743 Palestinians were killed and more than 4,891 others were injured while seeking assistance at Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF) distribution sites. The GHF, which began operating in the bombed Palestinian enclave in late May, has drawn widespread criticism amid multiple reports that its contractors as well as Israeli forces have opened fire on aid seekers.

"The tragedy is that this is again a conservative reading of casualties who were at these distribution points, waiting for food parcels," Al Jazeera's Hani Mahmoud said of the ministry's latest figures. Reporting from Gaza City, Mahmoud said the attacks on aid seekers come as Palestinian families are desperate to feed their families amid dire shortages caused by Israel's blockade of Gaza.

"People are going hungry. People are rationing supplies. A lot of families are not eating. Mothers here skip meals in order to provide for their children," he said. Earlier this week, a report by The Associated

Press news agency quoted American contractors who said live ammunition and stun grenades have been fired at Palestinian civilians seeking aid at GHF distribution points. Two unnamed US contractors told AP that heavily armed staff members appeared to be doing whatever they wanted.

The GHF denied the news agency's reporting as "categorically false" and said it takes "the safety and security of [its] sites extremely seriously". The administration of US President Donald Trump also has stood by the GHF, with a State Department spokesperson telling reporters on Wednesday that the group is the "one entity that has gotten food and aid into the Gaza Strip".

In late June, the Trump administration pledged \$30m in direct funding for the organisation. On Saturday, the GHF said two US workers at one of its sites in southern Gaza's Khan Younis were injured when grenades were thrown at them at the end of food distribution. "The injured Americans are receiving medical treatment and are in stable condition," the group said.

It was not immediately clear who was responsible for the attack. Leading humanitarian and human rights groups have demanded the immediate closure of the GHF, which they accused of "forcing two

million people into overcrowded, militarized zones where they face daily gunfire and mass casualties".

Amnesty International has described the group's operations as an "inhumane and deadly militarized scheme". "All the evidence gathered, including testimonies which Amnesty International is receiving from victims and witnesses, suggest that the GHF was designed so as to placate international concerns while constituting another tool of Israel's genocide," Amnesty said. Still, faced with dire shortages of food, water and other humanitarian supplies under Israel's blockade, many Palestinians in Gaza say they have no choice but to seek assistance from the group, despite the risks.

"I was forced to go to the aid distribution centre simply because my kids had not eaten for three days in a row," Majid Abu Laban, a Palestinian man who was wounded in an attack at a GHF site, told Al Jazeera. "We try to fool our children by all means, but they are starving," Abu Laban said.

"So I decided to risk my life and head to [an aid distribution point] at Netzarim," he said, referring to an Israeli military-established corridor south of Gaza City. "I took the road at midnight hoping to get some food. As crowds rushed in, Israeli forces fired artillery shells at us. In the chaos, everyone was just trying to survive."

UK re-establishing full Syria ties, says Lammy

DAMASCUS (AFP): The United Kingdom is re-establishing full ties with Syria following the toppling of longtime ruler Bashar al-Assad in December, foreign minister David Lammy said during a visit to Damascus on Saturday.

"After over a decade of conflict, there is renewed hope for the Syrian people. The UK is re-establishing diplomatic relations because it is in our interests to support the new government to deliver their commitment to build a stable, more secure and prosperous future for all Syrians," Lammy said in a statement. The statement came following Lammy's meeting with Syria's leader Ahmed al-Sharaa in Damascus, the Syrian presidency said, in his first visit since Assad's ouster.

Interim President Sharaa received Lammy alongside Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad al-Shaibani, according to photos of the meeting released by the presidency. The talks addressed "bilateral ties ... and ways of strengthening cooperation, as well as regional and international developments", Sharaa's office said in a statement. The Syrian foreign ministry issued a similar statement following a separate meeting between Lammy and Shaibani.

Syria has seen a flurry of diplomatic activity since rebel-led forces ousted Assad in December after more than 13 years of grinding civil war. In May, Syrian Defence Minister Muhrif Abu Qasra met with an official British delegation, the defence ministry said at the time. In April, the UK government announced it was lifting sanctions imposed on Syria's interior and defence ministries under Assad.

It also said it was lifting sanctions against various media groups and intelligence agencies, as well as on some sectors of the economy including financial services and energy production. A month earlier, it lifted sanctions on 24 entities including Syria's central bank. Syria's new authorities have welcomed the moves, which came as they seek to rebuild the country and reboot its moribund economy, both ravaged by the conflict and crippling sanctions.

Turkiye arrests three more Opp mayors

ISTANBUL (AFP): Türkiye arrested three more opposition mayors early on Saturday as part of an investigation into alleged graft, officials from the main opposition CHP said, denouncing it as a "political operation".

The early morning arrests were the latest move targeting elected officials of the Republican People's Party (CHP) as the government of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan puts increasing pressure on the party which won a huge victory against his AKP in the 2024 local elections and is rising in the polls.

They were linked an investigation into alleged graft which resulted in the removal in March of Istanbul's powerful opposition mayor, Ekrem Imamoglu, whose jailing sparked mass protests in Türkiye's worst street unrest since 2013. Imamoglu is Erdogan's biggest political rival and the CHP's candidate for the 2028 presidential race.

Earlier this week, police arrested 137 people as part of a probe into alleged graft in the opposition stronghold of Izmir, Türkiye's third city. They were still seeking others under a prosecutors' arrest warrant that named 157 people. The latest detainees were based in southern Türkiye's mayor of the southern city of Adana, Zeydan Karalar, mayor of the resort town of Antalya, Muhittin Bocek, and the mayor of Adiyaman in the southeast, Abdurrahman Tudure.

As he was being led away to a police car, a journalist asked Karalar why he was being arrested. "Where there is an influential journalist or politician, they silence them," he replied. "In a system where the law bends and sways according to politics, where justice is applied for one group and ignored for another, no one should expect us to trust in the rule of law or believe in justice," wrote Mansur Yavas on X, opposition mayor of Ankara, Türkiye's capital.



GAZA: Palestinian Abdel Hadi Bashir mourning the loss of his two daughters, who were killed in an Israeli air strike.

APC slams demolition of hotels and parks

Haleem Asad

LOWER DIR: An All-Parties Conference (APC) organized by the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F) Lower Dir chapter was held at the Timergara Rest House on Saturday under the chairmanship of former MPA and Awami National Party (ANP) district president Haji Bahadur Khan.

Participants of the conference strongly criticized the recent demolition and sealing of hotels and restaurants in Timergara under the pretext of anti-encroachment operations, warning that such actions could severely damage local tourism. They said the government claims to promote tourism while simultaneously destroying existing tourist facilities.

Prominent speakers at the APC included JUI-F district chief Sirajuddin, General Secretary Maulana Muhammad Huzaifa, former provincial minister Muzaffar Syed Advocate, JUI-F provincial leader Muhammad Rahim Haqqani, Timergara tehsil chairman Mufti Irfanuddin, Maulana Muhammad Nahi Shah, PTI MPA Malik Shafullah Khan, ANP district president Haji Bahadur Khan, Malik Muhammad Rasheed Khan, Jamaat-e-Islami KP North information secretary Engineer Yaqoob-ur-Rehman, PPP Lower Dir General Secretary Naemullah Khan, PML-N General Secretary Javed Akhtar Advocate, Timergara traders' union president Haji Anwaruddin, former Chamber of Commerce president Mian Noor Alam Bacha, Pakhtunkhwa Milli Awami Party president Sartaj Khan, HRCPP representative Akbar Khan, and PPP's Nawabzada Irfan, among others. Speakers condemned the govern-

ment for punishing the people of Lower Dir over its own failure in the Swat tragedy. They said that many hotels and restaurants were sealed or demolished without prior notice, despite the fact that they were built with the hard-earned money of overseas Pakistanis. "Labeling these private properties as state-owned and demolishing them without a clear demarcation of the riverbelt is unjust," they maintained.

They demanded that the district administration first properly define the riverbelt boundaries, as even irrigation and local officials are reportedly unaware of the actual limits of the Panjkora River. Participants also blamed the district administration for environmental destruction, claiming that the auction of riverbed minerals worth Rs70 million had turned the Panjkora River into a wasteland of pits and ruins. They questioned why the administration did not stop construction earlier if it was illegal, and held past district officials responsible for allowing and even facilitating such development.

In a joint declaration, the APC announced that a delegation led by PTI MPA Malik Shafullah Khan, comprising representatives from all political parties in Lower Dir, would meet Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur and the Chief Secretary. Meanwhile, another delegation led by PML-N's Javed Akhtar Advocate would call on Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to convey local concerns. The APC demanded the immediate reopening of all sealed hotels and restaurants and called for an end to the anti-encroachment operation in Timergara.

Residents protest prolonged

power outages: Residents of Talash on the call of Youth Islahi Jirga staged a protest rally on the main road at Shamsi Khan against prolonged and unannounced electricity load-shedding, bringing traffic to a halt for over two hours here on Saturday.

The protest caused severe disruption in traffic flow across five districts, leaving commuters and passengers stranded in sweltering heat. The protesters chanted slogans against PESCO, accusing the power authorities of negligence and mismanagement.

Speakers at the protest, including Youth Jirga president Muhammad Raziq, Haji Muhammad Ali, Tahir Altaf Sarhadi, Muhammad Zikrullah, and others said the relentless power outages during peak summer heat had made life unbearable. They pointed out that the prolonged load-shedding had led to acute water shortages in homes, mosques, and educational institutions.

The protesters warned that if PESCO failed to address the issue promptly, they would be forced to take more drastic steps. They expressed frustration that thousands of residents across the four union councils of Talash Valley were suffering despite being regular bill payers, while those involved in electricity theft continued to go unpunished. The demonstrators called for strict legal action against power thieves and demanded uninterrupted power supply to law-abiding consumers. Later, the protest was peacefully called off after successful negotiations between the demonstrators and local administration officials, including Assistant Commissioner Abdul Aziz, SHO Naem Khan, and SDO PESCO Talash Muhammad Idrees.

Pakistan, UAE to boost cooperation in education

F.P. Report

ABU DHABI: In a significant diplomatic engagement aimed at boosting bilateral cooperation, Pakistan's Ambassador to the United Arab Emirates, H.E. Faisal Niaz Tirmizi, held a high-level meeting with H.E. Dr. Abdulrahman bin Abdulmannan Al Awar, UAE Minister of Human Resources and Emiratisation, and Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research.

The meeting, held in Abu Dhabi, centered on enhancing collaboration between Pakistan and the UAE in the fields of higher education, professional skills development, and human capital enhancement. Both sides reviewed ongoing cooperative efforts and discussed practical steps to deepen institutional linkages that benefit students, academic institutions, and professionals from both nations.

Ambassador Tirmizi highlighted the vital contribution of the Pakistani diaspora to the UAE's development and expressed appre-



ciation for the UAE's continued support in fostering an inclusive and enabling environment for expatriates. He reiterated Pakistan's commitment to strengthening institutional ties, promoting skills training, and expanding opportunities in workforce development.

Minister Dr. Al Awar praised the historic and brotherly relations between the two countries and reaffirmed the UAE's keen interest in furthering strategic partnerships with Pakistan in sectors of mutual interest. He welcomed sustained engagement between relevant authorities from both nations to

ensure long-term coordination and effective collaboration.

The meeting underscored the shared vision of Pakistan and the UAE to invest in human capital, facilitate cross-border educational opportunities, and prepare the workforce for the challenges and demands of the global economy.

This diplomatic interaction represents a forward-looking step in reinforcing educational and manpower cooperation - a cornerstone of the broader UAE-Pakistan bilateral relationship, which continues to thrive on mutual respect, shared values, and people-to-people connectivity.

Two dozen girl campers missing in Texas flash floods, 27 people killed

TEXAS: Flash floods fuelled by torrential rains in the US state of Texas have killed at least 27 people, local officials said, as rescue teams scramble to save dozens of victims trapped by high water or reported missing in the disaster.

Among the missing were about two dozen people listed as unaccounted for on Friday at an all-girls and Christian summer camp located on the banks of the Guadalupe River, authorities said. Texas parents frantically posted photos of their young daughters on social media with pleas for information.

Search teams used helicopters and drones through

the night to look for victims and rescue people who were stranded. The danger was not over as more heavy rains were expected on Saturday and flash flood warnings and flood watches remained in effect for parts of central Texas. Authorities have come under intense scrutiny over whether the camp and others in the area received sufficient, if any, warning and whether enough preparations were made. AccuWeather, a private forecasting company, said it and the National Weather Service sent warnings about potential flash flooding hours before the devastation.

The destructive fast-mov-

ing waters along the Guadalupe River rose eight metres (26 feet) in just 45 minutes before dawn on Friday, washing away homes and vehicles. Hundreds of rescuers were deployed around Kerr County as part of a massive search-and-rescue operation, including at least 167 working by helicopter, authorities said.

The National Weather Service declared a flash flood emergency for parts of the county, located in south-central Texas Hill Country, about 105km (65 miles) northwest of San Antonio, following heavy downpours measuring up to 300mm (12 inches) of rain. — Aljazeera

Hamas says ready to start talks on Gaza ceasefire

JERUSALEM/GAZA CITY (AFP): Hamas said it was ready to start talks "immediately" on a proposal for a ceasefire in Gaza, where the civil defense agency said Israel's ongoing offensive killed 20 people on Saturday.

The announcement came after it held consultations with other Palestinian factions and before a visit on Monday by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to Washington, where President Donald Trump is pushing for an end to the war, now in its 21st month. "The movement is ready to engage immediately and seriously in a cycle of negotiations on the mechanism to put in place" the terms of a draft US-backed truce proposal received from mediators, the militant group said in a statement.

Israel meanwhile said Saturday it was still mulling its response to a positive reaction from Hamas to the latest US-sponsored proposal for a Gaza ceasefire. "No decision has been made yet on that issue," a government official said on condition of anonymity as they were not authorized to speak publicly about it. Israel's security cabinet was due to meet later on Saturday, after the end of the Jewish sabbath at sundown, Israeli media reported.

Hamas ally Islamic Jihad

said it supported ceasefire talks, but demanded "guarantees" that Israel "will not resume its aggression" once hostages held in Gaza are freed. Trump, when asked about Hamas's response aboard Air Force One on Friday, said: "That's good. They haven't briefed me on it. We have to get it over with. We have to do something about Gaza."

The conflict in Gaza began with Hamas's October 2023 attack, which sparked a massive Israeli offensive aimed at destroying Hamas and bringing home all the hostages seized by Palestinian militants. On Friday, Netanyahu again pledged to bring home the hostages, after coming under massive domestic pressure over their fate.

Two previous ceasefires mediated by Qatar, Egypt and the United States have seen temporary halts in fighting, coupled with the return of Israeli hostages in exchange for Palestinian prisoners. Efforts to broker a new truce have repeatedly failed, with the primary point of contention being Israel's rejection of Hamas's demand for guarantees that any new ceasefire will be lasting.

A previous round of talks broke down in May with Hamas and Israel trading blame for its failure. The Palestinian militant group

said it had given a "positive response" to a truce proposal from US special envoy Steve Witkoff, but its request for a guarantee that hostilities would not resume had been rejected by Israel.

A Palestinian source familiar with the negotiations told AFP earlier this week that the latest proposal included "a 60-day truce, during which Hamas would release half of the living Israeli captives in the Gaza Strip" — thought to number 22 — "in exchange for Israel releasing a number of Palestinian prisoners and detainees." Out of 251 hostages seized by Palestinian militants during the October 2023 attack, 49 are still held in Gaza, including 27 the Israeli military says are dead.

Nearly 21 months of war have created dire humanitarian conditions for the more than two million people in the Gaza Strip, where Israel has recently expanded its military operations. Civil defense spokesman Mahmud Bassal said Israeli military operations killed 20 people across the war-battered territory on Saturday. Media restrictions in Gaza and difficulties in accessing many areas mean AFP is unable to independently verify the tolls and details provided by the civil defense agency.

IAEA pulls inspectors from Iran

VIENNA (Reuters): The UN nuclear watchdog said it had pulled its last remaining inspectors from Iran as a standoff over their return to the country's nuclear facilities bombed by the United States and Israel deepens.

Israel launched its first military strikes on Iran's nuclear sites in a 12-day war with the Islamic Republic three weeks ago. The International Atomic Energy Agency's inspectors have not been able to inspect Iran's facilities since then, even though IAEA chief Rafael Grossi has said that is his top priority. Iran's parliament has now passed a law to suspend cooperation with the IAEA until the safety of its nuclear facilities can be guaranteed. While the IAEA says Iran has not yet formally informed it of any suspension, it is unclear when the agency's inspectors will be able to return to Iran.

"An IAEA team of inspectors today safely departed from Iran to return to the Agency headquarters in Vienna, after staying in Tehran throughout the recent military conflict,"

the IAEA said on X. Diplomats said the number of IAEA inspectors in Iran was reduced to a handful after the June 13 start of the war. Some have also expressed concern about the inspectors' safety since the end of the conflict, given fierce criticism of the agency by Iranian officials and Iranian media.

Iran has accused the agency of effectively paving the way for the bombings by issuing a damning report on May 31 that led to a resolution by the IAEA's 35-nation Board of Governors declaring Iran in breach of its non-proliferation obligations. IAEA chief Rafael Grossi has said he stands by the report. He has denied it provided diplomatic cover for military action.

Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi said on Thursday Iran remained committed to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). "(Grossi) reiterated the crucial importance of the IAEA discussing with Iran modalities for resuming its indispensable monitoring and verification activities in Iran as soon as possible," the IAEA said.

The US and Israeli military strikes either destroyed or badly damaged Iran's three uranium enrichment sites. But it was less clear what has happened to much of Iran's nine tons of enriched uranium, especially the more than 400 kg enriched to up to 60 percent purity, a short step from weapons grade. That is enough, if enriched further, for nine nuclear weapons, according to an IAEA yardstick. Iran says its aims are entirely peaceful but Western powers say there is no civil justification for enriching to such a high level, and the IAEA says no country has done so without developing the atom bomb.

As a party to the NPT, Iran must account for its enriched uranium, which normally is closely monitored by the IAEA, the body that enforces the NPT and verifies countries' declarations. But the bombing of Iran's facilities has now muddied the waters. "We cannot afford that the inspection regime is interrupted," Grossi told a press conference in Vienna last week.