

Army rescues four workers  
F.P. Report

MINGORA: The Pakistan Army personnel have rescued four workers trapped in an emerald mine in the Babuzai area of Swat Valley. The emerald mine suddenly collapsed last night, trapping the workers. As soon as the incident was reported, Pakistan Army teams were immediately dispatched to the scene. After relentless efforts, all the workers trapped in the debris were rescued safely.



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# Two killed in Wana bazaar IED blast

F.P. Report

WANA: A powerful bomb blast shook the main bazaar of Wana, on Thursday, leaving two civilians dead and more than 20 others injured, including two policemen. The explosion occurred during peak market hours, spreading chaos and fear throughout the area.

According to police officials, the blast took place near the Shakai Stand as a police van was passing through the area. Initial investigations suggest that the attack was carried out using a remote-controlled explosive device, with the police vehicle believed to be the intended target.

The sound of the explosion echoed across the town, shattering glass windows of several nearby shops and triggering a stampede among pedestrians. Eyewitnesses described the blast as unusually intense.

The two deceased have been identified as Sardar Hussain resident of Wacha Dana in Birmal and Muhammad Adnan from Dera Ismail Khan. Among the injured were Rehman, Umar, Gulab, Muhammad Rehman, Naik Muhammad, Zubair, Hafeezullah, Wazirzada, Musto Khan, Syed Rehman, Nauman, and Qasim. Another injured person remains unidentified and is reported to be in critical condition.

Two police constables

## Militant attacks on police posts in Dir foiled by security forces

Haleem Asad

LOWER DIR: Armed militants launched coordinated attacks on multiple police posts and a police station in the Maidan area of Lower Dir on Wednesday night, which were successfully repulsed by security forces, officials said. According to police, the most serious assault occurred at the joint police and Levies checkpoint in the Sar Lara area, where heavily armed militants opened fire. However, personnel of both the police and Dir Scouts responded swiftly and effectively, forcing the attackers to retreat. One Dir Scouts personnel identified as Naik Shakor sustained injuries during the exchange of fire and was promptly given medical aid. No casualties were reported among the police.

In addition to the Sar Lara incident, unidentified assailants also attempted to target Lal Qila Police Station and police posts in Sori Pao and Gumbat Banda. All attacks were thwarted without any loss of life or damage to infrastructure. DSP Jandol reached the scene to assess the situation, inquired after the injured personnel, and commended the alertness and bravery of the deployed forces. A report has been submitted to the relevant department for legal proceedings, and further investigations are underway. Police and other security agencies remain on high alert in view of the prevailing security situation and have vowed to take all necessary measures to ensure the safety of the public.

were also wounded in the blast. They have been identified as Zubair and Fareedoon. Both sustained serious injuries and are under treatment at Headquarters Hospital Wana, where medical staff have described the condition of at least two individuals as critical.

Immediately after the explosion, security forces cordoned off the area and launched a search operation. A bomb disposal squad was also called to

collect evidence from the scene.

District Health Officer (DHO) Lower Waziristan, Adnan Rashid, directed all doctors and medical staff at Headquarters Hospital Wana to ensure the best possible care and immediate medical assistance for the injured victims. Police say that further details will be released once the investigation is complete. So far, no group has claimed responsibility for the attack.

## President, PM vow to eradicate terrorism

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif have strongly condemned an attack carried out by terrorists of Fitna-al-Hindustan on security forces vehicle in district Mastung, Balochistan.

In their separate statements, they paid tribute to Major Muhammad Rizwan Tahir, Naik Ibn Ameen and Lance Naik Muhammad Younas, who embraced martyrdom in the attack. The President said entire nation stands shoulder to shoulder with its security forces in the war against terrorism.

He said terrorist elements operating under Indian patronage will soon be eliminated. The Prime Minister also reiterated government's resolve to completely eliminate all forms of terrorism from the country. Shehbaz Sharif said sacrifices of security forces in fight against terrorism are unparalleled.

Meanwhile, President Zardari grieves over the passing of former Romanian President Ion Iliescu. President Asif Ali Zardari has expressed deep sorrow over the demise of H.E. Ion Iliescu, former President of Romania and a key figure in the country's modern history.

In his condolence message, the President conveyed on behalf of the people and Government of Pakistan and in his personal capacity, heartfelt sympathies to the Government and people of Romania as well as to the bereaved family of the late President Iliescu. The President stated that Mr. Iliescu's leadership during Romania's transition to democracy marked a defining chapter in the nation's history. His service to the country will be remembered with respect and admiration. President Zardari offered prayers for the departed soul and expressed solidarity with the Romanian nation in this time of mourning.

## PHC grants bail to six PTI leaders

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: The Peshawar High Court (PHC) has granted protective bail to six Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leaders, including Members National Assembly (MNAs) Atif Khan, Shahram Tarakai, Shahid Khattak, Senator Mushal Yousafzai, and Provincial Minister Faisal Tarakai. The court directed the authorities stopped their arrest and asked them to approach the relevant courts, on Thursday.

PHC divisional bench comprising Justice Syed Arshad Ali and Justice Farah Jamshed heard the petitions filed by the PTI leaders. During the hearing, the court asked the authorities to provide details of the cases registered against the petitioners.

The PTI leaders had filed petitions seeking protective bail, fearing arrest in cases registered against them. The court was informed that the petitioners were members of the National Assembly or Senate and were willing to surrender before the courts.

Justice Syed Arshad Ali observed that the petitioners should approach the relevant courts for bail, but granted them protective bail.

Meanwhile, PTI Peshawar region's president, Atif Khan, has emphasized the need for a national dialogue to save the country from its current crisis. Speaking to the media after a court hearing, expressed his concerns about the country's situation and the need for political leaders to come together to find a way forward.

Atif Khan acknowledged that he has differences with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Khan Gandapur on certain issues. However, he emphasized that these differences are not personal and that he will stand with the chief minister in the effort to secure the release of PTI founding chairman.



ISLAMABAD: MNA Sardar Ghulam Abbas and former MNA, Raja Riaz called on Prime Minister, Shehbaz Sharif.

# Rapid population growth: PM calls for national policy

Saqib Mushtaq

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday termed Pakistan's annual population growth rate of 2.55 per cent, an alarming trend requiring immediate and coordinated policy action at the national level to address the issue.

The prime minister chaired a high-level meeting at the Prime Minister's Office to review the challenges posed by Pakistan's rising population and to deliberate on effective strategies to manage it, a Prime Minister's Office news release said. "We need comprehensive planning to ensure our growing population, especially the youth, becomes a productive part of the economy," he stressed. "A large segment of our population comprises young people, who are the most valuable asset for our country."

He emphasized that the government was taking several initiatives to empower the youth and integrate them into the country's economic mainstream. "Opportunities are being created to enable our youth to play a central role in national development," he added. Speaking on gender inclusion, PM Shehbaz underlined the critical importance of women's participation in the workforce. "Women constitute a significant portion of our human capital. We must ensure greater employment opportunities for them," he directed.

The Prime Minister instructed the formation of a committee to develop a comprehensive and effective national policy, in close collaboration

with provincial governments. "A unified and strategic response is the need of the hour," he asserted, calling for a coordinated federal-provincial framework to tackle population-related issues. He also stressed the importance of launching a nationwide awareness campaign to educate citizens about the implications of unchecked population growth, especially in the context of sustainable economic development.

During the meeting, the Prime Minister was briefed on various proposals and recommendations to manage population growth. Officials stressed that any long-term solution would require active provincial collaboration and public engagement at the grassroots level. The meeting was participated by Federal Minister for Planning and Development Dr. Ahsan Iqbal, Federal Minister for Education Dr. Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui, Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar, Federal Minister for Religious Affairs Sardar Muhammad Yousaf, Federal Minister for Law Azam Nazeer Tarar, along with senior officials from relevant institutions.

**Shehbaz hails increase in exports, remittances:** Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif expressed satisfaction over Pakistan's exports reaching 2.7 billion US dollars in the first month of the new fiscal year.

In a statement, he said, "From July 2024 to July 2025, exports have increased by 17 percent, which is very heartening." "Nine percent increase in exports in just one month is very satisfactory," he said adding,

"Export-led growth is the top priority of the government."

He said, "Economic indicators are moving in the right direction because of the government's best economic policies and priorities." "The efforts of the government's economic team are commendable," he remarked. He said, "The government is striving to increase exports of the country, promote investment and provide a business-friendly environment." "The implementation of the faceless customs assessment system is further improving port operations," he observed. The prime minister said, "the increase in the ratio of tax collection to GDP is satisfactory for the government."

"The improvement in Pakistan's credit ratings by global financial institutions is a reflection of the stability of Pakistan's economy," he noted. He said, "In the last fiscal year, 34.9 billion US dollars were received in remittances, which is 28.8% more than in the fiscal year 2023-2024." "More facilities are being provided to overseas Pakistanis," he said adding, "The Pakistan Stock Exchange 100 Index has shown historic performance in recent days by crossing the 145,000 mark."

Meanwhile, member of National Assembly Sardar Ghulam Abbas and former Member of National Assembly Raja Riaz called on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif here on Thursday and discussed matters of mutual interest. Sardar Ghulam Abbas gave a briefing on the issues related to his constituency. They also discussed the overall political situation of the country.

# Netanyahu says wants to take control of all of Gaza

WASHINGTON (Reuters): Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Thursday that Israel intends to take military control of all of Gaza and will eventually hand it over to armed forces that will govern it properly.

"We intend to," Netanyahu said in an interview with Fox News when asked if Israel would take control of the entire 26-mile strip. "We don't want to keep it. We want to have a security perimeter. We don't want to govern it. We don't want to be there as a governing body." Reuters adds: A senior member of the European Union's executive said the displacement and killing in Gaza looked very much like genocide, the first commissioner to level that accusation and publicly break with the body's position on the conflict.

"If it is not genocide, it looks very much like the definition used to express its meaning," Teresa Ribera – the European Commission's second-highest ranking official – told Politico in an interview published on Thursday. Israel has repeatedly rejected accusations of carrying

out genocide in its war in Gaza. Israel's mission to the EU did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Ribera is the European Commission's Executive Vice President, second only in seniority to President Ursula von der Leyen. The Spanish socialist, whose portfolio includes climate and anti-trust issues, is not responsible for EU foreign policy. "What we are seeing is a concrete population being targeted, killed and condemned to starve to death," Ribera told Politico.

Her statements went further than the European Commission, which has accused Israel of violating human rights in Gaza, but stopped short of accusing it of genocide. The Commission last week proposed curbing Israeli access to its flagship research funding programme after calls from EU countries to increase pressure on Israel to alleviate the humanitarian crisis in the enclave.

In that proposal, the Commission said Israel had violated a human rights clause in an agreement that governs its relations with the EU. "With its interven-

tion in the Gaza Strip and the ensuing humanitarian catastrophe, including thousands of civilian deaths and rapidly rising numbers of spreading extreme malnutrition, specifically of children, Israel is violating human rights and humanitarian law," it wrote. Israel has fended off accusations of genocide, including a case brought by South Africa at the International Court of Justice in the Hague that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu condemned as "outrageous".

The war was triggered when Hamas-led militants attacked Israeli communities and military bases near Gaza on October 7, 2023. About 1,200 people, including more than 700 civilians, were killed, and 251 hostages were taken to Gaza. Israel's military response has devastated the tiny, crowded enclave, killing more than 61,000 people, mostly civilians, according to Palestinian health authorities. Israel has repeatedly said its actions in Gaza are justified as self-defence and accuses Hamas of using civilians as human shields, a charge the militant group denies.

## Tarar calls for unity against terrorism

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Law and Justice Senator Azam Nazeer Tarar on Thursday clarified that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has consistently received its designated share under the National Finance Commission (NFC) Award, and urged lawmakers to adopt a unified stance against terrorism.

Responding to a query raised by MNA Asad Qaiser in the National Assembly, Tarar clarified that one percent of the divisible pool has been regularly transferred to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for counter-terrorism efforts since the last NFC Award. "I've personally attended ten meetings on this issue, including those with the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. There's no second opinion-the one percent NFC share has been transferred without interruption for the past 15 years," he stated.

Backing figures shared by PML-N MNA Talal Chaudhry, Tarar confirmed that payments related to the merged tribal districts-following the 2018 constitutional amendment-had also been released. He added that some pending amounts were still under technical discussion.

Addressing past government policies on talks with militants, the minister said, "The negotiations with terrorists and related policies during your government's tenure are part of the public record. The consequences of those actions are also part of history. We need not debate the past today." He emphasized the importance of moving forward with national unity and urged all members of the House to resolve collectively: "Let us stand united in one voice to declare that we want a terrorism-free Pakistan-and we are all ready to make sacrifices for it."

# Talal rules out any fresh operation in KP

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: State Minister for Interior Talal Chaudhry on Thursday ruled out any fresh operation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, asserting that ongoing counter-terrorism actions under the National Action Plan (NAP) will proceed unhindered.

Responding to issues other than the points of order raised by Asad Qaiser and Ms. Shazia Marri in National Assembly, Talal Chaudhry warned, "Let me be clear, NAP operations will not be stopped by anyone, no matter who they are. He slammed PTI, asking, "Who brought back the TTP? Which CM said, 'We won't fight or we'll end up like PPP or ANP?'"

On Youm-e-Istehsal protests of PTI, Talal Chaudhry defended the closure of Parliament's entry gates, citing security concerns due to Section 144 and a large rally near D-Chowk. He clarified that the Parliament gates were shut for incoming

crowds, not outgoing MNAs, who exited without obstruction.

Commenting on PTI's August 5 protest, the minister noted minimal turnout in Islamabad, with fewer than 100 protestors that too only brief detentions. No MNAs were arrested. In Punjab, 94 people were held out of a population of 130 million. Most protests were symbolic and dispersed swiftly. Talal Chaudhry dismissed the May 9 defense, stating that popularity offers no immunity from the law. He said those who attacked state symbols did so for political gain and are now facing legal consequences, with courts in Punjab and Peshawar delivering rulings.

"Those who set fire to monuments were doing it for future election tickets, and now they're facing the consequences. Courts in Punjab and Peshawar are issuing rulings-what more fairness do you want?" Talal confirmed that land travel for Arbaceen pilgrims

via Iran remained suspended due to regional tensions following the Israel-Iran conflict. He said the Interior Ministry and provincial authorities are in active dialogue with protesting pilgrims and MWM leadership. A delegation met ministry officials last Thursday, with further talks held recently with MWM's Engineer Raja Nasir Abbas, he said. Talal said, I'm ready to visit Karachi for continued negotiations, adding that Sindh and Balochistan governments were fully aligned and the Sindh governor was in close contact with the protesters.

The minister further informed the House that the Prime Minister had directed the Defence Minister to ensure facilitation of pilgrims through air travel. "We have increased the number of flights and engaged foreign carriers, including Iranian and Iraqi airlines, to enhance capacity. Discussions are also underway to reduce fares," he added.

aimed at stopping the auctions, thus clearing the way for NAB to dispose of Bahria Town's holdings. The sales took place at the NAB Rawalpindi Office and G-6/1 Islamabad.

In response, Malik Riaz Hussain has warned of a possible complete closure of Bahria Town's projects throughout Pakistan. Riaz voiced his anxieties over what he described as mounting pressure and interventions by government bodies in recent months, which he claims have significantly hampered the firm's functionality. He cited examples such as the detention of numerous employees, the freezing of corporate bank accounts, the confiscation of staff vehicles, and other limitations.

Riaz asserted that these measures have paralyzed

the corporation's finances, making it challenging to maintain daily functions and compensate workers. He stated, "We are being pushed to the edge and may be compelled to halt all Bahria Town activities nationwide."

While highlighting the seriousness of the situation, Riaz indicated that the decision to cease operations is not yet definitive, leaving room for discussion. "We remain willing to engage in discussions to address the current predicament, but the circumstances on the ground are deteriorating swiftly," he explained. This situation represents a crucial juncture for one of Pakistan's largest private real estate companies, with potential repercussions for the housing and construction sector across the country.

# NEPRA announces cut in power tariffs

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (Nepra) has announced a Rs1.88 per unit cut in power tariffs for the general public.

According to a notification issued by Nepra, the price reduction applies to DISCOs' consumers under the Quarterly Fuel Cost Adjustment (FCA) for the

April to June 2025 quarter.

The revised rates will be effective for three months, from August to October 2025, and are expected to bring a relief of Rs55.87 billion to electricity users across the country.

The benefit, however, will not apply to lifeline and prepaid meter users, as clarified in the official statement. Nepra noted that

the distribution companies (DISCOs) had requested a downward adjustment in power tariffs during the quarterly review.

The public hearing on this request was held on August 4, after which the decision was forwarded to the federal government for final approval. The reduction will apply to all consumers of DISCOs and K-Electric.



# Kundi inaugurates Emergency Rescue Center in Kanju

**Shafi Ullah**

MINGORA: Governor of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Faisal Karim Kundi, visited Swat on Thursday, where he inaugurated an Emergency Rescue Center at the Pakistan Red Crescent (Hilal-e-Ahmer) office in Kanju Township. During the ceremony, the Governor handed over two ambulance vehicles and five local rescue boats to the Swat chapter of the Red Crescent. First aid kits were also distributed among local volunteers.

Governor Kundi praised the organization's performance and lauded the commitment and contributions of the local volunteers. Speaking to the media on the occasion, the Governor strongly criticized the provincial government and the broader political landscape. He remarked that in 2013, a peaceful Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was handed over, but the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government reversed the

progress and brought back instability to the province.

"We do not want war; we want peace-whether through dialogue or any other means. But when all avenues are closed, an operation remains the last resort," he said. Governor Kundi demanded accountability for Rs. 700 billion received by the province under the NFC Award, questioning where such a huge amount had been spent. He also pointed out that even after eight years, the promised annual allocation of Rs. 100 billion for the merged tribal districts had not been fulfilled, terming it a betrayal of commitments.

The Governor launched a scathing attack on the PTI leadership, stating that former Prime Minister Imran Khan remained confined to rallies and public gatherings rather than appearing before courts. "PTI now has more than five different factions, and Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur is playing on

both sides of the wicket," he said.

He further alleged that the law and order situation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had deteriorated alarmingly and criticized the use of helicopters for the children of ministers rather than the general public. Highlighting a recent tragedy, Governor Kundi held the provincial government responsible for the loss of 16 lives in the Swat River incident on June 27. "Despite such a massive loss of life, the government has failed to learn any lessons. Shockingly, the brave rescue worker, Ismat Ali, who helped save lives, was suspended instead," he added.

Governor Kundi also took a dig at the Chief Minister, saying that while Ali Amin Gandapur rushed to meet the Corps Commander upon taking office, he himself had visited the graves of Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto and Benazir Bhutto first when he became Governor.

# Punjab CM launches project to save Ravi River

**F.P. Report**

LAHORE: Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz has initiated a significant environmental campaign to rehabilitate the Hudiara Drain and safeguard the Ravi River.

The announcement, disseminated via the PMLN's official X (formerly Twitter) account, detailed a comprehensive plan with firm deadlines and specialized objectives for participating government bodies and local administrations.

The ambitious program aims to decontaminate the 54-kilometer Hudiara Drain, which flows into the Ravi River, eliminating industrial effluents, hazardous contaminants, and untreated sewage. Specific targets have been assigned to ensure accountability and efficient execution of the cleanup initiative. The move is expected to have a substantial positive impact on the environment and public health in the province.

Meanwhile, the Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif has Launched State-of-the-Art Urban Electric Tram (SRT) in Lahore. The SRT has a capacity of 320 passengers and can travel 40 kilometers after a single charge.

CM Punjab had a trial trip in Pakistan's first urban electric train, Super Autonomous Rapid Transit (SRT). She personally monitored the road test of "Super Autonomous Rapid Transit (SRT) from Main Ali Town to Muslim Town.

She inspected the SRT, and reviewed its various facilities. She was briefed in detail by Minister for Transport Bilal Akbar about the SRT. Chief Minister also reviewed road test drive of the SRT, and checked running of SRT amidst normal traffic.

People on Raiwind Road and Canal Road expressed happiness after seeing the 'Super Autonomous Rapid Transit (SRT)', which is being run successfully in Turkey, China and other countries. She was apprised, "In Abu Dhabi, 03 bogies of 'Super Autonomous Rapid Transit', against a capacity of 04, have been installed.

Norco International's latest SRT has a capacity of 320 passengers. The first complete e-train 'Super Autonomous Rapid Transit' can travel 40 kilometers after a single charge." She was also briefed, "Super Autonomous Rapid Transit (SRT) will have air conditioning and other facilities.

It will reduce environmental pollution, and will improve traffic on roads," She said, "People of Punjab are now waiting for good news every day." She added, "Beauty of Lahore will be doubled with the running of SRT." She highlighted, "Good news of SRT is also coming to Gujranwala and Faisalabad.

**JI threatens protest outside GHQ**

**F.P. Report**

QUETTA: The provincial leader of Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) Balochistan today announced a potential escalation of protests if the government fails to address the region's concerns. He stated that if their 8-point charter of demands isn't implemented within six months, the JI will stage a demonstration outside the General Headquarters (GHQ) in Rawalpindi.

During a press conference at the Quetta Press Club, the JI leader emphasized his commitment to highlighting Balochistan's issues. He recounted the JI's recent long march from Quetta to Islamabad, which was halted in Lahore.

# ASJ convicted murderer for lifetime imprisonment

**F.P. Report**

THATTA: The Model Criminal Trial Court in Thatta awarded life imprisonment to the accused in a murder case registered at the Thatta police station in 2023. Additional Session Judge Islam ul Haq Arain, pronounced the verdict after hearing arguments from both sides and also imposed a fine of three hundred thousand rupees to be paid by convict Abdullah Walhari, who was found guilty of killing his tribesman Zahid Hussain Walhari over a land dispute.

The court, in a detailed verdict, held that the prosecution had proved its case beyond any shadow of doubt. The complainant's counsel Saddam Abbasi advocate argued that the defense plea raised by the accused was baseless and didn't apply to the prudent mind. The lawyer further asserted that the accused had committed murder with malicious intention and with well-articulated conspiracy and planning. Soon after the verdict, Abdullah Walhari was escorted to Central Prison Hyderabad, where he will serve his term of imprisonment.

# SSC results: KP-EEF Girls School Shines

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: The KP-EEF Model High School for Girls situated at Kotla Mohsin Khan Peshawar which is running under the command and control of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Education Employees Foundation Higher Education Archives Libraries Department has maintained its past tradition in the SSC Examination this year as well, outperforming all the Government and Private educational institutions in the area of Kotla Mohsin Khan and other surrounding areas by showing excellent results.

Student of 10th Class Aleena Ahmad secured 1129 Marks, while Maheen Bibi got 1056 Marks, Sadaf Javed 1054 and Nihal Adil secured 1047 marks. Similarly Ifrah student of 9th class secured 554 marks and stood first in the class while Sumbal Sohail got 533 marks.

The Principal of the School Mrs. Ruqia Shabnam credited the school's experienced teaching staff for this success, saying that these excellent results were possible due to their hard work.

# ISSI commemorates 58th ASEAN Day

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: The China-Pakistan Study Centre (CPSC) at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI), in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) and the ASEAN Committee in Islamabad (ACI), commemorated 58th ASEAN Day with a special Roundtable titled "Pakistan and ASEAN: Partners in Peace, Progress, and Regional Prosperity".

The Roundtable brought together Heads of Mission of ASEAN member states in Islamabad, Pakistan's Ambassadors/ High Commissioners posted in ASEAN capitals, and senior officials from Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Ambassador Imran Ahmed Siddiqui, Additional Foreign Secretary (Asia Pacific), was the Chief Guest. Ambassador Sohail Mahmood, Director General ISSI, delivered welcome remarks, while Dr. Talat Shabbir, Director CPSC, moderated the session.

In his remarks, Ambassador Sohail Mahmood highlighted Pakistan's commitment to a deeper, mutually-beneficial partnership with ASEAN. He appreciated the collaboration of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the ASEAN Committee in Islamabad (ACI) in organizing the RoundTable Dialogue. Highlighting ASEAN's transformation into a global economic powerhouse with a GDP exceeding \$4.2 trillion, he lauded its resilience, unity, and commitment to peace, stability, inclusive growth, economic integration and socio-cultural collaboration. He emphasized ASEAN's newly adopted Community Vision 2045 as a timely blueprint to address global challenges and realize the new opportunities. Ambassador Mahmood noted a 23% growth in Pakistan-ASEAN trade in 2024 and stressed the potential for synergies with CPEC and RCEP.

He underscored people-to-people ties, youth engagement, and cultural interface as critical pillars of this partnership. He highlighted ISSI's contributions, including the establishment of the 'ASEAN Corner' and the special ASEAN issue of PIVOT magazine. Calling ASEAN a pillar of dialogue and stability, he reiterated Pakistan's quest for a Full Dialogue Partner status and reaffirmed ISSI's commitment to advancing Pakistan-ASEAN cooperation through dedicated research, dialogue, and strategic



engagement.

A special video message from H.E. Dr. Kao Kim Hourn, Secretary-General of ASEAN, acknowledged Pakistan's long-standing role as ASEAN's first Sectoral Dialogue Partner and welcomed the growing economic and institutional ties between both sides. He emphasized Pakistan's contributions to peace, development, and regional connectivity, and expressed support for deepening cooperation under the ASEAN-Pakistan Practical Cooperation Areas 2024-2028.

H.E. Mr. Wunna Han, Ambassador of Myanmar and Acting Chair of ACI, lauded progress in Pakistan-ASEAN cooperation, urged continued support for ASEAN Vision 2045 and key initiatives, and shared thoughts on ways to further elevate the ASEAN-Pakistan partnership. ASEAN Heads of Missions including from Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, Vietnam, the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand and Cambodia, shared perspectives on advancing collaboration in political, economic, security, and socio-cultural spheres. They appreciated Pakistan's continued engagement with ASEAN frameworks and reiterated support for a deeper and enhanced partnership between Pakistan and ASEAN.

Pakistan's Heads of Mission posted in ASEAN capitals made important interventions. They highlighted progress on Practical Cooperation Areas, growing bilateral engagements, and identified new avenues for collaboration in areas such as Fintech, digital economy, sustainable development, trade, tourism, and cultural diplomacy. They emphasized the need for institutional linkages and high-level exchanges to broaden ASEAN-Pakistan ties, and expressed confidence in the potential of this

partnership to contribute to regional peace and prosperity.

Chief Guest Ambassador Imran Siddiqui reiterated Pakistan's commitment to ASEAN under the Vision East Asia policy. He emphasized ASEAN's importance as a model for regional cooperation and highlighted Pakistan's diplomatic presence in nine ASEAN capitals. He noted the opportunities for deepening integration through initiatives such as CPEC, regional connectivity, capacity building, and people-centric development. Ambassador Imran Siddiqui called for Pakistan's elevation to Full Dialogue Partner status, emphasizing: "Pakistan views its partnership with ASEAN as a convergence of strategic destiny. The time, we believe, has come to graduate this engagement to the level of Full Dialogue Partnership, an evolution justified by visions, history and aspiration."

In his concluding remarks, Ambassador Khalid Mahmood, Chairman BoG ISSI, highlighted ASEAN's remarkable journey as one of the most successful regional organizations and reaffirmed Pakistan's active engagement with ASEAN and its related forums. He expressed hope for Pakistan's elevation to Full Dialogue Partner status to further deepen bilateral cooperation. He also appreciated ISSI's role in strengthening Pakistan-ASEAN ties through research, education, and policy dialogue.

Earlier, Dr. Talat Shabbir, Director CPSC, welcomed the participants and underscored ASEAN's continued relevance as a pillar of peace, resilience, and consensus-building. The event concluded with the traditional ASEAN handshake and cutting of cake to mark the ASEAN Day (on 8 August).

# LHC reinstates female govt employee 16 years after dismissal

**F.P. Report**

LAHORE: The Lahore High Court has nullified the decision to dismiss a female government employee 16 years after her termination and ordered her reinstatement. Justice Malik Owais Khalid ruled that no one could be dismissed from employment merely on the basis of an inquiry. Justice Malik Owais Khalid issued a 10-page written judgment on the petition filed by Tasneem Kausar. The court accepted her appeal against her dismissal from government service after 16 years.

In the verdict, Justice Khalid wrote that under Article 10-A of the Constitution, no one can be removed from employment without being granted the right to a fair trial. The petitioner was dismissed from her position as a lab assistant in 2009 on grounds of misconduct. She challenged the decision in the Lahore High Court.

In 2014, the court ordered her reinstatement. However, despite the court's directive, the department concerned did not reinstate her and suspended her for an indefinite period. The judgment further states that in 2014, another inquiry was initiated against the petitioner and a show-cause notice was issued.

In 2015, she was dismissed again.

She once again approached the court, which in 2021 directed the department to decide the matter without external influence and disposed of the appeal. The department, however, rejected the petitioner's plea for reinstatement. The allegation against the petitioner was that she submitted fake certificates at the time of recruitment.

During the inquiry, the petitioner was not given an opportunity to respond to the allegations. The department claimed that the certificates were sent to the institution concerned for verification, but no one from that institution was summoned during the inquiry.

# Sindh Cabinet approves reforms: CNIC-based vehicle registration, MDCAT via IBA Sukkur, and heritage review

**F.P. Report**

KARACHI: In a major policy move, Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah, while presiding over a cabinet meeting, approved a series of wide-ranging reforms, including the launch of CNIC-based vehicle registration, the transfer of MDCAT examination responsibility to IBA Sukkur, and a province-wide reassessment of 3,371 protected heritage buildings. The Cabinet also gave the green light to register seized government vehicles with altered chassis, establish Vehicle Fitness Inspection Centres, and grant a final extension in service and salary payments for COVID-19-era technical and supporting staff.

The meeting, held at CM House, was attended by provincial ministers, advisors, special assistants, the chief secretary and the concerned secretaries.

CNIC-based vehicle registration & personalised number plates:

The Sindh Cabinet reviewed a proposal by the Excise department to introduce a CNIC-based vehicle registration system, along with Personalised Registration Marks (PRMs).

The new system will link registration marks directly to a vehicle owner's CNIC rather than the vehicle's chassis, allowing owners to retain and reuse their personalised number plates even after selling their vehicle. The Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) will now be based on the chassis number, which remains the permanent identifier of the vehicle. PRMs can be retained, reused, or surrendered by owners. The system enables real-time traceability of vehicles and aligns with international standards. CNIC-linked registration promotes easy tracking of taxpayer assets and improves administrative convenience. It will be a modernised, owner-centric registration system with Integration with NADRA's national database. It will have enhanced traceability and standardisation across provinces.

Under the proposed model, number plates will be retained by owners, and upon sale of a vehicle, the plate is detached from the chassis and can be reassigned. If not retained, the number will be surrendered for auction or re-sale.

The Cabinet, in principle, approved the CNIC-based registration model and its legal amendments to bring Sindh's system in line with global best practices and recent reforms in the Islamabad Capital Territory.

The CM directed the Excise & Taxation Department to develop the CNIC-based system and then begin its testing, followed by amending the necessary law. The CNIC-based vehicle registration would not be implemented immediately, but he would hold follow-up meetings to oversee its implementation once it has been properly tested.

Seizure of unregistered Customs Vehicles: The Sindh Government has proposed Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for the registration of confiscated or seized government vehicles with tampered chassis or cut-and-weld alterations. The SOPs allow only Federal and Provincial Government entities to register such vehicles under special non-transferable registration series (GPY/GPZ for federal, GSY/GSZ for provincial).

The registration fee will be based on the vehicle's invoice value, and thorough verification will be required before registration. Seized vehicles currently with the Sindh Excise Department may be released to Pakistan Customs, provided they are registered within 60 days under the new SOPs. The proposal has been submitted to the Provincial Cabinet for approval.

The cabinet formed a committee under the Minister of Excise to firm up the proposals under the law. Fitness of Commercial vehicles: The Sindh Cabinet reviewed a Government-to-Government (G2G) proposal from Wah Industries Limited (WIL) to establish Vehicle Fitness Inspection Centres across Sindh.

Sindh has 9.2 million vehicles, including one million commercial ones. Due to the lack of a proper inspection system, issues such as accidents, pollution, and breakdowns are on the rise. The Transport Department has begun digitising the inspection process, but expanded infrastructure is still needed. WIL's Proposal Includes seven Heavy Vehicle Fitness Centres (five in Karachi, one each in Hyderabad and Sukkur). In the Second phase, more HVFCs (Larkana, Mirpurkhas, Shaheed Benazirabad) and 25 Small Vehicle Fitness Centres would be established. The features include third-party monitoring, real-time data dashboards, and escrow-based revenue collection. Legal amendments are proposed to revise outdated fitness fees (last updated in 2015), mandate annual inspections for private vehicles (after 3 years) and appoint WIL as the sole authorised agency with enforcement powers

The Cabinet, in principle, approved the proposal and decided that only the fitness of commercial vehicles, heavy and light, would be mandatory. The cabinet directed the Transport department to negotiate with the WIL for assigning them the project; meanwhile, the department is to propose legal amendments to enforce the new inspection regime.

Reassessment of 3,371 heritage buildings: In a significant step toward preserving Sindh's architectural legacy, the Sindh Cabinet approved the formation of a committee or multiple committees of experts to reassess the 3,371 buildings currently declared as Protected Heritage across the province.

These heritage sites were originally identified and notified under the Sindh Cultural Heritage (Preservation) Act, 1994. An Advisory Committee was constituted to guide preservation efforts. Subsequent surveys, including one by NED University in 2008-9 and a departmental re-survey in 2017-18, led to the declaration of 3,371 sites as Protected Heritage based on their architectural and historical significance. However, over the years, many of these buildings have faced structural decay due to environmental exposure, unauthorised alterations, and lack of maintenance-especially in the case of privately owned properties. Some structures have deteriorated to the point of becoming dangerous and may no longer retain their original heritage value.

Given this, the Culture Department proposed three options for reassessment committees, each comprising experts in architecture, conservation, urban planning, history, and structural engineering. The cabinet approved the constitution of committee (s) to assess the buildings and submit their report with recommendations to the government. Alongside the approval of the reassessment initiative, the Sindh Cabinet has also sanctioned Rs. 20 million for the execution of this important project, which aims to revisit, reevaluate, and recategorise the declared heritage sites across Sindh.

This decision marks a renewed commitment by the Sindh Government to safeguarding and responsibly managing its rich cultural and architectural heritage for future generations, the CM said.

Education boards law amended: The Sindh cabinet approved an important amendment to the Sindh Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education (Amendment) Act, 2025, enabling the appointment of BS-19 and BS-20 officers as Chairmen of the education boards across the province.

The amendment comes in response to administrative challenges and the limited availability of BS-21 officers, who were previously eligible for these roles. The new amendment to Section 15(1) now permits the appointment of BS-19/20 officers by transfer as Chairmen. The Chairmen will continue to serve a three-year term, with eligibility for reappointment. The Controlling Authority retains the power to make appointments either by direct recruitment or transfer. The latest amendment aims to ensure smoother appointments and more effective governance of

Sindh's education boards.

Selling of shares of Pakistan Textile City Ltd: The Sindh Cabinet considered proposals regarding the Government of Sindh's 16 per cent shareholding in Pakistan Textile City Ltd (PTCL), a failed industrial project on 1,250 acres within Port Qasim. The Port Qasim Authority (PQA) has offered to buy out all shareholders at Rs 10 per share and take over PTCL's liabilities.

The Sindh Government invested Rs 200 million in equity and Rs 271 million through KW&SC for infrastructure. It has proposed three options, including land Compensation: Reclaim 200 acres of land (16 per cent share) for future development. Financial Compensation to seek Rs. 12.48 billion as total compensation for land, equity investment, and infrastructure costs with accrued returns, and the third proposal was to get 16% equity in any future projects on the same land.

The Finance and Law Departments support the proposals as commercially and legally viable. The Cabinet approved the formation of a Committee, including the Minister of Industries, the Minister of Law and the CM's Special Assistant Saleem Baloch, to examine various options and submit a report with recommendations

The CM also directed the committee to talk to the Textile Industrialists to start the Textile City report. Amendments to Strengthen Anti-Terrorism Act, 1997: To enhance the effectiveness and clarity of anti-terrorism proceedings in the province, the Sindh Home Department proposed amendments to the Anti-Terrorism Act, 1997. The existing federal law lacks clarity on several operational aspects critical to the functioning of Anti-Terrorism Courts (ATCs), particularly regarding the prescribed age limit for appointment of judges, clear provisions for the tenure extension of judges and a defined mechanism for transferring, shifting, or de-notifying ATCs. To address these gaps, the provincial cabinet approved specific changes to

Section 13(1) and Section 28(1) of the Act, which deal with the establishment and transfer of cases between ATCs.

Under the proposed amendments, Age limits and tenure extensions for ATC judges will be formally prescribed. A structured procedure for transferring or de-notifying ATCs will be introduced to improve case management and security coordination. The reforms aim to ensure greater judicial efficiency, consistency, and legal certainty in handling terrorism-related cases across Sindh. These proposals, after approval, were referred to the assembly.

Upgradation of special education staff posts to BPS-14: Addressing long-standing concerns of stagnation and lack of career progression, the cabinet approved the upgradation of various teaching and instructor posts in the Special Education and Rehabilitation Centres from BPS-08, 09, 11, and 12 to BPS-14.

The decision will benefit 170 employees serving in isolated positions across 66 operational centres in the province, who had no promotional avenues available, leading to widespread frustration and demotivation. Posts being upgraded include Vocational Teacher, Quran Teacher, Music Teacher, Braille Teacher, Drawing Teacher, PTI, Teachers for Blind, Deaf & Dumb, and Physically Handicapped, Instructors for Tailoring, Carpet, Wood Work, Needle Craft, Marketing and Lab Assistants. These positions had remained in low pay scales despite the specialised nature of the roles and their critical importance in the rehabilitation and education of differently-abled children.

To optimise resource allocation, Chief Minister Sindh directed the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPD) to abolish 73 redundant posts and implement the upgradation through adjustments within existing cost centres, ensuring no additional burden on the provincial exchequer.





PESHAWAR: A shopkeeper displaying national flag and other Independence Day related stuff at Khyber Road as part of Independence Day preparations. — INP photo

# KP Seed Council approves 38 new varieties

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: The 45th meeting of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Provincial Seed Council was held in Peshawar, with Minister for Agriculture Major (Retired) Sajjad Barakwal in the chair. The council reviewed and approved new varieties of fruits, vegetables, oilseeds, tea, and other essential crops.

Director General Agricultural Research, Dr. Abdul Rauf, delivered a detailed presentation on each proposed seed variety, covering aspects such as production potential, suitable cultivation zones, disease resistance, and other critical attributes.

The meeting was attended by Secretary Agriculture Ambar Ali Khan, Director General Agriculture Extension Murad Ali, members of the Provincial Seed Council, directors of various agricultural research centers across the province, and representatives from private seed companies.

The provincial agriculture minister appreciated the contributions of private seed companies in developing improved seed varieties, stating that their efforts were commendable. He assured the council that the government is committed to providing all possible support to the private sector for the development of seeds and crop varieties.

He also shared that zoning of the province is currently underway based on agricultural land characteristics and climatic conditions, to identify the most suitable crops and seed varieties for each region.

During the meeting, 53 seed variety proposals were presented, out of which 38 were approved for cultivation. These include four new varieties of maize, and one new variety each of rice and wheat.

In the fruit category, two new varieties each of kiwi, apricot, orange, and grapes were approved, along with one new variety each of plum, pecan nut, fig, and ber.

In the vegetable category, two new varieties of okra, three of tomato, and one variety each of onion and spinach were approved. In the oilseeds category, ten new varieties received approval, while two new varieties of tea were also endorsed by the council.

# Despite employees' strike, exams successfully held at UoP

**Exemplary leadership of Controller of Examinations Aisha Salman and Additional Controller Akhtar Amin widely appreciated**

**Sajjad Muhammad Khan**

PESHAWAR: Despite an ongoing strike by non-teaching staff, the successful and peaceful conduct of annual and semester exams at the University of Peshawar is being hailed as a commendable achievement. Much of the credit goes to Controller of Examinations Aisha Salman and additional controller Akhtar Amin, whose timely strategy, leadership, and tireless efforts kept the examination system running smoothly under challenging circumstances.

It is worth noting that various departments' non-teaching staff had announced a strike to demand resolution of their service-related issues, raising concerns about whether the exams would be postponed or canceled. This caused considerable anxiety among students and parents, who feared that such disruptions could negatively impact academic careers. However, Aisha Salman quickly assessed the situation and devised a comprehensive and effective strategy. Despite having limited staff, she managed the organization of examination centers, ensured timely delivery of examination materials, and made certain that all exams proceeded without interruption according to schedule.

Additional Controller Akhtar Amin also played a crucial role in the process. He oversaw the reassignment of examination staff, coordinated operations at the center level, and maintained a daily monitoring system. Both officers personally visited examination centers multiple times to ensure transparency and discipline at every level.

According to university sources, faculty members in some departments volunteered to perform invigilation duties, which reflects the spirit of unity and responsibility within the institution during this crisis. BBA students also expressed satisfaction and said: "We were extremely worried due to the strike, but when the exams started on time and were conducted in an organized manner, it gave us real peace of mind. We are truly grateful to the Controller of Examinations and her team."

Parents also expressed deep satisfaction. Faculty members from the university and education experts from other institutions described the successful conduct of exams as a "model case," stating: "The Controller and Additional Controller not only ensured the continuity of exams but also maintained their quality, transparency, and dignity."

The University of Peshawar, one of the oldest and most prestigious institutions in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, often faces financial and administrative challenges. However, the smooth conduct of exams during this strike has proven that the university has a strong system and capable leadership that can handle unexpected situations effectively.

This model is now being considered a replicable example for other universities in the province to handle crises, and experts are recommending that all educational institutions develop comprehensive plans for emergency situations.

Although the strike by employees is still ongoing and negotiations are in progress, the successful execution of the examinations will be remembered as a major achievement and an example of exemplary performance by the institution.

# Youth must understand the importance of IT: Dr. Shafqat

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: Special Assistant to the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Science and Information Technology, Dr. Shafqat Ayaz, has said that if the youth of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa understand the importance of Information Technology, acquire modern digital skills, and work hard in the tech field, they can change their lives ultimately becoming a source of pride not only for themselves but for all of Pakistan.

He said the present era belongs to IT, and nations investing in this sector are rapidly leading the global race for progress.

Dr. Ayaz urged young people not to use mobile phones and the internet merely for entertainment, but to turn them into tools for learning and earning.

He added that this vision was set forth by Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan, who emphasized youth empowerment through education, skills, and self-reliance.

Under the leadership of Chief Minister Ali Amin Khan Gandapur, the provincial government is taking revolutionary steps to promote IT and technology across the province.

Dr. Shafqat Ayaz noted that the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government is launching digital platforms, IT parks, freelancing training, and skill development programs so that young people can earn respectable incomes from the comfort of their homes.

He concluded by saying that IT is our future, and youth must seize this opportunity and start preparing today for the world of tomorrow.

# Afghan business leaders appeals extension of stay in Pakistan

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: Afghan business leaders have warned that if the Pakistani government does not extend the deadline for Afghan nationals to remain in the country, they will be forced to resort to self-immolation. This was stated during a press conference at the Peshawar Press Club by Baryalai Mian Khel, Chairman of the United Afghan Refugees Supreme Council, and Syed Nageeb Badshah, Chairman of the United Afghan Traders Alliance.

"We are thankful to the Government of Pakistan and especially the people of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for bearing our burden for the past 50 years. But how can 3 million Afghan refugees wrap up their businesses and return to Afghanistan in just 24 days?" said Baryalai Mian Khel. "Our children were born in Pakistan and generations of Afghans are now settled here. How can we end a journey of half a century in 24 days?"

Mian Khel criticized the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for remaining a silent spectator while Afghan refugees face serious difficulties. He emphasized that the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan is not capable of simultaneously absorbing the return of 3 million refugees, as the country lacks the necessary resources.

He urged the Government of Pakistan to reconsider the deportation deadline and allow Afghan citizens time to conclude their businesses and sell their assets without suffering massive financial loss. "PO(R) card holders should be issued long-term visas," he added.

He further alleged that obtaining a visa from the Pakistani consulate in Afghanistan is extremely difficult, with a wait time of up to six months. Due to this, Afghan applicants are often forced to pay up to \$1,000 through agents to secure a visa.

"In the past, Afghan returnees were given \$400 by UNHCR, but now they receive only \$35. This amount should be increased to at least \$1,000 per family," he demanded.

Mian Khel highlighted that 85% of Afghan refugees are young people who will face unemployment upon returning to Afghanistan. "And we all know what unemployed youth turn to - either terrorism or crime," he warned.

He called for a clear policy for the repatriation of Afghan families who have lived in Pakistan for the past 50 years, and stressed they should not be deported in a state of helplessness. "There is neither education nor employment in Afghanistan, so Afghan children studying in Pakistan should be allowed to complete their education before being deported."

# NAB launches probe into alleged corruption in gold extraction contracts

**Humayun Khan**

PESHAWAR: The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has initiated an investigation into alleged corruption in contracts for extracting gold from rivers in the province. The bureau has taken possession of all records from the Department of Minerals and started probing into the matter.

The contract for gold extraction in Nizampur was awarded for Rs4 billion instead of Rs6 billion, causing a loss of billions to the national treasury. The department allegedly favored certain individuals by awarding them contracts at lower prices, resulting in massive losses to the government.

According to NAB sources, Gold is extracted from the Indus River in areas including Nizampur, Swabi, Kohistan, and Kohat. NAB has taken possession of records from the Department of Minerals and is scrutinizing them. The department allegedly favored certain individuals by awarding them contracts at lower prices, resulting in massive losses to the government.

After reviewing the records, NAB will investigate officials and individuals involved in the alleged corruption. The bureau has confirmed that billions of rupees were embezzled in the gold extraction contracts, and those found guilty will face legal action.

This investigation is part of NAB's efforts to uncover corruption and ensure accountability in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The bureau has been active in probing various corruption cases, including the Kohistan mega corruption scandal, which involves embezzlement of over Rs40 billion.

# Success stories in gemstone sector of Pakistan Gems and Jewellery Center of Excellence, UET holds seminar

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: The Gems and Jewellery Center of Excellence (GJoC), UET Peshawar organized an awareness seminar titled, "Rising through the Rubble: Success Stories and Systemic Challenges in the Gemstone Sector of Pakistan", aimed at highlighting the potential and systemic challenges in the gemstone sector.

Mr. Arshad Hussain, Secretary was the Chief Guest on the occasion. He underscored that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is richly endowed with precious gems and minerals, however, due to a lack of awareness and absence of standardized practices, these valuable resources are often sold at nominal prices in international markets by local traders.

He cited the example of Thailand which despite having no natural gem reserves has built a trillion-dollar gemstone economy through the use of technology, value addition and marketing strategies.

Prof. Dr. Sadiq Khattak, Vice Chancellor UET Peshawar in his welcome address, stated that in response to the growing demand in the gems and jewellery sector, the university has announced six-month diploma program in Jewellery and Fashion Design in the upcoming session.

He highlighted that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Gilgit-Baltistan alone possess an estimated \$6 trillion worth of rare earth minerals, emphasizing the importance of strategic partnerships and standardized practices to harness the full potential of this untapped sector.

He further informed that the university is currently engaged in consultations with the Asian Productivity Organization (APO) through the National Productivity Organization (NPO) for the establishment of a state-of-the-art laboratory at the Gems and Jewellery Center of Excellence (GJoC) to support research, certification, technological advancement in gemmology.

Mr. Yasir Ali Rasheed, Director NAVTTC said, two diploma courses, fully funded by NAVTTC are currently offered to 102 students in Gemmology and Lapidary at GJoC. He assured that four additional courses will be offered to GJOCC in the upcoming session.

Prof. Dr. Nisar Muhammad, Director GJoC said the Center was established in 2006 with the support of USAID, has so far produced over 1100 graduates who are successfully contributing to the gemstone industry in Pakistan and internationally.

Dr. Habibur Rehman, Professor Gemmology highlighted that the Center has received international recognition and is officially acknowledged by GEM-A Thailand.

It is worth mentioning that a diploma course for professionals working in gemmology was also fully sponsored by USAID earlier in 2009 in collaboration with UET's Directorate of Media, marking a significant milestone in professional training in the gemstone sector.

Renowned gemmologists and Alumni of GJoC including Mr. Amer Latif CEO Hadi Gems and Dr. Syed Owais Professor of Sociology also delivered talks during the technical sessions. Later, Prof. Dr. Sadiq Khattak presented shields to the guests in appreciation of their support to UET Peshawar.



# Serena Hotels launches Global Prestige Club Programme

explored an interactive Experience Zone featuring a live demonstration of the new Prestige Club mobile app, designed to enable access to rewards, redemptions, reservations, and other services.

Speaking on the occasion, Aziz Boolani, CEO of Serena Hotels, stated, "Through the Prestige Club, we are bringing exceptional benefits to our members in recognition of their unwavering support at all Serena Hotels. This launch is not just a loyalty Programme; it is a commitment to elevating every guest experience across our hotels."

The celebration reaffirmed Serena Hotels' dedication to innovation, hospitality excellence, and building deeper relationships with its valued guests worldwide.

further enriching the guest experience across the Serena portfolio. Guests

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: Serena Hotels officially launched its global loyalty Programme, Prestige Club, at a special event hosted at Peshawar Serena Hotel and simultaneously across all Serena properties worldwide. The event was attended by government officials, corporate sector representatives, and esteemed Prestige Club members, marking a key milestone in the brand's journey across eight countries and 33 destinations. Mr. Faisal Kareem Kundi, Honorable Governor KP was the Chief guest on the occasion.

The launch introduced the enhanced Prestige Club Plus Programme, offering exclusive benefits on dining, Maisha Spa & Health Club, and a range of hotel services,

# Cashless financial system in TMAs will promote transparency and accountability: Arshad Ayub Khan

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: A high-level meeting was held in Peshawar on Wednesday under the chairmanship of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Minister for Local Government, Arshad Ayub Khan. The meeting was attended by Secretary for Local Government Saqib Raza Aslam, Secretary of the Local Council Board (LCB) Waheed ur Rehman, and other relevant officials. The meeting focused on the implementation of a Cashless Financial System (CFS) in the Tehsil Municipal Administrations (TMAs) of the province. Representatives from the LCB gave a comprehensive briefing on CFS," stating that under the minister's directives, the implementation process is ongoing in all TMAs to ensure transparency and effective monitoring of financial matters. So far, 71 TMAs in the province have transitioned to this system, where all payments are being made via cross-checks or digital platforms. For minor transactions and departmental collections, thermal printers are being used to instantly issue receipts. It was informed that under this system, all payments including taxes, fees, parking charges, fines, and other expenses will be collected digitally. The system will be linked to banks, and a joint meeting with bank officials has already been held in this regard.





## In brief

Awareness seminar held  
F.P. Report

KARAK: One-day training session and awareness walk on the benefits of breastfeeding held while SBC focal person Kashif Khattak declared mother's milk as the best food for newborns for six months. In this regard, a one-day seminar was organized in the conference hall of the DHO office in Karak in collaboration with Benazir Nashunama Program, Health Department, World Food Program and UNICEF to remove malnutrition among women and children and create awareness. DHO Dr. Shoaib Khattak, Deputy Director of Benazir Nashunama Program, Waheed Khattak and a large number of paramedics and health workers participated in the seminar. On this occasion, SBC Focal Person Kashif Khattak said in the seminar that balanced diet increases immunity and mother's milk is nutritious for children, but mothers and children in our areas are suffering from malnutrition. Only when the mother is healthy, the child will also be healthy and will be protected from various diseases. A walk was also organized at the end of the seminar.

Kabab seller caught  
Syed Waliullah Shah

NOWSHERA: In a significant crackdown on unfair trade practices, the Assistant Commissioner of Pabbi has arrested a well-known kabab seller, Rambil Kababi, in Taro Jabba, Nowshera, for selling underweight kebabs to customers. According to reports, Rambil Kababi was charging customers for 1 kilogram of kebabs but was actually providing only 700 grams of meat, thereby cheating customers out of approximately 300 grams of meat per kilogram. This illicit practice had been going on for a long time, with complaints received from customers. The Assistant Commissioner conducted a surprise raid and caught the kabab seller red-handed. A case has been registered against Rambil Kababi, and a fine has been imposed. Legal proceedings have been initiated, and further action is underway. The citizens have welcomed the administration's action and demanded strict monitoring of kabab sellers and butchers to prevent exploitation, especially during times of high inflation. They hope that this crackdown will ensure fair practices and protect consumers from being cheated.

Kalash-VDA gets Camping Pods  
F.P. Report

CHITRAL: In line with the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's tourism vision, the camping pods in Bumburet - established under the Culture and Tourism Authority (CTA) - have been handed over to the Kalash Valleys Development Authority (Kalash-VDA) to enhance local engagement and functionality. These pods have now been opened to tourists under a stable and sustainable local business model. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed in this regard at the office of the Secretary of Tourism, under a Government-to-Government (G2G) mode. The signing ceremony was attended by Habibullah Arif, Director General CTA, and Minhas Uddin, Director General Kalash-VDA, who formalized the agreement. The event was also attended by former Special Assistant to the Chief Minister for Minority Affairs, Wazir Zada, Secretary Culture, Tourism and Antiquities Dr. Abdul Samad, members of the Kalash-VDA, and other officials from the Department of Tourism.

## WAPDA offices to relocate to D I Khan

## F.P. Report

TANK: In a bid to avoid untoward incidents, the Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) has decided to shift its offices to Dera Ismail Khan. The decision comes in the wake of heightened security concerns in the region, with the Taliban militancy on the rise and intelligence-based operations being conducted by the law enforcement institutions these days.

According to a letter sent by the Superintendent Engineer of PESCO DIKhan Circle, the security situation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, particularly in the District Tank, has

deteriorated significantly. The militants have been checking government officers and officials on the Tank DIKhan road and surrounding areas, and there have been reports of kidnappings and killings.

It merits a mention that District Government has issued alerts to all government departments to avoid movement in the district, and several government officials have already been kidnapped. In light of these developments, WAPDA has decided to relocate its offices to Dera Ismail Khan to ensure the safety of its employees.

The decision is expected to be implemented soon, with the establishment of a camp office in Tank

Division to facilitate routine work. The move is seen as a precautionary measure to avoid any mishap with WAPDA officials.

The development comes as a relief to WAPDA employees, who have been working in a challenging security environment. The relocation is expected to provide a safer working environment and ensure the continuity of WAPDA's operations in the region.

Meanwhile, social and public circles of the area have called upon the provincial and federal government to take note of the matter with providing safety to employees of public servants and ensure better services on their part.

## Commissioner inspects Rescue 1122 infrastructure

## F.P. Report

MARDAN: Commissioner Mardan paid a visit to the Rescue 1122 office in Mardan on Thursday, where he reviewed the operational readiness, infrastructure, and services of the district's emergency response system.

Upon arrival, Commissioner Mardan Division was warmly received by District Emergency Officer (DEO) Shoaib Mansoor. A well-disciplined contingent of the Rescue 1122 team presented a guard of honour, marking the commencement of the visit. The commissioner conducted a detailed inspection of various rescue units and modern equipment, including fire-fighting vehicles, mountain fire-fighting gear, building collapse rescue systems, flood rescue tools, and other critical emergency apparatus.

He expressed satisfaction over the maintenance and availability of equipment essential for rapid response during crises.

During his tour, Commissioner Nisar Ahmad visited the central control room where he observed live emergency call operations. He commended the professionalism of the staff managing the control room, noting their efficiency in responding to distress calls and coordinating rescue efforts in real time.

One of the key highlights of the visit was the commissioner's inspection of the on-site oxygen generation plant. Officials briefed him that the plant not only meets the oxygen requirements of Mardan district but also supports neighbouring districts in times of need. He termed the facility a "vital asset" for the region's health and emergency infrastructure.

**Monsoon plantation drive kicks off at AWKUM:** The monsoon tree plantation campaign has officially started at Abdul Wali Khan University. In this regard, Vice Chancellor Prof. Dr. Jamil Ahmed inaugurated

the campaign by planting a sapling in front of the Directorate of Admissions. Dean Faculty of Chemical and Life Sciences Prof. Dr. Salimullah, Dr. Zafar Hayat, Dr. Badshah Islam, Provost Abdul Samad, Director Administration Farhad Safi and other faculty members and administrative officers were also present at the inauguration ceremony. A total of four thousand trees will be planted in the university under this campaign.

"The Department of Horticulture has been entrusted with the supervision of all stages of the tree plantation campaign and landscaping to enhance the beauty of the university. The Vice Chancellor said on the occasion that planting trees is a continuous charity and they not only improve the environment but also provide a beautiful and clean environment for future generations. He urged students, faculty and staff to participate fully in this campaign.

## Admn completes drainage of stagnant rainwater

## F.P. Report

HAFIZABAD: Deputy Commissioner Hafizabad has stated that the district administration has successfully completed the drainage of stagnant rainwater from rural areas affected by the recent monsoon downpours, thereby restoring all road links.

Speaking at the "Meet the Press" event held at the District Press Club Hafizabad, the DC said that in anticipation of possible flood threats from the River Chenab, flood relief camps have been established in nearby areas, and all relevant departments have been placed on high alert. He further informed that the District Health Department has mobilized field teams to prevent the outbreak of waterborne diseases. Necessary vaccines and medicines are being administered in vulnerable areas to ensure public health safety.

The event was attended by a large number of journalists, as well as senior officials including Additional Deputy Commissioner Revenue Tanvir Yaseen, Additional Deputy Commissioner Finance Hamid Nasir Goraya, ADCG Hamdullah, and Chief Officer of the Municipal Committee Ikramullah Sandhu.

The Deputy Commissioner highlighted that ongoing development projects across the district are progressing at an accelerated pace. Among these is the construction of an overhead bridge on the railway crossing along Sargodha Road, which is being worked on round the clock and is expected to be inaugurated soon. The bridge, he noted, will significantly ease traffic congestion and improve mobility for residents.

Commenting on the evolving role of the media, Mr. Razzaq said, "In

today's rapidly changing media landscape, the responsibilities of journalists have increased manifold compared to the past. There exists a close and cooperative relationship between the press and the administration, and we act promptly on the issues raised by journalists."

On behalf of the press, President of the District Press Club/Union of Journalists, Ch. Javed Asad, along with other office-bearers, thanked the Deputy Commissioner and accompanying officers for their visit. He commended the administration's transparency and proactive governance, adding that the press has effectively highlighted the district's public welfare initiatives at both national and international levels through print and electronic media. "Such coverage ensures that decision-makers remain informed of ground realities," he noted.

## Nauman Ali

**ALI Mohammad Joo, 65, stepped out of his home in Srinagar for a short evening walk with his daughter—an ordinary act in most parts of the world, but a rare moment of peace in the Indian-Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IOJK). He never made it home. A Jammu and Kashmir Police vehicle came hurtling down the road. Witnesses say it made no attempt to stop, swerve, or slow down. It crushed Ali Mohammad instantly and left his daughter critically injured. The driver didn't look back.**

For Kashmiris, this wasn't an accident. It was a message—a brutal assertion of impunity. A demonstration that their lives can be extinguished without warning, without consequence, and without justice. Even a walk with your daughter can become a death sentence under Indian occupation.

Ali Mohammad's story is not an anomaly. It is a glimpse into the suffocating, daily violence in one of the most militarised zones in the world. Under the shadow of draconian laws like the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, the Public Safety Act, and the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, Kashmiris live

without rights, without recourse, and without safety. Human rights groups have documented more than 90,000 deaths and thousands of enforced disappearances since the 1980s.

When India revoked Article 370 in 2019 and stripped Jammu and Kashmir of its limited autonomy, things only worsened. In the name of "integration," more than 10 million people were subjected to communications blackouts, mass detentions, and indefinite lockdowns. But beneath the smokescreen of security and development lies a far more insidious goal: demographic transformation.

India is engineering a slow erasure of Kashmiri Muslim identity through a series of calculated legal and administrative changes. Over 4 million domicile certificates have been granted to outsiders, allowing them to buy land, vote, and settle in Kashmir. The aim is to turn Kashmiris into a politically weak minority in their own land. Entire communities are losing orchards, forests, and pastures—seized under colonial-era laws. In Anantnag alone, over 600 acres were taken, far more than needed, often without consultation or compensation. Courts

rarely intervene.

This isn't development. It's dispossession. The political map has been redrawn to weaken Muslim-majority districts. Voting boundaries have been gerrymandered. Muslim representation has shrunk. Meanwhile, the media is under siege, journalists have been jailed, and the internet is shut down repeatedly as a tool of state control.

What does this mean for Kashmiris? It means waking up each day unsure if your home, your land, your job, or your voice still belongs to you. It means seeing your elderly father crushed in the street and knowing no one will be punished. And all of this is happening under the nose of the world's so-called largest democracy.

The international community must not look away. The siege in Kashmir is not only a humanitarian crisis but a direct challenge to the values we claim to uphold: justice, dignity, and the right of all peoples to determine their future. The Jammu & Kashmir conflict is not an "internal matter." It is a United Nations-recognised dispute and a nuclear flashpoint between two countries - India and Pakistan—that



QUETTA: Balochistan Minister for Health, Bakht Muhammad Kakar along with Shahid Rind, Spokesperson of Balochistan Government and Mujib-ur-Rahman, Balochistan Health Secretary addressing a press conference.

Asphalting work starts on road  
F.P. Report

KOHAT: Asphalting work on the Shakardara Bazaar Main Road of Kohat district has formally been started which is being executed under the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Highways Authority at a total cost of Rs. 570 million from the development funds of the MNA Shehryar Afridi and MPA Daud Afridi.

This initiative is expected to significantly improve the travel convenience for local residents, traders, and the business community. The road, constructed according to the modern standards, will not only enhance the traffic system but also positively impact the local economy.

Speaking to the media on this occasion, MPA Daud Afridi said, "Our mission is to serve the people and we will utilize all available resources to resolve public issues wherever possible."

Meanwhile, the local population expressed happiness and satisfaction over the launch of this development project. They thanked their elected representatives, stating that the construction of this road had been one of their long-standing demands which is fulfilled.

**Kohat DC assumes charge:** The Newly appointed Deputy Commissioner Kohat, Rahimullah, has formally assumed the charge of his office and started work. He on this occasion, expressed his commitment to serve the people of Kohat district with sincerity, dedication, honesty and responsibility.

He reiterated that public welfare, transparent governance and administrative improvement would be among his top priorities. He stated that every possible step would be taken to resolve issues and ensure the provision of basic facilities.

Kashmir cause backed  
F.P. Report

SUKKUR: Sukkur IBA University organized a seminar and panel discussion on the Kashmir Cause, in connection with Youme-e-Istehsaal.

The event brought together faculty members, scholars, and students to explore the historical, political, and humanitarian dimensions of the conflict in Indian-occupied Kashmir.

## 11th meeting of ASRB held at KKKUK

## F.P. Report

KARAK: The Khushal Khan Khattak University convened the 11th Meeting of the Advanced Studies & Research Board (ASRB), chaired by Prof. Dr. Muhammad Tahir Khalily, Vice-Chancellor of the university.

Dr. Fasih Ur Rehman, secretary of ASRB, personally oversaw the procedures and logistics of the meeting, ensuring a smooth and efficient review process. The meeting addressed several important agendas essential for advancing the university's academic and research initiatives.

The board reviewed and approved a range of MS/MPhil synopses, supporting new research projects and academic pursuits. Additionally, numerous PhD synopses were approved, reinforcing the university's commitment to high-level research.

The meeting also considered and granted requests for extra semesters, offering greater flexibility and support for students. These decisions reflect the board's dedication to maintaining and enhancing the academic standards and research capabilities of the university. Vice Chancellor and Registrar Muhammad

Rashad expressed their satisfaction with the meeting's outcomes, acknowledging the significant contributions of the board and the effective management by Directorate of Academic and Research. He praised the dedication of all involved in maintaining the university's high standards of academic and research excellence. The Khushal Khan Khattak university Karak is committed to creating a supportive environment for academic and research activities. The ASRB plays a key role in helping and guiding the university's academic programs and research efforts.

## Commissioner visits DHQ hospital Karak

## F.P. Report

KARAK: Commissioner Kohat Division, Syed Motasim Billah Shah has under the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Program "Awami Agenda", along with the Deputy Commissioner Karak, Shakeel Ahmad Jan, paid a surprise visit to the District Headquarters Hospital Karak today.

The purpose of the visit was to inspect the medical facilities being provided to the patients and evaluate the performance of hospital staff. He beside visiting the various hospital wards including the emergency department, also met with the patients and inquired about the quality of services. He also reviewed the condition of medical equipment, cleanliness standards, and staff attendance.

Later, the Commissioner Kohat held a special meeting with the Medical Superintendent and issued directions to further improve the medical services, hygiene, and overall patient care. During his visit, the Commissioner also inspected the newly constructed Campus of Khushal Khan Khattak University Karak and interacted with the on-site staff.

In addition, he also reviewed the ongoing development work on the main Indus Highway, including installation of signboards and road improvements. The authorities concerned were directed to ensure timely completion of work to facilitate

smooth flow of traffic and avoid any untoward incidents.

Commissioner stressed that public convenience and timely execution of the development projects remain top priorities for the government. He warned that delays in construction or compromise on quality will not be tolerated under any circumstances.

**Community engagement program held:** Additional Deputy Commissioner (G) Sahibzada Samiullah has under the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Program "Awami Agenda", held a community engagement program in Ahmadabad, Tehsil Takht-e-Nasrati of Karak District. The program besides others, was also attended by the local elders, community representatives and the Incharge of the Ahmadabad Police Post.

During the session, the Additional Deputy Commissioner highlighted the purpose of the program, emphasizing the need for strong community cooperation in maintaining law and order and combating the growing menace of drug abuse. He urged the residents to play an active role in making District Karak a true cradle of peace and security.

The Police Post Incharge stressed that public cooperation is essential in taking effective action against the drug peddlers and other criminal elements. He assured the participants that any information provided

by citizens would be kept strictly confidential. A question and answer session was also held in which the locals and community members raised the key issues included the prevalence of drugs, rising incidents of lawlessness and theft, uncleaned drainage systems in Ahmadabad, and the alarming condition of the Government Primary School building, which was described as dangerously dilapidated.

Responding to the concerns, Sahibzada Samiullah assured the participants that all reported issues would be addressed on a priority basis. The program concluded with a collective prayer for national progress, peace, and security.

Three food outlets fined  
F.P. Report

SARGODHA: The Punjab Food Authority (PFA) on Thursday imposed a total fine Rs 135,000 on three food outlets over poor hygienic conditions in Mianwali district.

According to a press release issued by the PFA spokesman, the PFA team conducted a series of operations against food outlets in Mianwali district in order to check quality of food items. The said the operations were conducted on Bilokhel road where multiple food points were inspected.

lence are repackaged as national security.

If India is allowed to behave like a rogue state - silencing critics abroad, targeting minorities at home, attacking its neighbours, and violating international law - it sets a precedent that majoritarianism and violence are now acceptable. The siege unfolding in Jammu & Kashmir could be the blueprint for future crackdowns. History warns us what happens when the world ignores early signs of fascism.

If the international community does not act now, there may soon be nothing left to defend in Kashmir. Kashmiris need our voice. They need to be given their right to self-determination through a fair and impartial plebiscite, as promised under UN Security Council resolutions and Indian leaders like Gandhi and the first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru.

India needs to be pressurized and held accountable for its human rights abuses and repression in Jammu and Kashmir. For no father should die like Ali Mohammad Joo. And no daughter should be left screaming on the street, blood-soaked and alone, wondering why no one stopped.

*The writer is Deputy Director at the Government of Pakistan.*

## Kashmir: A homeland under siege





# Myanmar's acting President Myint dies after illness

BANGKOK (AP): Myint Swe, who became Myanmar's acting president under controversial circumstances after the military seized power from the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi more than four years ago, died, the military said. He was 74.

He died at a military hospital in the capital, Naypyitaw, according to a statement from Myanmar's military information office. Myint Swe's death came more than a year after he stopped actively carrying out his presidential duties after he was publicly reported to be ailing.

His funeral will be held at the state level but the date has not been disclosed, a separate statement from the military information office said. State media reported that he had been in critical condition and receiving intensive care since July 24 at a military hospital in Naypyitaw. State media announced in July last year that Myint Swe was suffering from neurological disorders and peripheral neuropathy disease, which left him unable to carry out normal daily activities, including eating. A few days later, he authorized Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, the head of the military government, to assume his presidential duties while he was on medical leave, the reports said. Myint Swe became acting president on Feb. 1, 2021, after the military arrested former President Win Myint along with

Myanmar's top leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, when the army seized power. Myint Swe, a member of a pro-military party, took over the presidency under the constitution because he held the post of first vice president. Legal experts questioned the legitimacy of the move because Win Myint neither stepped down from his post nor was incapacitated. As acting president, Myint Swe chaired the National Defense and Security Council, which is nominally a constitutional government body, but in practice is controlled by the military. The council operates as the country's top decision-making body related to national security, with the authority to declare a state of emergency and oversee military and defense affairs.

Myint Swe's appointment and acquiescence to the army's demands allowed the council to be convened to declare a state of emergency and hand over power to Min Aung Hlaing, who led the army's takeover. During his time in office, Myint Swe could only perform the pro forma duties of his job, such as issuing decrees to renew the state of emergency, because Min Aung Hlaing controlled all government functions. Myint Swe, a former general, was a close ally of Than Shwe, who led a previous military government but stepped down to allow the transition to a quasi-civilian government beginning in 2011. Myint

Swe was chief minister of Yangon, Myanmar's biggest city, under the quasi-civilian government between 2011 and 2016, and headed its regional military command for years under the previous military government, which stepped down in 2011. During Buddhist monk-led popular protests in 2007 known internationally as the Saffron Revolution, he took charge of restoring order after weeks of unrest in the city, overseeing a crackdown that killed dozens of people. Hundreds of others were arrested.

Though he did not have a prominent international profile, Myint Swe played a key role in the military and politics. In 2002, he participated in the arrest of family members of former dictator Ne Win, according to accounts in Myanmar media. He also arrested former Gen. Khin Nyunt at Yangon Airport during a 2004 purge of the former prime minister and his supporters that involved a power struggle inside the military. Soon afterward, Myint Swe took command of the sprawling military intelligence apparatus that had been Khin Nyunt's power base. Myint Swe was among military leaders sanctioned by the US Treasury Department following the military takeover and arrest of de facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi and other senior politicians in February 2021. He was survived by his wife and two children.

## Big wildfire rages in S France

PARIS (Reuters): A wildfire in southern France's Aude region near the Spanish border has scorched around 4,500 hectares (11,100 acres) of forest, the fire brigade said late , as hundreds of firefighters battled to bring the blaze under control. More than 1,250 firefighters have been deployed to the scene, Colonel Alexandre Jouassard, spokesperson for the civil protection agency, told BFMTV.

President Emmanuel Macron said on X the fire was progressing and that "all the nation's resources were mobilized." Two people were injured in the fire, including one seriously, Lucie Rosech, the deputy prefect of Aude, told BFMTV.

## Ukraine's PM speaks to US official

KYIV (Reuters): Ukraine's prime minister said that she and US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent had discussed prospects for completing the first three projects of a new investment fund within its first 18 months of operation. Yulia Svyrydenko, the main driving force behind the creation of the fund, said she and Bessent had discussed the fund's operations and "continuing and strengthening cooperation in the defense and investment sectors".

"We are working on expanding its mandate so that the fund can also invest in the defense sector," Svyrydenko wrote in English on the X social media platform. "The first meeting of the board of directors is scheduled for September. The task is to launch the first three projects within 18 months." Svyrydenko was speaking to Bessent for the first time as prime minister since her appointment last month. As first deputy prime minister, she had signed the agreement setting up the fund in April as part of an accord, heavily promoted by US President Donald Trump, to develop Ukraine's mineral resources. In her comments, Svyrydenko also said she and Bessent had discussed a potential broad defence agreement that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has cited regarding production and sale of Ukrainian drones. They also discussed the prospect of imposing tougher sanctions on Russia, a measure Ukraine has long sought. Trump has warned Russia that he will introduce more sanctions on Moscow if it does not make more progress on ending the war before a deadline set for Friday.

## US-South Africa ties at 'a low'

JOHANNESBURG (AFP): US attempts to interfere with South Africa's domestic issues have brought relations between the nations to "a low", Foreign Minister Ronald Lamola told AFP in an interview. Tariffs of 30 percent -- the highest on any sub-Saharan African country -- are set to hit certain South African exports Friday in the absence of a trade deal, coming after months of escalating tensions over a range of domestic and international policies.

"In the past we have not had this situation where another government would want to interfere on a domestic issue like it is now," Lamola said. "Since the last 30 years, there have been disagreements with the US administration on a number of issues, but the diplomatic lines of engagement have always been open," he said, adding relations had "reached a low". Pretoria's ties with Washington plummeted after President Donald Trump took office in January.

Trump quickly attempted to bar asylum claims at the border, a move that has spurred a legal backlash. Last month, a court blocked his asylum ban on the basis that it created an "alternative immigration system" without deference to Congress's laws. But Trump's policies have nevertheless had a dampening effect on immigration at the border. In June, US Customs and Border Protection recorded only 9,306 "encounters" with migrants and asylum seekers at the country's southern border - a nearly 93 percent drop compared with the same period last year.

March had a different objective than those past caravans, though, particularly as migrants and asylum seekers turn away from the US and seek other destinations. Organisers of the march sought to draw attention to the slow processing time for asylum applications in Mexico and other hurdles to achieving legal immigration status. — Aljazeera



SEOUL: Col. Lee Sung-jun, public affairs director of South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff and Col. Ryan Donald, public affairs director of the United Nations Command (UNC), Combined Forces Command (CFC), and United States Forces Korea (USFK) attend a press briefing of Ulchi Freedom Shield 2025 exercise at the Defense Ministry in South Korea.

# South Korea, US militaries will stage large-scale drills

SEOUL (AP): South Korea and the United States will launch their annual large-scale military exercise this month to bolster readiness against North Korean threats, the allies said, in a move likely to irritate Pyongyang amid a prolonged stalemate in diplomacy. The exercise also comes against the backdrop of concerns in Seoul that the Trump administration could shake up the decades-old alliance by demanding higher payments for the US troop presence in South Korea and possibly move to reduce it as Washington puts more focus on China.

Ulchi Freedom Shield, the second of two large-scale exercises held annually in South Korea, following another set of drills in March, typically involves thousands of troops in computer-simulated command post training and combined field exercises. The Aug. 18-28 exercise may trigger an angry reaction from North Korea, which calls the joint drills invasion rehearsals and often uses them as a pretext to dial up military demonstrations and weapons tests aimed at advancing its nuclear program. Doubling down on its nuclear ambitions, North Korea has repeatedly rejected Washington and Seoul's calls to resume diplomacy aimed at winding down its weapons program, which derailed in 2019. The North has now made Russia the priority of its foreign policy, sending thousands of troops and large amounts of mili-

tary equipment to support Moscow's war in Ukraine.

About 18,000 South Korean troops will take part in this year's Ulchi Freedom Shield exercise, South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff spokesperson, Col. Lee Sung Joon, said during a joint briefing with US Forces Korea, which did not disclose the number of participating US troops. Both Lee and US Forces Korea public affairs director Col. Ryan Donald downplayed speculation that South Korea's new liberal government, led by President Lee Jae Myung, sought to downsize the exercise to create momentum for dialogue with Pyongyang, saying its scale is similar to previous years. However, Col. Lee said about half of the exercise's originally planned 40 field training programs were postponed to September due to heat concerns. The threat from North Korea's advancing nuclear and missile programs will be a key focus of the exercise, which will include training to deter North Korean nuclear use and respond to its missile attacks, Lee said.

The exercise will also incorporate lessons from recent conflicts, including Russia's war in Ukraine and the clash between Israel and Iran, and address threats from drones, GPS jamming and cyberattacks, Lee and Donald said. "We look across the globe at the challenges we may face on the battlefield and incorporate that so we can challenge the participants

in the exercise," Donald said. "We are focused on ensuring the alliance is sustainable and credibly deters aggression from the DPRK and addresses the broader regional security challenges," he said, using the initials of North Korea's formal name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. The announcement of the exercise came a week after the powerful sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un rebuffed overtures by Lee Jae Myung's government, saying that Seoul's "blind trust" in its alliance with Washington and hostility toward Pyongyang make it no different from its hard-line conservative predecessor. Kim Yo Jong later issued a separate statement dismissing the Trump administration's intent to resume diplomacy on North Korea's denuclearization, suggesting that Pyongyang - now focused on expanding ties with Russia - sees little urgency in resuming talks with Seoul or Washington.

On the other side of Seoul's security concerns is whether its alliance with Washington will see dramatic shifts during the second term of President Donald Trump, who has rattled allies and partners with tariff hikes and demands that they reduce their reliance on the US and spend more for their own defense. Dating back to his first term, Trump has regularly called for South Korea to pay more for the 28,500 American troops stationed on its soil.

# Suspect in murder of Israel embassy staffers in US indicted for hate crime

WASHINGTON: A man accused of shooting dead two Israeli embassy staff members in Washington, DC, has been indicted on federal hate crime and murder charges, as President Donald Trump suggested he may call on the National Guard to bring down crime rates in the United States capital. Court documents filed in federal court in Washington and unsealed show that defendant Elias Rodriguez has been charged with nine counts, including a hate crime resulting in death.

The 30-year-old is accused of shooting dead Israeli embassy staffers Yaron Lischinsky and Sarah Milgrim, a young couple who were about to become engaged, as they left an event at the Capital Jewish Museum in Washington in May.

Rodriguez, who witnesses described as pacing outside the museum before the attack, approached the couple and opened fire. Surveillance footage then showed him advance on Lischinsky and Milgrim as they fell to the ground, firing additional shots as he stood over them. Rodriguez appeared to reload before jogging off, according to officials. Two other people who were standing with the couple at the time of the attack escaped unharmed. Rodriguez then entered the museum and confessed to the killings. He was heard shouting "Free Palestine" as he was led away. Rodriguez also told police, "I did it for Palestine, I did it for Gaza", according to federal authorities.

Prosecutors described the killings as calculated and planned in court papers, alleging that Rodriguez fled to Washington from Chicago with a handgun in his checked luggage. Authorities also claimed Rodriguez purchased a ticket for the American Jewish Committee-organised event at the museum

three hours before it started. Rodriguez was previously charged with the murder of foreign officials and other crimes. Prosecutors added the hate crimes charges after bringing the case to a grand jury. Also included in the indictment is a notice of special findings allowing the Department of Justice to potentially pursue the death penalty.

Prosecutors are now tasked with proving that Rodriguez was motivated by anti-Semitism when he opened fire on Lischinsky and Milgrim. Lischinsky was a research assistant at the Israeli embassy in Washington, DC, while Milgrim organised trips to Israel for the embassy. Lischinsky, a German-Israeli citizen, had reportedly bought an engagement ring days before he and Milgrim, a Jewish US citizen, were killed. Also, President Trump said he may deploy the National Guard to police

Washington's streets, telling reporters outside the White House that the capital is "very unsafe" and it "has to be the best-run place in the country". "We're going to beautify the city. We're going to make it beautiful. And what a shame, the rate of crime, the rate of muggings, the killings and everything else. We're not going to let it," Trump said.

"And that includes bringing in the National Guard, maybe very quickly, too," he added. Trump made his latest threat of a federal takeover of the US capital after a staffer who was part of the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) was assaulted during a carjacking over the weekend. According to records on the police department's website, violent crime in Washington was down 26 percent in the first seven months of 2025 compared with last year, while overall crime was down some 7 percent. — Aljazeera

# Japanese population sees record drop in 2024

TOKYO (AFP): The population of Japanese nationals fell by a record amount -- more than 900,000 people -- in 2024, official data showed, as the country battles to reverse its perennially low birth rates. While many developed countries are struggling with low birth rates, the problem is particularly acute in Japan where the population has been declining for years.

Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba has called the situation a "quiet emergency", pledging family-friendly measures like more flexible working hours and free day care to try and reverse the trend. Last year, the number of Japanese fell by 908,574, or 0.75 percent, to 120.65 million. The decline -- for a 16th straight year -- was the largest drop since the survey began in 1968, the internal affairs ministry said.

Foreign resident totals, however, were at their highest since records began in 2013. There were 3.67 million foreigners as of January 1, 2025, representing nearly three percent of the whole population in

Japan, which was more than 124.3 million as of that date.

The overall population of the country declined by 0.44 percent from 2023.

The latest figures come as the government struggles to raise stubbornly low birth rates, while frustration over inflation and other concerns among some voters prompted the rise of a new opposition party with a slogan of "Japanese First". The anti-immigrant party has falsely claimed foreigners enjoy more welfare benefits than Japanese nationals.

Foreign nationals are helping address labour shortages exacerbated by the ageing population, and most commonly hold jobs in the manufacturing, hospitality and retail sectors. By age, Japanese nationals aged 65 and over accounted for nearly 30 percent of the population, while the age group between 15 and 64 made up 60 percent, both minor increases from the previous year. Japan has the world's second-oldest population after tiny Monaco, according to the World

Bank.

The number of births in Japan last year fell below 700,000 for the first time on record, health ministry data released in June said. The fast-ageing nation welcomed 686,061 newborns in 2024 -- 41,227 fewer than in 2023, the data showed. It was the lowest figure since records began in 1899. The shrinking population is also gutting rural communities, with the number of abandoned homes in Japan soaring to almost four million over the last two decades, government data released last year showed. Many of the homes belong to people living in major cities who have inherited them from relatives and who are unable or unwilling to keep them renovated.

The world's oldest person, Japanese woman Tomiko Itokawa, died at the age of 116 in December. Women typically enjoy longevity in Japan, but the expanding elderly population is leading to soaring medical and welfare costs, with a shrinking labour force to pay for it.

# Migrant march in Mexico continues

MEXICO CITY: A march has begun from the southern Mexican state of Chiapas northward to the central part of the country, in protest of policies that make legal immigration status difficult to achieve. March set out from the border city of Tapachula, near Guatemala, and nearly 300 migrants, asylum seekers and supporters took part.

But the demonstration was overshadowed by the arrest one day earlier of one of its leaders, prominent immigration activist Luis Garcia Villagran. Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum addressed the arrest in her morning news conference. She alleged that Garcia Villagran had been detained for taking part in human trafficking.

"That is the crime," she said, adding that Garcia Villagran was "not an activist". She added that an arrest warrant had been pending for the activist for years. But it was unclear why his arrest was carried out now. The nonprofit Pueblo Sin Fronteras, however, disputed Sheinbaum's characterisation of Garcia Villagran. "The detention of Luis Villagran, director and

human rights defender, is an unacceptable assault," the nonprofit's head, Irineo Mujica, wrote in a post to social media.

"Luis Villagrán's only 'crime' is to defend those who have no money or voice, and to tell the truth, which bothers the powerful. Stop criminalising human rights defenders!" Mujica - who was detained himself in 2019 on similar charges, only to be released - argued that Garcia Villagran's arrest was a political distraction. "This is a smokescreen: dirty and corrupt politics to cover up the true networks of corruption," he said. Mujica and Garcia Villagran have both been prominent voices in a movement to make legal immigration pathways more accessible.

They have also been among the organisers associated with the trend of the migrant "caravans" that travel from southern Mexico to the United States border in recent years. Some of those past caravans have involved thousands of people, many of whom banded together for protection against criminal networks, corrupt officials and other threats they may face as

they migrate. Migration northwards, however, has slowed, particularly since US President Donald Trump took office for a second term in January.

Trump quickly attempted to bar asylum claims at the border, a move that has spurred a legal backlash. Last month, a court blocked his asylum ban on the basis that it created an "alternative immigration system" without deference to Congress's laws. But Trump's policies have nevertheless had a dampening effect on immigration at the border. In June, US Customs and Border Protection recorded only 9,306 "encounters" with migrants and asylum seekers at the country's southern border - a nearly 93 percent drop compared with the same period last year.

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# US is no longer first choice for international students

**I**N China, wait times for US visa interviews are so long that some students have given up. Universities in Hong Kong are fielding transfer inquiries from foreign students in the US, and international applications for British undergraduate programs have surged.

President Donald Trump's administration has been pressuring US colleges to reduce their dependence on international enrollment while adding new layers of scrutiny for foreign students as part of its crackdown on immigration. The US government has sought to deport foreign students for participating in pro-Palestinian activism, reported Associated Press. In the spring, it abruptly revoked the legal status of thousands of international students, including some whose only brush with law enforcement was a traffic ticket.

After reversing course, the government paused new appointments for student visas while rolling out a process for screening applicants' social media accounts. The US remains the first choice for many international students, but institutions elsewhere are recognizing opportunity in the upheaval, and applicants are considering destinations they might have otherwise overlooked. The impact on US universities — and the nation's economy — may be significant.

New international enrollment in the US could drop by 30% to 40% this fall, according to an analysis of visa and enrollment data by NAFSA, an agency that promotes international education.

That would deprive the US economy of \$7 billion in spending, according to the analysis. Many international students pay full price, so their absence would also hurt college budgets, Associated Press reported.

As the second most popular destination for international students, Britain is positioned to benefit.

The country's new Labour government has vowed to cut migration, and officials have imposed time limits on post-study visas allowing graduates to stay and work. But admissions consultants say the United Kingdom is still seen as the most welcoming of the traditional "big four" English-speaking destinations in higher education — the US, UK, Canada and Australia.

After declining last year, the number of international applications for undergraduate study in the UK this fall grew by 2.2%, official figures show. A record number of applications came from China, up 10% compared with the previous year. Applications from the US also reached nearly 8,000 students — an increase of 14% and a 20-year high. Acceptances of international students for graduate programs in the UK grew an estimated 10% from last year, driven by demand for business and management courses in particular, according to data from UniQuest, which works with many British universities on admissions.

Data showing the extent of any impact will not be available until fall, said Mike Henniger, CEO of Illume Student Advisory Services, a consultancy that works with colleges in the US, Canada and Europe. "But the American brand has taken a massive hit, and the UK is the one that is benefiting," he said.

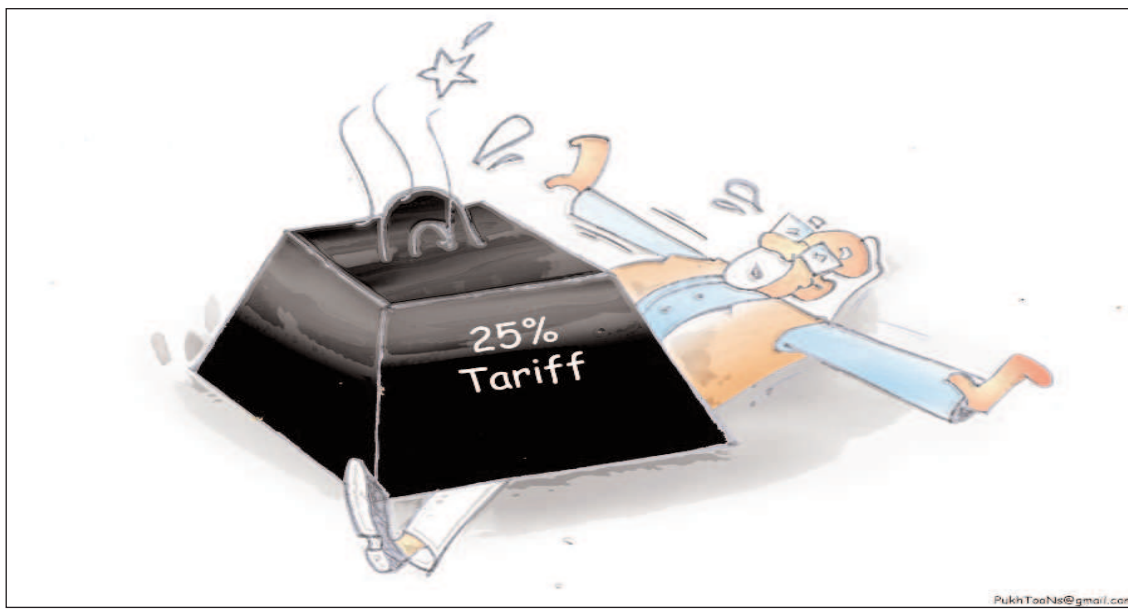
Demand from Chinese students has risen rapidly for universities places in Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia, said Will Kwong, managing director of AAS Education, a consultancy in Hong Kong. Many Western universities have offshore campuses there that are more affordable than going to the US or UK.

"Opting for study in Asia has been a trend since the easing of COVID-19," Kwong said. "But obviously it's been exacerbated by the change of administration in the US."

Some Asian families have told him the US is no longer their clear first choice because of political turbulence and visa difficulties, many are still waiting for US visa interviews and will likely miss the start of the fall term, Kwong said. Chinese college student Alisa, who is studying data science, plans to attend an exchange program this fall at the University of California, Berkeley. She hopes to pursue a master's degree in the US. But she is also looking into other options "just so I could still go to school if the extreme scenario occurs," said Alisa, who spoke on condition of partial anonymity out of fear of being targeted.

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## Unconsidered consequences

Michael Jansen

**S**IX months into his second term Donald Trump has built a loyalist cabinet, refashioned the presidential Oval Office in the White House, and initiated controversial policies, earning him the designation of "Great Disruptor."

He has raided conservative television channel Fox News for top jobs in his administration. The latest Fox appointment is of lawyer and former judge Jeanine Pirro as interim US attorney for the District of Columbia. She is the 23rd current or former Fox News employee Trump has recruited. A weekend Fox host, Pete Hegseth became secretary of defence and ex-Fox employee Dan Bongino was chosen as deputy director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. A former host of a Fox business programme Sean Duffy has been made secretary of transportation. Ex-Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard serves as Director of National Intelligence. Michael Walz as UN ambassador, and Mike Huckabee as US ambassador to Israel were Fox contributors. State Department spokeswoman Tammy Bruce and envoy for Middle East peace Morgan Ortugas were also tied to Fox News.

Trump has demonstrated his aspiration for kingship and lack of good taste by gilding the fire-place and filling the Oval Office with gold objects. During the visit of Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney in May, Trump called his attention to his additions, "You see the new and improved Oval Office. As it becomes more and more beautiful with love – you know, we handle it with great love – and 24-karat gold. That always helps, too," Trumps also plans transforming lawns of the Rose Garden into paved patio and has commissioned a \$200 million golden ballroom – at no cost to taxpayers – modelled on the French monarchical palace of Versailles.

Historians complain this will dwarf the White House.

Trump has disrupted the domestic scene by reversing bans on emissions causing global warming, reinstating a national emergency on the US-Mexico border, and barring the entry of migrants into the US. He has empowered federal agents to snatch illegal and legal migrants from workplaces, homes and fields and deporting them without judicial review. He has tried and, so far, failed to end "birthright citizenship" for all children born in the US. Trump set up the Department of Government Efficiency to reduce the federal bureaucracy, often at the expense of efficiency. Since he rejected the result of the 2020 presidential election which he lost, Trump pardoned the January 2021 rioters who stormed the Capitol while Congress was confirming Joe Biden. Trump, at 78, has also suggested he could run for a third term in 2028 although he is currently the oldest incumbent, and presidents are limited to two terms under the constitution.

Results released July 30th of a poll conducted by Reuters news agency and Ipsos showed that 56 per cent of respondents disapproved of his performance and his approval rating had fallen to 40 per cent since a mid-July poll put his rating at 41 per cent. His ratings have slumped due to his immigration crack down and economic policies which have featured tariffs on essential goods, particularly medications, clothes, steel, aluminium, fruit and vegetables, risking price hikes for consumers.

Members of Trump's Republican party have been vexed by revelations that he was close to convicted child trafficker Jeffrey Epstein. Controversy has grown over the potential release of transcripts of grand jury testimony in the

Epstein case. According to a Wall Street Journal report Trump wrote a congratulatory letter which was included in a bound volume issued on his 50th birthday by Ghislaine Maxwell, Epstein's associate and partner who now serving a 20-year prison sentence. Trump responded by calling the letter a "FAKE" and said the words in the letter are "not the way I talk."

On the international scene, Trump followed a policy adopted during his first term by ordering US withdrawal from the World Health Organization, the Paris Climate Accords, and the UN's educational and scientific organisation, UNESCO, the latter in response to its admission of Palestine.

He has adopted transactional policies by imposing tariff increases which have prompted retaliatory tariffs by targeted countries, causing stock market instability and angering traditional allies. He has strengthened ties with Israel during its war on Gaza, which has been branded a "genocide" by experts and human rights organisations. As Trump has not ended the war in Gaza, the humanitarian crisis is worse than ever, negotiations are deadlocked, and the US and Israel are in lock-step. He ordered bombings of Iranian nuclear sites at the end of Israel's war on Iran. Trump promised obut failed to end the Russia Ukraine war within 24 hours.

He paused arms support to pressure Ukraine to make concessions to Russia in exchange for a deal which did not happen. He imposed sanctions on Russia which continued to fight and has threatened to sanction India for buying Russian oil. Trump has now ordered the redeployment of US nuclear submarines following tough talk from Moscow. Since it is not known if the submarines are carrying nuclear weapons, concerns have

been raised over possible nuclear war.

Although he had expressed presidential ambitions as early as 1987, he registered with one party after another – Republican, Independence, Reform and Democrat – he did not settle on a vehicle for his bid until 2015 and became the Republican candidate in 2016 and won a disruptive first term.

The day after his first inauguration on January 20th, 2017, 2.6 million protested across the US, including 500,000 in Washington. During his first week in office, he signed executive orders for repealing the Affordable Care Act, which provided health care the elderly and poor people and for building a wall on the southern border with Mexico. He rolled back environmental protection legislation and regulations. He did not follow tradition by divesting himself of potentially conflicting interests by putting his businesses in a blind trust and continued to profit from them. When he entered office, the US economy was enjoying its greatest ever expansion which ended in 2020 with the covid crisis. While he pledged to cut the national debt, it increased by 39 per cent. When he left office, he appropriated hundreds of top secret and confidential documents which he stored insecurely in his Washington office and home in Florida. He was impeached for wrongdoing twice by the House of Representatives, but the Senate saved him on both occasions.

At the end of May, his niece Mary Trump told the Hay book festival in Wales that Donald Trump "is the only person I've ever met who's never evolved, which is dangerous." She added, "Never choose as your leader somebody who's incapable of evolving. That should be one of the lessons we've learned, for sure." She has said repeatedly that he is "unfit for office."

## Ignore the tech titans — AI is not your friend

Peter G. Kirchschrager

**M**ETA CEO Mark Zuckerberg and OpenAI's Sam Altman have been aggressively promoting the idea that everyone, children included, should form relationships with AI "friends" or "companions." Meanwhile, multinational tech companies are pushing the concept of "AI agents" designed to assist us in our personal and professional lives, handle routine tasks, and guide decision-making.

But the reality is that AI systems are not, and never will be, friends, companions, or agents. They are, and will remain, machines. We should be honest about that and push back against misleading marketing that suggests otherwise.

The most deceptive term of all is "artificial intelligence." These systems are not truly intelligent, and what we call "AI" today is simply a set of technical tools designed to mimic certain cognitive functions. They are incapable of true comprehension and are not objective, fair, or neutral.

Nor are they becoming any smarter. AI systems rely on data to function, and increasingly that includes data generated by tools such as ChatGPT. The result is a feedback loop that recycles output without producing deeper understanding.

More fundamentally, intelligence is not just about solving tasks; it is also about how those tasks are approached and performed. Despite their technical capabilities, AI models remain limited to specif-

ic domains, such as processing large datasets, performing logical deductions, and making calculations.

When it comes to social intelligence, however, machines can only simulate emotions, interactions, and relationships. A medical robot, for example, could be programmed to cry when a patient cries, yet no one would argue that it feels genuine sadness. The same robot could just as easily be programmed to slap the patient, and it would carry out that command with equal precision — and with the same lack of authenticity and self-awareness. The machine does not "care"; it simply follows instructions. And no matter how advanced such systems become, that is not going to change.

Simply put, machines lack moral agency. Their behavior is governed by patterns and rules created by people, whereas human morality is rooted in autonomy — the capacity to recognize ethical norms and behave accordingly. By contrast, AI systems are designed for functionality and optimization. They may adapt through self-learning, but the rules they generate have no inherent ethical meaning.

Consider self-driving cars. To get from point A to point B as quickly as possible, a self-driving vehicle might develop rules to optimize travel time. If running over pedestrians would help achieve that goal, the car might do so, unless instructed not to, because it

cannot understand the moral implications of harming people.

This is partly because machines are incapable of grasping the principle of generalizability — the idea that an action is ethical only if it can be justified as a universal rule. Moral judgment depends on the ability to provide a plausible rationale that others can reasonably accept. These are what we often refer to as "good reasons." Unlike machines, humans are able to engage in generalizable moral reasoning and, therefore, can judge whether their actions are right or wrong.

The term "data-based systems" is thus more appropriate than "artificial intelligence," as it reflects what AI can actually do: generate, collect, process, and evaluate data to make observations and predictions. It also clarifies the strengths and limitations of today's emerging technologies.

At their core, these are systems that use highly sophisticated mathematical processes to analyze vast amounts of data — nothing more. Humans may interact with them, but communication is entirely one-way. Data-based systems have no awareness of what they are "doing" or of anything happening around them.

This is not to suggest that DS cannot benefit humanity or the planet. On the contrary, we can and should rely on them in domains where their capabilities exceed our own.

But we must also actively manage and mitigate the ethical risks they present. Developing human-rights-based DS and establishing an international data-based systems agency at the UN would be important first steps in that direction.

Over the past two decades, Big Tech firms have isolated us and fractured our societies through social media — more accurately described as "antisocial media," given its addictive and corrosive nature. Now, those same companies are promoting a radical new vision: replacing human connection with AI "friends" and "companions."

At the same time, these companies continue to ignore the so-called "black box problem": the untraceability, unpredictability, and lack of transparency in the algorithmic processes behind automated evaluations, predictions, and decisions. This opacity, combined with the high likelihood of biased and discriminatory algorithms, inevitably results in biased and discriminatory outcomes.

The risks posed by DS are not theoretical. These systems already shape our private and professional lives in increasingly harmful ways, manipulating us economically and politically, yet tech CEOs urge us to let DS tools guide our decisions. To protect our freedom and dignity, as well as the freedom and dignity of future generations, we must not allow machines to masquerade as what they are not: us.

## Mideast crises deserve more than amateurs

Eyad Abu Shakra

**I**N 1997, I took part in an international conference hosted by an Arab country and organized by an American institute with global political interests. There, I had the chance to meet distinguished American and Arab thinkers, officials, journalists, and strategic experts. The conference covered various topics related to governance, democracy, and globalization.

There were several noteworthy interventions. I recall the remarks of Paul Wolfowitz, who would go on to become an "architect" of the Iraq invasion during his tenure as US deputy secretary of defense, and those of the brilliant American journalist and author Thomas Friedman. For their part, Arab intellectuals and academics made important contributions that enriched discussions, though they did not necessarily bridge the deep gap of "mistrust" between Washington and the Arab world.

In any case, I was especially struck by something Friedman said. He noted that he was often surprised, during his conversations with Arab politicians and intellectuals, by how "enchanted" they had been by the titles of American diplomats and envoys they had met. Friedman added that they would quote and recall every word those diplomats and envoys uttered as though it were gospel, a supreme will that could not be challenged.

He explained that his interlocutors failed to realize that most of those who had "enchanted" them with their positions were, in fact, fleeting figures and would be quickly forgotten once they left their roles. He went on to explain that many of their statements were made in order to take a stance, avoid revealing objectives, whose time had not yet

come, or distract from something that needed to be kept out of the spotlight — not to mention that they might simply reflect a personal opinion that did not bind their administration. Today, Lebanon sees Tom Barrack in a similar light. The current US ambassador to Türkiye and the envoy assigned to handle the Syrian file is of Lebanese descent, and because of the deeply intertwined historical relationship between Syria and Lebanon, his every move and statement have been closely followed, both by the Lebanese public and by the Lebanese-American lobby.

In the latest development regarding Barrack, the US State Department denied rumors in recent days about the termination of the Lebanese component of his mission and the reassignment of the Lebanon file to the former diplomat and intelligence analyst Morgan Ortugas. This denial may temporarily lower the temperature of the chronic and recurring debate around Hezbollah's weapons. However, it by no means suggests that the Trump administration has a coherent strategic approach, be it in Lebanon or on other hot-button issues in the region. Indeed, many observers still believe that Washington has no clear vision for how to manage international relationships, be it with allies or adversaries. Amid the "tariff wars" and naval fleets' show of force, even Washington's closest friends seem confused by an administration whose behavior is far more tactical than strategic.

closest friends seem confused by an administration whose behavior is far more tactical than strategic.

One could say that this state of affairs had been expected from an administration led by Donald Trump, who has made personal loyalty and blind allegiance his primary criteria for political and diplomatic appointments. Indeed, there are no towering intellectual or expert figures in the current administration comparable to Dean Acheson, Henry Kissinger, Anthony Lake, Condoleezza Rice, Madeleine Albright, or Susan Rice. Complex civilizational, historical, and geographical issues have been entrusted to friends, wealthy businessmen, and campaign donors. Steve Witkoff and Barrack, who now find themselves navigating the complexities of the Middle East, are two glaring examples.

This effective absence on the part of Washington could well open the region's doors to the unknown.

Russia, for example, has not yet "fully retired." It maintains its strategic footholds in northwestern Syria. Although it has suffered a major setback, Iran remains capable of mounting challenges and disrupting plans. And Türkiye, which has just achieved a major victory with the shift in Damascus, may not settle for the backseat, especially if Israel's regional influence grows and undermines what Ankara sees as its vital interests.

As for Israel, it sees an opportunity to extract as many gains as possible: This belief is born of several factors. First, exploiting the absence, or tacit blessing, of the US — there is little difference — in order to erase Palestine altogether, both as a people and as a cause. Second, the fact that the current regional climate, particularly in the Arab

world, makes military confrontation against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's expansionist ambitions untenable. Third, Netanyahu has sought to defend through offense, evading Israel's domestic political crisis by hiding behind unruly extremist allies who dream of a "Greater Israel" stretching from the Nile to the Euphrates. Finally, Israel's growing concern over the fractures beginning to appear in the alliance of extremists, the Zionist biblical fundamentalists and the white Christian evangelicals in the US.

This alliance had been solidified since the presidency of Ronald Reagan, and continued to consolidate under George W. Bush and the neoconservatives.

However, the rising power of white evangelicals in Trump's camp, alongside the increasingly racist tone of their discourse and the growing prevalence of the biblical backlash against the narrative of "antisemitism," have recently alerted sensible American Jews to the dangers of leaning too strongly on this discourse. The excessive exploitation of antisemitism has revived racism and brought back chilling memories of 1930s European Nazism to the collective consciousness.

Crises of this magnitude only grow deeper and more dangerous in the absence of conscious, fair, and strategic approaches, and when solutions are left in the hands of amateurs and passersby.



# Only a global pact can stop the threat posed by plastics

ease. But above all, they wait for a future that feels more distant with each passing day.





Anti-encroachment campaign:

## SCCI: No compromise on Shahi Katha, demolition of legal business & shops

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: The Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Businessman Forum along with several traders' bodies and associations on Thursday took a unified stance regarding the anti-encroachment campaign and declared no compromise on razing down legal businesses and shops, especially Shahi Katha market in the city.

Traders at a joint meeting arranged by Businessman Forum and SCCI here at chamber reaffirmed commitment to support provincial government and district administration in the ongoing anti-encroachment campaign.

They, however, made it clear that demolition of legal businesses and shops won't be acceptable under guise of the anti-encroachment drive in the city.

The meeting was chaired by SCCI Senior Vice president Abdul Jalil Jan and Businessman Forum leader and former FPCCI president Ghazanfar Bilour.

Apart from members of the chamber's executive

committee Haji Nadeem Rauf, Saifullah Khan, Aftab Iqbal, Ashfaq Ahmad, Abdul Nasir, Chairman of Anjuman e Tajran Khyber Pakhtunhwa Shaukat Ali Khan, Anjuman Tajran Peshawar lifetime president and former SCCI president Haji Muhammad Afzal, Business Forum leader Khalid Gul Mohmand, Khalid Pakhtunyar, Pir Dilwar Khan, Tariq Haideri, Tahir Nawaz, Zafar Khattak, Zafar Shinwari, Ajab Khan, Abdul Razzaq Chitrali, Gul Rehman, former vice president Javed Akhtar, Sohail Ahmad, Haji Ihsanullah, Saddar Gul, Faiz Rasool, Ishiaq Muhammad Paracha, along with traders, market, bazaar unions presidents, office bearers and others were present in a large number.

Traders viewed economic and commercial activities have already slowed down in the prevailing circumstances while the launch of the anti-encroachment drive further multiplied miseries of the business community.

We are ready to cooper-

ate with the local administration but there will be no compromise on Shahi Katha market.

The meeting slammed the misbehavior of senior officials and stated that the business community believes to resolve issues through table talks but abuse, harassment of traders is intolerable during the anti-encroachment campaign.

Ghazanfar Bilour commented on the ongoing anti-encroachment drive in the city, stating that they have no idea what the provincial government and local administration want or desire to flourish business and economic activities.

He made it clear that anti-traders policy is unacceptable and said the business community don't want any kind of confrontation but they have wished to resolve all issues through negotiations.

We stand with traders and have a firm stance on the anti-encroachment campaign.

Ghazanfar Bilour vowed to continue to fight for fulfillment of all legitimate demands and provision of

facilities and relief to the business community.

Businessman forum leader emphasized that foreign investment won't be flourished until provision of facilities to the established businesses and industries.

Haji Muhammad Afzal in his remarks opined SCCI and Businessman Forum have clear stance on the anti-encroachment and they will never allow anyone to commit economic murder of the traders and jobless them.

The traders' leader said SCCI and BF had always played a central role in resolution of business community issues by taking them with relevant authorities' effective manner.

Traders' leader said it is quite clear that Shahi Katha is property of the local government and the intervention of district administration into this matter is unacceptable.

He informed that traders in the city started removal of illegal structures on a self-help basis so he requested the administration.



PESHAWAR: Businessman Forum leader Ghazanfar Bilour addressing traders at Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

### Lodhi meets NLC, DP World officials

SIALKOT (APP): Sialkot Chamber of Commerce & Industry (SCCI) senior vice president Waseem Shahbaz Lodhi chaired a high-level meeting with NLC Director General Major General Farrukh Shahzad Rao, DP World Vice Chairman Farrukh-e-Alam along with Head of Traders Market at DP World Abdulla Yaqoob Al Sayed Ahmad Al Hashmi. Representatives from NLC were also present during the meeting.

The central focus of the discussion was the proposal to establish a "Pakistan Mart" in the UAE — envisioned as trade hub and a dedicated exhibition platform for showcasing Pakistani products. The concept was modeled after the success of Dragon Mart (by China) and the upcoming Bharat Mart, both serving as international hubs to promote national exports in the Gulf region and re-export around the world.

The delegation emphasized that the establishment of a Pakistan Mart would not only strengthen Pakistan's export footprint in the Middle East but also provide a permanent commercial presence in the UAE, enabling year-round trade, business networking, and promotional opportunities for Pakistani enterprises.

### Shipping activity at PQ

KARACHI (APP): Six ships, Hansa Africa, Hong Yong Chang Sheng, PVT Solana, Blue Bird, DS Rosa and Fuwairit carrying Container, Palm oil, Mogas, Chemicals and LNG, berthed at Qasim International Container Terminal, Liquid Cargo Terminal, FOTCO oil Terminal, Engro Vopak Terminal and Engro Elengy Terminal respectively, meanwhile another chemical carrier 'Chemroad Hawk' also arrived at outer anchorage on same day.

A total of eleven ships were engaged at PQA berths during the last 24 hours, out of them a containers ship 'Hong Yong Chang Sheng' is left the port on Thursday early morning, while three more ships, Hansa Africa, DS Rosa and MTR Chess-Master are expected to sail.

Cargo volume of 238,185 tonnes, comprising 179,873 tonnes imports cargo and 58,312 export cargo carried in 5,583 Containers (2,505 TEUs Imports 3,078 TEUs Export) was handled at the port during last 24 hours.

There are 12 ships at Outer Anchorage of Port Qasim, out of them two ships, CNC Dream and Sea Bird carrying Chemicals and Coal are expected to take berths at EVTL and PIBT respectively.

### Liquid foreign reserves position

**F.P. Report**

KARACHI: The total liquid foreign reserves held by the country stood at US\$ 19,495.6 million as of 01-Aug-2025. The break-up of the foreign reserves position is as under: Foreign reserves held by the State Bank of Pakistan: US\$ 14,231.9 million, net foreign reserves held by commercial banks: US\$ 5,263.7 million, total liquid foreign reserves: US\$ 19,495.6 million.

During the week ended on 01-Aug-2025, SBP reserves decreased by US\$ 72 million to US\$ 14,231.9 million due to external debt repayments.

## Chief Collector highlights major reforms of Customs

**F.P. Report**

KARACHI: A presser was given on Thursday in Customs House, Karachi regarding progress on reforms in the appraisal side of Customs. The Chief Collector while highlighting the progress informed that major reforms on the customs side are now on ground. The CAU is operational from 08.00 in the morning to 12:00 at night and 1,500 to 2,000 GDs are being cleared daily.

The assessment of over 95 % GDs is completed on the same day. The completion rate of physical examination in case of GDs allocated to the Red channel has increased substantially due to operationalization of CEU and posting of around 50 additional examiners by the FBR.

In the past same day completion rate was around 50 % which is now around 90 %. In case of single item

GDs and GDs filed at 10 off-dock terminals, same day completion rate is almost 100%. The reviews are now being conducted by the ACs/DCs in virtual mode and importers and their agents are not required to visit the customs offices.

The result is that over 90 % reviews filed before the ACs/DCs are disposed of on the same day. The Chief Collector also informed that referrals of samples to laboratory is being monitored at the senior level to ensure that samples are not unnecessarily referred to the lab and test reports are fed by the chemical examiners on the same day. The initiatives of Direct Port delivery and Decoupling of Payment from GD filing are also in the offing. The said initiatives would further facilitate the trade, would reduce congestion at the port, and would ease the liquidity constraints of the importers.

These reforms are a par-

adigm shift in the overall culture of Customs and certainly there are losers and gainers.

The report which appeared in the media allegedly on some audit observation of the PCA regarding clearance of vehicles under special schemes for the expatriate Pakistanis is a case in point. The clearance under these schemes is subject to conditions imposed by the import policy order and there is no change in the clearance process and conditions under the FCA. Moreover, there is no element of revenue loss but there seems to be a deliberate attempt to undermine FCA through such reports. He further emphasized that the reforms are creating their constituency with each passing day due to visible benefits in the form of reduction in cost of doing business for genuine traders and there is no question of their rollback."

## Beneficiaries of Old system malign Faceless Customs System to secure its roll back

**F.P. Report**

KARACHI: The Pakistan Customs has gradually expanded the scope and coverage of its Faceless Customs Assessment (FCA) to facilitate trade and minimise human interface in the clearance of goods from ports. Launched in December, 2024, FCA has deprived many who thrived on the gains made from the old system. They have actively been maligning FCA to secure its roll back.

Some of the leading national media outlets have unfortunately lent shoulder to propel this false narrative without proper due diligence and investigation. One such example is the

recent publication of news items stating that Audit report has revealed large scale clearance of luxury vehicles at highly under-invoiced values in FCA. In particular, example of a 2023 Toyota Land Cruiser has been given that was allegedly assessed at a petty value of Rs. 17,635, in FCA thereby causing huge loss to national exchequer.

On the contrary, it is clarified that the said vehicle was assessed at Rs. 10.05 million and an amount of Rs. 47.2 million was recovered in duty and taxes. In fact all such vehicles have been assessed by Customs under FCA at higher assessed values without causing any loss of revenue.

In the same report, the

issue of trade based money laundering has also been alleged in import of these vehicles ignoring the fact that only overseas Pakistanis are entitled to such imports under gift or transfer of residence schemes. These schemes do not involve any outward remittance of foreign exchange from Pakistan. Besides, import of used vehicles in the same manner has been taking place even before the launch of FCA.

It is also important to mention that internal reviews and Audit of FCA, which are often time quoted out of context, are being conducted by FBR itself to ensure that gaps in this new system are timely identified and addressed.

## PSX stays bullish, gains 558 more points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Pakistan Stock Exchange's (PSX) benchmark KSE-100 Index continued with bullish trend on Thursday, gaining 558.64 more points, a positive of 0.39 percent, closing at 145,647.14 points against 145,088.50 points last trading day.

A total of 712,527,450 shares were traded during

the day as compared to 788,463,721 shares the previous trading day, whereas the price of shares stood at Rs 55.677 billion against Rs 52.780 billion on the last trading day. As many as 483 companies transacted their shares in the stock market, 221 of them recorded gains and 235 sustained losses, whereas the share price of 27 companies remained unchanged.

The three top trading companies were Pak Petroleum with 33,121,252 shares at Rs 189.74 per share, WorldCall Telecom with 25,365,424 shares at Rs1.43 per share and Fauji Foods Limited with 23,971,113 shares at Rs 16.04 per share.

Rafhan Maize Products Company Limited witnessed a maximum increase of Rs 81.85 per share price, closing at Rs 9,679.12, whereas the runner-up was Al-Abbas Sugar Mills Limited with Rs39.7 rise in its per share price to Rs 1,119.37.

PIA Holding Company LimitedB witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs1,078.10 per share closing at Rs 29,857.80 followed by Nestle Pakistan

Limited with Rs530.57 decline in its share price to close at Rs9,037.58.

**Rupee gains 12 paise against US Dollar:** The Rupee on Thursday appreciated by 12 paise against the US Dollar in the inter-bank trading and closed at Rs 282.55 against the previous day's closing Rs 282.67. However, according to the FAP, the buying and selling rates of the dollar in the open market stood at Rs 284 and Rs 285, respectively.

The price of the Euro increased by Rs 3.15 to close at Rs 330.31 against the last day's closing of Rs 327.16, according to the State Bank of Pakistan.

### Name Correction Notice

I, Sania Khan, daughter of [Sana Ullah], resident of [Peshawar], hereby declare that my correct full name is Sania Khan. In several of my educational documents, my name has been mistakenly mentioned as Sania or Sana Sana instead of Sania Khan. I request all concerned authorities and individuals to kindly update their records accordingly.

## Askari Bank, SUNRATE join hands to expand global payment services

**F.P. Report**

ISLAMABAD: Askari Bank and SUNRATE- a global payment and treasury management platform - have signed an agreement to enhance global payment services in Pakistan. This collaboration marks a significant step in Askari Bank's commitment to supporting the country's financial ecosystem through global partnerships. The signing ceremony was held at Askari Bank's Head Office in Islamabad, attended by Mr. Zahid Rasul, Chief Technology Officer, along with AKBL's Home Remittance Team

and Mr. Mohsin Muzaffer, Head of MESA at SUNRATE.

This collaboration aims to bring seamless, secure, and scalable cross-border payment options to Pakistani beneficiaries while strengthening the country's financial infrastructure.

Speaking on the occasion, Muzammil Hanif, Head Home Remittances at Askari Bank, stated, "This partnership underscores Askari Bank's vision to enhance remittance services through innovation and international alliances. By joining forces with SUNRATE, we aim to deliver fast, reliable, and customer-

centric remittance solutions that support financial inclusion and contribute to national economic stability."

Also commenting on the collaboration, Mr. Mohsin Muzaffer of SUNRATE Middle East & South Asia (MESA) said, "At SUNRATE, we're committed to empowering businesses around the world. Our partnership with Askari Bank ensures that local businesses such as entrepreneurs, freelancers, and SMEs in the region can receive payments from international clients with ease, speed, and confidence."

Remittances play a vital role in Pakistan's economy

by bolstering foreign exchange reserves, reducing the current account deficit, and stimulating household consumption. Askari Bank's advanced remittance processing system offers Straight Through Processing (STP), ensuring that transactions are executed in real-time, 24/7, providing unmatched convenience and speed for recipients across the country.

This partnership reflects Askari Bank's continued commitment to delivering innovative financial solutions and reinforces its position as a forward-looking institution in Pakistan's dynamic banking landscape.

## PTCL expands strategic partnership with Teradata

**F.P. Report**

KARACHI: PTCL Group (Pakistan Telecommunication Company Limited & Ufone 4G), Pakistan's leading telecom and ICT services provider, has partnered with Teradata to transform and scale its Enterprise Data Warehouse platform. This extended engagement marks a significant milestone in the PTCL Group's journey toward digital excellence, aligned with its vision to become a data-driven, AI-enabled enterprise.

This partnership extension will enable PTCL Group to scale its data infrastructure into a high-performance, intelligent platform capable of supporting real-time insights, smarter decision-making, and enhanced customer experiences. The initiative is central to PTCL Group's broader data and AI roadmap, aimed at creating operational agility and long-term service excellence.

Jafar Khalid, Group Chief Technology and Information Officer, PTCL



and Ufone 4G, said, "Our extended collaboration with Teradata is a key step in PTCL Group's intelligent digital transformation journey. Scaling our Enterprise Data Warehouse platform allows us to unlock new capabilities in analytics that are essential for driving innovation and elevating customer value. This partnership reflects a shared vision for creating an agile and intelligence-led enterprise."

Waqas Hashmi, Area Vice President, Teradata Pakistan, commented, "We are proud to deepen our decades-long partnership with PTCL Group as they continue their digital transformation journey. By harnessing the power of Teradata's modern data platform and embedded AI capabilities, PTCL Group is positioning itself to unlock deeper insights, drive innovation at scale, and fast-track its strategic goals.

This renewed collaboration is not just a testament to our trusted relationship, but also to our shared vision of advancing data-driven excellence and AI adoption across Pakistan's telecommunications sector."

PTCL Group is at the forefront of building a modern digital ecosystem where data is not just stored, but actively leveraged to create smarter services, responsive operations, and future-ready capabilities.

## Asian markets rise as traders look past Trump chip threat

HONG KONG (AFP/APP): Asian equities rose Thursday as investors looked past Donald Trump's threat to impose 100 percent tariffs on semiconductors, with optimism still high that the Federal Reserve will slash interest rates next month.

A day before sweeping tariffs came into effect on dozens of countries, the US president said Washington would also be placing a "100 percent" tariff on chips and semiconductors but he did not offer a timetable.

However, he said "the good news for companies

like Apple is, if you're building in the United States, or have committed to build... in the United States, there will be no charge".

Stock gains were led Thursday by Taiwan's giant TSMC, which surged almost five percent, with the island's National Development Council chief Liu Chin-ching saying the firm was in the clear.

"Because Taiwan's main exporter is TSMC, which has factories in the United States, TSMC is exempt," he told a briefing in parliament.

TSMC, which is ramp-

ing up manufacturing in Arizona, has pledged to invest as much as \$165 billion in the United States.

Seoul-listed Samsung, which is also pumping billions into the world's number one economy, rose more than two percent while South Korean rival SK hynix was up more than one percent.

Apple-linked firms were helped after the US giant said it would invest an additional \$100 billion in the United States, taking its total pledge to \$600 billion over the next four years.

However, Japanese

trade Tokyo Electron, a major producer of chip-making equipment, plunged more than two percent, while chipmaker Renesas sank 3.8 percent.

Precision tools maker Disco Corporation gave up 1.8 percent.

Sony soared 4.1 percent after the PlayStation-maker raised its annual profit forecasts, citing strong performance in its key gaming business and a smaller-than-expected negative impact of US trade tariffs.

Analysts said that while the chip threat was steep, there was optimism the





# Teen Mboko upsets Rybakina to book Canadian Open final with Osaka; Zverev falls



MONTREAL (Reuters): Teenager Victoria Mboko survived a first-set wobble to battle to a 1-6 7-5 7-6(4) win over 2022 Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina and set up a Canadian Open showdown with Naomi Osaka, while men's top seed Alexander Zverev was stunned by Karen Khachanov.

Mboko, ranked 85th in the world, saved a match point against Kazakh ninth seed Rybakina in front of adoring home support as the 18-year-old became the first Canadian to beat three former Grand Slam champions in a single WTA event in the Open Era.

She has beaten Sofia Kenin, Coco Gauff and

Rybakina in her stunning run to the final in Montreal.

She is also just the third wildcard to reach the final at the Canadian Open in the Open Era after Monica Seles in 1995 and Simona Halep in 2015.

"I had everyone supporting me and pushing me through. Without you guys, I don't think I would've been able to pull this through," Mboko said after reaching her first WTA 1000 final.

Meanwhile, four-times Grand Slam champion Osaka booked a place in a WTA 1000 final for the first time since Miami 2022 after another impressive display, beating

Danish 16th seed Clara Tauson 6-2 7-6(7) in the second semi-final.

The 27-year-old Osaka, a former world number one, is the first Japanese player in the Open Era to reach the final at the Canadian Open.

In the men's tournament in Toronto, Zverev, a three-times Grand Slam runner-up, suffered a 6-3 4-6 7-6(4) loss against Russian 11th seed Karen Khachanov in the semis.

The 29-year-old Khachanov, who will climb to 12th in the world rankings, saved a match point to reach his second ATP Masters 1000 final, with the previous coming at Paris in 2018 where he

upset Novak Djokovic.

"I had to dig deep and lift my level. It was a very demanding, very mental, very physical match. So I'm very happy to get the win after losing some easy ones to him in recent years," Khachanov, who lost the last three encounters against Zverev, said after their near three-hour battle.

"Today was a real close one. I was match point down, if the ball touches the net and drops over we wouldn't be talking now."

Khachanov will face American fourth seed Ben Shelton, who upset second-seeded countryman Taylor Fritz 6-4 6-3 to become the youngest American to reach an ATP Masters 1000 final since Andy Roddick in Toronto in 2004, in the final.

Australian Open semi-finalist Shelton, 22, will be playing his first ATP Masters 1000 final when he takes on Khachanov.

"For me it's the level — 100%. I'm just looking for things in my game to just kind of improve and I've seen so many big improvements this week. So, that's what I'm most happy about — the way I'm playing, how I'm executing, how little I'm hesitating...." Shelton said.



CHELMSFORD, ENGLAND: Box To Box ridden by Joe Leavy (R) leads around the final bend in the bet365 Chelmsford City Cup at Chelmsford City Racecourse on Friday in Chelmsford, England.

## Nine PSG players on Ballon d'Or shortlist after treble-winning campaign

LONDON (Reuters): Nine players from treble-winning Paris St Germain have been nominated for the men's Ballon d'Or this year along with the club's coach Luis Enrique as France Football announced the list of nominees on Thursday.

Ousmane Dembele, Gianluigi Donnarumma, Desire Doue, Achraf Hakimi, Khvicha Kvaratskhelia, Nuno Mendes, Joao Neves, Fabian Ruiz and Vitinha are all on the list of 30 players nominated for the big prize. Dembele scored 35 goals and claimed 16 assists in all competitions as PSG won the Ligue 1 title, French Cup and Champions League and were Club World Cup runners-up to Chelsea.

Other nominees include Barcelona's Raphinha (34 goals, 25 assists), Liverpool's Mohamed Salah (34 goals, 23 assists), who was named Premier League Player of the Season, and Manchester City striker Erling Haaland (34 goals, five assists).

Scott McTominay, Serie

A's Most Valuable Player after guiding Napoli to the title, was also nominated as the first Scotsman in 38 years to make the shortlist.

Barca's Lamine Yamal (18 goals, 25 assists) made the cut while the 18-year-old winger was also nominated for the Kopa Trophy for best Under-21 player, an award he won last year.

Five England players were nominated for the women's Ballon d'Or after their Euros triumph, including goalkeeper Hannah Hampton, Lucy Bronze, Alessia Russo, Chloe Kelly and Leah Williamson.

Marta, who came out of retirement to lead Brazil to the women's Copa America title at the age of 39, was also nominated.

Along with Luis Enrique, Enzo Maresca, who guided Chelsea to the Club World Cup title, and Liverpool's Arne Slot, who won the Premier League crown in his first season at the club, were nominated for the men's Coach of the Year award.

The women's coach

nominees are led by Sonia Bompastor, who won a domestic treble at Chelsea, Renee Slegers, who took Arsenal to their second Champions League crown, and Sarina Wiegman after she helped England retain their Euros title.

**BALLON D'OR NOMINATIONS**

Men: Jude Bellingham, Ousmane Dembele, Gianluigi Donnarumma, Desire Doue, Denzel Dumfries, Serhou Guirassy, Viktor Gyokeres, Erling Haaland, Achraf Hakimi, Harry Kane, Khvicha Kvaratskhelia, Robert Lewandowski, Alexis Mac Allister, Lautaro Martinez, Kylian Mbappe, Scott McTominay, Nuno Mendes, Joao Neves, Michael Olise, Cole Palmer, Pedri, Raphinha, Declan Rice, Fabian Ruiz, Mohamed Salah, Virgil van Dijk, Vinicius Jr, Vitinha, Florian Wirtz, Lamine Yamal

Women: Sandy Baltimore, Barbra Banda, Aitana Bonmati, Lucy Bronze, Klara Buehl,

Mariona Caldentey, Sofia Cantore, Steph Catley, Temwa Chawinga, Melchie Dumornay, Emily Fox, Cristiana Girelli, Esther Gonzalez, Caroline Graham Hansen, Hannah Hampton, Pernille Harder, Patri Guijarro, Amanda Gutierrez, Lindsey Heaps, Chloe Kelly, Frida Leonhardsen-Maanum, Marta, Clara Mateo, Ewa Pajor, Claudia Pina, Alexia Putellas, Alessia Russo, Johanna Rytting Kaneryd, Caroline Weir, Leah Williamson

**OTHER AWARD NOMINATIONS**

Men's coach of the year: Antonio Conte, Luis Enrique, Hansi Flick, Enzo Maresca, Arne Slot

Women's coach of the year: Sonia Bompastor, Arthur Elias, Justine Madugu, Renee Slegers, Sarina Wiegman

Men's club of the year: Barcelona, Botafogo, Chelsea, Liverpool, Paris St Germain

Women's club of the year: Arsenal, Barcelona, Chelsea, OL Lyonnes, Orlando Pride.

## Azadi Cup Tenpin Bowling C'ship from Friday

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Azadi Cup Tenpin Bowling Championship will start from August 8, under the auspices of the Pakistan Tenpin Bowling Federation here at Leisure City Bowling Club, Safa Gold, F-7 Markaz.

According to President,

Pakistan Tenpin Bowling Federation, Ijaz ur Rehman, the Federal Secretary, Ministry of Inter Provincial Coordination (IPC), Mohyuddin Ahmad Wani, will inaugurate the week-long tournament.

He said that all arrangements for the champi-

onship have been finalized in the Organizing Committee's meeting.

He said that players from across the country will take part in nine different categories including Men's singles, men's doubles, Ladies singles, Amateur, team events,

Deaf singles (Men and Women), take-takers and Media events.

The concluding ceremony of the Championship will be held on August 14 in which Trophies, Medals, Certificates will be delivered to the winning players.

## ‘Sonny in LA’ - Son joins LAFC in MLS record deal

LOS ANGELES (Reuters): South Korean forward Son Heung-min said he is "here to win" after he joined Los Angeles FC for a record Major League Soccer transfer fee, ending a decade-long stint at Tottenham Hotspur.

Son was introduced at LAFC's BMO Stadium on Wednesday, where he was greeted by Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass and city officials amid chants and drumming from supporters' group 3252.

"What can I say, dream come true. LA, what a city," Son told reporters at his unveiling.

Financial details of the transfer were not disclosed by either club but the Athletic reported LAFC paid a fee in the region of \$26.5 million for the 33-

year-old, on revealed LAFC was not his initial preference, but credited the club's co-president and general manager John Thornington with persuading him to make the switch.

"He just changed my mind, heart, he changed my brain. He showed me the destination where I should be and right now I'm here and I'm so, so excited," said Son, who attended LAFC's 2-1 win over Tigres UANL on Tuesday night.

"I'm here to win. I will perform and I will definitely show you some exciting football, and we will definitely have success," he said.

The move is expected to resonate with Los Angeles' sizeable Korean community, with LAFC's stadium

located just south of Koreatown.

Son follows in the footsteps of other international stars who have joined LAFC, including Carlos Vela, Giorgio Chiellini, Olivier Giroud, and former Tottenham teammates Gareth Bale and Hugo Lloris.

Son, who joined Tottenham from Bayer Leverkusen in 2015, led the north London club to their first trophy in 17 years with a 1-0 win over Manchester United in the Europa League final in May.

The former Spurs captain made 454 appearances for the team and scored 173 goals, winning the Premier League Golden Boot in the 2021-22 season.

Reflecting on his depart-

ture from Tottenham, Son described the move as "very emotional."

"I felt like I needed a new chapter, I needed a new challenge and I chose LAFC," he said.

"I think you could say I'm old but I still have good physicality, good legs, and still have a good quality."

"Obviously I'm here to perform but I also want to give some advice to some young players for improvement."

"I can't wait... Let's do it together and win the trophy."

It was not immediately clear when Son will make his debut for the Black and Gold, who are currently sixth in the Western Conference and travel to face Chicago Fire on Saturday.

## McGrath predicts 5-0 win for Australia in Ashes

SYDNEY (BBC): Glenn McGrath predicts England will be whitewashed in the 2025-26 Ashes, backing Australia to win the series 5-0.

The former Australia bowler, a six-time Ashes winner, always makes this prediction and did so before the 2023 series, which ended in a 2-2 draw, with the tourists retaining the urn.

England have not won an Ashes series since 2015, drawing two and losing two, and have not won a series - or indeed a Test - in Australia since 2010-11.

"It's very rare for me to make a prediction, isn't it? And I can't make a differ-

ent one - 5-0," McGrath told BBC Radio 5 Live.

"I'm very confident with our team. When you've got Pat Cummins, Mitchell Starc, Josh Hazlewood and Nathan Lyon firing in their home conditions, it's going to be pretty tough."

"Plus, that track record England have had, it'd be interesting to see if they can win a Test."

Australia won 4-0 when England last toured the country in 2021-22 and Cummins' side have only lost two of their past 15 Tests on home soil, winning 11 and drawing two.

McGrath conceded there are "issues" with Australia's batting, particu-

larly their unsettled top three. Usman Khawaja, Cameron Green and Marnus Labuschagne are out of form, and opener Sam Konstas is yet to nail down his spot as the retired David Warner's replacement. But with England's bowling attack also needing "to strengthen a little bit", McGrath says the key battle will be between the tourists' top seven and Australia's bowlers, pinpointing Joe Root and Harry Brook as two players to watch.

"This series will be a big one for Root," said McGrath. "He's never really done that well in Australia, he's not even got

a 100 over there, so he'll be keen to get out there. He's in fine form."

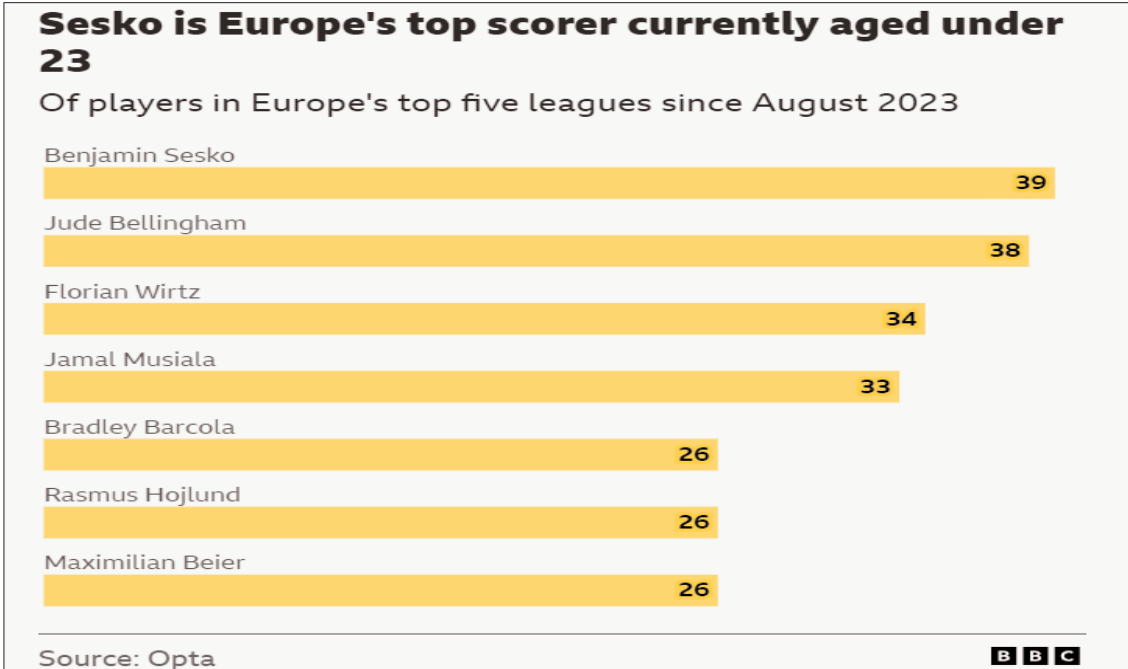
Joe Root has scored 892 Test runs in Australia, including nine fifties, but is yet to score a century.

He averages 35.68 down under, compared to his career average of 51.29, with a highest score of 89.

"Brook's the one that I've enjoyed watching," added McGrath. "He just goes out there, plays his game, and takes it on. The Australians will need to get on him pretty early."

"Ben Duckett is such an aggressive opener. Zak Crawley would be keen to score a few more runs than he has previously."

## Man Utd agree £74m deal for Leipzig striker Sesko



MANCHESTER (BBC): Manchester United have agreed a deal worth £73.7m (85m euros) with Red Bull Leipzig to sign Benjamin Sesko.

The agreement includes a guaranteed payment of £66.3m (76.5m euros) with

the remainder in add-ons.

Sesko will now complete the formalities, including undergoing a medical on Friday, before finalising his move to Old Trafford.

The 22-year-old Slovenia forward, who was also wanted by Newcastle,

has scored 39 goals in 87 appearances for German side Leipzig.

United have already signed forwards Matheus Cunha and Bryan Mbeumo this summer for a combined fee of around £130m.

Those payments have

been arranged in a favourable way to allow United to keep spending, while the entirety of Marcus Rashford's £325,000-a-week salary is being covered by his loan move to Barcelona.

United also received



£5m from Chelsea after the Blues pulled out of a deal to sign Jadon Sancho.

And United could also raise a further £50m by selling Argentine winger Alejandro Garnacho, who is attracting interest from Chelsea and has been told he can leave Old Trafford this summer.

Their main striker from last season, Rasmus

Hojlund, has been made available for sale for £40m after scoring just 14 Premier League goals in two seasons.

Sesko's decision to move to Old Trafford is a further blow to Newcastle, who missed out on Hugo Ekitike to Liverpool and face seeing their main striker Alexander Isak potentially join him at Anfield.

Since moving to Germany, Sesko is the top scorer currently aged under 23 in all competitions, of players based in Europe's top five leagues - with 39 goals in 87 games.

He is one ahead of Real Madrid's Jude Bellingham and five clear of Florian Wirtz, who joined Liverpool from Bayer Leverkusen for £100m this

summer. Sesko is big, strong, quick, good in the air and a fine finisher, and has been compared to Erling Haaland - and not just because they both played for Salzburg.

He was one of the fastest strikers in the Bundesliga at 35.7km/h - and had the best aerial success rate of strikers involved in at least 60 of them.





## In brief

### ITP fines over 33,000 vehicles

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Traffic Police (ITP) has taken legal action against more than 33,000 vehicles and motorcycles during the ongoing year — marking a sharp increase from the 20,965 cases recorded over the same violation last year. A police spokesperson told APP that the ongoing campaign targets the use of fancy or non-pattern number plates, which are in violation of official registration standards. Special enforcement squads have been deployed at strategic checkpoints across the capital, where police teams are issuing challans, impounding vehicles, and removing unauthorized plates on the spot. Chief Traffic Officer Captain (R) Syed Zeeshan Haider has directed all zonal DSPs to intensify the crackdown further and ensure firm, indiscriminate action against violators. He said strict enforcement of traffic regulations is essential to maintain road safety and ensure smooth vehicular movement across Islamabad. He also urged citizens to register their vehicles and motorcycles in a timely manner and to use only the official number plates issued by the Excise and Taxation Department. Using unauthorized or stylized number plates, he warned, may lead to fines, impoundment, and legal proceedings. According to officials, the upward trend in enforcement reflects ITP's renewed focus on accountability, and efforts will continue in the coming months with zero tolerance for non-compliance.

### 316,100 cusecs water released

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Thursday released 316,100 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 366,900 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, the water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1546.00 feet which was 144.00 feet higher than the dead level of 1402.00 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 226,500 cusecs and 197,100 cusecs, respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1204.40 feet, which was 154.40 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 29,400 cusecs and 8,000 cusecs, respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 214,800, 172,900, 197,300 and 178,200 cusecs, respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 30,600 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 50,300 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.

### Pak steps up climate action

ISLAMABAD (APP): Climate expert Dr. Zainab Naem on Thursday said that Pakistan has made progress in climate action over the past 10 to 12 years. She said that these steps are meaningful, but more urgent actions are needed in urban planning. She said that climate planning has been neglected, citing the Swat floods, where a riverside hotel destroyed in 2010 was rebuilt in the same spot and swept away again in 2022 due to poor enforcement. She said that the real estate and construction sectors must be included in climate planning in the country. She urged the government to focus on local action and build infrastructure that can handle future climate risks. She also stressed that construction waste is blocking natural waterways, which leads to floods and droughts.

# Ahsan stresses urgent need for Pakistan to strengthen its DRF

ISLAMABAD (APP): Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, Professor Ahsan Iqbal on Thursday stressed the urgent need for Pakistan to strengthen its Disaster Risk Financing (DRF), which he described as a “national insurance policy” rather than merely a source of funding for future natural catastrophes.

He made these remarks while addressing a seminar titled “Disaster Risk Financing to Strengthen Pakistan's Financial Resilience,” organized by the National Disaster Risk Management Fund (NDRMF) under the umbrella of the Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives; and the Ministry of Finance.

He said that in an era of escalating climate uncertainty and financial vulnerability, it was imperative to make Pakistan strong, sustainable and future-ready to face climate change risks.

The minister highlighted URAAN-Pakistan, the national transformation vision for a stronger, smarter, and more self-reliant country, which is anchored in five strategic pillars: exports, e-Pakistan, environment and climate change, energy and infrastructure, and equity and empowerment.

“Disaster Risk Financing, by design and by necessity, cuts across all

five pillars of URAAN-Pakistan,” he added.

Ahsan Iqbal stressed that without resilience, there could be no sustainable growth, and without financial preparedness, there could be no secure future.

“Climate change is no longer a distant threat. It is here, and we are experiencing it. It is now — and Pakistan, tragically, is on the front line,” he said, adding that Pakistan has been ranked the most climate-vulnerable country in the world this year.

Drawing the attention of the international community, he said Pakistan had endured a relentless series of disasters over the past two decades, including the 2005 earthquake and floods in 2010, 2011, 2014, 2020 and 2022 each inflicting billions of dollars in losses and displacing millions.

“Even now, as we face erratic monsoon patterns and rising glacial lake outburst floods, the threat remains very real,” he warned.

This year, the minister noted, the United Nations has declared the International Year of Glacial Preservation, a timely reminder that Pakistan's northern glaciers — which supply 75% of its river water — were rapidly retreating.

He said Pakistan has historically relied on the public exchequer and interna-

tional donor support to manage climate shocks.

While calling these “critical lifelines,” he noted they were neither sustainable nor timely. Delayed recovery, compounded damages, and disproportionate suffering among the poor underscore the need for change.

“This reactive approach is not fit for the future. We must shift from reaction to readiness, and from fragility to resilience. That is where disaster risk financing becomes a game-changer,” he said.

Ahsan Iqbal said a strengthened DRF would ensure immediate availability of resources, not weeks or months later, enabling efficient and targeted relief and reconstruction efforts.

He acknowledged the leadership of the NDRMF in advancing this agenda through initiatives such as national catastrophe modeling, integration of risk into public investment frameworks, and the exploration of insurance, contingent credit, and risk-layering instruments. “We are making meaningful progress,” he said.

The minister assured full implementation of the seminar's recommendations, adding that it was time for Pakistan to take a decisive step toward transforming into a \$1 trillion economy by 2035.

## RPO Alpa meets Peace Committee delegation

RAWALPINDI (APP): Regional Police Officer (RPO) Rawalpindi Babar Safraz Alpa on Thursday held a meeting with a Divisional Peace Committee delegation to discuss security arrangements for the Chehlum of Imam Hussain (AS) and ways for promoting mutual trust and religious tolerance.

The delegation included Divisional Peace Committee Hafiz Iqbal Rizvi Chairman, Divisional President Mufti Tanveer Alam Farooqi, President Attock Qari Ifikhar Ahmed Farooqi, President Talagang Qari Nazir Ahmed, Secretary General Islamabad Maulana Abdul Rehman Muawiya and Member Maulana Muhammad Shoaib Siddique, Mufti Bilal Umar, Qari Imran

Muawiya, Mufti Haider Ali and Mufti Nishad Ahmed, an RPO spokesman said.

The delegation members assured that the religious scholars would extend all possible cooperation to the police and administration to maintain an atmosphere of peace and security.

RPO Alpa said during Muharram-ul-Haram an exemplary atmosphere of peace and security was maintained in the Rawalpindi.

Once again foolproof security arrangements were being made for the Chehlum processions and gatherings to avoid any untoward incident.

More than 6,500 policemen would be deployed for securing more than 50 Chehlum processions and over 40 gatherings in the

Rawalpindi region, he added.

Control rooms, he said, were also being set up at the district level to monitor the security situation and regulate the traffic flow round the clock.

Alternative routes would be announced to avoid any disruption in the Chehlum processions and gatherings, the RPO added.

The Ulema and scholars reiterated the resolve that the message of brotherhood, tolerance and peace would be spread on the occasion of Chehlum of Hazrat Imam Hussain (AS).

RPO Alpa vowed that the Rawalpindi Police would ensure the observance of Chehlum of Hazrat Imam Hussain (AS) peacefully with the cooperation of scholars.

## Business community hails govt's move

ISLAMABAD (APP): Economic Policy and Business Development (EPBD) Chairman Gohar Ejaz on Thursday welcomed the issuance of the Sales Tax General Order (STGO) by the Federal Board of Revenue, which outlines a detailed procedure for investigation prior to the arrest of any businessman.

Gohar Ejaz termed the government's decision of making it mandatory for tax officials to consult at least two representatives of the business community before initiating investigations that could lead to arrests in tax fraud cases as a victory for taxpayers of the country.

He also gave credit to Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir for safeguarding the respect and honour of the business community from

the draconian powers granted to the FBR in the Finance Act 2025.

“As announced in the meeting on July 21, 2025 with business leaders, Field Marshal Asim Munir has safeguarded the respect and honour of the business community from the draconian powers granted to the FBR in the Finance Act 2025, following a presentation by the leadership of FPCCI, Dr. Gohar Ejaz, SM Tanveer, the President of FPCCI, and the presidents of 18 chambers, including Karachi, Lahore, Quetta, Sarhad, Faisalabad, Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Rahim Yar Khan, and Sialkot,” a press release quoted Gohar Ejaz as saying.

According to the STGO, the Board has directed that the following procedure shall be followed before ini-

tiating investigation leading to action under sub-section (8) and (9) of section 37A of the Sales Tax Act, 1990.

“(a) Inquiry shall not be initiated unless approval from the Commissioner has been obtained. (b) After conclusion of inquiry, the Commissioner shall not give approval to initiate investigation unless he has obtained approval from Member (Inland Revenue Operations) of Board. Before seeking approval of the Member (Inland Revenue Operations), it is binding upon the Commissioner to make consultation with two representatives of the business community from amongst such representatives as notified by the Board. (c) Board shall notify a list of representatives of business community on FBR's web portal.”



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs Muhammad Junaid Anwar Chaudhry talking to a delegation of Sindh Parliamentary Reporters Association.

### ICT admin seals 30 buildings

ISLAMABAD (APP): In a coordinated move to enforce construction regulations, the Islamabad district administration and the Capital Development Authority (CDA) conducted a large-scale operation in the Hostel City area and the teams sealed 30 buildings that were found in violation of the approved building codes. The action took place under the supervision of Assistant Commissioner Nilore.

According to the spokesman of ICT administration, the buildings had repeatedly ignored legal notices served over the past several weeks.

A CDA spokesperson said the sealed properties had been issued multiple warnings for non-compliance but continued construction and usage against regulations. The spokesperson added that despite repeated reminders, the owners failed to rectify the violations.

During the operation, the teams also removed illegal extensions and encroachments from the surrounding area. These structures were reportedly constructed without approval and were contributing to overcrowding and safety concerns in the locality.

Islamabad Police provided on-ground support during the action to maintain order and ensure smooth execution. Security personnel remained present throughout the operation to avoid any disruptions or resistance.

The crackdown is part of an ongoing effort by the CDA and district administration to ensure that urban development in the capital remains within approved guidelines. Officials say such actions will continue against properties that fail to comply with building standards.

A CDA representative said that violations of building codes not only compromise safety but also place additional pressure on the city's infrastructure. The spokesperson stressed that developers and property owners must seek proper approvals and follow regulations when constructing or altering buildings.

Authorities have warned that further non-compliance may result in stricter penalties, including legal action, demolition, or permanent sealing of properties. The operation in Hostel City is being viewed as a clear message to other violators in the capital.

The district administration has urged citizens to report any unlawful constructions in their areas to help maintain order and planned growth in Islamabad.

## Russian Diplomats briefed on upcoming speakers conference

ISLAMABAD (APP): Deputy Head of Mission at the Russian Embassy, Igor Kolesnikov and Press Attaché Natalia Shmeleva called on Advisor to the Chairman Senate, Misbah Khar, on Thursday.

During the meeting, Misbah Khar, along with Senior Director General Tariq Bin Waleed, briefed the Russian diplomats on the Inter-Parliamentary Speakers Conference (ISC)—a newly established global forum designed to promote parliamentary collaboration among nations.

They informed the delegation that the ISC current-

ly includes 45 member Speakers from various national parliaments. They also shared that in a recent election held in Malaysia, Senate Chairman Yousuf Raza Gillani was unanimously elected as the first President of the ISC.

The Russian diplomats were further apprised of the upcoming ISC session, scheduled to be held in Islamabad on November 11–12, 2025. On the occasion, Misbah Khar extended a formal invitation to Valentina Ivanovna Matvienko, Speaker of the Federation Council of the Russian Federation.

to attend the conference.

Khar and Waleed also gave a detailed overview of the conference's objectives, agenda, and preparation plans. They explained that the ISC aims to serve as a platform for constructive dialogue among parliamentary leaders on pressing global challenges, including peace, multilateralism, and sustainable development.

Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening parliamentary relations and enhancing people-to-people and legislative-to-legislature cooperation between Pakistan and the Russian Federation.

## PIC directs FBR to public tax-related information

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Pakistan Information Commission (PIC) has directed the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) to public the information related to tax recoveries and defaulted payments.

It ruled that such data is of significant public and economic importance and cannot be withheld under the Right of Access to Information Act, 2017.

The case arose from an appeal filed by a citizen after FBR denied access to the requested information. Although the public body shared partial information with the appellant on April 23, 2025, the appellant submitted a rejoinder on July 6, 2025, objecting to the refusal to disclose complete details.

After reviewing the information request, the

response from the public body, the appellant's rejoinder, and relevant provisions of the Right of Access to Information Act, 2017, the Commission concluded that the information sought pertains directly to matters of public interest and national economic relevance.

“The information requested by the appellant supports efforts by FBR to recover outstanding dues and taxes stuck in litigation,” the Commission stated. “This not only aligns with the directives repeatedly issued by the Prime Minister but also contributes to national revenue collection, transparency, and accountability.”

Citing the preamble of the Right of Access to Information Act, 2017, the Commission emphasized that the law is intended to

promote transparency, reduce inefficiency, and enhance public participation in governance.

It said that in light of these findings, the Commission has directed the Secretary (Compliance) / Designated Officer / Public Information Officer, FBR to compile and furnish the required information within 30 days of receiving the order.

Furthermore, copies of the order have also been forwarded to the Prime Minister Secretariat and the Chairman, FBR for their consideration and necessary action.

This decision reinforces the public's right to know and holds public bodies accountable for ensuring that vital economic information is not withheld from citizens.

## SSP Shoaib holds khuli kachehri in Saddar

ISLAMABAD (APP): Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Operations Muhammad Shoaib Khan on Thursday held a Khuli Kachehri (open court) in the Saddar Zone to listen to public complaints and issue on-the-spot directives.

A public relations officer told APP that the event was attended by SP Saddar Zone Kazim Naqvi, SDPOs, SHOs, and a large number of citizens from the area.

He said that Senior Superintendent of Police Operations Muhammad Shoaib Khan listened to the

grievances of complainants in detail and instructed officers to take immediate action for their resolution. He made it clear that there would be zero tolerance for delays in addressing the concerns of the public.

He said that strict action must be taken against those involved in drug trafficking and the illegal arms trade, adding that affected citizens should be provided timely relief without any discrimination.

He said the protection of citizens' lives and property and upholding justice is the

foremost duty of Islamabad Police.

“Officers who hinder the resolution of public issues or are involved in corruption have no place in the department,” he added.

He said the purpose of holding open courts is to ensure that citizens can raise their concerns without fear, and to promote transparency and accountability in police operations.

The citizens appreciated the initiative and lauded SSP Shoaib Khan's efforts to bridge the gap between the police and the public.

## Mangoes best natural source to heal various human deficiencies

ISLAMABAD (APP): Known globally as the “king of fruits,” mangoes hold a special place in the country's economy and culture.

With their sweet aroma and rich taste, mangoes remain Pakistan's most loved summer fruit. From bustling street markets to international export crates, mangoes are not just a seasonal favorite but a symbol of national pride.

Pakistan is among the top global producers of mangoes, cultivating over 1.8 million tons annually, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Popular varieties like Sindhri, Chaunsa, Langra, and Anwar Ratol are widely exported to the

Middle East, Europe, and North America, making mangoes an important contributor to the country's agricultural economy.

According to Waheed Ahmed, Patron-in-Chief of the Pakistan Fruit and Vegetable Exporters Association (PFVEA), mango exports this year are expected to cross \$100 million, despite climate-related challenges. To support the industry, the Ministry of Commerce and Pakistan Horticulture Development & Export Company (PHDEC) have introduced improved post-harvest methods, including mango bagging, upgraded cold chains, and enhanced grading systems to meet global

standards.

Beyond their economic value, mangoes are widely recognized for health benefits. Dr. Anwar Ali Khawaja, a respected Pakistani physician, dispels common myths, stating that mangoes are among the best natural sources of Vitamin C, calcium, and iron, all of which boost immunity, support eyesight, aid liver function, and improve digestion.

He recommended that there is no harm in eating mangoes up to 330 grams a day, and that misconceptions linking mangoes to skin rashes or weight gain stem more from seasonal heat than the fruit itself.

Nutrition experts across

the globe also consider mangoes a nutrient-rich superfruit. According to the USDA FoodData Central, a single mango provides over 60% of daily Vitamin C, along with good amounts of fiber, potassium, Vitamin A, and Vitamin B6.

Clinical dietitian Dr. Kirbie Daily explained that mangoes contain mangiferin, a rare natural antioxidant that helps reduce inflammation, supports digestive health, and may help in blood sugar regulation.

Peer-reviewed studies published in the Journal of Food Biochemistry and Phytotherapy Research also highlighted mangoes' potential to combat oxida-

tive stress, improve cholesterol levels, and protect against heart and liver diseases.

In local markets, the mango season brings both excitement and economic activity. Javed Iqbal, a fruit seller in Rawalpindi, shared that demand for premium varieties like Chaunsa triples on weekends. “It's more than fruit—it's an emotion,” he said with a smile.

Ayesha Malik, a schoolteacher shopping in Islamabad, remarked, “Mangoes are part of our summer tradition. We buy them in bulk, not just for the taste, but also because we know they're healthy for our children.”

This year, the mango season in Pakistan has faced serious challenges due to the growing impacts of climate change. Prolonged heatwaves, unexpected rainfall, and shifting weather patterns have significantly affected mango production, particularly in Punjab and Sindh — two of the country's key mango-producing regions.

According to the Pakistan Meteorological Department, early flowering due to warmer winters followed by scorching heat during fruit development led to considerable crop losses.

Experts from the Pakistan Fruit and Vegetable Exporters

Association (PFVEA) estimated a decline of nearly 20–30% in yield in some orchards.

Despite these hurdles, exporters remain optimistic, with the government promoting climate-resilient farming techniques like micro-irrigation, fruit bagging, and integrated pest management to adapt and sustain the mango economy.

With their unforgettable and unmatched taste, cultural importance, export value, and scientifically-backed medicinal properties, mangoes continue to be a golden symbol—rich in flavor, health, heritage and one of Pakistan's sweetest gifts to the world.



Fifteen robbers arrested

AIBAK/FAIZABAD (Pajhwok): Fifteen people, including 10 children, have been arrested on robbery charges in Samangan and Badakhshan on Thursday. Samangan police spokesman Hashmatullah said that two men and 10 children were arrested in Aibak city on robbery charges. He said the detainees were active in Baghlan, Samangan, and Balkh provinces and the two men used the children during robberies, stealing money, mobile phones, household and other items.

Nearly 300 Afghans freed

KABUL (Pajhwok): Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation said nearly 300 Afghan refugees have returned to their homeland after their release from prisons in Pakistan. These individuals returned to the country on Wednesday, the ministry announced in a brief post on its X handle on Thursday. Citing Spin Boldak-based officials in Kandahar province, the ministry wrote the returnees spent 20 days to three months in jails and had been arrested in Pakistan.

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

Women’s rights violations:  
Islamic Emirate  
rejects HRW report

KABUL (TOLOnews): The Islamic Emirate has rejected the latest report by Human Rights Watch, which accuses it of violating women’s rights and depriving girls of access to education.

Hamdullah Fitrat, Deputy Spokesperson for the Islamic Emirate, stated that the rights of all Afghan citizens are protected, and that the issue of women’s education is an internal matter.

He said: “No one’s rights have been violated in Afghanistan, and every individual’s rights are upheld. The definition of rights varies from country to country. As we live in an Islamic society, we define rights within the framework of Islam and Sharia, and consider protecting them a religious obligation.”

Previously, Human

Rights Watch had expressed concern over the violation of human rights in Afghanistan, particularly women’s rights and the ongoing restrictions on girls’ access to education.

The organization also noted that UN member states have taken no meaningful action in the past four years to address serious human rights violations in Afghanistan. It urged the European Union to propose a comprehensive accountability mechanism during its upcoming meeting.

Elaine Pearson, Asia Director at Human Rights Watch, stated: “On accountability, we ask Member States at the UN Human Rights Council to establish a new independent investigative mechanism that can collect and preserve evidence with a

view to future prosecutions.”

Meanwhile, several women’s rights activists have called on the Islamic Emirate to respect women’s legitimate demands, including their right to education, work, and participation in society.

Tafsir Siyahpoush, a women’s rights activist, said: “We don’t want condolences or symbolic support. We want the Islamic Emirate to genuinely defend women’s rights, give them what they are entitled to, and for the international community to stand with us.”

This comes as the Islamic Emirate approaches the fourth anniversary of its return to power and continues to assert that the issue of women’s education is a domestic matter.

Over 1.6m  
refugees  
return to  
Afghanistan

KABUL (Pajhwok): The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) says 1.668 million Afghan refugees have returned to their country as of July 26.

In a statement, OCHA wrote: “An estimated 1,668,000 Afghans have returned to Afghanistan in 2025, including 1,280,000 from Iran and 389,000 from Pakistan”.

Between July 1 and 26 alone, approximately 539,000 individuals returned from Iran, accounting for almost one-third of the overall number of people that have returned from Iran so far this year.

It said during the reporting period (July 20-26), daily arrivals from Iran averaged around 11,000. In contrast, returnees from Pakistan during the same period averaged 1,100 per day.

According to OCHA, returns from Pakistan are expected to increase in the coming months after the country’s Ministry of Interior signed a legal decree on the return of Afghans on July 31.

Statutory Regulatory Order confirmed that the validity of Proof of Registration cards expired on June 30, 2025 and rendered the continued stay of PoR cardholders as unlawful. Currently, around 1.4 million Afghan PoR cardholders remain in Pakistan”.

The UNHCR expressed concern over Pakistan’s decision to deport Afghans possessing PoR cards from the country and said this action would violate Pakistan’s commitments to accept refugees.

On July 30, the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriates said in the past three months alone, nearly two million people returned to Afghanistan from Iran and Pakistan had, including about 1.8 million forcibly deported from Iran.

Azizi, Indonesian envoy  
discuss trade, investment

KABUL (Pajhwok): The Acting Minister of Industry and Commerce, Nooruddin Azizi, and Indonesia’s Chargé d’Affaires, Dr Nanda Evalist, have discussed the establishment, development and strengthening of economic and trade relations between the two countries.

In a post on X, the Ministry of Industry and Commerce (MoIC) said that the meeting took place on Wednesday in Kabul.

During the meeting, both sides explored ways to enhance economic and trade ties, promote coordination between the private sectors of Afghanistan and Indonesia, and identify investment opportunities.

Dr Awalist emphasised the importance of identifying investment prospects in Afghanistan and expressed Indonesia’s keen interest in



expanding bilateral economic and trade relations.

Azizi spoke about the current trade volume between the two nations and highlighted the need to balance bilateral trade.

He also invited the Indonesian private sector to

invest in Afghanistan, noting the availability of opportunities in industry, mining, agriculture, and other sectors.

He added that Indonesia possesses abundant raw materials, and through close coordination between

the private sectors of both countries, significant achievements could be realised.

The statement concluded that both parties agreed to establish a joint working group to identify and pursue investment opportunities.

Young man builds school at his  
own expense in Ghor province

FEROZKOH (Pajhwok): A young man, a resident of western Ghor province, has begun constructing a school building with seven classrooms at his own expense for children who have been studying outdoors for years without proper facilities.

Abdul Khalil Hakimi, a resident of Tiora district, told Pajhwok Afghan News he had started construction

of a seven-classroom building inside the yard of Tiora Central High School at his own expense.

“Each class is six meters long and four meters wide, and each has a door, a gate, and two small doors”.

He did not provide details about the construction cost, but said: “We would arrange standard classrooms for our students, plaster it, paint it, and install a regular board. God willing, we would carpet our classrooms very properly, repair the plaster, paint it, and we will try to ensure that our students benefit from these classrooms and facilities in a short time and carry out their lessons with peace of mind”.

He took this action to create a safe educational environment for students because for years these

children have been studying in the open under the scorching sun and in the cold of winter.

Hakimi explained an inappropriate environment not only disrupts and makes the educational process difficult, but also causes the spread of certain diseases among students.

On the other hand, Hedayatullah Ahmadi, principal of the high school, praised the young man’s action, because half of the students of this school are engaged in outdoor education.

“Out of 20 classes, we have 10 classes where students are in, and the other 10 classes, from first to fifth grade, are taught in the open area under the scorching sun”.

He added. Mohammad Ali Forough, acting head of Education Department

said: “Among 74 schools in Tiora, only 13 have standard construction, and in all the remaining schools, all students attend classes in the open under scorching sun and in rain”.

Some students expressed satisfaction with this young man’s initiative, saying that years of outdoor education in heat and cold had been difficult for them.

Ezhar Ul-Haq Faqiri, a student, expressed hope that the construction of this facility will be completed and put into operation as soon as possible.

Meanwhile, Ezatullah Hamdard, another student, said: “We studied outdoors in the sizzling heat and faced difficulties, but now we are very happy”.

He hoped the construction work will be completed and the building put into use as soon as possible.

UN warns worsening  
drought threatens farming

KABUL (Ariana News): The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has sounded the alarm over a worsening drought crisis in Afghanistan, warning that prolonged dry conditions are severely affecting agriculture and livestock across at least half of the country.

In a new report based on satellite imagery and field assessments, the FAO identified the northern, north-western, and northeastern regions as the hardest hit, noting that the situation is “deteriorating rapidly” and likely to spread further in the coming months.

“Drought has become a serious threat to the survival of farming and herding families in many parts of Afghanistan,” the report said. Years of insufficient

rainfall have eroded soil moisture, decimated pastures, and weakened local economies.

Meanwhile, the effects of climate change have compounded the crisis, undermining the resilience of rural communities and pushing vulnerable families closer to the brink.

The FAO has appealed for \$34.5 million in emergency funding to support more than 1 million people in 16 drought-affected provinces, including Bamyan, Ghor, Herat, Balkh, Faryab, Jawzjan, Samangan, Sar-e Pul, Daikundi, Kandahar, Uruzgan, Zabul, Ghazni, Nangarhar, Paktika, and Panjshir.

The report also warned of rising cases of livestock disease—particularly foot-and-mouth disease—

adding to the pressure on farming communities already struggling with dwindling feed and water supplies.

Rain-fed agriculture has largely failed in many areas, while irrigated farming is also under threat due to falling groundwater levels and ongoing water scarcity. As a result, food production has been severely curtailed, increasing the risk of food insecurity across wide swathes of the country.

Beyond its immediate impact on crops and livestock, the drought is expected to deepen related challenges, including access to clean water, public health, displacement, environmental degradation, and the reintegration of returnees.

Afghanistan and Tatarstan ink  
trade accords worth \$ 183 million



KABUL (Pajhwok): Afghanistan and Tatarstan signed trade agreements worth 183 million US dollars concerning oil and construction sectors, the Ministry of Industry and Commerce said on Thursday.

In a statement, MoIC

wrote trade meetings were held between members of the private sector of both countries in Kabul.

It quoted Acting Minister Nooruddin Azizi as saying the purpose of holding these meetings was to pay special attention to the

importance of interaction between the private sectors of Afghanistan and Tatarstan, and called on the private sector of Tatarstan to invest in the mining, agriculture, and medicinal plant sectors of Afghanistan.

The Tatarstan Deputy

Prime Minister and Minister of Industry and Trade, while providing information about their country’s products and production in various sectors and in the civilian and military sectors, invited IEA delegation to participate in the oil exhibition to be held in Tatarstan on August 26.

He invited the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Investment to visit the Tatarstan Chamber of Commerce.

The business talks regarding the sectors of food, helicopter production, water management, oil and gas, electrical equipment production, detergents and sanitary products, construction materials and iron smelting resulted in the signing of business agreements worth a total of \$183 million in the oil and construction sectors.

Flooding causes fatalities  
and widespread damage

KHOST (BNA): Heavy rains, strong winds, and widespread flooding struck Khost province last night, causing significant loss of life, destruction of property, and financial hardship for residents and businesses.

According to provincial officials and local sources, intense rainfall in Matun city and surrounding areas triggered flash floods that severely impacted multiple neighborhoods. The floods led to the collapse of a house wall in the Askari Club area, tragically killing one girl and one young man.

In the Weish Market district, approximately 40 homes were damaged, with 21 completely destroyed and 19 suffering partial damage. Other affected neighborhoods

include Mazghora, Saroo Aoboo, Habashkhail, Charbani, and Gulzar Aka, where the floods destroyed six vehicles, damaged roofs and windows, killed numerous livestock, and inflicted additional structural damage.

Local residents also reported heavy hailstorms in Many and Tutpala areas, which not only damaged homes but devastated agricultural crops, raising concerns about future food security in the region.

The flooding severely disrupted local commerce, with street vendors and taxi drivers among those reporting substantial financial losses. Officials conducting damage assessments in the Askari Club zone estimated the economic impact in that

area alone to exceed 10 million Afghans.

Affected families have appealed urgently for assistance, calling on governmental bodies, charitable organizations, and international aid agencies to deliver prompt relief and support.

Provincial authorities have pledged to coordinate immediate humanitarian efforts to address the urgent needs of flood victims and to begin plans for recovery and reconstruction.

This latest natural disaster highlights the vulnerability of Khost province to extreme weather events and underscores the ongoing challenges faced by residents in terms of infrastructure resilience and disaster preparedness.

How Farzana Murad turns challenges into success?

AIBAK (Pajhwok): Farzana Murad, a 23-year-old woman from Aibak, the capital of northern Samangan province, has established a tailoring and handicrafts workshop that has not only made her financially self-reliant, but also enabled her to provide learning and employment opportunities for a number of other girls and women.

Farzana Murad believes that with effort, patience and innovation one can transform challenges into opportunities. After graduating from high school, Farzana had hoped to pursue higher education in her desired field at university.

However, the closure of institutions of higher education for girls dashed her dream. Despite this setback, she chose a new path. Having learned tailoring and handicrafts alongside her mother from a young age, she decided to make use of her skills.

Nearly two years ago, with only 10,000 afghanis,

Farzana launched a tailoring and handicrafts workshop in Samangan.

Today, she not only supports herself, but also provides work and training for a number of other girls who, like her, have been deprived of education.

Her workshop has given hope and skills to girls who dream of learning, and it has become a source of income for her and a beacon of light for at least 20 other girls.

In the workshop, they sew hijabs, do embroidery, design traditional clothing and learn other handicraft skills.

Girls, who once felt hopeless due to unemployment and closure of schools, now work and learn in this workshop with renewed motivation.

Speaking to Pajhwok Afghan News, Farzana said: “Starting this workshop wasn’t easy. I faced many challenges, including financial constraints, cultural opposition and social pressures. But I had

full faith in my abilities and persevered with making this workshop a success through these barriers.”

She added: “I began with an initial capital of around 10,000 afghanis, which only covered basic essentials for the workshop. Over time, my capital increased, and now, along with supporting my family, the workshop’s assets are worth close to 200,000 afghanis.”

Today, Farzana is not only an entrepreneur but also a teacher to other girls. In addition to tailoring, she teaches her students calligraphy and painting.

According to Farzana, no obstacle should stand in the way of a girl’s or woman’s future: “A talented and determined girl will undoubtedly face many challenges when trying to work, but these challenges should not deter her. She should be patient, make efforts, and seek alternative paths to success—because nothing is impossible.”

Farzana is no longer just a tailor or a trainer—she is a symbol of hope more than 20 girls, who after the closure of schools and universities, were confined to their homes.

These girls now sit beside her at sewing machines, stitching a new future with each thread.

In this period, Farzana has also provided practical training in tailoring and embroidery to nearly 30 other girls.

Many of them now work from home and have taken small but meaningful steps toward financial independence.

Yet, Farzana is not content with only this. She says: “My only wish is for the doors of education to reopen for girls. We all await the day we can return to school and university to pursue our unfinished dreams.”

Khadija Samea, one of the instructors at the workshop, describes the space as a haven for women in Samangan to express their

art and culture—from painting and embroidery to sewing Afghan and Arabic traditional dresses.

However, she expresses concern about the lack of a dedicated market for women’s products in Samangan: “Unfortunately, there is no independent market for women here to sell their products, so we are compelled to use websites and social media to grow our businesses.”

Khadija hopes that the government will support new female entrepreneurs—not only to help their businesses thrive, but also to reduce economic hardship and domestic violence. She believes that empowering women economically is the key to creating positive change in society.

Among those whose lives have been transformed are Hajara Jawadi and Ruwayda Hashemi—two girls who have gained not only artistic skills at the workshop but also confidence, hope, and purpose.



Hajara said: “Farzana didn’t just give us jobs, she gave us belief and motivation. One day, we hope to help other girls just like she helped us.”

Ruwayda, who says she suffered emotionally after the closure of schools beyond grade 6, described the workshop as a source of healing and opportunity: “I learned new skills here, found peace, and now I work with passion.”

Alongside individual

efforts, local institutions in Samangan also claim they support such initiatives.

Qari Enayatullah Yasin, Director General of Enterprises and Consumer Protection at the Samangan Department of Industry and Commerce, told Pajhwok Afghan News that his office has undertaken many activities in recent years—especially for female artisans and entrepreneurs.

He noted: “More than 2,000 women are currently

active in various sectors across this province, and we support them. These women are mainly engaged in hand embroidery, cotton weaving, carpet weaving, and scarf making.”

He added that efforts were underway to connect female entrepreneurs and artisans with partner organizations that work with his department to help resolve the challenges they face.



# Nathiagali hotel association discuss issues with KP CM



## F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A delegation of the Nathiagali Hotel Association met with the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Khan Gandapur at the Chief Minister's House on Thursday. The meeting focused on resolving challenges faced by hotel owners in tourist regions, improving services for tourists and promoting tourism across the province.

Provincial Cabinet's members Khaliq ur Rehman and Muzammil Aslam, along with senior officials from relevant departments also attended the meeting. The delegation briefed the Chief Minister on key issues faced by hoteliers in Nathiagali, Naran, and Kaghan. Responding to their concerns, Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur emphasized that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa holds immense potential for tourism and the government is taking comprehensive measures under a well-devised strategy to unlock these opportunities.

He reiterated that the incumbent provincial government is committed to modernizing the tourism

sector and facilitating private investment in the province. The Chief Minister said that private investors are being encouraged and are being provided with all necessary support to ensure their contributions to tourism development. Alongside infrastructure and service enhancements, the government is also prioritizing the preservation of the natural environment in tourist areas. He stressed that the natural landscape is a valuable asset and a trust for future generations, and its protection must be a shared responsibility.

Highlighting collaborative governance, Ali Amin Gandapur noted that if the public and private sectors work together, tourism can flourish while safeguarding the environment. He also mentioned ongoing government's initiatives, including the development of three additional tourist destinations in the province and the construction of access roads to improve connectivity.

Additionally, the tax collection system is being digitized to ensure transparency and ease of payment for taxpayers, with a digital payment system already introduced for this purpose. To further support the hotel

industry, the Chief Minister announced plans to implement a uniform taxation policy. He explained that following a comprehensive survey of the hotel industry in tourist areas, a five-year taxation framework would be introduced. 'All types of taxes in these regions would be collected through a single authority to streamline the process', he remarked. Chief Minister also addressed the long-standing issue of water scarcity in Nathiagali, stating that work is underway to resolve it on a permanent basis.

Moreover, a hospital project for tourists in Naran and Kaghan has been included in the Annual Development Programme. He added that a three-kilometer stretch of road connecting Naran and Kaghan will also be rehabilitated and expanded. During the meeting, the Chief Minister urged the Nathiagali Hotel Association to cooperate with the government in bringing unregistered hotels into the tax net. The delegation thanked the Chief Minister for his time and attention to their concerns and assured full support to the provincial government's efforts in promoting sustainable tourism.

## Govt to privatize 24 state-owned entities

### F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The federal government has decided to privatize 24 state-owned enterprises (SOEs) in three phases. The Cabinet Committee on Privatization approved the decision, which was later ratified by the federal cabinet. According to Federal Minister for Privatization Abdul Aleem Khan, the process will be carried out over the next five years.

Ten organizations will be privatized within the first year. This initial phase targets major institutions including Pakistan International Airlines (PIA), Roosevelt Hotel, New York, First Women Bank Limited, House Building Finance Corporation, Zarai Taraqati Bank Limited (ZTBL), Sindh Engineering Limited, Islamabad Electric Supply Company (IESCO), Faisalabad Electric Supply Company (FESCO), and Gujranwala Electric Power Company (GEPCO).

Thirteen more SOEs are slated for privatization in the second phase, spanning one to three years. These include Pakistan Reinsurance Company Limited, State Life Insurance Corporation, Utility Stores Corporation, and several power generation and distribution companies such as Jamshoro Power Company Limited, Central Power Generation Company Limited, Northern Power Generation Company Limited, Lakhra Power Generation Company Limited, Lahore Electric Supply Company (LESCO), Multan Electric Power Company (MEPCO), Hazara Electric Supply Company (HESCO), Peshawar Electric Supply Company (PESCO), and Sukkur Electric Power Company (SEPCO).

The final phase, expected to take three to five years, will focus on the privatization of Postal Life Insurance Company. This extensive privatization initiative is part of the government's economic reform strategy to enhance efficiency, lessen financial strain on the government, and attract private investment in key service and infrastructure domains.

## Karachi factory fire leaves 8 hurt

### F.P. Report

KARACHI: A huge fire at a factory in the Karachi Export Processing Zone (KEPZ) near Landhi, which injured eight people and damaged at least three nearby factories, was brought under control on Thursday after several hours of rescue operations, officials confirmed.

Sources reported that the intensity of the fire increased rapidly, engulfing the entire building and injuring eight people. Explosions were also heard intermittently from within the burning factory. Fire brigade officials classified the blaze as a third-degree fire. A total of 16 fire tenders and 2 water bowsers are engaged in extinguishing the flames. The five-story building's roof have already collapsed.

Fire brigade officials stated that the fire has been contained, all employees have been evacuated from the factory, and nearby factories have also been cleared. The owner of the garment factory, Iqbal Ayub, said the fire started in the basement. "People often underestimate the first signs of a fire," he noted.

"We have submitted a request to the district administration — this is a third-degree fire, and if not controlled, it could cause further damage. Accidents never come with a warning; they happen suddenly," he added. A video has emerged showing male and female employees escaping dangerously after a fire broke out in the factory.

A fire broke out in a factory located in the Landhi Export Processing Zone, but no adequate exit routes or arrangements were visible for the immediate evacuation of employees. Fire brigade vehicles were busy extinguishing the fire, while during the incident, male and female employees were seen hanging from a construction lift to get out of the factory.



KARACHI: A view of site after fire broke out at a factory in Landhi Export Processing Zone area.

# Trump says likely to meet Putin very soon

WASHINGTON (AFP): Donald Trump said he could meet with Vladimir Putin "very soon," following what the US president described as highly productive talks in Moscow between his special envoy and the Russian leader.

The potential summit was discussed in a call between Trump and Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelensky that, according to a senior source in Kyiv, included NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte and the leaders of Britain, Germany and Finland. "There's a good chance that there will be a meeting very soon," Trump told reporters Wednesday at the White House, when asked when he would meet the Ukrainian and Russian leaders.

He gave no indication where the meeting with Putin might take place. It would be the first US-Russia leadership summit since former president Joe Biden met with his counterpart in Geneva in June 2021. The New York Times and CNN, citing people familiar with the plan, said Trump plans to sit down with Putin as early as next week, and then wants a three-way meeting with the Russian leader and Zelensky.

"It seems that Russia is now more inclined to agree to a ceasefire; the pressure on them is working. But the main thing is that they do not deceive us or the United States in the details," Zelensky said on Wednesday evening. Trump's phone call with Zelensky came after US envoy Steve Witkoff met Russian leadership in Moscow earlier in the day for talks described by the Kremlin as "productive" — with Trump's deadline looming to impose fresh sanctions over Russia's war in Ukraine.

"Great progress was made!" Trump wrote on his Truth Social platform, adding that afterward he had briefed some European allies. "Everyone agrees this War must come to a close, and we will work toward that in the days and weeks to come," he said.

Minutes later, however, a senior US official said that "secondary sanctions" were still expected to be implemented in two days' time. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Witkoff was returning with a ceasefire proposal from Moscow that would have to be discussed with Ukraine and Washington's European allies. He also cast caution on the timeline for a Trump-Putin meeting, saying there was "a lot of work ahead," adding it could be "weeks maybe."

Trump, who had boasted he could end the conflict within 24 hours of taking office, has given Russia until Friday to make progress toward peace or face new penalties. Three rounds of Russia-Ukraine talks in Istanbul have failed to make headway on a ceasefire, with the two sides far apart in their demands.

Russia has escalated drone and missile attacks against its neighbor, a US and European Union ally, to a record high and accelerated its advance on the ground. "A quite useful and constructive conversation took place," Putin's aide Yuri Ushakov told journalists, including AFP, after the three-hour meeting with Witkoff.

The two men exchanged "signals" on their positions, Ushakov said, without elaborating. Zelensky confirmed his call with Trump and confirmed European leaders had taken part, although he did not name them.

Trump has voiced increasing frustration with Putin in recent weeks over Russia's unrelenting offensive. The White House has not officially outlined what action it would take against Russia, but Trump told reporters it plans to impose "a lot more secondary sanctions" targeting Russia's key trade partners, possibly targeting China. Earlier in the day he had ordered steeper tariffs on Indian goods over New Delhi's continued purchase of Russian oil.

Without explicitly naming Trump, the Kremlin on Tuesday slammed "threats" to hike tariffs on Russia's trading partners as "illegitimate." Russia's campaign against Ukraine since February 2022 has killed tens of thousands of people, destroyed swaths of the country and forced millions to flee their homes. Moscow has demanded that Ukraine cede more territory and renounce US and EU support if it wants the fighting to stop.

Kyiv is calling for an immediate ceasefire, and Zelensky last week urged his allies to push for "regime change" in Moscow. The Witkoff visit came as Moscow-Washington tensions are running high. Trump said he had ordered two nuclear submarines to be moved following an online row with former Russian president Dmitry Medvedev, and that they were now "in the region." Moscow then said that it was ending a self-imposed moratorium on nuclear-capable intermediate-range missiles, suggesting that it could deploy such weapons in response to what it alleged were similar US deployments within striking distance of Russia.

# Chief of Naval Staff visits Azerbaijan

### F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Naveed Ashraf called on Military and Naval Leadership of Azerbaijan during an official visit to Azerbaijan.

Upon arrival at Naval Forces Headquarters, Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Naveed Ashraf was presented Guard of Honour. Naval Chief called on Commander of Azerbaijan Naval Forces, First Grade Captain Shahin Mammadov.

The dignitaries exchanged views on bilateral naval collaboration and regional maritime security. Admiral Naveed Ashraf underscored the importance of enhancing the interaction between naval forces through exercises and training exchange programmes. The Naval Chief was given a detailed briefing on Azerbaijan Navy's operational readiness, training, education programmes and ongoing activities. Admiral Naveed Ashraf also visited Navy's Special Operations Forces unit and witnessed operational demonstration of Azerbaijan Naval Forces.

During the visit, Naval Chief called on Chief of the General Staff of Azerbaijan Army, Colonel General Karim Valiyev. During the



meeting matters of mutual interests and enhancing bilateral defence cooperations were discussed. To pay tribute to the Martyrs, Admiral Naveed Ashraf visited Alley of Martyrs and laid wreaths.

Pakistan and Azerbaijan historically enjoy brotherly relations and the visit of Chief of the Naval Staff will further augment and expand defence ties between Pakistan and Azerbaijan in general and navies in particular.

# CJP reaffirms commitment to strengthening judiciary

### F.P. Report

KARACHI: President District Bar Association Karachi Amir Warraich, and Abdul Rehman Korai called on the Chief Justice of Pakistan, Justice Yahya Afridi, here at the Supreme Court Branch Registry on Thursday.

Sohail Ahmed Mashori, Additional Resident Secretary, Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan

(LJCP), was also present on the occasion.

The Chief Justice said that the district judiciary remains central to the ongoing priority agenda, as it serves as the primary forum for interface public to access justice. He emphasized the need for equipping the district courts with modern infrastructure and institutional support to enhance the overall effectiveness of the justice sec-

tor.

He further noted that the Government was actively engaged in addressing the infrastructural requirements of the judiciary in line with contemporary standards. Given Karachi's status as the economic hub of Pakistan, he underscored the urgency of establishing a judicial infrastructure that can meet the city's expanding legal and commercial demands.

## Trump announces 100% tariff on semiconductor imports

WASHINGTON: United States President Donald Trump says he will impose a 100 percent tariff on foreign-made semiconductors, although exemptions will be made for companies that have invested in the US.

"We'll be putting a tariff on of approximately 100 percent on chips and semiconductors, but if you're building in the United States of America, there's no charge, even though you're building and you're not producing yet," Trump told reporters at the Oval Office on Wednesday evening. The news came after a separate announcement that Apple would invest \$600bn in the US, but it was not unexpected by US observers.

Trump told CNBC on Tuesday that he planned to unveil a new tariff on semiconductors "within the next week or so" without offering further details. Details were also scant at the Oval Office about how and when the tariffs will go into effect, but Asia's semiconductor powerhouses were quick to respond about the potential impact.

Taiwan, home of the world's largest chipmaker TSMC, said that the company would be exempt from the tariff due to its existing investments in the US. "Because Taiwan's main exporter is TSMC, which has factories in the United States, TSMC is exempt," National Development Council chief Liu Chin-ching told the Taiwanese legislature.

In March, TSMC — which counts Apple and Nvidia as clients — said it would increase its US investment to \$165bn to expand chip making and research centres in Arizona. South Korea was also quick to extinguish any concerns about its top chip-makers, Samsung and SK Hynix, which have also invested in facilities in Texas and Indiana. Trade envoy Yeo Han-koo said South Korean companies would be exempt from the tariff and that Seoul already faced "favourable" tariffs after signing a trade deal with Washington earlier this year.

Meanwhile, US President Donald Trump is expected to sign an order requiring universities to hand over admissions data to prove that they are not engaged in affirmative action efforts, the White House press secretary said in a post on X on Thursday.

In her post on X, White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt did not give details on the order, such as the ramifications universities will face if they do not cooperate. Since taking office for his second term, Trump's administration has attempted to dismantle affirmative action policies at universities, launching dozens of investigations and threatening to cut off funding to schools that promote diversity, equity and inclusion programs.

Trump has particularly taken aim at Harvard University since he took office, calling the institution a "joke" that teaches "hate and stupidity" and going as far as to freeze their government funding. In May, Trump's administration revoked Harvard's right to enrol foreign students — more than a quarter of its annual enrollment. Though the move was blocked by a judge, the US president stood by his decision. "Why isn't Harvard saying that almost 31 [per cent] of their students are from foreign lands, and yet those countries, some not at all friendly to the United States, pay nothing toward their student's education. — Aljazeera