



# Islamabad POST

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## Amid economic crunch

# PM Shehbaz vows to increase salaries in budget

Says Pakistan would soon become a powerful country through the functioning of a fair system and on the basis of hard work by the employers and the employees including workers

ABID RAZA / DNA

LAHORE: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday said that they were fully cognizant of the value of the labourers and workers in the national economy and stressed upon the wealthy, businessmen, investors and industrialists to prioritize improving the conditions of the workers. Addressing a gathering of labourers and workers from different sectors at his residence in connection with the observance of International Labour Day, the prime minister said that the country's economic situation was challenging but they were striving to turn it around, with collective efforts and sincerity. He said that Pakistan would soon become a powerful country through the functioning of a fair system and on the basis of hard work by the employers and the employees including workers. The prime minister said that the government was striving to bring about substantial changes in the national economy and to recover billions of rupees being wasted due to corruption. Referring to his recent visit from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, he said that Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and other leadership desired to see Pakistan moving on the path of progress. The Saudi business and investors' delegation would soon visit Pakistan which would increase businesses and job opportunities in the country, he added. The prime minister said that in the upcoming fiscal budget, they would try to provide further relief to the labour class. Calling upon the business people and well-to-do class, the prime minister said that they should also think beyond their families and businesses and invest in certain education and health

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## Bilawal promises pay raise in Sindh and Balochistan

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has reiterated his party's resolve to continue efforts for workers' welfare. Addressing a ceremony in Karachi on Labour Day, the former foreign minister said the PPP will raise the salary of workers in Sindh and Balochistan in the budget. The elite businesses run because of workers, he said, adding that they should be rewarded for their hard work. "The PPP made a historic increase in salaries and pensions." It ended the anti-labour policies of dictators," Bilawal maintained. He also assigned Raza Rabbani the responsibility of activating the labour bureau. The PPP chairman said: "The public-private partnership projects in Sindh remained successful. "The Pakistan International Airline (PIA) should be run under a public-private partnership instead of privatization. "The finance minister is praising our private-public partnership."



LAHORE: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif interacting with workers and their families at a luncheon he hosted in their honour on the occasion of International Worker's Day. - DNA

## New loan IMF team due on May 15 for talks

Both sides will first hold technical level talks and later policy level parleys will be held

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: The government of Pakistan and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have set a schedule of talks for the new loan programme and an IMF team will reach Pakistan on May 15 in this regard, reported a private news channel on Wednesday, quoting its sources. Both sides will first hold technical level talks and later policy level parleys will be held.

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## Washington reaffirms support for Pakistan's security challenges

State Dept spox highlights "shared interests" between countries. He says bilateral partnership includes military to military contacts

NEWS DESK

WASHINGTON: The United States has once again reaffirmed its support to Pakistan in its fight against terrorism aimed at protecting its citizens and protection of human rights. "We support Pakistan's efforts to combat terrorism and ensure the safety and security of its citizens in a manner that promotes the rule of law and protection of human rights," US State Department Principal Deputy Spokesperson Vedant Patel said in a press briefing on Tuesday. Responding to a question concerning the need to strengthen Pakistan's defence capabilities, the spokesperson highlighted "shared interests" between Islamabad and Washington. "Our partnership with Pakistan on security issues includes, of course, a high-level counter-terrorism dialogue, funding robust counter-terrorism capacity,

Continued on Page 06

## Police foil terrorist attack at check post

SHAMIM SHAHID

DERA GHAZI KHAN: Police foiled a terrorist attack at Hazrat Omer Farooq (Jhangi) check post on Wednesday in which seven police officials sustained injuries. According to police sources, 15 terrorists attacked the Jhangi police checkpoint with rocket launchers, hand grenades, and laser light guns in an attempt to take control of the checkpoint. However, police officials, under the leadership of Incharge Check Post Sub-Inspector Mohiuddin, retaliated and forced the terrorists to flee due to heavy retaliatory fire by the police As a result of the retaliation,

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## Briefs

### Dar reaches Gambia to attend OIC summit

OIC member states to meet in Gambia from May 4 to 5

### FOREIGN DESK

BANJUL: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar Wednesday reached Banjul, Gambia where he will be leading Pakistan's delegation at the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation's (OIC) upcoming summit wherein he will raise the issues of Gaza and Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK). "I have now arrived in Gambia to represent Pakistan at 15th Summit in addition to holding bilateral meetings with dignitaries from member countries attending the Summit," Deputy PM Dar said in a post on X.

### Punjab police need reforms: Gandapur

Says Punjab police remained instrumental in worst poll rigging

### BUREAU REPORT

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur said on Wednesday the Punjab police needed reforms, and the problems could not be solved just by donning police uniforms. Ali Amin Gandapur, while speaking to Dunya News, said, "If I pinpoint something, everyone starts criticising me. Everyone knows what's economic and employment situation when the PTI government was in power and how the PDM performed in its previous and present regime?" The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa chief minister said mere lip service would not work.

## IHC judges letter PTI demands full court minus CJP

Glaring disparity in treatment meted out to Khan, Nawaz exposes reality of double standards: Khurshheed

KHAYAM ABBASI

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) expressed dismay over the conduct of Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) during the Supreme Court's (SC) proceedings on the issue of meddling by intelligence agencies in judicial affairs and demanded a full court except CJP to hear the matter on daily basis. Speaking at a press conference here on Wednesday along with Gilgit-Baltistan former chief minister Khalid Khurshheed and PTI Core Committee member Advocate Abuzar Salman Niazi, PTI Central Information Secretary Raof Hasan said that the meddling in the judicial affairs was a very serious issue but unfortunately a spectacle was staged in the apex court the other day. He demanded that the matter should be heard by full court consisting of the existing judges of the top court to decide the issue as per the constitution and law of the land but the CJP should disassociate himself from the bench because he could not do justice. Raof said that the six judges of

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## Kundi hails PPP's role in uplifting labourers

Says PPP has always represented labourers

ADIL SHAHEEN

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) central information secretary Faisal Karim Kundi on Wednesday hailed the party's role in uplifting the labourers. Expressing his thoughts in line with International Labour Day, Kundi asserted: "The PPP has always represented the labourers and underprivileged segments of society. The credit goes to the PPP for increasing the salaries, pensions, and privileges of government employees."

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## Pakistan condemns Herat terrorist attack

Taliban officials blamed Da'ish for the attack

MEHTAB PIRZADA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan on Wednesday strongly condemned yesterday's heinous terrorist attack on a mosque in Herat, Afghanistan, resulting in loss of lives and injuries. At least six people including imam of the mosque and a three-year-old child were killed in the attack, with local residents claiming the minority Shia community had been targeted.

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## COAS, UK counterpart discuss measures to elevate defence ties

Both sides "discussed matters of professional interest and measures to further elevate bilateral defence relations



STAFF REPORT

RAWALPINDI: Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Asim Munir met his British counterpart General Sir Patrick Sanders, where the two discussed measures to further elevate bilateral defence relations, the military's media affairs wing said on Wednesday. In the meeting, which was also attended by CGS-designate of the UK Army

General Sir Roland Walker, both sides "discussed matters of professional interest and measures to further elevate bilateral defence relations", the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said. The army chief thanked Gen Sanders, the chief of general staff (CGS) of the UK Army, for his services in enhancing bilateral military ties and felicitated Gen Walker on his nomination as the UK Army's next CGS,

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## Governor emphasizes laborers' role in economic development

LAHORE: Punjab Governor M Balighur Rahman emphasized the indispensable role of laborers in propelling Pakistan's economic growth and fortifying its stability. On the Labour Day, he issued a message acknowledging the significance of the day which is commemorated worldwide, including in Pakistan. He extended his gratitude to all diligent workers, encompassing those engaged in factories, mills, fields, and construction sites, who sustain their livelihood through the honest means. Highlighting the importance of labour rights and workplace safety, the governor urged industries to prioritize the well-being of their workers. He emphasized the necessity of ensuring that laborers are accorded their rightful rights and that stringent safety protocols are enforced across all workplaces.—APP

## Speaker KP assembly highlights the role of labour

MANSEHRA: On the occasion of International Labor Day, Speaker of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly Babar Salim Swati Wednesday highlighted the pivotal role of labour in the national economy. Recognizing the significance of Labor Day, Swati underscored the service rendered by the working class towards national progress and prosperity. In his statement, Babar Saleem Sawati emphasized the divine recognition of labour, stating that Allah Almighty has designated labour as his friend, and urged for timely compensation for their efforts. Swati reiterated the indispensable contribution of laborers and workers, irrespective of their educational background or skill level, in the development of any country and society. He commended the past efforts of the PTI government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa towards the welfare and prosperity of laborers, assuring that such initiatives will persist in the current administration.—APP

## MPA demands improvement in laborer conditions

ABBOTTABAD: Member of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly representing PML-N, Amina Sardar, has highlighted the disconnect between the elite and the hardships faced by impoverished laborers, particularly regarding the understanding of inflation. Despite the annual celebration of International Labour Day on May 1st, Sardar emphasized that the condition of laborers remains largely unchanged. She expressed these sentiments in a press statement issued on the occasion of International Labor Day. Sardar paid homage to the laborers of Chicago, whose relentless struggles and sacrifices have ensured that workers' sacrifices are recognized at least one day a year in modern times. She pointed out that the elite in the country is unaware of the challenges faced by laborers.—APP

# Interior Minister visits HQs of the Pak Coast Guards

Minister Naqvi appreciated the performance of Pakistan Coast Guards regarding anti-smuggling. The Pakistan Coast Guard have to play a more effective role in anti-smuggling; Mohsin Naqvi

NAZIR SIYAL

KARACHI: Federal Minister for Interior Mohsin Naqvi visited the headquarters of Pakistan Coastal Guards in Karachi today. Mohsin Naqvi saw the items to be seized during the anti-smuggling operation at the headquarters of the Pakistan Coastal Guards. Minister Naqvi also inspected the bus and van seized during the anti-smuggling operation. DG Pakistan Coast Guards Brigadier Ghulam Abbas briefed the seized items and the routes used for smuggling. Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi was also shown the hidden parts of the smuggled items inside the bus. Federal Minister for Interior Mohsin Naqvi visited the monitoring room of Pakistan Coast Guards and observed the surveillance system of the coastal areas through CCTV cameras. Mohsin Naqvi appreciated the performance of Pakistan Coast Guard regarding anti-smuggling operations. Federal Minister for Interior Mohsin Naqvi ordered the Pakistan Coast Guard to conduct intensive anti-smuggling operations and announced the upgrade of the Pakistan Coast Guard, saying that the Pakistan Coast Guard would be upgraded on modern lines. Coastal guards have an important role to play in anti-smuggling drives. Pakistan Coast Guards have to play a more active role to stop smuggling from the coastal areas. He said that despite less resources, the performance of the Coast Guards is excellent. Federal Minister for Interior Mohsin Naqvi held an important meeting at the headquarters of the Pakistan Coast Guard. The meeting was attended



by the federal interior secretary, senior officials and officers of the Pakistan Coast Guards. Federal Minister for Interior Mohsin Naqvi said that anti-smuggling operation is essential for the stability of the economy. Pakistan Coast Guards is doing excellent work for anti-smuggling. A lot of expectations are attached to this force. At present, smuggling is destroying our economy. Earlier there was a belief and today this belief has become even stronger that only the Pakistan Coastal Guards can effectively stop smuggling. He

said that Pakistan Coast Guards is directly related to the strength of the economy. The hard work of Pakistan Coast Guard will give stability to Pakistan's economy. The Pakistan Coast Guard is doing a commendable job despite limited resources. The requirements of Pakistan Coast Guards will be met. This is our right and duty. In sh Allah, the entire force will carry forward the anti-smuggling operation with full force. The interior minister was briefed on the professional affairs of the Pakistan Coast

Guards. In which the responsibilities of the Coast Guards and the efforts made to prevent all kinds of smuggling, especially anti-drugs, were mentioned. Federal Minister for Interior Mohsin Naqvi will be briefed about the professional training of Pakistan Coast Guards and steps taken to prevent smuggling. Details of drugs, alcohol and other general items were explained. Appreciating the professional performance of the institution, the high determination, courage and efforts of the jawans, especially

in the field of counter-narcotics, the Interior Minister said that Pakistan Coast Guards is the only force performing its duties simultaneously on land and sea, which has an important role not only in peace time but also in any difficult and war situation. Therefore, the government will provide all possible support and necessary resources to make the Pakistan Coast Guards more active and strong. The federal interior secretary and officials of the Pakistan Coast Guard were also present on the occasion.

## PPP always represents workers, deprived class: Kundi

DERA ISMAIL KHAN: Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Central Information Secretary Faisal Karim Kundi on Wednesday said that his party always represented the workers and deprived class. In a statement issued here in connection with the World Labour Day, Kundi said the provision of necessities like 'bread, cloth and house' to the workers was the initial step towards the rights of the working class. He said that PPP founder leader Zulfikar Ali Bhutto even today lives in the hearts of poor people due to his pro-poor vision. The Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) was also an attempt to end the deprivation of the poor, Faisal Kundi mentioned. "Whenever the PPP gets power, it increases the wages of the workers," he said and added the credit for increasing the salaries, pensions, and benefits of government employees also goes to his party. "Even today, our coalition government was making efforts to eliminate poverty and get rid of economic challenges being faced by the country," he vowed. He said the PPP has an exemplary role in protecting the interests of the poor and labor class in the Sindh and Balochistan provinces. In both the provinces, Kundi said, the PPP governments were taking reform measures under the vision of Bhutto Shaheed. The coalition government in the center was also making efforts to resolve the issues of workers, government employees, and pensioners, he said and added the people would witness the benefits of these policies soon.—APP

## Sacrifices of May Day victims recognized

Solidarity processions on International Workers' Day held across Pakistan

STAFF REPORT

LARKANA : In Larkana, a ceremony was organized in Government Arts and Commerce College on the occasion of May 1 International Labor Day in Larkana, in which all the staff of the college participated. That we should value workers and workers and treat them with respect and pay them before they sweat. This day we got as a result of the sacrifices of Chicago workers, which is celebrated all over the world at the same time. On this day, let us stand with the workers and support their legitimate demands because the workers are still oppressed today.

Prof. Umid Ali Samtoe said that the real purpose of May Day is to sympathize with the workers and give them their rights. Professor Abid Hussain Bhutto said: We are all laborers who receive compensation for doing physical labor. We all should be aware of the problems of our workers. Professor Akbar Chandio said that historically, capitalists have been exploiting workers in every era and the same work is still going on today. Professor Amir Ali Abbasi said that when we read the history of workers in the world, it is full of oppression and oppression. Even in this modern era, there has been no improvement in the life

of the elderly class. We should demonstrate solidarity with the workers on May 1. should Prof. Aniza ran the program. On this occasion, the students of the college also gave speeches paying tribute to the workers. All the teaching staff of the college also participated in the program. On the other hand, a rally was taken out by the Sindh Chandia Welfare Association (SACHWA) in Larkana under the leadership of the president of Sindh Chandia, Haji Abdul Malik Chandio, who reached Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Press Club through different routes of the city. The participants said that International Workers' Day

has been celebrated for years, but unfortunately, even on this International Day, the welfare and rights of workers are not thought about. Many government policies are made, but they are not implemented. The prices of commodities reached the sky, but the wage of the laborer could not increase, even though the laborer barely feeds himself and his children with his meager income, what can be a greater tragedy than that those whose day is celebrated are still working today. Speakers said that we demand the government to increase the monthly wages of laborers and announce benefits for them as well.

## Joint operation against water bills defaulters

PESHAWAR: Water Supply and Sanitation Peshawar (WSSP) and district administration Peshawar are going to launch a crackdown against the defaulters of utility bills. A huge amount about of Rs.1.5 billion is outstanding against the consumers of the company. According to an official of the company, in the first of the operation, the defaulters would be served with notice and asked to pay their water bills and also clear outstanding against them. Otherwise, action would be taken against them under the KP Local Government Act. In this connection, on the directives of the Deputy Commissioner (DC) Peshawar, a meeting was held with the Additional Deputy Commissioner (ADC) in the chair. Besides, officers of

the district administration, directors East, and West of the Capital Metropolitan Government, and WSSP attended the meeting and finalized the operation against the defaulters. The Zonal Offices of WSSP and Directors East & West of the Capital Metropolitan Government Peshawar are issuing notices to defaulters with their signatures. Besides recovery of the arrears, an awareness campaign is also being initiated. The services of religious persons like Khatheeb and prayer leaders of Masjid are also being utilized. Meetings with the local elected public representatives are also being held to utilize them for creating awareness among the people to deposit their water bills. WSSP is facing a finan-

cial crunch, which is affecting the cleanliness and water supply operations. The company has over 89000 registered consumers out of which only 21000 are paying bills regularly and the remaining 68,000 are either defaulters or paying partial or sometimes. These defaulters also include those 24000 consumers, who had never paid their water bills while the remaining 44000 consumers are depositing their bills partially. Currently, WSSP has huge arrears to the tune of Rs.1.48 billion against the defaulters, out of which Rs.700 million are outstanding against those 24000 consumers, who have paid a single penny in head of water bills so far to the company while the remaining Rs.780 million are due against those who pay rarely.—APP

## Police foil attempt of supplying drugs at educational institutes

He said that the criminals involved in supplying drugs in the city especially at educational institutes would be treated with iron hands.

MULTAN: Muzaffarabad police foiled an attempt of supplying drugs at educational institutes and arrested suppliers besides recovering drugs from their possession during a special operational launched here on Wednesday. Keeping in view the ongoing rise of drug addiction among youngsters, the police launched a special operation against drug dealers to prevent drugs supply at educational institutes. The Muzaffarabad police under the supervision of SSP Operations Arsalan Zahid, conducted a raid at Shershah Interchange and arrested Shahbaz Ahmed s/o Irshad Javed and his son Husnain Ali residents of Shekhpura. The police recovered over three kilogram Ice from their possession which was going to be supplied at different colleges and universities of the city and took the car into custody. According to police sources, the arrested drug supplies have confessed that they used to supply drugs at different colleges and universities of the country. The police said that the criminals were history sheeters and already wanted to police various cases of drug supply. Holding a press conference on Wednesday, City Police Officer (CPO) Sadiq Ali Dogar said that police department was committed to eradicate drugs from the society and added that special crackdown and information bases operations were being conducted to prevent drug supply. He said that the criminals involved in supplying drugs in the city especially at educational institutes would be treated with iron hands. He assured that crackdown against drug peddling would continue on regular basis.—APP

## Labor Day- A glowing tribute to workers of Pakistan

PESHAWAR: Unaware of the mammoth rallies taken out on International Labour Day in Pakistan, Mustafa Shah-a 30 year-old poor labourer of Nowshera district was busy like a honeybees in completion of the assigned task of wheat harvesting before the sunset. The sun started setting down behind Kohay Sufaid mountains at Peshawar, Mustafa accelerated cutting of wheat on 10 acres ie Rs10000 per acre contract, asking his brothers Amanat Khan and Abad Khan besides five other labourers to hurry up to complete it well on time. Known as Speen Khan, the motivated labourer obtained a wheat harvesting contract includes its cut-

ting, threshing and storage and worked in two shifts to support his five members family in the wake of unprecedented price hike in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. "Following the demise of my father, Shamas Khan due to blood cancer, I had discontinued my education after metric and started different labour jobs including building construction, wheat harvesting, fruits selling and transport to meet household, health and education's expenses of my family. "I also closed my small general store shop after it was swept away by 2022 devastated floods in River Kabul. Later, I have purchased a rickshaw with financial support of my mother and was succeeded

in returning Rs5lac loan obtained for treatment of my father," he said. Enjoying a cup of black tea brought by his brother under a Shisham tree with his fellow labourers after completion of the task, he said that these day he preferred wheat harvesting due to high profit margin compare to other labour jobs. "Purchasing of own tractor-thresher was my dream but could not materialize it so far due to financial constraints," he said and urged the provincial government to give interest-free loans to labourers so that they may establish their own businesses. Like Mustafa, Abad and Amanat, hundreds of thousands of labourers were engaged in wheat

harvesting, bricks kilns, agriculture, construction and trees plantations besides others works in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, thus contributing to the country's economic development. Professor Dr Ejaz Khan, former Chairman International Relations Department, University of Peshawar said that 1st May is a significant day to remember and paid glowing tributes to all those labourers, who worked for the economic prosperity, and development and sacrificed their lives for Pakistan. The day was being observed in 80 countries in the world including Pakistan to pay homage to the great services of the labour community. year, International Labour Day was observed in memory of the

Chicago workers killed by police while protesting against long hours duty and low wages in 1886. The theme of this year was ensuring labourers' safety and health at workplace in a changing climate. In Pakistan, 1st May was officially declared as public holiday after it's inclusion in the first labour policy devised in 1972. From Chitral to Karachi and Kashmir to Gawadar, mammoth rallies, walks and seminars were held in all 35 districts of KP by holding placards and banners with pro labourers slogans.—APP



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## National Days and Armed Forces Days

### May

- May 03/  
Poland National Day
- May 06/  
Bulgaria Armed Forces Day
- May 06/  
UAE Armed Forces Day
- May 07/  
Kazakhstan Armed Forces Day
- May 08/  
Czech Republic National Day
- May 09/  
European Union National Day
- May 17/  
Norway Constitution Day
- May 21/  
Hungary Armed Forced Day
- May 22/  
Yemen Republic Re-unification Day(National Day )
- May 24/  
Eritrea National Day
- May 25/  
Lebanon Liberation and Resistance Day
- May 25/  
Argentina National Day
- May 25/  
Jordan Independence Day
- May 28/  
Azerbaijan Republic Day
- May 28/  
Ethiopia National Day
- May 31/  
Brunei Armed Forces Day



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Bomb Disposal.....15  
Fire Services Rawalpindi/ Islamabad.....1122 & 16  
Emergency Ambulance.1122  
& Rescue Services.4451122  
Motorway Police...9266044  
Motorway Police.9270601-20  
Women Police Stations Islamabad.....9222596  
Rawalpindi.....9270601-20



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Edhi Ambulance.....115  
PIA Flight Info.....114  
PIA Cargo.....9280979  
Railway Inquiry.....117  
Railway Exchange9270831-5  
WASA Rawalpindi..5555489  
CAA.....9281092



### Hospitals

CMH.....5611111  
MH.....5611116  
Cantt Hospital...9270907-11  
DHQ.....5556311-4  
RGH.....9290301-7  
Holy Family.....9290322-7  
PIMS.....9261170-79  
Polyclinic.....9218300-09  
Shifa International 4603666



### Departments

CDA.....9221334-43  
CDA.....9208301-04  
Met Office.....9250360-6  
RDA.....5555864  
TMA.....5770886  
Cantonment Board 9270151-3

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Islamabad.....0321-5744480

## Navigating Indus Water Treaty

# India's Hyper-nationalism, Pakistan's Water Challenges

Air Marshal Asim Suleiman (Retd), President, CASS, reaffirmed Pakistan's steadfast dedication to upholding the fundamental principles enshrined within the Indus Water Treaty

SAIFULLAH ANSAR

ISLAMABAD: The Centre for Aerospace & Security Studies (CASS), Lahore, hosted a seminar titled 'Navigating the Indus Water Treaty: India's Hyper-nationalism and Pakistan's Water Security Challenges'. The event focused on the heart of Pakistan's socio-economic wellbeing – its water resources, and the challenges the Treaty faces due to the changing political dynamics in India. The seminar commenced with opening remarks by Dr Bilal Ghazanfar, Associate Senior Researcher at CASS, Lahore, who emphasised that cooperation, not conflict, is the key to securing a shared water future for the region. This was followed by a keynote address by Engineer Suleman Najib Khan, Convener, Water and Resource Development Council, who spoke about India's water aggression and termed it as an ecocide in motion. He added



that there is no silver bullet and Pakistan must build the Indus Cascade for its water security. Mr Ahmed Rafay Alam, an environmental lawyer, discussed the legal perspective on the Indus Water Treaty and highlighted the need for Pakistan to

take a robust stance in defending its water rights and seeking international support to resolve disputes and ensure the implementation of the accord. The last speaker, Dr Hassan Abbas, a renowned hydrologist, framed the Indus Water Treaty

as a catalyst for environmental peacebuilding. He promoted a holistic approach to water management, emphasising cooperation, sustainability, and regional stability in the face of climate change and geopolitical challenges. In his concluding remarks,

Air Marshal Asim Suleiman (Retd), President, CASS Lahore, reaffirmed Pakistan's steadfast dedication to upholding the fundamental principles enshrined within the Indus Water Treaty. He emphasised that as Pakistan's eastern neighbour, In-

dia shares the responsibility for maintaining peace in the region. Therefore, he urged India to reaffirm its solemn commitment to international agreements and cautioned against any unilateral measures that could potentially jeopardise the Treaty's integrity. Furthermore, he said that international institutions that played a pivotal role in formulating the Treaty must step forward to safeguard its sanctity and ensure its continued efficacy. The speakers pointed out that India's hyper-nationalism and unilateral measures on the Indus Water Treaty threaten Pakistan's water security and peace, endangering the lives and livelihoods of millions in the region. They also noted that Pakistan faces significant security challenges, including water scarcity, climate change, and India's assertive actions as an upper riparian state. Therefore, the seminar concluded with a resolute commitment to uphold the Treaty and a fervent call to action for the international community.

## Pakistan's inadequate measures against tobacco industry

DNA

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's performance in preventing the influence of multinational tobacco manufacturing companies has been found unsatisfactory, resulting in the deaths of above one hundred and sixty thousand people in the country annually, a global study reveals. An international watchdog on tobacco control, the Global Center for Good Governance in Tobacco Control (GGTC) in its latest finding of 2023 has included Pakistan in an index where the tobacco industry heavily influences the governments. According to the findings of the international watchdog Pakistan's performance in adopting measures to prevent

the industry's influence, ensuring transparency, and avoiding the conflict of interest with the multinational tobacco companies has remained unsatisfactory. Mentioning the names of Pakistan Tobacco Company and British American Tobacco, the GGTC said that in 2021, 163,672 deaths in Pakistan occurred primarily by these two top producers of tobacco. It further said that in Pakistan, tobacco companies are not prohibited from promoting themselves through so-called socially responsible activities and from promoting their products through sponsorships of events, activities, or individuals. According to GGTC findings, tobacco taxes in Pakistan as a percentage of retail price is 61% while the global standard is 70%.

Meanwhile, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Technical Assistance Report titled 'Pakistan Tax Policy Diagnostic and Reform Options' released in February, on the consumption of cigarettes in Pakistan, has advised Pakistan to overhaul its tax system by increasing taxes on non-essential items like cigarettes and applying a uniform tax on cigarettes regardless of their national or multinational brand. Pakistan is currently contributing only 0.5% percent of GDP in revenue during FY21 while cigarette taxation has contributed 0.19% of the GDP, at current levels as a percentage of GDP, and has remained relatively stable in recent years. The World Bank also in its report 'Pakistan Development Update' has

highlighted that a significant revenue gain of 0.4 percent of GDP equal to 505.26 billion rupees could be achieved by applying the current rate on premium cigarettes, which is Rs. 16.50 per cigarette to standard cigarettes as well. On the other side, a recent study by London's Imperial College titled 'Tobacco & global environment footprint' has ranked Pakistan among nine poor countries that produce 90 percent of cigarettes for the world. The study finds that tobacco production in underdeveloped countries should be a cause of concern for policymakers as out of the top 10 tobacco-producing countries, 9 including Pakistan are developing and falling in the category of low-income food-deficit countries (LIFDCs).

## IMF move to release of the \$1.1 bn tranche welcomed

ISLAMABAD: Chairman of National Business Group Pakistan, President Pakistan Businessmen and Intellectuals Forum, and All Karachi Industrial Alliance, and former provincial minister Mian Zahid Hussain said on Wednesday that the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) disbursement of the \$1.1 billion tranche deserves praise. SBP's decision to keep interest rates unchanged has disappointed the business community, he said. Mian Zahid Hussain said that we are responsible for the devastation of the country's economy and will have to fix it as no one else is going to do it for us. Talking to the business community, the veteran business leader said that the IMF decision is a reason for satisfaction. This shows that the confidence of lenders is increasing in Pakistan, which will also increase the confidence of friendly countries and other creditors. The business leader said that the IMF's move would also pave the way for a new three-year loan from the IMF as the lender is satisfied with the government's policy and financial measures. Mian Zahid Hussain said that the economic condition of Pakistan is improving, inflation is also decreasing, and in these circumstances, it would have been better if the interest rate had been reduced. However, the Central Bank was afraid that inflation could bounce back therefore the interest rate was maintained, which has disappointed the business community. He demanded that the SBP reduce policy rates in the following review. Mian Zahid Hussain said that we have set fire to the country's economy, and we have to put it out. International organizations and friendly countries cannot do anything in this regard. To improve the economy, painful reforms and improvements in the tax system need to be done in order to get out of the chronic payments crisis. —DNA

## CAP marks 16 years of heritage preservation

ISLAMABAD, May 01 (APP): The Citizens Archive of Pakistan (CAP) commemorated its 16th anniversary with a grand celebration at the National History Museum, underscoring its steadfast dedication to preserving the rich heritage of Pakistan. Founded in 2007, the CAP has been at the forefront of safeguarding the nation's history, culture, and identity through its innovative initiatives. The CAP's pioneering oral history program, launched in 2008, stands as a testament to its commitment to capturing the diverse narratives that shape Pakistan's collective memory. With over 5,000 oral histories and 600,000 images in its digital archive, the CAP has curated a treasure trove of invaluable resources for researchers, students, and the public. A notable highlight of CAP's legacy is the National History Museum (NHM) Lahore. —APP



ISLAMABAD: Dutch musicians perform during a diplomatic reception in Islamabad. —DNA

## CCP's Proposal for mandatory expiry dates' on cement bags

FAISAL SHEIKH

ISLAMABAD: The Ministry of Science and Technology has decided to send the Competition Commission of Pakistan's (CCP) proposal of revision of national cement standards for disclosure of "manufacturing/expiry dates" on cement bags to the PSQCA for deliberation in the Technical Committee. A CCP team, led by Member O/T Saeed Ahmad Nawaz, held a follow-up meeting with Ali Tahir, Additional Secretary (In-charge) of the Ministry of Science and Technology (MoST), to discuss the proposal to amend the National Cement Stand-

ards, making the 'manufacturing/packaging and expiry/best before' dates on cement bags mandatory. The proposal was sent through a Policy Note issued on 7 March 2024 to MoST and the Pakistan Standards and Quality Control Authority (PSQCA). During the meeting, Member CCP emphasized the importance of these disclosures due to cement's hygroscopic nature, noting that non-disclosure violates Section 10 of the Competition Act, 2010. He highlighted the current practice where manufacturers disclose manufacturing/packaging and expiry/best-before dates individually on bags and collectively on bales for export but omit them for local products. He stressed the need

for a collaborative control mechanism involving all stakeholders. The Ministry pledged full assistance to the CCP in protecting consumer interests as mandated in Section 10 of the Competition Act, 2010. It was decided in the meeting that the matter will be referred to PSQCA for deliberations in Technical Committee meeting, which is scheduled on 7 May 2024. The participants of the meeting also agreed with Member CCP's proposal of convening a meeting with stakeholders, including the cement manufacturers association, to discuss the issue and inform them about potential enforcement actions. The meeting was also attended by senior officials from CCP, the MoST and the PSQCA.

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## Briefs

## Women Domestic Workers Union holds rally

ISLAMABAD: The Women Domestic Workers Union-Punjab held a rally in collaboration with WISE (women in struggle for Empowerment) on the International Labor Day on Wednesday. A large number of domestic workers joined the rally led by leaders of Women Domestic Workers Union. The participants were chanting slogans and carrying banners and placards inscribed with their demands. Speaking to the rally, Ms Bushra Khaliq, Executive Director WISE, said women domestic workers were particularly vulnerable to discrimination in respect of working conditions and terms of employment. "They are forced to face issues like long and unlimited working hours, violence and multiple forms of abuse at work, forced/child labour, lack of minimum wage, labour inspection and law enforcement, she added. President of the DWs union Shenzaj Ajmal and General Secretary Shenzaj Fatima demanded the government to increase wages of labourers in proportion to the rising inflation and implement the minimum wage notification 2023. They said the Punjab Employees Social Security Institute (PESSI) should register DWs and issue them social security cards.—APP

Famous playwright, actor Kamal Rizvi remembered

ISLAMABAD: Famous playwright and actor Syed Kamal Ahmed Rizvi was remembered on the occasion of his birth anniversary on Wednesday. He was born in Bihar, in 1930 and did his BA in Patna. In 1951, after the partition of the subcontinent, he migrated to Pakistan. Initially, he spent some time in Karachi and then shifted to Lahore where his penchant for artistic pursuits endeared him to the artist community. He rubbed shoulders with many literary luminaries, including writer Sadat Hasan Manto. Kamal Rizvi translated several English books into Urdu and wrote for magazines. In the late 1950s, he tried his hand at theatre and started writing plays, both original and adaptations. Some of his popular stage and TV plays are Badshahat Ka Khatma, Julius Caesar, Hum Sub Pagal Hain, and Bulaqi Badzaat. In 1965, when Lahore's television station became operational, he wrote and starred in the satirical drama series Alif Noon. The drama assumed iconic significance as it, by humorous and meaningful situations, exposed hypocrisies and double standards that existed in society. He played the role of the cunning and scheming Allan in the play, while the affable Rafi Khawar played the part of his friend Nanha, who is opposed to Allan but always falls for his cunningness. The government of Pakistan had given him the Pride of Performance Award in 1989.—APP

11,800 suspects arrested for power theft

ISLAMABAD: In a crackdown initiated by police against electricity thieves, more than 12,000 cases of electricity theft have been registered this year, resulting in the arrest of over 11,800 suspects. A police spokesperson said on Wednesday that in Iqbal Town Division, 1,720 suspects were apprehended, in Saddar Division 2,149, in Cantt Division 3,480, in Model Town Division 1,782, in City Division 2,020, and in Civil Lines Division 705 suspects were arrested. Capital City Police Officer Lahore Bilal Siddique Kamanya affirmed that an uncompromising crackdown against electricity thieves was underway in the provincial capital. He emphasized that relevant authorities were being fully supported to curb electricity theft. The CCPO stated that individuals involved in electricity theft did not deserve any leniency as they were causing financial losses to the national exchequer.—APP

## COP29 in Azerbaijan will inject new momentum into climate action

Ms. Romina emphasized Pakistan's pressing issue with plastic pollution, especially in urban areas. Owing to these daunting challenges, Pakistan has taken proactive steps, such as banning single-use plastics and polythene bags in 2019, to mitigate plastic waste generation

DNA

ISLAMABAD: COMSATS Observes Earth Day 2024 with MOCC COMSATS participated in "Planet vs. Plastic" campaign, reaffirming its unwavering commitment to Greener Future Commission on Science and Technology for Sustainable Development in the South (COMSATS) and the Ministry of Climate Change and Environmental Coordination (MoCC&EC), Government of Pakistan, jointly organized an event titled "Pakistan's Roadmap for Plastic Action" to mark Earth Day 2024. The event featured the introduction of the Pakistan National Plastic Action Partnership (NPAP), a government initiative implemented as part of the Global Plastic Action Partnership (GPAP) under the auspices of the World Economic Forum. Held at the COMSATS Secretariat at Islamabad, the participants were unanimous in emphasizing the critical need to combat plastic pollution for the well-being of both humanity and the environment.

Ms. Romina Khurshid Alam, Coordinator to the Prime Minister of Pakistan on Climate Change and Environmental Conservation (CC&EC), graced the occasion as the Chief Guest. Ambassadors, High Commissioners, and Diplomats from COMSATS member states and other countries in Islamabad also graced the event with their presence. Ms. Romina emphasized Pakistan's pressing issue with plastic pollution, especially in urban



areas. Owing to these daunting challenges, Pakistan has taken proactive steps, such as banning single-use plastics and polythene bags in 2019, to mitigate plastic waste generation. She stressed the importance of global cooperation in combating plastic pollution, citing initiatives like the Global Plastic Action Partnership (GPAP) led by the World Economic Forum and UNEP. Additionally, she highlighted Government of Pakistan's commitment to climate change adaptation

and mitigation through policies like the National Adaptation Plan and initiatives such as the Living Indus Initiative, Recharge Pakistan, and GLOF-II, which aim to enhance climate resilience and protect vulnerable sectors of the economy and ecosystems. In his opening remarks, Ambassador Dr. Nafees Zakaria, the Executive Director, COMSATS HEADQUARTERS, underscored the necessity of a cohesive global strategy to address the issue of plastic waste, emphasizing

the importance of not solely focusing on its sources. Dr. Zakaria highlighted that while enacting legislation and policy measures are commendable steps, the true challenge lies in their execution amidst resistance from pressure and interest groups. He pointed out that our planet is not only grappling with plastic-related pollution but also facing a myriad of other man-made hazards contributing to climate change and environmental degradation. Of particular concern is the

often-overlooked impact of military activities and motivated imposed wars, which have yet to be addressed in international conventions and protocols. Dr. Zakaria stressed the urgent need for initiatives and innovations, supported by scientific solutions, from advocates for our planet Earth.

Addressing the Occasion, Azerbaijan's Ambassador to Pakistan, Mr. Khazar Farhadov expressed hope that hosting COP29 in Azerbaijan will inject new momentum into climate action and international collaboration, furthering the objectives of the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement. He underscored the importance of collective action among various stakeholders, including countries, international organizations, financial institutions, and the private sector, to deliver meaningful outcomes at COP29. Further, Ambassador Farhadov highlighted that, under the directive of President Ilham Aliyev, Azerbaijan has designated 2024 as the "Year of Solidarity for a Green World." This reflects Azerbaijan's commitment to accelerating to accelerating environmental protection efforts and addressing climate change on a global scale, as demonstrated by its hosting of COP. During the event, the NPAP team presented the NPAP roadmap for Plastic Action in Pakistan, that will serve as a pivotal hub for concerted action and innovative initiatives within the sector, fostering tangible and enduring outcomes.

## Xinjiang enjoys social stability: Hina

DNA

ISLAMABAD: A delegation of Pakistani elite youth which recently visited Urumqi, Kashgar, and Atush said that Xinjiang's ethnic groups enjoy social stability, religious freedom and economic development. During the visit, the delegation engaged in in-depth exchanges with local people of all ethnic groups and experienced the actual situation of social stability, economic development, improvement

of people's livelihood, religious harmony, cultural prosperity, and thriving tourism in Xinjiang. Gwadar Pro reported on Wednesday. "All ethnic groups in Xinjiang live in harmony and enjoy the beauty of various cultures. You can always see people dancing together happily, and I really feel that the life of Xinjiang people is sweeter than honey," stated Hina Pervaiz Butt, a leader of the Pakistan Muslim League-N. She expressed that Xinjiang is so beautiful, and she is looking forward to visiting

again with her family and friends. The delegation visited several villages in Atush and learned about the development of rural tourism there. "The villages in Xinjiang are so beautiful; the villagers' courtyards are clean, neat, and well-decorated. I think people here are full of confidence in their future development. Xinjiang is developing very rapidly with convenient transportation and well-developed city clusters," said Qasim Qamar, an official from Sindh Province, who visited Xinjiang eight

years ago. The delegation experienced the vitality of Xinjiang's high-quality economic development after visiting the Kashgar Comprehensive Free Trade Zone and Urban Planning Hall of Urumqi Cultural Center. Covering 180 square kilometers, the Xinjiang pilot FTZ has been granted more autonomy to implement reforms and attract investments. "China deems it necessary to contribute to building a golden channel between Asia and the West.

## Pakistan, Turkey, Iran delegation visits Beijing

ISLAMABAD: A delegation comprised over 15 participants from the Economic Cooperation Organization Science Foundation (ECOSF) including Pakistan, Turkey, Iran, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan visited Beijing. The delegation representing the ECOSF, an intergovernmental organization for scientific and technological cooperation was here for a two-week international training course from April 15 to 29, Gwadar Pro reported on Wednesday. The training, sponsored by China's National New Energy Vehicle Technology Innovation Center, aims to enhance the participants' understanding of China's NEV industry and explore potential cooperation in the field of sustainable energy. The training workshop was led by leading Chinese experts in the field of electric vehicles (EVs) who delivered insightful sessions and lectures on various important topics such as electric vehicle policies, drivetrain technologies, battery technologies, smart manufacturing, autonomous driving, and charging and battery swapping infrastructure, among others. Participants also gained valuable insights through their visits to Launch Design (a global leader in turnkey solutions for electric vehicles), Baidu Autonomous Driving Center, Great Wall Motors Manufacturing Facility.—DNA

## HRCP playing important role in highlighting Kashmir dispute

ISLAMABAD: All Parties Hurriyat Conference Azad Jammu and Kashmir (APHC-AJK) chapter Convener, Mahmood Ahmad Saghar has said that the Human Rights Council of Pakistan has been continuously playing important role in highlighting the Kashmir dispute. Mahmood Ahmad Saghar expressed these views while talking to a delegation of the Council led by its Chairman Jamsheed Hussain at the APHC-AJK office, said a press release here on Wednesday.—APP

## COMSTECH partnered with Chinese University

DNA

ISLAMABAD: The Committee on Science and Technology of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (COMSTECH) has partnered with Hunan University of Chinese Medicine (HUCM) to provide training programs for technicians, covering a range of disciplines in both medical and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields. The primary goal is to build and strengthen scientific and technological capacities within OIC member states, Gwadar Pro reported on Wednesday. In this collaborative effort, titled the "COMSTECH-Hunan University of Chinese Medicine (HUCM) Technicians Training Program," 13 individuals from seven countries will visit China from May 6 to May 17 to receive advanced training in Medical Sciences and Science and Technology. The training program will include instruction on NMR and MRI techniques, as well as sessions focusing on Ethno Medicine Innovation and Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). Training will be conducted in two cities: Changsha and Beijing. Technical visits will also be part of the program, with trainees visiting Tianjin Tasly Holding. Among the 13 selected individuals, two are from Pakistan, two from Cameroon, two from Indonesia, and two from Bangladesh. Additionally, one participant each hails from Sudan, Kazakhstan, Egypt, and the UAE (with Pakistani origin). The candidates represent diverse educational and professional backgrounds, ranging from Lab Supervisors and Research Assistants to Lecturers and As-


sistant Professors at their respective institutions. Khazima Muazim, Program Manager, emphasized the prioritization of female candidates from Least Developed Countries (LDCs) to address marginalization and ensure inclusivity within the program. "This initiative was launched in December 2023, and after a rigorous selection process at COMSTECH and HUCM, we have selected 13 individuals from seven countries to be part of this program," she said, acknowledging the leadership of HUCM, particularly Prof. Dr. Wei Wang, Dean and WHO focal persons on TCM, for his incredible support, as well as the technical partners of the program Tianjin Holding, Prof. Dr. M. Iqbal Choudhary, Coordinator General of COMSTECH, outlined the first phase of the program, which includes two components: the technician training program and Post-Doc study at Hunan University. COMSTECH is also in the process of initiating similar programs with Ningbo University and Xinjiang Medical University. Additionally, COMSTECH has established a joint program with Huawei Technologies China in the field of cybersecurity. "OIC organizations will collaborate with China for the benefit of Muslim member states. In the first phase, 13 individuals have been selected from seven member countries. Next, we aim to engage more individuals, not only at the technological, educational, and scientific levels, but also in the promotion of TCM," said Dr. Iqbal, adding that 20 doctors from Pakistan will also receive training in Chinese traditional medicines in China.

## IIUI marks Labor Day

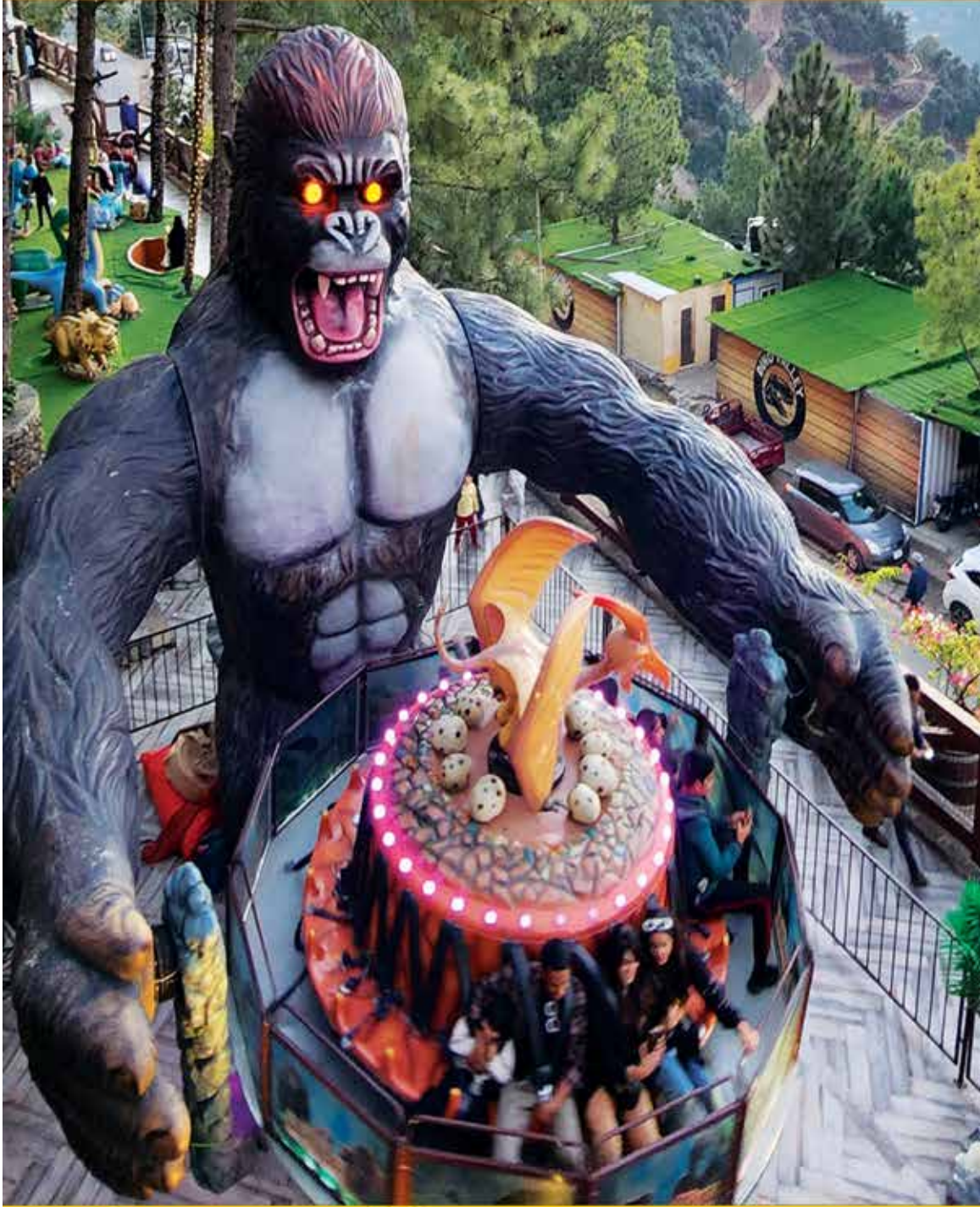
ISLAMABAD: Department of Teacher Education in collaboration with Office of Research, Innovation & Commercialization (ORIC) at the International Islamic University Islamabad (IIUI) organized a panel discussion to mark the Labor Day in which panelists and participants discussed the critical themes surrounding the rights of children to education and the urgent need to address the issue of child labor. Dr. Shamsa Aziz, Chairperson Department of Teacher Education briefed about the main idea behind arranging the panel discussion. The Panelists included Dr. Tabassum Naz Director Schools Federal Directorate of Education, Islamabad, Ms. Nazneen Zeira Deputy Director (Planning) Basic Education Community Schools, Islamabad, Ms. Shumaila Aslam Principal Ghori Ca-

reer School, Islamabad, Ms. Tabassum Shairwani Khan PhD Education Scholar, IIUI and Ms. Sana Naseer BECS School. The panel was moderated by Dr. Fouzia Ajmal. Under the theme "Empowering Futures: Right to Education vs. Child Labour," the discussion encompassed a wide range of topics, each shedding light on different dimensions of the issue. The panel unanimously agreed on the significance of education as a fundamental right for every child. They emphasized that access to education not only empowers individuals but also plays a vital role in shaping a prosperous society. Addressing the underlying socio-economic factors contributing to child labor was another focal point of the discussion, the panelists stressed the need for holistic approaches that tackle poverty, inequality,

and lack of opportunities, which often force children into labor. Panelists highlighted the pivotal role of teachers in eradicating child labor and promoting education. They emphasized the role of educators in creating inclusive and supportive learning environments that encourage children to stay in school and pursue their dreams. The main takeaways of the discourse included community involvement as a crucial factor in combating child labor. The panelists highlighted the importance of community partnerships and grassroots initiatives in identifying at-risk children and providing them with educational opportunities. According to the organizing departments, the panel discussion served as a platform for stakeholders from academia, government, and civil society to exchange ideas, share best practices.—APP



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## Xi to visit France, Serbia and Hungary

CHINESE President Xi Jinping will pay state visits to France, Serbia and Hungary from May 5 to 10 at the invitation of President Emmanuel Macron of the Republic of France, President Aleksandar Vucic of the Republic of Serbia and President Tamas Sulyok and Prime Minister Viktor Orban of Hungary, Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying announced on Monday, a trip that experts believe is expected to shape the future of relations between China and Europe. The visits show that both China and Europe are striving to explore the space and prospects of cooperation in an era when major power strategic competition intensifies and geopolitics returns, Chinese and European experts noted. The visits will inject momentum for the further development of China-Europe relations, showcasing that the two sides can maintain positive interactions and mutually beneficial cooperation transcending traditional geopolitics, experts said. This will be the first overseas tour of the Chinese president this year. It is also the first time that the Chinese top leader visits Europe in nearly five years. It underlines the fact that the Chinese leadership attaches great importance to Europe and highlights the prominent position China places on Europe in its global strategy and foreign economic policy, Xin Hua, director and chair professor of the Center for European Union Studies, Shanghai International Studies University, told the Global Times.

Xi's visit to France, the first in five years, comes as this year marks the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and France. In January, the Franco-Chinese year of cultural tourism was launched and a series of events will be held in both countries to celebrate cultural cooperation. Pierre Picquart, an expert in geopolitics and human geography from the University of Paris-VIII, told the Global Times that France's long tradition of diplomacy and openness to international relations and its early recognition of the economic potential of China as an expanding market and as an important trading partner made France the first major Western country to establish diplomatic relations with China. As France has significant influence on relations between Europe and China, "by choosing France as the first stop of his European tour, President Xi is sending a strong message about the importance of China-Europe cooperation and his commitment to multilateralism and dialogue diplomacy," Picquart said. In a telephone call with the French president's Diplomatic Counselor Emmanuel Bonne on Saturday, China's top diplomat Wang Yi said that China stands ready to strengthen high-level exchanges with France, give play to the leading role of head-of-state diplomacy, and add new connotations to the comprehensive strategic partnership between the two countries. Xi will hold talks with French President Macron to have in-depth exchange of views on China-France relations, China-EU relations and international and regional hotspots of mutual interest, according to Lin Jian, a spokesperson of the Chinese Foreign Ministry on Monday.

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## Tearing up of 'gentleman's agreement'

RECENTLY, the Philippines has once again denied that China and the Philippines had reached a "gentleman's agreement" on the South China Sea issue. Philippine Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro stated on Saturday that since Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr took office in 2022, the Philippine Defense Department is "not aware of, nor is it a party to, any internal agreement with China." However, Manila's stance not only ignores the joint efforts made by China and the Philippines in maintaining regional stability and peace but also will have a negative impact on the future of China-Philippines relations and the security situation in the South China Sea. As is well known, a "gentleman's agreement" is an informal, non-binding agreement that relies on the credibility and integrity of the parties involved to be implemented rather than enforced through legal means. Compared to formal treaties, the "gentleman's agreement" is more flexible to maintain specific social order or policy goals. In other words, it can be seen as a kind of consensus and "understanding." In a complex international environment, this allows countries to quickly coordinate positions and actions and deal with emergencies. Previously, when the situation in the South China Sea was extremely severe, regional peace and stability were severely threatened. The Chinese government and the Duterte government reached a "gentleman's agreement" with the aim of maintaining regional peace and preventing the escalation of the South China Sea disputes into regional conflicts. This not only serves the national interests of both sides but also the long-term interests and moral standards of the international community. China and the Philippines reached consensus on restricting military activities in sensitive areas and mutual understanding in humanitarian and material exchanges. In fact, it was precisely because both sides had been adhering to this agreement until early February last year that they effectively helped both sides control the situation and avoid potential military conflicts.

Currently, the Marcos government of the Philippines has publicly reneged on and denied the "gentleman's agreement" between the two countries, which has a significant element of political showmanship. But this is very unwise, and the real damage is to the Philippines itself. Reneging on the "gentleman's agreement" has an obvious impact on the international reputation of the Philippines. The "gentleman's agreement" is based on the credibility and mutual respect of all parties. The current government's denial of its existence will lead to doubts about its credibility in the international community, affecting its reputation on the international stage and directly impacting its weight and effectiveness in negotiations on international affairs in the future. At the same time, it will also affect the economic cooperation and political mutual trust between the Philippines and other countries, thus causing long-term adverse effects on the national development of the Philippines. Such inconsistency in diplomacy is likely to be criticized even within the Philippines.

# Germany's crackdown on criticism of Israel betrays European values

Matthaios Tsimitakis

The violent interruption and eventual cancellation of the pro-Palestine conference was a worrying escalation in the repression of the Palestinian solidarity movement that has been under way in Germany and across the West for the past six months. German police invaded the venue of the Palestine Congress, organised by Jewish Voice for Peace together with DiEM25 and civil rights groups, and shut it down by cutting off electricity, confiscating microphones, and detaining some of the participants. Then, in an unprecedented move, it issued a "Betätigungsverbot" (ban on activities) against Yanis Varoufakis, Ghassan Abu-Sitta, and Salman Abu-Sitta – three of the keynote speakers. As a result, former Greek Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis, a vocal figure in the global...

A FEW months ago, I found myself in a forum with German colleagues discussing European media. The conversation was lively and quickly moved from industry issues to broader topics such as German memory culture and the 2008 financial crisis. Surprisingly, my German colleagues found it inappropriate to criticise the Greek political stance at the time of the crisis, and they also found it inappropriate for me to talk about issues relating to German history, such as the Holocaust. They explained that "you cannot enter into the subjective experience and history of the other, so it is better to avoid it". I couldn't disagree more. If we don't engage in critical discussion, we can't align ourselves with what we think is morally right or hold power to account – we end up simply affirming our ethnic, religious, ideological or national alliances. To paraphrase Edward Said's famous quote, we can't show true solidarity if we don't criticise. And we cannot afford not to criticise a power when it is blatantly attacking the very values and principles it is supposed to uphold and protect. I thought of this discussion I had with German colleagues as I read about the police raid on the Palestine Congress in Berlin on April 12.

The violent interruption and eventual cancellation of the pro-Palestine conference was a worrying escalation in the repression of the Palestinian solidarity movement that has been under way in Germany and across the West for the past six months. German police invaded the venue of the Palestine Congress, organised by Jewish Voice for Peace together with DiEM25 and civil rights groups, and shut it down by cutting off electricity, confiscating microphones, and detaining some of the participants. Then, in an unprecedented move, it issued a "Betätigungsverbot" (ban on activities) against Yanis Varoufakis, Ghassan Abu-Sitta, and Salman Abu-Sitta – three of the keynote speakers. As a result, former Greek Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis, a vocal figure in the global progressive movement, will not be allowed to speak about Palestine in Germany, not even via a Zoom call, and it is unclear whether he will be able to stand with the German party DiEM25 in the run-up to the European elections in June. The intervention made it crystal clear that these days in Germany any and all criticism of the State of Israel and its conduct in Gaza is considered anti-Semitism and treated as such. Juxtaposed with the newfound acceptance of far-right figures with documented histories of anti-Semitism due to their defence of Israeli policies against Palestinians, it paints a depressing picture for freedom of speech in one of Europe's most powerful democracies. The contrast here is stark. Pro-Israeli politicians from the right-wing Alternative for Germany (AfD), including those who are under trial for using literal Nazi slogans, can freely speak on the Israeli war on Palestine under the guise of "fighting anti-Semitism", but Ghassan Abu-Sittah, the Palestinian surgeon and rector of Glasgow University who worked in Gaza hospitals and documented war crimes during this latest Israeli assault on the Palestinian enclave cannot give his testimony to the German public. As Udi Raz, the Jewish activist arrested at the Palestine Congress, said after his arrest, it seems that these days in Germany you

can fight anti-Semitism only if you support genocide. The raid on the Palestine Congress was just the latest in a series of escalating incidents. Under the pretext of security and with vague accusations of anti-Semitism, the German authorities have been suppressing the freedom of expression of everyone showing solidarity with the Palestinians and demanding a ceasefire in Gaza since October 7. Here are a few examples: In November, poet Ranjit Hoskote was forced to resign from the Selection Committee of Documenta 16, one of the most contemporary art exhibitions in the world, after it was revealed that he signed a letter comparing Zionism to Hindu nationalism in 2019. Just a few days after Hoskote's resignation, the remaining members of the committee also resigned, citing the lack of free speech about Israel-Palestine in Germany as the reason. "In the current circumstances we do not believe that there is a space in Germany for an open exchange of ideas and the development of complex and nuanced artistic approaches that Documenta artists and curators deserve," they said in an open letter announcing their resignation. In December, in a symbolically revealing move, Germany's Green Party-affiliated Heinrich Boll Foundation withdrew the Hannah Arendt Prize for Political Thought from Masha Gessen, citing Gessen's New Yorker essay titled "In the Shadow of the Holocaust" as the reason for the decision. In the essay, Gessen criticised Germany's Israel policy and politics of remembrance, comparing the situation in besieged Gaza to the plight of Jews in Nazi-occupied ghettos in Eastern Europe during the Holocaust. Then in February, the Berlin Film Festival, one of the biggest and most respected in Europe, faced backlash for awarding a prize to a film by Palestinian filmmaker Basel Adra and Israeli journalist Yuval Abraham which charted Israel's destruction of Palestinian villages in the occupied West Bank. German Culture Minister Claudia Roth faced calls for her resignation after being filmed clapping at the end of Adra and Abraham's speech. Rather shockingly, she later claimed that she was applauding only the Israeli filmmaker and not his Palestinian partner. After this incident, politicians threatened to cut funding to cultural institutions for perceived anti-Israel bias, sparking fears of censorship. Within the same month, Ghassan Hage, a renowned anthropologist, was fired from the Max Planck Institute after a right-wing newspaper accused him of making "increasingly drastic statements" critical of Israel following the Hamas attack and the Israeli assault on Gaza in October. A few weeks later, political theorist Nancy Fraser was stripped of her professorship at the University of Cologne due to her support for the Palestinian cause. As the world's second-largest arms exporter, Germany has consistently supported Israel, both politically and militarily. In 2023, some 30 percent of Israel's military equipment purchases came from Germany. After South Africa took Israel to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) accusing it of committing genocide in Gaza, Germany offered to intervene in the case on behalf of Israel. In response, Namibia – where Germany committed the 20th century's first genocide as

the colonial ruler between 1904 and 1908 – publicly urged Berlin to "reconsider" its "untimely" decision. Then-Namibian President Hage Geingob said Germany could not "morally express commitment to the United Nations Convention against genocide, including atonement for the genocide in Namibia" and at the same time support Israel. In the meantime, Nicaragua brought a separate case against Germany at the same court, accusing it of breaching the UN genocide convention by sending military hardware to Israel. With these moves, these two countries from the so-called Global South exposed the hypocrisy of Germany's claims that it is standing with Jewish people and fighting anti-Semitism by supporting – politically and militarily – Israel's war on Gaza. Furthermore, they showed how Germany is threatening to bankrupt the values and principles at the very core of the European project – human rights, human dignity, freedom, equality and the rule of law, among others – by continuing to arm, fund and diplomatically support Israel as it commits genocide against a people living under its occupation. This hypocritical stance has domestic as well as international consequences. Indeed, while German authorities claim to be fighting anti-Semitism by censoring pro-Palestinian speech, civil liberties groups warn that the German state's conflation of anti-Zionism with anti-Jewish bigotry is enabling a xenophobic crackdown within Germany, with migrants and refugees from Muslim-majority countries being accused of bringing "imported anti-Semitism" to the country for their support for the Palestinian cause and being unjustly targeted for deportation. Meanwhile, the German far right, which is gaining support ahead of the European Parliament elections in June, is using the state's conflation of anti-Semitism and criticism of Israel as cover for its Islamophobia and is doubling down on its intimidation and targeting of Muslims and Arabs in the country. This hypocritical stance on anti-Semitism and Israel is of course not unique to Germany. Across the Western world, Palestinians, Jews and progressives of all backgrounds who are opposing the Israeli government's crimes in Gaza are being branded as anti-Semites. Strikingly, Joe Biden and the Democratic Party in the United States, Marine Le Pen's far-right National Rally in France and the AfD in Germany appear to be on the same page when it comes to conflating anti-Zionist views and criticism of the State of Israel with anti-Semitism. The students of Columbia University in New York and other US colleges are being arrested and branded as hateful for protesting Israeli crimes against Palestinians. Earlier, Harvard President Claudine Gay and Penn President Liz McGill were forced to resign after being attacked as anti-Semites for not shutting down pro-Palestinian protests in their respective institutions under the same equation: Critique of Israel equals anti-Semitism. In the most telling example of the current state of affairs in the West, earlier this month, Hobart and William Smith Colleges, in Geneva, New York, removed tenured professor Jodi Dean from the classroom because of an article in which, echoing Edward Said, she argued that "Palestine speaks for everyone".

## EU hopes Egypt partnership can help curb illegal migration

Dr. Abdellatif El-Menawy

They accuse the EU of prioritizing halting illegal migration at any cost, potentially overlooking the plight of migrants. These agreements encompass various areas of cooperation, ranging from trade to clean energy initiatives to migration management. European leaders view them as instrumental in addressing the surge of migrants into Europe. Frontex, the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders, reported another increase in illegal migration rates to EU countries last year

I N recent years, the issue of illegal immigration has emerged as a significant concern for both Egypt and the EU. With the Mediterranean serving as a primary route for migrants seeking asylum in Europe, Egypt finds itself at the forefront of this complex challenge. However, amid this crisis, there has been a notable effort to bolster cooperation between Cairo and Brussels to mitigate the influx of migrants and ensure more secure borders. Last month's EU-Egypt agreement elevated their relationship to a "comprehensive strategic partnership," emphasizing increased coordination and cooperation in various areas related to immigration, supporting the Egyptian economy and addressing geopolitical concerns. While cooperation between the two parties has existed for several years, the new agreement reflects the EU's commitment to supporting Egypt in tackling the issue of illegal immigration. Ursula von der Leyen, president of the European Commission, expressed satisfaction with the signing of the cooperation agreement and the strengthening of relations with Egypt during a press conference in Cairo. She said: "Today marks a significant milestone with the signing of the Joint Declaration for a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership." Von der Leyen led a European delegation that visited Cairo on March 17, including leaders from Italy, Belgium, Austria, Greece and Cyprus. During this visit, agreements worth 7.4 billion (\$7.9 billion) were signed by Von der Leyen and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi. The EU-Egypt agreement aims to enhance dialogue between the two parties and support economic reform in Egypt. Under this framework, the EU will provide Cairo with loans worth 5 billion in the period to 2027, investments totaling 1.8 billion in areas such as digitization and energy transformation, and grants amounting to 600 million. Additionally, cooperation in combating terrorism and immigration has been agreed, with a focus on addressing the root causes of illegal immigration, while facilitating legal migration to Europe. Some 200 million will be allocated to managing migration issues. Since 2004, an association agreement has governed

the relationship between Egypt and the EU. According to the European Commission, 171 million has been approved to date to manage the migration file, support Egypt in border management, combating human trafficking and smuggling, and encouraging the voluntary return of migrants. Concerns about increased migration to Europe have prompted the signing of the new agreement with Egypt, with Brussels viewing cooperation with Cairo as more effective in controlling migration than with other countries. It is noteworthy that this is not the first agreement of its kind signed by the EU with a Mediterranean country, as agreements have also been signed with Tunisia and Mauritania in recent years. European leaders believe that the Egyptian government can implement stricter controls to minimize the number of boats departing the country. They argue that Egypt's security capabilities enable it to effectively control its borders and ensure there are no outlets for illegal migration. The EU's decision to sign this agreement is driven by valid geopolitical reasons. Cooperation with Egypt is seen as essential in preventing a geopolitical vacuum that could be exploited by other countries that have interests in the Mediterranean, such as Russia and China. For Egypt, cooperation with the EU represents one facet of its broad range of collaborative agreements. This particular accord, which is primarily economic in nature, signifies the EU's recognition of Egypt's pivotal role in addressing immigration challenges. The essence of the agreement lies in achieving stability within Egypt. While Cairo has made strides in managing migration, economic hurdles persist, highlighting the critical need for financial assistance. Furthermore, Egypt holds significant geostrategic importance for the EU, serving as a linchpin for security and stability in the region. Von der Leyen praised El-Sisi's personal efforts to broker a ceasefire in Gaza during her visit to Cairo. However, some human rights organizations and activists express reservations about these agreements, citing the lack of explicit provisions addressing human rights violations or the accountability of recipient countries for EU funds. They accuse the EU

of prioritizing halting illegal migration at any cost, potentially overlooking the plight of migrants. These agreements encompass various areas of cooperation, ranging from trade to clean energy initiatives to migration management. European leaders view them as instrumental in addressing the surge of migrants into Europe. Frontex, the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders, reported another increase in illegal migration rates to EU countries last year, reaching the highest level since 2016. According to the International Organization for Migration, Egypt hosts nearly 9 million migrants and refugees, including 4 million Sudanese and 1.5 million Syrians. This influx places immense strain on Egypt's economy, particularly given declining revenues from key sources like tourism, remittances and revenues from the Suez Canal, exacerbated by global economic downturns. Efforts to alleviate Egypt's foreign currency crisis appear promising, with development projects underway in the Ras El-Hikma area and the announcement of an \$8 billion financing agreement with the International Monetary Fund. El-Sisi emphasized Egypt's commitment to curbing illegal migration during a summit with the prime ministers of Greece and Cyprus in 2020, affirming that Egypt pursues this goal based on its own capabilities and moral obligations, refraining from leveraging the issue for financial or political gain. The partnership between Egypt and the EU presents significant opportunities to comprehensively and sustainably address the multifaceted issue of illegal migration. By pooling their strengths and resources, both parties can strive to create a safer, more prosperous and more humane environment for migrants and host communities alike. Recognizing the imperative of addressing the root causes of illegal migration, officials on both sides emphasize the importance of enhancing economic development, fostering job opportunities and promoting social stability in migrant-prone areas. Investments in education, vocational training and infrastructure projects are deemed essential components of this holistic approach.



## Briefs

PM Shehbaz  
vows to  
increase...

FROM PAGE 01  
projects for the deprived classes like those established in the developed countries. "It was not an objective behind the creation of Pakistan that there would be a difference between the rich and the poor. Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah led a massive movement in which the people offered huge sacrifices. The motive was the establishment of a welfare state in which everyone would have equal opportunities to excel in life on the basis of one's capacity and ability and take the country forward," he added. The prime minister reiterated that they were striving to end corruption and promised that all the organs of government and other state institutions, with their collective efforts, would carve a niche for Pakistan among the comity of nations.

COAS, UK  
counterpart  
discuss...

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the statement added. COAS Munir and Gen Sanders addressed the opening session of the sixth Pakistan-UK Regional Stabilisation Conference at Islamabad's National Defence University on Tuesday, the ISPR said. The UK Army's CGS-designate also attended the event. The conference is a flagship defence and security dialogue between Pakistan and the UK, held alternately in the two countries, the statement noted. It brings together a "formidable corpus of subject matter experts in diverse domains, including diplomats, defence officials, intellectuals and civil society representatives". In connection with the conference, a 30-member UK delegation led by Standing Joint Force Commander Major General Tom Bateman was visiting Pakistan from April 29 to May 3, the ISPR said. "During the conference, delegations from both sides will exchange perspectives on global and regional environment and its impact on national security, and regional peace and stability," it added.

Washington  
reaffirms  
support...

FROM PAGE 01  
and building programs and supporting a series of US and Pakistan military-to-military engagements," he noted. Patel's remarks come as both countries, during a meeting between US Acting Under Secretary for Political Affairs John Bass and Acting Foreign Secretary Ambassador Rahim Hayat in Islamabad, reaffirmed their commitment to enhance cooperation in the areas of trade, investment and regional security. Last week, the US State Department, in its "2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices" had underscored the lack of necessary measures by Pakistan with regard to addressing human rights abuses in the country.

Police foil  
terrorist at-  
tack at...

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seven police officials were injured including Assistant Sub Inspector (ASI) Imran, Constables Muhammad Amir, Ashiq Zain, Rehmat Ullah, Sanaulah and Elite Force officials Tariq and Shahid Manzoor while the terrorists managed to escape. The injured officials were shifted to the hospital from where the constable Shahid Manzoor was referred to Nishtar Hospital Multan due to critical injuries. Regional Police Officer (RPO) Capt (ret'd) Sajjad Hassan Khan and District Police Officer (DPO) Ahmed Mo-hiuddin reached the check post and appreciated the officials. In a statement issued on Wednesday, the Inspector General of Police (IG) Punjab Dr Usman Anwar, lauded the police performance for foiling terrorist attack. He directed RPO and DPO DG Khan Division to ensure the best medical facilities for the injured police officials.

Champions Trophy: PCB shapes  
up security plans for Indian team

"If they [India] are doing propaganda, why aren't you doing as well?" Naqvi asked the media. "We are not thinking of a hybrid model, there is no talk of the sort"

DNA

KARACHI: The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) is shaping up security plans for the Indian cricket team ahead of the Champions Trophy 2025 which is to be played in the country in February next year. The PCB has already put forward three venues to the International Cricket Council (ICC) in the initial draft schedule and the governing body will take feedback from the participating nations on it. Pakistan has decided to minimise India's travelling as a security measure, sources told Geo News. It was further revealed that in the first round, all of India's matches will be held in a single city. However, the name of the city or venue has not been revealed yet. ICC's pitch consultant Andy Atkinson arrived at the National Stadium in Karachi on Wednesday where he shared his input with local ground staff over the preparation of pitches for the mega event. Atkinson will visit three venues,



starting from Karachi, to inspect playing facilities. After Karachi, he will also visit Lahore and Rawalpindi. Earlier on Tuesday, PCB chief Mohsin Naqvi told the

press that there is no reason for India not to travel to Pakistan for the Champions Trophy. "We have sent the schedule [of the Champions Trophy] to the ICC, all eight

teams will come," Naqvi assured. "There is no reason as to why India would refuse to come. "If they [India] are doing propa-

ganda, why aren't you doing as well?" Naqvi asked the media. "We are not thinking of a hybrid model, there is no talk of the sort. Remember, Pakistan is also upgrading their venues in Karachi, Rawalpindi and Lahore and Naqvi is eager to complete the renovation work in four to five months. "The stadium upgrading work is going on rapidly. Yes, there have been some delays but we are determined to get it done as soon as possible," Naqvi said. "We have a three-member committee that is exclusively working on that. There is a director infrastructure, director international cricket and the remaining is director domestic cricket." This event will mark the return of the ICC Champions Trophy after an eight-year hiatus, with its last occurrence in 2017, when Pakistan emerged victorious by defeating India in the final. The teams confirmed for the 2025 ICC Champions Trophy include Pakistan (hosts), India, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Afghanistan, England, and Bangladesh.

Pakistan squad update  
ahead of T20 WC, Ireland  
and England series

Pakistan's next assignment is a three-match T20I series against Ireland

SPORTS DESK

LAHORE: The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) will announce the squad for the upcoming T20I series against Ireland and England on Thursday. It must be noted that the chairman of the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) Mohsin Naqvi had confirmed in a press talk on Tuesday that the team for the England and Ireland T20I series will be announced on Wednesday. However, due to an important event near the Gaddafi Stadium, it won't be possible to make the announcement today. According to sources, Haris Rauf, who has recovered from a shoulder injury, is likely to make a comeback in the squad. Top-order batter Usman Khan is also likely to get more chances in the coming games. Wicketkeeper-batter Mohammad Rizwan, who suffered a hamstring injury during the recently-concluded New Zealand T20I series, is also feeling better than before and could be part of the squad for England and Ireland series, sources added. Meanwhile, the squad for the T20 World Cup 2024 will be announced after the conclusion of the first T20I against England, which will take place on May 22. The initial deadline for squad submission for T20 World Cup was May 1 but the teams can make changes till 25th of the same month. After that, any changes will require approval from the event's technical committee.

## Pakistan's schedule of upcoming matches

**Tour of Ireland**  
May 10: First T20I at Clontarf  
May 12: Second T20I at Clontarf  
May 14: Third T20I at Clontarf  
**Tour of England**  
May 22: First T20I at Leeds  
May 25: Second T20I at Birmingham  
May 28: Third T20I at Cardiff  
May 30: Fourth T20I at The Oval  
**T20 World Cup 2024**  
June 6: Pakistan vs USA, Dallas  
June 9: Pakistan vs India, New York  
June 11: Pakistan vs Canada, New York  
June 16: Pakistan vs Ireland, Lauderhill

30th AZLAN SHAH CUP 2024  
4 - 11 MAY 24

MAY 04 Saturday 17.30 PST PAK vs MAS  
MAY 05 Sunday 15.15 KOR vs PAK  
MAY 07 Tuesday 15.15 PST PAK vs JPN  
MAY 08 Wednesday 13.00 PST CAN vs PAK  
MAY 10 Friday 13.00 PST PAK vs NZL

Ancelotti provides  
Bellingham  
injury update

WEB DESK

MADRID: Real Madrid boss Carlo Ancelotti provided injury update on star midfielder Jude Bellingham after the first leg of the Champions League semi-final against Bayern Munich on Tuesday, which ended in a 2-2 draw at the Allianz Arena. According to The Athletic, Bellingham had a virus last week and had barely trained ahead of the match against Bayern Munich. The England international also suffered from cramps during the match. "He'll be back to his best. He had the injury, which affected him considerably. He hasn't been at his best, but he'll be back very soon and by Wednesday he'll be at 100%," Ancelotti said. "Jude Bellingham was not at the best level tonight, but same for the entire team. Bellingham got cramps after 60 mins so I had to sub him off," he added.

Gloucestershire's Ben  
Wells retires at 23

LONDON: England's County Championship side Gloucestershire's player Ben Wells announced his retirement from cricket at the age of 23 due to a "rare" heart condition, confirmed the club on Wednesday. Wells made his Gloucestershire debut in September 2021, scoring 40 on 94 deliveries in his first professional innings. He was considered one of the best players in the county championship. In his last professional innings, Wells scored 108 not out against Durham in last season's Metro Bank One-Day Cup. Wells was diagnosed with an arrhythmogenic right ventricular cardiomyopathy (ARVC) in a routine test before the commencement of

pre-season, after which he announced his retirement. "This is something that I never thought I would have to write," Wells said in his open letter. "As tough as it is, this diagnosis has likely saved my life, and in time I hope that I can see it in that light. I'm very thankful to the doctors who have picked this up as soon as they could have. I could never have imagined that this is the path that cricket would have taken me down. I've loved every moment and am very grateful to have had the chance to live out a part of this dream, even if it was only for a few years. I will always be incredibly proud to be able to say I was a professional cricketer." - Agencies



## Paris dream of swimming in Seine within reach

His "worst day", however, was a few kilometres downstream from the capital as he passed a sewage works at Gennevilliers

PARIS: Going for a dip in the Seine on a hot summer's day has been the pipedream of many a Parisian since swimming in the river was formally banned a century ago. But floating on your back under the Eiffel Tower could very soon become reality thanks to the Paris Olympics. The river will be the star of the opening ceremony of the Games on July 26 and will host the triathlon and the swimming marathon. Then, if all goes well, next summer Parisians and tourists will be able to dive in too. Like Zurich and Munich before it, Paris has been reclaiming its river with one of three new urban "beaches" to open under the windows of its historic town hall next year, with another almost at the foot of the Eiffel Tower. Nearly 30 more - complete with pontoons, showers and parasols - are

planned for the suburbs and along the Marne, which flows into the Seine just east of the French capital. Once regarded as an open-air dump, former French president Jacques Chirac first floated the idea of swimming in the Seine in 1990. But it was the current mayor Anne Hidalgo who really ran with the idea, making it a pillar of her Olympic bid in 2016. Some 1.4 billion euros has been spent on colossal public works to counter pollution, with Hidalgo vowing to swim in the Seine herself in late June. French President Emmanuel Macron says he too will take the plunge - but is coy about saying exactly when. For many it feels like a long-held fantasy is finally within reach - a return to an 18th-century idyll when Parisians splashed naked in the Seine. But there is a big

if to all this: the sometimes sharp fluctuations in the Seine's water quality after storms. Disastrous Olympic test events last August have raised doubts over whether the triathletes and marathon swimmers will be allowed to race for gold in the river. Most of the events had to be cancelled because the water failed to meet European standards on two bacteria as found in faeces. Unusually violent downpours and a faulty valve in the sewage system were blamed. But it prompted the reigning Olympic marathon champion Ana Marcela Cunha to call for a "plan B". "The health of athletes should come before everything," the Brazilian great told AFP. What happened to lifeguard Gaelle Deletang will not reassure her. The 56-year-old, a member of the French capital's aquatic civil de-

fence team, got "diarrhoea and a rash" after swimming in the Seine in central Paris this winter, with the river looking decidedly brown in March as flood water poured over some of its banks. Several other volunteers "had a bug for three weeks... and everyone had stomach upsets", she added. Young adventurer Arthur Germain - who happens to be the mayor of Paris's son - also came across "zones where I had trouble breathing" from both industrial and agricultural pollution while when he swam the whole 777-kilometre length of the Seine in 2021. In deepest rural Burgundy - days before he got anywhere near Paris - he measured levels of faecal matter well above EU limits for swimming. Further north he swam past farmers spraying pesticides by the riverbank.

His "worst day", however, was a few kilometres downstream from the capital as he passed a sewage works at Gennevilliers. Yet there was progress in the summer of 2022, when the Seine passed EU water quality tests at three test points in Paris, only to fail at all 14 in the capital last year. With five big anti-pollution plants due to come on stream in the weeks leading up to the Games, Paris mayor Hidalgo was bullish on Tuesday, saying the "quality of the water will be right up there. "We are going to make it despite all the scepticism," she declared. Remi Delorme, captain of a boat that has been fishing rubbish from the river since 1980, has seen progress. His 20-metre (65-foot) catamaran Belenos sucks up rubbish from dead leaves and plastic bags to bicycles.

Delorme, 36, has seen it all. "Scooters, sofas, dead animals, and once or twice a year, human corpses. You get used to it," he told AFP. But year after year, the rubbish the boat hoovers up has been falling, from a high of 325 tonnes to 190 tonnes in 2020. The push to make the Seine swimmable for the Olympics has accelerated a French government plan to limit waste water and sewage getting into both it and the river Marne. A 2018 law obliges the boats and barges that line the Seine to be hooked up to the city's sewers to stop them flushing directly into the river. Officials said by March almost all were following the rules. "Uncontrolled flushing has a major impact on faecal bacteria in the river," said Jean-Marie Mouchel, professor of hydrology at the Sorbonne University.

PTI  
demands  
full court  
minus CJP

FROM PAGE 01

Islamabad High Court (IHC) penned letter to chief justice to take up the matter of spy agencies' meddling in judicial affairs in the Supreme Judicial Council but he referred the matter to the executive and prime minister was asked to form a commission to investigate the matter. However, he said that they should not forget that two persons who were implicated one of them was prime minister and other was operatives of intelligence agencies, adding that giving responsibility to an implicated person to constitute commission and appoint its head to look into the matter was in itself a crime in our view, which was committed by CJP. He made it clear that if punitive actions were not taken against the meddling of judicial affairs by operators of spy agencies, the practice could be not reined in come what may. PTI CIS stated that the entire judiciary was standing on one side about the interfering in judicial affairs, while the CJP on the other side, who always kept on saying that there was meddling in judiciary during his tenure despite the fact that even a common man knew that even today there was a judiciary was infringing upon.

Kundi hails  
PPP's role in  
uplifting...

FROM PAGE 01

Kundi asserted: "The PPP has always played a vital role in prioritising the interests of the people of Sindh and Balochistan." "Whenever, the PPP got the opportunity to come to power, the party increased the wages of the labourers," he added. Few days back, Kundi said that his party was having no issue in line with the talks with the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and military leadership. Addressing the press conference, Kundi asserted: "The PTI has five franchises. Each one of them has its own narrative. Those people who have been brought back to the country by the PTI are indulged in terrorism"

IMF team  
due on May  
15 for talks

FROM PAGE 01

A couple of days ago the IMF executive board had given the green light for a USD 1.1 billion loan tranche for Pakistan, signalling the conclusion of the second bailout package. Later the amount was transferred to the State Bank of Pakistan. This latest funding marks the third and final installment of a USD 3 billion standby arrangement with the IMF, crucial for Pakistan to stave off a sovereign default. Looking ahead, Pakistan is eyeing a new, more substantial IMF loan over a longer duration. Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb had indicated that Islamabad could secure a staff-level agreement on the new programme as early as July. The focus is on securing a loan spanning at least three years to bolster macroeconomic stability and implement much-needed structural reforms.

Pakistan  
condemns  
Herat...

FROM PAGE 01

"The people and government of Pakistan extend their heartfelt condolences to the people of Afghanistan. Our thoughts and prayers are with the victims and their families in this hour of grief," a Foreign Office statement said. "Pakistan condemns terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, including despicable attacks on places of worship," it added. While no group claimed the attack, the regional chapter of Da'ish is the largest security threat in Afghanistan and has frequently targeted Shia communities. The Taliban government has pledged to protect religious and ethnic minorities since returning to power in August 2021, but rights monitors say they've done little to make good on that promise.



## Briefs

## US novelist Paul Auster dies aged 77

NEW YORK: Paul Auster, the prolific American novelist whose works included "The New York Trilogy," has died of complications from lung cancer, a friend of the novelist told AFP. He was 77. Auster died on Tuesday evening at his home in Brooklyn surrounded by family, including his wife Siri Hustvedt and daughter Sophie Auster, his friend and fellow author Jacki Lyden said in a statement sent to AFP. He made his name with noirish, existentialist novels about lonely writers, outsiders and down-and-outers that were a huge hit in Europe particularly, author with the soulful, sunken eyes gained cult status in the 1980s and 1990s with his "New York Trilogy" of metaphysical mysteries and his hip film "Smoke," about the lost souls who frequent a Brooklyn tobacco shop.

Hustvedt, also an author, announced in March 2023 that he had been diagnosed with cancer. Auster's work straddles the divide between the middlebrow and the highbrow. His more than 30 books are as likely to be found in airports as on university reading lists and have been translated into more than 40 languages. His life was marred by tragedy in later years, with his 10-month-old granddaughter dying after ingesting heroin and his son Daniel, the child's father, dying of an overdose 10 months later. Lyden called Auster a "writer's writer" who covered "every facet of loss, loneliness, and the joys and sorrows of a life in words".

"He never lost touch with human suffering, and connectedness, and it made him the beloved writer he has become," she said. Auster grew up in Newark, New Jersey, the son of Jewish Polish immigrants.

He moved to New York to attend Columbia University and after graduating spent four years in France, where he made a living off translations while honing his craft as a writer. His big breakthrough came with "The New York Trilogy," a philosophical twist on the detective genre featuring a shady quartet of private investigators named Blue, Brown, Black, and White. His gift for sharp dialogue - Auster mercilessly edited himself for sentence rhythm - was key to the success of "Smoke," which he wrote and co-directed, about a Brooklyn smoke shop owner played by Harvey Keitel.—APP

## Finland's fading interest in Russian language

LAPPEENRANTA: Two Finnish towns near the Russian border plan to close schools offering Russian language and culture classes, upsetting parents and students who say cross-cultural understanding is needed more than ever.

Finland's relations with its powerful eastern neighbour have soured since Russia's 2022 invasion. The war prompted Helsinki to reverse its decades-long policy of military non-alignment and join NATO in April 2023, a decision that angered Moscow.

When the towns of Lappeenranta and Joensuu announced this year they would close their two schools focusing on Russian language and culture due to a lack of resources, school representatives saw it as fallout from the rise of anti-Russian sentiment in Finland since the war in Ukraine. The headmaster of the School of Eastern Finland, Katri Anttila, said town officials were no longer keen to maintain Russian language studies after the invasion.

"This is part of the same trend, which is very sad. I am happy we have parents and students who do not link the Russian language to Russian President (Vladimir) Putin and the Russian government, because language should never be linked to politics or a certain country," Anttila said. The School of Eastern Finland has three branches in the towns of Lappeenranta, Imatra and Joensuu, the only schools outside the capital Helsinki that offer Russian culture and language studies in addition to the Finnish curriculum.—DNA



ISLAMABAD: Apr30-Workers performing laborious job without any safety measures in a local industry in Sector 1-9 of Federal Capital. Labour Day being observed all over the world on May 1, which roots back to the fight for workers' rights in the 19th-century United States. On May 1st, 1886, a massive strike erupted with nearly 200,000 workers demanding an eight-hour workday. This movement turned violent in Chicago, culminating in the Haymarket Affair. The Government of Pakistan has ratified 36 ILO Conventions, including 8 fundamental conventions, as of now. In the South Asian sub-region, Pakistan is the second country that has ratified all eight fundamental conventions as enshrined in the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, still Labours unable to get their rights in the country.—ONLINE

## Traumatized Gazans bracing for Israel's full-scale assault on Rafah

There is an extraordinary, deep anxiety prevailing right now in Gaza because the question everybody asks is whether, yes or no, there would be a military offensive," UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini told

UNITED NATIONS: Ordinary Gazans remain in a "constant state of trauma" over an impending full-scale Israeli attack on the enclave's southernmost city of Rafah amid a growing number of strikes there, according to the head of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees. "There is an extraordinary, deep anxiety prevailing right now in Gaza because the question everybody asks is whether, yes or no, there would be a military offensive," UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini told reporters in Geneva on Tuesday. Following several reports by the UN aid coordination office, OCHA, of "intensive strikes on Rafah" that caused dozens of fatalities, Lazzarini said a full-scale invasion of Rafah - currently home to around one million displaced Gazans - depended on "whether or not a ceasefire deal will be reached this week". Despite renewed international pressure for a humanitarian pause, including from the United States, no breakthrough in negotiations has yet been announced. In the meantime, Gaza's hunger crisis has not gone away, the UNRWA chief said, pointing to "a spreading hunger and a looming famine", especially in the northern part of the

enclave. "The good news is that my colleagues have reported that there is more food available in the market - so increase the availability - but it still does not mean that the food is accessible just because there is absolutely no cash circulating in the northern part of the Gaza Strip." Echoing concerns in a regular update on the crisis, OCHA noted that the situation remains dire in Rafah, where residents "face severe challenges in accessing basic services such as healthcare, clean water and sanitation facilities". The UN aid coordination office added that the coastal water board had warned that the entire water and sanitation system was "nearing collapse". To address the rising need for safe drinking water, the Gaza utility and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) unveiled a solar-operated water desalination station in Rafah last week. It can produce enough potable water for 400 families at a school sheltering displaced people. To help meet still-desperate nutrition needs, UNICEF and more than a dozen humanitarian partners have also expanded outpatient treatment services for acutely malnourished children to more than 100 sites across Gaza, includ-

ing more than 50 in Rafah and three dozen in the north. In a glimmer of good news, Lazzarini said that more humanitarian supplies have entered the enclave in past weeks than in previous months, but it is "still far from enough to reverse the negative trend we have seen". UNRWA's requests to send aid convoys continue to be "systematically denied" by Israel, he continued, adding that the laborious process of having to unload and reload supplies to allow for inspection increased delays that were already impacted by operating hours of the crossing into Gaza that vary "from one day to another". The crossing into Gaza could also be closed at a moment's notice and "many times a week" by the Israeli authorities, the UN official said, "because they are just dumping released detainees or dumping sometimes (Palestinians) bodies who have been taken to Israel and back to the Gaza Strip". After renewing his call in common with the UN Secretary-General for the "unconditional and immediate release" of all Israeli hostages still held in Gaza, the UNRWA chief underscored deep concerns for all Gazans detained by the Israeli Security Forces. Citing testimonies

of released detainees, Lazzarini explained that they described being "routinely rounded up, stripped to their underwear and loaded into trucks, blindfolded and bound". Once arrested, the detainees remained incommunicado and faced "shocking inhumane treatment, including waterboarding, severe beatings, attacks by dogs and being forced to hold that stress position for hours, sometimes 12 hours, 24 hours". Detainees who Israel suspected of Hamas affiliation were also forced to wear a diaper instead of being able to go to the toilet and were also "pressured" to state that UNRWA was "politically affiliated" in the Gaza Strip, in violation of its neutral status. Gaza health authorities report that at least 34,500 Palestinians have been killed and more than 77,700 wounded in Israeli attacks since 7 October. To date, 182 UNRWA staff have been killed and more than 160 of the agency's premises have been damaged or totally destroyed, the Commissioner-General reported. "Most of these premises were sheltering displaced people and more than 400 people have been killed in these premises," he said, before condemning the use of these facil-

ties for military purposes after they were vacated, many in northern Gaza. This "blatant disregard of the United Nations" must be investigated once the war ends to prevent it becoming the "new standard" in warfare, Lazzarini insisted. Turning to unproven allegations of Hamas collusion involving UNRWA staff, the Commissioner-General repeatedly stressed the agency's neutrality, backed by the recently published findings of the Colonna inquiry, and noted that a separate UN investigation into 19 individuals had completely cleared one staff member of any wrongdoing and had been paused into four other cases, since no further information had been provided to justify the accusations. Speaking in French to reject serial, unfounded allegations that have circulated since the outbreak of hostilities that hundreds of UNRWA staff were members of armed groups, Lazzarini said "for the moment, these were just 'statements' lacking any substantiating information." In a related development on Tuesday, the UN's top court rejected a call to take action against Germany over the country's arms exports to Israel.—APP

## Judge threatens Trump with jail over gag order violations

NEW YORK: The New York judge presiding over Donald Trump's hush money trial fined the former president on Tuesday for defying a gag order and warned that further violations could see him thrown in jail. Trump, 77, is accused of falsifying business records to reimburse his lawyer, Michael Cohen, for a \$130,000 payment made to porn star Stormy Daniels just days ahead of the 2016 election, in which Trump ran against Hillary Clinton. Keith Davidson, Daniels' former lawyer, spent several hours on the witness stand on Tuesday testifying about the negotiations he held with Cohen to secure the X-rated movie star's silence about an alleged 2006 sexual encounter with Trump. Before Davidson's testimony, Judge Juan Merchan held Trump in contempt of court for multiple violations of a gag order he imposed on the former president ahead of the trial prohibiting him from publicly attacking witnesses, jurors or court staff and their relatives. Fined Trump \$1,000 each for nine specific violations of the gag order, and instructed him to remove seven "offending posts" from his Truth Social account and two from a campaign website. The posts were removed Tuesday afternoon. Lamenting that he could not impose a fine "more commensurate with the wealth of the contemnor," the judge warned Trump, "the first former president to face criminal charges - that he could be jailed if he continues to violate the gag order. Defendant is hereby warned that the Court will not tolerate continued willful violations of its lawful orders and that if necessary and appropriate under the circumstances, it will impose an incarceration punishment," Merchan said.—Agencies

## April temperatures in Bangladesh hottest on record: forecaster

DHAKA: Bangladesh last month saw the hottest average April temperatures since the country began keeping weather records in 1948, a senior forecaster told AFP on Wednesday. "2024 was the hottest April since 1948 in terms of hot days and area coverage in the country," Bangladesh Meteorological Department senior forecaster Muhammad Abul Kalam Mallik said. Bangladesh remains in the grips of a suffocating heatwave that prompted authorities to close schools nationwide, with temperatures not expected to moderate until Thursday. "This year the heatwave covered around 80 percent of the country. We've not seen such unbroken and expansive heatwaves before," Mallik said. Mallik said the 30-year average daily temperature for April between 1981 and 2010 was 33.2 degrees Celsius, but this year weather stations around the country recorded temperatures of between two and eight degrees higher. He added that Bangladesh had not seen the usual pre-monsoon April thunderstorms which normally cools the South Asian nation ahead of summer.—APP

## S. Korea to participate in AUKUS tech pact

SYDNEY: South Korea's defence minister on Wednesday said his country was actively discussing participation in a landmark defence technology pact between Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States. "During today's meeting we also discussed the possibility of partnering with AUKUS pillar two," Shin Won-sik said, referring to a pact focused on developing hypersonic weapons, drones and other advanced technologies. Shin was speaking after a meeting of Australian and South Korean defence and foreign ministers in Melbourne. AUKUS was established in 2021 with two main goals in mind: "Pillar one" aims to provide Australia with a fleet of nuclear-powered attack submarines. South Korea is not expected to be part of that project. "Pillar two" focuses on developing advanced warfighting capabilities such as artificial intelligence, undersea drones and hypersonic missiles. Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States have said they are open to other partners taking part, with Japan, South Korea and New Zealand all said to be in consideration. Shin welcomed his country being considered as a means to "enhance regional peace". "Korea is obviously a country with deeply impressive technology," said Australian defence minister Richard Marles. "So as AUKUS pillar two develops, I think there will be opportunities in the future". Bordered by North Korea, Seoul has one of the largest and most technologically advanced militaries in the region. "We do welcome that AUKUS members are considering Korea as an AUKUS pillar two partner," Shin said. "Korea's defence, science and technology capabilities will contribute to peace and stability, (and) to the development of AUKUS pillar two." AUKUS has been strongly opposed by China, which sees the pact as provoking division in Asia and risking nuclear proliferation. In recent years, Beijing has tried to chip away at US influence across the Pacific. Washington has responded by trying to bind allies tighter together through a latticework of bilateral and multilateral pacts. DNA

## Pakistan academics sow seeds of cross-border agricultural cooperation

DNA

BEIJING: Hafiz Muhammad Usman, a post-doctoral fellow at Guizhou University, felt a sense of gratitude that he could introduce the advanced agricultural technologies he learnt in China to his motherland Pakistan. Since 2017, Guizhou University has initiated the "Ph.D. Village Chief" program, and invited doctoral students, postgraduates and undergraduates to join the agricultural activities and apply their achievements in scientific research to agricultural development in rural areas, particularly back in their hometowns. This year, it was the first time the university invited foreigners to take part in the "Ph.D. Village Chief" program, attracting five post-doctoral fellows from Pakistan and India, according to Wang Yong, professor and deputy director of the department of plant production in the College of Agriculture,

Guizhou University, Xinhua reported. Usman came to study in China in 2017 and gained his doctor's degree at Huazhong Agricultural University in central China's Hubei Province. He decided to continue to carry out post-doctoral research at Guizhou University in 2023, and now serves as a fungal disease expert at the plant protection department. The key researches carried out by the College of Agriculture of Guizhou University are the creation of green pesticides, the continuous control of crop diseases and pests, as well as quality and safety management of agricultural products. Pepper is one of the major agricultural produces in Guizhou. Over the past few years, pepper production had been affected as plant pathogens developed resistance to fungicides. Usman and other members of the research team took samples across the province and carried out experiments to

find effective chemical alternatives to control drug-resistant fungal populations and increase pepper yields. In January this year, he went back to Pakistan for the winter vacation. During the one-and-a-half-month he spent back at home, he visited local agricultural departments and some villages. He discovered that local farmers hardly mastered the technologies to deal with plant diseases and pests. He then organized three seminars with the support of local agricultural research institutes, sharing with more than 500 local farmers sustainable methods to control plant diseases. Besides seminars, he also walked into the fields and taught farmers on-site methods to recognize pests and diseases as well as to prepare pesticides in the correct proportion. Maqsood Ahmed, also a postdoctoral fellow and member of the "Ph.D. Village Chief" program at Guizhou

University, hails from a major agricultural province of Pakistan, which mainly produces cereals and fruits, including maize, wheat, mango and banana. During the winter vacation, Ahmed visited the agricultural department in his hometown and learnt about problems affecting local agricultural development. He organized several seminars in local universities to exchange advanced technologies he has learned in China with Pakistani teachers and students. Ahmed promoted green pest control techniques suitable to local crops. Ahmed said that these techniques, including using biological control, pheromone traps and repellents, microbial pesticides, natural predators and beneficial insects, focus on managing pests in an environment-friendly and sustainable manner, minimizing the use of synthetic chemicals and reducing harm to non-target organisms and ecological systems.

## Southern China road collapse kills 19

BEIJING: At least 19 people died when part of a highway collapsed in southern China's Guangdong province on Wednesday, state media reported. State broadcaster CCTV said a stretch of road between Meizhou city and Dabu county in Guangdong province caved in at around 2:10 am (1810 GMT). The incident caused 18 vehicles to become trapped and involved a total of 49 people, CCTV said. As of 11:45 am, "19 people have been confirmed dead, and 30 are receiving all-out emergency care in hospital", according to the broadcaster. It added that the lives of those hospitalised were "not currently at risk" but did not specify their injuries. Social media footage shared by local news outlets showed flames and smoke emanating from a deep, dark pit into which cars seemed to have plummeted. Other clips showed around half a dozen people standing on a roadside gazing at the flashing lights of emergency vehicles in the distance. Authorities have dispatched around 500 people to the site to help with the rescue operation, CCTV reported. They are drawn from departments handling public security, emergency response, firefighting and mining rescue, according to the broadcaster. Local authorities said in a notice that part of the S12 highway was closed in both directions and ordered drivers to take detours.—APP



## Briefs

### CM Maryam suggests critics serve people

ABID RAZA

LAHORE: Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz has suggested her detractors also serve the people so that their videos will also be made, asking them to get out of their rooms and serve. In her speech at the inauguration ceremony of a field hospital in Lahore, the chief minister said it was a dream to provide health facilities to the people at their doorsteps. "I congratulate those who made the project of field hospitals a success. A field hospital has all the facilities of a clinic," she announced. She further said that the facility of lady health workers will also be available at the field hospital, as well as OPD, immunization, and first aid. The facility of surgery is also available in case of an emergency, besides the availability of X-ray machines, radiology, ultrasound, ECG, a pharmacy, and maternal and child health services. Maryam Nawaz said the Punjab government will provide health facilities to the poor, adding that medicines will be stored in Punjab in a modern way. She further said that former prime minister Nawaz Sharif started the health card program and ran it successfully. For this purpose, she said hospitals with 10 beds each were built, while the health cards were previously used to favour patients on a referral basis. The CM further said that Pakistan's first state-of-the-art cancer hospital was going to be built, which will start functioning in a year. The construction of the cancer hospital is going on day and night, she said, adding that state-of-the-art hospitals will be built in every district of Punjab. Maryam also dispelled the impression that the upcoming air ambulance service was being launched for the rich, saying it would cater to the poor rather.

### Students hold demo against Israeli aggression

DNA

LAHORE: Hundreds of students from different universities on Tuesday held a protest demonstration outside the US consulate against Israeli aggression in Palestine. Male and female students were wearing keffiyehs (a Palestinian national symbol) to express unwavering solidarity with Palestinians and condemn the ongoing genocide perpetrated by the state of Israel with the support of the US. The students were carrying Palestine flags and placards inscribed with slogans against Israel and America and in favour of Palestine. The protest was led by the Progressive Students Collective (PSC) and joined by diverse groups of students, social and political activists, academics, artists, and concerned citizens from all walks of life, united in their demand for justice and freedom for Palestine.



KARACHI: President Asif Ali Zardari chairing a meeting on security/law and order situation of Sindh at Chief Minister House. - DNA

## Iran's Khamenei calls for mounting pressure on Israel

The issue of Gaza tops the world's issues. At the international scene, the Zionists and their American and European supporters are doing whatever they can to cross out the issue of Gaza from the agenda of the world's public opinion, but all in vain," Ayatollah Khamenei said

NEWS DESK

TEHRAN: Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has called for piling up pressure on the Israeli regime so that the issue of Palestinians in the besieged Gaza Strip cannot be undermined. Ayatollah Khamenei made the remarks in an address to a group of teachers and academics on Wednesday on the occasion of the National Teachers' Day, which marks the martyrdom anniversary of Ayatollah Morteza Motahhari. "Today, the issue of Gaza tops the world's issues. At the international scene, the Zionists and their American and European supporters are doing whatever they can to cross out the issue of Gaza from the agenda of the world's public opinion, but all in vain," Ayatollah Khamenei said. The Leader pointed to the pro-Palestine protest by students in American and European universities, and said, "Nations have become sensitive to the Gaza issue as it is the world's top one. We should not allow this issue to be removed from the world's public opinion, and pressure must increase on the Zionist regime day by day." Touching on the US police violence and excessive force against student protesters, the Leader said the harsh treatment attested to the Islamic Republic's rightful stance regarding its mistrust of America. "Look at how the Americans and the relevant bodies in the country are dealing with verbal opposition to Israel. The students of US universities did not vandalize anything, did not shout destructive slogans, did not kill anyone, did not set fire to any place, did not break any glass; [but] this is how they are being treated," the Leader said.

## Blinken urges Hamas to agree Gaza truce

JERUSALEM: Top US diplomat Antony Blinken urged Hamas to accept a truce in the Gaza Strip on Wednesday, after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed to send troops into its far southern city of Rafah. Washington has heightened pressure on all sides to reach a ceasefire - a message pushed by Blinken, who was on his seventh regional tour since the Gaza war broke out in October. An Israeli official told AFP the government "will wait for answers until Wednesday night", and then "make a decision" whether to send a delegation to indirect talks being brokered by US, Egyptian and Qatari mediators in Cairo. The Palestinian militant group said it was considering a plan for a 40-day ceasefire and the exchange of scores of hostages for larger numbers of Palestinian prisoners. Hamas, whose envoys returned from Cairo talks to their base in Qatar, would "discuss the ideas and the proposal", said a Hamas source, adding: "We are keen to respond as quickly as possible." Blinken put the ball squarely in Hamas's court. "There is a very strong proposal on the table right now. Hamas needs to say yes, and needs to get this done," he said. But analysts questioned whether Hamas would sign up to another temporary ceasefire like the week-long truce that saw more than 100 hostages released in November, knowing that Israeli troops could resume their onslaught as soon as it was over. Meanwhile, the president of the European Commission has expressed opposition to Israel's planned ground invasion of the city of Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip, denouncing the possible imminent attack as "completely unacceptable." Ursula von der Leyen made the remarks on Tuesday, after Israel said it had approved final plans for the

phased invasion of Rafah despite growing international opposition. It would be "completely unacceptable" for Israel to attack Rafah, she said, adding that the EU Commission would "sit down" with its member states and "act on that" if Israel invaded Rafah. Von der Leyen also noted, "I'm never drawing red lines, but I think it would be completely unacceptable if (Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin) Netanyahu would invade," in response to a question whether attacking Rafah would constitute "a red line" and result in EU sanctions against Israel. The European Commission chief further described as "unbearable" and "unacceptable" the situation in Rafah, while recalling her visit to the city. She also reiterated her call for a ceasefire in Gaza and the so-called two-state solution as "the only solution that will bring peace to the region." On Tuesday, Netanyahu pledged to carry out the planned ground invasion of Rafah, whether or not a ceasefire and a swap deal is reached with the Palestinian resistance movement Hamas. His remarks came after the Israeli military's chief of staff, Herzli Halevi, said the military had approved final plans for the phased invasion of Rafah as well as the refugee camps in the central part of Gaza in the next 72 hours. Rafah, situated in the Gaza Strip's closed southern border with Egypt, is home to around 1.5 million Palestinians who have been displaced due to Israel's ongoing genocidal campaign in the besieged territory. Israel had designated Rafah a "safe zone," but in recent months it has been threatening a full-scale military aggression, leaving the people sheltering there terrified with nowhere to go. The assault has mounted fears over a new carnage against Palestinians and drawn global condemnations. - Agencies

Ayatollah Khamenei underlined that Palestine belongs to its "original owners" and normalization attempts will not calm the situation in the West Asia region. "Palestine must return to its original owners. Palestine belongs to the Palestinian people, including Muslims, Christians and Jews;

Palestine is for them and should return to them... this is how the problem of the West Asia region will be solved," the Leader said. "Some imagine that forcing neighboring countries to normalize their ties with the Zionist regime will iron out the problem. No, they are mistaken," the Leader added.



BANJUL: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Mohammad Ishaq Dar in meeting with Gambian Minister of Petroleum and Energy Nani Juwara accompanied by Foreign Secretary, Muhammad Syrus Sajjad. He arrives in Gambia for the 15th OIC Islamic summit. - DNA

## Australia tiptoes around Indian spy scandal

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said he would not comment on intelligence matters, after a public broadcaster broke the news citing unnamed "national security and government figures"

FOREIGN DESK

CANBERRA: A string of senior Australian ministers on Wednesday refused to confirm reports that a "nest" of Indian spies had been uncovered in the country and expelled - allegations that threaten to damage a burgeoning alliance. Australia's prime minister and foreign, defence and treasury ministers all dodged questions about allegations that Indian spooks tried to steal defence secrets and monitor expatriate communities in 2020. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said he would not comment on intelligence matters, after public broadcaster ABC broke the news citing unnamed "national security and government figures". Intelligence bosses revealed in 2021 that they had rumbled a "nest of spies" sent to Australia to steal defence secrets and monitor their country's expats. Although the foreign spies were expelled from the country at the time, Australian officials have long refused to say who they were working for. Local media now claim to have solved the mystery, with ABC alleging they were intelligence operatives dispatched from India. The revelations are politically awkward for Canberra, given the growing security relationship between India and Australia. Alongside the United States and Japan, they are members of the Quad security partnership.

Albanese wooed Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a visit to Australia last year, referring to him as the "boss" during a massive rally of Indian-Australians. Like many Western capitals, Canberra has chosen to play down concerns about the sectarian policies and democratic backsliding of Modi's Hindu-nationalist government, in favour of developing trade and defence ties. Relations between India and Canada cratered after Prime Minister Justin Trudeau publicly linked Indian intelligence to the killing of a Canadian citizen, a Sikh separatist, on Canadian soil. New Delhi called the allegations "absurd". Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong refused to comment on "intelligence matters", although she said it was crucial to "assert the importance of our democratic principles". Wong said Australia would "maintain the resilience of our democracy, including in the face of any suggestion of foreign interference". "And we have laws to deal with that," she added. Treasurer Jim Chalmers said it was "not something I'm prepared to go into" - but stressed Australia had a "good relationship with India". Top spymaster Mike Burgess has previously accused the spies of trying to cultivate politicians, police and embassy staff. "They tried to obtain classified information about Australia's trade relationships," he said in 2021, without naming their nationality. "They asked a public servant to provide information on security protocols at a major airport." The Indian High Commission did not respond to a request for comment.

### Staff 'posed' as patients during Australian minister's clinic tour

SYDNEY: When an Australian state health minister toured an urgent care clinic, she saw how busy staff treated patients in crisis - one rushed in by ambulance, another lying injured on a trolley. But all was not as it seemed during Victoria Health Minister Mary-Anne Thomas's visit last year to the clinic in the Colac health area, southwest of the state capital Melbourne. Things were apparently not busy enough. So "approximately 10" local health staff posed as patients and sat in the waiting room, said an independent investigation into the August 9 visit released Wednesday. In addition, "at least one ambulance" happened to arrive during the ministerial visit "containing an individual who posed as a patient" despite not needing treatment, it said. One area health worker "who had presented with an injury but who was not actually seeking medical treatment, occupied a trolley in the back corridor", the probe by Wise Workplace Solutions found. After the visit, the pretend patients' registrations in the system were cancelled and they left "without any treatment being administered". "I didn't notice anything in particular. I had no reason to think that anything was untoward," the health minister told reporters. "I'm very disappointed. I don't need our health services to be staging fake patients for me to know that our health system is facing challenges." Victoria's health department said the incident was "inappropriate". - APP

### Mian Iftikhar elected ANP KP president

SHAMIM SHAHID

PESHAWAR: Mian Iftikhar Hussain was elected as ANP Khyber Pakhtunkhwa president during the intra-party elections. ANP spokesperson announced that Hussain Shah Yousafzai secured the position of provincial general secretary, and Arslan Khan was elected as the provincial information secretary. Moreover, Syed Aqil Shah was elected as the senior vice president.

## Summer Camp

### Season 7

Package	1 Activity	2 Activity	3 Activity
1 Child	55,000	70,000	85,000
2 Children	65,000	80,000	95,000
3 Children	75,000	90,000	105,000
4 Children	85,000	100,000	115,000
5 Children	95,000	110,000	125,000
6 Children	105,000	120,000	135,000

**ACTIVITIES**

- Swimming
- Kids Aerobics
- Taekwondo
- Kids Yoga

**RULES & REGULATIONS**

Each activity will run for three consecutive weeks, missing days will not be compensated.

The female instructor only available for ladies.

15% discount on all Masha services and pool bar menu for the participants and their parents.

For registration, please scan the QR code and email the participant's birth certificate and photograph to [masha@islamabadserena.com.pk](mailto:masha@islamabadserena.com.pk) mentioning "summer camp 2024" in the subject line.

The offer cannot be combined with any other discounts or promotions.

Participants can participate in one activity per day.

Participating children are to be accompanied by one of their parents.

The timings of the classes will be assigned at the time of registration for the entire program, however, changing the time will be subject to availability.

Limited seats available.

All prices are subject to government taxes.

For more information please scan QR code or call: 051 2062549

Valid from 1st April to 31st August, 2024