

# Independent

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ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif chairs a meeting regarding the induction of technical advisors and consultants from the private sector into Public Sector.

## Judges letter suo motu notice: Attack on judiciary's independence won't be tolerated: CJP Isa

Says SC is taking letter by IHC judges very seriously; Judges must be sure that they are not in danger; Supreme Court indicates for constitution of full court

ISLAMABAD (INP): Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Qazi Faez Isa on Wednesday said that an "attack of any kind" on the judiciary's independence would not be tolerated.

He made the remarks as the Supreme Court took up a suo motu case pertaining to allegations made by six Islamabad High Court (IHC) judges regarding interference by the country's security apparatus in the judicial affairs. A seven-member bench — comprising Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Qazi Faez Isa and justices Syed Mansoor Ali Shah, Yahya Afridi, Jamal Khan Mandokhail, Athar Minalah, Musarrat Hilali and Naem Akhtar

— is presiding over the hearing. The proceedings are being live-streamed on the SC's website and its YouTube channel. Last week, it emerged that six Islamabad High Court (IHC) judges — out of a total strength of eight — wrote a startling letter to the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) members, regarding attempts to pressure judges through the abduction and torture of their relatives as well as secret surveillance inside their homes.

The letter was signed by judges Mohsin Akhtar Kayani, Tariq Mehmood Jahangiri, Babar Sattar, Sardar Ejaz Ishaq Khan, Arbab Muhammad Tahir and Saman Rafat Imtiaz. A day later, calls emerged from various quarters for a probe into the investigation, amid which CJP Isa summoned a full court meeting of the SC judges.

On Thursday, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif met CJP Isa, where the two decided to form an inquiry commission, which was later approved by the federal cabinet.

However, lawyers and civil society members — in a joint letter — had urged the top court to take "cognisance of the matter in its jurisdiction under Article 184(3) of the Constitution as this issue eminently relates to public interest and to the enforcement of fundamental rights".



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Power Sardar Awais Ahmed Khan Leghari presiding over a meeting regarding solarizing agricultural tubewells in Balochistan.

## CJP Isa, SC judges too get threatening letters with suspicious powder

LHC judges also received such letters: DIG Operations; CTD officer says threatening letters sent from GPO Rawalpindi

ISLAMABAD (Agencies): After Islamabad High Court (IHC) jurists, letters containing suspicious powdery substance and threatening messages have been posted to the Supreme Court (SC) judges, including Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Qazi Faez Isa, Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Operations confirmed before IHC's top judge on Wednesday. "Four Supreme Court judges have also received such letters," DIG Operation apprised the IHC Chief Justice Aamer Farooq who was conducting the hearing of cipher case today. The police officer was summoned to the rostrum by the IHC's top jurist during the hearing and questioned about the Tuesday's event of letters to the judges which suspectedly contain anthrax powder. It emerged that the

judges who received such posts on April 1 include CJP Isa, Justice Athar Minalah, Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhail, and Justice Aminuddin Khan, sources told a private tv channel. The letters have been handed over to the Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD). Additionally, a letter was also received by the top court's senior most Justice Mansoor Ali Shah which was posted by a woman named Gul Shad, the sources added. During the hearing, the DIG Operations told the high court that all envelopes containing letters and powdery substance have been sent for analysis to the lab. Moreover, the police department also wrote to the post master general to question why they cannot read a stamp properly, he added.

## Govt decides to solarize agricultural tube-wells in Balochistan

ISLAMABAD (Online): In Balochistan, agricultural tube-wells will be converted to solar energy to save power.

This was decided at a meeting chaired by Minister for Power Sardar Awais Ahmed Khan Leghari in Islamabad.

He directed officials from the Quetta Electric Supply Company to provide detailed information regarding feeders dedicated to agricultural tube wells.

## PPP chief pays homage to Zulfiqar Bhutto

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chairman, Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has offered glowing homage to the founding chairman of the party and Pakistan's first elected Prime Minister, Quaid-e-Awam Shaheed Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, on the occasion of his 45th martyrdom anniversary, being observed on April 4 (Thursday).

According to the press release, he expressed that as the nation commemorates the anniversary of its revered leader's martyrdom, there is a poignant sense of satisfaction tinged with sorrow, witnessing the country's justice system finally acknowledge its complicit role in the martyrdom of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto.



ISLAMABAD: PPP Chairman, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari in meeting with PPP Vice Chairman Syed Yusuf Raza Gilani along with Senator Rana Mahmood-ul-Hassan, held at Zardari House in Islamabad.

## President Zardari lauds army's exemplary role in safeguarding country's territorial integrity

COAS congratulates Zardari on becoming Commander in Chief of Armed Forces; Apprises President regarding army's operations against terrorism

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Syed Asim Munir, NI (M) Wednesday called on President Asif Ali Zardari, at the Presidency and apprised him about the ongoing Army operations against terrorism highlighting the operational preparedness against conventional threats.

In the meeting, the COAS extended felicitations on his appointment as the President of Pakistan and Commander in Chief of Armed Forces and conveyed his sincere wishes for a successful tenure, a press release issued by the President House said.

The COAS also intimated about the contributions of the Army towards development initiatives, particularly in the regions of Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The president acknowledged the exemplary role of the Armed Forces of Pakistan, affirming that the Army's contributions have been instrumental in safeguarding the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the state.

He commended the Army's efforts towards social uplift of the affected areas, underscoring the unwavering commitment of the Pakistan Army to national progress. The president emphasised Pakistan's steadfast commitment against terrorism and reaffirmed the nation's resolve to respond with full force through all elements of national power.

He noted with grave concern the baseless and unsubstantiated allegations levelled by a specific political party and its few individuals against the institution and its leadership to accrue narrow political interests and resolved to deal with such disruptive elements with iron hand.

The president paid homage to the martyrs who sacrificed their lives for the nation, emphasizing that their blood will forever symbolize the resilience and strength of the Pakistani nation. He reiterated the nation's unwavering commitment to honouring the sacrifices of the Shuhadas and their families, holding them in the highest esteem. The meeting concluded on a note of solidarity and determination to uphold the values of peace, security, and progress in Pakistan.

ISLAMABAD: Chief of Army Staff (COAS), General Syed Asim Munir, NI (M), calls on President Asif Ali Zardari, at Aiwan-e-Sadr.



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## PM stresses upon new initiatives to attract top talent

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday said that new initiatives to attract and retain top talent would be rolled out to secure Pakistan's success and stressed that Pakistan must build a world-class talent pool because this was an age where talent made all the difference to a nation's success.

The prime minister chaired a meeting regarding the induction of technical advisors and consultants from the private sector into public sector, PM Office Media Wing said in a press release.

Federal Ministers Muhammad Aurangzeb, Dr. Musadiq Malik, Ahmad Cheema, Attaullah Tarar, Sardar Awais Leghari, Deputy Chairman Planning Commission Muhammad Jehanzeb, Minister of State Shaza Fatima and high-level officials attended the meeting.

The meeting discussed ways to create a more capable workforce that could be able to deliver the government's policy programme effectively, and also founded on the principles of impartiality and recruitment on merit.

The prime minister noted that the need to focus on attracting and retaining top talent was as urgent and as important as their focus on investments in the country. "Businesses want to invest in places where the talent is; where the politics and policies are stable, and where the system works", he added.

He also appointed a committee under the chairmanship of finance minister to seek and firm up propositions in the policy to enhance and clarify the work pass framework currently in vogue in ministries to better support Pakistan's need for talent with the directions to submit its findings at the earliest.

The meeting noted a dearth of technical input at policy making levels and emphasized its need, which was imperative if the civil service was to develop new skills, improve its management of big projects and adapt to the demands of a digital age.

## Defence Minister calls for boosting Pak-Italy coop. in defense production

ISLAMABAD (INP): Minister for Defence and Defence Production Khawaja Muhammad Asif has emphasized the need to explore areas of cooperation with Italy in the field of joint defence production.

Talking to Ambassador of Italy, Marilina Armell in Islamabad today, he said Pakistan attaches great importance to its relations with the Republic of Italy and wants to further enhance defence collaboration.



Defence Minister said the exchange of military training can be mutually beneficial and Italian Armed Forces have valuable military exposure while Pakistan Armed Forces have rich experience in counter terrorism operations.

During the meeting latest security situation along the Pak-Afghan Border and Pakistan's commitment to peace and stability in the region also came under discussion.

## Journalists delegation calls on Jam Kamal

ISLAMABAD (APP): Azhar Jatoi, the newly elected President of the National Press Club on Thursday led a delegation to meet with Federal Commerce Minister Jam Kamal Khan. The meeting, attended by key officials from both sides, focused on fostering collaboration between the media and government for effective communication and transparency in trade and commerce-related matters, said a press release issued here.

During the discussion, Azhar Jatoi emphasized the importance of a strong relationship between the National Press Club and the Ministry of Commerce, pledging to facilitate close coordination in the future. Minister Jam Kamal Khan echoed this sentiment, highlighting the vital role of the press in informing the public about government initiatives and policies. President Azhar Jatoi underscored the National Press Club's role in representing journalists and facilitating constructive dialogue between the media and policymakers.

The meeting concluded with a mutual pledge to maintain open lines of communication and collaborate on initiatives aimed at promoting economic growth and development through effective media engagement.

## Govt announces four public holidays for Eidul Fitr

ISLAMABAD (INP): The federal government on Wednesday announced a four-day holiday for the occasion of Eidul Fitr.

According to a statement released by the Cabinet Division, the holidays have been scheduled from Wednesday, April 10, to Saturday, April 13, providing a four-day long break for citizens to celebrate the holy festival.

Eidul Fitr is a significant festival in the Islamic calendar, celebrated at the end of the Holy month of Ramadan.

## Two children among four died in Kalat car-coach collision

QUETTA (APP): A tragic accident occurred on Wednesday on the National Highway near Panja area of Kalat district, resulting in the deaths of at least two children and two others.

Four individuals also sustained injuries in the collision between a car and a passenger coach.

According to Levies sources, a Pishin-bound car from Karachi carrying a family was on its way when it hit a Karachi-bound passenger coach from Quetta that was coming opposite direction on the National Highway near Panja Kalat.

As a result, four people including two brothers died on the spot while four others received injuries.

The bodies and the injured were shifted to a nearby hospital where the injured victims' treatment was started. Levies force registered a case.

## Pakistan wants to further strengthen trade ties with UAE: Tarar

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister of Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar said on Wednesday that under the vision of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Pakistan wanted to further strengthen trade and business ties with brotherly country United Arab Emirates (UAE).

During a meeting with the UAE Ambassador to Pakistan Hamad Obaid Ibrahim Salem Al-Zaabi here, he said that there was a need to create a common road map for the improvement of the economy.

During the meeting discussion was held on issues of mutual interest including bilateral relations, promotion of cooperation in various sectors. The minister said that Pakistan and the UAE enjoyed strong ties based on common heritage and multilateral cooperation. People of Pakistan consider UAE as their second home, the minister said adding the first flight of Emirates Airline was flown by a pilot of PIA, which was a great example of cooperation between the two countries.

He said that late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan had very close relationship with the leadership and people of Pakistan. The minister briefed the UAE ambassador about the economic initiatives of the present government.

He said that tax reforms were being brought in Federal Bureau of Revenue and efforts were being done for digitalization of the economic sector.

## Punjab cabinet approves setting up of special speedy trial courts

LAHORE (INP): The Punjab Cabinet has approved the establishment of special speedy trial courts where rape and child abuse cases will be heard.

The approval was given during the fifth meeting of the provincial cabinet held under the chairmanship of Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz in Lahore on Wednesday.

As per the decision of the cabinet, the speedy trial courts legislation will soon land in the Punjab Assembly for approval. In the meeting, a briefing on the amendment of defamation law and establishment of the special court was given to the Chief Minister.

The meeting was briefed that in a defamation case, the degree must be completed within 90 days and the trial within 180 days while defamation notices can be given through major newspapers, social media, and couriers.

The Punjab Cabinet also approved the amendments in the Punjab Alternative Dispute Resolution Act 2019 and the formation of the Standing Committee on Legal Affairs.

In the meeting, the Punjab Cabinet approved the removal of the chairman of the Drug Court Gujranwala on the complaint of misconduct.

Addressing the meeting, CM Maryam Nawaz said the culture of lying and false accusations should be changed.



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Iran H.E. Dr. Raza Amiri Moghaddam calls on Federal Minister for Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resources Development Chaudhry Salik Hussain.

## Daily Voice of Masses Independent

### Senate elections

The Senate returned to almost its full strength yesterday after an unusually sedate election. Unfortunately, polling for KP's seats could not be held due to an ongoing stand-off between the provincial government and the ECP over reserved seats.

Meanwhile, there were few reports of the feverish wheeling-dealing and horse-trading that have, in the past, marred the conduct of Senate polls, which are held every three years to elect half of the total strength of the Upper House.

All of the candidates for Balochistan's seats were declared winners unopposed, while in Punjab, the PTI, PML-N, and PPP reportedly reached an understanding that allowed its seven general seats to be filled without contest. Punjab's five remaining seats — two for women, two for technocrats, and one for minorities — were all grabbed by the PML-N, thanks to its majority in the provincial assembly. In Sindh, the PPP secured all seats but two, which went to the MQM-P and Faisal Vawda, respectively.

Considering the drama surrounding the general election that took place just about two months earlier, the Senate election, at least on the face of it, managed to steer clear of any serious controversies. However, one need only look at the list of returned candidates to begin wondering whether the same forces and considerations prevailed.

For example, both the caretaker prime minister and chief minister of Punjab, who supposedly do not have any party affiliation, managed to secure a seat each, unopposed. The speculation was that they were rewarded for the 'services' they had rendered. The PML-N sacrificed a loyalist's seat for former bureaucrat Ahmad Cheema, while 'independent' candidate Faisal Vawda magically won the PPP's support for his candidature at the last minute, despite having nothing obvious to offer in return. Observers naturally connected his good fortune to friends in high places.

These elections also seemed like the end of an era in some respects. The PPP sidelined long-time loyalists and seasoned politicians like Raza Rabbani and Waqar Mehdī when handing out tickets, while the PML-N was forced to ignore stalwarts like Khawaja Saad Rafique, Rana Sanaulah, Khurram Dastgir and Javed Latif while handing its seats over to outsiders.

Finally, a comment on these Senate elections would not be complete without a word on how far-reaching the consequences of interfering in general elections can be. For example, the quarrel over public representation triggered by the ECP's 'bat verdict' still rages and resulted in elections for KP's seats being delayed yesterday.

And, because Senate seats are generally apportioned based on each party's strength in their respective assemblies, one could not help but be reminded of the controversies that still surround how these assemblies were formed. One can only hope that all this legislative power, now secured, will not be abused.

## Beyond Bhutto

Mahir Ali

The morning of April 4, 1979, lingers in the memory. I woke up to get ready for school, and found my mother red-eyed. Even before she uttered a word, I guessed the worst had come to pass. She tearfully confirmed it. A detestable military regime had killed Pakistan's first elected prime minister.

It wasn't entirely a surprise, but it was undoubtedly a shock. Many Pakistanis had harboured the hope of a last-minute reprieve of some sort. Almost every country with which Pakistan had diplomatic relations had appealed for clemency. (A notable exception was Suharto's Indonesian regime.) I have long suspected that at least two countries, had they so wished, could have exerted enough pressure to save Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's life: Saudi Arabia and the US.

Both of them chose not to do so. The executioner, Gen Ziaul Haq, dismissed the global appeals as an initiative on behalf of the international union of politicians. Benazir Bhutto's Daughter of the East notes that even the Supreme Court that had upheld the Lahore High Court's death sentence by a 4-3 margin unanimously recommended that the sentence be commuted. But Zia ignored that inconvenient opinion. He was convinced by that stage that there was just one coffin that lay in wait — either for him or for ZAB. The latter, at an obvious disadvantage, was inevitably destined to draw the short straw.

Thus it was that Pakistan's unfortunate history took a particularly sordid turn 45 years ago tomorrow. One can only conjecturally imagine what might have come to pass if the army had not intervened in July 1977, and the government-opposition agreement on

fresh elections (after the tainted exercise earlier that year) had not been pre-empted by Zia's coup. No one can deny that the regime ZAB presided over from December 1971 to mid-1977 was, at best, a flawed democracy. The initial signs were positive, once martial law had been lifted. One could even argue for 1972 as a golden year in Pakistan's rebirth as a truncated entity — except for the fact that it involved no reckoning with the previous year's massacres in what had by then emerged as Bangladesh.

In 1973, many of the hopes fell apart, notably with the National Awami Party-led provincial governments in Balochistan and NWFP being swept aside; the anti-Ahmadi legislation followed in 1974. By then, not only had the NAP leadership been incarcerated on ludicrous charges, but many among the PPP left-leaning stalwarts had been sidelined, and replaced with time-servers and feudal lightweights who were quick to abandon the PPP in or soon after 1977.

One can't decisively pinpoint the trajectory of Pakistan's progress had the military not intervened at that point, but it's safe to assume that any regression under civilian rule would have been less harmful. It's easy to say that to pick the obsequious Gen Zia as military chief was Bhutto's deadliest error. But unleashing Zia's predecessor, Gen Tikka — the 'Butcher of Bengal' — on Balochistan was another huge mistake. Setting up the paramilitary Federal Security Force was also a misstep that backfired when Masood Mahmood's very possibly fake testimony proved crucial in condemning ZAB to death. By any measure, it ought not to have sufficed as the basis for a

death sentence, but Zia and Maulvi Mushtaq, the Lahore High Court chief justice miffed by Bhutto holding back his promotion, were happy to clutch at straws.

The progress of the subsequent Supreme Court appeal ought to serve as a reminder that the six Islamabad High Court judges currently complaining about military interference are hardly treading fresh ground. In 1978-79, the nine-member bench — expected to rule by 5-4 in Bhutto's favour — was, by hook or by crook, whittled down to seven, reversing the balance to 4-3 against ZAB. And the three who dared to say no did so in the face of tremendous pressures and a variety of threats.

Last month's belated Supreme Court verdict, recognising that Bhutto did not get a fair trial, merely aligns the senior judiciary with what has long been public knowledge. The dubious verdict cannot be rescinded, and the extreme punishment, carried out with unseemly haste, is anyhow an indelible stain on post-1971 Pakistan.

ZAB's judicial (but profoundly injudicious) murder cut him down in his prime, aged just 51. His younger son, Shah Nawaz died at 26, Mir Murtaza was assassinated at 42, Benazir at 54. The Muslim world's broader malaise is reflected in the fact that ZAB was the third among the luminaries at the Lahore Islamic Summit 50 years ago to be eliminated, preceded by Saudi King Faisal and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975, and followed by Egypt's Anwar Sadat in 1981 and Libya's Muammar Gadhafi 30 years later.

In the Bhutto context, though, what comes across most poignantly is the steady decline in the nation's fortunes following his elimination. -- Courtesy Dawn

## Innocence in peril

Furqan Hyder Shaikh

We cannot risk frittering away more time trying to understand that protected children are essential for a sustainable and prosperous Pakistan. Often, discourse about child safety is wilfully avoided, and this escapism has had serious after-effects in the form of violent adults disowned by family, society and institutions. Can care and attention from the day of birth to the age of 18 not prove more beneficial for collective development?

Globally, children under the age of 18 enjoy all facilities in a stimulating environment replete with opportunities to learn and grow. It is these well-versed individuals who will go on to nurture peace and inclusivity and contribute towards national development.

But in Pakistan, children are deprived of basic services, such as free qualitative education, healthcare and playgrounds. Therefore, they turn into undesirable elements relegated to the outskirts of society. According to the Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child, the number of child beggars in the urban centres of Pakistan stands at 1.5 million. One wonders about these bitter results of negligence; why are they excluded from social development and who will keep them from committing crime?

The Sindh Child Protection Authority (Amendment) Act, 2021, describes 'caregiver' to include "state, agency, unit, organisation responsible to provide necessary care to child...". But poor children on urban roads are the very picture of abandonment by the same protection authority. For example, it is

highly unlikely that those working in shops in Hyderabad's Shahi Bazar have ever been visited by members of any organisation to ensure their safety, enrolment in schools and counselling for their parents.

According to Unicef, 3.3m children are deprived of a childhood due to child labour, poor healthcare and lack of education and they become abusive individuals for many reasons, such as certain painful experiences that scar them for life. Parents must play a better role so that children are shielded from being violated, exploited, neglected, and abused (VENA). The devastating floods of 2022 threw up tangible and intangible losses — devastated homes, livestock, public infrastructure and livelihoods and traumatised innocence.

District Dadu in Sindh was severely damaged in the deluge and Taluka Khairpur Nathan Shah was entirely submerged. More than one and a half years later, a majority of villagers in Khairpur Nathan Shah are still combating misery and abject poverty. Undoubtedly, children in these parts are in dire need of rehabilitation through housing, nourishment, medical treatment and psychosocial support to emerge from their distress. They simply cannot be left to endure the same fate as the residents of Badin and Thatta who have been trapped in angst since the cyclone in 1999, which ripped through Sindh's coastal belt.

Hence, whoever is committed to child protection, including the provision of urgent protective measures to the flood-affected young in Dadu, will be held in high esteem. The National Support Programme, in collabora-

tion with Save the Children International and the EU, is actively facilitating children in various flood-affected villages through diverse activities, such as establishing child friendly spaces (CFS) where rural children can go after school hours and enjoy recreational activities, learn life skills and acquire knowledge with learning kits. As the concept illustrates, CFS is an ideal situation to nurture and shelter children and ensures that they are not exposed to VENA.

First, in order to keep our children safe from VENA — present in family structures as well as the overall social landscape — parents and guardians must be made more aware of a child's movements.

Second, the government should establish CFS in every devastated village in Sindh to convert a child's free time into hours of creative and productive activity. Third, some robust legislation has to be carried out and implemented to make accountability certain. Moreover, the capacity-building of CFS with more staff, resources and security should be initiated to help systematically institutionalise child protection.

Fourth, the top cadres of Sindh's ruling party, the PPP, must take personal interest in streamlining CFS in the province and guarantee that all Sindh's children are safe from the multidimensional torment of VENA. What is also imperative is that print and electronic media raise awareness about CFS and promote the care model throughout the country. Finally, oil and gas companies operating in Sindh should fulfil their responsibility towards making child protection endeavours and CFS a significant part of corporate social responsibility. -- Courtesy Dawn

## Commerce News

### PM for joint efforts to enhance Pak, France coop. in trade, investment

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday stressed the need for working together to enhance cooperation between Pakistan and France, particularly in the areas of trade and investment. The prime minister, in a meeting with Ambassador of France in Islamabad Nicolas Galey who paid a courtesy call on him, invited the French companies to invest in Pakistan.

He welcomed the initiative of the French side to bring corporate leaders from top French companies on a visit to Pakistan soon. The prime minister, who was accompanied by

Foreign Minister Senator Muhammad Ishaq Dar, and SAPM Tariq Fatemi, also shared that stabilization of the economy was on top of the government's agenda.

The ambassador handed over a congratulatory letter from French Prime Minister Gabriel Attal, addressed to Prime Minister Shehbaz on his re-election.

The prime minister thanked the French leadership for the message of greetings.

He said that Pakistan enjoyed friendly and cordial ties with France and, although the relationship had undergone a difficult phase a few

years ago, the two countries were now working together to further strengthen bilateral cooperation.

Prime Minister Shehbaz fondly recalled his numerous interactions with French President Emmanuel Macron, in particular their meetings on the sidelines of UNGA Session in 2022, as well as on the margins of the Paris Conference on New Financing Pact on Climate Change in June 2023.

He also lauded President Macron's valuable contribution through virtual participation at the Geneva Conference on Resilient Pakistan in January 2023.



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of the Republic of France Amb. Nicolas Galey calls on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif.

### Turkmenistan Ambassador, Pakistan's minister discuss bilateral trade strategies

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Ambassador of Turkmenistan to Pakistan, Atajan Movlamov, on Thursday congratulate the Federal Minister for Commerce, Jam Kamal Khan, on his recent appointment and engaged in discussions aimed at bolstering trade relations between the two countries.

During the meeting, Minister Jam Kamal emphasized Pakistan's commitment to strengthening bilateral ties

with Turkmenistan, particularly in trade, for the mutual benefit of both nations, said press release issued here.

The discussions centered on various aspects of Turkmen-Pakistan relations, highlighting cooperation based on principles of mutual respect and equality. Both parties expressed interest in enhancing trade volumes, with a focus on exploring new routes and transit trade agreements.

### FCA to met by end of current month

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Federal Committee on Agriculture (FCA) is scheduled to convene by the end of the current month (April) to discuss the performance of key agricultural indicators during the Rabi season.

The committee will assess the output of major and minor crops during the Rabi season 2023-24 and establish production targets for Kharif crops 2024. This is essential to meet local dietary needs as well as to facilitate exports, said Food Security Commissioner in the Ministry of National Food Security and Research. The high-powered committee is mandated to oversee strategic measures

for ensuring food safety and security in the country and among others, he told APP here on Wednesday.

The meeting would also be attended by the senior officials of the provincial food and agriculture departments, State Bank of Pakistan, Zarie Taraqiat Bank Limited and other credit providing institutions, he added.

Besides, the FCA would also be attended by the representatives of National Fertilizer Development Center, Pakistan Meteorological Department, Indus River System Authority and member food security and climate change of Planning Commission of Pakistan, he added.

### Pak, Netherlands agree to explore new opportunities for partnership

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan and Netherlands here on Wednesday agreed on the significance of enhancing bilateral relations and exploring new opportunities for partnership in areas of mutual interest.

According to press statement issued by finance ministry, Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Pakistan, Mrs. Henny de Vries called on Minister for Finance and Revenue, Muhammad Aurangzeb, to discuss matters of mutual interest and strengthen the existing

ties between Pakistan and the Netherlands.

The minister warmly welcomed the Ambassador and expressed appreciation for the longstanding friendship and cooperation between the two countries. He highlighted the importance of the bilateral relationship, rooted in shared values and a history of collaboration.

The discussion also touched upon the structural reforms being implemented by the government of Pakistan for promoting economic growth and ensuring fiscal sustainability.



ISLAMABAD: Minister for Finance and Revenue Mr. Muhammad Aurangzeb was called on by H.E. Mrs. Henny de Vries, Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Pakistan.

### Minister says: PRA working with corruption free mechanism

LAHORE: Punjab Finance Minister Mujtaba Shujaur Rehman has said that Punjab Revenue Authority (PRA) is the only provincial tax collecting agency in the country that is working with a corruption free mechanism.

He expressed these views during the performance review meeting at the Punjab Revenue Authority, here on Wednesday.

He said the PRA has been collecting 66 percent of provincial revenue while Board of Revenue 22 percent and Excise and Taxation 12 percent. The PRA still has a lot of potential to double the tax

collections, he added.

He said a policy of increasing the tax net will be adopted to increase the collections. Apart from restaurants, beauty parlors and fashion designers, IT services, franchises and sponsorships will also be included in the tax net. Open door policy will be promoted in PRA offices. The success of the institution depends on the trust of the people, he added. Chairman Punjab Revenue Authority Javed Badr, Commissioner Lahore Misbah Nawaz, Additional Commissioner Sara Hayat, Member Atiya Ali Khan and concerned officers attended the meeting.



KARACHI: PTCL and National Insurance Company Limited sign an agreement for provision of Smart Cloud Services bundled with allied licenses, the agreement sign between Muhammad Basharat Qureshi, Group Vice President Enterprise Solutions PTCL, and Khalid Hameed, CEO National Insurance Company Limited (NICL) during a ceremony held NICL Head-Office.

### CDNS increase Savings Certificate, rates from March 19

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Central Directorate of National Savings (CDNS) has increased the rates of return for its National Savings Certificates, marking amendments across different instruments from March 19, 2024.

Return rates for Special Savings Certificates (SSC) have been adjusted upwards by 15.93 %, Defense Savings

certificates by 13.36 %, Regular Income Certificates (RIC) now offer 14.76%, the senior official of CDNS told APP here on Monday.

The new increases were also applied to Bahbood Savings Certificates (BSC), Pensioners Benefit Account (PBA), and Shuhadas Family Welfare Account (SFWA), with each now yielding 15.60 %.

### Shipping activity at Port Qasim

KARACHI (APP): Six ships namely, Maersk Kensington, Kyparissia, MSC Spring, Mala Kado, Silver Heba and Al-Wajbah scheduled to load/offload Container, Cement, Palm oil and LNG, berthed at Container Terminal, Multi-Purpose Terminal, Liquid Terminal and Elengy Terminal respectively on report period.

A total of thirteen ships were engaged at POA berths during the last 24 hours, out of them two ships, Al-Diab-III and Chemroad Journey left the Port on today morning while four more ships, Al-Areesh, Uog Sparta, MSC Spring and Maersk Kensington are expected to sail on today afternoon.

Cargo volume of 267,762 tonnes, comprising 222,987 tonnes imports cargo and 44,775 tonnes export cargo carried in 6,800 Containers (4,660 TEUs Imports and 2,140 TEUs export) was handled at the port during last 24 hours.

There are 5 ships at Outer Anchorage of Port Qasim, out of them two ships.

## Pakistan's friendly ties with Uzbekistan getting stronger with each passing day: Baligh

**Independent Report**  
LAHORE: Ambassador of Uzbekistan to Pakistan, Oybek Arif Usmanov, called on Punjab Governor Muhammad Baligh ur Rehman at Governor House Lahore. Honorary Consul of Uzbekistan in Punjab, Najeeb Mushtaq Vohra and Trade Counsellor, Bakrom Yusupov were also present on the occasion.

In the meeting, issues of mutual interest and ways to expand bilateral cooperation in the field of education and trade were discussed.

Speaking on the occasion, Punjab Governor Muhammad Baligh ur

Rehman said that Pakistan's friendly relations with Uzbekistan are getting stronger with each passing day and will be further strengthened in the near future. Governor Punjab said that both countries need to revive and strengthen their centuries-old trade, spiritual, cultural and historical ties.

He said that tourism is a priority sector for both countries. He added that it has great economic potential. Governor Punjab said that people associated with the media industry of both countries can work together on joint projects to highlight the common cultural heritage.

Governor Punjab said that trade has increased manifold in recent years. He said, "I am confident that the PTA Preferential Trade Agreement and the UPTTA Uzbekistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement will enhance our bilateral trade and economic relations."

Governor Punjab said that there is a need to further promote mutual cooperation between Pakistan and Uzbekistan in other important sectors including education and trade. He said that there is a great scope of investment in agriculture, information technology.



LAHORE: Ambassador of Uzbekistan to Pakistan, Oybek Arif Usmanov, called on Punjab Governor Muhammad Baligh ur Rehman at Governor House.

## KP Govt likely to increase BRT service fare

**Independent Report**  
PESHAWAR: Advisor to KP Chief Minister on Finance, Muzamil Aslam has said that the provincial government is likely to increase the fare of Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) services to arrest its deficit and divert the subsidy paid in this regard to other useful heads.

Talking to media during his visit to Peshawar Press Club (PPC) on Tuesday night, he said that since the launching of service in 2019, no increase has been made in its fare as compare to manifold hike in electric and petroleum products prices. He said that currently the provincial government has to pay an amount of over Rs.3 billion per annum in head of subsidy in the fare of the BRT Service. He said that a budgetary proposal regarding increase in the fare of the service will be submitted to the government. Regarding financial conditions of the autonomous organizations, he said that various such institutes particularly Universities are spending more than their sanctioned expenditures. He said the provincial government had never sanctioned any additional funds for them.

## AJK president congratulates Kashmiri-Origin judge in UK

**Independent Report**  
MIRPUR (APP): Azad Jammu and Kashmir President Barrister Sultan Mahmood Chaudhry has extended his heartfelt congratulations to Barrister Azhar Iqbal on his appointment as a judge of the United Kingdom judiciary, on Wednesday.

According to the statement issued by the AJK President office, Barrister Iqbal whose family hails from Faizpur Sharif in Mirpur, Azad Jammu Kashmir is the first Kashmiri-origin judge to be appointed to the British judiciary.

President AJK expressed his pride in Iqbal's achievement, stating that it was a testament to the contributions of the Kashmiri diaspora to British society.

He also urged the Kashmiri community in the UK to continue raising their voices for the resolution of the Kashmir conflict.

In a phone conversation with Iqbal, President Chaudhry wished him a successful tenure and expressed his confidence in his abilities as a judge.

Barrister Iqbal thanked the President for his congratulations and pledged to discharge his duties with the utmost integrity and impartiality.

## Local Islamic scholar and cleric arrested in connection with Mirpur KFC attack case

**Independent Report**  
MIRPUR (APP): Mirpur police on Wednesday made a pivotal arrest in connection with the March 29 Mirpur KFC attack, apprehending Mufti Ejaz, a religious scholar and cleric of the local Jamia mosque.

This arrest comes as a result of the ongoing preliminary investigations into the abhorrent attack by an unruly anti-Israel crowd of local miscreants, as confirmed by Senior Superintendent of Police Mirpur, Kamran Ali.

The arrest of Mufti Ejaz follows vital interrogation and information provided by individuals already detained in connection with the storming of the KFC outlet in southern Mirpur city of Azad Jammu Kashmir.

This tragic incident saw over a hundred accused allegedly involved in the attack, which resulted in the ransacking and setting ablaze of the Mirpur AJK fast food outlet, alongside damaging nearby private buildings in the densely populated business hub.

## Minister directs to initiate action against absent medical staff

**Independent Report**  
PESHAWAR: Health Minister Syed Qasim Ali Shah on Wednesday directed to initiate action against absent medical staff, stating that there is no place for those who don't perform their duties, especially for those working in hospitals.

In line with the minister's directive, the Director-General of Health Service Dr Shaukat Ali has issued final notices to fifteen dental surgeons who have been absent from duty for more than three years, following which they will face dismissal from their positions.

In his statement, the Health Minister emphasized the role of doctors in serving the public, warning that those who fail to fulfill their duties will face disciplinary action.

He further stated that those who do not report for duty will be dealt with according to health regulations.

The Health Minister highlighted complaints received regarding absenteeism among medical staff in health centers, indicating the immediate need for action against those not adhering to biometric attendance.

He urged health department officials to ensure the attendance of their staff to provide the best healthcare facilities to the public.



PESHAWAR: Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Leader, Hammad Azhar addresses to media persons during press conference, at Peshawar press club.

## BISP AJK disburses educational scholarships among 113,051 students

**Independent Report**  
MUZAFFARABAD (APP): Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) AJK Region disbursed Rs.320 Million among the 113,051 students under the Banizir Educational Scholarship Programme in Azad Kashmir at the start of academic year.

This was informed by Zonal Director, Central Zonal Office BISP AJK Dr. Abdul Aziz Quarshi while conducting BISP AJK 22<sup>nd</sup> Quarterly RCC Progress Review Meeting under his chair here on Wednesday.

The aim is to bring together key stakeholders to assess the ongoing initiatives and achievements aimed at enhancing educational opportunities for underprivileged BISP beneficiaries children. The meeting witnessed a comprehensive discussion on the latest developments and future strategies in line with BISP's commitment to empowering marginalized segments of society through educational support of Benazir Taleemi Wazaif. During the meeting, significant progress was reported on the implementation of Benazir Taleemi Wazaif (Educational Stipends) program, which aims to provide financial assistance to deserving students across the State.



LAHORE: Members Saut ul Gaza Forum are protesting with placards to show solidarity with Palestine.

## Bilal Yasin orders to dismiss all 93 invigilators of BISE Examination centre

**Independent Report**  
LAHORE: Provincial Minister Bilal Yasin is continuously in the field to ensure merit in ongoing examinations across Punjab. On the instructions of Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif, Provincial Minister Bilal Yasin visited Lawrence Road examination center here on Wednesday.

In the presence of Minister, the children participating in the examination spoke their hearts out. The children said that the private invigilators used to ask 7 thousand for a paper and more money was demanded for the maths exam.

invigilators at Lawrence Road examination center and they were demanding seven thousand rupees to solve each paper. Provincial Minister Bilal Yasin issued orders to dismiss all 93 private invigilators after receiving the information.

In the presence of the Minister, the children participating in the examination spoke their hearts out. The children said that the private invigilators used to ask 7 thousand for a paper and more money was demanded for the maths exam.

## One Killed in Tribal Clash

**Independent Report**  
SHIKARPUR: The dirty deadly game of Blood Shedding could not be discouraged which resulted one more villager gunned down over Mahar and Marfani Tribal Clash in Garhiyaseen on Wednesday.

According to reports reached here that some group of armed men attacked with automatic weapons at village Bambhihar in the jurisdiction of Garhiyaseen police station, as a result of firing, Riaz Ahmed of 35 son of Saifal Mahar was killed on the spot.

The cause behind the murder was said to be an ongoing Tribal Clash between two rival Mahar and Marfani tribes, police added.

Area police rushed to the place of incident and took the body in their custody and shifted the dead body of deceased Riaz Mahar to RHC Garhiyaseen for Medico Legal formalities and later the body was handed over to his heirs after conducting autopsy from there.

No FIR was registered till late evening.

Further police investigation into the matter is in process.

# International News

## Muslim leaders reject chance to break bread with Biden as anger over Gaza festers

**Monitoring Desk**  
WASHINGTON: Last year, President Joe Biden hadn't even spoken a word at the White House celebration of Ramadan before someone shouted out "we love you." Hundreds of Muslims were there to mark the end of the holy month that requires fasting from sunrise to sunset.

There are no such joyous scenes during this Ramadan. With many Muslim Americans outraged over Biden's support for Israel's siege of Gaza, the White House chose to hold a smaller iftar dinner on Tuesday evening. The only attendees were people who work for his administration.

"We're just in a different world," said Wa'el Alzayat, who leads Engage, a Muslim advocacy organization. "It's completely surreal. And it's sad."

Alzayat attended last year's event, but he declined an invitation to break his fast with Biden this year, saying, "It's inappropriate to do such a celebration while there's a famine going on in Gaza."

After rejections from Alzayat and others, he said the White House adjusted its plans Monday, telling community leaders that it wanted to host a meeting focused on administration policy. Alzayat still said no, believing that one day was not enough time to prepare for an opportunity to sway

Biden's mind on the conflict.

When the Democratic president took office three years ago, many Muslim leaders were eager to turn the page on Donald Trump's bigotry, including his campaign pledge to implement a "total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States."

But now Democrats fear that Biden's loss of support among Muslims could help clear a path for his Republican predecessor to return to the White House. This year's election will likely hinge on a handful of battleground states, including Michigan with its significant Muslim population.



Pro-Palestinian demonstrators hold signs as they call for a ceasefire in Gaza outside the White House in Washington, DC.

## Deadly strike on Iran consulate 'crossed a line': analysts

**Monitoring Desk**  
BEIRUT: A deadly strike blamed on Israel against Iran's diplomatic mission in Damascus could trigger a spillover of the Gaza crisis across the region, an escalation Tehran had sought to avoid, analysts said.

Monday's strike levelled the consular annex of the Iranian embassy and killed 13 people, including seven members of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), Iranian state media reported.

They included two senior commanders of the Guards' Quds Force foreign operations arm, Brigadier Generals Mohammad Reza Zahedi and Mohammad Hadi Haji Rahimi, Iranian officials said. Ali Vaez of the International Crisis Group called the attack "a significant escalation". "By targeting an Iranian diplomatic facility, Israel has crossed a line," he said. After months of aggression in Gaza, Israel is now stepping up its operations against Iranian and pro-Iran commanders in Lebanon and Syria.

## A fire in a tailoring shop in India kills 7, including children

**Monitoring Desk**  
NEW DELHI: A fire in a tailoring shop on Wednesday killed seven people, including two children, in the Indian city of Aurangabad, police said.

The blaze created panic in part of the business district of the city in Maharashtra state.

Authorities suspect that the deaths occurred due to smoke inhalation, the New Delhi Television cited city police chief Manoj Lohiya as saying. Authorities were investigating the cause of the fire in the city nearly 340 kilometers (210 miles) north-east of Mumbai, India's financial and entertainment capital.

Fires are common in India, where builders and residents often flout building laws and safety codes. In 2019, a fire caused by an electrical short circuit engulfed a building in the Indian capital and killed 43 people. In 2022, a fire in a four-story commercial building in New Delhi killed at least 27.



Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Finnish President Alexander Stubb appear after a joint press conference, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, in Kyiv, Ukraine.

## 9 dead, hundreds injured in most powerful Taiwan quake in 25 years

**Monitoring Desk**  
HUALIEN: At least nine people were killed and more than 1,000 injured on Wednesday by a powerful earthquake in Taiwan that damaged dozens of buildings and prompted tsunami warnings that extended to Japan and the Philippines before being lifted. Officials said the quake was the strongest to shake the island in decades, and warned of more tremors in the days ahead.

"The earthquake is close to land and it's shallow. It's felt all over Taiwan and offshore islands," said Wu Chien-fu, director of Taipei's Central Weather Administration's Seismology Centre.

Strict building regulations and widespread public disaster awareness appear to have staved off a major catastrophe for the earthquake-prone island, which lies near the junction of two tectonic plates.

Wu said the quake was the strongest since a 7.6-magnitude struck in September 1999, killing around 2,400 people in the deadliest natural disaster in the island's history.

## Finland, Ukraine sign 10-year security agreement

**Monitoring Desk**  
COPENHAGEN: Finland's President Alexander Stubb on Wednesday visited Ukraine where he and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy signed an agreement on security cooperation and long-term support between the two countries, Stubb's office said in a statement.

The deal covers a range of topics including political support, backing for Ukraine's defence and security and support for Ukrainian reforms and reconstruction.

## Philippine court orders arrest of religious leader with ties to Duterte

**Monitoring Desk**  
MANILA: A Philippine court has ordered the arrest of a church founder and long-time friend of former President Rodrigo Duterte, on charges of human trafficking and sexual abuse of a woman, court documents showed.

The evangelist preacher, who also figures on the most wanted list of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in the United States, is followed by millions of people in the Philippines, where church leaders are highly influential in elections.

A family court in the southern city of Davao has ordered the arrest of Apollo Quiboloy, a self-proclaimed "owner of the universe" and "appointed son of god", after he was indicted last month by the justice department on charges several years old. A lawyer for Quiboloy did not respond to a request for comment. Duterte's representatives did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

## Cambodia's ex-leader Hun Sen becomes senate president

**Monitoring Desk**  
PHNOM PENH: Former Cambodian leader Hun Sen was promoted to senate president on Wednesday, taking over a key ceremonial role less than a year after handing power to his son.

Hun Sen stepped down in August after nearly four decades of iron-fisted rule, passing the baton to his eldest son Hun Manet following a landslide win in national polls held without any significant opposition parties.

## Russia security says the US shares blame for a concert hall attack that killed 144

**Monitoring Desk**  
TALLINN: The head of Russia's national security council on Wednesday contended that the United States shares blame for the attack by gunmen on a Moscow concert hall that killed 144 people, even though a branch of the Islamic State group has claimed responsibility.

Since the March 22 attack at the Crocus City Hall, the deadliest on Russian soil in two decades, Russian officials including President Vladimir Putin have repeatedly claimed, without presenting evidence, that it was organized by Ukraine, which has been fighting a Russian invasion for more than two years.

An affiliate of the Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attack and Kyiv has consistently denied involvement.

"They are trying to impose on us that the terrorist act was committed not by the Kyiv regime, but by supporters of radical Islamic ideology, perhaps members of the Afghan branch of IS," security council head Nikolai Patrushev said at a meeting in the Kazakhstan capital Astana of security councils of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. The SCO is a nine-country regional security and economic bloc that includes China, India and Iran.

"However, it is much more important to quickly establish who is the customer and sponsor of this monstrous crime. Its traces lead to the Ukrainian special services. But everyone knows that the Kyiv regime is not independent and is completely controlled by the United States."

## WHO reports sharp rise in newborn deaths in Gaza

**Monitoring Desk**  
GENEVA: Newborn mortality is rising sharply in the Gaza Strip, with babies being born underweight, the World Health Organisation said on Tuesday, citing medical staff on the ground.

"From different doctors, particularly in the maternity hospitals, they're reporting that they're seeing a big rise in children born with low birth weight, and just not surviving the neonatal period because they're born too small," WHO spokeswoman Margaret Harris said at a briefing in Geneva. She said that at Kamal Adwan, the only paediatric hospital in northern Gaza, "at least 15 malnourished children are coming in per day, and the needs are just getting ever more severe".

The WHO is unable to establish precise statistics on child mortality because of the devastation in the Palestinian territory after six months of Israeli aggression, with Harris saying many people do not even get to hospital. She cited a stabilisation centre set up last week, saying the inpatients were typically children with medical illnesses as well as malnutrition. "If you have got an underlying condition, malnutrition will kill you much more quickly, so they become the most urgent patients," she said.

On Monday, the Israeli army pulled out of Gaza City's Al Shifa Hospital after a two-week military operation that left much of the complex in ruins and bodies scattered on the dusty grounds. The hospital was the biggest in the Palestinian territory. "Al Shifa Medical Complex is gone forever," its acting director Marwaan Abu Saadah said in a WHO video filmed at the scene.

## Pakistan's economic improvement acknowledged by international institutions

ISLAMABAD (APP): Leading international institutions, including the World Bank report, Bloomberg, a reputed global financial news agency, have acknowledged the improvement in Pakistan's economy.

This improvement stands as a testament to the prudent policies introduced by the coalition governments under Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

According to Bloomberg's report for the next fiscal year (2024-25), citing figures from the WB, Pakistan's economy is expected to witness a double increase compared to the economic growth of the current financial year, maintaining a gradual pace.

"The GDP growth rates are picking up, and the economy is starting to show growth," it added.

Analyzing the World Bank report, Bloomberg said that inflation in Pakistan is likely to fall by 11 percent in the next fiscal year.

Additionally, the International Monetary Fund (IMF)'s new bailout programme is expected to further accelerate and stabilize economic growth.

According to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS), the Consumer Price Index (CPI)-based inflation decreased to 20.7 percent in March 2023 from 23.1 percent recorded in February 2023.

This marks the lowest inflation rate of 20.7 percent in March for the first time in 22 months, indicating a downward trend after a two-year period. It is the

second consecutive month where the pace of inflation has slowed down significantly, surpassing even the optimistic official projections.

The Bloomberg reported that Pakistan would require \$24 billion in external financial assistance during the fiscal year starting from July 2024.

It is noteworthy that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, during his last 16-month government, made difficult decisions to save the country from economic default. And now, under the current coalition government led by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, the IMF program - the Stand by Arrangement (SBA) - has been restored, which is significantly contributing to economic stability.



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Reza Amir Moghaddam addressing an Iftar Reception at Embassy of Iran.

## PML-N leader slams PTI for alleged interference with judiciary, institutions

ISLAMABAD (APP): Dr. Tariq Fazal Chaudhry, a senior leader in the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N), criticized the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) on Wednesday for attempting to influence the superior judiciary and other national institutions to achieve their desired outcomes.

Speaking to the media alongside MNA Barrister Aqeel Malik, he expressed his disapproval of PTI's actions, stating that the same group of disgruntled people, through their social media campaign, was attempting to pressure the judiciary and certain institutions to serve their nefarious designs.

He stated that the PTI social media team had initiated a slanderous campaign against Justice (Retd) Tassaduq Hussain Jilani without any relevance to the overall matter. Moreover, there are now objections raised by PTI regarding the composition of the Supreme Court's larger bench concerning suo moto proceedings regarding interference in judicial matters.

The Supreme Court is handling the suo moto proceedings concerning complaints against Islamabad High Court (IHC) judges with utmost transparency. PTI should refrain from interfering in the matter as it will be resolved by the judiciary in a fair manner. The judicial verdict will be accepted by all parties involved.

He encouraged PTI to steer clear of violence in politics and instead engage in competition with PML-N within the political realm. The governing party is prepared to engage PTI politically, and their tendency towards bickering is deemed unacceptable.

He said despite reservations, PML-N joined the system in 2018 as his party believes in supremacy of constitution and promotion of democratic traditions.

Speaking on the occasion, Barrister Aqeel Malik, MNA, expressed his disapproval of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) for engaging in undemocratic behavior and making baseless accusations against the institutions. He called on PTI to refrain from meddling in matters related to judges' complaints, asserting that they are not directly involved in the issue. Malik criticized PTI for attempting to sensationalize a case that is under judicial consideration.

## Non-Formal Education Statistics Report to be launched today

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Pakistan Institute of Education (PIE), in collaboration with the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training and the JICA-AQAL Project launch its highly anticipated Non-Formal Education Statistics Report 2021-22 on Wednesday.

This report represents a significant milestone in the ongoing efforts to enhance access, quality, and equity in non-formal education (NFE) across Pakistan.

## ANF continues crackdown on drug supply in educational institutions of Twin Cities

ISLAMABAD (APP): Anti Narcotics Force (ANF) in a crackdown on drug supply in educational institutions of Twin Cities, seized 2.4 kg hashish from an accused who was a student of BS Computer Science in a local university.

The accused was arrested with drugs near Waheedabad Colony on Lahtrar Road. During investigation, the accused confessed to supplying drugs in different hostels.

Drug use and sale in educational institutions are a hindrance to educational attainment and the agency is vigilant and always in the search of those involved in this heinous crime, said the press release.

There are also threats to the future of youth. It is unfortunate that students are involved in drug peddling.



ISLAMABAD: PML(N) leaders Tariq Fazal Chaudhry and Barrister Aqeel addressing a press conference at Press Club in the Federal Capital.

At UN

## Pakistan rebuts India's claim of Kashmir being its 'integral part'

UNITED NATIONS (APP): Pakistan Tuesday hit back at India for claiming Kashmir to be its 'integral part', saying that repeating a wrong position would not make it acceptable at any forum. "Let me reaffirm that Jammu and Kashmir is an internationally recognized disputed territory and is not, by any means, a so-called integral part of India", Pakistani delegate Gul Qaiser Sarwani said, while responding to comments by India's representative during the general debate of the UN Disarmament Commission, which began its 2024 session on Monday.

The Indian representative, who was reacting to Pakistani Ambassador Munir Akram's speech to the Commission on the opening day, claimed that Jammu and Kashmir was an "integral part" of India, and accused Pakistan of being involved in terrorism. The Indian representative also

accused Pakistan of misusing the forum by raising the Kashmir dispute.

In his speech, besides other issues, Ambassador Akram had highlighted that Kashmiris and Palestinians were among the peoples still denied the right to self-determination, asserting that India's large-scale arms acquisitions plus its set of aggressive military policies has turned the security environment in South Asia "volatile and explosive".

Exercising his right to reply, Sarwani, the Pakistani delegate underscored that Jammu and Kashmir is an internationally recognized disputed territory and not an "integral part of India", and that Ambassador Akram's remarks were completely irrelevant to the work of the Commission.

"Contrary to India's assertion, the situation in the Indian illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir, India's massive arms build up, aggressive posturing, and war-fighting doctrines are completely relevant to the Commission's work, as they carry grave implications for regional and international peace and security - and hence impinging on efforts towards disarmament," Sarwani added.

The Pakistani delegate said that his country was facing a significant threat of terrorism, which is orchestrated, supported and financed by its Eastern neighbour (India), a well-known state sponsor of terrorism whose terrorist network has gone global, reaching countries far beyond its borders.

Sarwani reiterated Pakistan's stance on the longstanding Jammu and Kashmir dispute, emphasizing that it remains on the agenda of the UN Security Council and that its final disposition is to be determined by its people through a UN-supervised plebiscite.



ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's High Commissioner-designate to Singapore, Ms Rabia Shafiq, called on President Asif Ali Zardari, at Aiwan-e-Sadr.

## President for promoting trade, business linkages with Singapore

ISLAMABAD (APP): President Asif Ali Zardari on Wednesday urged Pakistan's High Commissioner to Singapore to work for the promotion of bilateral trade and business linkages with Singaporean businesses, besides encouraging them to benefit from Pakistan's investment-friendly policies.

Talking to Pakistan's newly-appointed High Commissioner, Rabia

Shafiq, who called on him, the President highlighted the need to explore opportunities for the export of Pakistani food and agricultural products to Singapore.

He added that Pakistan could become a steady source of food supplies for Singapore by exporting processed food items, such as poultry, meat, seafood etc.

He also emphasized

the need for exploring avenues to export Pakistani manpower to Singapore and work for the enhancement of bilateral cooperation in the areas of Information Technology and agriculture.

The president congratulated Rabia Shafiq on her appointment as Pakistan's High Commissioner and wished her a productive and professional successful tenure in Singapore.

## CDA, PITB sign agreement for digitisation of official record

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Capital Development Authority (CDA) and Punjab Information Technology Board (PITB) have signed an agreement to digitise all office working of the authority.

Under the agreement, a modern property management system will be introduced to computerise the property record of the citizens. According to the details, the e-office will be established as per the agreement between the Capital Development Authority and PITB.

In order to ensure transparency in all information related to the property, it is possible to get rid of record tampering, including record missing or record leaking and the land or property record can also be saved in a modern way, an official of the CDA said.

"Besides, the aim of this initiative is to empower the

Capital Development Authority (CDA) by equipping it with modern tools and technology in the realm of 'smart governance', the official said.

He said that by using the latest tools, the Capital Development Authority aims to enhance its decision-making process and ultimately achieve e-empowerment for the authority so that all citizens and applicants can be facilitated for speedy processing of their allotment, transfer and other services.

"This initiative will help citizens to secure property and land records. Similarly, any type of record can be accessed on a single click through ID and specific password," the official said. He said that the main aspect of the project is to introduce "smart applications" and promote e-empowerment among the citizens of Islamabad.

## Pakistan's pop queen Nazia Hassan remembered on her birth anniversary

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 59th birth anniversary of the most iconic figure of Pakistan Nazia Hassan is being observed around the world on Wednesday.

Nazia, alongside her brother Zohaib Hassan, revolutionized the music scene in Pakistan and India with hits like "Disco Deewane" and "Boom Boom."

Born on April 3rd, 1965, Nazia burst onto the music scene at just 15 with her mesmerizing rendition of "Aap Jaisa Koi" for the Indian film Qurbani, introducing the disco genre to the subcontinent.

Her debut album, "Disco Deewane" in 1981, soared to international fame, charting in fourteen countries and becoming the best-selling Asian pop record of its time.



KARACHI: Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah presides over a cabinet meeting at CM House.

## Sindh cabinet lifts ban on recruitment, grants extension to COVID doctors, other staff

KARACHI (APP): Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah presided over a cabinet meeting on Wednesday which approved the lifting of the ban on recruitment in the provincial government departments and also granted an extension to the doctors, nurses and other staff who were appointed during the COVID-19 pandemic until June 30, 2024.

The meeting was held at the CM House and was attended by provincial ministers, advisors, Chief Secretary, PSCM, Chairman P&D, and concerned secretaries.

The Sindh government of Murad Ali Shah at completion of its last tenure had imposed a ban on recruitment in the government department. The cabinet members told the chair that there were thousands of posts of lower

grades lying vacant in government departments. Lifting the ban on recruitment not only improves the working of the departments but the youth would get employees opportunities, the cabinet members. he chief minister with the consent of the cabinet members approved the lifting of the ban on recruitment in government departments and directed the Law Minister Ziaul Hassan Lanjar and the Advocate General to pursue the case in the court and get the stay order issued against the recruitment vacated.

At the request of Education Minister Syed Sardar Shah the cabinet allowed School Education dept to continue the recruitment process of PST/JEST as per Teachers Recruitment Policy 2021 through IBA Sukkur.

Minister Health Dr Azar Fazal and Secretary Health Rehan Baloch briefing the cabinet said that the Health Department on the directives of the chief minister had appointed doctors, nurses, paramedical, skilled and supporting staff on a "Service Rendered Basis" for 89 days in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic in the year 2020. Subsequently, on the recommendation of the health department the COVID-19 doctors, and nurses were allowed extensions in their hiring period from time to time up to 30th June 2023. Later on, under the orders passed by the Sindh High Court, Karachi on March 17, 2023, the Health Department referred the 824 doctors and 324 staff nurses to the SPSC to ascertain their suitability.



ISLAMABAD: Volunteers serving food items during Iftar for people in fast in the Islamic fasting month of Ramadan at Faisal Masjid in the federal capital.

## Ashrafi holds grand Iftar reception to strengthen diplomatic relations

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Ulema Council Chairman Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mehmoed Ashrafi on Wednesday hosted a grand Iftar reception, extending a warm welcome to diplomatic missions in Pakistan.

The event, held here at a local hotel, aimed to foster deeper cordial relations with nations across the globe.

Among the esteemed guests were Saudi Ambassador Nawaf bin Said Al-Malki, Iranian Ambassador Reza Amir Moqadam, as well as representatives from Malaysia, Indonesia, Türkiye, and other friendly countries. The gathering provided a platform for dialogue and engagement, emphasizing the importance of diplomacy in promoting harmony and cooperation on the international stage.

In his address, Ashrafi expressed optimism regarding the newly appointed Minister for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony, Chaudhry Salik Hussain. He voiced hope for smooth operations

within the ministry and the resolution of pertinent issues under his leadership.

Furthermore, Ashrafi commended Religious Affairs Secretary Dr. Syed Atta-ur-Rehman for his dedicated efforts in addressing the ministry's challenges, both domestically and internationally. He underscored the significance of effective leadership in managing religious affairs and promoting interfaith dialogue.

The highlight of the event was a prayer led by the Ambassador of Royal Embassy, invoking blessings for peace and prosperity for both Pakistan and the respective nations represented. This spiritual gesture underscored the shared aspirations for harmony and cooperation among nations, transcending geographical boundaries.

Ashrafi hoped that the reception would foster strong diplomatic ties and promote mutual understanding among nations, anchored in the principles of respect, tolerance, and cooperation.



ISLAMABAD: Chairman Prime Minister's Youth Programme, Rana Mashood Ahmed Khan in a meeting with representatives of British Council.

## X closure case: IHC gives indication to summon PM

ISLAMABAD (Online): Islamabad High Court (IHC) has summoned interior secretary in X closure case besides giving indication to summon Prime Minister (PM).

The Chief Justice (CJ) IHC Aamer Farooq gave indication to summon PM.

The petition filed by journalist Ahtesham Abbasi against closure of X came up for hearing in IHC Wednesday.

Joint interior secretary told the court X has been closed on the report

of security agencies.

The CJ IHC expressed annoyance over interior ministry report.

He remarked tell us about any written thing. Tell us by reading out was it said to bring the details. What is this procedure. Which is this attitude. Assist the court. What has been done. Neither file nor any thing was brought. You should tell what reason should I got written. Every thing has been closed.

## HEC invites applications for scholarship in Romania

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Higher Education Commission (HEC) has invited applications from Pakistani/AJK nationals for the scholarship offer of the University of Politehnica for the academic year (2024-25), launched by the Romanian Government for Master's and PhD studies in the fields of Engineering and Information Technology. According to the official sources, Master's studies are offered by the University of Politehnica Bucharest, Romania in programmes including Chemical Engineering,

Electrical Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, Energy Engineering, Electronic Engineering, Telecommunication and Information Technology, Aerospace Engineering, Transportation Engineering, Computer & Information Technology, System Engineering, Industrial Engineering, Applied Engineering Science, Engineering and Management.

As per eligibility criteria, applicants with incomplete degrees on the closing date of application are not allowed to apply.

## CPO issues special directives for dolphin squad officials

ISLAMABAD: The Capital Police Officer (CPO) DIG Operations Syed Shehzad Nadeem Bukhari on Wednesday issued special directives for Dolphin police personnel.

A public relations officer said that the directives emphasized the importance of diligent duty fulfillment, wearing protective gear during patrolling, and promptly responding to calls from the helpline "Pucar-15".

The officers were instructed to patrol near mosques during prayer times, inspect suspicious individuals and vehicles, and maintain respectful behavior during citizen checks.

Moreover, exemplary performance will be duly rewarded, while stringent measures will be taken against any involvement in bribery or misconduct.

This initiatives highlighted the commitment of Islamabad Capital Police towards ensuring public safety and maintaining law and order in the city.

## Several educational boards join IBCC attestation portal

ISLAMABAD (APP): In a groundbreaking development, several education boards across Pakistan have seamlessly integrated their systems with the Inter Boards Coordination Commission (IBCC) Attestation Portal, marking a significant step forward towards the verification process of student records.

According to IBCC, the APIs of the BISE Bahawalpur, BISE Lahore, BISE Malakand,

BISE Quetta, BISE Rawalpindi, BISE Sahiwal, FBISE Islamabad and Ziauddin University Examination Board Karachi have been successfully connected with the IBCC Attestation Portal for the online verification of SSC/HSSC records.

This collaborative effort eliminates the need for students to bring sealed envelopes of verification for attestation of certificates.