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ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari address to the joint session of parliament Speaker of National Assembly Ayaz Sadiq presiding the session in Parliament House

## President calls for meaningful dialogue, consensus to take Pakistan forward

**Says institutional harmony required for development; Calls for turning new page, making a fresh start; We have little time to waste. Country needs us to move on from the polarisation so common now to contemporary politics; House turns into fish market during address of president Asif Ali Zardari**

ISLAMABAD (APP): President Asif Ali Zardari on Thursday, stressing for turning a new page and making a fresh start, called for a meaningful dialogue, parliamentary consensus and fostering an atmosphere of mutual respect and political reconciliation to do away with the polarisation and overcome the challenges pervading the country.

"In my considered view, it is time to turn a new page... The challenges we face are not impossible to overcome. They just require the fundamentals of a meaningful dialogue and parliamentary consensus... We can effectively tackle our challenges and foster an atmosphere of mutual respect and political reconciliation," the president said addressing the Joint Session of the Parliament.

Chaired by National Assembly Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq, the joint sitting was attended by members of the National Assembly.

**Continued on page 2**

## Pakistan, Turkiye vow to expand bilateral defense collaboration

**COAS, Turkish general discuss matters of mutual interest; General Gürak lauds Pakistan's efforts in fostering regional peace; Both sides agree on forging deeper strategic ties.**

RAWALPINDI (APP): Chief of the Turkish General Staff General Metin Gürak met Army Chief General Syed Asim Munir in Rawalpindi on Thursday.

The discussion encompassed various topics of mutual interest, spanning defence, training, and initiatives aimed at bolstering regional peace and stability.

Both sides acknowledged the robust relationship between their nations and committed to expanding defense collaboration further. The Army Chief underscored the imperative of advancing existing military cooperation between their armed forces.

The visiting dignitary commended Pakistan's efforts in fostering regional

peace and stability, as well as the Pakistan Army's role in combating terrorism.

Earlier, upon arrival at GHQ, the Chief of the General Staff of the Turkish Army paid respects at Yadgar-e-Shuhada by laying a floral wreath. A well-presented contingent of the Pakistan Army rendered a guard of honour to the esteemed visitor.



RAWALPINDI: Chief of the Turkish General Staff General Metin Gürak meeting with Army Chief General Syed Asim Munir

## Pakistan's economic reforms more important than size of new bailout package: IMF

**Monitoring Desk**  
LONDON: The International Monetary Fund (IMF) is ready to support Pakistan and the package of reforms is now more important than the size of new programme, the global lender's Middle East and Central Asia director said on Thursday.

"I think what is important at this stage is to accelerate the reforms, double down on the structure of reforms in order to provide Pakistan with its full potential of growth," Jihad Azour told a press conference on the sidelines of the IMF 2024 Spring Meetings.

The statement comes as Foreign Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb,

who is currently in Washington, initiated discussions with the IMF for a new multibillion-dollar loan agreement to support its economic reform programme.

Pakistan is nearing the end of a nine-month, \$3-billion SBA with the IMF designed to tackle a balance-of-payments crisis, which brought it to the brink of default last summer.

With the final \$1.1 billion tranche of that deal likely to be approved later this month, Pakistan began negotiations for a new multi-year IMF loan programme worth "billions" of dollars, Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb told AFP in Washington earlier this week.



WASHINGTON: Donald Lu, Assistant Secretary and Ms. Elizabeth Horst, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of US State Department met Finance Minister Mohammad Aurangzeb at World Bank Headquarters to underline the political will in Washington to strengthen Pak-US ties.

## GoB fully ready to conduct re-polling & by-elections in transparently & peacefully: CS

**Independent Report**  
QUETTA: The Chief Secretary Balochistan, Shakeel Qadir Khan has stated that the provincial government is fully ready to conduct re-polling and by-elections in different districts of the province.

He issued directives to the concerned authorities to ensure timely completion of the arrangements besides providing desired facilities and ensuring transport and security at all the respective polling stations.

The Chief Secretary urged the political parties and election candidates to

cooperate with the district administration in this regard so as to conduct the elections and repolling in peaceful and transparent manner.

The Chief Secretary was chairing meeting held to review arrangements about the re-polling and by-elections in different constituencies here on Thursday.

Those who were present in the meeting were included Provincial Election Commissioner, Muhammad Farid Afridi,

Continued on page 2

## Will personally monitor Saudi investment projects; no laxity to be tolerated: PM

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday said that he would personally monitor the Saudi investment projects and warned against any laxity due to red tape or outdated procedures.

The prime minister, chairing a meeting to review the matters related to the recent high-powered Saudi delegation and Saudi investment in different sectors, thanked Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman for sending a high-level Saudi delegation that would usher new era of Saudi investment in Pakistan, trade partnership as well as business ties.

He lauded the relevant federal ministers, Special Investment Facilitation Council and relevant senior officers for their efforts for converting the Saudi delegation's visit into a mutually beneficial partnership.

The prime minister instructed the authorities con-

cerned to engage world-class experts to execute the foreign investment projects and called for capacity building of the ministries to achieve the desired results.

He asked the Board of Investment, SIFC and relevant ministries to devise a mechanism to ensure execution of the projects agreed with the Saudi delegation.

He told the expected visit of a delegation of prominent Saudi businessmen to Pakistan was welcoming and that further investment opportunities would also be explored during his visit to Saudi Arabia to attend the World Economic Forum to be held in the Kingdom.

He said both Pakistan and Saudi Arabia enjoyed cordial brotherly ties and the Kingdom always supported Pakistan in every hour of need.

Prime Minister Shehbaz thanked the Saudi King and Crown Prince for their keen interest in promoting cooperation and partnership with Pakistan.



ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari being received by the Prime Minister of Pakistan Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif upon his arrival at Parliament House.

## Interior Minister orders blocking SIMs issued on invalid, expired ID cards

ISLAMABAD (INP): Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi has ordered National Database Registration Authority (NADRA) to block all mobile phone SIMs issued on invalid and expired identity cards.

Mohsin Naqvi on Thursday visited the entire building of NADRA headquarters in Islamabad and inspected all sections including printing.

Mohsin Naqvi instructed for setting up model NADRA offices across the country on the pattern of model police sta-

tions established in Punjab. He said establishing model NADRA offices will improve service delivery and provide convenience to the public.

NADRA Chairman Lieutenant General Muhammad Munir Afsar welcomed Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi on his arrival at the National Database and Registration Authority Headquarters.

Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi also presided over an important meeting at NADRA headquarters.

## Five customs officials martyred, two others injured in firing incident

DERA ISMAIL KHAN (APP): At least five customs officials were killed as their moving vehicle was ambushed by unidentified terrorists near Saggu area here on Thursday.

According to the police control room, the Customs Intelligence vehicle was on its routine patrol within the limits of Darban police station when the armed assailants targeted it by opening fire indiscriminately, leaving five customs officials martyred.

The moving vehicle collided with another vehicle coming from the opposite direction, resulting in injuring two persons including a child.

The attackers managed to escape after the incident.

As information was received about the incident, a heavy contingent of police and Rescue 1122 teams rushed the site and shifted the injured and the bodies to the hospital.



QUETTA: Chief Secretary Balochistan Shakeel Qadir Khan presiding over a meeting regarding preparation for bye polls in different districts

## Justice Hashim, Justice Ishtiaq appointed BHC, PHC CJs

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Ministry of Law and Justice on Thursday notified the appointment of Acting Chief Justice of the Peshawar High Court (PHC) Ishtiaq Ibrahim, as PHC Chief Justice and Acting Chief Justice of Balochistan High Court (BHC) Muhammad Hashim Khan Kakar as BHC Chief Justice.

The ministry, in its notifications, said that the appointments were made by the President of Pakistan in exercise of the powers conferred under clause (1) of Article 193 of the Constitution with effect from the date they would take oath of their offices.

## CM grieved over loss of lives of 7 persons during rains in Chaman

**Independent Report**

QUETTA: The Chief Minister Balochistan, Mir Sarfraz Ahmed Bugti has expressed sorrow over the loss of lives of seven persons including women and children during the Rai in Chaman. In a condolence statement issued here on Thursday, the Chief Minister expressed heartfelt grief over the loss of precious lives in the natural calamity.

Mir Sarfraz Ahmed Bugti said that we are with bereaved families in the time of grief. The Chief Minister directed all concerned departments and district administration to remain alert during rains.

## Threat alert: DC Pishin asks JUI to postpone public gathering

QUETTA (APP): Deputy Commissioner Pishin Juma Dad Mandokhail on Thursday asked the leadership of Jameet Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F) to postpone public gathering scheduled to be held on 20th April, in Pishin district of Balochistan due to a possible threat alert.

In a letter issued to the provincial leadership of JUI-F, DC warned unknown terrorists are planning to carry out Attacks at JUI-F public gathering to be held at Pishin held on 20th April.

According to PTI spokesperson powers that be, their tributary administration and puppet elite class together are out to poke last nail in the coffin of justice.

According to spokesperson the courts are being transformed into Kangaroo courts by harassing the judges at all level from SC

## Address of Zardari to joint session of Parliament: President provides comprehensive roadmap to political parties for resolving public issues: CM

**Independent Report**

QUETTA: The Chief Minister Balochistan, Mir Sarfraz Ahmed Bugti has stated that the President Asif Ali Zardari has provided comprehensive roadmap to all political parties for resolving the public issues through combined platform.

The Chief Minister stated so in a statement issued here on Thursday marking address of the President Zardari to joint session of parliament on commencement of first parliamentary year.

He described the address of President Zardari and said that he stressed the need to end politics of polarisation from the country because the country is in need of unity.

The Chief Minister recalled that when he (Zardari) had been elected president for the first time then he had made historic decisions making parliament empowered.

Sarfraz Bugti said that the President is symbol of a strong federation and he would take all provinces

equally. He said that the country can't afford any chaos and we have to serve the masses a lot by mobilizing all the resources.

In this regard, the President Zardari has expressed his vision for development and reconstruction of the country, Chief Minister said adding that the president has also presented comprehensive strategy for resolving the challenges being faced at the internal and external fronts.

The president also spoke at length about the future roadmap including opportunities of investment, education, health and employments in the country in his address to the joint session of parliament.

The president gave clear message to all the political parties that parliament is center of public service and our survival lies in democracy, the Chief Minister added.

He said that PPP would continue to serve the masses as per its manifesto.



HUB: View of Pishukan to Gwadar link Shabi bridge once again washed away in water relay after massive rainfall in Hub

## PTI declares CJP responsible for harassment of judges

ISLAMABAD (Online): PTI has declared Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) responsible for harassment of judges from Supreme Court (SC) to High Court (HC).

According to PTI spokesperson powers that be, their tributary administration and puppet elite class together are out to poke last nail in the coffin of justice.

According to spokesperson the courts are being transformed into Kangaroo courts by harassing the judges at all level from SC

to subordinate courts. The judges who are hearing cases against politically victimized PTI leaders and workers whenever insist on deciding the cases in the light of law instead of taking dictation from secret agents of state are targeted. The judges are being subjected to fear through references and state campaigns of character assassination besides using kidnapping and violence as weapon against the family members and relatives of judges.







## 33 people died, 46 others injured in rain, flood related incidents

PESHAWAR (APP): As many as 33 people have died and 46 others have been injured so far due to heavy rains in various districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. According to the report issued by Provincial Disasters Management, 17 children, eight men and eight women are among the dead, while the injured include six women, 32 men and eight children.

A total of 1932 houses were damaged due to the collapse of walls and roofs in different districts, in which 326 houses were completely damaged and 1606 houses were partially damaged.

Due to heavy rains, life and financial accidents

occurred in various districts of Khyber, Dir Upper and Lower, Chitral Upper, Swat, Bajaur, Shangla, Mansehra, Mohmand, Malakand, Karak, Tank, Mardan, Peshawar, Charsadda, Nowshera, Bunir, Hangu, Battagram, Bannu, North and South Waziristan, Kohat, Dera Ismail Khan and Orakzai districts.

On the special instructions of the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, PDM has released Rs. 50 million. Since March 29, PDMA has released 8.1 million rupees to the administration of various districts to deal with emergency situations.

In addition, PDMA has provided relief materials to the affected districts of Swat, Chitral Lower, Bajaur, Kohistan Lower, Peshawar, Nowshera, Mohmand, Dir Upper and Lower.

Relief supplies include tents, mats, kitchen sets, blankets, beds, tarpaulins, solar lamps and other daily life items.

The PDMA and all related organizations are continuing relief activities in the rain-affected districts and rains are likely to continue intermittently till April 21, PDMA has issued a letter to all district administrations to be alert and take precautionary measures.



LAHORE: Provincial Minister for Health Khawaj Salman Rafique and Provincial Minister for Food Bilal Yaseen inspecting the revamping project of Govt Mian Munshi Teaching Hospital.

## AJK Usher o Zakaat signs up for payments through S-Paisa

MUZAFFARABAD (APP): The AJK department of Usher o Zakaat and Special Communication Organization (SCO) has signed an agreement to make payments through S-Paisa under which the Zakaat and Usher payments to the poor and destitute segments of the society would be ensured timely on fast track basis.

The agreement ceremony was held at SCO Sector Headquarter Muzaffarabad here on Thursday signed by Sector Commander SCO Col. Muhammad Rashid Khan and Chief Administrator Usher o Zakaat Ch. Abdul Razaq. Speaking on the occasion, the Sector Commander said that AJK region mostly comprises on difficult terrains, mountains and steeply up and down tracks and saying that the people of Neelum valley, Leepa valley and Haveli like

remote areas are facing harsh weather conditions and SCO is providing them telecommunication services successfully.

Sector Commander said that SCO has already transmitted billions of rupees to needy people under Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) through S-Paisa system and our utmost effort would be to deliver Zakaat funds to poor, needy and destitute segments through S-Paisa system on priority in the same way.

He was of the view that S-Paisa and S-net system would be introduced across Azad Jammu and Kashmir in near future to facilitate the people.

Chief Administrator Usher o Zakaat Ch. Abdul Razaq while speaking in the ceremony he said that initially the system would be launched in Neelum and Haveli districts as a pilot project because the people.



LAHORE: Provincial Information Minister, Azma Bukhari take keen interest in dresses during the exhibition organized by Dandy School of Fashion Design held at Al-Humra in Lahore.

## Effective mechanism for early payment to media houses devised: Memon

**Independent Report**  
KARACHI: Secretary Information Department Nadeem-ur-Rehman Memon said that action will be taken against those advertising agencies, who deliberately delays in submission of the bills, this he said while chairing a meeting with the Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of Advertising Agencies, which are on the panel of Information Department in his office on Wednesday. He said that the effective mechanism for early payment to media houses has been devised in the department in order to avoid the outstanding liabilities at maximum level.

Secretary Information said that a third party audit firm is being hired to clear the liabilities of media houses by ascertaining the genuineness and verification of the claim bills accordingly and the payment details will be uploaded on the website. Stressing on

early submission of the bills, Secretary Information Nadeem-ur-Rehman directed the advertising agencies to submit the bills of the campaigns within the fifteen (15) days after release of any public awareness campaigns to print, electronic or social/digital media. Secretary Information said that the scope of the information department is not only limited to the publicity of the Government but also to get public issues to be redressed by sending the media reports of public demands and grievances to the concerned quarters. He said that effective steps are being initiated for the revamping and improvement of the Information Department by using the latest tools of Information and Communication Technology. He said that advertisements are being released by the department as per the criteria mentioned in the Advertisement Policy-2023.

## Sindh Tourism Minister calls on Governor

KARACHI (APP): Sindh Minister of Tourism, Culture, and Antiquities Syed Zulfiqar Ali Shah called on Governor Sindh Kamran Khan Tessori at the Governor's House here on Thursday.

In the meeting, the improvement of tourist places, measures to promote the culture of the province and other issues were discussed.

The governor said that steps should be taken to provide better facilities at the tourist places of the province.

He further said that countless tourists' attractions were available across Sindh.

Kamran Khan Tessori said that integrated measures were also necessary for promoting culture of the province.

Earlier, Provincial Minister Syed Zulfiqar Ali Shah gave a detailed briefing to the Sindh Governor about his departments.

## PIBC ED resigns

MULTAN (APP): Bringing an end to the controversies development owing to appointment issue of a general surgeon on plastic surgeon seat, Pak Italian Modern Centre (PIBC) Executive Director, Dr Naveed Akhtar has tendered resignation from his post.

PIBC Official sources told this news agency here on Thursday that Dr Akhtar sent his resignation to Secretary Specialized healthcare and Medical Education, Lahore today.

"It is with heavy heart that I'm taking this decision, but recent circumstances have rendered it necessary for well-being of myself and the institution" reads the resignation.

## Four arrested over gang rape

FAISALABAD (APP): City Jaranwala police have arrested four accused involved in a gang rape case.

A police spokesman said here on Thursday that a woman (F) filed a complaint, contending that she was returning home along with coworker Kashif Hussain after performing duty in a local mills when accused Humanyun alias Doctor resident of Pak Land Town, Sajawal Masih an employee of Municipal Committee, Suno resident of Usmania Park and Shahid resident of Abdullah Park intercepted him and her coworker near Karmanwala Chowk on April 06 and abducted her. They severely tortured Kashif Hussain and snatched cash in addition to take her to a house.



ZAFARWAL: Federal Minister Ahsan Iqbal visited NADRA centre in Zafarwal, Punjab, which will be opened soon as a state of the art facility to citizens of Zafarwal for processing all their ID related documents.

## Lahore revamping plan gets deadline of June 30

LAHORE (APP): The Punjab government has set a deadline of 30 June for the completion of "Chief Minister Lahore Revamping Plan" and to transfer the authority of Punjab Local Governments Department as an executing agency to Metropolitan Corporation Lahore (MCL).

The decision was made during a meeting chaired by Punjab Local Governments Minister Zeeshan Rafique held here at WASA head office on Thursday, attended by Special Assistant to Chief Minister on Political Affairs Zeeshan Malik, Director General LDA/Commissioner Lahore

Muhammad Ali Randhawa, Administrator Metropolitan Corporation Lahore/Deputy Commissioner Rafia Haider, MD WASA Ghufuran Ahmed and other concerned officials.

During the meeting, a detailed review of the progress in "Lahore Revamping Plan" was made. Local Governments Minister Zeeshan Rafique while addressing the participants said that according to the revamping plan, launched under the directions from Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif, 188 schemes of MCL and 207 schemes of Wasa would be completed. "The GIS mapping of each

scheme will be completed by April 25", he hoped. The chair directed that PC-1 should be completed within 10 days and the tendering of schemes be done within 30 days. He said the Deputy Commissioner as the administrator of MCL would supervise the whole plan. Zeeshan Rafique emphasized that direction of Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif to create a single dashboard of all relevant agencies should be fully implemented. "After the revamping is completed, there will be no need for any new development scheme in Lahore for next four to five years", he resolved.

## Awais Shah says: Govt fully focused on development in underprivileged areas

SUKKUR (APP): Speaker of the Sindh Assembly, Syed Awais Qadir Shah, stated that the provincial government is dedicated to developing and providing health and education facilities in underprivileged areas of the province.

Talking to a delegation of Saleh Puit taluka at his residence here on Thursday, he said that the government is taking crucial steps in this regard and the results of it would be visible soon.

The members of the delegation briefed the

Governor regarding problems faced by the people of the area and called for their resolution.

Speaker Sindh said that the development of all backward districts is the joint responsibility of all stakeholders and they would have to play their role in this regard. He assured the delegation that he would take up the matter relating to problems with the authorities concerned to ensure the availability of medical staff in hospitals and teachers in schools.

## KPCM condemns killing of custom officials

PESHAWAR (APP): Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Health Minister, Syed Qasim Ali Shah attended the Fourth International Public Health Conference as a special guest held at Khyber Medical University (KMU) Peshawar.

The four-day international conference is being held from April 16 to April 19 at (KMU).

Eminent experts and speakers from the University of Central Lancashire, Aga Khan University, Qatar University, Dow University of Health Sciences, Baqai University, Shifa Tameer-e-Millat University, World Bank, WHO, and other relevant institutions delivered

## Minister Education inspects exam hall, assures transparency

**Independent Report**  
PESHAWAR: Provincial Education Minister Faisal Khan Tarakai on Thursday visited the examination hall of Government High School City No-1 and inspected arrangements for ongoing matric exams.

Expressing well wishes for the students, he said practical steps were being taken to ensure transparent examinations across the province. The future of the nation, he said, depends upon students who were the builders of the nation and ensuring supremacy of merit was prerequisite to ensure achievement of this goal.

Secretary Education Masood Ahmad, Special Secretary Asfandyar Khattak and Chairman Peshawar Educational Board Nasrullah were also present on the occasion.

The Minister said he

himself and his team were inspecting the matric examination process across the province and no negligence in this regard would be tolerated. He said the educational boards have made sufficient arrangements, assuring the students that they would get the fruit of their hard work. He informed that the merit-based transparent exams, assistance from district administration, police, WAPDA and relevant departments has been obtained.

He said during the current matric exams a total of 893524 students from across the province were taking part of which 457000 were from the ninth class while 435000 from the 10<sup>th</sup> class. For this purpose, he informed that a total of 3569 examination halls have been set up in the province.



HYDERABAD: Chief Secretary Sindh Asif Hider Shah going after court hearing from High Court Hyderabad circuit.

## KP Minister attends 4th Int'l Public Health Conference at KMU

**Independent Report**  
PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Health Minister, Syed Qasim Ali Shah attended the Fourth International Public Health Conference as a special guest held at Khyber Medical University (KMU) Peshawar.

The four-day international conference is being held from April 16 to April 19 at (KMU).

Eminent experts and speakers from the University of Central Lancashire, Aga Khan University, Qatar University, Dow University of Health Sciences, Baqai University, Shifa Tameer-e-Millat University, World Bank, WHO, and other relevant institutions delivered

lectures on infectious diseases, non-communicable diseases, health hazards under climate change, and strengthening healthcare systems. Addressing the conference, the minister stated that thirty per cent of our society is afflicted with diabetes, and symptoms like high blood pressure are prevalent among eighteen-year-olds.

"We not only need to talk about health but also take practical steps", he added.

"In this regard, we are launching initiatives under 'Live Well' to emphasise healthy living among students in educational institutions. We urge students to participate actively in this initiative", he maintained.

## Meeting discuss financial losses of landowners due to recent rains

PESHAWAR (APP): Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Agriculture, Sajjad Barkawal chaired a meeting here Wednesday and discussed matters including financial losses of the landowners due to current rains and floods in the province, prevention of erosion of agricultural land due to floods and damage to crops. The meeting was attended by Chief Secretary, Nadeem Aslam Chaudhry, Additional Chief Secretary Intiaz Hussain Shah, Secretary Agriculture, Javed Marwat, United Nations FAO Country Representative Miss

Florence Rolle and FAO Regional Chief Farokh Tayrif. The meeting discussed the emergency situation in the province due to recent rains and floods. Participants pondered over the ongoing measures for development of agriculture and welfare of landowners and appreciated initiatives of World Food Organization in KP and merged districts.

Provincial minister termed efforts of international organization FAO as ideal and valuable in agricultural development and expressed hope that this mutual cooperation would continue in the future.



PESHAWAR: Students attempting the Matriculation (Matric) paper at Government High School No 2 as the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) exams have started in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

## Jirga held to maintain peace in district Kurram

KURRAM (APP): An extraordinary jirga of tribal leaders from across the Kurram district was held at Governor Cottage Parachinar in which GOC 9 Division Major General Zulfiqar Ali Bhatti, prominent tribal leaders and elders of Upper, Lower and Central Kurram were in attendance. The Grand Jirga in District Kurram was chaired by Deputy Commissioner (DC) Javed Ullah Mehsud to ensure law and order in the area. During the Jirga, the DC

outlined its aims and objectives, emphasizing that peace has been restored in the Kurram district through many sacrifices. He urged the leaders of the area to cooperate with the government to maintain this peace. Addressing the Jirga, GOC 9<sup>th</sup> Division Major Gen Zulfiqar Ali Bhatti said in his address that peace will be maintained in the district of Kurram and action will be taken against the miscreants.



KARACHI: Diarrhea patients are being treated at Civil Hospital in Karachi.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif chairs a meeting regarding Power Sector.

## PM orders for boosting privatization, outsourcing process of power Discos

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday directed the relevant authorities to accelerate the process of privatization and outsourcing of the power distribution companies (Discos). Chairing a high-level meeting regarding power sector here, the prime minister said the assistance of private sector experts and globally accepted models should be taken to improve the management affairs of the distribution companies (DISCOs). He also directed to prepare and present a comprehensive plan in the next meeting to improve the power system in the country. The prime minister said reforms in the power sector would help reduce the country's circular debt. He also vowed not to allow electricity thieves and other elements to harm the country's treasury. In the meeting, the recommendation and measures with respect to prevent the power theft, reorganization of National Transmission and Dispatch Company (NTDC) and new projects of the electricity transmission were presented.

The meeting was told that Matiari-Rahim Yar Khan transmission line and Ghazi Barotha-Faisalabad line will be constructed to ensure the power transmission from Southern part of the country. The meeting was further informed that a comprehensive strategy had been evolved for the reorganization of NTDC to bring reforms in the power transmission system and to minimize the government's circular debts. The prime minister directed to complete all the reforms' initiatives within the stipulated time. The meeting was attended by the federal ministers Mohammad Ishaq Dar, Khawaja Muhammad Asif, Ahmad Khan Cheema, Sardar Awaiz Khan Leghari, Dr Musadik Malik, Abdul Aleem Khan, Ataullah Tarar, Syed Mohsin Raza Naqvi, former power minister Muhammad Ali, Deputy Chairman Planning Commission Jehanzeb Khan, Member of National Assembly Bilal Azhar Kayani, Engineer Qamar ul Islam, Rana Ehsan Afzal, Salman Ahmed and other concerned officials.

## Prudent policies, reforms poised to result in sustainable economic growth: Governor SBP

**Independent Report**  
KARACHI: Governor State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) Jameel Ahmed highlighting country's substantial improvements in macroeconomic outlook hoped that time bound reforms will put the economy on the path of sustainable economic growth. Governor SBP expressed the views during his meetings with key international investors during multiple events organized by leading global banks and financial firms, including JP Morgan, Citibank and Jefferies, on the sidelines of the IMF-World Bank Spring Meetings in Washington DC, said a statement issued here.

He informed the participants about the substantial improvement in Pakistan's macroeconomic outlook achieved over the past year as a result of a prudent monetary policy, backed adequately by fiscal consolidation and beginning of the implementation of key structural reforms. Governor referring to sharp decline in inflation over the past year from a peak of 38 percent in May 2023 to the two-year low of 20.7 percent in March 2024 explained that the deceleration in inflation is broad-based, reflecting the combined impact of monetary tightening, fiscal consolidation, ease in import supplies, improved agriculture output and base effect. "More importantly, core inflation declined markedly, reaching 15.7 percent in March, after persistently staying above 20 percent throughout last year," he added. The governor informed the participants that the external sector has also stabilized, as reflected in the sharp reduction in the current account deficit (CAD) to \$1 billion during Jul-Feb FY24 from \$3.8 billion in the same period last year. In addition to stabilization policies, improved agriculture output has contributed to higher food exports.

## FPCCI waives off 50% membership fee of women chambers

**Independent Report**  
ISLAMABAD: The Federation of Pakistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) on Thursday announced waiver off 50% membership fee for women chambers. President FPCCI Atif Ikram Sheikh in a statement issued here said that the country and society cannot progress without the full role of women, adding the initiative of reducing membership fee was important for women empowerment.

"We have fulfilled our promise, for which the full credit goes to the leadership of United Business Group (UBG), who had promised this during the election campaign," he added. Ikram said that Pakistani women were extremely talented and the chamber was striving to empower them in the economic field. "If Pakistan is to progress, we have to make our women educated, skilled and empowered to business women," he added.



WASHINGTON: Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Muhammad Aurangzeb interacted with representatives of Deutsche Bank.

## ICCI pledges to have a female president soon

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) has pledged to have its first female president soon followed by other chambers across the country. The facilitation centers for women home-based workers would be established in all the provincial capitals. This was disclosed by the Chairperson National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW), Nilofar Bukhtiar during the Eid Milan and Award Ceremony held here Thursday.

## KP Govt decides to establish Gem Processing & Export Centre

**Independent Report**  
PESHAWAR: The government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has decided to develop gemstone sector as formal export sector and for this purpose the gemstone cluster at Namak Mandi would be developed in the shape of Gems Processing & Export Centre. The Gem Export Center will be redesigned and shifted to a spacious and suitable building equipped with all international standards. In this regard, a high-level meeting was held on Thursday in the committee room of the Industries Department here at Civil Secretariat, Peshawar with Special Assistant to Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Commerce and Technical Education Abdul Karim Tordhir in the chair. Besides, Secretary Industries, Syed Zulfiqar Ali Shah and Special Secretary Muhammad Anwar Khan, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Economic Zones Development and Management Company (KP-EZDMC) Javed Iqbal Khattak, Executive Director of Federal Export Development Fund (EDF) Samiullah Khan and Director Zafar, PDA and Local Government Officers, representatives of Sarhad Chamber of Commerce & Industry (SCCI) Gemstones Association and officers of other relevant departments also attended the meeting.

## MoU signed for skilled manpower in AJK: PM lauds initiative

MIRPUR (APP): Azad Jammu Kashmir Prime Minister, Chaudhry Anwar ul Haq Thursday termed signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between state-run TEVTA and NAVTTC as a significant development. He emphasized the importance of talented and educated individuals, particularly the youth, leveraging this opportunity for skill development. The AJK PM highlighted that the MoU would contribute to

reducing unemployment in the region. The signing ceremony, held at Jammu Kashmir House in the federal metropolis and Executive Director NEVTTC Aamir Jan and TEVTA Chairman Chaudhry Farid Ahmed present on the occasion. Senior Minister Col. (ret'd) Waqar Ahmad Noor, Minister TEVTA Sardar Amir Altaf, Chief Secretary Dawood Muhammad Burich, Chairman NEVTTC Ms. Gulmina Bilal, and other officials attended the event.

## Finance Minister rules out rupee devaluation in talks with IMF

ISLAMABAD (Online): Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb has ruled out any further significant rupee devaluation ahead of talks with International Monetary Fund. Speaking at roundtable meeting with Bloomberg team in Washington, he said there is no reason for rupee devaluation as Pakistan has solid foreign-exchange reserves, stable currency, rising remittances and steady exports.



HYDERABAD: Farmers are busy in their works to earn their livelihood for support their families, at a field located near Hyderabad.

## Country prepared to become tech hub: Shaza Fatima

LAHORE (APP): State Minister for Information Technology and Telecommunication Shaza Fatima Khawaja on Thursday said that the country was prepared to become regional tech hub and IT leader. She said this while addressing a press conference along with Digital Cooperation Organization (DCO) Secretary General Deemah Al-Yahya at a local hotel. She said, "Youth is our asset and we have strong connectivity," adding that Pakistan had partners like Saudi Arabia and other countries which wanted to strengthen this sector.

She further said that Digital Foreign Direct Investment conference would be organized at the end of this year, adding that World Economic Forum, Digital Cooperation Organization and Pakistan would host conference every year to bring investment in the country for IT sector, manufacturing, software and telecommunication sides as well. She further said that these initiatives and the policies of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif aimed at supporting private sector would yield positive results to put the country on road to progress. Shaza Fatima said that the incumbent government was working on various policies and legislation whether it was related to data protection, cyber security, cloud policy to create feasible environment for growth of IT, tech and telecom sectors. She said, "Pakistan is a founding member of



LAHORE: Minister of State for IT and Telecommunication Ms. Shaza Fatima Khawaja and Ms. Deemah Al-Yahya, Secretary General Digital Cooperation Organization (DCO) cutting ribbon to inaugurate 24th ITCN Asia 2024 at Expo Centre.

## Zong business revolutionizes digital landscape for CGCMS through recent partnership

ISLAMABAD (APP): Zong Business, Pakistan's leading telecom operator has joined hands with China Gezhouba Group Corporation (CGGC) is a key subsidiary of China Energy Engineering Group Co., Ltd., a prominent state-owned enterprise, said a news release issued here on Thursday. CGGC specializes in

ambitious goals without hindrance. Founded in 1970, China Gezhouba Group Corporation (CGGC) is a key subsidiary of China Energy Engineering Group Co., Ltd., a prominent state-owned enterprise, said a news release issued here on Thursday. CGGC specializes in

various sectors including water conservancy, power generation, infrastructure construction, and real estate development, encompassing design, construction, investment, and operation services. CGCMS' expertise combined with Zong 4G's proficiency in network architecture, security,

the State Minister said that recently Saudi Arabia foreign minister and representative of Investment Ministry visited Pakistan, adding that country's IT sector was also highlighted during meetings with the delegation from Saudi Arabia.



SIALKOT: A person filling water in pot at water filtration plant with petrol pump style water nozzle at Mubarak Pura.

## SAARC BAZAAR – A way Forward for South Asian Businesses

**Independent Report**  
ISLAMABAD / SAARC BAZAAR: Empowering Trade, Fostering Growth, and Celebrating Diversity [WWW.SAARCBAZAAR.COM](http://WWW.SAARCBAZAAR.COM), the innovative e-commerce platform designed to revolutionize trade within the SAARC region, is now officially live. With a vision to connect global consumers by providing a 100% free-of-cost, user-friendly e-commerce portal that bridges traders across the SAARC region, including MSMEs (Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises) and entrepreneurs, particularly women who own home-

based industries, SAARCBAZAAR is strategically positioned to capitalize on this growth by fostering regional economic integration and empowering businesses and consumers alike. The SAARC region, projected by the World Bank to be the world's fastest-growing region in 2024 with a 6% output growth, is poised for a significant economic leap. SAARCBAZAAR goes beyond commerce by highlighting the rich cultural heritage and tourist attractions of each SAARC country. Explore the best of art, cuisine, and history while conducting business.

Businesses from all corners of the SAARC region can now showcase their products, services, and source materials effortlessly. The platform facilitates direct connections between traders, manufacturers, and consumers with just a click. SAARCBAZAAR serves as an invaluable resource for accessing up-to-date economic data, news, and information on trade events and exhibitions within the SAARC region. It is committed to fostering self-employment and entrepreneurial opportunities. For women entrepreneurs, especially

those in peri-urban and remote areas, the platform provides a level playing field to showcase their talents and products. Businesses registered with regional commerce chambers and women entrepreneurs receive distinctive identity badges. This spotlight feature enhances visibility and credibility, promoting trust among consumers. SAARCBAZAAR proudly pioneers a first-of-its-kind reporting mechanism for NTMs and NTBs. An open database system ensures prompt resolution of potential trade issues through formal channels. SAARCBAZAAR

is more than an e-commerce platform; it's a gateway to economic prosperity. By connecting businesses, celebrating diversity, and addressing trade barriers, we aim to transform the SAARC region." - Zohaib Mushtaq, Project Coordinator, SAARCBAZAAR. ABOUT SAARCBAZAAR: SAARCBAZAAR is a non-profit initiative supported by trade bodies, and development agencies. Its mission is to create a vibrant ecosystem that fosters economic growth, inclusivity, and cross-cultural exchange within the SAARC region.

## Mobilink Bank registers solid start to year by doubling its revenue in Q1 2024

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan's leading digital microfinance institution, Mobilink Bank, has reported a staggering 97% increase in revenue during Q1 2024 compared to the same period last year, marking a powerful start to the year. The Bank's Profit before Tax (PBT) also witnessed 110% growth, said a news release. The substantial increase in the revenue and PBT underscore the Bank's robust financial performance, heightened customer & stakeholder confidence, and the positive momentum within the country's economic

and business environment at the outset of the year. Mobilink Bank is part of the VEON group, a global digital operator that provides converged connectivity and digital services to nearly 160 million customers in six dynamic markets that are home to 7% of world's population. Mobilink Bank champions financial inclusion and works to advance the growth and sustainability of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), particularly those owned and run by women. The Bank leverages microfinance and fintech to foster access to finance.



QUETTA: Deputy Commissioner Quetta Lt (ret'd) Saad Bin Asad presides over the meeting of Poultry Farms and Shopkeepers Association.

## European Union official urges G7 to step up air defense for Ukraine and expand Iran sanctions

**Monitoring Desk**  
CAPRI: The European Union's top diplomat urged Group of Seven foreign ministers on Thursday to take quick, concrete steps to provide more air defense systems to Ukraine, warning that continued delays could tilt the war in Moscow's favor.

Without more Patriot air defense missile systems to guard against incoming Russian strikes, "the electricity system of Ukraine will be destroyed. And no country can fight without having electricity at home, in the factories, in the front line," EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell warned.

He was speaking on the sidelines of a G7 foreign ministers meeting on the Italian resort island of Capri, where Russia's war in Ukraine and surging tensions in the Middle East over Iran's unprecedented attack on Israel were top-

ping the agenda.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken echoed Borrell's call, saying he hoped U.S. funding for Ukraine would soon come through Congress but that other allies needed to step up.

"In this moment, it is urgent that all of the friends and supporters of Ukraine maximize their efforts to provide Ukraine with what it needs to continue to effectively defend itself against this Russian aggression," Blinken said after meeting with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba.

Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani opened the first working session by calling for new sanctions against Iran for its weekend attack and concrete help for Ukraine to defend itself from Moscow's invasion.

"If Ukraine loses, Putin will never sit at the peace table," Tajani warned.

Russia's war in

Ukraine and the Israel-Hamas war were taking center stage at the Capri meeting of the foreign ministers from Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United States, which dovetailed with other regional diplomatic efforts sending the same messages.

On Wednesday, EU leaders meeting in Brussels vowed to ramp up sanctions on Iran to target its drone and missile deliveries to proxies in Gaza, Yemen and Lebanon. Borrell said the existing EU sanctions regime would be strengthened and expanded to punish Tehran and help prevent future attacks on Israel. At the same time, he said, Israel needed to exercise restraint.

"I don't want to exaggerate but we are on the edge of a war, a regional war in the Middle East, which will be sending shockwaves to the rest of the world, and in particular to Europe."



**British Foreign Secretary David Cameron, European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock, Japanese Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa, Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs Melanie Joly, French Foreign Minister Stephane Sejourne and Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani meet on the second day of a G7 foreign ministers meeting on Capri island, Italy.**

## China accuses US of hypocrisy over Biden's 'xenophobic' claims

**Monitoring Desk**  
BEIJING: Beijing on Thursday accused the United States of hypocrisy in response to accusations by President Joe Biden that China is "xenophobic" and "cheating" on trade.

"I would like to ask him: are you talking about China or the US itself?" foreign ministry spokesman Lin Jian said when asked about the comments.

In a speech on Wednesday to union members, Biden called for a hike in steel tariffs on China, accusing it of cheating as he courted blue-collar voters on an election campaign trip to the battleground state of Pennsylvania.

"They're not competing, they're cheating. They're cheating and we've

seen the damage here in America," the 81-year-old Biden said to cheers at the headquarters of the United Steelworkers union in Pittsburgh.

The Democrat said Chinese steel companies "don't need to worry about making a profit because the Chinese government is subsidizing them so heavily."

Biden said he had called for the US Trade Representative to triple the tariff rates for Chinese steel and aluminum if Beijing was confirmed to be using anti-competitive practices. "They're xenophobic," he added. "They've got real problems. I'm not looking for a fight with China. I'm looking for competition — but fair competition."



**Palestinian forensic experts and others search for bodies near Al-Shifa Hospital, in Gaza City.**

## Russia reports downing 5 Ukrainian military balloons in Kyiv's latest apparent war innovation

**Monitoring Desk**  
NEW YORK: Russian air defenses downed what authorities described as five Ukrainian balloons overnight, the defense ministry in Moscow said Thursday, as the sides kept up long-range strikes that have featured heavily in what has largely become a war of attrition. Neither Russian nor Ukrainian officials have provided details about the

secretive balloons, which Moscow authorities and media have reported on the battlefield in recent weeks. Ukraine's military has been driving innovation since the war began in February 2022, notably adapting drones for wide use against the bigger Kremlin forces.

According to Russian news reports, the Ukrainian balloons are equipped with a GPS module and carry

explosives. They reportedly are harder to detect and could carry a bigger payload than more common small drones. It is not clear if they are helium or hot air or another type of balloon.

The balloons aren't able to maneuver in the air. The GPS module is likely used to coordinate the release of explosives if the balloon floats over a specific area.

## Another mass grave found in Gaza hospital

**Monitoring Desk**  
GAZA CITY: A fresh mass grave was found in Gaza Strip's Al-Shifa Hospital this week, according to Al Jazeera.

The grave was found after some employees informed relief and rescue workers that an unspecified number of bodies were dumped in the hospital's premises over the past few months because the incessant bombardment by Israel had made it almost impossible to ensure a normal burial.

The channel's correspondent quoted an employee of the hospital as saying he was confident that another mass grave would be found at Beit Lahya, a town near Gaza City which bore the brunt of Israeli bombing soon after the crisis unfolded on Oct 7.

According to the channel's correspondent, Palestinian families have been visiting the hospital to find out whether the grave

contains the bodies of their loved ones. Walid Radwa Fuma was one of them. He said he was able to identify the body of his mother thanks to a distinctive mark on her leg.

Israel's onslaught in Gaza was triggered by the Hamas' raid inside the Jewish state on Oct 7, which by its tallies killed 1,200 with 253 taken prisoner.

The subsequent bombardment by Israel has killed more than 33,000 Palestinians, displaced the majority of Gaza's 2.3 million people and caused a grave humanitarian crisis.

Israel has faced growing global opposition to the relentless bombardment of Gaza, which the United Nations and aid agencies have warned has pushed the north of the territory to the brink of famine. But Netanyahu rejected any claims about famine on Wednesday, saying Israel is doing "above and beyond" what is needed "on the humanitarian issue".

## Tel Aviv under pressure to defuse tensions with Iran

**Monitoring Desk**  
TEHRAN: Amid a diplomatic flurry aiming to calm a region already on the edge, Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Wednesday his country would decide how to respond to Iran.

Tehran, however, said its military and air force were ready to confront any Israeli attack.

Israel faces pressure from its allies to refrain from striking back at Iran.

British Foreign Secretary David Cameron and his German counterpart Annalena Baerbock were the first Western envoys to visit Israel and urge calm, but Netanyahu told the visiting ministers that Israel "will reserve the right to protect itself," his office said.

The German FM called for "prudent restraint", saying the region must not slide into a situation whose outcome is completely unpredictable.

Meanwhile, Mr Cameron said that "we're very anxious to avoid escalation and to say to our friends in Israel: It's a time to think with head as well as heart."

The US has already made clear it won't join any attack on Iran and has called for de-escalation, as have a host of other Western and Arab leaders.

Israel's military chief Herzi Halevi has already vowed "a response" to Iran's first-ever direct attack, while military spokesman Daniel Hagari stressed that Tehran would not get off "scot-free".

## Jordan says Israeli retaliation for Iran strikes risks wider regional war

**Monitoring Desk**  
AMMAN: Jordan's Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi said on Wednesday an Israeli retaliation against Iranian strikes could bring a real risk of dragging the whole region into a devastating war.

In an interview released by state media, Safadi said his country was lobbying major powers against an escalation that would have far-reaching consequences for regional stability and security.

"The risks are enormous. That could drag the whole region into war, which would be devastating to us in the region and we'll have very, very serious implications for the rest of the world including the US," Safadi said.

## Indian polls from Friday to decide future of its democracy

**Monitoring Desk**  
NEW DELHI: India begins its crucial national elections on Friday amid hopes and fears for its troubled democracy.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the most right-wing leader to head the country, is hoping to win a third consecutive term, the first time since Jawaharlal Nehru, while his rejuvenated rivals say he could lose.

Mr Modi says he is confident of getting more than 400 seats in the 18th Lok Sabha, a brute majority of in the 545-seat lower house, a feat achieved only

once by Rajiv Gandhi.

The Bharatiya Janata Party hopes to increase its tally from 303 to 370, the rest coming from other members of the ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA).

It is widely feared that Mr Modi would seek to use the majority to change the constitution to align with his idea of Hindu Rashtira.

Mr Modi's hitherto fractious rivals comprising regional parties plus the Congress, recently cobbled the India National Development Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) bloc.

## UN Security Council to vote on Friday on Palestinian UN membership

**Monitoring Desk**  
UNITED NATIONS: The United Nations Security Council is scheduled to vote on Friday on a Palestinian request for full UN membership, said diplomats, a move that Israel ally the United States is expected to block because it would effectively recognize a Palestinian state. The 15-member council is due to vote at 3 pm (1900 GMT) on Friday on a draft resolution that recommends to the 193-member UN General Assembly that "the State of Palestine be admitted to membership of the United Nations."

## Europe wants two things from China

**Monitoring Desk**  
BEIJING: Europe wants two things from China: First, a shift in its relatively pro-Russia position on the war in Ukraine. Second, a reduction in the trade imbalance — Chinese goods exports to the EU exceeded its imports from the 27-nation bloc by 291 billion euros (\$310 billion) last year.

It's not clear if it will get very far on either front. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz became the latest European leader to leave China with promises to talk but little more. The Chinese statements on his meetings in Beijing this week didn't appear to give ground on the issues that divide the EU and China.

There is some reason for hope in Europe. China badly wants foreign investment to boost its sluggish economy. And China has made efforts to mend its relationships from Europe to the United States and Australia, despite its differences with them. But those considerations may not

outweigh the larger strategic reasons China has for aligning itself with Russia as it seeks an alternative to the U.S.-led global order and for promoting its green energy companies as it tries to build the nation into a technology leader.

Both the EU and the U.S. are complaining that Chinese policies to promote green energy have incentivized companies to build too much manufacturing capacity for electric cars, solar panels and other related products.

Low-priced exports have taken a toll on solar companies in Europe and America and pose a potential threat to other industries. The EU launched an investigation last fall into Chinese subsidies and could impose tariffs on electric vehicles exported from China. China has agreed to talks on production capacity with the U.S. but remained steadfast in defending its exports of green energy products.

## Hamas chief Haniyeh to visit Turkey this weekend: Erdogan

**Monitoring Desk**  
ISTANBUL: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Wednesday he will host the leader of Palestinian group Hamas, Ismail Haniyeh, in Turkey this weekend.

"The leader of the Palestinian cause will be my guest this weekend," Erdogan, an outspoken critic of Israel, told lawmakers.

Private television channel NTV reported that the two men would meet on Saturday at the Dolmabahce palace in Istanbul.

Their last meeting was in July 2023 when Erdogan hosted Haniyeh at the presidential palace in Ankara alongside Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

Erdogan has been one of the strongest critics of Israel since the start of the war in Gaza, sparked by the group's attack on Israel on October 7, 2023.



**Andrej Plenkovic, Prime Minister of Croatia, reacts to the preliminary results of the country's parliamentary election, in Zagreb, Croatia.**

## Nine arrested for \$20M Canada gold heist

**Monitoring Desk**  
ONTARIO: Canadian police have made arrests and issued nine warrants in the largest gold theft in the country's history, the BBC reported on Wednesday.

More than 6,500 gold bars worth C\$20m (£11.6m), were stolen from Toronto Pearson Airport, in April 2023, along with millions in cash.

According to the report, the alleged driver was arrested in the US carrying dozens of guns that police say were intended for use in Canada.

Police said the "Netflix-series"-style heist

was executed by a "well-organised group of criminals".

The announcement on Wednesday by the Canadian Peel Regional Police and the US Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms Bureau came exactly one year after the massive gold heist, reportedly the sixth largest in the world.

The year-long joint investigation was codenamed Project 24K. It has included dozens of search warrants and interviews.

So far, police have recovered C\$90,000 of "pure gold", fashioned into six "crudely made" bracelets.

## UAE reels for a third day after record-breaking storm

**Monitoring Desk**  
DUBAI: The United Arab Emirates (UAE) was still grappling on Thursday with the aftermath of a record-breaking storm this week that brought much of the country to a standstill.

In Dubai, operations at the airport, a major travel hub, remain disrupted after Tuesday's storm flooded the runway, resulting in flight diversions, delays and cancellations. The airport said on Thursday morning it had resumed receiving inbound flights at Terminal 1, but that flights continue to be delayed and disrupted.

## Thousands evacuated as Indonesia volcano erupts, causes tsunami threat

**Monitoring Desk**  
MANADO: Indonesian rescuers raced to evacuate thousands of people Thursday after a volcano erupted five times, forcing authorities to close a nearby airport and issue a warning about falling debris that could cause a tsunami.

The crater of Mount Ruang flamed with lava against a backdrop of lightning bolts overnight after erupting four times on Wednesday, forcing authorities to raise its alert level to the highest of a four-tiered system.

The volcano in Indonesia's outermost region was still billowing a

column of smoke on Thursday morning, prompting authorities to shut the nearest international airport in Manado city on Sulawesi island for 24 hours.

Authorities said they were rushing to evacuate 11,000 residents from the nearby area that included the remote island of Tagulandang, home to about 20,000 people.

Some residents were already trying to flee in a panic, according to officials.

"Last night people evacuated on their own but without direction due to the volcano's eruption and materials in the form of small rocks that fell.

## EU needs to turbocharge defence-industrial capacity

**Monitoring Desk**  
BRUSSELS: European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said on Wednesday that the EU needs to turbocharge defence-industrial capacity in the next five years amid rising global threats.

Speaking at a defence and security conference in Brussels, she added that the focus will be on innovation.

"We will focus on innovation to ensure Europe has that edge in the new technologies, which we see being deployed across the world in different conflicts."

## Climate impact set to cut 2050 global GDP by nearly a fifth

**Monitoring Desk**  
PARIS: Climate change caused by CO2 emissions already in the atmosphere will shrink global GDP in 2050 by about \$38 trillion, or almost a fifth, no matter how aggressively humanity cuts carbon pollution, researchers said on Wednesday.

But slashing greenhouse gas emissions as quickly as possible remains crucial to avoid even more devastating economic impacts after mid-century, they reported in the journal Nature.

Economic fallout from climate change, the study shows, could increase tens of trillions of dollars per year by 2100 if the planet were to warm significantly beyond two degrees Celsius above mid-19th century levels.

Earth's average surface temperature has already climbed 1.2C above that benchmark, enough to amplify heatwaves, droughts, flooding and

tropical storms made more destructive by rising seas.

Annual investment needed to cap global warming below 2C — the cornerstone goal of the 2015 Paris Agreement — is a small fraction of the damages that would be avoided, the researchers found. Staying under the 2C threshold "could limit average regional income loss to 20 percent compared to 60 percent" in a high-emissions scenario, lead author Max Kotz, an expert in complexity science at the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK), said. Economists disagree on how much should be spent to avoid climate damages. Some call for massive investment now, while others argue it would be more cost-effective to wait until societies are richer and technology more advanced.

The new research sidesteps this debate, but its eye-watering estimate of economic impacts helps make the case for ambitious near-term action.



**Polling officials carrying EVMs at Sukma, in India's Chhattisgarh state, embark an aircraft bound for a polling station.**

## Tarar for enhanced collaboration between public, private sector to ensure rapid economic dev.

ISLAMABAD (APP): Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar on Thursday stressed the need for enhanced collaboration between the public and private sectors to fast track the process of economic development of the country.

Addressing the First Pakistan Semiconductor Summit, he said that the Special Investment Facilitation Council had been set up to attract investment in Pakistan and ensure 'ease of doing business'. He said it was main thrust of the government policy to encourage innovation and investment in the country.

He said that Pakistan, as the fifth largest democracy in the world, was endowed with great natural resources and its biggest resource was its human resource. "We are blessed with a huge population of youth which constitutes 68 per cent of its population". That is a huge potential

which we can offer to the world, he added.

He said Pakistan was strategically located at the crossroads of the world which was a source of pride for the nation.

He said that the Government of Pakistan as a policy encouraged innovation and investment in the country which this summit was offering precisely - a collaboration between public and private sector.

He said that the federal cabinet meeting on Wednesday had approved a public private partnership policy framework to eventually facilitate investment in the country.

He said that the job of the government was not only to regulate but also facilitate investment. He said unfortunately sometimes governments forget their primary responsibility as a facilitator which hampered the investment.

He said that the government could fulfil this responsibility through collaboration between public and private sector and by ensuring 'ease of doing business'.

He said that Pakistan has been producing 50,000 engineering graduates every year and it has the best engineering universities in the world. Our engineering graduates are well placed globally but unfortunately we are not able to reap the benefits of the semiconductor industry. It is \$ 550 billion industry at this moment with the projection of \$ 1 Trillion by 2030.

Tarar said that Pakistan had great potential to deploy its human resource in this industry.

The minister said that he was proud to inform that Shehbaz Sharif during his stints as chief minister of the Punjab had attached great importance to vocational training and skill development. From day one, the priority of the PML-N was skill development of the youth.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif witnesses signing of a letter of intent between Prime Minister's Youth Programme and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund.

## PM witnesses signing of letter of intent between PMYP, UNICEF

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday witnessed signing of a letter of intent regarding the United Nations Generation Unlimited (GenU) programme between Prime Minister's Youth Programme and the UN International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF).

GenU was launched by the Secretary General of the United Nations in 2018 with the aim to empower the youth through education, technical training and entrepreneurship and working towards early education and training.

GenU is planning to start its full operations in Pakistan with an initial investment of 20 million Euros in youth related projects.

Signing the document will help provide equal opportunities to education and training to the youth. GenU and the PM Youth Programme will work together on operational strategic framework in this regard.

Earlier the UNICEF delegation headed by representative of UNICEF in Pakistan Abdullah A Fazil called on the prime minister. Chairman PM Youth Programme Rana Mashhood was also present in the meeting.

The delegation apprised the prime minister about the collaboration between the PM Youth Programme and UNICEF regarding increasing the capacity of the youth in Pakistan.

The prime minister appreciated the steps being taken by UNICEF for the welfare of children all over the world, including Pakistan.

## Quetta, Gwadar submerged, roads washed away as stormy rains lash Balochistan

GWADAR (INP): Continuous heavy rains have caused widespread destruction in Balochistan. Quetta and Gwadar submerged and mostly areas lost ground connectivity as roads and highways were washed away on Thursday.

According to the channel, continuous rainfall has been reported in Quetta and Gwadar regions since last night, leading to water entering houses, roads being closed for traffic, and disrupting daily life.

Due to the unprecedented downpour in Gwadar regions, highways also washed away and ground connectivity with Karachi and other Sindh areas was disturbed.

The SP Coastal Highway confirmed that traffic between Gwadar and Karachi has been suspended at Makran Coastal Highway near Princes of Hope as the road has been blocked by flood and other routes were also washed away. In Quetta, it has continued to rain since last night and water entered the houses while highways and linked roads were closed for any traffic.

The downpour also badly affected the areas of Turbat, Panjgur, Noshki, Pishin, and Chaman as well. Reportedly, flooding caused roads to wash away in Chaman and rain waters entered into houses.

Intense rainfall in Ziarat, Pasni, Ormara, Jiwani, and Jhal Magsi has led to flash flooding in streams and nullahs.

According to the report, numerous settlements in these areas have been submerged, and the roofs of many houses have collapsed while ground connectivity has also been disrupted in several villages.

Karachi was also affected by the westerly rain system as it experienced downpour in areas like Metrowell and SITE, Orangi Town, and Sher Shah.

In the early morning in Lahore, the weather became pleasant due to rain in different parts of the city.

The Meteorology Department has predicted heavy rains in Sindh and Punjab for the next three days as a spell of rains is expected from April 18 to 21.

As per the met office report, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan will also receive rain during next three days.



ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari meeting with Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, Chairman Senate Syed Yousaf Raza Gillani, Speaker National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq, and Deputy Speaker Syed Ghulam Mustafa Shah, at Parliament House.



ISLAMABAD: Senator Mushahid Hussain Syed along with others inaugurating Pakistan Africa Institute for Development and Research (PAIDAR) at Institute of Strategic Studies under the Thematic Focus: 'Reviving the Bandung Spirit of Afro-Asian Solidarity: Pakistan-Africa Relations'.

## All areas cleared thanks to administration: Commissioner, DG PDMA visit different areas of Quetta; review cleanliness situation

**Independent Report**  
QUETTA: The Commissioner Quetta, Muhammad Hamza Shafaqat and Director General, Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA), Jahanzaib Khan visited different areas of the metropolis and reviewed the post-rain situation of cleanliness.

They visited double road, Jinnah road, Airport road, Liaquat bazaar, Shahrah-E-Iqbal and other areas saying that all these areas have been cleared from the rain and sewerage water.

Speaking on the occasion, Commissioner said that he has inspected different areas, which have been cleared following the timely steps taken by the administration.

He urged the general public to adopt preventive measures and ensure drainage of rain water from the roofs of their homes.

He also asked the people to contact the control room in case of emergency so as to give timely response.

The Commissioner said that it is our aim to serve the masses for we are all ready.

He said that all possible steps are being taken to provide maximum relief to the people during the rain situation.

## Pakistan to commence Hajj flight operation from May 9

ISLAMABAD (INP): Pakistan to commence Hajj 2024 operation from May 9 from eight airports of the country.

According to details, the arrangements for the Hajj 2024 flight operation have been completed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony.

Four Airlines including Pakistan International Airlines (PIA), Saudi Airlines, Air Blue and Serene Air will take part in the Hajj operation.

The vaccination of the pilgrims will start on April 30 at the Hajj Camps. As many as 69,500 pilgrims will depart on the spiritual journey under the government's scheme.

Hajj 2024 flight operation will be carried out from Islamabad, Lahore, Karachi, Multan, Quetta, Sukkur, Sialkot, Rahim Yar Khan and Faisalabad airports.

## Pakistan, UK ties based on mutual respect: Speaker

ISLAMABAD (APP): Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq on Thursday said that Pakistan attached great importance to its longstanding relations with the United Kingdom (UK) which were based on mutual respect and shared perceptions on broad range of regional and international issues.

It is high time to further solidify this cordial bond through increased people-to-people interactions, enhanced parliamentary engagements, and bolstered economic ties for the mutual benefit of the two friendly countries, he expressed these views while talking to the British High Commissioner to Pakistan, Jane Marriott, who called on him.

Highlighting the significance of parliamentary cooperation, Speaker Sadiq underscored that parliamentary diplomacy had historically played a pivotal role in strengthening bilateral relations.

He emphasized the continuous exchange and collaboration between the two parliaments through parliamentary friendship groups.

## PM exchange greetings with MPs

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prior to President Asif Ali Zardari's address to the Joint Session of Parliament on Thursday, Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif had an interaction with parliamentarians of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and allied parties.

He went across the National Assembly Hall to exchange greetings, besides shaking hands, with the members of Parliament (MPs), including Pakistan Peoples Party Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari.

## Mushahid launches Pakistan's first think tank on Africa

**Independent Report**  
ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's first think tank on Africa, Pakistan-Africa Institute for Development & Research (PAIDAR) was launched at a well attended event at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) here on Thursday.

The think tank is the brain child of Senator Mushahid Hussain Syed, introduced the aims and objectives of this new initiative as the founding President of PAIDAR.

The think tank was launched at a Seminar hosted by the ISSI with the theme: "Reviving the Afro-Asian solidarity: Pakistan-Africa relations". The guests included a number of ambassadors, especially from African countries as well as scholars, students, dignitaries and think tanks, a news release said.

Senator Mushahid Hussain Syed noted the launch of PAIDAR coincides with the 69th anniversary of the Bandung conference of Asian and African nations held on April 18, 1955 in Indonesia in which Pakistan participated along with China as well as countries from Africa. He termed Africa as the pivotal player in the resurgence of the Global South with 54 members of the African Union. Referring to Pakistan-Africa relations, Senator Mushahid Hussain said that Pakistan's ties with Africa predate the creation of Pakistan as the Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the Founder of Pakistan visited Egypt in 1946 to forge friendly ties with this key African country.

## World Bank demands tax reforms from Pakistan

ISLAMABAD (INP): The World Bank has put forth major demands for tax reforms from the Pakistani government and eliminating the exemptions on duties and sales tax.

The World Bank released its report on Pakistan and suggested the government of the urgent need for tax system reforms and the elimination of sales tax exemptions to promote economic and social improvement.

The report calls upon the government of Pakistan to establish a national policy for the child development and advocates for reducing subsidies on energy and other commodities.

## Acting Speaker BA slams bid on life of Akhonzada

**Independent Report**  
QUETTA: The acting Speaker Balochistan Assembly, Ms Ghazala Gola has strongly condemned the bid of life of leader of Pakistan Peoples Party and its new nominated candidate for National Assembly, Akhonzada Chatan.

In a condemnation statement issued here on Thursday, Ms Ghazala Gola said that the anti state elements are trying to spoil the peaceful situation of the country under preplanned conspiracy.

However, the morale of political workers can't be downed through such cowardly acts.

The acting Speaker of provincial assembly demanded of the Khyber Pakhtunkaw Government to provide every possible protection to the masses of province.

## Ambassador Jiang says Chinese workers will continue contribution to Pakistan's socio-economic development

ISLAMABAD (INP): Chinese staff and workers at different CPEC-related projects will continue contribution to Pakistan's socio-economic development with same spirit and zeal, said Jiang Zaidong, the Ambassador of China to Pakistan.

In an interview with private TV channel on Thursday, the Ambassador expressed his satisfaction that the high-level inquiry initiated by the government of Pakistan into recent terrorist attack in which five Chinese personnel were killed was progressing smoothly, hoping that it will pave the way safeguarding the safety of the CPEC-projects and the Chinese workers.

He noted that the incident was widely condemned by all sections both at the government and the public level. Following this tragic mishap, the government and the security agencies took immediate steps to expose the culprits and bring them to book.

His government, the Ambassador said is willing to work with Pakistani security agencies to achieve the security objectives. To ensure, consistent progress of CPEC, the government will have to ensure the safety of those who are engaged in the development work at various locations of the country.

Ambassador Jiang congratulating the new government in Pakistan said that it showed its seriousness in maintaining the depth of Sino-Pak decades old strategic partnership.

## Govt, security forces launch anti-narcotics operation across country

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Govt of Pakistan, in collaboration with security forces, has initiated an anti-narcotics operation aimed at curbing drug trafficking and apprehending offenders.

During the course of this operation, authorities have seized a very large quantity of narcotics totaling 1,024,399 kg from various regions across the country.

Additionally, a total of 1,244 drug dealers have been arrested, signaling a significant blow to the illegal drug trade.

Recent figures from April 7th to 14th reveal notable seizures in different provinces.

## Opposition's protest amid President's address taints Parl. norms: Raisani

ISLAMABAD (APP): Youngest Member of the National Assembly (MNA) and Pakistan Peoples Party Parliamentarians (PPP-Balochistan) Nawabzada Mir Jamal Khan Raisani on Thursday said the Opposition's protest during the President's address to the joint sitting of Parliament tainted the parliamentary norms of the country that brought bad name to the country before foreign dignitaries who were attending the special session as guests.

Raisani praised President Asif Ali Zardari for his constructive address to the joint session of the Parliament which was a good start.

The President presented his vision on all the social issues of the country including law and order, rights of Balochistan, construction and development projects which should have been listened by the opposition, the youngest lawmaker from Balochistan said while talking to APP outside the Parliament.



QUETTA: Commissioner & Administrator Quetta Hamza Shafaqat and Director General PDMA Jahanzaib Khan visiting city during rain.

## PTI announces to support PkMAP's candidates in bye-elections of PB-50 & 51

**Independent Report**  
QUETTA: The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has decided to support the candidates of Pashtoonkhaw Milli Awami Party (PkMAP) in the bye-elections taking place on the Provincial Assembly's constituencies of PB-50 and PB-51.

This was announced by the provincial president of PTI Balochistan, Dawood Shah Kakar while addressing joint press conference with the senior leader of leader of PkMAP, Abdul Rahim Ziaratwal here at the Quetta press club on Thursday.

The provincial president of PTI said that the bye-elections are going to be held on PB-50 and 51, and the PTI would support candidates of PkMAP in the bye-elections.

Speaking on the occasion, the PkMAP's Abdul Rahim Ziaratwal thanked the leadership of PTI and especially Qaidi No. 804 for supporting the party's candidates in the bye-elections.

Ziaratwal announced that Mir Wais and Abaseen Khan are our candidates in the bye-elections of PB-50 (Killa Abdullah) and PB-51 (Chaman) respectively.

The PkMAP's senior leader said that the country is passing through critical time and there's a political instability in the country.

## Speaker NA meets Chairman Senate

ISLAMABAD (APP): Speaker National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq on Thursday met with Chairman Senate Syed Yousuf Raza Gillani at Parliament House. The Speaker congratulated Syed Yousuf Raza Gillani on assuming the office of Chairman Senate and expressed his best wishes, said a press release issued by the Senate Secretariat.



QUETTA: Balochistan National Party (BNP) Senior Vice President, Sajid Tarin addresses to media persons during press conference, at Quetta press club.



QUETTA: Deputy Controller Station Director Radio Pakistan Aneesur Rehman meeting with Director General Public Relations Balochistan Muhammad Noor Khetran. Deputy Controller Radio Pakistan Siddiq Khan and Senior Producer Saleem Khan are also present.

## Iranian envoy for making Pak-Iran border a 'commercial gateway'

ISLAMABAD (APP): Iran's Ambassador in Pakistan Dr. Reza Amiri Moghadam on Thursday proposed transforming the Pakistan-Iran border into a 'commercial gateway' in a bid to strengthen trade ties between the two countries.

Ambassador Moghadam suggested expanding border markets and opening new crossing points to facilitate trade.

Talking to a private news channel, he expressed optimism about furthering Pak-Iran bilateral cooperation across various sectors.

He said strides had been made in enhancing economic, commercial, and cultural ties between the two nations.

Ambassador Moghadam said that although Pakistan-Iran relations witnessed an improvement in recent years, there remained a significant untapped potential for deeper collaboration.

He underscored the need to elevate the trade volume between the two countries from the current \$2.8 billion to a target range of \$10 to \$25 billion.