



# Punjab on alert as PMD warns of heavy rains till April 29

*Punjab chief minister directs officers to remain active*

Staff Reporter

LAHORE: Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Saturday directed the authorities to take precautionary measures amid a forecast for torrential rains across the province.

The Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD) had on April 22 alerted the concerned authorities with a forecast of a new spell of rainfall in Punjab till April 29.

The Met Office had predicted that various cities including Lahore would receive moderate to heavy rains from April 26 to 29.

"Rain-wind/thunderstorm (few moderate/ heavy falls) is expected in Murree, Galliyat, Islamabad/Rawalpindi, Attock, Chakwal, Jhelum, Mandi Bahauddin, Gujrat, Gujranwala, Hafizabad, Sialkot, Narowal, Kasur, Okara, Faisalabad, Toba Tek Singh, Jhang, Khushab, Sargodha, Mianwali, Pakpattan and Sahiwal.

"While, in Dera Ghazi Khan, Rajanpur, Bhakkar, Layyah, Multan, Kot



Addu, Muzaffargarh, Rahim Yar Khan, Sadiqabad, Khanpur, Bahawalpur and Bahawalnagar rain is expected with occasional gaps from April 26 to 28. Hailstorm is also expected at isolated places during the period," the PMD had said.

Maryam issued instructions for taking measures in advance on the forecast of heavy rains in Punjab till April 29.

She directed the commissioners, deputy commissioners and the Water and Sanitation Agency (WASA) managing director to remain active for the drainage of rainwater.

The Punjab chief minister directed the officers concerned to be present on the ground in all shifts and utilise all resources for drainage of the water.

"All necessary steps should be taken

to keep the traffic flowing in Lahore and the other cities. The traffic wardens should actively perform duties in the field to help citizens," she ordered in a bid to ensure easy flow of vehicular traffic during and after rains.

The chief minister instructed rescue services agencies to take immediate safety measures to make sure that the people from low-lying areas were timely transferred to safe places.

CM Maryam also directed that the residents of the low-lying areas should be warned in advance about the situation and help should be taken from media, social media and mobile alert service in this regard.

Maryam said effective measures should be taken to protect livestock in rural areas.

The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) had also directed the provincial and district disaster management authorities as well as other departments concerned to gear up for nationwide torrential rains and thunderstorms till April 29.

## Education promotion top priority: KP Governor



Staff Reporter

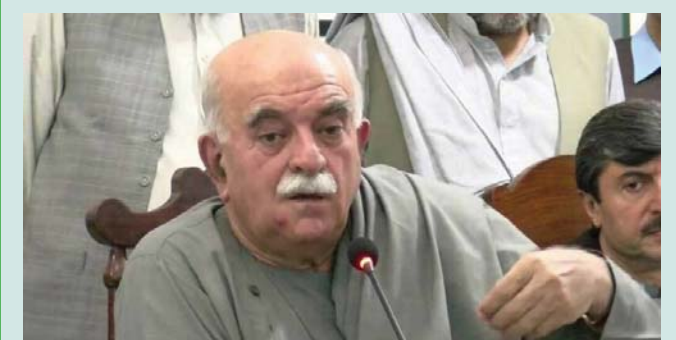
PESHAWAR: Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Haji Ghulam Ali Saturday said that promotion of education is among top most priorities of government and steps have been taken to educate each and every child of the province.

He was the Chief Guest in annual prize distribution of Inspires International School System. The governor appreciated the role of private education institution to promote education and said that children are our future and teachers and parents should realize their responsibilities to groom children.

He said that basic education is the right of each and every child and the collective efforts of private and public sector institution would materialize the dream of hundred percent educated societies.

KP Governor said children should also be informed about significance of our moral and ethical values and taught skills that are needed to lead a happy and successful life. He said that teachers should educate children following the golden principles of Islam that are core foundation of an Islamic society. Later, he visited various stalls and distributed prizes among outstanding students of the school.

## Court suspends Mahmood Khan Achakzai's arrest warrant



QUETTA: A local court in Quetta on Saturday suspended the arrest warrant of Pashtunkhwa Milli Awami Party (PkMAP) Chairman Mahmood Khan Achakzai till next hearing on May 31.

The investigation officer apprised the court that the PkMAP chief did not comply with the warrant by not appearing before the court in connection with the first information report (FIR) against him.

The judicial magistrate suspended Achakzai's arrest warrant and fixed the date for next hearing on May 31.

The warrant for the politico's arrest was issued a day earlier and the police were directed to arrest and produce him before the court on April 27.

The local administration had lodged a case at the Gawalmandi police station against Achakzai on March 11 for interference in the public affairs during a raid on his house.

On March 4, the district administration refuted the claims of the raid at the senior politician's house, saying that it just got an empty government land vacated near Achakzai's house on Quetta's Quarry road.

Quetta Deputy Commissioner Saad bin Asad had said Achakzai illegally occupied the government land by putting up walls around it. He confirmed that a person, who was guarding the land, was arrested for pointing weapons at an assistant commissioner and interfering in the state affairs.

Former Balochistan caretaker information minister Jan Achakzai, in a hurriedly called press conference, also denied the claims of a raid at the PkMAP chairman's house, saying the district administration of Quetta recovered a government land.

He said lands in the city's outskirts were recovered and the campaign against illegal land occupation would continue in the future as well. The district administration took action on a landlord's complaint and got a plot vacated in front of the veteran politician's house, he added. Agencies

## Chilam Josh festival to commence from May 13



KALASH: The four-day Chilam Josh festival will be held in three Kalash valleys, including Bumburet, Birir and Rumbur from May 13 to 17 to entertain the tourists from various parts of the country. The annual festival comprises traditional events including dances of Kalash girls and boys to the beats of traditional drums and will be attended by a large number of tourists, including foreigners from all over the world, said a news release issued here Saturday.

The Chilam Josh festival will start with 'Milkday,' in which Kalash people offer libations of milk that had been saved for 10 days prior to the occasion. The celebrations will highlight their rich cultural, plethora of colors and the underlying message of happiness. During the festival, the Kalash people will seek the blessings of their God and pray for the safety of their herds and crops of the community. Women usually dress up in traditional clothes of vibrant colors gold and silver jewelry, and elaborate headgear, while men wear traditional shalwar kameez with a woolen waistcoat.

Kalash women and men dance and sing in a circle to the rhythmical chant of drum beats. Kalashi festivals are famous throughout the world and celebrated in different months of the year. The Chilam Joshi festival starts at Rumbur valley and then festivities extend to other valleys of Kalash. People pray for the protection of their fields and animals before going to their fields and for this purpose, they usually spread milk on their Gods. On the first day, the Zoshi/Zosh ceremony takes place, where boys and girls go to the higher pastures to pluck wildflowers and walnut leaves to the beat of drums. On second day, C'irik pi pi (Milk drinking and distribution day) is held, in which goat stables are decorated with wildflowers and walnut leaves, singing rituals, and ceremonies take place in every village.

On third day wherein villages get together at the top of the village, distribute dried mulberries and walnuts for the ceremony on their newly born babies. On the fourth day, during the Ghona ceremony, all the villagers of the Kalash community gather at the main venue, and similar rituals and ceremonies are followed.

## Slow work

KARACHI: The construction work of Karimabad underpass progressing at a very slow pace in the Provincial Capital.



Photo: Online

# Bilawal felicitates people on 87 years of Sindh Assembly

Spokesman Report

ISLAMABAD: Chairman Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has extended warmest congratulations to the people of Pakistan, especially those in Sindh and their esteemed democratic institutions on the momentous occasion of the Sindh Assembly commemorating 87 years of its parliamentary journey.

According to the statement issued on Saturday, he remarked that the inaugural session of the Sindh Legislative Assembly was convened on April 27, 1937.

He emphasized the enduring legacy of democratic perseverance, noting that even prior to the formation of Pakistan, our forefathers steadfastly championed democratic ideals. Highlighting the pivotal role of Sir Shahnawaz Bhutto in the inception of the first Sindh Assembly, he lamented that a conspiracy deprived him of participation in its maiden session.

"Despite the concerted efforts to sideline his party, both Sir Shahnawaz Bhutto and Sir Abdullah Haroon's party secured a majority in the Sindh Assembly. However,



despite this majority, Sir Shahnawaz Bhutto's party was denied the opportunity to form the government. Instead, the

then Governor extended the invitation to a party with merely three members in the House, disregarding the mandate of the majority party," he pointed out.

Bilawal Bhutto reiterated that despite facing numerous conspiracies and injustices, our predecessors remained steadfast in their commitment to fortifying democratic institutions. He emphasized that the annals of his party's history are replete with a relentless struggle to bolster democracy and its institutions, spanning from the pre-partition era to the present day.

# Effective arrangements made for Hinglaj Mata Festival

QUETTA: The Balochistan government has made effective arrangements to provide maximum facilities to the Hindu devotees gathered at Hinglaj Mata Temple to perform religious rituals.

The three-day annual Hinglaj Mata festival of the Hindu community, started on the other day, was in full swing with traditional religious fervor.

Hinglaj Mata temple is the historical temple of Hindus located in Lasbela district of the province, Hindu community from across the country reached Hinglaj Mata in a large numbers to participate in the annual festival.

Additional Deputy Commissioner General and Focal Person Hinglaj Mata Festival Sayed Yasin Akhtar has visited Hinglaj Temple and reviewed the security arrangements. He also visited the medical camp set up under the health plan for the three-day festival of Hing-



laj Mata Mandir.

Focal Person of Hinglaj Mata Festival, ADC General Lasbela Sayed Yasin Akhtar was told that paramedical staff and doctors of Emergency Rescue Center have been appointed in the medical camp and over 100 volunteers of Hinglaj Shiva Mandli Committee

are also assisting in providing facilities to the pilgrims along with the administration.

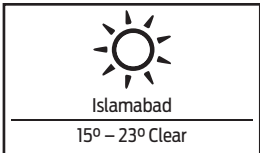
ADC General Lasbela and Focal Person Hinglaj Mata Mela Sayed Yasin Akhtar said in a media briefing that PDMA would provide ration, water cooler, sanitizer and other necessary

items for Yatries.

He said that due to flood, the bridge on Hangul River has been damaged, the DG PDMA has been provided rescue boats, expert swimmers and ambulances for the safety of devotees. The people of the Hindu community are performing their religious rituals freely without fear and danger. In Pakistan, the minorities have complete religious freedom and their places of worship are protected, he maintained.

Special food stalls have also been set up in the festival and langar is being distributed among the participants of the religious gathering.

Local Leader of Hindu Community said that the main purpose of the festival was to bind and unite the people with love, peace, affection and brotherhood and there is a need to spread the preaching to bring a cordial atmosphere in the society.



**SERVICES**  
**Namaz Timings**

Fajr	3:53 am
Zohr	12:06 pm
Asr	4:52 pm
Maghrib	6:48 pm
Isha	8:19 pm

**EMERGENCY**

Rescue (Police)	15
Bomb Disposal	15
Fire Services Rawalpindi/ Islamabad	1122 & 16
Emergency Ambulance	1122 & 4451122
Motorway Police	9266044
Motorway Police	9270601-20

**Women Police Stations**

Islamabad	9222596
Rawalpindi	9270601-20

**ENQUIRY**

Edhi Ambulance	115
PIA Flight Info	114
PIA Cargo	9280979
Railway Enquiry	117
Railway Exchange	9270831-5
WASA Rawalpindi	5555489
CAA	9281092

**HOSPITALS**

CMH	561111
MH	561116
MH	561116
Cantt Hospital	9270907-11
DHQ	5556311-4
RGH	9290301-7
Holy Family	9290322-7
PIMS	9261170-79
Polyclinic	9218300-09
Shifa International	4603666

**DEPARTMENTS**

CDA	9221334-43
CDA	9208301-04
Met Office	9250360-6
RDA	5555864
TMA	5770886
Cantonment Board	9270151-3
Islamabad Metropolitan Corporation	9209224
Potohar Town	9209224
Rawal Town	5773343

**COMPLAINTS**

Water Tanker Service	
E-7, F-10 & F-11	9204654
G-5, G-6, G-7, G-8	9203883
G-9, G-10, G-11, G-12, H-8	9266316
Wapda Islamabad	9217579-80
Sui Gas Complaint	119, 9272249
Wasa Water Tank	
Rawalpindi	0331-5022125

**Pak Master Tenpin Bowling C'ship postponed**

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Master Tenpin Bowling Championship that was scheduled for April 27 at Leisure City Bowling Club, Jinnah Park, Rawalpindi has been postponed.

The championship that was being organized by the Pakistan Tenpin Bowling Federation has been postponed due to unavoidable reasons.

According to Pakistan Tenpin Bowling Federation President Ijazur Rehman, the new date of the championship will be announced in the coming days.

Players from all over the country would participate in the championship and two categories of competitions will be contested in the extravaganza including men's singles and men's doubles. APP

**KSrelief distributes 450 food baskets in Shangla**



ISLAMABAD: The King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center (KSrelief) distributed 540 food baskets in Shangla district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa here Saturday.

The assistant programme benefiting 3,150 individuals from the neediest and most vulnerable segments affected by the floods as part of the fourth phase of the Food Security Support Program for 2024, the SPA reported.

The aid comes within the relief efforts of the Kingdom through its humanitarian arm, KSrelief, to needy peoples and countries around the world. APP

**Naqvi directs new IG Islamabad to wipe out crime from Capital**

*Interior Minister says drug paddlers are the enemies of the future of Pakistan*

Staff Reporter

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Interior Mohsin Naqvi on Saturday directed the new Inspector General of Police Islamabad to improve law and order situation and crackdown against criminals in the capital.

In a high level meeting here, Mohsin Naqvi assigned a task to the police officials to conduct a strong crackdown against the gangs involved in the sale and purchase of drugs and apprehend also the drug mafia with the use of modern technology.

He said that drug paddlers are the enemies of the future of Pakistan and thus strictest action be taken against them while the surveillance outside educational institutions also be increased to stop the sale of intoxicants including ice and arrest the sellers.

The new Inspector General of Police Ali Nasir Rizvi gave a detailed briefing to the minister interior about the law and order situation in the meeting which was also attended by all DIGs and CTOs.

The minister ordered to ensure foolproof security of foreign nationals living in Islamabad and to establish a special protection force for the security of foreign nationals in Islamabad while special attention should be given to the security of all important offices and places including the red zone and diplomatic enclave, he added.

He also ordered an effective action against beggar mafia and professional beggars in the city roaming freely in the city.

The minister asked the police to ensure 100% registration of First Information Report (FIR) on the complaints of citizens while

using delaying tactics or denying registration of FIR will initiate an action against concerned police station and SHO, he warned.

The minister also directed IG police to immediately deal with promotion cases of capital Police saying that the promotion is the employee's right that he should get on time because promotion will improve morale of police force.

The minister ensured the police officials that the steps will be taken to bring the salaries of Islamabad Police at par with the Punjab Police while ordered to fill the vacant posts in Islamabad police through fair and competitive recruitment process.

The minister also sought a comprehensive plan to solve the traffic problems in Islamabad while identifying areas of high traffic congestion and suggesting



workable solutions, adding that Islamabad Safe City system will have to be equipped with modern

requirements like Lahore Safe City. He said that the government is determined to improve the condi-

tion of police stations in Islamabad and good results will be obtained in a few months' time.

**Enjoying weather**

ISLAMABAD: Children enjoying the pleasant weather at a park in the Federal Capital.



Photo: Online by Sultan Bashir

**President PBF proposes national economic recovery plan**

ISLAMABAD: President Pakistan Business Forum (PBF) Khawaja Mehboob ur Rehman on Saturday shared his national economic recovery plan and reiterated that the incumbent government was successfully carrying out the economic transformation process in the country. He said that the structural transformation in every sector of the economy took some time and they were making all-out efforts in this regard. Talking to media here Saturday, the PBF President said that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif was committed to transforming the economy of the country and he also understands the problems of the business community.

Khawaja Mehboob ur Rehman shared the National Economic Recovery plan aimed to create income and livelihood opportunities for the people on the following points, ensuring solvency, revenue and fiscal sustainability, bending the political economy of Pakistan toward economic justice and good governance, reducing defi-



cit through inclusive growth and effective import-export management, transitioning to green economy; ensuring social protection and social safety nets to minimize the adverse impact of structural reforms on the most vulnerable.

Similarly Khawaja Mehboob also stressed on fostering collaboration between the federal government and provinces to promote timely decision-making and avoid duplication. Such actions will promote the concepts of "one government" and "collective government" to remove all barriers to investment and business activities.

PBF Chairman Punjab, Muhammad

Naseer Malik emphasised that export-oriented FDI's held the key to economic revival. In order to facilitate industries, administrative barriers must be removed and measures such as timely energy supply and competitive rates, including tax refunds, need to be implemented. Malik further stated that in Pakistan, industrialists and businesspersons were paying the highest amount of taxes. We must understand that the role of industrialists and traders is crucial for economic development.

Immediate steps need to be taken in consultation with stakeholders to reduce the production cost of exportable goods so that we can easily compete with other countries in the region. Pakistan Business Forum also welcomed the resolve of Army Chief General Syed Asim Munir that the armed forces of the country with the support of the nation would fail all the inimical forces bent on impeding Pakistan's development and prosperity. APP

**IHC judges 'propose contempt proceedings' against meddling in court affairs**

ISLAMABAD: In compliance with the Supreme Court's April 3 order, the Islamabad High Court (IHC) judges, in a unanimous stance, proposed a "contempt proceeding" against any meddling in judicial affairs, revealed sources privy to the matter.

This was stated in the proposal submitted by the IHC judges to the Registrar of the Supreme Court earlier this week.

Subject to the institutional consensus, the high court should exercise its contempt of court powers to counter meddling, the sources said quoting the IHC proposal on how to stop meddling in the judicial matters.

Earlier this week the IHC full court meeting was held today with Chief Justice Aamer Farooq in the chair to finalise



proposals before submission to the top court in connection with a matter related to the alleged interference of the spy agencies in judicial affairs.

Last month, six judges of the IHC — comprising Justice Mohsin Akhtar Kiyani, Justice Tariq Mehmood Jahangiri, Justice Babar Sattar, Justice

Sardar Ejaz Ishaq Khan, Justice Arbab Muhammad Tahir, and Justice Saman Rafat Imtiaz — wrote a letter to the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC), seeking its guidance on "interference" of the intelligence agencies in the courts' affairs.

"We are writing to seek guidance from the Supreme Judi-

cial Council (SJC) with regard to the duty of a judge to report and respond to actions on [the] part of members of the executive, including operatives of intelligence agencies, that seek to interfere with [the] discharge of his/her official functions and qualify as intimidation, as well as the duty to report any such actions that come to his/her attention in relation to colleagues and/or members of the courts that the high court supervises," read the latter.

Later, the apex court initiated suo motu proceedings on the letter and sought a proposal from the Pakistan Bar Council (PBC), the Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA), high courts and the federal government in this regard. Agencies

**India continuously violating int'l laws in IIOJK: Report**

ISLAMABAD: India is continuously violating all international laws and conventions in Indian illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir. According to a report released by KMS on Saturday, the Modi regime revoked special status of occupied Jammu and Kashmir in flagrant violation of international laws.

It said India is settling non-Kashmiris in the occupied territory against resolutions of the United Nations, adding the Bharatiya Janata Party regime is plotting to deprive Kashmiris of their identity. The report said India is preventing Kashmiris from exercising their universally-recognized right to self-determination. India is not willing to implement UN resolutions on Kashmir, it lamented.

It said India must be punished for violating global laws and agreements in IIOJK. The UN is morally bound to help resolve the lingering Kashmir dispute as per its resolutions, the report said and maintained that the world powers must stop shutting their eyes to the plight of the IIOJK people. APP

**Pakistan Embassy in Beijing hosts Pakistan Professional and Student Forum**



Spokesman Report

ISLAMABAD: The Embassy of Pakistan in Beijing hosted "Pakistan Professionals and Students Forum" under the theme "Building Bridges between Academia and Industry".

The event was attended by high-ranking government officials, private sector representatives, members of academia as well as a large number of Pakistani professionals and students residing in China.

The forum featured a pre-recorded message from Chaudhry Salik Hussain, Minister of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development, underlining the importance of building bridges between academia and industry for national development and prosperity.

The Minister commended Pakistan Embassy for providing a platform to Pakistani students and professionals to interact and exchange ideas on harnessing the current and emerging opportunities in the industry.

**Mobile snatcher targeting lady school teacher held**

RAWALPINDI: The police on Saturday have successfully apprehended a mobile snatcher who targeted a lady school teacher few days ago. The culprit, identified as Usman, was held with the help of modern technology, human intelligence, and CCTV footage analysis.

The incident occurred in the Tula Road area of Civil Lines, where the accused, riding a motorcycle, snatched the purse of a female school teacher and fled the scene. Following the incident, special teams led by SP Potohar were mobilized to track down the perpetrator.

After hectic efforts of the police, Usman was located and arrested. Additionally, the motorcycle used in the crime was also seized. The recovered purse and a sum of Rs. 6000 in cash were returned to the school teacher by the SHO Civil Lines and a lady police officer.

SSP Operations commended the exemplary performance of the police team involved in the operation, emphasizing that stringent measures will be taken against individuals involved in such criminal activities.

Expressing her gratitude, the school teacher extended her thanks to the Chief Minister of Punjab, IG Punjab and the Rawalpindi Police for their swift action in apprehending the culprit. APP

**PTI says US report on 'HR...'**

Continued from Page 1

spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch said in a statement on Thursday.

She added: "It clearly demonstrates double standards thus undermining the international human rights discourse."

In line with its constitutional framework and democratic ethos, Pakistan remains steadfast in its commitment to strengthen its own human rights framework, constructively engage to promote international human rights' agenda, and uphold fairness and objectivity in the international human rights

discourse, the spokesperson reiterated.

"If the US must engage in this exercise, then we expect the US State Department to at least exercise due diligence when conducting an assessment of complex issues, demonstrate objectivity, impartiality and responsibility in finalising such reports," according to an official statement issued by the FO.

"It should demonstrate the requisite moral courage to speak truth about all situations and play a constructive role in supporting international efforts for bringing an end to atrocities in the most urgent hotpots of gross human rights violations," it concluded. Agencies

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# Looming water crisis demands immediate action

**Dr. Majid Rafizadeh**

In the not-too-distant future, a pervasive challenge will haunt the entirety of the Middle East and North Africa region: a time when water shortages will reach critical levels. Projections indicate an alarming trajectory whereby each nation within this geographical expanse will grapple with the profound implications of extreme water stress by the midpoint of the 21st century. This imminent reality underscores the pressing need for proactive measures and concerted efforts to address the impending crisis before its ramifications become insurmountable.

A report published last month by the Center for Strategic and International Studies has sounded the alarm, predicting that, by 2050, every single country in the region will grapple with extremely high water stress. This forecast paints a stark picture of a region that is already burdened with political strife, economic disparities and social unrest facing an existential threat. The report indicated: "If temperatures rise by 4 degrees Celsius, the region would experience a 75 percent drop in freshwater availability, and many countries in the region are expected to warm about 5 C by the end of the century."

The implications of such a scenario are profound and far-reaching. First of all, water scarcity not only jeopardizes access to drinking water, but it also threatens agriculture, industry and public health. It exacerbates poverty, as well as conflicts, and fuels mass migration as communities seek refuge in more hospitable environments. In essence, water scarcity is a threat multiplier, amplifying existing

vulnerabilities and laying bare any inadequacies in governance structures and resource management practices.

The causes and complexities surrounding water scarcity in the MENA region are multifaceted and intricately intertwined, stemming from a confluence of factors. Climate change is a primary driver, with escalating temperatures amplifying evaporation rates and diminishing crucial sources of water replenishment, such as snowpack and rainfall. Concurrently, burgeoning populations, coupled with rapid urbanization, exert mounting pressure on already strained water reservoirs and distribution systems. Unsustainable water use practices exacerbate the strain, increasing the imbalance between water supply and demand.

Moreover, the region's geopolitical landscape adds another layer of complexity, with political tensions and conflicts often disrupting essential water infrastructure and impeding effective water management strategies. These interrelated dynamics underscore the urgent need for holistic approaches to address the root causes of water scarcity in the MENA region, emphasizing not only environmental conservation but also sociopolitical cooperation and sustainable development initiatives.

In order to address the region's water crisis, we need a multifaceted approach that addresses both the root causes and the immediate consequences of water scarcity. First and foremost, there needs to be a concentrated effort to mitigate climate change and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This requires global cooperation and a commitment to transitioning toward renewable energy sources, promoting energy efficiency and implementing sustainable land use practices.

In addition to addressing climate change, there is an urgent need for improved water management practices and infrastructure development in the MENA region. This includes investing in water conservation measures, such as drip irrigation and rainwater harvesting, to optimize water use in agriculture. It also entails upgrading aging water infrastructure to reduce leaks and losses and improve water distribution efficiency.

Furthermore, there needs to be greater cooperation and collaboration among countries in the region to manage shared water resources more effectively. For example, transboundary water agreements and mechanisms for joint water management can help mitigate conflicts and ensure equitable access to water for all stakeholders. Regional organizations such as the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council can play a critical role in facilitating such cooperation and dialogue.

Furthermore, at the national level, governments must prioritize water security and integrate it into their broader development agendas. This entails investing in water infrastructure, promoting water-efficient technologies and implementing policies to incentivize sustainable water use practices. It also requires improving water governance and transparency to ensure accountability and the equitable distribution of water resources.

Moreover, there is a need for increased public awareness and engagement on water issues in the MENA region. This means that education and outreach campaigns can help raise awareness about the importance of water conservation and empower communities to take action at the grassroots level. Civil

society organizations, academia and the private sector also have a crucial role to play in driving innovation and promoting sustainable water management practices.

In addition to addressing the immediate challenges posed by water scarcity, there is also a need to build resilience and adaptability to future uncertainties. This ought to include investing in research and technology development to improve water efficiency, enhance water recycling and desalination capabilities and develop climate-resilient agricultural practices. It also entails integrating water considerations into urban planning and development to ensure sustainable growth and resilience to future shocks.

Finally, addressing the region's water crisis requires a collective effort from all parties — governments, civil society, the private sector and the international community. It also requires bold leadership, innovative solutions and a commitment to solidarity and cooperation in the face of a shared existential threat.

In a nutshell, the recent findings by the Center for Strategic and International Studies serve as a sobering reminder of the urgent need to address the water crisis in the MENA region. Failure to act decisively risks dire consequences for the region's people, economies and stability. However, with cooperation among governments, civil society, the private sector and the international community, it is still possible to avert the worst-case scenarios and build a more sustainable and resilient future for the region. However, we should act immediately.

(Courtesy: Arab News)  
 Dr. Majid Rafizadeh is a Harvard-educated Iranian American political scientist.



Cartoon by Amjad Rasmī. (Courtesy of Asharq Al-Awsat)

## New US funding for Kyiv comes at a crucial moment

**Luke Coffey**

Following months of disapproval, a sign of his indirect support. Johnson thus felt politically reassured to push for more Ukraine aid despite pressure from the isolationists in his own party.

Secondly, intelligence briefings would have played a role. The House speaker is second in the presidential line of succession, so Johnson is privy to high-level and sensitive intelligence briefings that most members in Congress are not. It is likely that the briefings he received about Russia's activities in Ukraine convinced him it was time to provide more American aid.

Finally, Iran's large-scale missile and drone barrage against Israel probably forced Johnson to support a vote for Ukraine aid. Many in Washington's foreign policy community recognize that military cooperation between Moscow and Tehran is a threat: what happens in Ukraine can affect other regions such as like the Middle East. For example, the technology used by the Iranian drones that flew through Iraqi and Jordanian airspace before targeting Israel was perfected in Ukraine. And, in the same way that additional US support for Ukraine is divisive for some Republicans, additional support for Israel is also controversial for some Democrats. If Johnson wanted to get more aid for Israel passed, the easiest way was to do it alongside an aid package for Ukraine.

So what are the implications of all this for US politics and the presidential race? If recent aid packages are any gauge, \$61 billion should last Ukraine a long time. This was by design, as it means no new heated political debate about Ukraine before the US elections in November.

(Courtesy: Arab News)  
 Luke Coffey is a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute.

## The world indeed is divided as West versus 'Rest'

**Chen Weihua**

Representatives from the United Nations Security Council vote on Thursday in New York on a draft resolution that recommended the UN General Assembly admit Palestine as a full UN member. The resolution failed, as it was vetoed by the United States. MINLU ZHANG / China Daily

The world is now divided more or less between pro-United States or pro-West countries and "the Rest" as most countries are appalled by the double standard, hypocrisy and bullying of the US and some of its allies.

That the US uses double standard was evident on April 18 when it vetoed the UN Security Council resolution on granting full membership of the United Nations to the State of Palestine. The fact that 12 of the 15 Security Council member states, including close US allies Japan, the Republic of Korea and France, voted in favor of the resolution, and the United Kingdom and Switzerland abstained makes the US action even more shocking.

This is just one sign of how isolated the US has become due to its blind support for Tel Aviv in the Israel-Palestine conflict, which entered the 200th day on Tuesday. Worse, the US now doesn't even feel the need to hide such bias.

On Wednesday, US President Joe Biden signed a bill providing a \$26 billion foreign aid package to Israel, including a large cache of weapons despite the worsening humanitarian crisis in the Palestinian enclave of Gaza. In December, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken played a key role in bypassing US Congress to provide US military weapons to Israel at a time when the entire world was shocked to see the incessant Israeli bombing of Gaza.

At a press conference on the 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices on Monday, Blinken said: "Hamas's horrific attacks on Israel on Oct 7 last year and the devastating loss of civilian life in Gaza as Israel exercises its right to ensure that those attacks never happen again, have also raised deeply troubling human rights concerns." His speech is disturbing because US politicians have been saying that Hamas should be held responsible for the deaths of 34,000 Palestinians, including more than 14,000 children. But the rest of the world strongly disagrees.

The US and some of its allies have doubled down on their double standard after Iran retaliated against Israel for attacking the Iranian diplomatic compound in Syria and killing two senior Iranian generals. The US and G7 "condemned Iran in the strongest terms" and threatened to impose fresh sanctions against Iran, in sharp contrast to their silence on Israel's actions and their description of the horrific situation in Gaza as merely "unacceptable". When the US ambassador to the UN, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, applauded the condemnation of Iran's retaliation at the UN by 48 members assembled by the US, she accidentally revealed that more than 140 UN members disagreed with the US on the issue.

European Union Foreign Policy chief Josep Borrell said in February that "if the current global geopolitical tensions continue to evolve in the direction of 'the West versus the Rest', Europe's future risks being bleak". But the US has refused to recognize that. As Blinken pointed fingers at the human rights records of one country after another, he forgot to mention the worsening human rights situation in the US.

After being complicit in the atrocities in Gaza, the US has kept mum in the face of the gross violation of women's rights after the US Supreme Court abolished the abortion rights in November 2022, revoking Roe v Wade.

Besides, rampant gun violence, widening wealth gap, and increasing racial discrimination and homeless people are plaguing the US society. The UN Human Rights Committee's report in November criticized the US for its policies on not just women's reproductive rights, but also torture of women, excessive use of force by law enforcement agencies and, its policies on immigration.

The US' barbaric embargo against Cuba has been condemned by the UN General Assembly members every year for more than 30 years, but no US leader has had the guts to correct the US policy. The US continues to abuse its financial power to sanction numerous countries, including its latest threat of imposing sanctions on Pakistan if it continues work on a gas pipeline linking Iran.

Such bullying and double standard used by the US will only sow the seed of division and hatred, and isolate the US and some of its allies from the rest of the world.

(Courtesy: China Daily)  
 The author is chief of China Daily EU Bureau based in Brussels.

# Ukraine's Zelenskiy calls for air defense systems as allies meet

*Pentagon announced it will buy \$6 billion worth new weapons for Ukraine to sustain its Patriot air defence system*

WASHINGTON: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy called for additional air defense systems to be sent to Kyiv to help protect against Russian strikes, adding that a pause in U. S. funding had helped Moscow seize the initiative.

Zelenskiy's comments come just days after Congress emerged from a half-year of deadlock to approve a \$61 billion aid package for Ukraine.

On Friday, the Pentagon announced that it will buy \$6 billion worth of new weapons for Ukraine including interceptors for the Patriot air defense system, the single largest assistance package President Joe Biden's administration has provided.

"This year, Russian jets (have) already used more than 9,000 guided aerial bombs against Ukraine and we need the ability to shoot down the air combat aircraft so that they do not approach our positions and borders," Zelenskiy said at the start of a virtual meeting led by the United States on helping arm Ukraine.

The first such meeting, known as the Ukraine Contact Group, was held two years ago on Friday.

"While we were waiting for a decision on the American support, the Russian



army managed to seize the initiative on the battlefield," Zelenskiy said.

"We can still now, not only stabilize the front, but also move forward achieving our Ukrainian goals in the war," he added.

After the meeting, U. S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said he would ask allies to accept more risk.

"We're going to ask (allies) to accept

a little bit more risk so that we can do what's necessary in Ukraine," Austin told reporters.

Austin said the Patriot missile defense system itself would not be a "silver bullet" for Kyiv, but rather integrating it with other missile defense systems.

Spain's defence minister said on Friday that Madrid would deliver Patri-

ot anti-aircraft missiles to Ukraine, following pressure from NATO and European Union allies to send more military aid to Kyiv.

The new \$6 billion U. S. weapons package announced will be purchased from defense contractors and not drawn from U. S. stocks and delivery to Ukraine will take time, perhaps even years for some systems.

The United States hopes its new deliveries of weaponry will help Ukraine rebuild defenses and refit its forces as it recovers from a gap in U. S. assistance, but it does not expect Kyiv to launch large-scale offensive operations against Russian forces in the near term.

The influx of weapons could improve Kyiv's chances of averting a major Russian breakthrough in the east, just over two years since the start of Moscow's full-scale invasion, military analysts say.

But it remains unclear how much pressure Kyiv can apply on Russia after months of rationing artillery as its stocks ran low. Kyiv also faces manpower shortages on the battlefield and questions linger over the strength of its fortifications along a sprawling, 1,000-km (621-mile) front line. Reuters

## Bangladesh reels under longest heat wave in 76 years



DHAKA: Bangladesh experienced its longest heat wave in recorded history this April with forecasts showing no improvement for the rest of the month, according to meteorologists.

Md. Bazlur Rashid, a meteorologist at the Bangladesh Meteorological Department, told Anadolu that heat waves swept across the entire country for 27 days straight until Saturday.

"According to the data available since 1948, this month (April) has already seen records of heat wave days in a single year," he added.

This year, for the first time, nearly 75% of the country has experienced continuous heat waves.

The closest example of such extreme heat was recorded in 2014 when the country saw 25 days of heat wave, Rashid added.

The Met Office weather forecast said Saturday that a very severe heat wave was sweeping over mid-west, west, and central Bangladesh, while the rest of the country was seeing severe to mild heat waves.

"Climate change is among the major causes of the extreme weather," said Rashid, adding that the Bangladeshi capital Dhaka has become a tough place to live in during summer, due to declining greenery and water bodies.

Meanwhile, a season-high temperature of 42.7C (108.9F) was recorded in Chuadanga on Friday.

A recent study by the Met Office showed that both the minimum and maximum temperatures in the country are increasing, with the maximum temperature increasing rapidly.

The extreme weather conditions have disrupted people's lives and livelihoods, especially for low-income groups, in the South Asian nation of 170 million.

In the second week of April, the country was forced to shut schools and educational institutions for a week due to the scorching heat wave. Anadolu Agency

## In support of Palestinians

NEW YORK: A Palestinian flag flies at the protest encampment at Columbia University where students demonstrate in support of Palestinians in New York City.



Photo: Online

## US food regulator gathering info on Indian spices after alleged contamination

HYDERABAD, INDIA: The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is gathering information on products of Indian spice makers MDH and Everest after Hong Kong halted sales of some of their products for allegedly containing high levels of a cancer-causing pesticide.

"The FDA is aware of the reports and is gathering additional information about the situation," an FDA spokesperson told Reuters on Friday.

Hong Kong this month suspended sales of three MDH spice blends and an Everest spice mix for fish curries. Singapore ordered a recall of the Everest spice mix as well, saying it contains high levels of ethylene oxide, which is unfit for human consumption and a cancer risk with long exposure.

Reuters is the first to report the US FDA's review of alleged contamination of Indian spice products.

MDH and Everest did not immediately respond to Reuters requests for comment on this matter.

Everest has previously said its spices are safe for consumption. MDH has not responded to queries about its products so far.

MDH and Everest spices are among the most popular in India and are also sold in Europe, Asia and North America. India's food regulator, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), is now checking the quality standards of the two companies, following the moves in Hong Kong and Singapore.

India's Spices Board, the government's regulator for spice exports, said on Wednesday it had sought data on MDH and Everest exports from authorities in Hong Kong and Singapore, and was working with the companies to find the "root cause" of the quality issues as inspections started at their plants.

In 2019, a few batches of MDH's products were recalled in the US for salmonella contamination. Reuters

## Taiwan reports Chinese military activity after Blinken leaves Beijing



TAIPEI: Taiwan reported renewed Chinese military activity near the island on Saturday with 12 aircraft crossing the sensitive median line of the Taiwan Strait, a day after US Secretary State Antony Blinken ended a visit to China.

The United States is Taiwan's most important international supporter and arms supplier despite the absence of formal diplomatic ties. Blinken said he had stressed the "critical importance" of maintaining peace and stability across the strait while in China.

Democratically governed Taiwan has faced increased military pressure from China, which views the island as its own territory. Taiwan's government rejects those claims.

Taiwan's defense ministry said that from 9:30 a.m. (0130 GMT) on Saturday it had detected 22 Chinese military aircraft, including Su-30 fighters, of which 12 had crossed the median line to Taiwan's north and center.

The line once served as an unofficial border between the two sides over which neither sides' military crossed, but China's air force now regularly sends aircraft over it. China says it does not recognize the line's existence.

Taiwan's defense ministry said the aircraft were involved in "joint combat readiness patrols" with Chinese warships, adding that Taiwanese aircraft and ships responded "appropriately." It did not give details.

China's defense ministry did not answer calls seeking comment outside of office hours on Saturday.

Taiwan's armed forces are well-equipped and well-trained but dwarfed by those of China's, especially the navy and air force, which respond almost daily to Chinese missions.

China considers Taiwan the most important issue in its relations with the United States, and Beijing has repeatedly demanded Washington end weapons sales to Taiwan.

Taiwan President-elect Lai Ching-te takes office on May 20 after winning January's election. Beijing considers him a dangerous separatist and has rebuffed his repeated calls for talks.

Lai said on Thursday that China should have the confidence to talk to Taiwan's legally elected government. Like outgoing President Tsai Ing-wen, Lai says only Taiwan's people can decide their future. Reuters

# Abbas, world leaders to hold Gaza talks in Riyadh

*'There is now a bit of momentum for negotiations on the hostages and also a possible ceasefire,' says WEF president*

RIYADH: Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and several international officials will be in Riyadh this week for talks aimed at pushing for a peace agreement in Gaza to be held on the sidelines of a World Economic Forum meeting, the WEF's president said on Saturday.

"We do have the key players now in Riyadh and hopefully the discussions can lead into a process towards reconciliation and peace," Borge Brende said at a news conference in Riyadh, adding that Gaza's humanitarian crisis would be on the agenda.



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will attend the meetings alongside regional leaders including Qatar's prime minister, Saudi Arabia's foreign minister, Oman's crown prince and Bahraini officials, Brende said.

Read also: Hamas receives Israel's response to its ceasefire proposal, says 'studying' it

Egypt's foreign minister, Brende said, would be there to update officials on a round of talks Egyptian negotiators held in Israel on Friday in an effort to restart stalled efforts to end the war in Gaza and return the remaining Israeli hostages.

"There is now a bit of momentum for negotiations on the hostages and also a possible ceasefire," Brende said. Reuters

# Hamas receives Israel's response to its ceasefire proposal, says 'studying' it

*Negotiations remain deadlocked, with Hamas sticking to its demands that any agreement must end war*

CAIRO: Hamas said it had received on Saturday Israel's official response to its latest ceasefire proposal and will study it before submitting its reply, the group's deputy Gaza chief said in a statement.

"Hamas has received today the official response of the Zionist occupation to the proposal presented to the Egyptian and the Qatari mediators on April 13," Khalil Al-Hayya, who is currently based in Qatar, said in a statement published by the group.

After more than six months of Israel's war in Gaza, the negoti-

ations remain deadlocked, with Hamas sticking to its demands that any agreement must end the war.

An Egyptian delegation visited Israel for discussion with Israeli officials on Friday, looking for a way to restart talks to end the conflict and return remaining Israeli settlers taken captive when Hamas fighters stormed into Israeli-occupied towns on October 7, an official briefed on the meetings said.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said Israel had no new proposals to

make. Although, it was willing to consider a limited truce in which 33 hostages would be released by Hamas, instead of the 40 previously under discussion.

On Thursday, the United States and 17 other countries appealed to Hamas to release all of its hostages as a pathway to end the crisis.

Hamas has vowed not to relent to international pressure but in a statement it issued on Friday it said it was "open to any ideas or proposals that take into account the needs and rights of our people".

However, it stuck to its key demands that Israel has rejected

and criticized the joint statement issued by the US and others for not calling for a permanent ceasefire and the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza.

White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan said on Friday he saw fresh momentum in talks to end the war and return the remaining hostages.

Citing two Israeli officials, Axios reported that Israel told the Egyptian mediators on Friday that it was ready to give hostage negotiations "one last chance" to reach a deal with Hamas before moving forward with an invasion of Rafah,



the last refuge for around a million Palestinians who fled Israeli forces further north in Gaza earlier in the war. Meanwhile, in Rafah, Palestinian health officials said an Israeli air strike on the house killed at least five people and wound-

ed others.

Israel has killed more than 34,000 Gazans and injured at least 70,000 more since October 7, 2023, when Hamas fighters raided into Palestinian land occupied by Israel. The attack

resulted in the deaths of 1,200 Israeli settlers, whereas 253 were taken captive.

Thousands of Gazans remain missing, suspected to have been buried under the rubble of buildings bombed by Israel. Reuters

## Bull & Bears PSX 100-Share Index Fluctuation

Pakistan: PSX 100-Share Index	
Current	Prev. Close
72,742.74	71,764.18
Day's High	Day's Low
72,862.41	71,764.18
Index Value	Change
14,307,377,262	+771.34
Percentage	Time
+1.07%	26 Apr, 2024 5:00 pm

Europe: FTSE 100 Index	
Index Value	Change
8,139.83	+60.97
Percentage	Time
+0.75%	26 Apr, 4:35 pm GMT+1

USA: Dow Jones Industrial Average	
Index Value	Change
38,331.51	+245.71
Percentage	Time
+0.65%	26 Apr, 1:06 pm GMT-4

Asia Pacific: Nikkei Stocks Average	
Index Value	Change
37,934.76	+306.28
Percentage	Time
+0.81%	26 Apr, 3:15 pm GMT+

Open Market Forex Rates		
Currency	Buying	Selling
Australian Dollar	178.5	180
Bahrain Dinar	740.5	748.5
Canadian Dollar	200.8	203
China Yuan	38.47	38.87
Danish Krone	40.02	40.42
Euro	294	297
Hong Kong Dollar	35.57	35.92
Indian Rupee	3.34	3.45
Japanese Yen	1.86	1.94
Kuwaiti Dinar	904.6	913.6
Malaysian Ringgit	58.28	58.88
New Zealand \$	165.38	167.38
Norwegians Krone	25.35	25.65
Omani Riyal	723.13	731.13
Qatari Riyal	76.49	77.19
Saudi Riyal	73.3	73.95
Singapore Dollar	204.5	206.5
Swedish Korona	25.53	25.83
Swiss Franc	304.82	307.32
Thai Bhat	7.52	7.67
U.A.E Dirham	75	75.75
UK Pound Sterling	343.75	347.9
US Dollar	277.25	279.8

# Govt committed to protect interests of farmers: Minister

*Says any increase in the price of fertilizers without a corresponding increase in gas prices is unjustified*

**Staff Reporter**

ISLAMABAD: Minister for Industries and Production Rana Tanveer Husain says government is committed to protect interests of farmers and ensure the stability of fertilizer prices.

Taking notice of increase in price of urea by a fertilizer company, he said any increase in the price of fertilizers without a corresponding increase in gas prices is unjustified. He strongly denounced the unilateral price hike of 561 rupees per bag of Sarsabz Urea fertilizer by Fatima Fertilizer Limited and

urged the company to immediately withdraw the increase.

The Minister said if the company cannot justify the price hike, the ministry will determine the prices according to relevant laws.

Rana Tanveer Hussain said efforts are being made in collaboration with provin-

ces to control hoarding of fertilizers and a mechanism will be made to check availability of real-time stock of fertilizers in the country.

He called upon the fertilizer companies to facilitate the farmers in enhancing crop productivity.



## Wrist watches

ISLAMABAD: A roadside stall holder selling wrist watches in the Federal Capital.



Photo: Online by Sultan Bashir

# Chinese market as key to electrification

BELJING: The Chinese market is central to the transformation of the Audi brand into a leading global provider of premium electric mobility. With the opening of the new factory in Changchun, locally developed electric models, and state-of-the-art digital technology tailored to users' requirements, we are putting our plan for continued success into action, Gernot Dollner, CEO of Audi, stated at the news conference of 2024 Beijing International Automotive Exhibition. The German auto giant is showcasing its strategy and all-electric portfolio for the world's largest automotive market. Highlights include the Audi Q6L e-tron, which is the first production models on the Premium Platform Electric (PPE). Only all-electric vehicles will be showcased at the booth, as both Audi joint ventures in China are bringing models tailored to the Chinese market's specific requirements, China Economic Net (CEN) reported.

Audi FAW NEV Company will start production of three PPE-based models of the Audi Q6 e-tron and Audi A6 e-tron families for the Chinese market before the end of 2024. Pre-series production at the new plant has already begun. Another German giant, Mercedes-Benz, would not yield an inch as well. On the heels of Chancellor Olaf Scholz's visit to China two weeks ago, German automakers are ramping up their efforts here, as evidenced by an exhibition presentation by Mercedes-Benz.

The company's presence at the AutoChina2024 is led by the all-new electric G-Class and the Concept CLA Class, a fleet consisting of one world-premiere model, seven China-premiere models, and eight models that are ready to hit the market, among which Maybach EQS SUV is the first fully electric model of the top-end luxury brand.



China is the most dynamic new energy vehicle market, country chief Hubertus Troska said at the press conference on April 25, echoed by Chief Executive Ola Kaellenius, "You have to be here and you have to be part of that innovation cycle. We have been steadily growing our partner group and will continue to do so. And Mercedes-Benz China sales chief Duan Jianjun noted that he hoped the new electric models the German automaker brought to the show would put to rest rumours that the company had given up on electrification. As for the sports car manufacturer Porsche, it is firmly underscoring its In China, for China's strategy at the show with a special China version of the new-generation Taycan, the market premiere of the all-electric Macan.

Last year, some 79,283 cars were delivered to customers in China. This corre-

sponds to a 25 percent share of Porsche's global deliveries in the 2023 financial year. Oliver Blume, Chairman of the Executive Board of Porsche, sees further potential, Electromobility is developing rapidly in China. It's fascinating to see. With our Chinese version of the new Taycan and our first all-electric Macan, we are pushing forwards here at just the right time. I am certain that we will once again inspire our customers and further expand our position in the luxury BEV vehicle segment. All examples show that global auto giants are addressing the individual wishes and needs of the Chinese market in a very targeted manner and also with the involvement of their own R&D organization across China, where Chinese and foreign developers are working side by side on the future of automobile industry, in mixed teams. APP

# KP desires to seek gems' sector accreditation from Thailand: SACM

PESHAWAR: Special Assistant to Chief Minister (SACM) Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Industries, Commerce and Technical Education, Abdul Karim Tordhair has expressed desire for getting accreditation from the Gems Technology Institute of Thailand to achieve the global standards in gems technology. He expressed these views while speaking as a chief guest during a training workshop organized under the aegis of the National Productivity Organization (NPO) at Gems and Jewelry Centre established under the auspices of Technical Education and Vocational

Training Authority (TEVTA) at Hayatabad here Saturday. He indicated that Gems Centres would be established in other areas of the province as well. The Special Assistant said that if Thai experts want, they could be provided a place for gems business in the Small Industries Development Board (SIDB)'s exhibition centre in Islamabad. He said that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was an important stakeholder in the development of the regional economy and there were very vast and useful opportunities for foreign investors in various sectors, which could be utilized

by the regional investors. He said that mutual contacts and holding joint forums were essential for finding the possibilities of investment at local level as bilateral cooperation was important platform for promotion of investment at local level. Abdul Karim Tordhair said that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was a very attractive place for foreign investment and trade in terms of gems beside investment in other sectors, saying they were moving towards providing a favorable environment with facilities to investors to attract foreign investors

to take benefits of the incentives of gems sector. He said that 80 percent gem resources are found in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and a modern gem processing centre was being established in Peshawar where a one-window operation and all the required facilities would be available at one place. So, he said, they are inviting foreign investors to take benefit of them. The experts trained the teachers and students of the Gems Centre on various software as per international standards and try to equip them with modern technology. APP

# Business community demands reduction in interest rate

PESHAWAR: Members of the business community urged the government and the State Bank of Pakistan to cut interest rates to flourish industries, trade and businesses and improve the economy of the country.

The business community said prices of import items and raw materials increased exorbitantly owing to the gradual increase in policy rate by the central bank, consequently cost of doing business also increased and inflation also jacked up.

According to details, a meeting of businessmen was held under the Chairmanship of Industrialists Association Peshawar President Ayub Zakori in the IAP office, said in a press release issued here on Saturday.

Besides, IAP former presidents, executive members

and senior members and industrialists, members of the business community were present on the occasion. The participants of the meeting said that the further increase in the policy rate will work under the prevailing scenario.

"At 25-26pc interest rate, it is hard to borrow from the banks," he said, adding that it will be hard for the government to earn revenue due to a decline in large-scale manufacturing.

Participants of the meeting said it is very hard for businesses and industry to survive on high-interest rates at a time when the soaring power and gas tariff had already pushed up the cost of doing business, making exports uncompetitive in the world market. APP

# Vegetables rates have reduced: Azma Bukhari

LAHORE: Provincial Minister for Information and Culture Azma Bukhari said on Saturday that rates of various vegetables, especially onion, tomato, and potato have reduced due to strict checking of prices by the authorities concerned.

She said price of onion had reduced by Rs. 29 per kilogram, tomato by Rs. 24 and potato by Rs. 22 in a period of one week.

The prices of other vegetables have also reduced by Rs 15 to Rs 20, she added. She said the prices of fruits were also decreasing.

This is the result of an

excellent performance of the administration of all districts of Punjab. She said that price control magistrates and teams were working in a proactive manner across the province on the directions of Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz.

The minister said getting the official rate list implemented was the biggest task. To implement that, all DCs, ACs and commissioners visit the markets on a daily basis. CM Maryam Nawaz's mission is to provide 'roti' and vegetables at an affordable rate to people of the province. APP

## Elon Musk's AI company xAI 'raising \$6b' in funding

DUBAI: Tech billionaire Elon Musk's 10-month-old AI company, xAI, is raising \$6 billion with an \$18 billion pre-money valuation, according to reports by TechCrunch and The Information.

The reports suggest that Musk who helped create Sam Altman's OpenAI in 2015, has recently unveiled his AI company's ChatGPT-like chatbot, "Grok" and is expected to seal the deal in the upcoming weeks.

"Sequoia Capital and Future Ventures, the venture fund co-founded by Musk's long-time friend Steve Jurvetson, are participating in the round," the report mentioned.

Other participants are likely to include Valor Equity Partners and Gigafund VC firms.

After his departure from OpenAI in 2018, Musk, 52, has criticised OpenAI for its change in ethos.

He announced Grok last year amid the rising popularity of the usage of AI across tech companies. His AI company now looks to compete with OpenAI.

According to Mashable, xAI is marketed as an AI brand that will integrate with Musk's other companies, including Tesla, SpaceX, The Boring Company and Neuralink.

The company aims to "master the physical world" by training on data from all of Musk's companies and aiding Tesla in creating self-driving cars and its robot Optimus.

xAI's only real product at this point is Grok, an AI chatbot integrated into Musk's own social media company X, formerly Twitter, which is also one of the AI company's shareholders.

According to experts at Mashable, the chatbot has not performed well.

The reports also revealed that xAI is currently hiring engineers and designers, apart from people for product, data and infrastructure verticals.

The AI company is offering cash and equity-based compensation, medical, dental and vision insurance and unlimited paid time off as employee benefits.

AI chatbot "Grok 2" is now in training and will "exceed all expectations" when it is released, said Musk. Agencies

# Power Division refutes reports of imposition of fixed tax on solar power

**Staff Report**

ISLAMABAD: Power Division has refuted reports of imposition of fixed tax on solar power.

In a statement, the power division stated there is no truth in the news of solar power fixed tax. The Central Power Purchasing Agency or Power Division has not sent any such summary to the government in this regard.

The power division said the Net Metering Policy of 2017 was aimed at promoting alternative energy in the system. There has been a



phase where the solarization has increased very rapidly.

The power division said that such proposals and amendments are being considered to save the poor from further burden.

The statement affirmed to protect the investment of one hundred and fifty to two hundred thousand net metering consumers.

# Babar, Shaheen aid Pakistan to level series against New Zealand

LAHORE: Captain Babar Azam's 34th half-century, followed by Shaheen Afridi's four-fer powered Pakistan to a narrow nine-run victory against New Zealand in the fifth T20I of the five-match series here at Gaddafi Stadium on Saturday.

Pakistan came from behind to level the five-match T20I series 2-2 after losing back-to-back matches.

While chasing 179, Tom Blundell hit Afridi for a boundary but the bowler made a comeback, reducing New Zealand to 5-1.

Tim Seifert gave New Zealand hope with his aggressive stroke play during his one-sided 76-run partnership with Michael Bracewell.

Seifert scored 52 runs from 33 balls with the help of seven boundaries and two sixes before Usama Mir castled him in the ninth over with 81 runs on the board.

Mir bowled the maiden and removed Mark Chapman in the next over to reduce New Zealand to 97-3.

Shadab Khan and Imad Wasim also joined the party as the visitors slipped to 103-5 before James Neesham and Josh Clarkson's brief 22-run stand, which pushed the total to 125.



However, Afridi returned to the attack and picked back-to-back wickets to break the budding partnership.

Clarkson fought the lone war with an unbeaten 38 off 26, however, could not find support from the other end as New Zealand bundled for 169 in the last over.

Afridi topped the bowling charts for Pakistan with his figures of 4-30, while Mir claimed two wickets.

New Zealand invited Pakistan to bat first and got an early breakthrough as

Saim Ayub fell prey to William O'Rourke with only eight runs on the board.

Babar Azam launched an onslaught, keeping Pakistan in command, meanwhile Usman Khan, after a shaky start, joined the party.

Together they raised 73 runs for the second wicket in 45 balls, before Ish Sodhi removed Khan. The right-handed batter scored 31 off 24, featuring three boundaries and one six.

Fakhar Zaman joined Babar Azam



on the crease but remained scratchy during their 42-run stand for the third wicket.

Azam top-scored for Pakistan with 69 runs from 44 balls with the help of eight boundaries, including two sixes before he was bowled by Ben Sears' searing yorker.

Zaman switched gears during his one-sided 36-run partnership with Iftikhar Ahmed, scoring 28 runs but fell in the last over.

The left-handed batter scored 43 off 33 with the help of four boundaries and

one six. Shadab Khan (15) and Imad Wasim (4) remained unbeaten as they pushed Pakistan's total to 178-5 in 20 overs.

For New Zealand, Foulkes, O'Rourke, Sears, Sodhi, and James Neesham bagged one wicket each.

## Trophy tour

LAHORE: Former Pakistani cricketer Shoaib Akhtar holds the trophy of ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2024 during the trophy tour at the Gaddafi Cricket Stadium in the Provincial Capital. The 2024 tournament will be hosted by the West Indies and the US from June 1 to June 29, 2024.



Photo: Online

## Can't imagine tennis without Nadal: Alcaraz

MADRID: Carlos Alcaraz admitted Friday that it is impossible to "imagine tennis without Rafa" as he hailed superstar compatriot Rafael Nadal who is closing in on the end of his career.

Nadal, a 22-time Grand Slam champion, will be 38 in June and has made just a handful of appearances since January 2023 due mostly to a hip injury.

"I don't want to imagine it yet. Like any Rafa fan, like any tennis fan, no one wants to imagine the tour without Rafa," said 20-year-old Alcaraz after making the third round of the Madrid Open where he is the defending champion.

"Personally, I want to make the most of Rafa, every time he steps on the court, whenever he can play."

"I know that's what he wants, that's what he craves, and that he works for it day in, day out to feel competitive, to be able to go out on the court and try to win."

"Whenever I can, I will be there to enjoy his tennis as much as possible."

Nadal will attempt to reach the third round in Madrid on Saturday when he faces Alex De Minaur of Australia, the man who knocked him out of the Barcelona tournament last week. AFP

## Pak juniors shine through silver medals at Qatar squash c'ship



DOHA: Two squash players — Abdullah Zaman and Ahmed Ali Naz — exhibited Pakistan's shining potential during the Qatar Junior Squash Championship which concluded in Doha on Thursday.

Pakistan's Abdullah Zaman and Ahmed Ali Naz secured silver medals after losing in the finals of the U15 and U11 categories, respectively. Meanwhile, Rayyan Zaman, Abdullah's younger brother, lost in the semis of the U11 event.

It must be noted that Abdullah and Rayyan are sons of former player Mansoor Zaman and grandsons of the legendary Qamar Zaman.

"We are delighted to share that three of our most talented players from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa boys have made a mark in the Qatar Junior Squash Championship held in Doha," Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Squash Association said in a statement.

"Abdullah Zaman, the grandson of the legendary Qamar Zaman, performed exceptionally well in the Boys Under-15 age category and won the silver medal. His skills and techniques left the audience spellbound, and he proved to be a formidable opponent for his competitors."

"Similarly, Ahmed Ali Naz, in the Boys Under-11 age category, proved his mettle and emerged victorious. His agility, quick reflexes, and on-court strategies were impressive, and he displayed great sportsmanship throughout the tournament."

"The championship was highly competitive, with players from all over the world participating. However, our players showed their talent and proved that they are among the best in their respective age categories. We are proud of their excellent performance, and we congratulate them on their well-deserved win." Agencies

## Arteta receives Wenger's advice

BENGALURU: Arsenal coach Mikel Arteta has been seeking counsel from former manager Arsene Wenger as the club aims to end their 20-year wait for the Premier League title this season, Arteta said ahead of Sunday's trip to Tottenham Hotspur.

A win over their north London rivals could galvanise Arsenal's hopes of lifting the title.

The Gunners lead in the standings by one point over Manchester City, who face Nottingham Forest later on Sunday with a game in hand.

Wenger during his 22-year tenure led Arsenal to three league titles, in 1997-98, 2001-02, and the remarkable "Invincibles" season in 2003-04.

# Palestinian athletes to be invited to Paris Olympics: Bach

The IOC Chief expects the Palestinian delegation to be of 'six to eight' members

LAUSANNE: Between six and eight Palestinian athletes are expected to compete at the Paris Olympics, with some set to be invited by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) even if they fail to qualify, its head Thomas Bach said.

Bach told AFP on Friday that qualification events for the Paris Games, which start on July 26, were ongoing for a number of sports.

"But we have made the clear commitment that even if no (Palestinian) athlete would qualify on the field of play... then the NOC (National Olympic Committee) of Palestine would benefit from invitations, like other national Olympic Committees who do not have a qualified athlete," he said in an interview at IOC headquarters in Lausanne, Switzerland. He said he expected the Palestinian

delegation to number "six to eight".

Bach said that the International Olympic Committee "from day one of the conflict" in Gaza had "supported in many different ways the athletes to allow them to take part in qualifications and to continue their training."

Palestinian militants from Hamas attacked Israel on October 7, resulting in the deaths of about 1,170 people, according to an AFP tally of Israeli official figures.

Israel's retaliatory military campaign to destroy Hamas has killed 34,356 people, mostly women and children, according to the health ministry in Hamas-run Gaza.

Bach dismissed suggestions the IOC has treated Russia differently over its invasion of Ukraine compared with Israel and its war in Gaza.



Russia was suspended from many international sports after its invasion and its athletes have been banned from competing under the national flag at Paris 2024.

In order to take part in the Paris Games, they are also required to have never publicly supported the war against Ukraine and not be employed by the mili-

tary or security services.

The sanctions against Russia were a result of Moscow violating the "Olympic truce" in its invasion of Ukraine soon after the Winter Olympics in Beijing in 2022 and for annexing Ukrainian sports organisations.

"The situation between Israel and Palestine is completely different," Bach said.

He said he had been even-handed in his public statements on Ukraine, the Hamas attack on Israel and the "horrifying consequences" of the war in Gaza.

"From day one, we expressed how horrified we were, first on the seventh of October and then about the war and its horrifying consequences," Bach said.

"We have always been very clear as we have been with the Russian invasion in Ukraine." AFP

# Yuvraj believes Pak-India will make it to semis in WC2024

DUBAI: As International Cricket Council (ICC) gears up for the upcoming T20I World Cup 2024, which is set to be played in the United States and the West Indies, fans couldn't help but wonder how will different teams perform in the mega event.

Expressing his views on the pressing question, former Indian cricketer Yuvraj Singh, who has also been appointed as the World Cup's ambassador, has said that he sees India and Pakistan reaching the semi-finals of the mega event.

Other two teams, the former all-rounder believes will reach the eliminators are Australia and England.

Yuvraj, who won the 2007 T20 World Cup, will be attending the promotional events in the US before and during the World Cup, including the most-anticipated clash of the tournament between Pakistan and India in New York on June 9.



The ex-cricketer further said that he is excited to be part of the event where he etched his name in history by hitting six sixes in an over against England in 2007.

"Some of my fondest cricketing memories have come from playing at the T20 World Cup, including hitting six sixes in an over, so it's very exciting to be part of this edition, which is set to be the biggest one yet," Yuvraj said as quoted by the ICC.

"The West Indies is a great place to play cricket with the fans coming to

watch creating a vibe that is completely unique to that part of the world, while cricket is also expanding in the US and I'm excited to be part of that growth through the T20 World Cup.

"India's clash against Pakistan in New York is going to be one of the biggest sporting fixtures in the world this year, so it's a privilege to be a part of and to witness the best players in the world playing in a new stadium."

It is worth mentioning that 20 qualifying teams are divided into four groups of five, from which the top two teams of every group will make their way to the Super 8 round.

In that stage, qualifying teams will once again be divided into two groups of four, from which the top two teams will make their way to the semi-final and then the winners will play the final on June 29. Agencies

# Cristiano Ronaldo among Barca legend's top 5 players

DUBAI: FC Barcelona's Portuguese defender, Joao Cancelo, recently shared his "top five" list of historical footballers in a video made by "FIFPRO".

In his list, he included several former Manchester City teammates but did not include any current Barca players which disappointed many fans, according to FC Barcelona Noticias.

Interestingly, he completely left out Barcelona legend Lionel Messi, who currently plays for David Beckham's Inter Miami.

Instead, he placed his compatriot Cristiano Ronaldo as the reference in attack.



For the goalkeeper position, Cancelo opted for Brazilian Ederson, praising his consistency, skill in keeping the goal invincible in key

moments, and his ability to play with his feet.

In defence, he included Ruben Dias for his leadership and personality on the field, describing him as a warrior who gives his all.

In the midfield, Cancelo chose Barca's Bernardo Silva. He praised his intelligence and commitment to the team, highlighting his physical capacity to run throughout the game, covering half of 13-14 kilometres.

Alongside himself, he chose Ronaldinho, whom he considers his all-time favourite player.

Finally, as the only forward, Cancelo chose CR7, whom he considers a legend of Portugal and an inspiration for all the youngsters aspiring to turn into professional footballers. Agencies

## Paying Tribute

KARACHI: Chief Justice of Pakistan Justice Qazi Faez Isa offering Fateha at the Mazar-e-Quaid on Saturday.



Photo: PID

# ' Hamas' resistance against Israeli occupation justified under int'l law'

Senator Mushahid underlines Pakistan's unwavering support for Palestine, says cause 'part of country's DNA'

ISTANBUL: Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed termed Hamas' struggle against Israel's occupation as "rightful resistance" that significantly altered the status quo in the Middle East and emphasized that "Palestine is part of Pakistan's DNA".

The senator spoke at a three-day conference titled International Conference on Palestine, inaugurated by President Erdogan on April 26 in Istanbul.

The Pakistani parliamentary delegation at the conference includes Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed, Member of National Assembly (MNA) Sheryar Meher, Chaudhry Shahbaz, and Junaid Akbar.

The conference has drawn parliamentarians and political leaders from 80 countries.

A member of the executive board of Parliamentarians for Palestine & Al Quds, the PML-N senator stated, "Palestinians' armed resistance to brutal Israeli occupation was

fully justified under International Law and the UN Charter."

He underscored Pakistan's unwavering support for Palestine, tracing it back to the nation's founder, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah. In his address, he condemned Israel's genocide in Gaza, labeling it the "first live televised genocide in modern history".

He criticized the lack of substantial support for Palestinians from both Muslim regimes and Western countries, except for public opinion.

Mushahid highlighted the impact of the "Al Aqsa Storm" unleashed by Hamas on October 7, stating it had "altered the global political landscape, especially in the Middle East, by shattering the myth of Israeli invincibility".

Referring to Pakistan's historical support for Palestine, he mentioned Pakistan's participation in two Arab-Israeli Wars in 1967 and 1973, as well as the



ISTANBUL: Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed speaking at the 3-day "International Conference on Palestine" held at Istanbul inaugurated by President Erdogan on April 27.

first recognition of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) under Yasser Arafat at the Lahore Islamic Summit in 1974.

The senator called for an immediate ceasefire and steps to establish an independent

Pakistan with Jerusalem as its capital.

The Pakistani delegates also held meetings with President Erdogan and the Speaker of the Turkish Parliament Dr Noman Kurtulmus.

A day earlier, speaking at the

United Nations Security Council's ministerial-level debate on the Middle East situation, Ambassador Usman Jadoon called on the United Nations and the world community to consider "further measures" against Israel to secure a ceasefire in Gaza and an end to its "plausible genocide" of the Palestinian people in the besieged enclave.

Earlier this week on April 23, Pakistan along with Iran reiterated the need for enhanced international endeavours to bring an end to Israeli genocide in Gaza.

Pakistan has been actively advocating for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza at various international forums.

On April 16, Munir Akram, Pakistan's permanent representative to the UN, called on the international community to act together, saying Israel's activities should not go unpunished and should be shown to have costs. Agencies

## Sessions judge kidnapped near Tank-DI Khan border

KP CM takes notice, orders measures for safe recovery of Marwat

TANK: District and Sessions Judge Shakirullah Marwat posted in South Waziristan was kidnapped by armed men near border area of Tank and Dera Ismail Khan in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, police said on Saturday.

DI Khan Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) Mohammad Adnan confirmed the incident, which

took place in a village named Bagwal in the border area between Tank and DI Khan when the sessions judge was on his way back to DI Khan, returning from duty.

He said that the abductors left the judge's car and driver on the spot. Police said that no one has claimed the responsibility of the judge's abduction. Reacting to the unfortunate

incident, Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Central Information Secretary Faisal Karim Kundi expressed concern and grief over the matter.

He called on KP Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur to explain the reason of his "non-seriousness" in the establishment of peace in the province.

"The CM should tell why

isn't he serious about establishment of peace and why are terrorists are on the loose," he asked.

Kundi said that the reports of the judge's abduction has given rise to sense of insecurity among the masses. He then prayed for the safe recovery of the judge.

Taking notice of the matter, KP CM Gandapur issued

directives for safe recovery of the abducted judge. He said that emergency measures should be taken for Marwat's recovery and all available resources should be utilised for the task.

Gandapur condemned the incident, saying that elements involved in the kidnapping cannot escape justice. Agencies



## Pakistan to transform region into pivot of growth: Gilani

Senate chairman emphasizes economic cooperation, regional connectivity for sustainable peace



Our Correspondent

LAHORE: Senate Chairman Syed Yusuf Raza Gilani highlighted the importance of economic cooperation and regional connectivity in fostering sustainable peace.

Speaking at a one-day International Conference on "Navigating Regional Dynamics: from Conflict to Cooperation in South Asia," hosted by Minhaj University here on Saturday, he said that the conference had brought together esteemed international and national speakers to discuss key issues facing South Asia.

Gilani praised the organizers for facilitating dialogue and understanding on regional affairs, noting the significance of such efforts in addressing the challenges and opportunities in the region. He acknowledged the multitude of challenges South Asia faces, including historical disputes, political tensions, security threats, and cross-border issues such as terrorism and drug smuggling.

Despite these challenges, he reiterated Pakistan's commitment to regional and international peace. He emphasized Pakistan's role in facilitating dialogue and peace talks, as well as its significant contributions to United Nations peacekeeping efforts.

Additionally, he highlighted Pakistan's efforts in hosting talks between Afghanistan, the Taliban, and the United States government, aiming to find a peaceful resolution to the conflict in Afghanistan.

Syed Yusuf Raza Gilani outlined a transformative approach to navigating regional dynamics, emphasizing a shift from traditional geopolitics to the realm of geoeconomics. This reorganization and emphasis on interdependence among nations mark a significant evolution in strategy.

He expressed optimism about the opportunities this paradigm shift brings, transcending borders to foster mutual understanding and prosperity. Envisioning the region as an engine of growth, he underscored the importance of collaborative efforts towards poverty alleviation, financial inclusion, and social justice.

He reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to promoting socio-economic development in the region, emphasizing the belief in shared prosperity as integral to ensuring stability and growth in South Asia. Backed by research and analysis, Gilani emphasized the pragmatic necessity of increasing regional connectivity to boost collective GDP, stressing the

imperative for united action towards inclusive and sustainable socio-economic growth across the region.

Highlighting Pakistan's commitment to achieving regional development goals, the Senate Chairman emphasized the launch of cooperative initiatives such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the Central Asia-South Asia (CASA-1000) project.

He said that the CPEC, a flagship project of the Belt and Road initiative, connects Western China to the Arabian Sea through Pakistan, facilitating trade, infrastructure development, and energy cooperation. Similarly, he added that the CASA-1000 facilitates the sale of surplus electricity from Tajikistan to Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, promoting shared benefits and regional integration.

Acknowledging that Pakistan cannot achieve these goals alone, he called upon regional partners, countries, and the international community to actively support and engage in promoting peace, stability, and economic growth in South Asia. He emphasized the immense potential of tourism and the benefits of joint efforts in promoting regional tourism to further enhance economic cooperation and integration.

Syed Yusuf Raza Gilani emphasized the pivotal role of tourism in bridging divides, dispelling stereotypes, and fostering closer connections among people. Stressing the importance of prioritizing people-to-people exchange, he underscored the need for bilateral and multilateral partnerships, joint investments, and the promotion of good governance to create a conducive environment for shared prosperity in South Asia.

He reiterated Pakistan's commitment to regional cooperation and peace-building efforts, with a focus on transforming complex regions into hubs of growth through collaborative socio-economic development initiatives. Gilani emphasized the necessity of a shared vision for the region and international support to achieve cooperation, stability, prosperity, and peace in South Asia.

In his capacity as Chairman of the Senate, he pledged full support to initiatives aimed at promoting peace, stability, and prosperity in the region. He expressed readiness to engage in meaningful dialogue and cooperation with neighboring countries, advocating for collective efforts to build a brighter future. With a shared goal of overcoming historical conflicts, he called for South Asia to emerge as a beacon of stability, prosperity, and shared development through collaborative regional efforts.

Austrian Ambassador in Pakistan Andrea Wicke also spoke on the occasion.

## Tharii-Ranipur section to be completed by Dec 2024: Minister

Staff Reporter

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Communications Abdul Aleem Khan has said that the repair work of the 52 km long Tharii-Ranipur section would be completed by December 2024 at the cost of Rs 498 million. He expressed these views while responding to an attention notice in the National Assembly presented by the members of the National Assembly, Ms Nafisa Shah, Ms Naz Baloch and Ms Mehtab Akbar Rashidi, in which attention was drawn to the immediate repair of the highway as mentioned above.

Giving details of the repair work, Aleem Khan said that repairing the Tharii-Ranipur section schemes was in the procurement process and their financial bids had been opened on April 24, 2024. He hoped that the documentation would be completed in the next two to three weeks while the construction and repair work would be started soon and would be completed by December 2024, according to the schedule. Aleem Khan informed that the old alignment of the Ranipur section passes through the Sindh cities of Khairpur, Kot DG and Kumba, adding when the N-5 was converted into double, the distance between Tharii and Ranipur was also decreased.

## Wang Yi says...

Continued from Page 1

underscored the need to oppose the island nation's independence.

Without taking any names, the minister lamented the double standards of "some countries" for arming the Taiwan independence separatists on one hand and calling for regional peace and stability on the other.

His remarks come as Washington, a key and arguably Taiwan's most important and staunchest ally, has been arming it with advanced weaponry over the years — something Beijing is weary of.

In January earlier this year, China sanctioned five US arms manufacturers over the sale of weapons to the self-ruled island.

Furthermore, responding to a question pertaining to the ongoing Israel-Gaza war, Yi decried the 100,000 civilian deaths and reiterated the need for a ceasefire.

## SC orders...

Continued from Page 1

can be ensured by placing the barriers within the premises.

"Therefore, all are directed [...] to clear public roads and pavements of all encroachments within three days, failing which the same should be demolished/removed by the relevant authority and the cost incurred thereon shall be recovered from those who encroached thereon," the order added.

The SC also said that this order to remove encroachments is applicable across Pakistan. Agencies

## PTI founder green-lights talks with establishment, political forces

PTI founder suggests establishing TORs prior to engaging with stakeholders

ISLAMABAD: Former prime minister and incarcerated Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder, Imran Khan, has reportedly authorised his party to engage in negotiations with the establishment and other political entities.

Express News reported that PTI is open to discussions with both the establishment and political parties, a notion confirmed by PTI leader Shibli Faraz, who stated that Imran Khan has granted permission for negotiations.

Sources indicate that Khan has stressed that any negotiations must adhere strictly to the Constitution and legal frameworks. Furthermore, it is

suggested that Terms of Reference (TORs) will be established prior to the negotiations, guiding discussions with stakeholders including the establishment and political parties.

Addressing journalists on Saturday, Faraz highlighted the current political instability in the country and stressed the importance of defining negotiation parameters. The manner in which the negotiations will take place and in what environment should be decided first, only then will the way for the negotiations be paved with those who are the stakeholders, he added.

Faraz said PTI is a reality and so is

the establishment. He raised questions on the authenticity of the incumbent government formed post-February 8 elections, noting the reliance on Form 47.

The PTI leader stated, "It remains to be seen how empowered it [government] is." Faraz emphasised the need to lay the groundwork and create a conducive environment before initiating dialogue with the government and establishment.

During a Senate session the previous day, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) Senator Irfan Siddiqui extended an invitation to PTI for talks on the directive of party leadership.

On the same day, PTI leader Shehryar Afridi expressed intentions to engage in discussions with the military establishment. Afridi, speaking to a private TV channel, indicated that talks with the army chief and DG ISI would take place soon.

Afridi clarified that PTI's objective is not to seek a National Reconciliation Ordinance (NRO) for itself but rather to negotiate for the betterment of Pakistan's future. He also mentioned Imran Khan's longstanding desire to engage with the establishment from day one, lamenting the absence of a response thus far. Agencies