



Daily The Spokesman

A Leading National Daily



فرمان رسول ﷺ
 نبی کریم صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم نے فرمایا کہ اللہ
 نے تمہیں اپنی نافرمانی پر توبہ کرنے سے روکا ہے اور
 (اللہ کے حقوق کو نہ توڑنا حق ان سے
 مطالبات کرنا بھی حرام قرار دیا ہے، لڑکیوں
 کو زبردستی نہ کرنا بھی حرام قرار دیا ہے) اور
 «خُلِّقُوا قَالًا» (فصل ہائیں) کثرت سوال
 اور مال کی برابری کو بھی پابند کیا ہے۔
 (کنز الدقائق، حدیث نمبر 5975)

Barkat Rice Mills
(Pvt) Limited



Sindh extends Rs2,000 fuel subsidy for motorcycle owners

Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah has approved an extension of the targeted fuel subsidy for motorcycle owners, providing continued relief as petrol prices remain elevated. The subsidy, which was due to expire, will now remain in place, allowing eligible citizens to continue receiving Rs2,000 per month.



Cross-border shelling from Afghanistan claims nine lives in Bajaur

The Deputy Commissioner of Bajaur has released a detailed list of individuals killed and injured in firing by Afghan forces targeting civilian areas along Pakistan's north-western border. According to the official record, nine people were killed, including three women and six children, in cross-border shelling.

Simultaneously published from Islamabad, Lahore and Multan

Ziq'a'd 13, Friday, May 1, 2026

www.dailyspokesman.net

@daily_spokesman

Daily Spokesman Vol: 20, Issue: 14

Price Rs. 25.00 Pages 8

Apna Ghar Program

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif distributes PM Apna Ghar Program cheques among the beneficiaries on Thursday.



Photo: Online

PM launches Rs3.2 trl program to fund building of 0.5m homes in five years

City Desk

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday launched a landmark five-year, Rs3.2 trillion housing program, aimed at funding the construction of 500,000 homes nationwide, with a vision to provide affordable shelter for low-income citizens, lacking the financial means to build their own houses.

Wazir-e-Azam Apna Ghar Program, said that besides enabling people to own a house, the initiative will also act as a powerful economic multiplier to boost significant industrial growth and create jobs for a diverse workforce, ranging from manual laborers to engineers.

program is the culmination of extensive deliberations and tireless effort, having successfully overcome a myriad of complex challenges," the prime minister told the ceremony attended by Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, Housing and Works Minister Mian Riaz Hussain Pirzada, other federal ministers, banking professionals, representatives from the construction industry, and the beneficiaries of the program.

Ghar" initiative as a sacred obligation of any government, intended to support the needy who have long been deprived of the security of homeownership.

Petrol nears Rs400 as govt hikes fuel prices again

Naveed Ahmad Khan

ISLAMABAD: The government has increased the prices of petroleum products once again, pushing petrol close to the Rs400 per litre mark, according to a notification issued by the Petroleum Division.

Meanwhile, high-speed diesel (HSD) saw a sharper increase of Rs19.39 per litre, with the new price set at Rs399.58 per litre.

Officials said the price revision was announced a day earlier than usual due to the May 1 public holiday.

would remain uninterrupted. "Spreading panic among the people through fake propaganda should be avoided," the division said, adding that fuel availability has been maintained even during heightened regional tensions.

UNICEF delegation calls on Mustafa Shah, reaffirms commitment to child welfare, education

ISLAMABAD: A UNICEF delegation Thursday called on Deputy Speaker of National Assembly Syed Ghulam Mustafa Shah at Parliament House.

well-being, protection and future of children remain a top national priority.

face barriers in accessing quality education, health-care and nutrition.

UNICEF's engagement in advancing child rights, reaffirming the Caucus's commitment to strengthening related legislative and policy efforts.

DPM/FM Dar reviews preparations for OIC Ministerial Conference on Women to be held in Pakistan

City Desk

ISLAMABAD: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar on Thursday chaired a meeting to review preparations for the 9th OIC Ministerial Conference on Women, scheduled to be hosted by Pakistan on 12-13 July 2026.



Expressing satisfaction at the state of preparations, DPM/FM directed all relevant Ministries/Departments to continue taking all necessary actions for a productive and successful event,

according to a press statement issued by the Foreign Office Spokesperson.

The meeting was attended by the Federal Ministers for Law & Justice and Information Technology, SAPM Tariq Bajwa, Foreign Secretary Anna Baloch, the Secretaries of Cabinet and Human Rights Divisions, Permanent Representative to OIC, as well as senior officials from Finance, Interior, & other concerned Ministries.

Security forces foil infiltration bids, kill 13 terrorists

City Desk

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's security forces have foiled two infiltration attempts along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, killing 13 terrorists

ists in separate operations, according to the military's media wing.

were effectively repelled, with eight militants killed in an exchange of fire in Mohmand District and five more neutralised in North Waziristan.

the terrorists were affiliated with "Fitna al-Khawarij" adding that they were operating with foreign backing. It added that the incidents once again highlighted gaps

Continued on Page 7

آزاد حکومت ریاست جموں و کشمیر کے زیر اہتمام
 مرکز حق بنیان المرموس کی عظیم الشان کامیابی کا ایک سال مکمل ہونے پر
 (ایکھم مئی تا 10 اگست 2026)
 عشرہ اظہار بے پستی افواج پاکستان
 قوم اپنی بہادر افواج کو سلام پیش کرتی ہے!
 افواج پاکستان کی قربانیوں، بہادری اور وطن عزیز کے دفاع
 میں بے مثال کردار کو خراج تحسین پیش کرنے کے لیے
 افواج پاکستان سے ہفتہ اظہار بے پستی کے موقع پر تمام سرکاری و نجی تعلیمی اداروں اور دیگر
 محکمات میں خصوصی تقریبات، سیمینارز، تقاریر، واکس اور دعائیں مجالس کا انعقاد کیا جائے گا
 آئیں! ہم سب مل کر اپنی عظیم افواج کے ساتھ بے پستی کا اظہار کریں اور وطن سے محبت کا عہد تازہ کریں
 پاکستان زندہ باد — افواج پاکستان پاکستان باد
 وزارت اطلاعات آزاد حکومت ریاست جموں و کشمیر

AJK PM orders strict deadline for development fund utilization

Spokesman Report

MUZZAFFARABAD: The Prime Minister of Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Faisal Mumtaz Rathore, has directed all government departments to ensure timely and transparent utilization of development funds well before the close of the financial year while strictly adhering to legal and procedural requirements.

He issued these instructions while chairing a development review meeting held here today. The Prime Minister warned that departments unable to utilize allocated funds within the stipulated timeframe must inform the forum within a week. "Funds will be reallocated to departments that have completed physical progress and are in a position to utilize them in accordance with the rules," he said.

Rathore further directed departmental secretaries to finalize their



planning within a week, adding that progress would be reviewed in a follow-up meeting next week.

The meeting was attended by ministers, the Chief Secretary of Azad Kashmir, secretaries, and heads of various departments. Meanwhile,

Secretary Planning and Development Aamir Latif Awan briefed participants that the federal government has so far released Rs 35 billion, of which approximately Rs 28 billion has been allocated to different departments.

He added that under the austerity policy of the Prime Minister of Pakistan, an amount of Rs 3 billion would either be returned or adjusted in the next installment. "Overall, around 66 percent of the released funds have been utilized so far," he said.



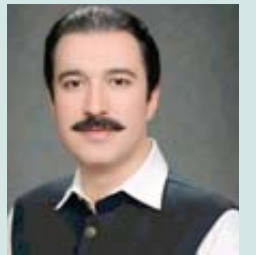
MIRPUR: Inspector General of Police of Azad Jammu and Kashmir Captain (Rtd) Liaqat Ali Malik awarding Shield to Muhammad Javed Malik Dy Director Information Mirpur.

AJK PM Pledges International Standards for Worker Welfare on Labour Day

Abdul Majeed Tahir

MUZZAFFARABAD: The Prime Minister of Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Faisal Mumtaz Rathore, has vowed to align workers' welfare measures with international standards.

In his message issued on International Workers' Day, the Prime Minister, while reaffirming his government's commitment to safeguarding labor rights, said Islam accords high importance to the dignity and welfare of laborers.



Citing a saying of the holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), he said the prophet had emphasized timely payment of wages to workers.

He said Labor Day is observed in memory of Chicago's workers whose struggles and sacrifices led to the recognition of labor rights. He added that global progress rests on the hard work and resilience of the working class.

Highlighting his party's legacy, PM Rathore said the Pakistan Peoples Party has consistently championed workers' rights.

He noted that former prime ministers Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Benazir Bhutto introduced key reforms, including granting workers the right to obtain passports, enabling millions to seek employment abroad, particularly in the Middle East.

He also lauded the role of the International Labour Organization in advancing the cause of workers.

He also stressed the need to uplift underprivileged segments of society.

Muslim Conference leaders demand stronger parliamentary system for Kashmir Base

Spokesman Report.

ISLAMABAD: In order to strengthen and stabilize the base camp of the Kashmir Freedom Movement, it is imperative to make the parliamentary system of government active and strong in accordance with its true spirit.



These views were expressed by Raja Muhammad Zarin Khan, Senior Vice Chairman Publicity Wing Muslim Conference, and Dr. Muhammad Abid Abbasi, Vice Chairman Publicity Wing Muslim Conference in their joint statement issued here today.

Raja Muhammad Zarin Khan appealed to the current assembly members to make the floor crossing law more stringent and effective before the end of their constitutional term, so that the change of loyalties of elected representatives can be prevented in the future.

Both leaders said that a full participation will be taken in the upcoming elections under the leadership of Sardar Atiq Ahmed Khan, while ideological and sincere workers are the real asset of the party. They appealed to the people to unite for the protection of the Kashmir freedom movement and the state of Jammu and Kashmir and make the candidates of the All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference successful.

AJK Minister Emphasizes Worker's Vital Role in National Progress on Labour Day

Spokesman Report

MUZZAFFARABAD: The working class plays a fundamental role in national development, economic stability and social prosperity. The day-to-day hard work of workers is a strong foundation for the development and progress of any society. These views were expressed by the Minister for Information of the Azad Jammu and Kashmir Government, Chaudhry Rafique Nayyar, in his special message on the occasion of International Labour Day. He said that Islam has laid special emphasis on hard work, honesty and protection of labour rights. For the formation of a fair and civilized society, it is necessary to provide decent employment, reasonable wages and a safe environment to the working class.

The Information Minister said that the Azad Kashmir government is taking effective steps for the welfare and well-being of the workers, better employment opportunities and protection of their rights so that the working class can fully benefit from the fruits of national development. He said that International Labour Day reminds us to acknowledge the services of the workers, make serious efforts to solve their problems and give them their rightful place in the society. Chaudhry Rafique Nayyar paid tribute to the workers across the state, saying that the state is moving towards progress and prosperity due to their tireless work, determination and dedication.

Muhammad Furqan Hayat Achieves Master's Success in UK with Honors

City Desk

MIRPUR: Young columnist Muhammad Furqan Hayat, the young son of Chaudhry Khizr Hayat, the central chairman of the All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference Public Liaison Board and the founder chairman of the environmentalist social organization Care Foundation, has passed the Master's degree examination in International Relations and Politics from a UK university with distinction. However, the university's convocation will be held in July where he will be awarded the degree. Various political, social and educational literary figures congratulated Chaudhry Khizr Hayat and expressed their best wishes for young Muhammad Furqan Hayat and wished him further success. It is worth mentioning that Chaudhry Khizr Hayat is among the close associates of former Prime Minister Sardar Attique Ahmed Khan.

Group photo

RAWALPINDI: Group photo of Chairman of the World Peace Jirga Programme (WPJP), Raaitullah Khan (Khan Baba) and Chairperson Sadia Khan (Khan Bibi) with participants of National Seminar.



Photo: Online

Azad Kashmir Declares May 1-10 'Yekjehti Pak Fauj' Amid Flag Hoisting Events

Spokesman Report

LONDON/ISLAMABAD: Azad Jammu and Kashmir Minister for Information, Religious Affairs and Auqaf Chaudhry Muhammad Rafique Nayyar has said that on the special instructions of Prime Minister Azad Jammu and Kashmir Faisal Mumtaz Rathore, "Yekjehti Pak Fauj" will be celebrated with great enthusiasm and unity in the entire Azad Jammu and Kashmir from May 1, 2026 to May 10, 2026. On this occasion, the national flag will be hoisted across the state to express full solidarity with the Pakistan Armed Forces. He said that during these ten days, the green cres-

cent flag of Pakistan will be hoisted in all the districts, tehsils and towns of Azad Kashmir, while various ceremonies, seminars, rallies and special prayer gatherings will be organized.

These events will pay tribute to the sacrifices, bravery and historic role played by the Pakistan Army in the defense of the country. Information Minister Chaudhry Muhammad Rafique Nayyar said that the entire Kashmiri nation salutes its brave Pakistan Army, which has always made unparalleled sacrifices for the defense of the motherland and has thwarted the evil intentions of an enemy many times bigger than itself in the fight for justice.



Attique Khan: May Day Honors Labor Sacrifices, Cites Islamic Teachings



Bureau Report

MUZZAFFARABAD: President of All Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference and former Prime Minister Sard-

ar Attique Ahmed Khan said that May Day is celebrated as a symbol of the greatness of labor and the sacrifices of the workers. In his message on the occasion of May Day, he said that Islam taught the rights of workers and the one who works with his own hands has been called the friend of God. He said that the real beginning of the workers' movement in the world was the strike of Kashmiri workers and laborers from the silk factory in Srinagar. He said that it is imperative to highlight the greatness of labor in the society. The media should fulfill its responsibility in this regard. He said that in accordance with the teachings of Islam, workers should be given a legitimate place in the society and their rights should be protected at all levels.

DC Gujrat Lauds Ayesha Bashir Cleft Hospital for 'Outstanding Welfare'

Anwar Chohan

GUJRAT: Deputy Commissioner Gujrat Ms. Noor-ul-Ain Qureshi has said that individuals and organizations serving suffering humanity are the true beauty and valuable asset of any civilized society. Such institutions not only provide medical treatment to patients but also give hope to broken hearts, smiles to deprived faces, and a new life to helpless families. She stated that several organizations are working for social welfare and humanitarian services in District Gujrat; however, Ayesha Bashir Cleft Hospital Gujrat holds a distinguished position due to its

outstanding welfare services, sincerity, and spirit of humanity.

She further said that the Pakistan Cleft Lip and Palate Association and Cleft Hospital Gujrat have set a remarkable example of humanitarian service by giving thousands of children a new life and beautiful smiles.

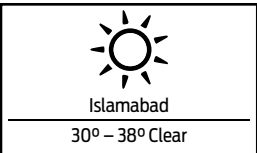
She was addressing the participants of the meeting after administering the oath to the newly elected President of the Pakistan Cleft Lip and Palate Association, Albaj Amjad Farooq, General Secretary Mirza Ashfaq Bashir, and Finance Secretary Zulfikar Ali.

The meeting was attended by General Secretary Mirza Ashfaq Bashir, Finance

Secretary Zulfikar Ali, Information Secretary Khurram Altaf Bhatti, Senior Vice President Umair Rafiq Royal Fan, Vice Presidents Ahmad Hassan Mattu and Sheikh Gulraiz Nabi, Joint Secretary Ahmad Yaseen, Advisor for Social Advocacy Chaudhry Nadeem Manzoor Begha, Advisor for Public Relations Begum Samia Ejaz, Advisor for Women Affairs Begum Ayesha Ayub, Advisor for Research and

Training Sultan Nadeem Malhi, along with other distinguished personalities.





SERVICES

Namaz Timings
 Fajr 3:49 am
 Zohr 12:05 pm
 Asr 4:52 pm
 Maghrib 6:50 pm
 Isha 8:22 pm

EMERGENCY

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

Women Police Stations

Islamabad 9222596
 Rawalpindi 9270601-20

ENQUIRY

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

HOSPITALS

CMH 561111
 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

Chief Minister Sindh Murad Ali Shah Inaugurates KDSP Hyderabad Chapter

By Qayoom Sarohi

HYDERABAD: In a significant step towards inclusive social development, Chief Minister Sindh Syed Murad Ali Shah inaugurated the Hyderabad chapter

of the Karachi Down Syndrome Program (KDSP). The initiative has been launched with the support of the Provincial Government's Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPD), aiming to expand



specialized support services for individuals with Down syndrome across communities in Sindh.

The newly established center is the sixth KDSP chapter in the country and the fourth in Sindh. It is expected to serve not only Hyderabad but also families from nearby districts including Sanghar, Badin, Mirpurkhas, Dadu, and Nawabshah, enabling access to essential care closer to underserved communities.

Accompanying the Chief Minister were Minister for Irrigation Jam Khan Shoro, Mayor Hyderabad Kashif Shoro, Deputy Mayor Sagheer, Members of the Provincial Assembly from the Pakistan Peoples Party, and other distinguished guests. Secretary DEPDA Taha Farooqi and his team were also present at the ceremony.

Addressing the event, the Chief Minister stated that the establishment of the Hyderabad center fulfills

a commitment made during the inauguration of KDSP's North Nazimabad center in July 2025. He shared that a parent had requested the establishment of a similar facility in Hyderabad, upon which he immediately directed action.

He said it is a matter of pride that the promise has been fulfilled within a short time and added that the new center will offer facilities comparable to those in Karachi.

A beautiful view

ISLAMABAD: A beautiful view of Faisal Mosque under clouds carved in the Federal Capital.



Photo: Online by Sultan Bashir

IHC removes objections on plea regarding Bushra Bibi's meetings with family

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Thursday removed objections raised by the registrar's office on a petition seeking access for meetings and a personal physician for Bushra Bibi, the spouse of the PTI founder, and directed that the case be fixed for hearing on Monday.

A single bench of Justice Arbab Muhammad Tahir heard the petition filed by Mubashra, the daughter of Bushra Bibi. During the proceedings, lawyers Salman Akram Raja, Ali Bukhari, Nacem Panjhuta, and Khaled Yousaf Chaudhry appeared before the court.

Justice Tahir observed that he had previously given a ruling requiring petitioners to approach the relevant authority before filing a petition. "If you have not yet approached the jail authorities, do so today. The case will be numbered and heard on Monday," the judge said.

Salman Akram Raja said that the petitioner is Bushra Bibi's daughter, and her meeting should not be stopped. Bushra Bibi's health is not well, and she has also undergone surgery. There is an emergency situation in this case, and the court should hear it today or tomorrow, Raja argued.

Justice Tahir noted that Thursday was the last working day of the week. "Objections are being removed. The case will be heard on Monday, the first working day of next week," the judge said, adjourning further proceedings until Monday.

FIA Multan Signs MoU with Mukhtar A. Sheikh Hospital for Subsidised Healthcare

By Zain Khan Malghani

MULTAN: The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) Multan Zone has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Mukhtar A. Sheikh Hospital to provide quality medical services to its personnel at discounted rates.

The agreement was formally signed in a ceremony chaired by the Director FIA Multan Zone and the Managing Director of Mukhtar A. Sheikh Hospital.

Under the MoU, FIA officers and their families will have access to subsidised, high-quality healthcare services, ensuring timely and improved medical treatment.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) Multan Zone and Mukhtar A. Sheikh Hospital offers comprehensive benefits by ensuring that FIA officers and their families receive quality healthcare services at subsidised rates, significantly reducing their financial burden. The agreement also facilitates priority



and timely medical treatment, including quicker consultations, emergency care, and hospital admissions, which is crucial in urgent situations. By providing access to a well-equipped hospital with modern diagnostic facilities and specialist doctors, the MoU enhances the overall

standard of healthcare available to employees.

Officials stated that the initiative aligns with the vision of the Director General FIA, aimed at promoting the welfare of its officers and enhancing their overall quality of life.



The rally organized by the Rawalpindi Restaurant Caterers, Sweets and Baker Association to express solidarity with the Pakistani Armed Forces was well attended by participants.

Sindh CM intervenes after journalist claims harassment, detention by Hyderabad Police

By Bureau Report

HYDERABAD: Senior journalist Abdul Ghafoor Sarohi lodged a complaint with the Chief Minister of Sindh regarding his illegal arrest by Hyderabad Police. The Chief Minister directed the DIG Hyderabad to conduct an inquiry and ensure justice is provided.

During an event in Hyderabad, senior journalist Abdul Ghafoor Sarohi informed the Chief Minister of Sindh, Syed Murad Ali Shah, that for writing the truth and reporting facts, he was harassed by the SHO of four police stations on the orders of SSP Hyderabad Shahzeb Chachar, and was held hostage at Bhitai Nagar Police Station. He stated that there was no complaint registered against him, and that the police had taken unlawful action, which was an attack on freedom of expression.

Upon this, Chief Minister Sindh Syed Murad Ali Shah directed DIG Hyderabad Tariq Razzaq Dharijo, who was present at the venue, to immediately hear the journalist's stance, conduct an inquiry, and ensure justice is provided to him.

Prof. Dr. Hassan Khaliq Qureshi Assumes Charge as Vice Chancellor of Emerson University Multan

By Special Correspondent

MULTAN: Prof. Dr. Hassan Khaliq Qureshi has formally assumed charge as Vice Chancellor of Emerson University Multan on Thursday, April 30, 2026. His appointment notification was issued earlier this week by the competent authority.

Prof. Dr. Hassan Khaliq Qureshi is a distinguished academic, researcher, and administrator. Prior to this appointment, he was serving as a tenured professor at National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST), Islamabad.

Upon assuming office, the university administration, faculty members, students, and academic circles warmly welcomed him. On the occasion, various educational, social, and literary circles expressed optimism that under his leadership, Emerson University Multan will witness further improvement in academic standards, strengthened research initiatives, and significant overall institutional development.

Attock launches strict anti-plastic drive: ADC warns of zero tolerance crackdown

By Raza Naqvi

ATTOCK: Additional Deputy Commissioner General and Administrator Municipal Committee Attock, Anil Saeed, has said that making the environment plastic-free can not only significantly reduce environmental pollution but also ensure the protection of human lives. He stated that the harmful effects of plastic have become a serious threat to human health, aquatic life, and agricultural land,

making immediate and effective measures imperative.

He expressed these views while addressing a press conference held at the Municipal Committee Attock regarding the anti-plastic campaign. Deputy Director of the Environment Department, Dr. Rabia Nausheen, Chief Officer Municipal Committee Attock, Sardar Aftab Ahmed Khan, and other concerned officials were also present on the occasion.

During the briefing, Deputy

Director Environment Department Dr. Rabia Nausheen said that, under the directions of Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz Sharif and the supervision of Deputy Commissioner Attock Rao Atif Raza, a strict crackdown is being launched to make Attock a plastic-free district. She clarified that indiscriminate legal action is being taken against business operators who are using or selling substandard shopping bags measuring 12/16 inches and having a thickness of less than

75 microns.

She further stated that officers from the Punjab Enforcement and Regulatory Authority, alongside the district administration, will actively participate in this special operation. Strict action will be taken against violators under a zero-tolerance policy.

Additional Deputy Commissioner Anil Saeed reaffirmed that the district administration is committed to making Attock clean, green, and environmentally friendly. He emphasized



that all possible measures are being taken to achieve this objective. He urged citizens, traders,

and industrialists to ensure compliance with government directives so that a safe, healthy,

and sustainable environment can be provided for future generations.

Group Chairman/Chief Editor: **Almass Ayoub Sabir**
 Vice Chairman: **Asim Nazir Ahmad**
 Editor: **Naveed Ahmad Khan**
 Head Editorial Advisory Board: **Amjad Mehmood**
 Bureau Chief Karachi: **Khurram Jaffrani**
 (jaffrani@adpluse.pk)
 Bureau Chief Lahore: **Syed Afraz Ali Nazish**
 (afrazalishah@gmail.com)
 Head Office: AIMS Building, Street No. 4, H-8/1, Islamabad.
 spokesmanislamabad@gmail.com
 Phone: +92 51 2227123,
 WhatsApp +92 346 5008408
 Karachi office: A111, Block C, Gulsha-e-Jamal, PRECHS,
 Karachi Phone: 021-33399390
 Email: spokesmankarachi@gmail.com
 Lahore Office: 7-E, Samanberg, Johar Town.
 spokesmanlahore@gmail.com
 Daily The Spokesman available only on annual subscription

The Contradictions at the Heart of America's Iran War

The recent Pentagon hearing on the Iran war, held on April 29, 2026, before the House Armed Services Committee, was expected to bring clarity to one of the most consequential military decisions in recent U.S. history. Instead, it revealed a pattern of contradictions, evasions, and inconsistencies that raise serious questions about the coherence of the policy itself.

Testimony from Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, delivered under sustained questioning from lawmakers in Washington, D. C., combined with emerging reporting and prior briefings, suggests that the war has been driven less by a unified strategic vision and more by shifting justifications and disputed assumptions. What should have been a straightforward explanation of objectives, costs, and outcomes instead became an exercise in deflection, leaving members of Congress, policy experts, and the public with more uncertainty than answers at a moment when clarity is urgently needed.

One of the most striking issues to emerge from the hearing was the lack of agreement on the financial cost of the war. The Pentagon's official estimate placed the total expenditure at approximately \$25 billion, a figure that the Secretary presented as comprehensive.

However, members of Congress quickly challenged this number, arguing that it fails to account for a wide range of additional costs, including replacement of destroyed equipment, long-term operational commitments, and broader economic consequences.

Some estimates presented during the hearing suggested that the true cost could reach or exceed \$600 billion, with American households effectively bearing an annual burden of around \$5,000. The Secretary did not provide a detailed rebuttal or breakdown to counter these claims, instead redirecting the discussion

toward the hypothetical cost of allowing Iran to acquire nuclear weapons. This response, while rhetorically compelling, left unresolved the central question of how much the war is actually costing and whether those costs are being transparently communicated to the public.

The confusion surrounding cost is mirrored by an equally significant contradiction in the stated justification for the war. At its outset, the conflict was framed as a necessary response to an imminent nuclear threat posed by Iran, a characterization that implied urgency and immediate danger.

Yet during the hearing, the Secretary asserted that Iran's nuclear program had been effectively "obliterated," suggesting that the threat had already been neutralized. When pressed to reconcile these positions, he shifted the rationale once again, arguing that Iran's ambition to develop nuclear weapons justified continued military action.

This progression—from imminent threat to neutralized capability to future ambition—reveals a lack of consistency that undermines the credibility of the war's original premise. A conflict justified on the basis of immediate necessity cannot easily be sustained on the grounds of speculative intent without raising fundamental questions about its legitimacy.

Further complicating the narrative is new information indicating that key risks associated with the war were clearly identified before it began. According to reporting, Dan Caine warned that a U.S. attack on Iran could prompt retaliation in the form of closing the Strait of Hormuz, one of the world's most vital shipping lanes. Military assessments indicated that

Iran possessed the capability to deploy mines, drones, and missiles to disrupt or shut down the strait.

President Donald Trump was aware of these risks but chose to proceed, operating under the assumption that Iran would either capitulate quickly or that the United States could easily manage any escalation. In reality, neither outcome materialized. Iran did not back down, and the Strait of Hormuz quickly became a critical leverage point, contributing to global energy instability and economic disruption. This sequence demonstrates that the consequences now being faced were not unforeseen accidents but rather foreseeable outcomes that were consciously discounted in the decision-making process.

One particularly controversial incident involved a strike on a school, which reportedly resulted in mass civilian casualties, yet remains officially classified as under investigation. The persistence of such responses raises questions about accountability and the extent to which civilian harm is being addressed or acknowledged.

Despite these concerns, the Pentagon did not present a comprehensive analysis of domestic economic impacts during the hearing, leaving a critical dimension of the war's consequences largely unexplored. This absence is notable, particularly given the historical precedent of acknowledging and preparing for the economic sacrifices associated with major conflicts.

Throughout the hearing, a consistent pattern of evasion emerged in the Secretary's responses to questioning. Direct inquiries were frequently met with indirect answers, while requests

for specific data were often redirected toward broader strategic arguments. This approach may have been intended to maintain flexibility in messaging, but it also contributed to a perception of uncertainty and lack of clarity.

When confronted with contradictions, the responses tended to shift rather than resolve them, reinforcing the impression that the underlying strategy itself may not be fully coherent. The inability to provide clear, consistent answers on key issues such as cost, justification, and operational decisions raises concerns about the extent to which the war is being guided by a well-defined plan.

Taken together, the evidence presented during the hearing and in subsequent reporting points to a conflict that lacks a stable foundation. The war was launched despite clearly articulated risks, justified through evolving and sometimes contradictory arguments, and sustained without a transparent accounting of its costs. Its consequences—military, economic, and humanitarian—continue to expand, even as the rationale for its continuation remains uncertain.

At its core, the conflict appears to rest on an unresolved question: whether it was initiated to counter an immediate threat or to prevent a potential future one. This distinction is critical, as it shapes not only the justification for the war but also the criteria by which its success or failure will ultimately be judged. If the war is indeed based on assumptions about future intentions rather than concrete evidence of present danger, then its premise is inherently unstable, and its long-term trajectory uncertain.

The writer is Press Secretary to the President (Rtd), Former Press Minister, Embassy of Pakistan to France, Former Press Attaché to Malaysia and Former MD, SRBC. He is living in Macomb, Michigan



Analysis

Qamar Bashir

International Labour Day

Acting President of Pakistan, Yousuf Raza Gilani, in his special message on the occasion of International Labour Day, has said that May 1 is not merely a day on the calendar, but a powerful symbol of hard work, struggle, human dignity, and the collective commitment to social justice. The day is observed worldwide as an expression of solidarity with workers and serves as a reminder of the great sacrifices made by labourers in their struggle for fundamental rights.

He noted that the historical significance of May 1 is linked to the Haymarket incident in Chicago, United States, where workers staged a peaceful protest demanding an eight-hour workday. The unfortunate events that unfolded during this movement gave a new direction to labour rights struggles across the world, and in remembrance of those sacrifices, May 1 came to be observed as International Labour Day.

The Acting President emphasized that national development, economic stability, and sustainable prosperity are deeply tied to the tireless efforts and dedication of the working class. He described workers as the backbone of any economy, stressing that no vision of progress can be realized without ensuring their welfare and well-being.

He further highlighted that both the teachings of Islam and the Constitution of Pakistan place great emphasis on respecting workers, protecting their rights, and ensuring social justice. He underlined that it is the fundamental responsibility of the state to provide workers with dignified employment, fair wages, social protection, and a safe working environment so that they may lead honorable lives.

Yousuf Raza Gilani also underscored that Parliament has consistently raised a strong voice for the protection of workers' rights and has played a key role in enacting relevant legislation. He reaffirmed that Parliament remains committed to promoting labour-friendly laws, better wages, social security, workplace safety, and welfare initiatives in fulfillment of its constitutional responsibilities.

Reiterating his resolve, the Acting President stated that further legislative measures, institutional reforms, and strengthening of social protection systems would be pursued to ensure sustainable and effective solutions to the problems faced by workers.

Paying tribute to overseas Pakistani workers, he acknowledged their vital contribution to the national economy through remittances and assured that the protection of their rights remains a priority of the government.

In conclusion, he said that International Labour Day provides an opportunity to recognize the services of workers, appreciate their struggles, and express solidarity with them. In the context of current global economic challenges, the importance of this day has further increased. He reaffirmed that the Pakistan Peoples Party and Parliament will continue their efforts to uphold workers' rights, promote social justice, and work towards the establishment of a fair and equitable society.



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

Labour Day: The Dire Condition of the Working Class in Pakistan and the Need for Reforms

Every year on May 1st, Labour Day is celebrated across the world with the resolve to highlight the rights, protection, and welfare of the working class. In Pakistan too, this day holds significance, but the ground reality is that workers here are still deprived of many basic economic and social protections.

The biggest contradiction in Pakistan's labour market is that a large portion of the economy stands on the shoulders of the working class, yet this very class remains the most vulnerable and insecure.

The Current State of Pakistan's Labour Market

According to recent estimates, Pakistan's total labour force consists of approximately 85 million people, out of which:

Nearly 83% of workers are employed in the informal sector

Only about 17% are part of the formal sector

These figures clearly indicate that Pakistan's economy is largely based on the informal economy, where workers neither fall under social security schemes nor enjoy any legal protection.

Trade Unions: Weak Representation

Trade unions are the main platform for representing workers in Pakistan. According to one estimate, there are around 7,000 registered unions, but only a few hundred are active. These unions have approximately 1.4 million members. The majority are "pocket unions," and even the workers in the concerned factories and industries are often completely unaware

of them. The unionization rate is only a little over 2%. This rate is extremely low compared to international standards.

Major Obstacles:

- Complex and outdated labour laws
- Resistance from employers
- Informal pressure against unionization
- The informal sector being outside the legal framework

As a result, workers are unable to raise their collective voice effectively.

Social Security: Extremely Limited Coverage

Institutions like EOBI and provincial social security departments exist in Pakistan, but their coverage is very limited:

Registered individuals with EOBI: approximately 8.6 million

Active contributors: only 2.6 million

Compared to the total labour force, the coverage is extremely low.

Conclusion:

More than 90% of Pakistan's working class is working without any formal social protection.

New Reality: Digital and Gig Workers

- A new class is rapidly emerging in today's era:
 - Food delivery riders
 - Bykea / Careem drivers
 - Freelancers
 - Home-based workers
- These are Gig Economy Workers, who work through platforms but:
 - Do not have permanent employment
 - Have no insurance or pension

Lack clear legal protection
 Face unstable income
 Despite being part of the modern economy, this class remains outside the scope of old labour laws.

Institutional Problems

Pakistan's labour institutions are suffering from multiple issues:

- Weak governance and administrative structure
- Lack of data and non-transparent systems
- Irregularities in the use of funds
- Delays in payments and benefits
- These factors further erode workers' trust in the system.

The Real Challenge: The Protection Gap

The biggest problem in Pakistan is:
 Labour Force: ~85 million
 Protected class: Less than 10%
 Unprotected class: More than 90%

This "Protection Gap" is not just an economic issue but a social crisis as well.

Need for Reforms: Concrete Proposals

To improve the condition of workers in Pakistan, the following steps are essential:

- National Labour Registry
- All workers should be registered in a NADRA-linked digital system so that accurate data becomes available.
- Bringing the Informal Sector into the Legal Framework
- Small businesses and informal workers should be included in the system through simplified registration processes.
- Legal Status for Gig Workers
- The law should include a clear definition of "Platform Workers" and their rights should be

Continued on Page 7

Labour Day 2026: Will Defense Agreements and Exports Improve Workers' lives in Pakistan?

As Pakistan approaches Labour Day on May 1, 2026, its workers face a deep contradiction between entrenched hardship and emerging opportunity. Across agriculture, construction, mining, and manufacturing, laborers continue to struggle with wage theft, weak enforcement of minimum

investments in roads, power, cybersecurity, and public-sector hiring directly generating economic activity and employment. Enhanced internal security, particularly in Karachi, has boosted investor confidence, reflected in stock market gains and industrial expansion, which in turn creates jobs and improves

livelihoods. Together, these dynamics suggest that while workers' grievances remain urgent and unresolved, the combination of strategic strength, diplomacy, and economic momentum is beginning to create conditions that could support more stable employment, higher incomes, and broader social progress.

Looking at the specific mechanics of how defense exports improve workers' lives, we can point to the Bureau of Emigration's job postings in early 2026, which specifically listed "Weapons Manufacturer" as a high-demand category for jobs in Saudi Arabia, with a salary of 1500 Riyal, plus free accommodation, medical insurance, and transport. These are skilled jobs created by the reputation of Pakistan's defense industry. The technicians who learned to maintain an ammunition plant in Wah are now exportable commodities themselves, earning foreign exchange that they remit back to their families in Mardan or Swat. This is

Continued on Page 7



Analysis

Abdul Basit Alvi

Freedom of Press Under Attack

Journalist Abdul Ghafoor Sarohi Detained for Four Hours

Bureau Report

HYDERABAD: Strong anger and outrage continue across Sindh among journalists, political figures, and social leaders over the incident in which journalist Abdul Ghafoor Sarohi was allegedly held hostage for four hours by police on the orders of SSP Hyderabad for writing truthfully and reporting facts. The police action has been widely condemned as illegal and an attack on freedom of expression, with demands for the removal of SSP Shahzeb Chachar along with four SHO's and initiation of legal proceedings against them.

According to details, senior journalist Abdul Ghafoor Sarohi, Bureau Chief of Daily The Spokesman and Chief Executive of News Plus Channel, had published reports highlighting rising crime and the narcotics trade in the city. In response, he was allegedly harassed and unlawfully detained on the orders of SSP Hyderabad Shahzeb



Chachar. Journalists, political activists, and civil society representatives across Sindh termed the action unethical, unlawful, and an attempt to suppress free speech.

Journalists from Karachi, Hyderabad, Sukkur, Mirpurkhas, Matiari, Khairpur Mirs, and other cities contacted Abdul Ghafoor Sarohi to express solidarity and strongly condemned the police action.

The legal community in Hyderabad also reacted sharply, calling the detention of a journalist

without any complaint equivalent to abduction. Hyderabad District Bar Association President Ashar Majeed Khokhar, General Secretary Fazal Qadir Memon, senior journalist and advocate Abdul Wahab Munshi, PTI leader Advocate Aslam Laghari, journalist Azmatullah Kumbhar, Advocate Shahid Shams Memon, Advocate Zulfiqar, Advocate Mir Aajiz Lashari, Advocate Meer muhammad nohrio, Advocate Qazi Ahmer Hussain and others stated that holding journalist Abdul Ghafoor Sarohi without



legal justification amounted to kidnapping.

They said such an unlawful act under the supervision of SSP Hyderabad Shahzeb Chachar had raised serious questions about the conduct of the police. They further announced complete legal support for Abdul Ghafoor Sarohi

and warned that if justice was not provided, a joint protest movement would be launched.

Sindh Awami Forum President Habib Jatoi, General Secretary Dr. Hassan Laghari, Amrishi Thakkar and other leaders also condemned the police conduct and assured full support to the

journalist. Educationist Jaleel Qureshi, Barkat Noonari and several other personalities also denounced the incident.

Political and social leaders, along with journalists, stated that SSP Shahzeb Chachar had tried to silence the voice of truth through misuse of power. They

said the unlawful four-hour detention of Abdul Ghafoor Sarohi was a blatant violation of the law.

Demands have been made for the suspension of SSP Hyderabad Shahzeb Chachar and the four police officers allegedly involved in detaining and harassing the journalist: SHO Qasimabad Muzaffar Ali Khaldi, SHO Bhitai Nagar Ghulam Hussain Pirzada, SHO SITE Abdul Waheed Sheikh, and SHO Naseem Nagar Sharef khoso, stating that they no longer had any moral authority to remain in office.

Journalists have further demanded that Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah, Home Minister Zia Lanjar, IG Sindh Javed Alam Odho, and Provincial Information Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon take notice of the alleged excesses committed by the SSP and initiate legal action against him. Otherwise, a province-wide protest movement against SSP Shahzeb Chachar will be launched across Sindh.

Labour Day Message

Workers Are the Backbone of Economic Strength, says Chaudhry Zulfiqar Ali Anjum

Zain Khan Malghani

MULTAN: On the occasion of Labour Day (May 1), Chaudhry Zulfiqar Ali Anjum, Chairman of SM Group of Industries and Member of the National Export Development Board and Board of Investment, paid tribute to workers, calling them the driving force behind industrial growth and national development.

In his message, he said that Labour Day serves as a reminder of the historic struggle for workers' rights and the enduring values of hard work, integrity, and determination. He emphasized that laborers play a

fundamental role in strengthening industry, the economy, and society through their tireless efforts.

Anjum extended his appreciation to all workers, engineers, and officers associated with SM Group of Industries, acknowledging their dedication as the foundation of the organization's success. He reiterated that the workforce is the true strength of any institution, and their welfare remains a top priority.

He highlighted that SM Group has consistently ensured timely payment of wages, financial assistance during difficult times, quality healthcare facilities, and special initiatives for

the education of workers' children. He affirmed the group's commitment to providing a safe, dignified, and progressive working environment where every individual can realize their full potential.

Reaffirming his pledge on this Labour Day, Anjum said the organization would continue striving for the protection of workers' rights, their well-being, and a better future. He concluded that a prosperous workforce is essential for a strong economy and a bright Pakistan.

He prayed that Allah Almighty grants everyone the strength to continue this journey of hard work,

honesty, and service to humanity, ending his message with "Pakistan Zindabad."

High Commissioner Inaugurates Pakistan Pavilion at Major North American Food Expo Spokesman Report

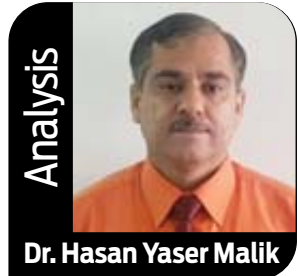
Ottawa: The Pakistan Pavilion at the SIAL Canada 2026 food products exhibition in Montreal featured six prominent exhibitors, showcasing Pakistan's diverse and high-quality food products. The pavilion at Sial Canada, the largest Food and Beverage exhibition in North America region, was inaugurated by High Commissioner Muhammad Saleem.



The High Commissioner, Consul General Faisal Abro and Trade and Investment Counsellor Altamash Janjua hosted visit of the Canadian Federal and Quebec Government dignitaries as well as private sector representatives to various stalls of Pakistan Pavilion.

Pakistan's strong presence at the three-day long (April 29-May 01, 2026) exhibition highlighted the country's deep interest in enhancing export of food products to Canada and offered platform for exporters to connect with international buyers and agri-food industry stakeholders.

Chokepoints within Muslim Maritime Territorial Waters are Re-defining the Global Order



Dr. Hasan Yaser Malik

In maritime domain, a chokepoint refers to a narrow passage along a waterway that is critical for the movement of vessels and their goods. These chokepoints are often natural features, such as straits or channels, which connect larger bodies of water, like oceans seas or gulfs. They are vital for global trade because they often represent the shortest or most efficient routes between major ports or regions. A few of the vital chokes points sitting in the Muslim Territorial Waters have been historically dominated by the Muslim admiralities. In maritime history on one hand Hugo Grotius is remembered only for his book 'Mare Liberum' where as great Muslim explorers like Ibn Battuta and Zheng He has been ignored. Western historians where they have projected the colonist like Christopher Columbus as an explorer of America. Unfortunately they have also tried to project the great Mediterranean Sea Loin Khari-Udin Barbarossa as 'The King Pirate' even through cartoons. Khari-Udin Barbarossa, dominated the Mediterranean Sea so well that even after three hundred years of his death the U.S President Joy Moris signed the "Treaty of Commerce and Navigation" with Turkish Sultan Emir Aali Pasha on 25 Feb 1862 which was ratified on Jun 5, 1862 In Western Indian Ocean impact of Omani navy is traceable since 807 to 824 AD during the reign of Imam Ghassan Bin Abdullah. Omani domination continued until the arrival of Portugueses from 1624 to 1649 AD. However Omani navy regained the control of Western Indian Ocean from 1650 to 1856 AD until it became a British Protectorate during the Colonization era. Chinese

Muslim Admiral Zheng He (Jiang Ha) during the reign of 3rd Ming Emperor Zhu Di prepared a fleet of 317 ships and 30,000 men and conducted seven vogues from China to Mozambique from 1405 to 1433 AD. He defeated the Sri Lankan king and Pirates of Malacca during his admiralty. Since 9th century during various pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial eras the chokepoints points have been under the domination of various powers and even in recent scenario where in apart from Panama Canal all the chokepoints are sitting in the Muslim Territorial Waters are being contested to be influenced or dominated for geopolitical interests, Strait of Hormuz and Bab El-Mandeb are point in case that too along the Fifth Island Chain. The present scenario of vital chokepoints are mentioned below:

Strait of Hormuz (Iranian and Omani Territorial Waters)

Strait of Hormuz offers passage from the Persian Gulf to Arabian Sea, 21% of global petroleum liquids pass through this vital artery. Asia's energy security and the stability of oil prices depend on the free flow of merchant vessels through this chokepoint. Since the U.S-Israel offence on Iran starting on 28 Feb 2026 the passage through Hormuz has been affected and is being controlled by Iran. The Strait of Hormuz primarily dominates the trade of hydrocarbons between Middle East to Far East and China and Bab-Mandeb dominates the trade of hydrocarbons to Europe to America.

Bab El-Mandeb Strait (Part of Yamani, Eritrean and Djibouti Territorial Waters)

Bab el-Mandeb Strait links the Mediterranean to Arabian Sea. Approximately 12% of all seaborne trade including 4.5 million barrels oil passes through this chokepoint daily. Bab el-Mandeb facilitates the internal trade of Middle East's goods and hydrocarbons to Europe and America. Owing to its strategic location, and the Strait's history of piracy, the U.S., China, France, Italy, China, Japan, and Germany possess military bases in Djibouti. Just imagine if the recent U.S-Iran War scenario



continue and Iran also use its influences over Yemen to block the Bab El-Mandeb in that case apart from ME, Asia, Europe and America will also suffer the direct economic crunch hence leading to forming of new diplomatic and military alliances.

Strait of Malacca (Indonesian and Malaysian Territorial Waters)

Serves as a boundary among the Pacific and Indian Ocean. Malacca is an 800 km channel between the Malay Peninsula and the Indonesian island of Sumatra. At its narrowest point, near Singapore, it contracts to just 2.7 km barely wider than the length of a modern container ship. Through this passage flows the lifeblood of Asian economies: oil, gas, containers, and raw materials traversing between the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Approximately 25-30% of all global maritime trade passes through Malacca over 100,000 vessels annually as of 2025. Approximately 16 million

barrels of oil per day, representing the majority of Middle Eastern energy exports to East Asia. Japan imports approximately 80% of its oil through Malacca; South Korea, 70%; China, over 80%.

The strait handles roughly three times the volume of the Suez Canal and five times that of the Panama Canal. On any given day, over 300 vessels transit the strait. The total value of cargo transiting annually approaches \$5 trillion, roughly equivalent to one-third of global seaborne trade value. Approximately 80% of China's oil imports, over 10 million barrels per day transits through and over 60% of China's total seaborne trade Malacca. Between 2000 and 2006, Malacca was the world's most pirate-infested waterway, with over 150 attacks in the peak year of 2000.

Suez Canal (Egyptian Territorial Waters) Manmade

Suez Canal provides entry to Mediterranean Sea from Red

Sea. Suez Canal bypasses Africa, making it the quickest sea route between Asia and Europe. Between 10% and 12% of global trade transits through the Suez Canal, including around 30% of all cargo container ships. The Suez is also home to 16 undersea cables, making it one of the most important nodes in the global telecommunication system. Approximately 17% of the world's internet traffic travels along these cables. On 21 March 2021, the Ever Given, a 400-meter-long container ship traveling from Malaysia, to Rotterdam became lodged in the canal obstructing all traffic for six days. By 28 March 2021, over 400 ships were waiting to navigate the canal amounting to USD \$1 billion of direct economic damage daily.

Strait of Gibraltar (Moroccan, Spanish and British Territorial Waters)

Strait of Gibraltar is one of the most strategically significant and heavily monitored waterways on the planet. It forms the only

natural maritime link between the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea, physically separating the continents of Europe and Africa by just 14.2 kilometres at its narrowest point. Named after the Rock of Gibraltar, which itself traces its origins to the Arabic Jabal-e-Jariq meaning "Jariq's Mount," this 58-kilometre-long strait has served as a critical corridor for trade, military movement, and human migration for thousands of years. As of 2026, the Strait of Gibraltar remains one of the busiest and most consequential maritime chokepoints in the world. With over 300 vessels crossing every single day and handles more than 10% of global maritime trade valued at approximately \$1.1 trillion annually. Approximately 3.3 million barrels per day (20% of European oil imports).

Bosphorus Strait (Turkish Territorial Waters)

Bosphorus Strait links Black to

Mediterranean Sea. It serves as a vital shipment source for grain, and fertilizer. Russian and Ukrainian nitrogenous fertilizer exports accounted for 28% of the global market. Black Sea is currently a theatre of war between Russia and Ukraine. However when Ukraine was allowed to resume grain shipments via the Black Sea, global food prices dropped almost 20%, highlighting the macroeconomic impacts of chokepoint on global food security.

Panama Canal (Panamanian Territorial Waters) Manmade

Panama Canal facilitates movement from the Atlantic to Pacific Oceans. It is principal route for movement of agricultural goods from Western to Eastern hemisphere. Presently 6% of global maritime trade flows through it.

Hydrocarbon of Indian Ocean Littoral Muslim Countries

It will be relevant to understand that apart from the chokepoints, the chokepoints surrounding countries, which are predominantly the Muslim and own 75 per cent of global oil reserves which transits through these chokepoints. Indian Ocean littoral Muslim countries possess the highest reserves per cent with KSA owning 18.4, Iran 9, Iraq 8.5, Kuwait 6, UAE 5.9, Kazakhstan 1.93, Oman 1.3, Qatar 1.15, Malaysia 0.52, Indonesia 0.26 and Bahrain 0.20 per cent. Natural Gas is consumed as 24 per cent of global energy utilization and Indian Ocean Littoral Muslim countries possess 46.79 per cent of total gas reserves out of which ME alone has reserves 34.8 of worldwide gas. Major countries possessing natural gas include Iran 16.27, Qatar 12.5, UAE 5.9, KSA 5.9, Iraq 1.8 and Turkmenistan 9.89 per cent. Location of the chokepoints within in the Muslim territorial waters along with combination of possession of hydrocarbons brings in the Muslims countries to position of geopolitical strength. The example of Iran to dominate the Strait of Hormuz and influence Strait of Bab El-Mandeb consequent to U.S-Israel attack over it since 28 February 2026 is a point in case.

Bull & Bears PSX 100-Share Index Fluctuation

Pakistan: PSX 100-Share Index

Current	Prev. Close
162,994.17	165,823.87
Day's High	Day's Low
164,357.47	160,391.18
Index Value	Change
28,136,145,942	-2829.70
Percentage	Time
-1.71%	29 Apr, 2026 4:30 pm

Europe: FTSE 100 Index

Index Value	Change
10,378.82	+165.71
Percentage	Time
+1.62%	30 Apr, 4:35 pm GMT

USA: Dow Jones Industrial Average

Index Value	Change
49,576.98	+715.17
Percentage	Time
+1.46%	30 Apr, 1:32 pm GMT-4

Asia Pacific: Nikkei Stocks Average

Index Value	Change
59,284.92	-632.54
Percentage	Time
-1.06%	30 Apr, 3:45 pm GMT+9

Open Market Forex Rates

Currency	Buying	Selling
Australian Dollar	197.35	202.45
Bahrain Dinar	729.10	740.85
Canadian Dollar	203.31	206.85
China Yuan	40	40.25
Danish Krone	43.25	43.65
Euro	325.58	330.83
Hong Kong Dollar	35.15	36.11
Indian Rupee	2.35	2.55
Japanese Yen	1.7342	1.8340
Kuwaiti Dinar	879.50	894.28
Malaysian Ringgit	65.15	66.55
New Zealand \$	161.99	167.70
Norwegians Krone	27.6	27.9
Omani Riyal	722	737.08
Qatari Riyal	73.25	74.25
Saudi Riyal	74.35	75.40
Singapore Dollar	216.94	222.85
Swedish Korona	30.25	30.55
Swiss Franc	353.24	358.50
Thai Bhat	8.5	8.70
U.A.E Dirham	75.95	76.95
UK Pound Sterling	376.05	381.81
US Dollar	279	279.80

PTCL refutes news of potential change in the investment position of e& in Pakistan



Commerce Desk

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Telecommunication Company Limited (PTCL) notes recent media reports regarding a potential change in the investment position of e& (formerly Etisalat) in Pakistan.

The company would like to reject the baseless and speculative reports and is not aware of the sources referenced in these reports. As a publicly listed entity, PTCL emphasizes the importance of accurate and responsible reporting, as unverified information may lead to unnecessary market speculation.

PTCL's shareholders remain fully committed to the company's long-term strategy and growth trajectory. This is reflected in key strategic initiatives, including the acquisition of Telenor Pakistan and Orion Towers, Ufone's 5G spectrum acquisition,

and the continued expansion of the company's fiber network across the country.

The Board has recently reviewed PTCL's Q1 2026 performance and continues to provide clear strategic direction for the company's future growth and transformation. e&, as

the managing shareholder, remains closely engaged with PTCL, with a shared focus on delivering long-term value and advancing Pakistan's digital ecosystem. PTCL remains committed to creating sustainable value for its customers, stakeholders, and shareholders.

Threshing

ISLAMABAD: Farmers busy in threshing wheat crop at their field in the Golra area of the Federal Capital.



Photo: Online by Sultan Bashir

Bank of Kashmir Board Pushes for Scheduled Bank Status with SBP Approval

Spokesman Report

MUZAFFARABAD: The 102nd meeting of the Board of Directors of the Bank of Kashmir was held under the chairmanship of Minister for Finance and Inland Revenue and Chairman Board of Directors, Chaudhry Qasim Majeed. The meeting reviewed the bank's overall performance and deliberated in detail on its future strategy.

Key matters related to the core banking system were discussed, with a focus on aligning it with modern requirements. Participants

were also briefed on ongoing initiatives and future plans in this regard.

The meeting agreed that a formal application would soon be submitted to the State Bank of Pakistan for approval of the Bank of Kashmir as a scheduled bank, in order to expand its operations and scope.

Speaking on the occasion, the Finance Minister appreciated the bank's performance and emphasized that adopting modern banking systems is the need of the hour, which would help provide improved financial services to the public.

New SMEDA-JICA project brings glad tidings for women in Punjab



Commerce Desk

LAHORE: A landmark women empowerment project to be executed by the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA) and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) was formally launched here on Thursday.

The five-year initiative, titled "Project for Capacity Enhancement of Women Entrepreneurs in the Informal Economic Sector in Punjab," marks a significant milestone in the SMEDA-JICA collaboration.

In her opening remarks, SMEDA's Chief Executive Officer Nadia Jahangir Seth said her organization's collaboration with JICA was a continuation of the endeavors to be taken by SMEDA under Ministry of Industries and Production in line with vision of the Prime Minister of Pakistan for enabling women-led enterprises to become an integral part of national economic growth.

Sadaf Abid, a renowned strategic communication specialist, delivered a presentation on the significance of women's inclusion in sustainable growth

in Pakistan. She said women in Pakistan faced economic and social barriers but there's a window of opportunity as things are gradually improving.

Speaking on the occasion, Chiyo Mamiya, the chief adviser of JICA, gave an overview of the project and said it will be piloted in Lahore and Sialkot and aims to target 2,000 women entrepreneurs and transgender entrepreneurs across Punjab over a period of five years while prioritizing high-potential sectors such as IT, services, textiles, sports goods, furniture and surgical instruments.

Zong Special Bundles for Hajj Pilgrims

Commerce Desk

ISLAMABAD: Zong, Pakistan's leading technology service enterprise, has launched customized bundles for the 2026 Hajj pilgrimage, aimed at ensuring seamless connectivity and uninterrupted communication for pilgrims throughout their sacred journey.

Khuram Ishaq, Head of International Business, Zong, stated: "Supporting Pakistan's pilgrims is a responsibility we hold close to our hearts. We've moved beyond standard offerings to design truly personalized bundles that reflect how families communicate today. By prioritizing seamless, high-speed access for the apps pilgrims rely on most, such as WhatsApp, we are addressing the modern traveler's need for convenience

and peace of mind. We are proud to serve as the bridge that keeps our customers connected to home, allowing them to remain fully focused on this journey of a lifetime."

Zong users can conveniently subscribe to these special bundles through the



Zong website, My Zong App, or by dialing 310.

Through these specially curated offerings, Zong continues to drive Pakistan's digital transformation agenda through innovative solutions and services, ensuring uninterrupted communication and a seamless experience for pilgrims.

Students' Week concludes at HU

News Desk

KARACHI: Hamdard University's Faculty of Engineering Science and Technology won the Best Faculty Award on Thursday at the culmination of its Students' Week 2026, after securing the most championships among all faculties.

A glittering ceremony marking the end of the week was held in the university's main auditorium.

It was graced by the university's Chancellor, Madam Sadia Rashid (Hilal-e-Imtiaz), and Vice Chancellor Prof. Dr. Imran Amin.

Besides indoor and outdoor games — during which students from seven faculties vied for top honors — a special auto show and wrestling bonanza were organized on Wednesday and Thursday, respectively.

During the week, tournaments in cricket, football, basketball,



futsal, badminton, table tennis, throwball, volleyball, and chess were held.

Kashf Foundation Celebrates 31 Years of Empowering Women at WEA 2026

Commerce Desk

LAHORE: Kashf Foundation, Pakistan's leading microfinance institution, hosted its flagship Women Entrepreneurship Awards 2026 (WEA 2026) at the Nishat Hotel, Lahore, under the theme "Give to Gain". The event marks 31 years of Kashf's commitment to advancing financial inclusion for women and enterprise development and impact across the country.

Speaking at the event, Roshaneh Zafar, Founder and Managing Director, Kashf Foundation, said "Kashf's journey over the past three decades has consistently demonstrated that when women are given access to capital and opportunity, they don't just transform their own lives, they create ripple effects across families, communities and local economies. WEA 2026 is about celebrating that multiplier effect as we step into a new decade of impact."

The evening featured a keynote address by Sima Kamil, Former President & CEO of UBL and the first woman Deputy Governor of the State Bank of Pakistan, who spoke on the importance of women leadership and financial inclusion.

The screenings were followed by a live panel discussion featuring documentary filmmaker Anya Raza alongside Kashf clients Naima Bajji, who built a successful home nursery business, and Sadia Bajji, who has broken barriers as an electrician in a male-dominated profession.

The programme culminated in the presentation of awards across eight categories, including the Give to Gain Pioneer Award, Sustainability Champion Award, Heritage Craft Preservation Award, Community Catalyst Award, Emerging Change-Maker Award, Kashf School Sarmaya Award, Digital Innovator Award, and Young Woman Entrepreneur of the Year.

Pakistan Navy Bolsters Maritime Defence With Commissioning of 1st Hangor Class Submarine in China

Spokesman Report

ISLAMABAD: Commissioning ceremony of 1st HANGOR Class Submarine, PNS/M HANGOR was held at Sanya, China. President Asif Ali Zardari graced the occasion as Chief Guest; Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Naveed Ashraf was also present at the ceremony.

President Zardari described the commissioning of HANGOR as a historic milestone in Pakistan Navy's modernization, affirming Pakistan's resolve to maintain a robust, balanced and credible defence posture. He stated that Pakistan is fully capable of defending its sovereignty, protecting its maritime interests and ensuring the security of its economic lifelines.

Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Naveed Ashraf highlighted that disruptions at critical maritime choke points increasingly threaten global trade and energy security, and maintaining a stable, rule-based maritime order demands technologically advanced naval forces. He stated that HANGOR Class Submarines—armed with state-of-the-art weapons, advanced sensors and Air Independent Propulsion—will be key in preserving maritime order and stability in the region. These submarines will play a pivotal role in deterring aggression and ensuring security of vital Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) across the Arabian Sea and the wider Indian Ocean region.



Naval Chief reiterated that the name HANGOR holds a significant place in our national history. In 1971, earlier HANGOR became the first submarine since World War II to sink a warship. PNS/M HANGOR will carry this illustrious legacy forward as this is an important milestone for Pakistan Navy that will bolster our maritime defence and modernize our fleet with cutting-edge technology.

The commissioning of 1st HANGOR Class Submarine marks another chapter in the time-tested and enriching friendship between Pakistan and China. The ceremony was attended by senior officials from Pakistan Navy and PLA (Navy).

The Prime Minister of Pakistan and COAS & CDF have congratulated the entire nation and the Pakistan Navy on achieving this historic milestone.

place in our national history. In 1971, earlier HANGOR became the first submarine since World War II to sink a warship. PNS/M HANGOR will carry this illustrious legacy forward as this is an important milestone for Pakistan Navy that will bolster our maritime defence and modernize our fleet with cutting-edge technology.

The commissioning of 1st HANGOR Class Submarine marks another chapter in the time-tested and enriching friendship between Pakistan and China. The ceremony was attended by senior officials from Pakistan Navy and PLA (Navy).

The Prime Minister of Pakistan and COAS & CDF have congratulated the entire nation and the Pakistan Navy on achieving this historic milestone.

Pakistan Anti-Corruption Academy Concludes Crucial OSINT Training for Law Enforcement

Spokesman Report

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Anti-Corruption Academy (PACA) successfully concluded a specialized two-day capacity-building course titled "Utilization of Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT) in Money Laundering / NAO Cases," held on April 28th-29th, 2026, in Islamabad. This initiative was designed to modernize investigative techniques across various Law Enforcement Agencies by introducing officers to the effective use of

publicly available data in addressing the increasingly sophisticated nature of modern financial crimes. The course was attended by NAB officers, prosecutors and officers from other LEAs.

Presiding over the opening session, Syed Ghulam Safdar Shah, Director General of PACA, highlighted that the training aligns with the vision of the Chairman NAB to evolve investigative practices. He noted that as money laundering and corruption cases become more complex, involving digital platforms and cross-border

networks, traditional methods must be supplemented with data-driven intelligence. He emphasized that the training focused on equipping participants with practical skills to trace financial transactions and identify hidden linkages, thereby contributing to improved transparency, accountability, and efficiency in anti-corruption efforts.

The training adopted a structured and interactive methodology featuring expert lectures and analytical discussions led by experienced professionals.

Mr. Muhammad Aqib, a Certified OSINT Master Trainer, demonstrated tools for daily investigations while ensuring adherence to the legal and evidentiary framework of the National Accountability Ordinance (NAO). Mr. Umair Nazar, Program Officer at the UNODC Counter Terrorism Unit, conducted a session on crime analytics, highlighting the critical shift toward proactive, intelligence-led law enforcement. Additionally, Mr. Farhan Nawazish, Program Officer at UNODC, addressed the misuse



of digital currencies and blockchain platforms, providing participants with methods to monitor and trace virtual transactions associated with terrorism financing and illicit financial flows.

In his concluding remarks, the Director General of PACA commended the course for effectively enhancing the professional skills of the participating officers.

A 'Laborer-First' Punjab

As Punjab marks International Labor Day on May 1, nearly 14 million workers across the province have far more to celebrate than a symbolic public holiday. Under the Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif, Punjab has embarked upon one of its most ambitious and comprehensive labor reform agendas in decades, one that boldly redefines labor welfare not as charity, but as the very cornerstone of inclusive economic development.

The most transformative intervention has been on wages. The Punjab government first established a minimum wage of Rs. 37,000 per month across all districts, subsequently raising it to Rs. 40,000 for skilled, semi-skilled and large-enterprise categories under the Labor and Human Resource Department. Crucially, a digital complaints portal and grievance helpline were launched to enforce compliance, because a wage guarantee without accountability is merely a promise on paper.

Under the ILO's Decent Work Agenda, minimum wage is not simply a salary benchmark; it is a social contract between labor and capital. Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz has ensured Punjab joins the global "living wage" movement advancing across Vietnam, Brazil and Indonesia, while introducing digital labor-violation reporting systems comparable to those in South Korea and Malaysia.

Legislative reform has been equally sweeping. The Punjab Occupational Safety and Health Rules, 2024 provide the province's first comprehensive workplace safety framework, placing statutory responsibility on employers across sewerage lines, construction sites and factories. This brings Punjab in line with ILO Convention C155 on occupational safety. The Punjab Restriction on Employment of Children Rules, 2024, strengthen penalties for child labor, while the landmark Punjab Labor Code consolidates over 26 fragmented laws into a unified legal framework, formally extending protection to agricultural, domestic and construction workers who have long been excluded from the system's reach.

Housing, historically neglected in labor policy, has become a defining priority under CM Maryam Nawaz Sharif's government. In a landmark decision, 1,220 free residential flats were allotted through transparent balloting at Labor Complexes in Sundar, Kasur and Taxila. The chief minister subsequently approved 3,000 additional housing units, signaling not a one-off gesture but a sustained institutional commitment to dignified living. Under the Punjab Workers Welfare Fund, 750 additional flats

were opened with reserved quotas for widows and disabled workers. Two worker hostels accommodating 704 women were approved in Garment City, Sheikhpura, a progressive step mirroring best practices from Bangladesh's export-oriented garment sector.

Financially, the government allocated Rs.6 billion to clear long-overdue death and marriage grants for over 29,000 workers, restoring not just benefits but institutional trust. A transformative Rs.84 billion ration card program for 1.25 million working families has been introduced, issuing digital cards through a bank that provides monthly food subsidies and access to 13 financial services, including

salary advances and cash transfers. This extends labor welfare beyond wages into household economic security, a hallmark of socially progressive governance.

Healthcare has seen some of the boldest investments in Punjab's labor history. New 50-bed social security hospitals were inaugurated in Kasur and Sardogha, with a foundation laid in Rahim Yar Khan. A 200-bed Cardiac City for workers in Lahore's Defence Road has been announced. The Punjab Employees Social Security Institution (PESSI), reconstituted and equipped with a Rs.36 billion

surplus budget for FY 2024-25, of which Rs.18.63 billion is earmarked for hospitals and dispensaries, has begun offering advanced tertiary care. Nawaz Sharif Social Security Hospital performed its first spinal neurosurgery on a registered worker, while Faisalabad's facility completed brain and spine procedures. Twenty-seven new ambulances and province-wide telemedicine infrastructure further extend this safety net to remote workers.

Globally, labor reform fails not from weak laws but from weak enforcement. CM Maryam Nawaz Sharif has addressed this directly, ensuring that inspectorates, digital compliance systems and dedicated enforcement mechanisms accompany every major reform. This governance discipline distinguishes Punjab's agenda from performative policy-making.

On Labor Day 2026, Punjab's labor framework stands as more than democratic symbolism. It represents a practical, funded and enforceable model of pro-worker governance, driven by a leader who has placed the dignity of millions at the center of public policy. With sustained political will, Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif is writing a new chapter in Punjab's social contract, one where every worker's right to a fair wage, safe workplace, healthy life and secure home is not an aspiration, but a guarantee.

(The writer is a Lahore-based public policy analyst and can be reached at qudratu@gmail.com)



Analysis

Qudrat Ullah

Labor is the True Strength of a Nation, Declares Sarfraz Malik, Chairman JCCI

News Desk

ISLAMABAD: In a powerful tribute to the global workforce on International Workers' Day, Sarfraz Malik, Chairman of the Incredible Jhelum Chamber of Commerce and Industry (JCCI) and CEO of the SLS IELTS Official Test Centre, hailed the labor class as the backbone of national prosperity. In his official statement, Mr. Malik emphasized that the relentless hard work, integrity, and dedication of laborers are the primary engines driving the country's economy toward stability.

He noted that no nation can achieve true development without acknowledging the pivotal role of its working class, asserting that the hallmark of a civilized society is the provision of fair rights, respect, and equal opportunities for every worker. The Chairman urged stakeholders to ensure improved welfare measures and safer environments, enabling the workforce to contribute with even greater passion and peace of mind. Concluding his message, Mr. Malik stated that Labor Day serves as a vital reminder to value the hands that build our future. He called for move beyond rhetoric to take practical steps in securing a prosperous future for workers, identifying them as the genuine power behind the nation's progress.

Security forces foil...

Continued from Page 4

in border management on the Afghan side.

The statement reiterated Pakistan's demand that Afghan Taliban authorities ensure their territory is not used for activities against Pakistan.

Security forces, it said, remain resolute in defending the country's borders, with counterterrorism operations continuing under the Azm-e-Istehkam campaign.

A clearance operation is currently underway in the affected areas to locate and eliminate any remaining militants, the ISPR added.

Labour Day 2026: Will Defense Agreements and Exports ...

Continued from Page 4

the human face of the arms trade: the migrant worker whose remittances stabilize the national current account and who returns home with savings to build a house or start a small business.

The Iranian diplomatic dividend from the US-Iran mediation extends to the restoration of Pakistan's standing in global financial institutions. The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, which viewed Pakistan through the lens of "fragile and risky," have adjusted their outlook. The stability projected by a country that can mediate between superpowers is attractive to lenders. This has resulted in more favorable terms for the ongoing Extended Fund Facility, freeing up government revenue that was previously earmarked for interest payments to be spent on labor welfare schemes like the Benazir

Income Support Program (BISP) and the expansion of the Employees' Old-Age Benefits Institution (EOBI). While these safety nets are still woefully inadequate, they are being funded at levels not seen since the early 2000s, precisely because the fiscal pressure has eased thanks to the strategic premium the world is now placing on Pakistan.

Of course, no amount of JF-17 sales or diplomatic high-fives will instantly fix a broken labor rights inspection system or eliminate the culture of harassment in the workplace. The "huge problems" of Pakistan's labor force remain structural and require legislative action, political will, and the empowerment of trade unions, which often find themselves at odds with the very military-industrial complex that is now driving growth.

As we stand on the precipice of Labour Day 2026, the narrative is complex, but it is not contradictory. The

laborer has huge problems: the fight against inflation, against hazardous conditions, against the theft of his sweat by a system rigged against him. Yet, for the first time in a generation, the state has produced a strategic surplus that can be converted into economic resources. The victory of May 2025 was not just a military victory over India; it was a victory for the idea that Pakistan is a nation to be reckoned with, not a nation to be pitied or sanctioned. The success in mediating between the US and Iran was not just a diplomatic victory; it was a victory for the idea that Pakistan sits at the center of the world's most important energy and security crossroads, and it must be paid for that position. The defense agreements are not just about hardware; they are about keeping the factories running, the engineers employed, and the foreign exchange reserves healthy.

Labour Day: The Dire Condition of the Working Class in Pakistan and the Need for Reforms

Continued from Page 4

properly defined.

Reforms in EOBI and Social Security

Complete digitalization
Transparent contribution system
Prompt and automatic delivery of benefits

Simplification of Trade Union Laws
Simplify the registration process
Remove unnecessary restrictions on unionization

Transparency and Digital Monitoring

The workers of Pakistan are still victims of:

Low wages
Uncertain employment
Lack of social security
Absence of legal protection

In Pakistan, millions of children from the working class are already deprived of education. Now, due to the privatization of educational institutions, even those few who could study will also be deprived.

The majority of the working class suffers from illness due to malnutrition, and with the privatization of hospitals, whatever little access they had to healthcare will also disappear.

If Pakistan is to move towards a strong and sustainable economy, the working class must be made a central

part of economic policy. Real progress will only be possible when the labourer is not treated merely as "a person who works," but is recognized as a protected and empowered part of the economic system.

And the working class itself must recognize its own power. A force of 85 million in a democratic country is a huge strength — it is nearly one-third of our population.

Workers will have to play their role in changing the system. They must break free from the clutches of feudal lords, capitalists, and bureaucracy, and join hands with honest, capable, competent, and service-oriented people to change this rotten and stinking system.

Writer is President of National Labour Federation Pakistan

Labour Day

ISLAMABAD: Labourer carrying iron bars at an iron factory in the Federal Capital on the eve of the International Labour Day. The day is observed annually to pay tribute to the rights of workers and the martyrs of Chicago



اس کے نام پہ چھٹی ہوگی خود وہ کام پہ جانے گا
میرے دیس میں کل مسزور کا دن منایا جانے گا

Photo: Online by Sultan Bashir

PM Shehbaz reaffirms commitment to child health, Lead-Free future

City Desk

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister, Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday underscored the government's commitment to protecting children's health, prioritising polio eradication and addressing the growing risks of lead exposure through coordinated national and international efforts.

He expressed these views during a meeting with a delegation of the Partnership for Lead Free Future and UNICEF at the Prime Minister's Office, a news release said.

Welcoming the delegation, the prime minister said



the government was taking priority measures to safeguard the future of children, adding that Pakistan remained fully committed to eliminating polio from the country.

He said exposure to lead posed serious risks to children's

physical and mental development and described it as a major public health challenge, assuring that all possible steps would be taken to mitigate its impact.

The prime minister emphasised that Pakistan would

continue to work closely with international partners to prevent lead exposure and improve child health outcomes.

The delegation included Director of the Lead-Free Future Secretariat Abdullah Fadil, UNICEF Pakistan Representative Perrille Ironside, and experts from Stanford University School of Medicine Jenna Forsyth and Thomas Hird. Federal Ministers Ahsan Iqbal, Mustafa Kamal and Ayesha Raza Farooq, along with senior officials, were also present.

The delegation appreciated the government's efforts under the prime minister's leadership

in protecting children from diseases, including polio, and improving health and development indicators.

They briefed the meeting on findings from their recent survey, identifying areas affected by lead exposure in Pakistan and highlighting the need for increased public awareness about its harmful effects.

The participants also acknowledged the government's initiatives in health, education, youth development and information technology, terming them important steps towards sustainable national development.

Senator Aurangzeb reaffirms commitment to fostering collaborative environment with business community

Commerce Desk

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb on Thursday reaffirmed the government's commitment to fostering a collaborative and consultative environment with the business community to support sustainable and inclusive economic growth.

The ministers held a meeting with Atif Ikram Sheikh, President Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI), and Zahid Hussain, Chairman, Policy Advisory Board, (FPCCI), to discuss key issues related to the business environment, financial sector dynamics, and ongoing reform initiatives.

At the outset of the meeting, the Finance Minister appreciated the continued engage-



ment of the business community and acknowledged the constructive role of FPCCI in providing policy input and facilitating dialogue between the government and the

private sector.

He emphasized the importance of sustained consultation to ensure that reforms remain responsive to industry needs and support long-term

economic stability.

The Finance Minister underscored the importance of a predictable and transparent regulatory environment, noting that policy

continuity and institutional strengthening are essential for building investor confidence and addressing the needs of the business community.

He highlighted ongoing efforts to advance end-to-end digitalization, improve compliance systems, and enhance transparency across revenue administration.

In this context, he also noted progress towards operationalizing an independent Tax Policy Office under the Finance Division, formally separating tax policy formulation from the Federal Board of Revenue.

He further emphasized that this institutional reform is aimed at strengthening policy formulation, enhancing transparency, and ensuring greater clarity and consistency in the overall tax framework, thereby facilitating a more conducive environment for businesses.

Pakistan's diplomatic efforts to resolve US-Iran conflict continue

City Desk

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan is continuing its diplomatic efforts to resolve the ongoing US-Iran conflict and to bring both sides to the negotiating table, a Foreign Office spokesperson said on Thursday.

Addressing his weekly press briefing in Islamabad, Tahir Andrabi reiterated Pakistan's active engagement with both

Iran and the US and emphasised that diplomatic channels between the two countries remain open.

He highlighted that Pakistan's efforts to resolve the conflict were ongoing, adding that the country supported a peaceful resolution through dialogue and diplomacy.

Andrabi confirmed that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has been in direct communication with the lead-

ership of Iran, Saudi Arabia, and other key regional players to push for de-escalation in the Middle East.

In this regard, he said, Prime Minister Shehbaz held important discussions with Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, and leaders of Turkey, Qatar, and the European Union.

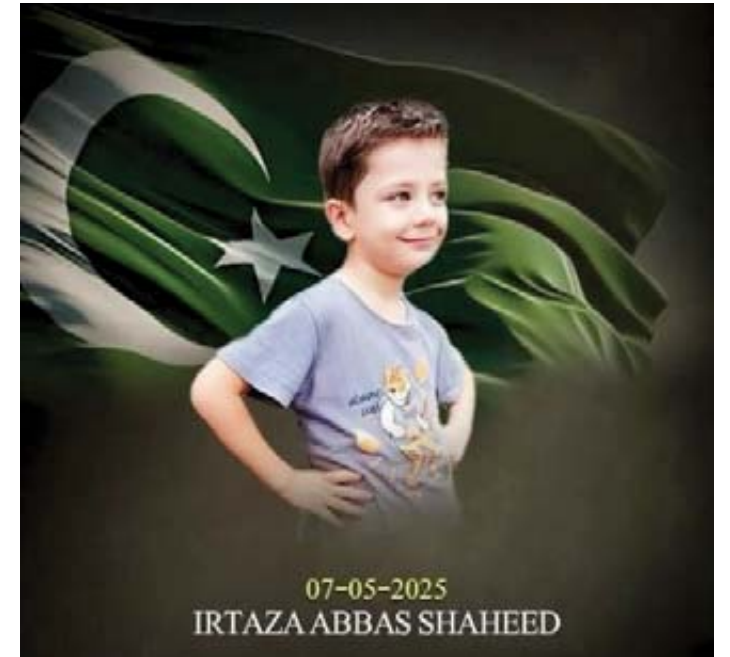
Prime Minister Sharif's talks with these leaders focused on the importance

of dialogue and diplomacy to ensure lasting peace in the region, the spokesperson added.

He pointed out that President Erdogan of Turkey fully supported Pakistan's peace initiatives.

Tahir Andrabi added that Pakistan would continue to play a key role in facilitating dialogue and ensuring stability, especially in critical maritime routes like the Strait of Hormuz.

Tarar pays tribute to martyred child Irtaza Abbas



City Desk

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar on Thursday paid tribute to seven-year-old Irtaza Abbas Turi, son of Lieutenant Colonel Zaheer Abbas Turi, who was martyred in Azad Kashmir, last year, due to unprovoked Indian cross-border aggression.

"Martyrdom of young Irtaza Abbas has raised the nation's pride, and the sacrifices rendered in the Marka-e-Haq will never be forgotten," the minister said.

Tarar expressed these views as

a delegation of federal ministers visited the residence of the martyred child to offer condolences and pay homage.

He added that victory in the Marka-e-Haq achieved through the sacrifices of the armed forces and the prayers of the nation, for which the country remains deeply grateful to Almighty Allah.

Federal Minister for Climate Change and Environmental Coordination, Dr. Musadik Malik, and Minister of State for Federal Education and Professional Training, Wajih Qamar, were also present on the occasion.

Major Political Shift: Former AJK President Zulqarnain Khan Family Joins PML-N



City Desk

ISLAMABAD: A high-level delegation of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) including Federal Ministers Mr. Rana Sanaullah Khan, Engineer Amir Muqam, Dr. Tariq Fazal Chaudhry and Mr. Anjum Aqeel Khan MNA, Chaudhry Abid Raza former MNA, President Pakistan Muslim League-N Azad Jammu and Kashmir Mr. Shah Ghulam Qadir, Dr. Najeeb Naqi Khan, Barrister Iftikhar Gilani, Chaudhry Abdul Rehman Arain and Chaudhry Tariq Farooq met Raja Muhammad Zulqarnain Khan, former President Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Raja Qaiser Zulqarnain Khan and Raja Babar Ali Zulqarnain Khan at their residence in Islamabad and invited them to formally join Pakistan Muslim League-N Azad Jammu and Kashmir.

Upon which Raja Zulqarnain

Khan and his family members indicated their formal joining after consulting with their colleagues.

Rana Sanaullah conveyed to them a message of good wishes from his leader Mr. Muhammad Nawaz Sharif. Former President of Azad Jammu and Kashmir also warmly welcomed Rana Sanaullah Khan, Engineer Amir Muqam, Dr. Tariq Fazal Chaudhry and all the members of the delegation and thanked them for inviting them to join the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz. He said that we have had a very long-standing relationship with the Sharif family. Mr. Nawaz Sharif and Shahbaz Sharif have played an exemplary role in the construction and development of Pakistan and Azad Jammu and Kashmir. He paid tribute to Field Marshal Asim Munir and the Pakistani army for their sacrifices for the defense of the country and their role in the world for peace.

Maryam Nawaz unveils Rs23bn uplift plan for katcha areas

Bureau Report

LAHORE: Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz on Thursday announced a Rs23 billion development package for the province's katcha areas, alongside a plan to distribute 14,500 acres of state land among local residents.

The initiative aims to transform the underdeveloped belt into a "safe, prosperous and model region," the chief minister said, adding that development and economic opportunity are the right of every resident.

As part of the plan, the government will launch the "Apna Khet, Apna Rozgar" programme to support livelihoods, while investing Rs7.1 billion in law and order and Rs13.9

billion in social infrastructure.

Authorities will construct schools, hospitals, roads and bridges, and deploy a modern solar-powered drone surveillance system to improve security monitoring in the area.

The plan also includes the upgradation of 65 schools, establishment of 16 new schools and two girls' colleges.

A "hard area allowance" has been approved for officials posted in the region, along with a digital monitoring system to curb illegal weapons.

CM Maryam said the initiative would ensure sustainable development, improved security and dignified employment opportunities for residents of the katcha belt.