

# PM calls on global powers to hold India to account in Dushanbe

Reaffirming Pakistan’s vision for regional unity through trade, he championed the extension of CPEC into Central Asia as a gateway to shared economic revival and strategic cooperation

News Desk

DUSHANBE: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday voiced Pakistan’s desire for regional peace but cautioned that the international community must not turn a blind eye to India’s “irresponsible conduct and aggressive actions”, calling them a threat to stability in South Asia.

During a high-level meeting in Dushanbe with Tajik President Emomali Rahmon, where he is on a two-day official visit, the Pakistani premier laid out Islamabad’s concerns over escalating tensions with New Delhi. He made it clear that while Pakistan continues to pursue dialogue and regional harmony, it cannot remain indifferent to India’s behavior, which he described as dangerous and akin to an act of war.

The meeting between



the two leaders touched on bilateral ties, regional developments, and shared interests. Prime Minister Shehbaz revisited his earlier trip to Tajikistan in July 2024, calling it a turning point that laid the groundwork for deeper cooperation between the two countries. Reiterating Pakistan’s focus on economic and strategic connectivity, he underlined Islamabad’s ambition to extend the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) into Central Asia, a move

that he said would bring collective prosperity to the region.

In a pointed reference to Kashmir, Shehbaz stressed that a fair and lasting solution to the long-standing dispute was crucial. “A just resolution of the Kashmir issue, in accordance with UN Security Council resolutions, is essential for lasting peace in South Asia,” he said, reiterating that Pakistan remains committed to peace but will defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity “at all

costs”. While geopolitical tensions dominated the talks, the two sides also found common ground in areas such as climate change and water diplomacy. The Pakistani Prime Minister lauded Tajikistan’s leadership for convening a major international conference on glaciers and environmental challenges—an issue increasingly shaping regional discourse.

President Rahmon responded warmly, describing Pakistan as a reliable and longstanding partner. He commended Shehbaz Sharif’s statesmanship and reaffirmed Dushanbe’s support for peaceful engagement in the region. Tajikistan, he said, looks forward to strengthening collaboration with Pakistan across a range of sectors including agriculture, trade, and industry.

## Israel carries massacre against 67 innocent civilians

News Desk

GAZA: In the Gaza Strip on Thursday, a devastating wave of Israeli airstrikes claimed the lives of 64 Palestinians, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Health. The attacks marked yet another brutal escalation in the long-standing conflict, with the ministry reporting that over the past 24 hours alone, 67 Palestinians have been killed and 184 injured as a result of relentless military operations.

Rescue teams worked tirelessly to recover the bodies of five additional victims trapped beneath the rubble of destroyed buildings, underscoring the scale of destruction faced by civilians. Since the fragile ceasefire



collapsed in March, Israeli strikes have killed nearly 4,000 Palestinians in Gaza, leaving thousands more wounded and communities shattered.

The ministry’s figures reveal a grim reality for Gaza’s population, reporting that over 11,000 people have sustained injuries in the months since the ceasefire ended. The overall toll since the conflict’s flare-up on 7 October 2023 is staggering: more than 54,000 Palestinians have lost their lives, while over 123,000 have been wounded.

These numbers paint a stark picture of the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza, where relentless military action continues to inflict profound suffering on civilians, many of whom live in densely populated areas with limited access to medical care and essential services. The international community remains deeply concerned as the cycle of violence shows little sign of abating, further complicating efforts to restore peace and stability to the region.

## Karachi temperature hits 38.5°C, feels like 51°C

News Desk

KARACHI: Karachi, Pakistan’s bustling metropolis and its largest city, is currently grappling with intense heat coupled with high humidity, creating uncomfortable conditions for its residents.

According to the Meteorological Department, the maximum temperature recorded today climbed to 38.5 degrees Celsius, but the real challenge came with the heat index—a measure of how hot it actually feels to the human body—peaking at a staggering 51 degrees Celsius by early afternoon.

The oppressive heat is compounded by humidity levels lingering around 42 percent, adding to the discomfort. The Meteorological Department has issued a warning that this sweltering weather is not likely to ease anytime soon.

# Field Marshal vows Pakistan will never relent on Kashmir

Field Marshal Munir firmly reminded the academic delegation that Pakistan’s stance on Kashmir is unwavering, insisting that any agreement compromising its claim is entirely unacceptable

By ISPR/Asghar Ali Mubarak

ISLAMABAD: Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir has reaffirmed Pakistan’s unwavering stance on the Kashmir dispute, stating unequivocally that the country will never relinquish its claim over the territory. Speaking during a meeting with vice chancellors and senior faculty members from various universities, the Army Chief made it clear that any notion of compromising on Kashmir is out of the question.

According to the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), Field Marshal Munir told the academic delegation that India must understand Pakistan’s position: “We will never forget Kashmir. Any deal over it is unacceptable. Water is a red line for Pakistan, and we will not allow this fundamental right of 240 million Pakistanis to be compromised.”

The Army Chief further said Pakistan would never accept Indian hegemony in the region. He criticized New Delhi for attempting to bury the Kashmir issue for decades, adding that these



efforts have now failed. “Kashmir can no longer be silenced. Terrorism in India is a domestic issue, rooted in its rising oppression and discrimination against minorities, particularly Muslims,” he said, framing Kashmir as a global human rights issue.

Commenting on the situation in Balochistan, Field Marshal Munir identified the group “Fitna-e-Hindustan” as a foreign proxy with no organic connection to the Baloch people. He emphasized that such elements are part of India’s hybrid warfare and must not be confused with legitimate local concerns.

The Army Chief also spoke about the pivotal role of teachers in nation-building. “Teachers are the nation’s greatest asset. What-

ever I am today is because of my parents and my teachers,” he said. He stressed the responsibility of educators to shape future generations and to preserve and pass on the true narrative of Pakistan’s history.

In a broader reflection on state governance, Munir urged for the development of a strong and accountable state where all institutions function strictly in accordance with the Constitution and law. Participants at the event echoed their support for the armed forces, chanting, “Yeh Jo Mehfooz Dharti Hai, Is Ke Peeche Wardi Hai” (“This safe homeland stands protected by the uniform”). The attendees expressed pride in Pakistan and its armed forces, pledging to stand united with them.

# NEPRA warns K-Electric over worsening power outages

Several areas of Karachi have suffered power outages lasting over 12 hours, with many residents reporting blackouts ranging from two and a half to three hours at a time

By our correspondent

ISLAMABAD: Karachi’s electricity supply is facing mounting criticism as the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (NEPRA) has issued a stern warning to K-Electric over prolonged power cuts across the city. In a recent letter, NEPRA directed the utility company to take immediate and effective steps to improve the situation and ensure uninterrupted electricity for Karachi’s residents.

According to NEPRA, many parts of Karachi have experienced power outages exceeding 12 hours, with individual complaints reporting blackouts lasting two and a half to three hours.

The regulator highlighted that the ongoing heatwave has made these extended outages especially difficult for citizens, impacting daily life and severely disrupting commercial activities and the local economy.

NEPRA’s letter points to a continuous decline in K-Electric’s overall performance. It notes rising losses in electricity transmission and distribution, along with



poor recovery rates, which have undermined the goals of privatization. Despite access to affordable electricity—reportedly 1600 megawatts available from the national grid—K-Electric has failed to pass on any relief to consumers, according to NEPRA.

The regulator further criticized K-Electric for running some of its power plants at partial capacity while load shedding persists, describing this as a clear sign of poor planning by the company. NEPRA emphasized that reducing transmission losses and improving recovery should be core responsibilities for K-Electric, warning that cutting feeders to enforce bill payments is neither ethical nor legal.

This is not the first time NEPRA has penalized K-Electric for unfair load shedding.

The letter notes that instead of taking corrective action, K-Electric has sought concessions, further frustrating the regulator. NEPRA urged the company to prioritize ending load shedding, reducing losses, and improving recovery rates.

The letter also clarifies that attributing non-payment of bills to the FCA (Fuel Cost Adjustment) is misleading. NEPRA expects K-Electric to swiftly implement reforms to address the crisis. As Karachi endures these long hours without electricity, residents and businesses alike hope for meaningful change soon.

## Indian contestant to speak out after crown revoked

News Desk

MUMBAI: The crown of Miss Grand International Rachel Gupta has been taken back amid conflicting accounts over whether the title was revoked by the organization or returned by Gupta herself after serious disagreements.

This controversy has once again exposed the intense pressures, politics, and exploitative environment often faced within international beauty pageants.

The Miss Grand International organization released an official statement accusing Gupta of failing to fulfil her responsibilities, pointing to her involvement in other projects without permission and her refusal to



attend a scheduled trip to Guatemala.

Following these issues, they declared her crown formally revoked.

In response, Rachel Gupta posted a heartfelt message on Instagram, saying she returned the crown voluntarily, citing broken promises and a toxic atmosphere she could no longer endure.

“Becoming Miss Grand International was one of the most beautiful dreams of my life, but the following months were filled with betrayals, mistreatment, and an environment I can no longer silently tolerate,” she wrote.

Gupta also promised to soon release a detailed video sharing her full story and the treatment she received.

Media reports indicate that CJ Opaza, the first runner-up from the Philippines, is likely to take over the crown.

This controversy follows closely on the heels of criticism from Miss England 2025, Mila Maggi, who called out the Miss World India contest for exploitative sponsor behavior and pressures about wardrobe choices, highlighting ongoing challenges and exploitative practices within the pageant world.

The incidents reflect the difficult realities many contestants face behind the glamour and spotlight.

# US officials testify on Trump’s trade role in India-Pakistan ceasefire

The case unfolds amid a recent court ruling that struck down Trump’s tariffs as unlawful, prompting government officials to swiftly file an appeal

By Amjad Qaimkhani

WASHINGTON: US officials defending former President Donald Trump’s trade policies have presented a striking argument in court, asserting that the former president wielded tariffs not merely as economic measures but as strategic tools to help preserve a fragile ceasefire between India and Pakistan.

The case unfolds against the backdrop of a recent court ruling that declared Trump’s tariffs unlawful, a decision that has prompted government representatives to file an appeal. They warn that restricting the president’s authority over trade and tariffs risks more than economic disruption—it could unsettle a delicate balance in one of the world’s most volatile regions. The officials emphasized that Trump’s use of trade policy was deeply entwined with diplomatic efforts aimed at maintaining peace between two nuclear-armed neighbors whose history is fraught with conflict.

The argument hinges on the premise that curbing executive power in this sphere might inadvertently unravel ongoing agreements designed to prevent a resur-



gence of violence. The stakes, they insist, are not just about trade and economics but about the security and lives of millions caught between long-standing hostilities. At the heart of the debate is the fragile truce that has held, however tenuously, in a region marked by decades of mistrust and conflict. US officials caution that any misstep in handling tariffs and trade relations could provoke renewed tensions, with devastating humanitarian consequences.

Yet, amid these claims, India has consistently distanced itself from suggestions that the Trump administration played a direct role in brokering or enforcing the ceasefire, highlighting the complexity and opacity often characteristic of international diplomacy. This legal battle

encapsulates the increasingly blurred lines between economic policy and geopolitics, underscoring how decisions traditionally seen as domestic or economic tools can have profound diplomatic and security implications.

The court’s ruling, and the appeal that follows, thus raise pressing questions about the limits of presidential authority, the role of trade in global peacekeeping, and the delicate balancing act governments must perform when economic interests collide with the imperative for regional stability. As the case unfolds, its implications will resonate far beyond the courtroom, illuminating the intricate and often hidden connections between trade policy and the pursuit of peace.

# Security forces strike Indian proxy group, kill five in Balochistan

News Desk

QUETTA: In two separate intelligence-based operations conducted on 28 May, security forces killed five terrorists associated with the Indian-backed proxy group “Fitna-e-Hindustan” in the Loralai and Kech districts of Balochistan, according to a statement issued by the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR).

In Loralai, the operation followed credible intelligence about the presence of the group’s operatives. A heavy exchange of fire ensued, resulting in the killing of four militants. The ISPR confirmed the recovery of weapons, ammunition and explosive material from the site. The group’s members were reportedly involved in a series of past attacks and were deemed a serious



threat to national security. A separate operation in Kech district led to the death of another terrorist linked to “Fitna-e-Hindustan.”

According to the ISPR, the individual was responsible for two deadly attacks on the N-70 highway near Rarasham, carried out on 26 August 2024 and 18 February 2025. These attacks claimed the lives of 30 civilians. The ISPR stressed that the slain militants had

been operating under Indian patronage and were being closely tracked by law enforcement for their role in subversive activities across the region. Security forces had been pursuing them over a prolonged period.

Reaffirming their stance, the ISPR said that security forces remain committed to eradicating terrorism, particularly those acts orchestrated under foreign sponsorship.

# Indian Army Chief criticized for visiting Hindu ‘Jogi’

News Desk

NEW DEHLI: India’s top military officer is facing backlash at home after attending a Hindu religious leader’s ashram while dressed in full military uniform — a move critics say blurs the line between faith and the secular image of the armed forces. General Upendra Dwivedi, the Indian Army Chief, recently visited the ashram of Hindu spiritual figure Jagadguru Ram Bhadracharya in Madhya Pradesh.

During the visit, the religious leader openly urged General Dwivedi to “bring



back Pakistan-administered Kashmir,” a remark that sparked further political unease. The general’s public appearance in uniform at a religious venue has raised serious concerns about the

growing influence of Hindu nationalism, or Hindutva, within India’s military ranks.

Prominent defense analyst Sushant Singh was among those voicing alarm, saying such actions damage

the traditional image of India’s army as apolitical and secular. “When a military chief visits a specific religious figure in uniform, it undermines the very idea of India’s neutral armed forces,” he said. He warned that this could worsen civil-military relations and further align the military with the ruling BJP’s Hindutva narrative.

“This not only weakens the army’s impartiality but also deepens the sense of alienation among minorities and reinforces the idea of majoritarian dominance within institutions,” Singh added.



# Rubio announces visa cancellations for Chinese students

Observers warn that the new measures may cast a long shadow over the enduring educational exchanges between the US and China, dampening academic cooperation and trust

By Amjad Qaimkhani

WASHINGTON: US Secretary of State Marco Rubio has announced that visa applications from Chinese and Hong Kong nationals will now face heightened scrutiny, especially those tied to politically sensitive affiliations and high-risk academic fields.

Speaking to reporters in Washington, Rubio confirmed that current and prospective students with any affiliations to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) will be subject to visa revocation or denial.

The policy will immediately impact students in fields considered vital to national security. Though specific disciplines were not listed, officials suggested



that areas such as artificial intelligence, nuclear technology, and cybersecurity are likely to be targeted. Rubio emphasized that the tightening of visa protocols aims to "safeguard American innovation and prevent foreign influence," referencing longstanding US concerns over intellectual property theft and

academic infiltration.

"This is about protecting our national interests," said Rubio. "We are taking decisive steps to ensure that sensitive knowledge does not fall into the wrong hands." The move marks a clear reversal of the Biden administration's earlier decision to ease some Trump-

era restrictions. By reintroducing stringent vetting procedures, the US appears to be recalibrating its academic openness in favor of national security—signaling bipartisan agreement in Washington over the risks posed by Chinese state-linked individuals in American institutions.

As part of the revised policy framework, the State Department will also overhaul the eligibility criteria for Chinese students, introducing more rigorous background checks and screening mechanisms. This applies not only to future applicants but also to current visa holders whose academic or political affiliations are now under review.

Observers believe the new measures could have a chilling effect on the long-

standing educational exchanges between the US and China. Chinese students currently represent one of the largest international student groups in the United States, and the anticipated visa revocations may trigger significant academic and financial disruption for universities dependent on foreign enrollments.

In a related diplomatic development, the United States has also called on India to take a more assertive role in regional security. During high-level bilateral talks in Washington, Indian Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri met with US Deputy Secretary of State Christopher Lenza, where the focus shifted toward strategic cooperation in the Indo-Pacific and beyond.

## Freedom Network warns of deteriorating press freedom in Pakistan

Sudhir Ahmad Afridi

ISLAMABAD: The Freedom Network Board of Advisors has voiced serious concerns over the worsening state of press freedom in Pakistan, pointing to the growing misuse of the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA), persistent impunity for crimes against journalists, and a shrinking, hostile environment for women in the media sector.

During their meeting on May 27 in Islamabad, the Board sharply criticized the government for failing to implement the "Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals Act-2021." They highlighted Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's unfulfilled commitment made at the Asia Safety Forum in December 2022 to establish a commission dedicated to journalists' safety. The Board warned that the delay in setting up this body only empowers perpetrators and further restricts free expression.

The recent killing of journalist Latif Baluch in Balochistan's Awaran district on May 24 drew strong condemnation from the Board, which demanded swift justice and called on the provincial government to urgently apprehend those responsible.

Newly appointed Board members—Benazir Shah, Farzana Ali, Dr. Faizullah Jan, Mazhar Abbas, and Peter Jacob—agreed to serve a voluntary four-year term.

## CM Sindh says to allocate Rs2.5bn for heart disease hospitals

By Salman Shah

KARACHI: Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah has announced a major investment of 2.5 billion rupees for two dedicated heart disease institutes and their associated hospitals. Speaking at the inauguration of a new hospital in Karachi's Baldia Town, he highlighted the rising incidence of heart conditions among young people and the urgent need for advanced cardiac care.

Murad Ali Shah said the new hospital would provide top-quality medical facilities for heart patients. He recalled how the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation, with financial support from the Sindh government, began building the hospital years ago, but the project had stalled for a long time. After consultations with the Sindh Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases (SICVD), the hospital was completed within eight months and now offers



world-class health services.

The Chief Minister also noted that patients from other provinces, including Balochistan, have been receiving treatment at this facility, underscoring its importance beyond Sindh. He shared the story behind SICVD's establishment, revealing that at one point federal funding for hospitals was abruptly cut. As finance minister at the time, he arranged for the funds to be included in the Sindh budget after consulting former Chief Minister Qaim Ali Shah.

Murad Ali Shah stressed

the critical importance of the first hour after a heart attack and the government's ongoing efforts to expand specialized cardiac care throughout Sindh.

Addressing other pressing issues, he described the upcoming Sindh budget as challenging due to the ongoing recovery from recent floods. He condemned the recent violent incident in Moro, where homes were set on fire, questioning who was behind the attack on the home of the provincial interior minister and criticizing those stoking tensions.

## Parents urged to break silence on child marriage in Khairpur

By Imtiaz Hussain

SUKKUR: In District Khairpur, a series of five one-day sensitization sessions were held across different union councils to raise awareness among fathers and mothers about child, early, and forced marriages (CEFM).

These sessions were organized by Bhattai Social Watch & Advocacy (BSWA) in partnership with Strengthening Participatory Organization (SPO), Save the Children, and supported by the US Department of State.

The initiative aimed to foster community-led action to combat this harmful practice.

The sessions took place in Sadar Ji Bhatyoon, Hadal Shah, Layari, Goondariro, and Ahmedpur, where parents openly discussed the deep-rooted social norms that perpetuate early and forced marriages.

Emphasis was placed on promoting positive parenting, gender equality, and respect for children's rights.

Experts including Prof (Retd) Dr Taj Muhammad Lashari, Ms Rabia Naseer, and Mr Manzar Abbas educated participants on the legal framework surrounding CEFM, highlighting the Sindh Child Marriage Restraint Act 2013 which prohibits marriage below the age of 18. They also explained the penalties for violations and the reporting mechanisms available to communities.

## 86 BISP families in Khairpur receive solar home systems from SRSO

By Imtiaz Hussain

SUKKUR: The Sindh Rural Support Organization (SRSO) recently distributed 86 Solar Home Systems to families registered under the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) in Khairpur Mirs, Sindh. The distribution

event was held at the SRSO Unit Office in Sobhodo.

This initiative is part of the larger Sindh Solar Energy Project (SSEP), a government-led effort aiming to deliver 200,000 solar home systems to low-income households in rural areas across the province.

The project is designed to promote the use of renewable energy and reduce reliance on traditional, often unreliable power sources.

SRSO is the implementing partner for this programme in five districts: Khairpur Mirs, Shikarpur, Jacobabad, Larkano, and Kamber-Shahdadkot.

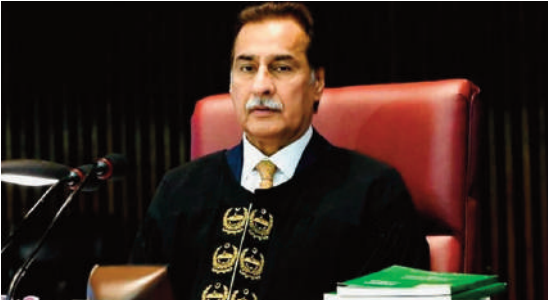
## Sadiq warns India for no longer conventional war

By Asghar Ali Mubarak

ISLAMABAD: National Assembly Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq has warned that the conflict between Pakistan and India has escalated beyond conventional warfare, signaling a new phase of heightened alert and readiness. Speaking at a recent event, he cautioned that should India initiate another attack, Pakistan would respond decisively and with full force, leaving no doubt about the coun-

try's commitment to defending its sovereignty.

Sadiq praised the armed forces for their resolute defence, saying their response to India's aggression has been a source of pride for the nation. Reflecting on the historical roots of the current tensions, he suggested that the situation might have been different had former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif not conducted nuclear tests on 28 May, im-



plying that those tests altered the strategic dynamics in the region.

Describing the recent Indian attack as a failed conspiracy, Sadiq reiterated Pakistan's calls for neutral investigations, emphasizing the country's transparency and the clarity of its actions on both governmental and military fronts. He sought to dispel doubts by highlighting that Pakistan's responses and policies have been clear and observable to the international community.

On the domestic front, Sadiq drew attention to the robust public support for the armed forces in Balochistan, countering narratives that suggest a handful of individuals, allegedly funded by India, are attempting to create unrest in the province. He dismissed these claims as unfounded, underscoring the unity between the people and the military in the face of external threats.

## METRO MATTERS

### MQM-P MPAs express anger over severe power outages in Karachi

By our correspondent

KARACHI: Members of the Sindh Assembly representing the Muttahida Qaumi Movement Pakistan (MQM-P) have voiced growing frustration and despair over the ongoing power crisis plaguing Karachi, the country's largest metropolis. In a strongly worded statement from their Bahadurabad center, they described the city as being held hostage by what they termed the 'electricity mafia,' accusing the responsible authorities of willfully neglecting their duty to provide a basic and essential public service.

The power outages, they stressed, persist regardless of the time of day, weather conditions, or even significant festivals, leaving residents to suffer in silence and darkness. The lawmakers condemned the situation as not just a failure of governance but as a blatant violation of citizens' fundamental rights, amounting to mental torture for millions enduring daily blackouts that often last more than sixteen hours. They highlighted the paradox of Karachi's crisis: despite the availability of all necessary resources and the collection of billions of rupees in electricity bills, the economic heart of Pakistan remains shrouded in darkness.

The contradiction has left residents bewildered and officials seemingly powerless to reverse the worsening trend. MQM-P members directed sharp criticism at K-Electric, the city's sole power distributor, accusing the company of repeatedly breaking promises and failing to deliver even a single additional megawatt of electricity in over two decades since signing the supply agreement. The state of Karachi's power network, they argued, is visibly deteriorating, underscoring the company's neglect and inefficiency.

In an urgent appeal, the MQM-P lawmakers called on Prime Minister Mian Shehbaz Sharif to intervene decisively, urging him to play a pivotal role in liberating Karachi from the stranglehold of this 'mafia.' They demanded strict legal action against K-Electric for its breach of contract, suggesting that only through accountability and enforcement can Karachi's residents hope for a return to reliable electricity supply. The plea captures the mounting impatience of a city tired of darkness, longing for a break from the cycle of neglect that has left millions struggling to carry on with their daily lives.

### Man sent to jail on judicial remand over assault on female teachers

By our correspondent

KARACHI: A judicial magistrate in Karachi's East district has sent a man accused of assaulting female teachers at a private school to jail on judicial remand as police investigations into the case continue.

During the hearing, the magistrate reprimanded the accused, saying, "By raising your hand on a teacher, you've brought shame upon everyone. Do you not understand the value and respect that teachers command? Even when teachers discipline students, it is for their own good." The case stems from a violent incident at a private school in the Jamshed Quarters area, where a female teacher was reportedly attacked after disciplining a student.

According to police, the incident involved a man who posed as an SHO of Kalakot and entered the school wielding a pistol. He was later identified as the student's maternal uncle and a suspended head constable in the police department. Police informed the court that the accused has been suspended and an internal inquiry has been initiated. One suspect was already arrested by Jamshed Quarters Police earlier in connection with the assault. A case has been registered against the student, her parents, and her uncle under relevant sections of the law.

The assaulted teacher told authorities that the man not only attacked her but also hurled abuse and physically assaulted other female staff members. Disturbing footage of the attack went viral on social media, sparking widespread outrage and calls for stricter action to protect educators from violence and intimidation. The court has ordered the investigating officer to present the charge sheet at the next hearing and continue the investigation with due diligence.

### New Karachi tribunal set up to address water, sewerage violations

By Aslam Shah

KARACHI: A new tribunal has been set up in Karachi to handle offences related to water and sewerage management, with District and Sessions Judge Nasiruddin Shah appointed as its chair. This tribunal is mandated to resolve complaints within 30 days on issues such as water wastage, damage to infrastructure, tax collection irregularities, and unauthorized water businesses. It aims to address Karachi's persistent problems in managing its water supply and sanitation systems more effectively.

However, doubts about the tribunal's credibility have emerged amid allegations of irregularities in the appointment of technical experts who will play a key role in its functioning. Reports indicate that no public advertisement was issued to recruit these specialists, and the criteria for eligibility and age limits remain unclear. Instead, the Sindh government allegedly handpicked candidates from within the Karachi Water and Sewerage Corporation (KW&SC), raising concerns about transparency and fairness.

Several senior engineers, including Muhammad Mansoor Siddiqui, Syed Ejaz Kazmi, and Azam Khan, refused to participate in protest against the opaque selection process. Retired officials Syed Muhammad Jamil Akhtar and Manzoor Ali Khatri were reportedly rejected without clear reasons. Meanwhile, former Chief Engineer Muhammad Hanif Baloch, with 35 years of experience, was not interviewed, while serving officer Muhammad Jamil, Chief Engineer of KWSSIP, was interviewed following a special request.

A confidential letter dated 9 January 2025 reveals that six candidates were forwarded for approval to the Additional Chief Secretary, with two final appointments expected soon. This process was overseen by Sindh's Local Government Minister Saeed Ghani, who directed the Local Government Secretary to seek names directly from the KW&SC CEO, further reinforcing concerns about potential insider influence.

The tribunal will function under civil and criminal procedure codes, and its decisions will be subject to appeal in the Sindh High Court. Despite the tribunal's goal to strengthen governance and impose hefty penalties—up to one million rupees for tampering with water meters—experts and civil society observers warn that the opaque recruitment process risks undermining its ability to deliver impartial and effective justice.

### PMDC opens licensing facility for doctors, dentists in Lahore

By Aziz Khatri

KARACHI: The Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PM&DC) has launched its new licensing system in Lahore, marking the first phase of a nationwide rollout aimed at easing the registration process for medical and dental graduates. The digital system, inaugurated at PM&DC's Lahore regional office within Sheikh Zayed Medical Complex, is designed to streamline registration, license renewals, and other administrative tasks for healthcare professionals.

This move eliminates the need for doctors and dentists in Punjab to travel to the Islamabad head office for routine matters. Instead, they can now handle new registrations, renewals, good standing certificates, duplicate certificate requests, and data updates locally.

The system also includes support from staff at the Lahore office for those facing challenges with the online portal. While academic credentials and practical experience verification are still managed at the central level, most professional services are now conveniently accessible.

In subsequent phases, the licensing system will expand to Karachi and Peshawar, followed by Jamshoro and Balochistan, with Multan being the final stop in the rollout plan. Applicants can expect greater efficiency and transparency, along with significantly reduced wait times.

Certificates will be delivered directly to professionals via TCS courier, though copies can be collected in person. PM&DC President Professor Dr. Rizwan Taj hailed the initiative as a historic advancement, saying it would allow young doctors to begin their professional careers without delays caused by bureaucratic red tape. He also reaffirmed that the system, though currently focused on Punjab, would soon benefit medical and dental professionals across the country.

### Four unidentified bodies recovered from different areas of Karachi

By Ahsan Mughal

KARACHI: Four bodies were found in different parts of Karachi recently, raising concerns as investigations continue into their causes of death, which remain unknown. The first body was discovered near the Northern Bypass, close to the livestock market, and has been identified as 55-year-old Shabbir. Another body that of 42-year-old Sohail, was recovered near Ismail Food Street in Port Qasim.

In addition to these identified victims, two more bodies were found, both of unidentified men. One, believed to be around 35 years old, was found near Site Area Siemens Chowrangli, while the other, estimated to be about 40 years old, was located in the Garden area of the city.

All four bodies have been transferred to the Edhi morgue in Sohrab Goth, where forensic examinations are underway. Authorities are yet to determine how these individuals died, and the investigations remain ongoing. The discoveries have stirred unease among local residents, with many calling for swift and transparent inquiries to bring clarity to these troubling incidents.

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# Cautious signs of recovery

The Ministry of Finance's latest economic outlook paints a nuanced picture — a country attempting to regain its footing, inching forward in some areas, yet stumbling in others. Inflation, projected to stay between 1.5 and 2 percent this month, suggests a modest relief in price pressures that have burdened households for months. But beneath that surface lies a tapestry of mixed signals, where optimism is cautious and every step forward is shadowed by the risk of slipping backward. In the ten-month stretch from July to April, exports inched up by 6.8 percent, touching \$2.7 billion. It's not a number that would turn heads in regional comparisons, but in the context of Pakistan's struggling industrial and export base, it represents effort and persistence. Yet the joy is short-lived when one looks at the import bill, which ballooned by 11.8 percent to \$4.86 billion.

The result is a familiar one — a widening trade deficit that again places pressure on the already stretched external sector. However, the surprise entry in this economic narrative is the current account surplus of \$188 million. That modest surplus, though fragile, acts like a bandage on a long-festering wound — a reminder that balance is possible, even if fleeting. Foreign direct investment, often seen as a barometer of international confidence, slipped by 2.8 percent, settling at \$178 million. The number is not catastrophic, but it reveals that foreign investors are still hesitant, waiting for more predictability, for more structural clarity, and perhaps for greater political calm. Still, not all external indicators are gloomy. The State Bank's reserves reached \$11.4 billion, offering a cushion against immediate shocks and, symbolically, buying time for policymakers.

On the revenue front, there are reasons for quiet celebration. Tax revenues surged by over 26 percent to 930 billion rupees, and non-tax revenues rose even more sharply by nearly 70 percent. These are substantial increases, and they speak of improved collection mechanisms and perhaps a more assertive fiscal posture. But numbers alone cannot paper over structural weaknesses. The informal economy remains massive and untapped. The tax base is still narrow, and revenue gains, while impressive on paper, may not be sustainable unless they're accompanied by deeper reforms and broader compliance. Credit rating agency Fitch's decision to upgrade the country's economic outlook adds another feather in the cap of policymakers. It serves as external validation — a nod of approval from global observers who rarely mince words. Inflation in April dipped dramatically to just 0.3 percent.

Combined with a strong wheat harvest of nearly 29 million tons, this could mean short-term relief in food prices and availability — a vital breather for the poorest households. Among the standout performances is the automobile sector, which saw an astonishing growth of 95.8 percent. It's an eye-catching figure, though the base effect and pent-up demand from previous slumps should not be ignored. Large-scale manufacturing grew year-on-year by 1.8 percent, another sliver of hope. But that hope is quickly tempered by the monthly data — a 4.6 percent drop, a reminder of just how sensitive the industrial sector remains to cost fluctuations, import dependencies, and power shortages. It's one step forward, half a step back. The digital economy and overseas remittances remain sturdy pillars.

IT exports surged by 21.1 percent, and remittances continue to flow in strong volumes. These trends point to a crucial evolution — the growing role of services and digital exports as lifelines in an otherwise manufacturing-heavy development model. Pakistan's diaspora, ever dependable, continues to fuel local consumption and provide vital foreign exchange. Of the 22 key industrial sectors, 12 recorded positive growth. These sectors contributed to a notable 36.7 percent rise in overall revenue. The fiscal deficit has been brought down to 2.6 percent of GDP — no small feat in a time of global turbulence and domestic constraints. The introduction of Green Sukuk — environmentally conscious Islamic bonds — is a promising step toward integrating sustainability into fiscal policy.

Yet while some celebrate this financial innovation, others are more concerned with the immediate crises — rising costs in health and education, two sectors that touch ordinary families most directly. Inflation in these areas is not just a policy statistic; it's a daily pain point. In social protection, the disbursement of over 40 billion rupees through the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) continues to offer some relief for those at the bottom of the economic ladder. But these cash transfers, however well-intentioned, do not replace the need for systemic change — in employment, in health delivery, in education infrastructure. One cannot keep patching wounds without curing the disease. So where does all of this leave Pakistan? At a crossroad — again. The economic indicators show flickers of light, but too many of those lights are fragile candles in a storm. Yes, inflation is cooling. Yes, the trade balance has its moments of improvement. Yes, digital sectors are thriving and revenue performance has improved.

But there is volatility in manufacturing, uncertainty in investment, and a persistent dependence on imports that makes every external fluctuation a domestic threat. The structural issues are clear. A narrow tax base, reliance on remittances, poor industrial diversification, energy dependence, and a social safety net that often operates on emergency mode rather than developmental planning — these are not new challenges, but they are becoming harder to ignore. Meanwhile, the global economic environment remains uncertain, with commodity prices volatile and geopolitical risks mounting. Policymakers now face a choice. They can ride the short-term improvements and hope that things hold. Or they can take this fragile recovery as an opportunity — perhaps the last in this cycle — to push for deeper reforms. Reforms that tackle tax justice, boost industrial productivity, encourage innovation, and finally wean the economy off its dependence on remittances and external borrowing.

*Metro Morning and its policy not necessarily consensus with any writer's thoughts*

By Uzma Ehtasham



In the clear skies above South Asia, what was once a domain of strategy and deterrence has turned into a theatre of very real violence. The recent downing of six Indian fighter jets marks a chilling reminder that modern air warfare, for all its technological spectacle, remains deeply human in its consequences. Beyond the acronyms and airframes, behind every cockpit lies a life — disciplined, trained, and vulnerable. The latest aerial engagements reflect more than just firepower. They lay bare the geopolitical tremors that increasingly ripple across this volatile region. The downing of a Mirage 2000 over Pampore, with Wing Commander Omnaktam at the controls, signals not only the loss of a highly capable aircraft but also the brutal efficiency of the Chinese-made PL-15 missile system. Fired from a J-10C, the kill represents more than a tactical victory — it speaks to the quiet but accelerating shift in air power capabilities across the region. The pilot, clinging to life at 92 Base Hospital in Srinagar, lies as a painful emblem of the split-second brutality that defines modern aerial engagements. To the north in Ramban, the tale takes a darker turn. Squadron Leader Kishore Yadav, piloting a MiG-29 — once a jewel of India's fleet — found himself on the wrong side of the same missile system, this time launched from a JF-17 Thunder. His

death on May 22, after sustained efforts at Command Hospital in Udhampur, is not just a military loss; it is a personal tragedy for his family, his squadron, and a nation forced to reckon with the human toll of its defence imperatives. Yet amid the devastation, there are moments of relief. The SU-30MKI crash near Akhnoor ended without fatality. Wing Commander Lalat Garg and Flight Lieutenant Mandat Tiwari survived the strike and remain in stable condition at the 170 Military Hospital. Their survival is a small mercy in a week of heavy losses — a reminder that the line between death and life in the skies can be no more than a matter of altitude, timing, or fate. More sobering still is the loss of three Rafale EH jets — the pride of India's recent military acquisitions. Their destruction adds a technical blow to the psychological one, suggesting that no amount of modernization can fully eliminate vulnerability. Wing Commander Arun Panwar, gravely injured near Bhattinda, now lies in the critical care of Chandimandir Command Hospital. His condition remains uncertain, a heart-beat away from becoming another entry in the tragic roll call. Wing Commander Manish and Squadron Leader Sunil, downed in separate incidents near Bhattinda and Srinagar respectively, are stable but shaken. Their recoveries may be physical, but the psychological scars are likely to endure. This chain of incidents marks a turning point in the region's military posture. The PL-15 missile, capable of long-range engagement, represents a paradigm shift in air combat dynam-

ics. Its repeated use in these recent encounters underscores how aerial warfare is no longer dictated by dogfights and radar locks alone, but by beyond-visual-range lethality. Aircraft once considered untouchable are now vulnerable before they even cross into enemy radar zones. This technological asymmetry is forcing a rethink of doctrines long held sacred in the subcontinent's air force strategies. But for all the focus on armament, payloads, and kill ratios, what this conflict exposes more clearly than anything else is the fragility of human life. Pilots are not just assets. They are individuals — sons, husbands, brothers — trained to protect, sometimes sacrificed in the name of a broader cause. In every report of a downed jet, there is an unseen narrative of a family waiting for news, of young children asking when their parent will return, of silent vigils in military quarters. These are the echoes of conflict that data cannot record. And in that silence lies the real tragedy. For while air forces may tally their losses in aircraft and personnel, no spreadsheet captures the ripple effects on military morale, civilian trust, and political stability. The skies may host battles of pride and deterrence, but their aftermath is always grounded — in blood, in sorrow, in the unbearable lightness of loss. As these incidents dominate headlines and official statements are parsed for hints of escalation or de-escalation, one must pause and ask — what is being defended? And at what cost? In the pursuit of air superiority, the region risks inflaming the very in-

stability these forces are meant to deter. Escalation spirals are not just theoretical risks; they are lived realities for the families now grieving, and for the pilots who carry the weight of war even after surviving it. In the face of such danger, diplomatic silence becomes complicity. Each aircraft downed should not only provoke military analyses but also intensify calls for strategic restraint. There is still room — however narrow — for backchannel diplomacy, confidence-building, and a genuine pause to consider the direction of regional security. Because if the lessons of these aerial encounters are ignored, the next wave of losses may not stop at the borders of the sky. For now, hospitals remain busy with the injured. Families wait at bedside vigils. Squadron mates polish boots and prepare sorties, knowing too well what hangs in the balance. And in the haze of nationalism, somewhere, the human cost waits to be acknowledged. Every fighter jet lost is not just a tactical data point. It is a life interrupted, a future rewritten, a reminder that even the mightiest wings can fall. The burden now rests on leaders — military, civil, and diplomatic — to ensure that these stories are not repeated, that the sky, once a symbol of aspiration and reach, does not become merely a graveyard in blue. **The writer is a public health professional, journalist, and possesses expertise in health communication, having keen interest in national and international affairs, can be reached at [uzma@metro-morning.com](mailto:uzma@metro-morning.com)**

By Atiq Raja



In the hushed meeting rooms of capitals from Washington D.C. to Islamabad, from Brussels to Canberra, decisions are forged that ripple through the lives of millions. These decisions—on everything from healthcare and education to trade and security—are shaped not just by elected officials but also by a powerful, often misunderstood force: lobbying. While the term can evoke suspicion and cynicism, lobbying is far more complex, nuanced, and integral to modern democratic governance than many realize. At its core, lobbying is the attempt to influence the decisions made by lawmakers, government officials, and regulatory bodies. It is a process by which individuals, groups, corporations, and civil society organizations seek to make their voices heard, advocate for change, or protect their interests. This activity is woven into the fabric of democratic systems, offering a channel through which diverse perspectives can reach the corridors of power. Contrary to popular misconceptions that equate lobbying with corruption, it is a legal and often necessary practice. Without it, democracy risks becoming a hollow exercise, where laws and policies are crafted without the input of those they affect most. Lobbying,

when done transparently and ethically, provides an essential bridge between citizens and their governments, enabling more informed and responsive policymaking. Lobbying takes many forms and follows a strategic path. It usually begins with extensive research and analysis, where lobbyists gather data, study public opinion, and scrutinize the legal landscape to build compelling arguments. Identifying the right policymakers and committees to engage is crucial, as these are the individuals with the power to shape legislation. Lobbyists then engage with officials through meetings, submitting detailed reports, testifying in committees, or organizing public campaigns to rally support. This process is ongoing. Lobbyists closely monitor legislative developments, propose amendments, and negotiate compromises, always seeking to influence outcomes in ways favorable to their causes or constituencies. After a law or policy is passed, they continue their work by assessing its impact and advocating for effective implementation. Lobbying operates at various levels. Direct lobbying involves personal interaction with legislators or regulators, often through face-to-face meetings, calls, or written communications. Grassroots lobbying mobilizes ordinary citizens, encouraging them to contact their representatives or participate in awareness campaigns, amplifying the call for change from the ground up. Coalition lobbying sees multiple organizations banding to-

gether to combine resources and strengthen their voice. The so-called "revolving door" phenomenon, where former politicians or bureaucrats become lobbyists, brings insider knowledge into the equation, raising both the effectiveness and the ethical debates around lobbying. The importance of lobbying lies in its ability to foster democratic participation and more nuanced policy decisions. Legislators cannot be experts on every issue; they rely on lobbyists to provide valuable data, expertise, and real-world perspectives. This input helps create laws that are better informed, practical, and effective. Lobbying also offers a platform for minority groups, NGOs, and watchdog bodies to challenge dominant corporate or political interests. Moreover, lobbying plays a crucial role in economic policymaking. Industries advocate for regulations that impact jobs, innovation, taxation, and competitiveness, ensuring that economic voices are part of political conversations. Beyond commerce, many social and environmental reforms—from civil rights advancements to climate action—have been driven by tireless lobbying efforts by passionate activists and nonprofits, demonstrating lobbying's potential as a tool for positive change. Yet, despite these benefits, lobbying faces serious criticism. Access to lawmakers is often uneven, with wealthy corporations and interest groups command-

By Ghulam Hussain Baloch



The quiet catastrophe unfolding in medicine cabinets across the country is no longer a distant statistic or a line on a government report. It is the lived reality of millions—children with fevers left untreated, elderly patients forced to skip doses, mothers wrestling with the impossible choice between buying bread or life-saving medication. The soaring prices of medicines have turned what should be basic healthcare into an unaffordable luxury. This crisis is not only economic; it is a profound human tragedy that exposes the widening fault lines within our healthcare system and society. Across both bustling cities and remote villages, the price tags on essential medicines have outpaced the means of ordinary people. What was once considered affordable, even routine, now feels like a distant aspiration. Antibiotics, insulin for diabetics, painkillers—these essentials have all slipped beyond the reach of many households. The financial strain does not discriminate entirely; while the poorest bear the brunt, even the middle classes find their budgets squeezed by medical bills. This creeping crisis is quietly eroding the health and well-being of a broad swath of the population, silently deepening inequality. Health

is not a privilege reserved for the wealthy. It is a fundamental human right, enshrined in every declaration and echoed in the hopes of every family. Yet when medicines become prohibitively expensive, what we are witnessing is not just policy failure, but a collapse of moral responsibility. The stark contrast could not be clearer. In private hospitals and clinics, those who can pay still find shelves stocked and care accessible. But public hospitals, which serve the majority, are overwhelmed and chronically under-resourced. Their pharmacies are often bare, leaving patients to fend for themselves in the face of illness. In such circumstances, even the most common ailments can spiral into life-threatening emergencies, not due to the absence of medical knowledge but because of the absence of affordable medicine. The roots of this crisis are complex and interwoven. Currency depreciation and the rising costs of imports have undeniably pushed prices higher. But these are only symptoms of a deeper malaise. The absence of effective price regulation allows pharmaceutical companies to set prices with little oversight or accountability. Regulatory bodies tasked with protecting public interests often lack the resources or will to enforce fair pricing. This regulatory vacuum has turned medicine pricing into an

opaque business, shielded from public scrutiny, enabling profiteering at the expense of patients. This lack of transparency exacts a terrible toll on those least able to bear it. Ironically, the poorest pay the highest price—not just in monetary terms but in the shortened lives and unnecessary suffering caused by inaccessible treatment. The middle class, often overlooked in policy discussions, is not spared either. Faced with mounting medical expenses, many are driven into debt or forced to postpone necessary care, placing their health in jeopardy. There are solutions, but they require political courage and a renewed commitment to public welfare. The government must reclaim its role as the guardian of public health. Implementing and enforcing price caps on essential medicines is not an attack on business interests but a necessary protection for the people. Subsidies targeted at those most vulnerable can ease immediate burdens and save lives. Equally important is the encouragement of local pharmaceutical production, which can reduce dependency on costly imports and generate employment opportunities. However, such support must come with strict conditions to ensure that affordability and quality are non-negotiable. Transparency is the cornerstone of trust. Drug

pricing must be demystified through clear, publicly available information and robust oversight mechanisms. Without this, public suspicion will fester, and patients will continue to suffer silently and invisibly. Above all, we must change the conversation. This is not simply an economic or administrative challenge; it is a profound moral and social crisis. When the price of a pill exceeds the price of a meal, we betray the very social contract that binds us. Allowing people to fall ill—or worse, die—because they cannot afford medicine is not just an unfortunate consequence. It is a stark failure of society and government. The price of inaction will be paid not in rupees, but in human lives. Each untreated fever, each skipped dose, each family pushed into despair is a mark of that failure. The time to act is now—before the silent catastrophe becomes a public tragedy that no one can ignore. If society is to live up to its highest ideals, it must ensure that healthcare and medicines remain a right, not a privilege. Only then can we say we have honored the dignity and worth of every individual, no matter their means. **The writer is a journalist working with different tasks currently stationed in Balochistan, can be reached at [news@metro-morning.com](mailto:news@metro-morning.com)**

# Agriculture budget: Boon or burden for Pakistan?

By Mahira Gichki & Abdul Rafay Shaikh



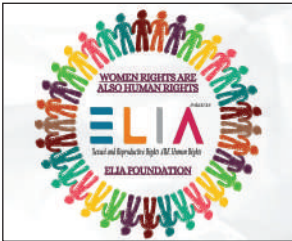
The importance of agriculture for any country cannot be overstated, as it serves as the backbone of a nation's food security, providing the primary source of food and nutrition for its citizens. A strong agricultural sector ensures a stable food supply, reduces reliance on imports, and lays the foundation for economic growth. Moreover, agriculture plays a critical role in poverty reduction, as a significant proportion of the population in many countries relies on it for their livelihood. In Pakistan, agriculture remains a vital sector, contributing significantly to the country's GDP and workforce expansion. It accounts for around 24 percent of Pakistan's GDP and employs nearly 37.4 percent of the workforce. The sector is essential for ensuring food security, reducing poverty, and supporting economic progress. While Pakistan's agricultural sector holds the potential to drive development, it demands strategic investments and sustained support. However, the fiscal budget for 2024–25 has failed to address the vulnerabilities of the agro-food production sector, which accounts for 21

percent of the national GDP. The sector's stake in the fiscal plan is insufficient, with the aggregate budget expenditure for agriculture being approximately Rs5 billion out of the Rs1.8 trillion national budget. This meagre allocation has raised concerns among farmers and professionals, who feel that the government's budgetary apportionment is inadequate to meet their basic agricultural inputs. The distinction between the 2023–24 and 2024–25 funding plans for agriculture is substantial. The 2023–24 budget showed potential, with the agro-sector achieving 6.25 percent expansion, driven by boosted agricultural loan disbursement and improved assistance. However, the 2024–25 budget indicates a turning point, reducing critical subsidies and financial assistance. The reduction in budget allocation for markup allowance and risk mitigation programs for agricultural machinery, the Prime Minister's Youth Business and Agriculture Loan Scheme, and the Prime Minister's Kissan Package funding has raised concerns about the government's focus on the sector. The 2024–25 budget's neglect of the agricultural sector poses a significant risk to the country, as the cuts to subsidies, credit, and support for inputs may lead to decreased crop production, resulting in food shortages, higher prices, and exacerbated hunger among the

poor. Experts caution that the budget allocation for agriculture is woefully inadequate, reflecting misplaced government priorities. Furthermore, farmers are grappling with increased production costs due to reduced subsidy allocations and increased taxation on essential inputs like energy and fertilizers. Small-scale farmers, who form the backbone of Pakistan's agriculture, are particularly affected, with many forced to reduce agricultural planting or discontinue practices altogether due to unsustainable costs. The Kissan Scheme's allocation of Rs 5 billion is widely regarded as a token gesture, lacking meaningful fiscal support and instead appearing as a primarily political move. The budget for 2024–25 highlights several key areas that require urgent attention and improvement in the 2025–26 fiscal plan, particularly in relation to agriculture in Pakistan. One major concern is the meagre allocation of Rs5 billion for agriculture out of a total budget of Rs1.8 trillion, which is grossly inadequate to meet the sector's needs. Furthermore, the reduction in subsidies and financial assistance for farmers, including the Prime Minister's Kissan Package and the Youth Business and Agriculture Loan Scheme, has increased production costs and hindered agricultural growth. Additionally, the Kissan Scheme's allocation is widely viewed as un-

sustainable and primarily a political move, rather than meaningful fiscal support. The budget for 2025–26 should prioritize an increase in the allocation for agriculture, the restoration of subsidies, and the provision of easy loans and credit facilities to small-scale farmers. Moreover, investment in modern farming tools and techniques, such as precision agriculture and drip irrigation, as well as a stronger emphasis on consultation with farmer advocates during budget planning, could help boost crop yields, reduce waste, and stimulate economic growth in the agricultural sector. By addressing these issues, the government can promote sustainable economic development, enhance food security, and support the livelihoods of millions of Pakistanis who rely on agriculture. It is also recommended that steps be taken to strengthen agriculture-led economic growth by increasing the agricultural budget to at least 10 percent of the national expenditure. Restoring subsidies on essential inputs, improving access to affordable credit, and introducing modern farming innovations can together ensure a more resilient and productive agricultural economy. **Both authors are students of BSS-IV, Department of H&SS, Bahria University Karachi Campus, and can be reached at [news@metro-morning.com](mailto:news@metro-morning.com)**





WB to provide \$4bn to Pakistan under new 10-year plan

In the first phase of the partnership, the World Bank will release \$2 billion in loans aimed at strengthening essential public services and institutional capacity

By our correspondent

ISLAMABAD: The Ministry of Economic Affairs has begun executing a comprehensive 10-year partnership framework with the World Bank, a move that will channel \$4 billion in funding to Pakistan between 2026 and 2035. This landmark collaboration not only marks a notable increase in the duration of engagement—from the usual five-year cycles to a full decade—but also reflects growing international confidence in Pakistan's economic reform agenda.

According to officials from the Economic Affairs Division, the agreement is the first of its kind in Pakistan's history, with the World Bank committing to a decade-long roadmap tailored to the country's development needs. Under the first phase of the partnership,



ship, the World Bank will disburse \$2 billion in loans targeted at bolstering critical public services and institutions. These funds will be used to improve education and healthcare systems, accelerate climate action, promote clean energy initiatives, and tackle the mounting challenges of air pollution in urban centers.

Beyond direct funding, the framework sets out an ambitious plan to stimulate private sector participation in Pakistan's development.

Through the International Finance Corporation (IFC), an additional \$2 billion is expected to be mobilized in private investment, focusing on inclusive economic growth and infrastructure that supports livelihoods across all strata of society. The strategy underscores the shift in policy thinking—from reliance solely on public funding to a hybrid model that places private enterprise at the center of national progress.

The partnership is

closely aligned with the government's own "Uraan Pakistan" development plan, reflecting a convergence of domestic policy priorities and international support. It covers a broad scope of sectors where reforms and investments are urgently needed, especially in climate resilience and the transition to sustainable energy—areas where Pakistan remains highly vulnerable.

The World Bank's long-term financial commitment arrives at a crucial juncture for Pakistan, as the country continues to recover from economic volatility and environmental disasters exacerbated by climate change. With growing fiscal pressures and a widening development gap, this new agreement offers not only critical funding but also a framework for strategic reform and planning.

Family planning seen as key to future, says media

By Mehrab Shah Afridi

ISLAMABAD: Journalists and media experts have issued a united call for urgent government investment in family planning, highlighting its crucial role in Pakistan's prosperity and human development. This consensus emerged during a Media Coalition Meeting organized by the Population Council in partnership with UNFPA, where speakers emphasized the media's vital role in advancing accurate public messaging and advocating for policies centered on children's well-being.

Dr. Ali Mir, Senior Director at the Population Council, stressed that population planning must begin with child survival and extend to principles of equity, dignity, and opportunity. He described media professionals as frontline defenders in the nation's pursuit of sustainable development, underscoring the importance of reliable data and strategic investment—especially in women and children.



Presenting a grim snapshot of Pakistan's human capital crisis, Ikram ul Ahad, Deputy Manager at the Population Council, revealed alarming statistics: 675 newborns die every day, 26 million children are out of school, and 40 percent of children under five suffer from stunting that hampers cognitive development. Provincial disparities remain stark, with Sindh seeing 50 percent of children affected by stunting, Balochistan having only 22 percent primary school attendance, and Punjab facing under-five mortality rates of 80 per 1,000 live births.

Ahad attributed these challenges largely to chronic underinvestment in health and education, which remain far below global benchmarks of 6 percent and 7 percent of GDP respectively. Yet, findings from the Population Council's Pakistan @2050 report offered hope: slowing population growth to 1.2 percent by 2030 could accelerate GDP growth by 1.7 percentage points, double per capita income, reduce out-of-school children from 38 percent to 8 percent, and triple female post-secondary education rates by 2050.

Turning to regional tensions, the minister accused India of aggression on 10 May and lauded the Pakistan Air Force for its decisive response, claiming the Downing of three Rafale jets. He said the swift and effective counteraction compelled India to seek a ceasefire through Washington, demonstrating Pakistan's military readiness and technological competence.

PM stands firm against India over Indus water treaty violations

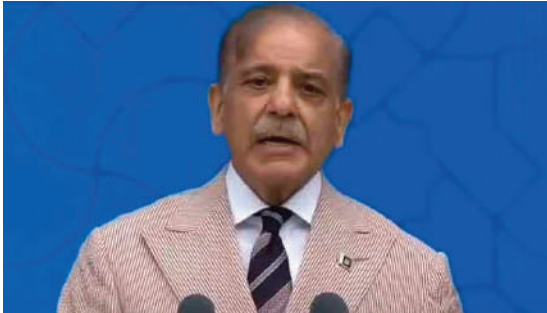
Sharif condemned India's unprovoked aggression and praised the professionalism and courage of Pakistan's armed forces

News Desk

DUSHANBE: Pakistan's Prime Minister Shabbaz Sharif delivered a firm message amid escalating regional tensions, asserting Pakistan's unwavering resolve to prevent any violation of the Indus Water Treaty by India. Sharif dismissed Indian threats to block Pakistan's water supply as impossible, reinforcing Pakistan's commitment to peace and readiness for dialogue—provided India demonstrates sincerity.

The meeting, symbolizing the strong bonds between the three nations, saw Sharif describe Turkey and Azerbaijan as Pakistan's military brothers and steadfast pillars of support. He made clear that any attempt by India to disrupt the water flow guaranteed under the treaty would never succeed.

Addressing recent India-Pakistan tensions, Sharif condemned India's "unprovoked aggression" and lauded the professionalism and bravery of Pakistan's armed forces, including Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir, in defending the nation. He expressed hope that patience and wisdom would pave the way for lasting peace and prosperity in the region.



Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, attending the event, welcomed the ceasefire between Pakistan and India as a relief and voiced hope that it would lead to permanent peace. He echoed the deep ties between Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Pakistan, describing the relationship as "three countries, one nation."

Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev announced a \$2 billion investment in Pakistan, highlighting opportunities for expanded defence cooperation among the three allies. Sharif also emphasized Pakistan's willingness to engage India in talks on trade and counterterrorism if India shows genuine intent. He criticized India for weaponizing the Indus Water Treaty against Pakistan and vowed that Pakistan is taking all necessary steps to safeguard its water rights.

In a separate ceremony marking Azerbaijan's Independence Day, Sharif reiterated the unity among Pakistan, Turkey, and Azerbaijan, calling them "one soul in three bodies." He reaffirmed Pakistan's position on Kashmir, insisting the dispute should be resolved in accordance with United Nations Security Council resolutions.

Sharif also condemned the ongoing violence in Gaza, calling for an immediate ceasefire to halt the suffering of Palestinians, including more than 52,000 deaths, many of them women and children. Sharif's statements underline Pakistan's steadfast stance on regional challenges, its commitment to peace through dialogue, and its strategic alliances aimed at fostering stability and justice in a complex geopolitical landscape.

FBR chairman signals delay on taxing teachers, solar energy

By our correspondent

ISLAMABAD: As the federal government continues to prepare tax proposals for the 2025–26 budget, Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) Chairman Rashid Mahmood Langrial has clarified that no decision has been made to impose taxes on teachers or solar panel users.

Speaking to the media, Langrial stated that the government has not agreed on levying additional duties on imported solar panels, nor is there any current proposal to increase existing tax rates on solar energy products. This clarification comes amid growing concerns about possible fiscal measures that could affect clean energy adoption and the education sector.

He emphasized that tax exemptions granted to various sectors are under review as part of a broader reform agenda, but reassured that teachers will continue to benefit from income tax rebates. From the next fiscal year, teachers will be eligible for a 25% income tax rebate, while for the current fiscal year, any pending rebates will either be refunded or adjusted.

Langrial also confirmed that the Senate Standing Committee on Finance has approved the Income Tax (Second Amendment) Bill 2025, and reiterated that the government is working closely with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to secure relief for salaried individuals in light of inflationary pressures.

He added that discussions are ongoing to extend relief measures to other sectors as well, signaling a more inclusive approach in the upcoming budget, which is expected to balance revenue generation with economic support for vulnerable communities.

Netanyahu accepts US ceasefire plan as Gaza suffering grows

News Desk

OCCUPIED BAITUL MAQDAS: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has cunningly announced his acceptance of a new American proposal for a ceasefire in Gaza, marking a possible step towards ending months of brutal conflict that has devastated the Palestinian enclave.

According to Israeli media, Netanyahu informed the families of Israeli hostages that he had agreed to the plan presented by US special envoy for the Middle East, Steve Wietkoff. The proposal, now under review by Hamas, aims to pause the fighting and facilitate prisoner exchanges.

Arab media reports indicate the plan includes a 60-day ceasefire and the release of 10 hostages, with further exchanges scheduled over two phases within a week.



As part of the proposed terms, Hamas is expected to hand over the remains of 18 Israeli captives, while Israel would release a number of Palestinian prisoners from its jails. Hamas has confirmed receiving the proposal and said it is currently examining its contents.

The ceasefire offer comes amid a renewed wave of international criticism over Israel's expansionist policies. In a separate development earlier this week, the Israeli government approved the construction of 22 new illegal settlements in the occupied West Bank. Israel's finance minister said the move was aimed at strengthening the eastern border and expanding Jewish presence in the north.

The announcement sparked strong condemnation from the UK, with Minister for the Middle East, Hamesh Faulkner, calling it a deliberate obstacle to the creation of a viable Palestinian state. "This decision violates international law and undermines peace efforts," he said.

Minister links strong economy to Pakistan's defence strength

By our correspondent

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister Ahsan Iqbal has underscored the necessity of building a strong and sustainable economy to reinforce Pakistan's defense posture. Speaking at a Youm-e-Takbeer event organized by the Islamabad High Court Bar, he stressed that military achievements must be matched by economic resilience to preserve the strategic legacy of 10 May.

Reflecting on national milestones, Iqbal described May as a proud month for Pakistan, linking the commemorations of 28 May and



10 May to the country's enduring resolve. He credited former Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and nuclear scientist Dr Abdul Qadeer Khan for initiating Pakistan's nuclear program, which has been advanced by successive governments.

Iqbal announced the launch of the "Uran Pakistan" project, aimed at embedding modern technology in national defence. He noted that the digital revolution is not only reshaping education—with tablets now being introduced at the pri-

mary level—but also bolstering Pakistan's technological capacity in strategic sectors. He recounted the country's transformation from not producing even bicycles to now manufacturing its own fighter jets like the JF-17 Thunder.

Turning to regional tensions, the minister accused India of aggression on 10 May and lauded the Pakistan Air Force for its decisive response, claiming the Downing of three Rafale jets. He said the swift and effective counteraction compelled India to seek a ceasefire through Washington, demonstrating Pakistan's military readiness and technological competence.

Sindh, federal govts unite to address maritime challenges

By our correspondent

KARACHI: The Sindh government and the Federal Ministry of Maritime Affairs have unveiled a major collaborative plan to tackle Karachi's longstanding maritime and environmental challenges through comprehensive infrastructure and coastal development projects. At a high-level meeting held at the Chief Minister's House, Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah and Federal Minister Junaid Anwar expressed their shared commitment to enhancing the city's sewage treatment capacity and sustainably developing its coastal resources.

The meeting brought together key provincial and federal officials, including Karachi Mayor Murtaza Wahab, Chief Secretary Asif Haider Shah, and representatives from the Karachi Port Trust (KPT) and China Road and Bridge Corporation (CRBC), signalling a co-ordinated approach to address Karachi's urgent urban and environmental needs.

Central to these efforts is the ambitious Karachi Coastal and Commercial Development Zone (KCCDZ), a \$3.1 billion initiative led by CRBC focused on reclaiming land near Machar Colony. The project envisions creating a Business Bay, High-Tech Knowledge Park, New Industry City, Cruise Terminal, and a Desalination Plant. Notably, the development aims to generate significant employment opportunities without displacing the local population, reflecting a careful balance between growth and



community preservation. To combat the city's critical sewage crisis, plans have been confirmed to upgrade existing Treatment Plants TP-1 and TP-2, boosting their capacities to 100 million gallons per day (MGD) and 180 MGD respectively. In addition, a new Treatment Plant-4 with a capacity of 180 MGD will be constructed in Korangi. Fast-tracking the Greater Karachi Sewerage Plan (STP-III) is a key priority to prevent untreated sewage from contaminating the Arabian Sea through the Lyari and Malir rivers, a step crucial for environmental protection and public health.

Khurshidi warns of sanitation crisis in Karachi ahead of Eid Ul Adha

By our correspondent

KARACHI: Ali Khurshidi, the leader of the opposition in the Sindh Assembly representing the Muttahida Qaumi Movement Pakistan (MQM-P), has voiced serious concerns over the worsening drainage and sanitation crisis engulfing Karachi, just days before Eid ul Adha. In a candid statement, Khurshidi painted a grim picture of the city's streets and alleys, littered with garbage heaps and plagued by overflowing drains.

Khurshidi described these conditions as a stark indicator of the failure of local government officials to fulfil even the most basic responsibilities toward the city's residents. He did not hold back in assigning blame, pointing to persistent internal conflicts and power struggles within municipal bodies as the root cause behind the city's growing filth and neglect. He was especially critical of those who wield influence over Karachi's affairs despite having secured less than seven percent of the vote, branding their leadership as ineffective and deeply disappointing.

For him, this disconnect between political authority and genuine public mandate has translated into widespread mismanagement,



leaving citizens to bear the brunt of administrative apathy. The opposition leader called on the civic administration to abandon internal wrangling and empty rhetoric. Instead, he urged authorities to focus on delivering essential services that address the urgent needs of Karachi's population. Khurshidi insisted that meaningful progress in the city can only be achieved when governance is truly centered on improving the everyday lives of its people, rather than being mired in political turf wars.

81pc of children vaccinated nationwide in three days, says NCOC

By Asghar Ali Mubarak

ISLAMABAD: The National Emergency Operations Centre (NEOC) has reported substantial progress in the ongoing national polio eradication campaign, with 81 percent of children across Pakistan having received their polio vaccinations within the first three days. The campaign, a critical part of the country's efforts to eliminate the virus, continues to push forward despite logistical challenges and persistent public health threats.

According to official figures, Punjab has emerged with an encouraging 85 percent coverage rate, followed closely by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa at 86 percent.

Balochistan, where access and terrain often pose barriers, has managed to reach 74 percent. Sindh lags slightly behind with 68 percent, while Islamabad has

reported the lowest rate so far, at 63 percent. In contrast, both Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan have shown impressive results, with 93 and 91 percent of their child populations covered, respectively.

The campaign comes at a crucial time as health authorities in Pakistan and neighboring Afghanistan are conducting simultaneous vaccination drives in a bid to prevent cross-border transmission of the virus, which remains active in environmental samples in both countries. The coordination

is seen as vital in containing the disease, especially in high-risk regions where population movement is frequent and surveillance is complex.

NEOC has reiterated its appeal to parents across the country to cooperate with frontline health workers, who are working tirelessly to ensure no child is missed. The center warned that the polio virus remains a real and present danger, particularly for children under the age of five, who remain the most vulnerable to paralysis caused by the disease.

