

## Colombia supports Pakistan, India shows disappointment

India's recent conflict exposed its diplomatic isolation, leaving leadership unsettled as major powers withheld clear support amid rising tensions

### News desk

BOGOTA: Shashi Tharoor, the head of India's all-party diplomatic delegation, has openly expressed his sheer disappointment with Colombia's response to recent hostilities between India and Pakistan. Speaking at a press conference in Bogotá, Tharoor criticized Colombia for extending condolences exclusively to those who unfortunately killed in Pakistan during Indian hostility, while failing to acknowledge India's false flag operation Pahalgam's casualties.

Tharoor described Colombia's stance as "deeply regrettable," highlighting what he framed as an imbalance in international sympathy. His remarks are part of a wider diplomatic effort by New Delhi to counter growing isolation on the



global stage amid India's recent attempt to escalate tensions with Pakistan. According to diplomatic analysts, India found itself without clear backing from any major international players during the recent conflict, a situation that has unsettled its leadership.

India has mobilized a high-level delegation representing multiple political parties, dispatched to capitals

across the world with the aim of explaining India's narrative and seeking broader global understanding.

This charm offensive comes at a crucial moment when India's regional influence and credibility face significant challenges, exacerbated by international criticism of its domestic and foreign policies.

Tharoor's comments in Bogotá reflect not just frustra-

tion over Colombia's position, but also the deeper unease within Indian diplomacy about the country's standing in a rapidly changing geopolitical landscape.

The delegation's efforts highlight New Delhi's recognition that managing international perceptions is as critical as any military or political strategy in this fraught dispute.

As the delegation continues its outreach, the challenge for India will be to rebuild trust and demonstrate the legitimacy of its claims in the eyes of an international community wary of escalating regional conflicts. The Colombian episode underscores the difficulties India faces in securing unequivocal support at a time when tensions in South Asia remain volatile and the world watches closely.

## Gaza protestors released after brief detention in Islamabad

By our correspondent

ISLAMABAD: Prominent human rights activists Tahira Abdullah and Samina Umar along with Jamaat-e-Islami's former Senator Mushtaq Ahmed were released by Islamabad police hours after being detained outside the National Press Club, where they had reportedly gathered to express solidarity with the people of Gaza. Speaking to the media during her detention, Tahira Abdullah expressed confusion over the arrest, saying, "We don't know why we were picked up. We were just standing here."

According to the Human



Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), the two women were taken into custody before the scheduled protest had even begun and were not part of any crowd at the time of arrest. The HRCP also clarified that neither activist had violated Section 144 — a legal provision often used to prohibit gatherings — and demanded their immediate release.

Their arrest occurred amidst a crackdown on pro-Palestine demonstrations in the capital, where former Jamaat-e-Islami senator Mushtaq Ahmed Khan was also detained while participating in a protest in support of Gaza. The detentions sparked outrage among civil society and rights organizations, who viewed the arrests as an infringement on peaceful assembly and free speech.

The eventual release of the activists followed mounting pressure and condemnation from rights groups, lawyers, and journalists across the country. The episode has once again raised serious concerns about the shrinking space for dissent and the use of arbitrary detentions to stifle solidarity movements — even those advocating for human rights beyond Pakistan's borders.

## Man shoots dead 3 dacoits during attempted robbery

### News Desk

HUB: In a dramatic turn of events in Jam Colony, Hub, a citizen fatally shot three armed robbers during an attempted robbery, according to local police officials.

The incident occurred when the man, who had just withdrawn cash from a nearby bank, was ambushed by four robbers on two motorbikes.

As the robbers tried to snatch the money, the citizen opened fire, resulting in the deaths of three of the assailants on the spot.

## India's Air Chief raises alarm over Teja's delays, combat readiness

Air Chief Marshal AP Singh exposes the quiet chaos of India's defence establishment, where inertia and indecision sabotage ambition in a region edging towards peril

### News Desk

NEW DEHLI: India's Chief of the Air Staff Air Chief Marshal Amar Preet Singh has publicly questioned the state of the country's defence preparedness, offering a rare glimpse into the internal frustrations of military leadership. In a string of unusually direct comments since February, Air Chief Marshal has expressed his deep unease over the chronic delays that have plagued nearly every Air Force project, none of which, especially Indian-made air combat fighter jet "Teja", he said, has been completed on time.

With an uncharacteristic candor, the Air Chief has pointed to a troubling pattern: not a single Air Force project, he said, has been delivered on time. This is not a passing grievance. It is a damning reflection of systemic inertia, of a defence apparatus that struggles to match intent with execution. In choosing to speak out, AP Singh has drawn back the curtain on the bureaucratic drift that continues to undermine India's military ambitions, even as its strategic environment grows more



volatile by the day.

Air Chief Marshal did not point fingers directly, but the implications of his words were unmistakable. Defence contracts, he suggested, are often signed in full knowledge that deadlines will not be honored. It's an indictment not just of procedure, but of a mindset — one that tolerates delay as routine and treats preparedness as a distant goal, rather than a pressing necessity. For a nation that spends billions on modernizing its forces and talks frequently of self-reliance 'Aatmanirbharta', such admissions land heavily.

Singh's remarks have rippled beyond the military sphere and into the political one, raising uncomfortable questions about whether the government's much-publicized commitment to de-

fence reform is moving at the pace required. His tone was measured, but his intention was unmistakable: to jolt the system into recognizing that the Air Force cannot continue to function in a state of permanent expectation — always waiting, rarely receiving.

The strategic timing of his intervention is no coincidence. After Operation Sindoor, where tensions with China once again came to a boil, the spotlight on India's defence capabilities has sharpened. In the backdrop of Chinese military expansion and rapidly advancing air power, the sense of urgency should have already been palpable. But if the Air Chief's comments are anything to go by, that urgency has yet to filter down into meaningful action.

## Pakistan, US to engage, seeking stronger trade ties

Both parties expressed cautious optimism that swift, constructive talks could overcome delays, reflecting urgent shared interests demanding immediate resolution

### By our correspondent

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and the United States have agreed to launch detailed technical-level discussions in the coming weeks, marking a renewed effort to strengthen economic and trade cooperation between the two nations. This development comes as both countries seek to deepen engagement amid shifting global economic dynamics and regional challenges.

The announcement followed a video call between Pakistan's Federal Finance Minister, Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb, and U.S. Trade Representative Jayme Staley Grier. According to a statement from Pakistan's Ministry of Finance, the conversation was described as constructive, with both sides emphasizing their commitment to fostering mutual understanding and cooperation on key economic matters.

The forthcoming talks are expected to focus on a range of issues critical to advancing bilateral trade, including market access, tariff barriers, and regulatory alignment. Both parties expressed optimism



that the discussions would be completed swiftly and in a "constructive atmosphere," underscoring the urgency to address matters of mutual interest without unnecessary delay.

This agreement signals Islamabad's broader strategy to diversify and strengthen its trade relationships at a time when Pakistan faces significant economic challenges, including balance of payments pressures and the need for structural reforms.

Enhanced trade ties with the United States, one of Pakistan's largest trading partners, are seen as a potential lever to support economic stability and growth.

From Washington's perspective, maintaining robust

economic ties with Pakistan aligns with broader geopolitical goals, including promoting regional connectivity and stability. The United States has consistently signaled interest in supporting Pakistan's economic reforms and development initiatives, recognizing the country's strategic importance in South Asia.

While concrete outcomes of the upcoming discussions remain to be seen, the dialogue itself marks a positive step forward in rebuilding trust and cooperation. Both sides appear keen to move beyond past uncertainties and lay the groundwork for a more predictable and mutually beneficial trade relationship.

## 'No water, no power', is it Moon? Sindh Governor

### By our correspondent

KARACHI: Sindh Governor Kamran Tessori has lashed out at the worsening state of basic services in Karachi, saying the lack of water and electricity in the city makes it feel "as if we're living on the Moon, not in Karachi."

Speaking at an event at the Governor House on Thursday, Tessori expressed frustration over the chronic water and electricity shortages that continue to plague the city despite repeated public outcry. "There is no water, no electricity — what kind of city is this?" he said, his remarks echoing growing public discontent.

The governor also shared updates on relief efforts, noting that 30,000 families are currently receiving ration packs through his office. In a bid to invest in the city's youth, he added that nearly 50,000 children are being taught information technology at the Governor House as part of an ongoing educational initiative.

Touching on political pressures, Tessori said there were active efforts to have him removed from office. "But I will continue to be the voice of truth and justice," he declared, vowing not to back down despite the obstacles.

## Ahsan says China supports Pakistan like rock

### By our correspondent

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Planning and Development Ahsan Iqbal has reaffirmed the enduring strength of Pakistan-China friendship, calling it a relationship rooted in mutual trust and respect, and praising China for consistently standing by Pakistan "like a rock" during difficult times.

Speaking at a luncheon hosted in honor of Chinese Ambassador Jiang Zaidong, Ahsan Iqbal emphasized that the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) remains the engine of Pakistan's economic transformation and regional integration. He announced that Gwadar Port has now been fully connected to the national grid, a major milestone in realizing its potential as the gateway to prosperity for the entire region. Ahsan Iqbal hailed the next phase of CPEC as a transition from planning to performance, noting that Pakistan is determined to make the upcoming Joint Cooperation Committee (JCC) meeting in July 2025 highly productive and results-oriented.

In response, Ambassador Jiang Zaidong acknowledged Pakistan's crucial role in promoting regional peace and stability, and described CPEC as the flagship project of regional connectivity.

## SC strikes down civilian court-martials in detailed verdict

The 2015 constitutional amendment expanded court-martial powers to terrorism cases, reflecting wartime urgency but raising questions over military overreach

### News Desk

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court of Pakistan has released the minority detailed judgment declaring civilian court-martials invalid. A seven-member constitutional bench had earlier ruled by a 5-2 majority in favor of validating civilian court-martials. However, the minority dissenting judges presented a strong opposing view.

The minority judgment cautioned against creating the impression that civilian courts have failed to address serious issues like terrorism. It stressed that the solution cannot solely lie in court-martials, which by law apply only to individuals under the Pakistan Army Act. Court-martials are designed to try military personnel accused of military or general offences, not civilians.

The judgment pointed out that military courts do not have jurisdiction over terrorism or other criminal cases. The extension of court-martial jurisdiction to terrorism cases was introduced through the 21st constitutional amendment in 2015, during a declared state of war. This amendment gave military courts authority only until 2019, after which court-martials lost the power to try civilians.



The minority judges highlighted that no country in the world tries terrorism cases in military courts. The Supreme Court regularly reviews decisions of criminal courts, but the recent appeals by the federal, Punjab and Balochistan governments reflected a loss of confidence in criminal courts. The judgment criticized these elected governments for doubting the criminal justice system rather than reforming it, thereby shifting an unnecessary burden onto military courts.

It pointed out that military officers lack judicial expertise in handling criminal trials and delivering fair sentences. Court-martials cannot be considered equivalent to judicial officers trained in law. The minority judgment expressed concern that governments seek to achieve political objectives through

court-martials instead of addressing the root causes of terrorism. Expecting criminal courts to convict without evidence violates legal principles — without proof, no punishment can be justified.

If investigations are thorough and evidence strong, guilty individuals will be held accountable. The minority noted that some petitioners were themselves facing court-martial proceedings. They concluded that military courts do not have the authority to try civilians and declared the sentences given to individuals involved in the 9 May 2023 events invalid as beyond jurisdiction. This minority verdict adds significant nuance to the ongoing debate about the role of military courts in Pakistan's justice system, raising important questions about civilian rights and legal protections.

## ECP tells SC, "PTI never requests reserved seats"

### By our correspondent

ISLAMABAD: The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has submitted a detailed written argument to the Supreme Court in the ongoing legal battle over reserved seats, asserting that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) did not follow legal procedures to claim these seats before or after the February general elections.

In its submission, the ECP argued that PTI neither submitted nomination forms nor made any formal request for the allocation of reserved seats for women and minorities—requirements that must be fulfilled before polling day, according to the election schedule. The commission contended that any attempt to allow submission after the polls would directly contradict electoral laws and undermine the legal framework.

At the heart of the dispute is a controversial ruling issued on July 12, in



which the Supreme Court replaced the Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) with PTI in matters related to reserved seats. The ECP has called this decision legally flawed, arguing that it disrupts the electoral process and ignores key statutory provisions.

The commission also objected to the declaration of 39 members as PTI representatives without proper verification, maintaining that this move violated established procedures and precedents. The ECP cited previous judgments by Justices Mansoor Ali Shah and

Munib Akhtar, stating that critical legal principles had been overlooked.

In a sharp critique of the Supreme Court's majority ruling, the ECP claimed that its clarifications, issued on September 14 and October 18, were not considered, and that the judgment was passed without referring the matter to a 13-member full bench. This, the ECP contended, amounted to a violation of constitutional protections under Articles 10A (right to fair trial) and 4 (right to be treated in accordance with the law).

### News Desk

OCCUPIED BAITUL MAQDAS: In a provocative and defiant declaration, Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz has announced intentions to formally establish a Jewish Israeli state in the occupied West Bank, intensifying tensions in a region already engulfed by escalating violence and diplomatic friction.

Calling it a "decisive response" to what he termed "terrorist organizations that seek to weaken and harm us," Katz's statement signals a headline stance aimed not only at Palestinians but also at the broader international community. His remarks



came shortly after French President Emmanuel Macron and other European leaders reaffirmed their symbolic support for Palestinian statehood. "This is a clear message to Macron and his colleagues," Katz said. "While they recognize a Palestinian state on paper, we will build a

state on the ground." The comments mark a new level of rhetorical aggression from Tel Aviv, openly rejecting the long-held international consensus supporting a two-state solution. The West Bank, illegally occupied since 1967, is considered under international law

to be Palestinian territory. Israel's expanding settlements there have been repeatedly condemned by the United Nations, European Union and human rights groups as violations of international law.

Katz's remarks are being viewed as an assertion of Israel's hardline agenda in the face of growing global calls for Palestinian self-determination, particularly amid mounting casualties in Gaza and the broader occupied territories. His reference to "establishing facts on the ground" is not just political rhetoric—it reflects years of settlement expansion that many observers see as part of a de facto annexation strategy.



# Field Marshal vows no bowing to pressure

Field Marshal Munir’s carefully crafted message, shared by ISPR, resonated beyond Pakistan’s borders, challenging both global audiences and his own military cadre alike

By ISPR/  
Asghar Ali Mubarak

RAWALPINDI: Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir, Pakistan’s Chief of Army Staff, has declared that the country will not bow to pressure, sending a firm message of defiance amid rising regional tensions. During a visit to the Command and Staff College in Quetta, he said Pakistan’s strength stems from national unity, institutional harmony, and the unwavering professionalism of its armed forces.

In an address that combined reflection, warning and resolve, the army chief paid tribute to the martyrs of Operation Bunyan Marsos, hon-



oring the sacrifices of those who laid down their lives in the fight against terrorism. He assured their families of the nation’s continued solidarity and said that their sacrifice represents more than memory — it is a reminder of the country’s enduring fight for

peace and sovereignty.

Field Marshal Munir’s words, shared by the military’s media wing, ISPR, appeared deeply intentional — aimed as much at the world beyond Pakistan’s borders as at the officers and students gathered before him.

He described the people of Pakistan, under national leadership, as a "steel wall" defending the homeland, and warned that any attempts to undermine national efforts — especially in the fight against terrorism — would be met with forceful resistance.

There was little ambiguity in his tone when referring to India. The army chief called out what he termed India’s “unprovoked aggression”, describing it as a dangerous pattern that threatens regional peace. He also accused New Delhi of “illegal and unethical water terrorism” and condemned its alleged role in fueling unrest within Pakistan. His com-

ments seemed to echo a growing unease within Islamabad over what it perceives as deliberate efforts by India to create instability through indirect means.

Speaking to young officers and military scholars, the army chief urged them to remain committed to their duties with passion and integrity. He emphasized that modern warfare no longer unfolds only on the battlefield, and future leaders must prepare for challenges that are as intellectual and technological as they are physical. Research, strategic foresight, and adaptability, he said, would define the military leadership of tomorrow.

## SHC mentions security crisis after Sadaf Hasalo murder hearing

By Imtiaz Hussain

SUKKUR: The Sindh High Court Circuit Bench in Larkana has strongly expressed its frustration over the deteriorating law and order situation in the region during the hearing of a petition related to the murder of female school teacher Sadaf Hasalo. The court’s remarks highlighted the serious challenges faced by the police and administration in maintaining security across the Larkana division and wider Sindh.

The case of Sadaf Hasalo, who was shot dead near Rahooja Larro in Qambar City Police Station jurisdiction around 45 days ago, was brought before the court by her family through lawyer Bahadur Shahani. The single bench headed by Justice Amjad Ali Sahato heard the petition, during which the court demanded urgent reforms in policing practices and better law enforcement mechanisms.

IG Sindh Ghulam Nabi Memon and Additional Home Secretary Javed Ali submitted progress reports on the investigation into Sadaf Hasalo’s murder and the broader law and order scenario. IG Sindh informed the court that an active investigation is underway, led by DIG Sukkur, into the failure of police officers to provide security to the deceased teacher.

Two suspects, including a woman, have been arrested, and a special police team headed by DIG Larkana is tasked with apprehending the main accused, Farid Hasalo. The police have been instructed to use technical tools and modern technology to ensure his arrest. They also have arrested a fugitive police officer, Fareed, wanted in the same murder case .

## JI chief asserts right to self-defence in talk with UK HC

By our correspondent

ISLAMABAD: British High Commissioner to Pakistan Jane Marriott held a significant meeting in Islamabad with Hafiz Naeem ur Rehman, the Ameer of Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan, where key geopolitical and humanitarian concerns were discussed.

During the interaction, Hafiz Naeem strongly emphasised Pakistan’s right to self-defence in response to what he described as India’s “water aggression.” His statement reflects growing anxieties in Pakistan over New Delhi’s upstream control on river flows, an issue that has long troubled bilateral relations under the Indus Waters Treaty.

The meeting also included a stern appeal by the Jamaat-e-Islami chief for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and the uninterrupted delivery of humanitarian aid, aligning with mounting global



calls for restraint and relief amid the humanitarian catastrophe in the besieged Palestinian enclave.

On the Kashmir dispute, Hafiz Naeem reiterated the party’s firm stance that the issue must be resolved in line with UN Security Council resolutions, stressing the importance of a just and democratic solution to ensure peace in South Asia.

Highlighting the strategic importance of Pakistan-Afghanistan relations, Hafiz Naeem also briefed the British envoy on Jamaat-e-

Islami’s view of regional co-operation, urging constructive diplomacy over confrontation, especially as cross-border tensions and refugee concerns continue to evolve.

High Commissioner Jane Marriott’s engagement with opposition leaders like Hafiz Naeem signals Britain’s ongoing interest in understanding Pakistan’s diverse political spectrum, especially as the country navigates economic stress, political flux, and its place in a volatile regional context.

## Chinese analyst outshines Indian host in live TV debate

News Desk

NEW DEHLI: On India’s Republic TV’s recent program, senior Chinese analyst Professor Victor Gao took a commanding stance during a heated debate with retired Indian Major General G.D. Bakshi and host Arnab Goswami, leaving both visibly unsettled. The discussion centered on the complex geopolitical dynamics involving China, India, and Pakistan.

Professor Gao opened by reaffirming the enduring strength of China-Pakistan relations, describing their friendship as “rock solid.” This assertion sparked a sharp response from Major General Bakshi, who blamed China for initiating attacks in Tibet—actions he claimed had worsened India-China relations.

Gao swiftly challenged Bakshi’s historical understanding, advising him to better study the historical context before making military claims.

“I know you study the military, but without understanding history, you cannot become a great military leader,” Gao remarked pointedly. He emphasized that no global power could undermine the decades-old, unbreakable alliance between China and Pakistan—a partnership far older than recent developments.

Gao further stressed that China’s close cooperation with Pakistan in defending its sovereignty and regional integrity should not surprise anyone.

Addressing India’s aggressive rhetoric following the April 22 Pahalgam incident, Gao urged restraint, warning against military action without thorough investigation or solid evidence.

## Student dies after alleged corporal punishment

Sudheer Ahmad Afridi

KHYBER: A tragic incident has shocked the community in Jamrud tehsil of Khyber district, where a fifth-grade student died following alleged corporal punishment by the principal of a private school. The death of Ittehad Khan, a young boy from Surkamar Bhagiari, has stirred deep grief and outrage both locally and across social media platforms.

According to early reports, the incident occurred during the school’s morning assembly when Principal Waqar Ahmad reportedly administered physical punishment. Ittehad sustained severe injuries and was rushed to a nearby hospital, but despite medical efforts, he succumbed to his wounds.

District Police Officer (DPO) Khyber, Rai Mazhar Iqbal, acted promptly, ordering Jamrud SHO

Naseem Khan to take immediate action. Within an hour, the principal was arrested, placed in police custody, and is now facing legal proceedings.

Conflicting accounts have emerged regarding the exact circumstances. Some suggest the fatal injury was accidental, occurring when the principal intended to discipline another student and the stick slipped, striking Ittehad on the head.

## Commissioner Abbasi praises Aror University’s innovative research

By Imtiaz Hussain

SUKKUR: Commissioner Sukkur, Fayaz Hussain Abbasi, has expressed strong admiration for the innovative work being carried out by Aror University, highlighting its role as a beacon of research and community involvement.

His remarks came during a dinner reception hosted by the university’s Vice Chancellor, Prof. Dr. Zahid Hussain

from bananas. This pioneering effort has drawn significant attention as an example of how higher education institutions can meaningfully contribute to sustainable development goals.

Commissioner Abbasi praised the project not only for its ingenuity but also for its potential to foster practical solutions that address environmental and economic challenges through the integration



Khand, which also welcomed a delegation from National Textile University in Faisalabad. Professor John Arthur from Northumbria University in the UK, and the Vice Chancellor of the University of Kamalia.

The evening provided a platform to celebrate a remarkable project currently underway in Taluka Saleh Patt, Sukkur district, where Aror University is exploring cutting-edge methods to extract fiber, gas, energy, and fertilizer

of teaching, research, and international cooperation. The presence of esteemed guests underscored the growing recognition of Aror University’s approach, which emphasizes research-driven innovation with real-world applications.

Professor John Arthur, representing Northumbria University, commended the university’s commitment to bridging academic knowledge with tangible community benefits.



## METRO MATTERS

### JI shifts protest focus to major highways amid worsening outages

By our correspondent

KARACHI: Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) Karachi Ameer Monem Zafar announced plans to escalate protests against K-Electric (KE) amid worsening power outages that have severely tested Karachi residents’ patience. He revealed that demonstrations will shift to the National Highway on Saturday, followed by widespread rallies across the city on Monday, June 2, after earlier protests were largely ignored.

Speaking at a press conference outside KE’s Karachi head office on Friday, Zafar described the electricity crisis as dire. He highlighted that areas such as Korangi, Orangi, Landhi, Malir, Baldia Town, North Karachi, New Karachi, and PMT Colony are enduring some of the worst load shedding. He sharply condemned KE’s management, comparing the utility company to the East India Company, and criticised the CEO for refusing to appear before the Sindh Assembly’s Standing Committee. Zafar also condemned KE for suspending electricity connections of consumers who pay their bills on time, in defiance of court rulings.

He recalled that the privatisation of KESC was intended to eliminate subsidiaries and end load shedding, yet the company’s outstanding dues have skyrocketed from Rs1.4 billion at privatisation to Rs174 billion today, while power outages have worsened dramatically. Zafar also took aim at the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (NEPRA), accusing it of issuing only “cosmetic” warnings to KE for unannounced load shedding and routinely siding with the company by permitting it to pass recovery losses on to consumers.

Demanding swift action, Zafar called for an immediate end to load shedding and the cancellation of KE’s licence. He urged the government to supply electricity directly to Karachi through the national grid, noting the country has sufficient power capacity. Additionally, he demanded that Karachi be charged electricity tariffs on par with the rest of Pakistan, as current rates remain disproportionately high.

### Illegal hydrants reappear again across Karachi: Murtaza Wahab

By Aziz Khatri

KARACHI: Karachi’s mayor, Murtaza Wahab, has openly acknowledged the persistent challenge of illegal water theft in the city, revealing that even after operations at more than 200 locations over the past 15 months, unauthorized water hydrants continue to resurface across Karachi. His candid admission during a recent City Council session laid bare the complexity and scale of the crisis affecting Pakistan’s largest metropolis.

Wahab did not shy away from the frustrations faced by city authorities in their attempts to control water theft, a problem that has long undermined efforts to manage Karachi’s severely strained water supply. “We’ve taken action, but the hydrants return,” he said, acknowledging a cycle of enforcement and relapse. His remarks hinted at deeper obstacles, pointing towards political and institutional pressures that complicate the implementation of measures designed to curb illegal water extraction.

The mayor’s tone carried a sense of realism — and urgency. He announced plans to intensify operations against illegal water connections once again, emphasising that tackling Karachi’s chronic water shortage requires a unified and sustained effort. “We must come together to resolve Karachi’s water shortage and ensure fair distribution,” Wahab urged fellow council members, underscoring that piecemeal or half-hearted efforts will fall short.

In the midst of this ongoing battle, Wahab drew attention to the long-delayed K-IV water supply project, a critical infrastructure initiative meant to alleviate Karachi’s water woes. “It’s been inaugurated five times already,” he remarked with a note of frustration, reflecting widespread skepticism about the project’s repeated promises and missed deadlines. He further highlighted the unique challenges the city faces, noting that Karachi is the only city in Pakistan where water must be transported from as far as 125 kilometres away — a logistical hurdle that magnifies the water crisis.

### KU raises awareness on mental health challenges

By Musarrat Arif

KARACHI: The University of Karachi (KU) held a significant awareness event titled ‘Youth Mental Health and Substance Reliance Awareness Initiative’ at its Audio Visual Centre on Friday. This important session was organized jointly by KU’s Department of Political Science, the Government of Sindh’s Sports and Youth Affairs Department, and the Legal Rights Forum.

KU Vice Chancellor Professor Dr Khalid Mahmood Iraqi opened the session by emphasizing that mental health is a societal challenge impacting all genders equally. He criticized the widespread mindset that trivializes women’s mental health struggles as mere drama, while men’s issues are taken more seriously, urging a shift in this biased perception. He also warned about the devastating effects of drug addiction, describing it as a threat not just to individuals but to the nation as a whole.

Highlighting Pakistan’s economic challenges, Professor Iraqi noted the near stagnation of industrial growth and insufficient investment in education. He argued that economic stability and educational progress are essential to curbing substance abuse and fostering the country’s development.

Members of the Provincial Assembly, Bilal Jadoon and Muhammad Danial, stressed the importance of confronting life’s difficulties rather than turning to substance abuse. Speaking directly to students, they encouraged youth to actively participate in political and community affairs, recognizing them as the country’s future and greatest asset.

Professor Dr Samina Saeed, Dean of KU’s Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, underscored the damaging impact of drug abuse on both the body and the soul. She called for greater societal empathy and support for individuals facing mental health challenges. Shireen Ejaz, Program Manager of the Legal Rights Forum, highlighted the need to break the taboo surrounding mental health discussions and to raise awareness about the long-term dangers of substance addiction.

### SMIU’s former ORIC head faces financial scandal claims

News Desk

KARACHI: A serious financial scandal has surfaced involving Dr. Amir Iqbal Imrani, the former Director of the Office for Research, Innovation and Commercialization (ORIC) at Sindh Madresatul Islam University (SMIU). Dr. Imrani is accused of causing the university to suffer significant financial losses amounting to millions of rupees due to mismanagement of utility bill payments during his tenure.

According to detailed reports, Dr. Imrani, while managing the National Incubation Center (NIC) project in partnership with the Punjab Information Technology Board (PITB), displayed gross administrative negligence. He allegedly obstructed the rightful claim and receipt of nearly PKR 4 million in funds. Instead of actively pursuing the reimbursement, Dr. Imrani reportedly misled the PITB administration into believing that the university was financially stable and did not require the outstanding amount.

This misrepresentation resulted in a prolonged delay in recovering the funds, causing substantial financial damage to SMIU. An official statement from the university pointed out that, unlike other universities that consistently submitted quarterly reimbursement claims to avoid losses, SMIU failed to claim any payments throughout the three-year duration of the project. This glaring oversight raises serious questions about Dr. Imrani’s administrative competence and points to grave financial negligence.

The issue is particularly concerning in the context of widespread financial challenges faced by public universities, many of which operate under severe budget constraints. Refusing to claim legitimate dues based on an inaccurate assessment of the university’s finances not only reflects poor financial management but also constitutes a serious injustice to the institution.

While the university eventually managed to recover the withheld funds from PITB, the official response towards Dr. Imrani has so far been limited to issuing a letter demanding an explanation. No disciplinary measures have been taken, nor has any formal inquiry or accountability process been initiated.

This scandal underscores the urgent need for transparent financial governance and stringent oversight mechanisms in public universities, especially at a time when many such institutions face acute fiscal distress. It also highlights how administrative lapses can deepen financial losses, undermining the mission of educational institutions to foster research and innovation.

### Pakistan, UK discuss climate, coastal issues

By our correspondent

KARACHI: A delegation from the British High Commission recently met with Sindh’s Secretary of Environment, Agha Shah Nawaz, in Karachi to discuss urgent challenges related to climate change, coastal protection, and disaster management.

The British team included Second Secretary Noam Rosenbaum and Namra Zaheer, head of the humanitarian aid team, alongside Waqar Hussain Phulpoto, Director General of the Sindh Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA).

DG SEPA Waqar Hussain Phulpoto briefed that Sindh is unique as the only Pakistani province to have formulated a fisheries policy. He also noted progress in solar and wind energy projects, many of which are supported by Chinese companies, advancing the province’s renewable energy ambitions.

Describing Sindh’s geography as a complex mosaic of coastal, desert, and agricultural landscapes, Waqar Hussain termed the province a “hotspot” of environmental and climatic importance in South Asia. When questioned about Sindh’s international collaborations, Secretary Shah Nawaz explained the establishment of a provincial Climate Change Working Group under his leadership.

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# India’s IAF reveals incapacity in air combat

India’s Air Chief Marshal has voiced a stark warning that reverberates far beyond routine military briefings, exposing critical fissures in the country’s defence preparedness at a time when regional security concerns are mounting. His pointed remarks about persistent delays in defence projects and the resulting erosion of the Indian Air Force’s (IAF) combat capabilities have stirred fresh debate on the government’s commitment to strengthening the nation’s military might, especially under the banner of ‘Aatmanirbharta’ — or self-reliance. The Air Chief’s candid criticism carries significant weight, particularly because it comes from the highest-ranking official responsible for safeguarding India’s skies. His complaint about the indefinite delay in the delivery of the Tejas fighter jet’s promised variant, originally assured by the government back in 2010, is not merely a lament over missed deadlines.

It speaks to a much deeper concern about the strategic vulnerability that these delays create. Each year that passes without modern aircraft delivery weakens the IAF’s ability to deter adversaries or mount an effective defence in an increasingly hostile regional environment. What makes the Air Chief’s statements especially striking is the level of transparency and frustration they reveal. Traditionally, military leaders tend to frame such critiques diplomatically, avoiding public confrontations with civilian authorities. Yet here, the Air Chief has laid bare a systemic problem: defence contracts often get signed despite an underlying awareness that the stipulated timelines are unrealistic. This disconnect between planning and execution points to bureaucratic inertia, inefficiency, and possibly a lack of political will to prioritize urgent defence needs.

The timing of these remarks could not be more crucial. Recent tensions with China, particularly following Operation Sindoor, have exposed gaps in India’s aerial combat readiness. Questions have been raised across strategic circles about the capabilities of China’s rapidly modernizing air force and how India plans to respond.

The Air Chief’s statement underscores an uncomfortable reality — while the country’s neighbors are upgrading their arsenals, India’s Air Force risks being outpaced due to delays in critical indigenous projects. This situation also casts a shadow over the government’s much-touted campaign for ‘Aatmanirbharta’ in defence manufacturing. While self-reliance remains a laudable goal, the Air Chief’s remarks reveal disconnect between rhetoric and reality.

The promised aircraft, such as advanced variants of the Tejas fighter jet, remain undelivered, prompting growing scepticism about whether these initiatives are mere slogans or a tangible transformation of India’s defence industrial base.

Beyond pointing fingers at bureaucratic delays, the Air Chief’s comments hint at a more sobering possibility: that India’s Air Force might currently be equipped to handle limited, short-term engagements but lacks the readiness for prolonged, high-intensity conflict.

This is a critical strategic concern, as the nature of modern warfare increasingly demands sustained capabilities and technological edge. His warning is not just about the present but about the future security trajectory of the nation. In a region where geopolitical rivalries are intensifying and neighbors are investing heavily in advanced military technology, India cannot afford complacency. Defence preparedness is not a luxury; it is an existential necessity.

The government’s failure to meet deadlines on crucial Air Force projects also risks undermining morale within the armed forces. When promises are broken repeatedly, it chips away at confidence in political leadership’s ability to back their defence commitments. It could also hinder recruitment and retention, as armed forces personnel seek assurance that their safety and effectiveness are not compromised by policy or administrative failures. The Air Chief’s remarks, particularly in the form of a public statement, appear to be a calculated appeal for urgent attention.

By voicing his frustrations openly, he signals that internal channels for resolving these issues might have been exhausted or ignored.

The hope is that this candidness will prompt policymakers to take concrete action, expedite pending projects, and align resources with strategic imperatives.

At its core, the message is clear: self-reliance in defence is a worthy aspiration, but it cannot come at the expense of operational readiness. The nation must balance the long-term goal of building indigenous capability with the immediate need to equip its forces adequately.

This balance requires transparency, accountability, and a pragmatic approach that prioritizes delivering results on the ground over ceremonial announcements or ambitious targets.

As India navigates complex security challenges, the onus lies on political and defence leadership to respond to these warnings with seriousness and urgency. The future of the country’s air defence depends not just on slogans but on concrete, timely action.

The Air Chief Marshal’s candid observations should serve as a wake-up call, reminding all stakeholders that delays and inefficiencies in defence procurement have real-world consequences—consequences that could determine the outcome of future conflicts and the security of millions of citizens. In this context, the public airing of such concerns is not merely a critique but a necessary step towards reform.

The government must now demonstrate that it can move beyond rhetoric to deliver the modernization and capability enhancements that the Indian Air Force urgently needs. The security of the nation, and the lives of those who serve to protect it, depend on it.

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

# Finally Taliban warn cross boarder terrorists

By Uzma Ehtasham



The recent statement by Saeedullah Saeed, a senior commander of the Afghan Taliban, during a police graduation ceremony in Kabul has sent ripples far beyond Afghanistan’s borders. His warning was stark and unmistakable: any armed activity conducted against the orders of the Taliban’s emir—especially those targeting Pakistan—will be deemed sedition. This pronouncement, delivered with rare clarity, carries profound implications for the region’s already fragile peace and security. It signals a pivotal moment in how the Taliban intends to manage its own ranks and engage with its neighbors, particularly Pakistan, which has long borne the consequences of Afghan instability.

For years, the borderlands between Afghanistan and Pakistan have been a theatre of violent skirmishes, insurgencies, and cross-border attacks that have undermined regional peace and development. Various militant factions have often exploited the porous frontier, justifying their actions in the name of jihad, a word loaded with religious, political, and emotional weight. Yet Saeed’s unequivocal message challenges the very premise on which such groups operate. The authority to declare or sanction any such operations, he insists, lies exclusively with the emir—the supreme leader of the Taliban. This means that the self-appointed warriors who act independently, crossing borders and unleashing violence without official sanction, are now being openly condemned

as rebels and lawbreakers.

This stance is more than a mere assertion of control. It reflects a strategic effort by the Taliban leadership to discipline a movement that has long been fragmented by factionalism and competing loyalties. By drawing a hard line on unauthorized militant actions, especially those that could drag Pakistan into further conflict, the Taliban are signaling their intent to prioritize broader regional stability over narrow militant agendas. This is significant. It shows a recognition, at least at the highest levels, that the past era of unchecked militancy cannot continue if the region is to move towards peace and reconstruction.

Pakistan, in particular, has a deep stake in this development. Decades of conflict in Afghanistan have repeatedly spilled over into its territory, often with devastating human and economic costs. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in the 1980s brought waves of refugees and fighters into Pakistan, while the US-led war on terror and NATO’s presence introduced new layers of complexity and violence.

Throughout these turbulent years, Pakistan’s security narrative has been shaped by a mix of burden and cautious engagement. It has expressed solidarity with the Afghan people and supported peace talks, most notably the Doha negotiations, which ultimately paved the way for the US-Taliban agreement. Yet the path has been littered with setbacks, betrayals, and persistent threats from extremist groups.

One cannot ignore the shadow cast by India’s regional strategy, which has often involved supporting proxy elements operating within Pakistan and Afghanistan. These in-

terventions have exacerbated instability, contributing to the loss of tens of thousands of lives and ongoing insecurity. Meanwhile, terrorist outfits like the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and ISIS affiliates continue to exploit the chaotic situation, carrying out attacks that affect not only Pakistan but Afghanistan and the wider region. Saeedullah Saeed’s warning arrives against this complex backdrop, carrying the weight of urgent necessity.

The timing of Saeed’s statement is particularly telling. It comes just before high-level diplomatic talks between the Afghan and Pakistani foreign ministers in Beijing, an event that could mark a new phase of engagement. The decision to include Afghanistan in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) under a trilateral framework with China introduces fresh hopes for economic cooperation and development. Such initiatives have the potential to reshape the region’s future, provided they are underpinned by genuine political will and stability on the ground.

Pakistan’s recent counterterrorism operations, marked by greater intensity and resolve, further underscore a commitment to addressing the threats emanating from militant groups. The anticipated trilateral conference in Kabul this July, bringing together Pakistan, China, and Afghanistan, represents a vital opportunity to build trust and coordinate policies that could foster peace. This moment demands careful nurturing, cautious optimism, and, above all, unity among neighbors who have historically viewed one another with suspicion and hostility.

The road ahead remains perilous. The

legacy of decades of conflict, mistrust, and violence cannot be erased overnight. Yet Saeedullah Saeed’s clear and firm message offers a glimmer of hope. It shows that within the Taliban leadership, there is recognition of the need for law, order, and a monopoly on legitimate use of force—a fundamental principle for any functioning state. This approach, if sincerely pursued, could reduce the cycle of rogue militancy that has long destabilized the border regions and beyond. For the people of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the wider region, the promise of peace is a fragile but vital aspiration.

It rests on leaders who understand that the future cannot be built on factional violence or proxy wars. It depends on diplomatic efforts that respect sovereignty and the rule of law. Most importantly, it requires the commitment to prioritize the welfare of millions caught in the crossfire over narrow political gains.

As the world watches closely, the region’s fate hinges on whether these warnings translate into concrete action. The strength of Saeedullah Saeed’s words lies in their potential to usher in a new era—one where militancy is tamed, diplomacy is elevated, and development can finally take root. The long-suffering people of Afghanistan and Pakistan deserve no less than a future free from the shadow of endless conflict, and this moment may well mark the first step toward that future.

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By Atiq Raja



There’s an enduring belief that morality is an absolute force, a steady light guiding us through the murky waters of human behavior. We like to think of it as a universal truth, a fixed compass that points clearly toward what is right and away from what is wrong. But history, culture, and lived experience consistently show us that this isn’t quite the case. Morality, in truth, is far more complicated, far more human — shaped not by some cosmic decree but by context, necessity, and the passage of time. To speak of morality as a fixed ideal is to ignore the reality of how people have lived, adapted, and justified their actions over centuries. “Do not kill” sounds like an absolute, but we have made exceptions — in wars, in self-defence, in the name of justice.

“Do not steal” is a rule echoed in almost every society, and yet it crumbles in the face of poverty or revolution. A starving child taking bread isn’t seen the same way as a banker siphoning millions. These distinctions matter. They tell us that morality is not about hard rules but about the values and stories we attach to situations. And then there’s Socrates — a man punished by his own society for daring to think too deeply, for questioning the gods and the norms of

his time. His moral courage was condemned by those around him, yet generations later, we hold him up as the father of critical thought. That shift is revealing. It tells us morality is not only what a society deems acceptable, but what it is willing — or unwilling — to understand. Cultures around the world prove this daily. What is honorable in one might be offensive in another.

The South Asian tradition of arranged marriages, for instance, is rooted in familial respect and social harmony. To many in the West, however, it appears restrictive, even coercive. Neither culture is wrong in its own context, but their interpretations of what is morally correct vary dramatically. The same applies to what we eat, how we dress, and how we define family, love, or success. These differences do not weaken the idea of morality; they humanize it. Religions, too, offer frameworks of morality — rich, diverse, and often contradictory. At their core, most preach compassion, truth, humility. But when it comes to modesty, justice, or the role of women, their teachings diverge. And even within the same religion, interpretations change across time and geography.

What was once read as divine command is now often debated, reinterpreted, even challenged. This is not heresy. It is evolution — a necessary one. Consider how societies have treated slavery, women’s rights, or same-sex relationships. Not so long ago, slavery was accepted as the economic backbone of empires. It was legally de-

fended, religiously justified, and morally normalized. Today, it is an unthinkable atrocity. The transformation did not come because the world discovered a new rulebook. It came because we listened to those who suffered, who resisted, who made their humanity impossible to ignore. The same can be said of women’s right to vote, to work, to speak, to lead. Or the long fight for LGBTQ+ rights — still ongoing, still controversial in many parts of the world, but undeniably a reflection of shifting moral awareness.

So what does it mean when we say morality evolves? It means we are learning. Slowly, often painfully, but learning nonetheless. With each generation comes the opportunity to question what we inherited, to keep what is compassionate and discard what is cruel. This evolution requires more than intelligence; it needs empathy — the ability to see life through the eyes of another. But here lies the danger. When people cling to the belief that their moral framework is the only correct one, they stop listening. This kind of moral absolutism has led to some of the darkest chapters in human history. Colonialism was justified as a “civilizing mission”. Religious wars were waged to “save souls”. Genocide has often been cloaked in the language of moral purification. The damage was done not just with guns or fire, but with the terrifying conviction that only one truth deserved to exist.

To believe that our values are superior is to silence others. It kills the conversation.

And morality, if it is to have any use at all, must be a conversation — a constant act of questioning, listening, and responding. It is not a commandment, handed down to be obeyed without thought. It is a dialogue, written and rewritten by every generation. Of course, none of this means morality is meaningless. Relativism — the idea that everything is acceptable if someone, somewhere, believes it — is not the goal. There are still things we must stand against: cruelty, injustice, indifference. But we must also carry humility with us. The humility to admit that our moral compass is not infallible.

The humility to adjust, to grow, to be willing to learn from others — especially from those who have suffered under the weight of systems we never had to question. In a time when the world feels increasingly polarized — politically, culturally, ideologically — this openness becomes even more vital. Moral certainty might feel reassuring, but it is often a disguise for fear. Fear of change. Fear of difference. What we need instead is the courage to be morally curious. Morality is not carved in stone. It is written on the ever-shifting pages of human consciousness. It listens. It changes. It grows. And in that growth lies its real strength — not in absoluteness, but in its humanity.

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# This used to be our playground

By Mustafa Tariq Wynne

Cities don’t collapse overnight. In Islamabad, they collapse one park, pitch and playground at a time. What once set the capital apart from sprawling metropolises like Lahore and Karachi was its abundance of green spaces, public parks and accessible sports grounds. As construction projects expand and concrete spreads, these features that made Islamabad unique are vanishing.

What were once spaces for laughter, leisure, and family time are now being replaced by highways, commercial plots, and parking lots. Children’s playgrounds, neighbourhood cricket grounds, and football fields — foundational spaces for a healthy and connected city — are being erased in favor of car-centric ‘development’.

Take the case of Al-Muslim Cricket Ground in Sector F-11. Once a beloved cricket ground for young cricketers, it has been slowly dismantled. In 2020, its practice area was razed and replaced with residential plots. More recently, mounds of mud were dumped onto the main pitch. The Capital Development Authority (CDA) now speaks of converting it into a “multipurpose facility”.

A children’s park between sectors F-11 and F-10 near Iran Avenue has disappeared entirely. Once a lively, inclusive space, it welcomed families from all walks of life, a place where children played freely in the evenings and weekends while parents gathered on benches or strolled under the trees. It was one of the few public spaces in the city that truly belonged to everyone, with no barriers of class or cost. Today, that park is gone, buried beneath a newly constructed flyover. While wealthier families can still afford private clubs and indoor play zones, the city’s majority is left with nothing.

This is not an isolated case. In the New Blue Area, a cluster of once-thriving sports grounds has been steadily dismantled to make way for road expansion and commercial development. Two football grounds once stood side by side — one has vanished entirely and the other has been reduced to nearly half its original size.

The story is just as bleak for cricket. Of the three cricket grounds that once served the area, one has been completely erased. Now, big, tall buildings are resurrected there. Another cricket practice area has been shrunk to the size of a small driveway, with shortened boundaries of its main play area. The third

ground has also lost space, with its boundary from the Fatima Jinnah Park end now only about 50 to 55 meters long, making it unfit for standard play. It is not long before these leftovers are also auctioned off to loaded real-estate developers.

Even Kachnar Park, a much-loved green refuge for residents of Sectors I-8 and I-9, has also shrunk in size. When the Islamabad Expressway was expanded, large sections of the park were swallowed by new lanes of traffic. What was once a peaceful escape for morning walkers, joggers, and families is now edged by the roar of vehicles. Locals who used to find calm beneath its trees now find themselves fenced in by asphalt, noise, and pollution.

The hockey grounds in Sectors G-9 and G-6, right next to the Itwar Bazaar, have fallen into disrepair, with no AstroTurf, no lighting, and little to no maintenance. The players play on grass, which was phased out in the 1970s. The G-9 hockey ground no longer resembles a proper hockey facility. Instead, it’s become a makeshift space where young people cobble together games of tape-ball cricket, volleyball, or informal football, not out of choice, but because there’s nowhere else to go.

And mind you, this is just the story of Zones I and III, two of Islamabad’s five designated zones. The situation in the remaining zones is even more troubling. These are dominated by private, gated housing societies for the rich, whose focus is overwhelmingly commercial. In many of these societies, parks are either limited or absent, and sports grounds are rare, if they exist at all with minimal oversight and little regard for community infrastructure. They do, however, cater to affluent residents with paid amenities like cinemas, bowling alleys, indoor gyms, and private sports lounges.

It is also pertinent to mention that even the few public sports grounds still under CDA management are not truly accessible. Those who wish to book these grounds — especially on weekends — are charged exorbitant fees, ranging from Rs30,000 to Rs40,000 per day, perhaps even more, depending on the grounds’ location. These rates are far beyond the reach of most local clubs and community teams. Yet despite collecting such high fees, the upkeep remains abysmal. The pitches are maintained by makeshift curators with little expertise, and the grass, when it’s cut at all, is mowed by ageing tractors that leave deep tire tracks on a fragile turf.

With every cricket pitch removed, another generation loses its launchpad. Islamabad has long produced athletes in cricket, football and perhaps hockey — not due to elite academies but because public spaces allow young people to play, train, and grow. That ecosystem is drying up at a rapid rate.

As public grounds shrink, privatised sports facilities are on the rise — but they’re not for everyone. In a city where inflation is stretching family budgets, paying Rs2,000 per hour to play paddle tennis in a private club is simply out of reach for most. For the vast majority of students, working-class youth and aspiring athletes, such prices are simply out of reach. A city cannot function like this: where recreation becomes a luxury and public infrastructure collapses while private profit flourishes. This deepening divide is not just unsustainable but unjust.

One wonders why a country of nearly 250 million people struggles to consistently produce world-class athletes like Sohail Abbas or Arshad Nadeem.

The answer lies in the systemic neglect of grassroots sports infrastructure and the commodification of recreational spaces, while nations with significantly smaller populations excel on the global stage.

At the Paris 2024 Olympics, Pakistan sent a contingent of only seven athletes, a stark contrast to its vast population. In comparison, countries like New Zealand, with a population of approximately five million, secured 18 gold medals. Australia, with a population of approximately 27.3 million, achieved remarkable success at the Paris 2024 Olympics. The Australian Olympic team secured a total of 53 medals: 18 gold, 19 silver, and 16 bronze, marking the nation’s most successful Olympic campaign to date.

Islamabad’s current planning philosophy treats sports and play as a luxury. The ‘babocracy’ might get their dopamine hit from the protocol they enjoy, from and the screech of sirens yelling ‘Hato Bacho’ But for a generation grappling with rising stress, economic insecurity, and climate anxiety, play is not optional. It is essential.

If the trend continues, Islamabad risks becoming a two-tiered city: private sports for the privileged and ruins for everyone else. The CDA and city planners must urgently reevaluate their priorities. Sports grounds and parks are not idle land; they are infrastructure for public health, talent, equity and community. Without them, the city loses more than space. It loses its soul.

# Defence first

By Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani

The government’s preparations to present the federal budget for the new fiscal year in the National Assembly have entered the final stages. However, like every year, some analysts are raising questions about the budget allocated for defence, citing the economic crisis, foreign debt, and the significance of the social sectors.

The Roman Empire was a superpower in ancient times, and it was very strong economically, but it eventually collapsed due to its declining defence capabilities. Once upon a time, Baghdad was a cradle of knowledge and craftsmanship, and it also enjoyed the status of a global centre of education, trade, science and culture, but the Mongols destroyed it.

Paper currency was introduced in ancient China under the Song dynasty for the first time in history. However, the downfall was due to the inability to resist foreign aggression. The present-day Italian city of Venice was considered the largest trading power in the Mediterranean in the past, but due to its weak defence, it was conquered by the French army led by Napoleon Bonaparte.

During the Mughal era, India was globally recognised due to its development and prosperity. No empire in the world could compete with the glory and splendour of the Mughal emperors. But then history tells us that the Mughals lost their throne and crown due to their lagging behind in modern defence capabilities. Similarly, the Ottoman Empire, which ruled three continents for centuries, was defeated in World War I and disappeared from the world map.

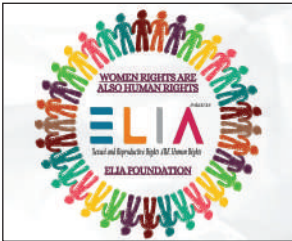
In the modern era, the significance of the defence sector’s key role in national security, prestige, geographical stability and economic prosperity can be evaluated from the fact that the total volume of global defence spending reached \$2.718 trillion in 2024. According to international media reports, this is the largest annual increase since the end of the cold war between the US and the Soviet Union.

Reportedly, the only superpower America allocated a huge amount of \$997 billion for war expenses, while the defence spending of the world’s second-largest economic power, China, was reported to be \$314 billion, which is increasing rapidly. Russia increased its defence budget to \$149 billion due to the ongoing military conflict with Ukraine.

While India has the highest defence budget in the South Asian region, with \$46.5 billion, Pakistan’s defence budget was limited to only \$10.2 billion, which is approximately 0.4 per cent of the global defence expenditure. Prominent countries that have allocated billions more than Pakistan in the defence budget include Australia, South Korea, Germany, Japan, Saudi Arabia, France and the UK. The Nato countries are committed to spending at least 2.0 per cent of their GDP on defence. However, the above-mentioned countries claim that the purpose of increasing defence spending is not war but the prevention of war.

From the ancient era to modern times, the survival of any sovereign country depends on its strong defence capabilities. The military capability of any country determines its influence at the global and regional levels.





## President Zardari signs 'Child Marriage Restraint Bill' into law

The new law bans Nikah Khwan from solemnizing marriages involving anyone under 18, marking a decisive step against child marriage in Pakistan

By Asghar Ali Mubarak

ISLAMABAD: President Asif Ali Zardari has signed the Child Marriage Restraint Bill, marking a crucial step forward in protecting children's rights across Pakistan. The bill, introduced in the National Assembly by PPP leader Sharmila Faruqi and in the Senate by Senator Sherry Rehman, establishes clear legal boundaries to prevent child marriage.

Under the new law, marriage officials, or Nikah Khwan, are forbidden from solemnizing any marriage where either party is under the age of 18. Those who violate this rule face up to one year in prison and a fine of 100,000 rupees. The law further stipulates that any man over 18 marrying an underage girl could be sentenced to up to three years of rigor-



ous imprisonment. Parents who arrange or fail to prevent child marriages are also liable to the same penalties, reflecting the serious stance the law takes against this practice.

Courts are empowered to intervene proactively and stop child marriages if they become aware of such cases. The legislation also ensures protection for whistleblowers who report underage marriages and

wish to remain anonymous, an important safeguard for those brave enough to speak out.

This bill represents a significant stride towards ending child marriage and promoting the rights and well-being of children throughout Pakistan. Senator Sherry Rehman hailed the bill's approval as a landmark victory for women's and children's rights in the country. She paid tribute to

President Zardari for signing the bill despite considerable pressure, calling it a milestone that ushers in a new era of reforms.

Rehman stressed that this law is the culmination of a long and difficult struggle and will be pivotal in improving girls' education and health. More than just legislation, she said, it is a promise to uphold girls' rights to education, health, and a prosperous future. By banning child marriage, the law offers protection, hope, and brighter prospects for generations to come.

Sherry Rehman urged other provinces to follow Sindh and the federal government's example by sending a strong message against child marriage through similar laws, reinforcing a nationwide commitment to safeguarding children's futures.

## Cop penalized after man snatched in Karachi

By Aziz Khatri

KARACHI: In a troubling incident just days ahead of Eid, armed men snatched sacrificial animals and a rickshaw from a citizen in Karachi's Ayesha Manzil area—prompting swift disciplinary action against the local police. The city's police chief, Additional IG Javed Alam Odho, has ordered that one year of service be forfeited for the Station House Officer (SHO) of Azizabad, where the incident occurred.

The move signals a tough stance on police negligence, particularly in cases that shake public trust. Odho also directed officers to arrest the culprits and recover the stolen animals and rickshaw within three days. He warned that failure to show progress would lead to seri-



ous legal consequences for those responsible. The incident, which took place near Ayesha Manzil, involved four armed suspects on two motorbikes.

According to the police report filed at Azizabad station, the victim, Rashid, had been returning home to the FC Area after failing to sell his three sacrificial lambs. It was then that the assailants stopped him and took off with the rickshaw and the animals. A video recorded shortly after the incident shows Rashid visibly shaken and in tears—a powerful image that has stirred public anger and highlighted the growing sense of insecurity.

## Riyadh issues quiet warning to Tehran over risk of Israeli attack

Riyadh's warning, set against the backdrop of its rapprochement with Tehran, signals a shrewd shift towards pragmatic diplomacy in a region on edge

News Desk

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia has quietly delivered a stark warning to Iran, cautioning that failure to reach a nuclear agreement with the United States could trigger a military strike from Israel—a message reflecting mounting regional anxiety as tensions escalate over Tehran's nuclear ambitions.

According to a report from an international news agency, Saudi Arabia dispatched its Defence Minister on a confidential diplomatic mission to Tehran last month, carrying what sources described as an unambiguous and urgent message from King Salman bin Abdulaziz. The high-stakes meeting, held on April 17 within the walls of Iran's presidential compound, reportedly brought together Iran's newly elected President Masoud Pezeshkian, Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, and the powerful Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, General Mohammad Bagheri.

Though no official statements have been issued by either capital, the message—while delivered diplomatically—is believed to have expressed deep concern over the path Iran's nuclear program is taking, es-



pecially in light of increasingly explicit threats from Israel to act unilaterally. Riyadh's warning, emerging just months after the historic thaw in Saudi-Iranian relations, illustrates the kingdom's evolving role as a pragmatic mediator amid rising fears of a broader regional conflict.

The urgency of the Saudi démarche mirrors growing Western alarm, as intelligence assessments suggest Tehran may be edging dangerously close to weapons-grade uranium enrichment. Against this volatile backdrop, the kingdom appears determined to avoid being caught in the crossfire of an Israeli-Iranian confrontation—one that could ignite a firestorm stretching well beyond the Gulf.

At the same time, Saudi Arabia's intervention signals a broader geopolitical calcu-

lus. As the kingdom pushes ahead with its Vision 2030 agenda—aimed at transforming its economy and reducing dependence on oil—it has every incentive to preserve regional stability. An open conflict between Israel and Iran would be a direct threat not just to Gulf security, but to the investment climate and economic progress Saudi Arabia is striving to build.

This quiet yet assertive move from Riyadh also highlights the limits of traditional diplomacy at a time when backchannel negotiations between Washington and Tehran remain precarious. The 2015 nuclear accord, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), continues to hang in the balance. Efforts to revive the deal have stalled, with both sides trading accusations and signals of mistrust.

## Over 1.5m pilgrims attend final Friday prayers in Mecca

News Desk

MECCA: More than 1.5 million pilgrims from across the globe gathered at Masjid al-Haram in Mecca for the final Friday prayers ahead of the commencement of Hajj rituals, marking a powerful display of unity, devotion, and spiritual anticipation.

Worshippers filled every corner of the holy mosque and surrounding courtyards, seeking blessings before the official rites of Hajj begin. Amid the sweltering Saudi heat, colourful umbrellas formed a patchwork of shade across the congregation, as pilgrims sought protection from the harsh weather. Despite the intensity of the heat, Saudi au-



thorities confirmed there were no reports of contagious or epidemic outbreaks.

However, five heatstroke cases were recorded in Mecca, according to the Ministry of Hajj. The Ministry of Health reported that nearly 1,600 pilgrims are being treated in intensive care units, including eight who underwent open-heart surgery and 104 who had angioplasty procedures. In a remarkable medical intervention, a team at the Mecca Health Centre saved an Egyptian woman from losing her eyesight, highlighting the readiness and capacity of Saudi Arabia's health services during the pilgrimage season.

To ensure the safety and security of pilgrims, the Saudi Ministry of Interior deployed 50,000 personnel across the holy sites. Officials confirmed that all unauthorized entry routes have been sealed off, and dozens of individuals attempting to enter without valid permits have been arrested. Accessibility remains a priority, with authorities providing large electric vehicles for the elderly and disabled, ensuring they can perform Hajj rituals with comfort and dignity.

## China launches global arbitration body backed by allies

Observers say the rise of IOMed signals a growing pushback against Trump's America First stance, which keeps shaking the global order's fragile balance

News Desk

HONG KONG: China has officially launched a new international arbitration organization, backed by a coalition of friendly nations, in a move seen as part of a broader shift in the global order. The organization, known as the International Organization for Mediation (IOMed), was formally inaugurated at a high-profile signing ceremony in Hong Kong. Pakistan's Foreign Minister, Ishaq Dar, attended the event alongside delegates from 32 signatory countries.

The ceremony also drew representatives from over 80 nations and 20 international bodies, underlining the growing appeal of alternative platforms for conflict resolution—especially at a time when traditional global institutions are being tested. Observers note that the formation of IOMed comes as US President Donald Trump's "America First" doctrine continues to challenge the foundations of the existing international system.

In this context, China's move appears both timely



and strategic, offering an alternative vision of global governance—one grounded in diplomacy and multilateralism. The Hong Kong government has described IOMed as an intergovernmental forum designed to offer peaceful solutions to disputes between states. It aims to provide countries, particularly those outside dominant Western blocs, with a neutral platform to settle differences without escalating tensions.

During the signing ceremony, Foreign Minister Dar congratulated his Chinese counterpart, Wang Yi, on the launch of IOMed. Wang, in turn, expressed gratitude for Dar's participation. According to Pakistan's Foreign Of-

fice, this marked the second meeting between the two ministers in just ten days—a sign of the deepening ties between Islamabad and Beijing. Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to what they call their "ironclad friendship" and strategic partnership.

They also expressed satisfaction with the pace of bilateral cooperation and discussed regional and global developments. As global alliances shift and trust in Western-led institutions falters in parts of the world, IOMed may represent a significant attempt to reshape international diplomacy—with China positioning itself at the centre of a more multipolar order.

## PM to attend Jirga in Quetta today

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif is scheduled to visit Quetta tomorrow for a one-day trip to participate in a key jirga aimed at addressing Balochistan's security and political challenges.

According to sources, the jirga will include the Governor and Chief Minister of Balochistan, provincial ministers, and members of the Balochistan Assembly. Tribal and political leaders from across the province have also been invited to take part in the meeting.

The discussions are expected to centre on the overall security landscape and other urgent issues facing the province, with a focus on fostering trust and collaboration between federal authorities and local stakeholders.

## UN warns entire Gaza population faces risk of famine

News Desk

GENEVA: The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has issued a dire warning, stating that every single resident of Gaza is now at risk of famine—a crisis unprecedented in scale anywhere in the world today.

In a press briefing from Geneva, OCHA spokesperson Jens Laerke painted a harrowing picture of the humanitarian collapse unfolding in Gaza. "It is the only place on Earth where an entire population faces such a threat,"



Laerke said, stressing that the flow of aid remains disastrously inadequate. "What is arriving is akin to drip-feeding a catastrophe," he added.

Although around 900 aid

trucks have reportedly entered Gaza in the past ten days through a limited number of reopened entry points, operational hurdles have prevented meaningful distribu-

tion. Nearly 600 of these trucks were offloaded, yet much of the aid has not reached the people due to what Laerke described as logistical bottlenecks and dangerously unsafe conditions.

The UN representative criticized the aid corridors authorized by Israeli authorities as being congested and unpredictable, marked by excessive delays and insecurity. These restrictions, coupled with limited entry approvals, have strangled humanitarian access just as the territory plunges deeper into starvation and deprivation.

## Pakistan boosts Kabul mission in bid to deepen bilateral relations

By Asghar Ali Mubarak

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan has announced the elevation of its diplomatic mission in Afghanistan to ambassador-level representation, a move hailed by Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Ishaq Dar as a step towards fostering deeper cooperation between the two neighboring nations.

In an official statement issued from Islamabad, Dar expressed optimism that the decision would help expand bilateral engagement across critical sectors including trade, security, and eco-



nomics. "This upgrade signals our intent to work closely with Afghanistan and support regional stability through mutual respect and dialogue," he said.

Until now, Pakistan's mission in Kabul was led by a chargé d'affaires. The appointment of a full ambassador marks a significant shift in Islamabad's approach, suggesting a more struc-

tured and assertive diplomatic presence amid an evolving regional landscape. The change is widely seen as a gesture aimed at easing tensions and rebuilding trust, particularly in light of cross-border security concerns and longstanding issues over trade and refugee management.

Dar also noted that relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan are "progressing in the right direction," despite challenges. The announcement comes at a time when Pakistan is seeking to stabilize its western frontier, enhance border co-

operation, and prevent the spillover of militancy and economic disruption from Afghanistan.

Observers believe this move reflects Islamabad's broader strategy to engage Kabul through sustained diplomacy rather than public confrontation, especially in the context of its own domestic security recalibrations. For Kabul, the appointment of a full ambassador could be interpreted as a recognition of its legitimacy in regional affairs, while offering a platform to discuss shared concerns more constructively.

## Pakistan, Ethiopia explore closer cooperation in higher education

By Zahid Karani

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan and Ethiopia are poised to deepen their bilateral cooperation in higher education following a high-level meeting in Islamabad on Friday. The discussion between Dr Jemal Beker Abdula, Ethiopia's Special Envoy and Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, and Dr. Mukhtar Ahmed, Chairman of Pakistan's Higher Education Commission (HEC), focused on expanding academic collaboration through various initiatives.

Both sides explored opportunities for student and faculty exchange programs, joint curriculum development, quality assurance frameworks, collaborative research projects, and knowledge sharing, especially in educational digitalization. The dialogue emphasized key sectors including agriculture, science and technology, medicine, engineering, and artificial intelligence, reflecting shared priorities for innovation-driven growth.



Ambassador Dr. Jemal highlighted the strategic focus Ethiopian Prime Minister Dr. Abiy Ahmed places on quality education and modern technology adoption. He acknowledged Pakistan's extensive experience in higher education as a valuable asset for Ethiopia's efforts to develop its human capital. Describing education diplomacy as a crucial mechanism for fostering sustainable bilateral relations, he emphasized the long-term benefits of strengthened academic ties.

Dr. Mukhtar Ahmed welcomed the initiative and reiterated Pakistan's commitment to supporting Ethiopia's academic advancement. He

shared recent progress in Pakistan's higher education sector, particularly regarding digital learning platforms and enhanced research capacity, pledging full cooperation from the HEC to establish institutional linkages and provide educational opportunities to Ethiopian students in Pakistan.

In a further gesture of collaboration, the HEC chairman invited senior officials from Ethiopia's Ministry of Education and leading universities to participate in the 6th Vice Chancellors Forum, scheduled for June 23–25, 2025, in Rabat, Morocco. This platform offers an additional opportunity to exchange ideas and build partnerships.