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PM Shehbaz, Erdogan vows to reduce tensions in region

ISTANBUL (APP): Pakistan and Turkey expressed their commitment to increase bilateral trade volume to five billion US dollars and discussed ways to increase bilateral trade and investment in special economic zones.

Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan made the commitment while addressing a joint press conference after their meeting here. The Prime Minister, in his remarks, appreciated the unprecedented progress of Turkiye in all fields under the leadership of President Erdogan and said that Pakistan was proud of its friendship with Turkiye.

He said important meetings were held with Turkish businessmen in the B2B forum and comprehensive and constructive talks were held with President Erdogan.

"We discussed increasing investment in special economic zones and we are determined to achieve the target of 5 billion dollars in bilateral trade volume." He mentioned the common stance and cooperation of the two countries on global and regional disputes and said that Pakistan supported Turkiye's position on the Cyprus issue.

He thanked Turkiye for its unequivocal stance on the Kashmir issue. The Prime Minister, while mentioning the talks aimed at enhancing bilateral cooperation, said that Pakistan's success was Turkiye's success and Turkiye's progress was Pakistan's progress. "We have to give a new dimension to the partnership between Pakistan and Turkiye."

He thanked President Erdogan for the wonderful welcome and warm hospitality. He described Istanbul as a beautiful city and a beautiful blend of East and West and said that the people of Pakistan and Turkiye have deep love and attachment to each other.

"There is a heartfelt bond between the two," he said and reminded that in Turkiye's war of independence, the Muslims of the subcontinent fully supported and mothers and sisters donated their jewellery.

"This unique relationship is based on shared faith, culture, history, mutual brotherhood and sacrifices."

He said that Pakistan-Turkiye relations have a wonderful history. Both countries always supported each other in every difficulty. "Be it war or earthquake, natural disasters or floods, Turkiye has always supported Pakistan. Turkiye's help in Muzaffargarh and other flood-affected areas is part of history," he mentioned.

He said Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan himself came to flood-hit Muzaffargarh along with his wife.



ISTANBUL: The President of Turkiye Recep Tayyip Erdogan receives the Prime Minister of Pakistan Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif at Vahdateen Palace



TEHRAN: Chairman of the Senate Syed Yousuf Raza Gillani in a meeting with Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, Speaker of the Parliament of Iran

Strong Pak-US partnership vital for regional peace: President Zardari

ISLAMABAD (APP): President Asif Ali Zardari, extended felicitations to the President of the United States of America Donald Trump and the American people on the momentous occasion of the United States' 250 years since the Declaration of Independence. In his letter to the US President, he said that the United States continued to build upon its enduring legacy of strength, innovation and commitment to the ideals of freedom, democracy and opportunity. He noted that the remarkable achievements of the American people over the past two and a half centuries have contributed significantly to global progress and prosperity, President Secretariat Media Wing said in a press release President Zardari said that Pakistan and the United States shared a long-standing relationship based on mutual respect, shared interests and a common commitment to advancing peace, security and prosperity. He emphasised that these enduring ties have been further strengthened by the vibrant Pakistani-American community, whose achievements and contributions continue to enrich both societies while serving as a lasting bridge of friendship and understanding.

"Describing the bilateral relationship as being on an ascendant trajectory, characterised by renewed engagement and a shared determination to build a stronger, future-oriented partnership, the President stressed the importance of sustaining this momentum through structured engagement in energy security, trade and investment, defence and counter-terrorism, and other areas of mutual interest," it was added. Underscoring that a strong Pakistan-US partnership directly contributes to regional peace.



FAISALABAD: Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Mr. Muhammad Aurangzeb, receiving the honorary shield from the president of FCCI after the post Federal budget seminar at Faisalabad Chamber of commerce and industry (FCCI).

Gilani, Ghalibaf vows to further enhance Pak-Iran relations

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chairman Senate of Pakistan, Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani, met with the Speaker of the Islamic Consultative Assembly of Iran, Dr Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, in Tehran.

The meeting featured a comprehensive exchange of views on Pakistan-Iran bilateral relations, parliamentary cooperation, regional peace and stability, challenges facing the Muslim Ummah, and the promotion of global peace.

During the meeting, Chairman Senate expressed his heartfelt condolences to the Government, Parliament, and people of Iran on the martyrdom of the Supreme Leader.

He reaffirmed Pakistan's solidarity with the brotherly nation during this difficult time and stated that peace, stability, and prosperity are essential for lasting peace and development across the region.

Chairman Senate Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani said that Pakistan and Iran are bound by deep-rooted historical, religious, cultural, and fraternal ties, which should be further strengthened through enhanced cooperation.

He emphasized the importance of expanding parliamentary exchanges, economic collaboration, trade, and people-to-people contacts between the two countries. Speaker of the Iranian Parliament, Dr Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, appreciated Pakistan's steadfast support and solidarity during Iran's difficult times.

He remarked that Pakistan has consistently proven to be a sincere and reliable friend of Iran in times of trial and that the Iranian leadership and people hold Pakistan and its people in the highest esteem.

Both leaders reaffirmed their commitment to further strengthening Pakistan-Iran relations and enhancing cooperation for regional peace, stability, prosperity, and the promotion of global peace through sustained bilateral engagement.

Political trust strongest asset of bilateral relationship: DPM

ISTANBUL (INP): Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar has said that Pakistan and Türkiye are ready to shape a shared future, not only as trusted friends but also as partners in prosperity, innovation, and regional stability.

Addressing the Pakistan–Türkiye B2B Conference in Istanbul, he said the two countries have consistently stood by each other on issues of regional peace and security, humanitarian assistance, and support for their core national interests.

He added that this political trust remains one of the strongest assets of the bilateral relationship and must now be translated into a dynamic economic partnership. The Deputy Prime Minister said the international landscape is changing rapidly, with the global economy being reshaped by geopolitical competition, technological transformation, shifting supply chains, energy transitions, and evolving trade and investment patterns.

He noted that Pakistan and Türkiye are strategically located at the crossroads of Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and Central Asia, adding that together they connect markets and create opportunities beyond their borders.

He said this strategic geography must be turned into an economic advantage for both countries.

Ishaq Dar said diplomacy today is no longer limited to political dialogue but has increasingly become economic diplomacy.

Senior doctors initiates mediation efforts to end YDA's strike

QUETTA (ANN): Senior medical professionals have stepped forward to help resolve the deadlock caused by the Young Doctors Association's (YDA) strike at Civil Hospital Quetta in the wake of the acid attack on Dr Mah Noor Nasar.

According to sources, a delegation of senior doctors visited the YDA protest camp and held discussions with the association's leadership in an effort to pave the way for the restoration of normal healthcare services at the hospital.

The delegation comprised psychiatrist Prof Dr Ghulam Rasool, Prof Dr Ashraf Achakzai, Teaching Staff Association President Dr Abdullah Khan Achakzai, Prof Surgeon Bazam Bizenjo, Dr Khalil Baloch and several other senior physicians.

Bakht Kakar vows to ensure timely, quality medical services for people of Balochistan

QUETTA (ANN): Balochistan Health Minister Bakht Muhammad Kakar pledged full medical support for those injured in the deadly Dhana Sar passenger bus accident, saying the provincial government had mobilized all available healthcare resources to ensure prompt and effective treatment. In a statement, the minister expressed deep sorrow over the loss of lives in the tragic accident, describing it as a devastating incident that had left the bereaved families and the entire province in mourning.

He said the Health Department immediately declared an emergency after receiving information about the accident, directing hospitals concerned to activate emergency protocols while doctors, nurses and paramedical staff were instructed to report for duty without delay.

Kakar said comprehensive arrangements had been put in place to provide uninterrupted medical care to the injured.

Transport safety laws to be enforced more rigorously in Balochistan: Zarak

QUETTA (ANN): Member of the Balochistan Assembly Sheikh Zarak Khan Mandokhail called for strict accountability following the deadly passenger bus accident at Dhana Sar, saying the provincial government was determined to ensure justice for the victims and their families through a transparent legal process.

In a statement, the lawmaker expressed profound grief over the loss of lives in the tragedy and extended heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families, assuring them of the government's full support during this difficult time.

Mandokhail said the provincial government had acted swiftly by registering a First Information Report (FIR) against the bus company and the driver, adding that a thorough investigation was in progress to establish the circumstances that led to the fatal accident.

He said investigators were examining every aspect of the incident to determine whether negligence or violations of transport regulations had contributed to the tragedy, stressing that anyone found responsible would face legal action without exception. The MPA underscored that protecting the lives of citizens remained one of the government's highest priorities and said transport safety laws would be enforced more rigorously across the province.

Governor vows to enhance Balochistan's public healthcare system

Says effective leadership and sound management essential for improving public service delivery

QUETTA, (VoM Report): Governor Balochistan Sheikh Jaffar Khan Mandokhail inaugurated the Digital Health Information System (DHIS) and the Electronic Medical Record (EMR) module, terming the initiative a major breakthrough that will improve transparency, accountability and operational efficiency in the province's public healthcare system.

Speaking at the Third Balochistan Healthcare Leadership Conference in Quetta, the governor said the digital platform would enable systematic collection and management of health data from medical facilities across the province, allowing authorities to monitor healthcare delivery with greater accuracy and efficiency. He said the newly launched system would provide real-time information on the attendance of doctors and paramedical staff, the availability and distribution of medicines, and the functioning of health facilities, including district headquarters hospitals, Basic Health Units (BHUs) and labour rooms.

Mandokhail said the introduction of the digital monitoring mechanism marked an important step towards strengthening institutional accountability, adding that District Health Officers (DHOs) and Medical Superintendents would now be directly responsible for the performance and service delivery of their respective health institutions.

The governor lauded Provincial Health Minister Bakht Muhammad Kakar and Health Secretary Mujeeb ur Rehman Panezai for leading the reform process.



NABLUS, WEST BANK, PALESTINE: The interior of a restaurant is seen heavily damaged after Israeli settlers raided and set fire to the building near An-Najah National University

MQM-P still believes in shortcut politics: Sharjeel Memon

KARACHI (INP): MQM-P leader Farooq Sattar has said that the MQM will not avoid resigning from the National Assembly seats or sitting on opposition benches if the party's demands not accepted.

"Rana Sanaullah and Khawaja Asif are saying that they have nothing to do with the removal of the MQM's governor," Sattar said in a press conference.

He demanded return of the governorship, "if the step was taken to appease someone". "We have given the names of our missing workers to concerned authorities," MQM leader said.

He demanded that Karachi being made an administrative unit and being handed over to the federation. He said the time has ripe for bringing citizens to the roads. He alleged that an extraconstitutional government being run in Sindh.

Farooq Sattar appealed to the prime minister to visit Karachi and urged that the federal government should play its constitutional role.

Sindh's Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon, reacting to Farooq Sattar's press conference, said that the MQM-P still believed in shortcut politics rather than the public mandate. Using issues like federal intervention as tools for political pressure is proof of the MQM-P's political blackmail.

He said that the MQM-P has lost the trust of the people, it was haunted by memories of power, and it was searching for shortcuts.



TEHRAN: Hundreds of thousands of Iranians gather at the Imam Khomeini Mosalla to attend the funeral prayer at Imam Khomeini Mosalla Mosque during the funeral ceremony for former Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and his family members

Pakistan's strategy against illegal migration becomes model for other countries: Talal

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan's efforts to combat illegal migration received international recognition at the high-level meeting of the Global Alliance to Counter Migrant Smuggling in Vienna, where the European Union commended the country's effective measures that have significantly reduced irregular migration. Addressing the conference, Minister of State for Interior Talal Chaudhry said Pakistan's strategy against illegal migration had become a model for other countries.

He attributed the success to the policies and coordinated efforts led by Prime Minister Muhammad Shahbaz Sharif and Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi, stating that illegal migration had declined by 47 percent under their leadership.

Chaudhry described irregular migration as a global challenge that extends beyond national borders and stressed that no country can address the issue in isolation.

THE VOICE OF MILLIONS

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Silent deaths in Gaza

As we approach the second anniversary of the horrific and genocidal assault on the civilian population of the Gaza Strip, we are witnessing Israel's systematic disregard for international law and human rights and its weaponization of humanitarian principles. In any armed conflict, the denial of food and water constitutes a war crime under international criminal law. But the mass starvation in Gaza—which quickly evolved into a man-made famine—is unlike any other crisis in modern times.

In Gaza, not only is access to food and water deliberately obstructed, but humanitarian aid itself has become a tool of warfare—used as leverage and denied as a means of collective punishment. The visibility of this crisis, the abundance of credible evidence of war crimes, the immense suffering of civilians—above all women and children—and the impunity of powerful actors make this both a test case for the erosion of humanitarian norms and a tragic outlier in the history of international law.

The blockade and starvation of Gaza are not new. They have a long history—and a uniquely bleak future compared to other conflict-related famines. Since 2007, Gaza has been under Israeli blockade. During this period, Israel systematically calculated the minimum caloric intake required for survival—creating a so-called "Gaza Diet."

Entering the war, Israel had detailed knowledge of the population's basic needs and made a conscious, sustained choice to deny adequate access to food and clean water for over 21 months.

Unlike other conflicts, there is no escape from the devastation in Gaza. The entire territory is a war zone, and all 2.3 million Palestinians are treated as enemies—collectively punished and militarily targeted. Humanitarian convoys wait at border crossings, fully loaded, but are denied entry. Food rots within sight of starving families, often just meters away.

Due to Gaza's specific circumstances, starvation spread rapidly—from the North to the Center and then to the South. By December 2023, with winter approaching, most homes and residential areas were destroyed. The majority of Gazans were living in tents or the ruins of buildings—without food, water, cooking facilities, heating, or sanitation. Evidence has long shown that catastrophic living conditions, a crumbling healthcare system, and severely inadequate and sporadic humanitarian aid produced mass malnutrition and imminent famine.

Israel has repeatedly denied UN and NGO reports about the use of starvation as a weapon. The US government also ignored clear warnings and overwhelming evidence. For months, most Western governments avoided using the words famine or genocide in relation to Gaza. The UN's Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), the authoritative global body on famine assessments, has yet to formally declare a famine in Gaza—despite mounting evidence—due to political pressure from perpetrators. Statements by UN Special Rapporteurs, based on scientific data, and multiple interim rulings by the International Court of Justice warning of the "plausibility of famine" have been disregarded. Instead, Israeli forces have responded with further attacks on aid convoys and on civilians trying to collect sacks of flour. These were not collateral damages; they were targeting tactics.

Day by day, the situation has gone from bad to worse—to catastrophic. On March 2, 2025, during a broken ceasefire, Israel blocked all international humanitarian aid from entering Gaza, allowing only minimal deliveries through a militarized and dehumanizing distribution system it controls. In March 2025, the blockade entered a harsher phase, marked by stricter restrictions and the militarization of aid distribution. After two months without food and water, the United States, alongside private contractors and mercenaries under Israeli military supervision, launched a long-planned entity: the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF).

This new structure replaced over 400 non-militarized UN distribution points with just four distribution centers—located in highly insecure areas. Humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence were completely abandoned. UN agencies and international humanitarian organizations refused to participate in this privatized, militarized, and lethally deceptive system.

Dire results were feared from the outset. More than 1,000 people have died of Israeli army sniper attacks at these sites, and more than 5,000 have been injured. People walk for hours along dangerous, dusty roads, wait under the desert sun, and are given just 11 minutes to collect 25 kilograms of flour before the GHF arbitrarily closes its gates. When they exit, the ordeal often continues. Many are shot—by Israeli forces, private security, or armed groups. Gaza's civilians are forced to choose between being killed by snipers or dying of hunger. Today, simply following the path of supposed humanitarian aid amounts to a death sentence.

On July 20, 2025, Israeli tanks and snipers attacked a 25-truck World Food Programme convoy at the Zikim crossing. More than 100 Palestinians waiting for food were killed. It is a demonic inversion of humanitarianism: starvation weaponized, aid turned into bait, and civilians punished for seeking sustenance.

Famine, though still undeclared, is now undeniably present in Gaza. Why does the IPC exist if it cannot act? In recent days alone, over 100 people have died of hunger, including infants. Humanitarian workers and medical staff are collapsing from exhaustion and malnutrition. Every day, 10–15 people die from starvation.

Starvation is a silent death. It hides its cruelty. It is a societal torture. People lose the energy to ask for help. Children stop crying. It is also one of the most painful deaths—the body consuming itself. Children suffer first, and if they survive, they are left with lifelong physical and cognitive damage. The effects of the Gaza famine will persist for generations.

Even the death toll has become a political battleground. Israel accuses Gaza's health authorities of inflating numbers, yet respected research institutions have reported far higher estimates. In July 2024, The Lancet projected over 186,000 deaths—many from indirect causes such as starvation, dehydration, and exposure. Oxfam now reports that in the past 100 days, the daily death rate in Gaza is over 250—higher than in any other 21st-century conflict.

Unless there is an immediate permanent ceasefire or a meaningful intervention by the international community, Gaza will become even more of a monstrous killing field—a real-life version of The Hunger Games. What once seemed like dystopian fiction is now a horrifying reality, unfolding in plain sight.

China and America — competitive coexistence

INAM UL HAQUE

Last week while discussing Sino-US rivalry, we concluded the improbability of a war over Taiwan. And although the US leads in many critical sectors, China is rapidly closing the capability gap, as capacity or scale has never been a problem for Beijing. This piece will discuss additional facets of Sino-US competition.

The comparison of both countries' national power potential (NPP) becomes confusing, as there are strong arguments on both sides which gravitate to declare either side a winner. In the May-June 2025 issue of Foreign Affairs, Kurt M Campbell and Rush Doshi argue that China has the advantage of 'scale and mass' compared to a 'strategically distracted and politically paralysed US'.

They define 'scale' as the ability to use 'size' for generating efficiency and productivity to outcompete rivals. They dispel the notion that 'an aging, slowing, and increasingly nimble China would not overtake an ascendant US in due course of time.' They make the case that on many critical metrics, PRC has already outmatched the US. And even if China falters and slows down, as many pundits believe, it remains formidable technologically, militarily and economically.

For China, scale or 'quantity has a quality all its own' as the Soviet leaders used to say about the USSR. To undo the Chinese advantage of scale — the cited writers recommend - Washington should revamp its alliances, shunning the legacy approach of treating allies as 'dependent recipients of protection'; and instead consider its alliance architecture as a collection of 'managed relationships' for pooled and integrated capacity across military, economic and technological domains. They posit that the US must play for 'cohesion and collective leverage' against Beijing, playing for 'time and mass'. The combined economies of America, together with its main anti-China allies including Canada, India, Japan, Korea, Mexico, New Zealand and EU are $60 trillion, compared to China's $18 trillion.

In the absence of cited alliance, China is destined to win the race for power and hegemony all over the world, except Europe, where the US power is likely to be confined, in the mid to long-term. Despite China's challenges such as demography, dependency ratio (adult workers to children and retirees), labour shortfalls (compensated by AI and robotics in future) and debt, China will continue to play the long game.

Using the World Bank methodology, China economically 'surpassed' the US about a decade ago and is 25% larger today. PRC's productive capacity is three times larger than the US; its share of global manufacturing is 30% compared to America's 15% (projected to come down to 11% by 2030); China's cement production is 20 times, steel 13 times, cars 3 times, power generation 2 times larger than the US.

China produces almost half of the world's chemicals, three quarters of electric batteries, more than two-thirds of electric vehicles, half of the world's ships, 80% of consumer drones, 90% of solar panels and almost monopolises rare earths' supply chain. China has helped install half of the world's industrial robots (seven times larger than the US) and is way ahead of the US in fourth-generation nuclear technology. So, rise of the Middle Kingdom to Global prominence is only a matter of time.

Realising the above inevitability, another analyst, Rana Mitter in the cited magazine, emphasises co-existence with China urging the West Plus to avoid policies that make conflict inescapable. To him, China ardently follows the Qing Dynasty (ruled 1644-1912) slogans of "Rich Country and Strong Army" and "Chinese for Essence and Western for Usage".

Under President Xi Jinping, China has continued to pursue a 'harmonious world'; democracy with Chinese characteristics; and material progress without becoming Western. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has made PRC militarily strong and economically secure. It has pursued the 'Confucian Canon Project', stressing the importance of harmony in public life.

China's upward trajectory is likely to continue unless it involves itself or is drawn into military conflict. Although, Chinese nationalists would want Beijing to have a more muscular, aggressive and assertive international and regional posturing, shunning the image of a 'hesitant power'. A conflict would scare away China's neighbours especially in Southeast Asia, with whom China has territorial disputes, driving them to anti-China camp more staunchly. Conflict also erodes China's soft power. CCP understands this, hence, believing in peaceful rise, it would avoid conflict over Tiawan, as argued last week. The Party in all pragmatism, would deprioritise its quest for unification of Taiwan with mainland and continue with military 'posturing' only.

China's present and future leadership see value in 'cooperative existence' within an inter-connected and inextricably linked world. Beijing has recently moved to that position by becoming peacemaker in the Middle East like other cooperative actors Türkiye, Qatar, the UAE, etc, even though their internal policies are not reflective of democracy and other trappings of Western-styled governance. China would need to overcome global scepticism about its intentions, as some analysts argue. And sell itself abroad like America does, despite internal discord within the US over various issues. As the world sees more strongmen in positions of power and democracy eroding, China's humanistic values steeped in Confucianism can lead to greater peace and amity under some sort of 'authoritarian welfarism'. Beijing can champion clean and green energy, for example, humanise AI, emerge as a technology hub and a centre of hybrid cultures fusing elements from China and the West, creating a more peaceful Global Order than the one that brought wars, destruction, pain and suffering.

A Wess Mitchel partially emphasises the above sentiment by stressing "The Return of Great-Power Diplomacy" as a way forward. Since the US is increasingly becoming militarily incapable to fight forever wars, especially in the future against China and Russia simultaneously, it must return to 'strategic diplomacy' by containing the weaker (Russia) partner through détente and focusing against the stronger (China) and nudge Europe along. He also emphasises building the largest possible coalition against China, starting in Aisa.

From the above discussion, one thing is clear. Chinese power is unsettling to the West with strong contenders for containing it or coexisting with it competitively. Drawing Beijing into war may be necessary for Western hawks, and CCP needs to reckon with it.

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Poverty by design

SAEEDAHMED

According to the World Bank's new poverty estimates, 44.7 per cent of Pakistan's population (around 110 million) now lives in poverty. The proportion of people living in extreme poverty has risen from 4.9pc to 16.5pc. This revision, based on revised threshold, does not take into account the fallouts from the Covid-19 pandemic, the 2022 floods, and recent years' phenomenal spike in cost of living, that may have pushed more people into poverty.

Meanwhile, per capita income has increased to $1,824 in FY25. But this rise conceals worsening income disparity across the country. These aren't just statistics; they are a reflection of policy choices and an indictment of the country's economic direction. It shows that our economic model is broken, necessitating a complete rethink of our economic strategy to fighting poverty.

Successive governments have poured billions into subsidies and relief programmes such as the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), while neglecting growth, job creation, human development, and rural development. Poverty in Pakistan is not simply rising; it is being manufactured and maintained through decisions that entrench inequality and suppress opportunity.

BISP has played a crucial role in Pakistan's social safety net by providing financial assistance to low-income families and vulnerable groups since 2008. In FY26, BISP allocation has been increased by 20pc to Rs 722bn (0.5pc of GDP) to expand coverage to 10m families. The quarterly stipend will increase from Rs13,500 to Rs14,500. While the government is striving to expand beneficiary coverage and improve transparency in fund distribution, the overall poverty reduction strategy needs a serious rethink, given limited fiscal space and the low-growth, low-investment trap.

Poverty in this country is the outcome of deliberate policy choices, neglect and systemic flaws.

Broadly speaking, the government needs focused policies to address critical issues directly affecting the public. The FY26 budget was directed at the IMF, business elites and government employees. There was no vision, strategy, or action plan to address economic stagnation, unemployment, poverty, inequality, or the country's dismal state of human development.

Poverty in Pakistan is not just accidental. It is a consequence of deliberate policy choices, neglect and systemic flaws. For example, our farmers incurred Rs2.2 trillion losses in wheat production alone this year, jeopardising food security and reducing rural incomes. Agriculture, which accounts for 23pc of GDP, employs 37pc of the labour force, and contributes 60pc to export earnings, has been hit hard by climate shocks, plummeting prices, policy missteps and state neglect. Crop production fell by 13.5pc in FY25: cotton by 30.7pc, maize by 14.7pc, and wheat by 8.9pc. Fertiliser shortages during sowing seasons, removal of wheat support prices under IMF pressure, and abandonment of commodity procurement left farmers exposed to market volatility and exploitation by middlemen. Instead of ensuring a smooth policy transition and putting in place an alternative market mechanism to protect farmers, the government simply backed off. This underscores the lack of planning and blind implementation of IMF advice.

In a painful example of fiscal irresponsibility, the government has been increasing salaries and benefits of ministers, legislators, judges and bureaucrats. In a country scrambling for aid and barely managing debt repayments, such extravagance reflects a shocking disregard for the hardships faced by ordinary Pakistanis.

Likewise, our tax system perpetuates inequality. Salaried individuals contributed around Rs555bn in FY25, 51pc more than last year. Meanwhile, large retailers, landlords, speculators and grey-market earners remain untouched. The FBR's Tajir Dost Scheme raised a mere Rs4m, against a Rs50bn target. Eminent economist Dr Hafeez Pasha estimates that the average real income of salaried individuals has declined by 30pc due to inflation and aggressive taxation.

Beyond the cynicism, let's look at the global efforts to end extreme poverty, and to understand what works, and what doesn't. Africa's reliance on foreign aid offers a cautionary tale. Despite receiving billions in development assistance annually over decades — $53.5bn in 2022 alone — African countries are home to three-quarters of the world's poor. Sub-Saharan Africa still has the highest number of people living in extreme poverty: 411m in 2023, 45pc up from 1990. Foreign aid has failed to eradicate poverty, highlighting the limitations of externally funded relief without structural reforms. Instead, Africa is drowning in debt.

In contrast, China, India and many Latin American countries pulled hundreds of millions out of poverty through sustained economic growth, institutional reforms and targeted support. China combined broad-based economic transformation with targeted assistance to disadvantaged regions and households, starting with agricultural reforms and later developing labour-intensive industries. India, the world's fastest growing major economy over the last decade, more than doubled its GDP from $2.1tr in 2015 to $4.3tr in 2025, while investing in basic infrastructure such as toilets, clean water and electricity to uplift rural communities.

Latin American countries, too, made significant progress by strengthening institutions, reducing inequality, and adopting sound policy frameworks. Meanwhile, during the last three years, Pakistan has experienced negative per capita growth with GDP growth rate of -0.5pc in FY23, 2.5pc in FY45, and an estimated 2.68pc in FY25. Stabilisation without growth is becoming the country's new normal and we can no longer afford it. It only exacerbates unemployment, poverty and inequality. With inflation easing and commodity sectors underperforming, we must use both fiscal and monetary policies to boost private investment and stimulate growth.

The 2023 digital census has shown startling gaps in literacy in rural Sindh, Balochistan and KP. Likewise, healthcare lacks adequate infrastructure and resources. Within provinces, there are substantial disparities between urban and rural areas, and between different districts. The government must focus on improving development outcomes in the districts that have the lowest development indicators.

The nations that have seen the most dramatic improvements in poverty reduction and other measures of human well-being have all focused on growth, economic reforms and targeted social protection policies. Pakistan must learn from these lessons. This will require sincere political will, a strong policy focus and coordination amongst the different tiers of government.

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Community and governance

FAISAL BARI

Can we have a law-enforcement officer or a video camera on every street corner, in every public space, physical and online? Clearly not. How do societies ensure that the people abide by the law when there is little fear of being caught in the absence of the law-enforcement officer? Through ethics, community standards and the fear of being thought ill of.

For instance, you are alone on a street where a fancy car is parked. You see a Rs5,000 note lying on the front seat of the car. Will you break the window of the car to get it? No one else is visible on the street and there are no video cameras either. So, the probability of being caught is zero. Would you break the window to get the note? Some might. Others might not. The reasons will vary. Some might feel they have nothing to lose as they will not be caught and the broken window is not their problem, while they would gain Rs5,000. So, they may go ahead and break the window. If they are desperate for the money, it will add to their reasons for doing so. Others might feel that Rs5,000 is just too small an amount to justify the effort and perceived risk. But they could change their mind if the amount were Rs50,000. There would be others who would not take the money because of the fear of being caught, out of habit, or for religious and ethical reasons.

What sort of society should we aim for? A society that follows its self-interest and only deviates from it when there is fear of law or punishment? Everyone is ready to break the window; they only refrain if a policeman is present or if they fear being caught and punished. Clearly, such a society would be a terrible one to live in, even if it were possible to have a 'society' like this. When norms are violated, the first response is to look towards strengthening the law. Take the example of a society that has some focus on community and a sense of belonging; it is one in which individuals are brought up with a sense of citizenship and community rights and responsibilities. It does not mean this society would be without laws or their enforcement but that a lot of the societal interactions would be based on the norms of the community and the ways of doing things. The law would be enforced as a measure of last resort. The examples of how citizens behave in Japan, Europe or traditional societies and tribes can be taken from societies with strong norms, which are invested in seeing the latter internalised in their population — this may be implemented for the younger people through education systems and parental and community guidance.

In this country, over the last few decades, we have been sliding in the other direction. When norms are found to be inadequate for addressing certain issues, or when they are violated, the first response is to look towards strengthening the law or its enforcement. If people do not wear helmets when driving motorcycles, let us fine them. If they still do not comply, let us raise the fine and strictly enforce it. If it still does not work, how about lodging FIRs against them and locking up vehicles and so on? And all this is for what? For the protection of the person who is driving the motorcycle and the people around him or her. We might achieve compliance this way eventually, but will compliance then become the norm? The moment enforcement lags, and we have seen it happen a number of times, people start to ignore the law. Take the example of speeding on the Motorway. Fines were imposed — the Motorway Police was quite good at this. But then, things became lax and many people started to drive fast. Fines were hiked, but that was found to be inadequate, so now, if you drive above a certain limit, an FIR is registered against you and you can be arrested and your car can be impounded. We can see this in the realm of expression as well — in both physical space and online. Norms were not enough to deter excesses when protests took place and people let their views be known on online forums. What was the solution? The social media platform X was shut down for a long period. And laws were made stricter, with their enforcement now on steroids. This has, of course, not solved the issue; in fact, it cannot solve the issue. Underlying issues need to be addressed and we have to learn how to disagree with each other and manage this disagreement. Every time a person expresses anger against the government, a department of the state, or individuals in the government or departments, it is not disloyalty, not grounds for persecution and definitely not a reason for a 'software update' — the ugly term we have coined for abduction, torture and destruction of an individual's human dignity. Where does society go from here? Once we have set off in the direction of invoking the law and ensuring its enforcement, the importance of norms is reduced. Thus norms become weaker. So, the use of the law is not norm-neutral. Escaping from the vicious cycle of infringements of norms, stricter law and enforcement, weaker norms, more infringements and even stricter laws, gets harder and harder. We are already caught in more than one cycle in some of the areas mentioned. Can we reverse the trend? It will take a major social and political upheaval to change things. And the upheaval will have to dislodge beneficiaries of the current system to allow reconfiguration. The current beneficiaries will, of course, continue to resist. So, for the foreseeable future, we will see the continuation of a vicious cycle.

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Childcare in Pakistan: policies, practices and challenges

DR SEEMA LASSI

In recent years, women's participation in Pakistan's labour market has increased due to various factors, including economic pressures. Female employment is currently at 23% and is expected to grow as education and job access improve, creating an urgent need for supportive environments. Promoting workforce gender equality requires policies to boost women's involvement and ensure fair division of caregiving responsibilities. Family-friendly policies are essential for working parents, especially mothers. They promote work-life balance, improve employee wellbeing and increase productivity, while helping parents manage work and family duties. They include paid parental leave, flexible hours, breastfeeding and childcare support and elder care. These policies contribute to a more inclusive and equitable society while driving economic growth and workforce sustainability. Pakistan's traditional joint family system reduced reliance on formal childcare. However, migration and modernisation have shifted family structures toward nuclear units. Combined with economic pressures and the need for dual incomes, demand for formal childcare is rising. Without family support, women are forced to leave careers to care for children as there are major challenges in accessing quality childcare. For many, this career break becomes permanent, limiting their return to the workforce or confining them to lower-level roles with little advancement. Others, unable to afford quitting, juggle work and childcare at the expense of their health and career growth. A study by UNICEF Pakistan, the Pakistan Women Council and UN Women examined family-friendly policies in the formal sector. Conducted mainly in Karachi, with smaller samples from Lahore and Islamabad, it engaged parents, childcare and school administrators and policymakers. It also assessed legislation and international best practices. The study found high awareness of family-friendly policies but low implementation due to gender inequality, cultural norms and employer restrictions. Childcare utilisation was low due to cost, limited access and poor quality. Most unemployed parents identified lack of childcare as the main barrier to workforce participation. Both employed and unemployed parents cited poor quality and limited hours as major obstacles and strongly preferred onsite childcare to support employment continuity. Pakistan's parental leave and childcare policies show progress but remain inconsistent. Paid maternity leave is relatively established, though coverage varies. Paid paternity leave exists only under federal law and in Punjab but is absent elsewhere. Workplace stigma discourages men from using paternity leave, while women often face career stagnation due to caregiving demands. Organisations offering six months of maternity leave, 15–30 days of paternity leave and onsite childcare tend to retain more employees. Childcare facility demands also vary. Federally, employers with 70 or more employees must provide childcare. In Punjab, Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the rule applies to organisations with 70+ female employees. In Sindh, the requirement is triggered when women make up at least 10% of staff. However, there is no legal obligation for onsite childcare or financial support for working parents.

Iran stages massive Khamenei funeral to project post-war unity

TEHRAN, (Monitoring Desk): Iran is preparing for days of nationwide funeral ceremonies for Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, turning the burial of the country's longtime supreme leader into what officials hope will be the largest public display of loyalty to the Islamic Republic in decades. Khamenei was killed in U.S. and Israeli strikes during the opening phase of the war, ending nearly four decades of his rule. His death, followed by the appointment of his son, Mojtaba Khamenei, as Iran's third supreme leader, marks one of the most consequential turning points since the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Beginning this weekend, authorities will stage an elaborate series of ceremonies across Iran, with major funeral processions planned in Tehran, Qom and Mashhad before concluding with religious events in Iraq's Shiite holy cities.

For Iran's leadership, the funerals are about more than honoring a slain leader. They are intended to demonstrate that the Islamic Republic remains united after surviving what officials describe as an existential war and to signal both domestic strength and defiance toward its enemies. "The large public turnout at the funeral procession of the martyred leader and the other martyrs will, in effect, be another referendum for the Islamic Republic," Ayatollah Mohammad Saidi, the Friday prayer leader in Qom, told state media. Authorities are leaving little to chance.

State institutions are working to mobilize millions of mourners by offering discounted hotels, free transportation and temporary accommodations in schools, mosques and sports halls. Bus and rail services are being redirected to funeral sites as officials prepare for what they hope will be overwhelming crowds.

The government views the ceremonies as an opportunity to reinforce the legitimacy of the Islamic Republic after a devastating conflict that claimed the lives of several senior figures. Mojtaba Khamenei, who succeeded his father despite reportedly suffering serious injuries in the strike, has not appeared publicly since the war began, adding further intrigue to Iran's leadership transition.

Across Tehran, workers have erected new posters featuring the late Khamenei alongside images of Mojtaba and raised revolutionary fists, while black mourning banners hang from buildings throughout the capital.

Public grief masks deeper divisions.



The Venezuelan government held an international press conference in Caracas following two earthquakes that struck the country.



KYIV: Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy walks with Interior Minister Ihor Klymenko as he visits the site of an apartment building damaged during overnight Russian missile and drone strikes, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine.

Spain's premier labels social media 'failed state,' calls for urgent regulation

OVIEDO, (Monitoring Desk): Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez described social media platforms as a "failed state," and warned of growing risks to young people, mental health and democratic systems.

"There are no rules, and the rules that apply in the physical world are not applied in the digital world," Sanchez said at a joint press conference with Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva in Barcelona.

Sanchez said the lack of regulation is a source of concern not only for parents but also for young people themselves.

"If we accept this, we have to move quickly, because we are already late," he said, urging action at national, regional and multilateral levels.

He cited a major study conducted in Santiago de Compostela showing that the average age of first exposure to pornography in Spain is 11, arguing that such content is often pushed onto minors by platforms rather than actively sought out.

"This undermines everything we are doing offline to promote equality between men and women," he said.

Sanchez said Spain is working on legislation to prohibit the use of social media for children under 16 and evaluating changes to the penal code to hold platforms legally accountable.

"If they do not remove harmful content — whether disinformation or violent material — and instead promote it with algorithms, they must assume legal responsibility," he said.

On Thursday, 14 European Union member states met to discuss establishing common standards to better protect young users online, he added.

Sanchez said the issue will also be addressed at a gathering of progressive leaders in Barcelona this weekend, where discussions will in part focus on the impact of digital platforms on democracy and society.

"Technology is political — it is an instrument of power," he said. "This is what we are seeing — tech oligarchs taking advantage of society's naivety around the supposed promise of social media to turn it into a political tool for their own benefit."

Lula echoed concerns about online risks, particularly for young people. "If there is no guidance, parents may share photos of their children, and criminals can take those images and do whatever they want with them," he said.

10 killed as Russia launches daytime attacks on Ukraine

Monitoring Desk

KYIV: Russian strikes killed at least 10 people in Ukraine on Friday, officials said, as Moscow launched the latest in an increasing number of daytime barrages.

Moscow has been firing aerial broadsides at Ukraine throughout its more than four-year invasion, mostly at night, but in recent weeks it has stepped up daytime attacks.

The Russian military used more than 500 drones and dozens of missiles in its salvo on Friday, according to the Ukrainian air force. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky accused Russia of intensifying attacks ahead of Catholic Easter on Sunday, "turning what should have been silence in the skies into an Easter escalation".

Images from Ukrainian emergency services showed damaged residential buildings, with a block of flats ripped open and rubble strewn on a street. The attack killed one person and left eight wounded in the capital region of Kyiv, said regional governor Mykola Kalashnyk. "Unfortunately, animals were also affected by the attack — approximately 20 animals died due to damage to a veterinary clinic," Kalashnyk added. Some residents of the capital sheltered in the metro or in basements, reporters saw, but many people sat in cafes unfazed by the attacks and despite blaring air raid sirens.

In the Kyiv region, "a drone struck a residential building in Obukhiv, and another attack occurred between a kindergarten and a school in Vyshneve, damaging homes," said Prime Minister Yulia Svyrydenko. Three people were killed in Ukraine's northern Sumy region, according to authorities. One person was killed in the northwestern Zhytomyr region, while attacks on the frontline Kharkiv, Donetsk and Kherson regions killed five others, local officials said. The barrage prompted emergency power outages in several regions, operator Ukrenergo said. "This is how Moscow responds to Ukraine's Easter ceasefire proposals — with brutal attacks," said Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andriy Sybiga. Zelensky said earlier this week he was ready for a truce over the Easter holidays, but the Kremlin said it had not received "clearly formulated" proposals. Ukraine has accused Russia of prolonging the war to capture more territory, and says Moscow is not interested in peace. Talks between the two warring parties, mediated by the United States, have been stalled by the war in the Middle East.

In comments to reporters published on Friday, Zelensky said he had invited an American delegation to Ukraine to relaunch negotiations with Moscow.

Myanmar junta chief elected president by pro-military MPs

Monitoring Desk

NAYPYIDAW: Myan-mar's pro-military lawmakers elected junta chief Min Aung Hlaing as president on Friday, with the ex-armed forces commander set to maintain his rule in a civilian guise after snatching power by force five years ago.

The coup-leading general ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi in 2021, triggering a civil war that has killed tens of thousands of people. Parliament speaker Aung Lin Dwe announced Min Aung Hlaing was elected president, chosen by military-aligned MPs installed in a recent election overseen by the junta he leads.

Min Aung Hlaing secured 429 of 584 votes cast in the upper and lower houses of parliament in the capital Naypyidaw on Friday, a parliament official said. While the junta touted parliament's reopening last month as a return of power to the people, analysts describe it as civilian window dressing intended to launder the military's continuing rule.

"There is no hope for the country under his presidency. The country will only get worse," said a 50-year-old Yangon resident. "I never expected anything from this government anyway," she said, adding it was formed through "fake elections".

The pro-military Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) won more than 80 percent of parliamentary seats contested in the phased poll that concluded in January. Serving members of the armed forces also occupy unelected seats making up a quarter of the total.

Man arrested for setting off fire on German train

Monitoring Desk

BERLIN: A 20-year-old man armed with knives was arrested after setting off pyrotechnics on a high-speed train in Germany, injuring 12 people, police said on Friday.

The incident occurred late on Thursday on an Intercity Express train, the German equivalent of France's TGV, bound for Frankfurt in western Germany, with around 180 passengers evacuated.

The case has been referred a security service unit in Bonn specialised in handling politically motivated crimes, a police spokeswoman said.

She declined to comment on a report by the German daily Bild that the suspect was believed to be an extreme-right activist with a criminal record.

A police statement said that "a political motive cannot be ruled out at the moment".

US returns Chinese fugitive in rare extradition

Monitoring Desk

BEIJING: The US handed over a Chinese fugitive suspected of drug-related crimes to China for the first time in recent years, state news agency Xinhua reported on Friday, citing Chinese police.

The individual, surnamed Han, was suspected of drug smuggling and trafficking, Xinhua said. The suspect was repatriated to China by the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency based on leads provided by China's narcotics-control authorities, it added.

The report did not specify when the handover took place or provide further details on the drug Han was accused of smuggling.

The joint action comes ahead of a visit to China by US President Donald Trump, which was originally planned for the end of March but postponed to May due to the war in Iran.

Trump has used tariffs to pressure China to crack down on sellers of chemicals used to make fentanyl, the deadly synthetic opioid that is a leading cause of drug overdose deaths in the US.

Trump agreed to lower fentanyl-related tariffs after meeting Chinese President Xi Jinping in South Korea in October, in exchange for China's pledge to crack down on the fentanyl networks.

The two countries have nonetheless continued to spar over the issue, with Washington accusing Beijing of failing to stop sales of precursor chemicals for fentanyl; China has dismissed the allegation as false while calling the US irresponsible.

Last month, state media reported that China had arrested seven people and subjected 12 more to "criminal compulsory measures" in an operation targeting traffickers.

'Democracy kills,' says Burkina Faso junta leader

Monitoring Desk

DAKAR: Burkina Faso's military leader, who seized power in a coup in September 2022, told journalists that "people need to forget about democracy" and that "democracy kills", the latest sign he aims to rule for the long term.

Ibrahim Traore's military government had originally committed to organising an election in 2024. But a year after the coup, he said there would be no elections until the country — which has struggled for more than a decade to contain insurgencies linked to Al Qaeda and the militant Islamic State group — was safe enough for everyone to vote.

When asked about elections during a roundtable with journalists aired on state television on Thursday night, Traore said his administration was focused on other challenges.



Security measures have been increased in Ankara for the NATO Summit, and mounted police units operating in the city have intensified their patrols around Ankara Castle and its surroundings.

1st group of migrants deported from US arrive in DR Congo

KIGALI, RWANDA, (Monitoring Desk): The first group of migrants deported from the US has arrived in the Democratic Republic of Congo under a deal reached with Washington, a diplomatic source said.

The development comes weeks after the Congolese government announced earlier this month that it had agreed to provide "temporary reception" for deported migrants from the US.

"The plane with the first group of 15 migrants from the US landed in Kinshasa Friday night after a stopover in Accra, Ghana," the source told media. "The first group that includes seven women, is made up of nationals from Peru, and Ecuador."

Congo joined other African countries including Rwanda, Uganda, Eswatini, Ghana, and South Sudan, which have since 2025 accepted to take deportees as US President Donald Trump's administration turned to Africa as a destination for migrants from the US.

Kinshasa said the arrangement is temporary and does not amount to permanent settlement, relocation, or the outsourcing of migration policy.

China urges respect for Palestinian rights

Monitoring Desk

BEIJING: China called for Palestinians' rights to be protected after Israel approved a bill to allow the execution of Palestinians convicted on terror charges for deadly attacks. Under the new law, passed by Israel's parliament on Monday, Palestinians in the occupied West Bank convicted by military courts of carrying out deadly attacks classified as "terrorism" will face the death penalty as a default sentence. "The legal rights of the Palestinian people should be respected and protected," China's foreign ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said.



Switzerland and Algeria face off during the 2026 FIFA World Cup Round of 32 match at BC Place (Vancouver Stadium) in Vancouver, Canada

Slovak PM says EU should drop sanctions on Russian oil and gas to boost energy security

Monitoring Desk

WARSAW: The European Union should end sanctions on Russian oil and gas imports, take steps to restore Druzhba oil pipeline flows and end the war in Ukraine to tackle the energy crisis stemming from the war in Iran, Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico said on Saturday.

Fico said in a statement after a call with Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban that the EU should renew dialogue with Russia and ensure conditions so member states can get missing gas and oil supplies from all sources, including Russia.

Hungary and Slovakia's leaders are outliers in the EU for maintaining relations with Moscow.

Oil prices have surged since U.S. and Israeli strikes on Iran started on February 28, holding up shipments from the Gulf and creating, what the International Energy Agency called the biggest oil supply disruption in history.

Central European nations have taken measures to cool the impact of high prices at the fuel pump for people and businesses.

The EU was importing just 1% of its oil from Russia by the final quarter of 2025, having slashed imports since Moscow's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Hungary and Slovakia were the only two EU countries still importing Russian oil by January 27, when Kyiv said a Russian drone strike hit pipeline equipment in Ukraine, disrupting Russian oil shipments.

Budapest and Bratislava have accused Ukraine of deliberately delaying the repairs to resume oil flows through the Druzhba pipeline, triggering a political dispute that has seen Hungary block an EU loan to Kyiv. Ukraine says it is fixing it as fast as it can. In the statement on Saturday, Fico said it was not enough to deal with the energy crisis only at the national level.

Meanwhile, five other European Union countries are calling for a windfall tax on energy companies' profits in reaction to the rising fuel prices.

Kazakhstan releases endangered falcons in Saudi-backed restoration drive

Monitoring Desk

ALTYN PARK: With a loud thwack of their wings, the falcons took flight, quickly soaring high above the rocky desert landscape of Altyn-Emel National Park in southeastern Kazakhstan.

The 34 birds were on an important mission: to help restore Kazakhstan's population of saker falcons, which for centuries have symbolised nobility and freedom for the nomadic peoples of the Kazakh steppe, as well as serving as faithful hunting companions.

Saudi Arabia's state-run Saudi Falcons Club is leading a saker falcon restoration programme in partnership with a Kazakh institute in an effort to boost the population of this endangered "Red List" species. The group will release 35 to 45 birds annually over the next three years.

A migratory bird with a wingspan of 97126 cm (3850 inches), the saker falcon ranges across a vast area from central Europe to northeastern China.

Myanmar cuts ex-leader Aung San Suu Kyi's sentence, frees former president

NAYPYIDAW, (Monitoring Desk): Myanmar has reduced the sentence of imprisoned ex-leader Aung San Suu Kyi, her lawyer told media, as part of an amnesty by a new president who ousted her government a coup five years ago.

Suu Kyi, 80, was serving a 27-year sentence for a litany of offences her allies said were politically motivated to keep her at bay, ranging from incitement and corruption to election fraud and violating a state secrets law.

The sentence has been cut by one-sixth, but it remains unclear whether the Nobel Peace Prize winner will be allowed to serve the rest of her sentence under house arrest, the lawyer said.

The wildly popular Suu Kyi, who had dismissed the charges against her as "absurd", has not been seen in public since the end of her marathon trials, and her whereabouts have been unknown.

Earlier, state media reported that President Min Aung Hlaing approved an amnesty for 4,335 prisoners, the third such move in the past six months. Amnesties typically take place in Myanmar each year to mark Independence in January and New Year in April.

mong the prisoners freed was Win Myint, who served as president from 2018 until the 2021 military coup.

Win Myint, an ally of Suu Kyi, was "granted a pardon and the reduction of his remaining sentences under specified conditions", state broadcaster MRTV said.

A spokesperson for the military-backed government did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The 2021 coup against Win Myint and Suu Kyi's democratically elected government was led by Min Aung Hlaing. It plunged the Southeast Asian country into a nationwide civil war that continues to rage.

Min Aung Hlaing was elected president on April 3 following polls in December and January during which the opposition was stifled.

UN warns of rising violence, mounting humanitarian crisis in South Sudan

UNITED NATIONS, (Monitoring Desk): The top UN official in South Sudan warned about escalating violence and deepening humanitarian needs, urging global leaders to prioritize a political solution as the country faces renewed instability.

"The security situation remains deeply concerning. Fighting between the South Sudan People's Defense Forces and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army in Opposition, particularly in Jonglei, has intensified and in some cases been accompanied by inflammatory rhetoric," Anita Kiki Gbeho, head of the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), told the Security Council.

"Civilians continue to bear the brunt," she said.

According to UNMISS human rights reporting, deaths and injuries rose by 40% in 2025 compared to the previous year, underscoring the worsening toll of the conflict, Gbeho said.

At the same time, she said, humanitarian conditions are deteriorating rapidly, adding nearly 10 million people across South Sudan now require assistance.

Gbeho stressed that the country's challenges cannot be resolved through military means alone, calling instead for a sustained political process grounded in inclusive dialogue. "There is broad agreement across political actors, civil society, women, youth, and communities on the need for a peaceful transition, even as views differ on sequencing and modalities; particularly on the 'how' rather than the 'why' – providing a positive basis for continued engagement," she said. She highlighted the importance of regional diplomacy in advancing that goal, welcoming the appointment of Jakaya Kikwete as African Union High Representative. His role, she said, has already helped inject new momentum into efforts to revive political dialogue.

As the Security Council considers renewing the UNMISS mandate, Gbeho warned that the scale of the crisis is outpacing current international support.

"As the Security Council deliberates on the renewal of the UNMISS mandate, it is important to recognize the dilemma we collectively face: the scale and urgency of needs on the ground are not yet matched by the type of sustained commitment and investment required to fully meet the shared ambition of sustainable path to peace," she said.

She also underscored the responsibility of South Sudan's leaders to implement the country's peace agreement.

28th Constitutional Amendment not to be introduced in haste: Law Minister

LAHORE (APP): Federal Minister for Law and Justice Senator Azam Nazeer Tarar said the government was committed to improving legal education, strengthening the professional training of lawyers and ensuring the effective administration of justice.

Addressing the inauguration of the Lawyers Education Academy at the Punjab Bar Council and a certificate distribution ceremony for successful participants of the Bar Vocational Course, the minister said work was underway on introducing a comprehensive health insurance policy for lawyers and their families. He said the federal and Punjab governments were extending full support to the welfare of the legal fraternity.

Tarar said lawyers would be provided treatment for cancer, kidney, liver and heart diseases at both public and private hospitals under the proposed health scheme. He added that the Punjab government had released Rs1.35 billion in grants for bar associations and announced an additional Rs20 million for the Bar Vocational Course.

The minister said the establishment of the Directorate of Legal Education at the Pakistan Bar Council was a major reform aimed at modernising legal education. He described the legal profession as a sacred responsibility and urged lawyers to strengthen their institutions and resolve disputes through institutional forums.

On judicial reforms, Tarar said a seven-member committee had been constituted to ensure transparency and merit in the appointment of High Court judges. The committee will interview candidates and submit its recommendations to the Judicial Commission.

Questioning why High Court judges should not undergo interviews when Civil Judges and Additional Sessions Judges are required to pass examinations, the minister said judicial appointments must be based strictly on merit. He added that the government was introducing, for the first time, a constitutional mechanism for the annual evaluation of judges' performance through a Judges Evaluation Committee. Under the proposed system, a Judges Evaluation Committee will review the performance of judges at the end of each year. If a judge's performance is found unsatisfactory, the committee may send a reference to the Judicial Commission and recommend removal, he added.

Commenting on constitutional reforms, Tarar said the 28th Constitutional Amendment would not be introduced in haste.

He said that whenever the amendment is introduced, it will only be after broad consultation. He noted that the legal fraternity, including the Supreme Court Bar Association and other bar councils, had supported the 26th and 27th Constitutional Amendments.



A funeral ceremony is being held in Tehran for Iran's former leader Ali Khamenei, who died in the US-Israeli attack that began on February 28. Tens of thousands of people from various cities in Iran and abroad are attending the ceremony at the Imam Khomeini Musalla Mosque in Tehran.



ISLAMABAD: Law Minister Azam Nazeer Tarar addresses a joint press conference alongside IT Minister Shaza Fatima Khawaja

President Zardari expresses profound grief, sorrow over demise of Fauzia Habib

ISLAMABAD (INP): President Asif Ali Zardari, expressed his profound grief and sorrow over the demise of former member of the National Assembly and senior Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) leader Fauzia Habib.

In a condolence message, the president paid tribute to the late Fauzia Habib's dedicated services to the Pakistan Peoples Party and the nation, adding she rendered valuable contributions to democracy, public service, and the PPP. The president recalled that Fauzia Habib also served as a member of the staff at Aiwan-e-Sadr during his first presidential term from 2008 to 2013, President Secretariat Media Wing said in a press release.

Describing her death as an irreparable loss to the Pakistan Peoples Party, he prayed for the elevation of the departed soul's ranks in Jannah and extended his heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family.

Mir Sadiq Umrani expresses serious concern over unjustified reduction in Balochistan's water share

NASIRABAD, (VoM Report): The Balochistan government has accused the Sindh Irrigation Department of withholding 46 percent of the province's allocated canal water, warning that legal action will be pursued if the province's constitutional water rights are not restored. Superintending Engineer, Irrigation Circle Nasirabad, Mudassar Khoso, said that despite improved water availability reported by the Indus River System Authority (IRSA), Balochistan was receiving only 0.365 million acre-feet (MAF) of water against its allocated 0.678 MAF, leaving a shortfall of 0.310 MAF.

He said that at RD-109, only 4,096 cusecs were being supplied against a demand of 6,700 cusecs, while at RD-102, the province was receiving 1,050 cusecs against the required 2,400 cusecs.

Khoso said the Irrigation Department had formally requested a review of water flows for Balochistan but received a response that was inconsistent with official procedures. He added that he would visit Guddu Barrage on July 6 to personally assess the water distribution.

Balochistan Irrigation Minister Mir Muhammad Sadiq Umrani expressed serious concern over what he described as an unjustified reduction in the province's water share. He said the matter had been taken up with the Federal Minister for Water Resources, the Sindh Irrigation Minister, the Irrigation Secretary and the Chairman of IRSA through official correspondence and direct contacts.

The minister said Balochistan Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti had also raised the issue with Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah, who had assured that no reduction would be made. However, he alleged that the Sindh Irrigation Department continued to restrict water supplies to Balochistan.

Umrani further stated that the IRSA Chairman had informed the Sindh government that Punjab was not responsible for the shortfall and that the reduction was being made by Sindh, terming it an injustice to Balochistan.

Pakistan wants to privatize loss-making power sector entities: PM Shehbaz

ISTANBUL (APP): Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif invited Turkish businessmen and investors to invest in Pakistan's sectors of industry, mines and minerals, power, information technology and participate in the country's privatization process.

He was speaking at a Pakistan-Türkiye Business Conference attended by Turkish and Pakistani ministers and businessmen. He said Pakistani delegation was in Turkiye to explore economic opportunities.

Turkiye, under the leadership of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, had made tremendous strides in industry, automobile sector, textiles, and agriculture in the last 20 years, he noted, adding that Pakistan wanted to learn from the success of Turkiye in the process of privatization and setting up special economic zones.

He declared that his government had earmarked 1000 acres for Turkish investors in President Tayyip Erdogan's special economic zone in Karachi. Similarly, in the field of mine and minerals there was great scope, he said, adding, "Now is the time to explore these natural resources through our joint cooperation. Similarly, opportunities existed in the field of artificial intelligence and information technology. Pakistan has a young population. We are a country of 240 million people and 60 percent of it is youth and we wanted to take advantage of their talent."

The Prime Minister said Pakistan wanted to privatize its loss-making power sector entities and was also inviting investments in alternative energy, including solar and wind. He appreciated the Turkish investors for their interest in investing in different sectors of Pakistani economy.

He said Pakistan was willing to sign government-to-government agreements with Turkiye to attract investment. He lauded Turkiye for standing by Pakistan as a rock in challenging times, even bearing losses for the sake of Pakistan. He said he wanted to work with President Erdogan to strengthen the bilateral relations. He said Turkiye was one of the staunchest allies of Pakistan around the globe. "This fraternal bond between our two countries goes back centuries," he said, adding, "This wonderful, unique relationship dates back to Turkiye's war of independence when Muslims under the leadership of Ali brothers supported Turkiye's sacrifices and efforts for independence." He said people of Turkiye had shown compassion, friendship and support for Pakistan in times of war, earthquake and floods. He said the strength of the bilateral relationship demanded that ideas shared at the conference should be converted into concrete action for the benefit of two people.

He recalled that Pakistan, with the support of Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan, had been able to mediate peace between the United States and Iran. "It was not an easy but an uphill task and without the sincere support of President Erdogan, along with other friendly and brotherly countries, the mission would have been impossible.



Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, Ahsan Iqbal with members and office-bearers of the Association of Physicians of Pakistani Descent of North America (APPNA) during the 49th Annual Convention of APPNA in Orlando



QUETTA: Senior Doctors delegation Professor Dr. Ghulam Rasool, Professor Dr. Ashraf Achakzai and others talking to Chairman Young Doctors Association Dr. Tahir Musakhail, Dr. Noor Ali and others during Doctors protect camp.

Pakistan's youth can transform national economy: Hafiz Naeem

ISLAMABAD, (Agencies): Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan Emir Hafiz Naeem ur Rehman said Pakistan's youth are the country's greatest asset and, if provided with quality training in information technology (IT) and artificial intelligence (AI), they have the potential to transform the national economy and even help eliminate the country's debt burden.

Addressing the Bano Qabil Graduation Ceremony organized by the Alkhidmat Foundation Islamabad, Rehman said Pakistan's IT exports currently stand at only $4 billion, compared to India's $250 billion, despite the country's enormous untapped potential. He maintained that Pakistan's IT exports could easily increase to $25 billion with the right policies, investment, and skilled workforce.

Calling the Bano Qabil initiative a "true game changer," the JI chief announced that the programme would establish its own university and reiterated that Jamaat-e-Islami would make education free if it comes to power, in accordance with the constitutional right of every child to free education.

Education foundation of national progress, economic stability: Defence Minister

SIALKOT (APP): Federal Minister for Defence Khawaja Muhammad Asif emphasized the importance of quality education and lifelong learning while addressing the annual convocation of a private college in Sialkot.

He expressed satisfaction over the high participation of female graduates, noting that nearly 80 per cent of the graduating students were women, while male graduates accounted for around 20 per cent. He described this as an encouraging sign for the country's future.

Khawaja Asif said that a well-educated society can never default, stressing that education is the foundation of national progress and economic stability. However, he observed that in some institutions, degrees are awarded without ensuring the required academic standards, underscoring the need to prioritize quality education over the mere distribution of certificates. He said that earning a degree should be viewed as the beginning of a lifelong journey of learning rather than its completion. He stressed that knowledge has no limits and encouraged graduates to continue expanding their skills and understanding throughout their lives. Reflecting on earlier times, Khawaja Asif remarked that although educational institutions were fewer in number during his youth, the scope and value of learning were limitless.

NA Speaker takes strong notice of bogus appointment letter case

ISLAMABAD (APP): Speaker of National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq has taken strong notice of the misuse of the name of the National Assembly Secretariat through a forged appointment/offer letter and the alleged misuse of the official status of the National Assembly.

It has come to the notice of the National Assembly Secretariat that a person namely Abdul Wajid, a resident of district Ghotki, falsely represented himself as a Grade-17 employee of the National Assembly and used a forged appointment letter issued in the name of the National Assembly Secretariat, which also bore forged signatures of the Speaker National Assembly. According to reports, the said individual not only misled government officials and police authorities by claiming this fake status and allegedly obtained undue privileges and protocol, but was also reportedly involved in harassing and pressuring citizens through various means, causing concern and unrest among the public.

The National Assembly Secretariat clarifies that Abdul Wajid has no connection whatsoever with the National Assembly Secretariat, and there is no record of his appointment or employment in the National Assembly. The appointment letter being used by him is completely fake and has no legal or official standing. On the directions of Sardar Ayaz Sadiq, Acting Secretary National Assembly has written formal letters to the Director General Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) and the Inspector General of Sindh Police, requesting initiation of legal proceedings against Abdul Wajid, tracing the origin of the forged appointment letter, identifying those involved in this matter, and taking strict legal action against all responsible persons under the relevant laws. On the complaint of the National Assembly Secretariat, FIA took prompt action and arrested the accused person. Legal proceedings against him are underway, while investigations are also in progress to trace the source of the forged appointment letter and identify any other individuals involved in the offence.

Israel trying to derail US-Iran peace talks

NEW YORK (APP): The United States believed Israel was plotting to kill Iran's head negotiators in the middle of the peace talks, with Washington going as far as to warn Tehran through third party countries of the risks, and eventually Pakistani fighter jets escorting the Iranian delegation's plane to and from Islamabad, according to American officials.

Fears that Israel could derail the fledgling peace talks spiked in April as America believed the Jewish state had their eyes on Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and Parliament speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, The New York Times reported. The two leaders would go on to approve the current peace deal with the US. If they were killed, it would have likely prolonged the conflict as previous assassinations by Israel have.

FM Araghchi and Speaker Ghalibaf were known to have been on a so-called "kill list" back in March, which was composed of top regime officials who Israel sought to remove. The two leaders, however, were removed from the list following intervention from the US as the negotiations began to take form, Reuters reported.



QUETTA: Balochistan Governor Jaffar Khan Mandokhail inaugurates Digitalized Health Information System.

Aleem Khan vows to resolve issues of people of AJK

ISLAMABAD (INP): President of the Istehkam-e-Pakistan Party (IPP), Abdul Aleem Khan, has pledged to address the long-standing grievances of the people of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), promising quality education, improved civic infrastructure and transparent governance if his party comes to power.

Addressing a press conference in Islamabad, Aleem Khan said the IPP would ensure that all decisions concerning AJK are made in line with the aspirations of its people and vowed to fulfil every commitment made to the people of Kashmir.

He said practical measures would be taken to ensure that every child in Azad Kashmir has access to education, adding that expanding educational opportunities would be among the party's key priorities. Aleem Khan said that if the IPP is elected to form the government in AJK, it would uphold merit, transparency and public service in all state affairs.

PTI announces boycott of AJK elections

Criticising rival parties, Aleem Khan said those who had remained in power for years were responsible for the hardships faced by the people. He remarked that parties which had governed the country multiple times should first account for their own performance before criticising others.

On the occasion, several political figures joined the IPP.

One killed, 18 wounded as van plunges into ravine in Dukki

DUKKI (INP): One person was killed and 18 other were wounded when a van fell into ravine in Dukki, a city in Balochistan province.

According to details, the accident occurred in Mandaytak area of Dukki where a van, bringing back engagement ceremony guests, fell into a gorge when its brakes failed, killing one person on the spot and injuring 18 others.

Police and rescue teams reached the spot after getting information and shifted the dead and injured to District Headquarters (DHQ) Hospital. Rescue sources informed that three injured persons were in critical condition.



Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan Emir Hafiz Naeem ur Rehman addresses Bano Qabil graduation ceremony in Islamabad.

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