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Aurangzeb, World Bank discuss growth

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## Ruling alliance sweeps Senate polls with PPP grabbing 11, PML-N six seats

Overall 356 lawmakers cast their votes in the upper house of parliament's elections, whereas,

## Nawaz, Shehbaz cast their votes for Senate election



ISLAMABAD Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and PML-N leader Nawaz Sharif cast their votes for Senate election. Polling in National as well as Sindh and Punjab assemblies was held simultaneously to elect 19 senators. As many as 35 candidates are in the field for 19 Senate seats whereas 18 senators have already been declared winners unopposed. In Islamabad, Ishaq Dar of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) is contesting on the technocrat seat, Rana Mehmoodul Hasan of the Pakistan Peoples Party on the general seat, Ansar Mehmood supported by the PTI on the technocrat seat and Farzand Hussain Shah is contesting on the general seat.



Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif casting his vote at the Senate elections at Parliament House

Soon Times Correspondent The Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) has taken the lead in the Senate polls with 11 seats, while Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) clinched six seats. The Muttahida Qaumi Movement Pakistan (MQM-P) secured an independent candidate Faisal Vawda secured one seat each. The polling for the 19 vacant seats was held in the National, Punjab, and Sindh assemblies while elections on 11 Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's seats were postponed by the Election Commission over the "denial" of oath-taking to the lawmakers elected on reserved seats. Overall 356 lawmakers cast their votes in the upper house of parliament's elections, whereas, votes of five NA lawmakers were rejected. Sindh The ruling party in Sindh — the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) — managed to win 10 Senate seats from the province, whereas, each Senate seat was won by the Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan

(MQM-P) and an independent candidate. On the general seat, Ashraf Ali Jatoi, Dost Ali Jassar, Kazim Ali Shah, Masroor Ahsan, and Nadeem Bhatti have been declared victors, as per preliminary results. MQM-P's Amir Chishti has been elected senator on a general seat while independent candidate Faisal Vawda also won the general seat in the Senate. PPP leaders Rubina Saadat Qaimkhani and Quratunnaila Marri were elected on women's seat while another PPP candidate Punjohi Mili Bhatti won a reserved seat for minority. PPP's Sarmad Ali and Zamir Ghumro won technocrat seats. In Sindh Assembly, the provincial election commissioner Sharif Ullah announced the results of the Senate polls. Punjab, Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb grabbed victory in the upper house polls on technocrat seats after securing 128 votes. PML-N leader and Federal Minister for Energy Musadik Malik also won a technocrat seat after securing 121 votes.

## Omar Ayub notified as NA opposition leader



Soon Times Correspondent ISLAMABAD. Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader Omar Ayub was elected unopposed as the Leader of the Opposition in the National Assembly on Tuesday after the National Assembly Secretariat notified his appointment. The notification came following the successful scrutiny of Ayub's nomination papers as per Rule 39 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business of the NA. Ayub and PTI leaders Barister

## Ishaq Dar appointed as presiding officer for Senate chairman, deputy chairman polls



Soon Times Correspondent ISLAMABAD. Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar has been appointed as the presiding officer for elections of the Senate chairman and deputy chairman as well as the swearing-in of the newly elected senators. On advice of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, President Asif Zardari appointed Dar as the PO by signing the summary. The Senate secretariat said that according to the parliamentary tradition, only a senator can be the presiding officer of the first session. Meanwhile, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) Tuesday postponed Senate elections in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa after the opposition members.

## Eight IHC judges receive 'threatening letters filled with powder'



Islamabad Web Desk. In a disturbing turn of events, eight judges of the Islamabad High Court (IHC), including Chief Justice Aamer Farooq, have reportedly received threatening letters filled with an unknown powder. This incident has sparked fears of intimidation and raised concerns about the safety and security of the judiciary. Last week, six judges of the IHC penned a letter to the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC), expressing their concerns about alleged interference by intelligence agencies in the court's affairs. This development has put a spotlight on the delicate balance between judicial independence and external influence. Judicial sources told Express News that when the staff of two judges opened the letters, they found powder inside. Subsequently, the affected staff experienced burning sensations in their eyes. Swift action was taken, with affected individuals using sanitizer and washing their

## Constitution is being violated repeatedly, will fight tooth and nail to get our right: Gandapur



Soon Times Correspondent PESHAWAR. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur said on Tuesday the Constitution in the country was being violated repeatedly. Speaking to media, Gandapur said, "We will not back down. Lawmakers on reserved seats will not be allowed to take oath illegally." He further said, "The Constitution is being repeatedly violated in the country. The Constitution was breached by not holding elections in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa within 90 days." Gandapur said PTI's election symbol and seats were snatched. He said the system would unravel soon.

## Imran claims Bushra poisoned in Bani Gala sub-jail

Former premier requests court to order Bushra's medical examination by a doctor from Shaukat Khanum hospital



Soon Times Correspondent ISLAMABAD. PTI founder Imran Khan claimed on Tuesday that his wife and former first lady had been poisoned while incarcerated at Bani Gala sub-jail and asked for her medical checkup by a doctor of his choosing. During the hearing of the ₹190 million corruption reference in Adiala jail, the former premier informed Judge Nasir Javed Rana that there had been an attempt to poison the former first

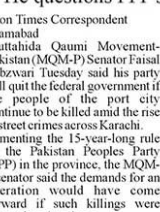
lady and added that she has marks on her skin and tongue as a side effect of the poisoning. "I know who is behind it," said the PTI founder. He added that if any harm came to Bushra, the army chief should be held responsible as members of an intelligence agency are controlling everything in Bani Gala and Adiala jail. Imran further urged the court to order Bushra's medical examination by Dr. Asim of Shaukat Khanum Hospital, adding that he and the party do not trust

the doctor who examined Bushra earlier. He also urged to have an inquiry into the matter of Bushra's alleged poisoning. Following the former premier's request, the court directed Imran to submit a detailed application regarding the former first lady's medical examination. Talking to the media during the hearing, Bushra said rumours regarding her being an 'American agent' were circulating in the party. She further said that she was poisoned by "three drops" of a popular toilet

cleaner which were added to her food and claimed that a person's health deteriorates after a month of consumption. Read Bushra fears Imran could be 'poisoned' in Adiala Jail "My eyes swell up, I feel pain and discomfort in my chest and stomach and food and water also taste bitter. Some suspicious substance was mixed in honey earlier and now the toilet cleaner was mixed in my food," claimed the former first lady. "I was told by someone in jail about what was added to my food. I will not reveal any names."

## MQM-P threatens to quit federal govt over rise in street crimes

Subzwari asks why barriers not being placed on the streets. He questions PPP's 15-year-long governance in curbing crime.



Soon Times Correspondent Islamabad. Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P) Senator Faisal Subzwari Tuesday said his party will quit the federal government if the people of the port city continue to be killed amid the rise in street crimes across Karachi. Lamenting the 15-year-long rule of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) in the province, the MQM-P senator said the demands for an operation would have come forward if such killings were happening elsewhere. "If our people continue to be killed, we will leave the government," he said, speaking with journalists in Karachi. Karachi has been gripped by street crimes claiming the lives of dozens of citizens who have fallen victim at the hands of criminals for the past few weeks. Many have been killed while resisting robberies and snatching incidents, particularly in the month of Ramadan during which



criminals seem to have been let loose. From January till March, at least 50 citizens have lost their lives due to street crimes. Meanwhile, six robbers have been killed in 75 police encounters while 93 accused were arrested with injuries. However, Sindh Home Minister Ziaul Hasan Lanjar termed crime "part of a daily life", alleging that the worsening state of crimes in Karachi is being "exaggerated" in local media. Contrary to his remarks, the Sindh cabinet, in its maiden meeting on March 13 was informed that nearly 16,000 street crimes had been recorded in the metropolis since January this year.

## Court defers gifts case hearing against Nawaz, Zardari till Jan 4

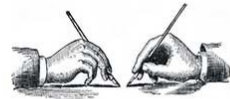
Meanwhile, talking about the suspension of PTI founder's sentence in the Thoshakhana case,



Soon Times Correspondent Lahore. The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has vehemently opposed the formation of a larger bench and demanded of the Supreme Court (SC) to establish a full court to adjudicate the case concerning the letter written by six Islamabad High Court (IHC) judges. Addressing a press conference, PTI Central Spokesperson Raouf Hassan underscored the imperative for Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa to convene the full court and ensure an open hearing broadcast live on television to enable the public to witness the judicial process in this pivotal case. "A full court is essential given the gravity and significance of the matter. Both the high court judges and the people of Pakistan demand justice, a demand that must be met. The responsibility lies with the chief justice that he cannot evade," he said. The six IHC judges had written a letter to the chief justice, alleging agencies



meddling in the judicial matters. On that the government had formed a single-member inquiry commission consisting of former chief justice (ret'd) Tassaduq Jilani. However, Jilani recused himself on Monday. The PTI spokesperson noted that the former chief justice's letter corroborated the stance of the PTI as well as that of the legal fraternity, taking the issue beyond the purview of the chief justice and a seven judge bench. On the occasion, former Gilgit-Baltistan chief minister Khudhdad Khurshid criticized the state of the judicial system in the country. He said it was a watershed moment in Pakistan's history when six judges took a stand against interference by the agencies in judicial affairs. Khurshid commended their courage and called upon the Supreme Court and the nation to safeguard them and rectify past mistakes. He underscored the importance of a robust judicial system in fostering growth and attracting investment.



## WILDLIFE RESCUE FORCE

A suite of directives spearheaded by Senior Provincial Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb, to safeguard and conserve wildlife, have borne fruit. These orders have been issued in accordance with the guidelines of Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif. In a statement issued on Tuesday, Senior Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb stated that the establishment of a wildlife rescue force has been ordered under the vision of the CM Punjab. In the first phase, the rescue force will consist of trained staff, veterinary ambulances, doctors and rescue vehicles in Khanewal, Lahore and Rawalpindi.

She explained that legislation will be enacted regarding the capture of lions, leopards and wild cats under the Wildlife Act. Prior to the ten-day timeline for the combing operation against illegal possession of animals, continuous operations resulted in the recovery of 11 rare black bears from Sargodha, Nankana Sahib, Bahawalpur, Multan, Gujranwala and DG Khan, she added.

The senior minister disclosed that the search operations led to the rescue of 96 green parrots, 20 monkeys, 85 sparrows, 6 pheasants, 35 partridges, 45 rosy starlings (Pastor roseus),

and 25 peacocks from unlawful captivity. Additionally, a Bengal tiger was intercepted while being transported from Lahore to Multan. Those found keeping animals illegally are subject to arrest under the amended Wildlife Act of 1973, with fines amounting to Rs.712,500 imposed on various offenders. She assured that the rescued animals will be temporarily housed in aviaries before being released back into their natural habitats, many of which are endangered. Furthermore, educational lectures and seminars have been conducted in academic

institutions to raise public awareness regarding wildlife protection and conservation efforts, she said. Marriyum Aurangzeb emphasized that no leniency will be shown towards those unlawfully detaining animals or perpetrating acts of cruelty against them. The true sanctuary for wildlife lies within forests and other natural environs. Keeping wild animals and birds in unlawful captivity constitutes a criminal offense, she asserted, urging the public to report any such instances to aid in wildlife preservation efforts.

## Pakistan's FY24 economic outlook remains bleak, warns World Bank



The World Bank also warned that Pakistan would continue to face liquidity issues in the medium term, due to trade deficit and limited access to external financing, unless authorities take "major and sustained economic reforms."

"Pakistan is expected to continue facing foreign exchange liquidity issues due to the persistent trade deficit and limited access to external financing. Even with the recent successful completion of the IMF-SBA and continued rollovers, reserves are projected to remain low. Import management measures are expected to continue disrupting domestic supply chains, while tight macroeconomic policies will mute aggregate consumption and investment," the report said.

It said the fiscal deficit was projected to increase to 8.0% of GDP in FY24 due to higher interest payments. "It will then gradually decline over the medium term as interest payments decrease and fiscal consolidation measures take hold," the report said.

It added that the primary deficit was expected to decline to 0.1% of GDP in FY24, reflecting the recent fiscal consolidation measures.

"It is expected to grow to 0.3 percent of GDP in FY25-26. A deeper fiscal consolidation over the medium term will be necessary to restore fiscal and debt sustainability," the World Bank said.

foreign exchange reserves," the WB report said.

The report said under the current policy settings, and unless a major structural reform programme was durably implemented, growth was expected to remain muted amid continued very low investment, persistent external imbalances (likely necessitating continued import and capital management measures), distortionary fiscal policies, and a large state presence in the economy.

The multilateral donor said Pakistan's economy stabilised with improved economic management and new external inflows, while a sustained recovery, with improved growth prospects, and poverty reduction would remain a challenge.

"Without major reforms, no significant poverty reduction is expected over the medium term. Financial sector stress, looming policy uncertainty with potential policy slippages, climate change-induced shocks and natural disasters, and external headwinds all pose very high risks to the outlook," the IFI's report said.

Web Desk

The World Bank (WB) on Tuesday projected Pakistan's economy to grow by only 1.8% in the current fiscal year ending June 2024, stressing the need for structural reforms, as inflationary burdens have sent nearly 40% of the population below the poverty line.

According to World Bank's latest "Pakistan Development Update: Fiscal Impact of Federal State-Owned Enterprises," the modest economic recovery in recent months is attributed to stringent monetary and fiscal policies, ongoing import control measures to safeguard limited foreign reserves, and subdued economic activity amidst low confidence levels.

"A clearly articulated, ambitious, and credible economic reform agenda is required to reduce uncertainty and restore confidence. Risks remain very high, and key policy constraints to sustainable economic growth remain unaddressed. Policy buffers to manage any shocks remain depleted, with high levels of debt and tightly constrained

## "The Politics of Privatization in Pakistan: An Analysis of the Impact on Democratic Accountability and Professionalism"



Awais Akmal  
From Sargodha University

Privatization has been a widely adopted policy approach around the world, driven by the belief that transferring state-owned enterprises (SOEs) to the private sector can enhance economic efficiency, foster competition, and promote overall development. However, the process of privatization is not merely an economic phenomenon; it has profound implications for democratic accountability and the professionalism of public services.

Pakistan, a developing nation in South Asia, has experienced multiple waves of privatization over the past few decades. The introduction of market-oriented reforms in the 1990s, under the influence of international financial institutions, led to a significant shift in the government's role in the economy. Numerous public enterprises were privatized, spanning sectors such as telecommunications, banking, energy, and transportation. While privatization was often promoted as a means to increase efficiency and reduce the fiscal burden on the government, its consequences for democratic accountability and professionalism have received less attention.

Democratic accountability is a vital pillar of any functioning democracy, ensuring that decision-making processes are transparent, participatory, and subject to public scrutiny. The privatization of public services can potentially impact democratic accountability by transferring decision-making power from accountable government institutions to profit-oriented private entities. It raises questions regarding the degree of public oversight and control over essential services, such as healthcare, education, and utilities, once they are handed over to private hands. Understanding the dynamics of democratic accountability in the context of privatization is crucial for evaluating the broader implications for governance and citizen engagement.

Moreover, the professionalism of public services is an essential

factor in the efficient delivery of services to citizens. Privatization often brings market-oriented incentives that may reshape the ethos and practices within public institutions. It can introduce performance-based metrics, introduce competition, and redefine the roles and responsibilities of public servants. This raises questions about the potential impacts on the quality and accessibility of public services, as well as the integrity and accountability of public officials.

Privatization in Pakistan has been an ongoing process that dates back to the late 1980s. It has been pursued by various governments with the aim of reducing the burden on the public sector, improving efficiency, attracting investment, and stimulating economic growth. Here is a historical overview of privatization in Pakistan:

•Late 1980s: The process of privatization in Pakistan began in earnest under the government of Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto in 1988. The government established the Privatization Commission in 1990 to oversee the privatization process. However, due to political instability and resistance from labor unions, progress was limited during this period.

•1990s: Privatization gained momentum during the government of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in the 1990s. The privatization program was expanded to include industries such as banking, telecommunications, and energy. Key privatization initiatives included the sale of shares in United Bank Limited (U.B.L.), Pakistan Telecommunication Company Limited (PTCL), and the Karachi Electric Supply Corporation (KESC).

•Early 2000s: The process of privatization faced some setbacks in the early 2000s due to political changes and legal challenges. However, the government of President Pervez Musharraf reinvented the privatization program by launching the Privatization for People program, which aimed to offer shares to the general public. This led to the successful privatization of various entities, including Pakistan State Oil (PSO), Pakistan Steel Mills, and the Oil and Gas Development Company Limited (OGDCL).

•2008-2013: The government of President Asif Ali Zardari faced criticism for the slow pace of privatization during this period. However, some progress was

made, including the privatization of the Pakistan Reinsurance Company Limited (PRCL) and the National Investment Trust (NIT). •2013-2018: The government of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, in his third term, placed a renewed emphasis on privatization. The government pursued a comprehensive privatization agenda, including the sale of shares in Pakistan International Airlines (PIA), Pakistan Steel Mills, and various power generation companies. However, political and legal challenges resulted in limited progress during this period.

•2018-present: The government of Prime Minister Imran Khan has expressed its commitment to privatization as part of its economic reform agenda. The government aims to divest shares in various state-owned enterprises, including Pakistan International Airlines (PIA), Pakistan Steel Mills, and Pakistan State Oil (PSO). However, progress has been slow due to a challenging economic environment and political opposition.

Now here are some policy recommendations for strengthening democratic accountability and enhancing professionalism: •Enhance transparency and information disclosure throughout the privatization process, including the publication of relevant documents and public access to information.

•Establish robust oversight mechanisms to monitor privatization initiatives, ensuring that decision-making processes are accountable to democratic institutions and stakeholders.

•Promote citizen participation in decision-making, such as through public consultations, hearings, and involvement of civil society organizations, to ensure diverse perspectives are considered.

•Develop and enforce professional standards in privatized sectors to ensure the delivery of high-quality services and maintain professionalism among employees. •Establish capacity-building programs and training initiatives to bridge skill gaps and enhance the expertise of the workforce in privatized entities. •Implement performance monitoring and evaluation systems to measure the efficiency and effectiveness of privatized services, while also incorporating customer feedback and satisfaction surveys.



Speaker National Assembly, Sardar Ayaz Sadiq, called on President Asif Ali Zardari, at Aiwan-e-Sadr,



## MC Sargodha is not paying heed towards open manholes: Citizens



Soon Times Correspondent Sargodha: All manhole covers in Sargodha are missing. There is a danger of children falling into manholes. On behalf of the citizens, requests have been made several times to Commissioner Ajmal Bhatti and Deputy Commissioner Captain retired

Shoab Ali. Falling into open manholes in the streets is a threat to children's lives. Children play in the streets on their way home from school which can lead to accidents anytime. But the Sargodha administration is sitting in its office as a silent spectator. Citizens say that the administration does not take action until an accident occurs in Sargodha.

Sargodha administration has the biggest hand in turning Sargodha city into ruins. Therefore, we request Prime Minister Pakistan Shehbaz Sharif and Chief Minister Punjab Maryam Nawaz to take action on them. Open manholes in streets and markets should be closed to avoid any untoward incident.

## Security staff of THQ Hospital Bhera went on strike



Soon Times Correspondent Bhera: The security staff of Tehsil Headquarters Hospital Bhera went on strike for non-payment of salaries. Security officials

say that we have not received salary for three months. Our families are starving. The strike will continue until the salary is not paid. Medical Superintendent Dr. Hafiz Muhammad Ismail said that the salary of

security personnel is the responsibility of their security agency. They have informed the district health authority about the whole situation. They are trying to get their salaries before Eid-ul-Fitr.

## Wildlife department is continuing a combing operation against illegal hunting: Urooj Zaheer



Soon Times Correspondent Sargodha: Assistant Director Wildlife Sargodha Urooj Zaheer participated as a guest in the city service program "Shaheen Sargodha" broadcast by Radio Pakistan Sargodha. While talking to program anchor Malik Qasim, she

said that on the special instructions of Senior Minister Punjab Maryam Aurangzeb, under the leadership of DG Wildlife Mudassar Riaz Malik, a combing operation has been going on across Punjab since March 26 against the trend of illegal hunting. Under this operation, engaged wild animals and

birds from different areas of Punjab have been rescued and released in the open air. Shopkeepers keeping these birds have been punished and fined heavily. In this regard, two bears have been recovered from District Sargodha and transferred to Joharabad Wildlife Park. Similarly, a raid was conducted in Bhalwal Birds Market, where hundreds of birds were rescued from different shops and released in the open air. It should be remembered that under the third schedule of the Punjab Wildlife Act, birds and animals, including parrots, sparrows, black bears, monkeys, chakors etc. are not allowed to be kept in homes. Those who are keeping peacocks, aryls and chinkara deer without license will be taken into custody and legal action will be taken against those responsible. The Wildlife Department has been carrying out awareness campaigns among people against illegal poaching of wildlife through pamphlets, hoarding boards, penfalex, electronic and print media as well as visiting schools and colleges.



Chief Minister Gilgit Baltistan Gulbar Khan calls on Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif in Islamabad

## Women Leaders of PTI arrested in Mianwali riot case

Soon Times Correspondent Sargodha:

Threec-e-Insaf's women leaders Sanam Javed and Alia Hamza have been arrested in the Mianwali riot case. These women leaders were also named in the four cases of May 9 and 10. Mianwali police arrested Alia Hamza and Sanam Javed from Lahore and brought them to Sargodha. Both the PTI leaders were produced before the Special Anti-Terrorism Court. The police has requested a 30-day remand of Sanam Javed and Alia Hamza. Judge Ijaz Ahmad Buttar of the Special Anti-Terrorism Court has granted a 14-day remand. Sanam Javed and Alia Hamza were named in terrorism cases registered in Mianwali police station Kamar Mashani, Musa Khel



police station and City police station on May 9. Further hearing will be held on April 16.

## Aitzaz moves SC to form commission to probe IHC judges' letter

Soon Times Correspondent LAHORE

A petition was lodged in the Supreme Court (SC) Lahore Registry, urging the formation of a commission comprised three top court serving judges to investigate the recent letter written by six judges of the Islamabad High Court. Senior lawyer Aitzaz Ahsan filed the petition in the Supreme Court making the Ministry of Law and the Ministry of Defence as respondents. The petition highlights the letter written by six judges of the Islamabad High Court on March 25, questioning whether there was a way to handle intimidation by secret agencies. It further contends that the letter, along with Justice (ret'd) Shaukat Siddiqui's revelations, signifies undue influence exerted by secret agencies on the judgments.



The petition seeks to identify the individuals within secret agencies involved in illicit activities. Additionally, it calls for the dismissal of all agency officials involved in such unlawful acts by the federal government. Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa has taken suo moto notice of the letter sent by six judges and formed a seven-member bench to hear the issue of alleged interference in the judiciary.



## Methodist Church Opens Door to Promote Social Cohesion

Soon Times Correspondent Quetta:

In a landmark event hosted by the Methodist Church in Quetta, a diverse array of religious leaders and dignitaries gathered for a Dialogue cum Iftar dinner, a collaborative effort between the Balochistan Rural Support Program (BRSP) and the Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF). Among the attendees was Speaker Provincial Assembly Cap (R) Abdul Khaliq Achakzai, who emphasized the vital need for collaborative endeavours in fostering peace and understanding among communities. Achakzai urged attendees to carry forward the spirit of unity and understanding nurtured during the event, emphasizing that together, they can build a more prosperous and inclusive society. Nadir Gul, the CEO of PPAF, emphasized the influential role of religious scholars in promoting education, countering extremist ideologies, and advocating for social justice and equality. He reiterated the vision of Quaid-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah for a Pakistan that embraces religious freedom and unity among all faiths. Gul also highlighted the significance of Paigham-e-Pakistan in fostering interfaith harmony and social cohesion, emphasizing its role in bridging communal gaps and nurturing a sense of unity among Pakistanis. Mr. Dawood Bazai, Secretary of Minority Affairs Government of Balochistan (GOB), shed light on the

government's initiatives to promote interfaith harmony, social cohesion, and protect the rights of religious minorities. He emphasized the pivotal role of collaborative efforts in nurturing unity and harmony to build an inclusive and peaceful society through collective actions. Zahoor Balidi, a member of the Provincial Assembly of Balochistan, delivered valuable perspectives on the importance of dialogue and cooperation among various faith communities. He stressed the significance of mutual respect and understanding in cultivating a society that values its diversity, highlighting the positive impact of such gatherings in promoting interfaith harmony and inclusivity. Bishop Khalid Rehmat emphasized the celebration of diversity and social pluralism, urging unity in embracing Pakistan's rich cultural tapestry. He commended the collaborative efforts of government institutions in fostering social cohesion and understanding among diverse communities, noting the importance of governmental support in building a society where every individual is valued and respected. Earlier, while welcoming to the participants Dr. Tahir Rasheed, CEO of BRSP, underscored the importance of cooperation among various stakeholders, including government agencies, donor organizations like PPAF, religious leaders, civil societies, and the media.



## PCB likely to bench Shaheen for three T20I matches against NZ



ISLAMABAD

Pakistan pacer Shaheen Shah Afridi will likely miss part of the five-match T20I series against New Zealand in line with the policy of the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) to lessen the burden on leading fast bowlers of the team.

According to the publication, there are ongoing consultations on the matter to protect the pacers from unnecessary burden and test the form and fitness of newcomers.

Meanwhile, the fast bowlers who are making a comeback have more chances to be included in the T20I series against the Kiwis.

There are chances that leading fast bowlers including Shaheen will be rested for the first part of the series or the complete series against the visitors, which is set to begin on April 18.

The development comes after PCB replaced Shaheen as the T20I captain and reappointed Babar Azam in his place. The former captain was reportedly unhappy with the board's abrupt decision of his removal.



## Bella Hadid, family get death threats for speaking out against Israel

(Web Desk) - Amid increasing global condemnation of Israel's actions, various celebrities are using their platforms to raise awareness.

Palestinian-American model Bella Hadid recently criticised Israel's apartheid regime on her Instagram Story. She shared a clip of an Israeli minister denying the existence of the Palestinian people and responded by highlighting her own Palestinian heritage and condemning the injustices suffered by Palestinians.

Bella also shared a video from Al Jazeera showing casualties in Syria caused by Israeli airstrikes, expressing her outrage at the ongoing violence.

## Shagufta Ejaz reminisces about PTV's heyday



(Web Desk) - Shagufta Ejaz is a popular Pakistani television actor who has appeared in numerous hit drama serials. Appearing on a TV show, she drew comparison between the past and the present actors. She said the actors in the past focused on skill and performance whereas today's actors lacked maturity and tolerance.

In the show, she talked about the professionalism of actors - both old and the young. She also gave her opinion on the latest trends in the drama industry. Shagufta Jaz said, "previous actors had tolerance, current actors lack tolerance level, we had perfection in our craft, now actors don't have that perfection and maturity."

Today's actors have achieved a lot of success and financial stability in a very short period of time, they have got everything and we spent decades in achieving that success.

Also, in old times, actors used to take work as priority, their focus was on craft, they didn't have much distractions. The actors used to focus on performance rather than sets and ambiance."



## World Central Kitchen charity halts Gaza operations after Israeli strike kills 7 workers

The charity said the team was traveling in a three-car convoy that included two armored vehicles.

DEIRAL-BALAH, Gaza Strip

An Israeli airstrike killed seven aid workers with World Central Kitchen, leading the charity to suspend delivery Tuesday of vital food aid to Gaza, where Israel's offensive has pushed hundreds of thousands of Palestinians to the brink of starvation.

Cyprus, which has played a key role in trying to establish a sea route to bring food to the territory, said ships that recently arrived were turning back — with some 240 tons of undeclared aid. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu acknowledged that the country's forces had carried out the "unintended strike" on "innocent people in the Gaza Strip." He says officials are looking into the strike and would "do everything for this not to happen again."

Footage showed the bodies, several wearing protective gear with the charity's logo, at a hospital in the central Gaza town of Deir al-Balah. Those killed include three British nationals, an Australian, a Polish national, an American-Canadian dual citizen and a Palestinian, according to hospital records.

A man displays blood-stained British, Polish, and Australian passports after an Israeli airstrike, in Deir al-Balah, Gaza Strip, Monday, April 1, 2024. (AP Photo/Abdel Kareem Hana)

A man displays blood-stained British, Polish, and Australian passports after an Israeli airstrike, in Deir al-Balah, Gaza Strip, April 1, 2024. (AP Photo/Abdel Kareem Hana)

World Central Kitchen, a food charity founded by celebrity chef José Andrés, was key to the recently opened sea route, which offered some hope for northern Gaza — where the U.N. says much of the population is on the brink of starvation, largely cut off from the rest of the territory by Israeli forces.

## Russia damages energy facility in drone attacks on central Ukraine, Kyiv says

KYIV

Russian drones targeted energy infrastructure in overnight attacks on Ukraine's central Dnipropetrovsk and Kirovohrad regions, hitting an energy facility in the latter, Ukraine's military said on Tuesday.

Nine drones were shot down over Dnipropetrovsk region where debris caused two fires in the regional capital of Dnipro, the governor said in a statement on the Telegram messaging app, adding they had both been put out. But a drone hit a high voltage substation in Kirovohrad region, causing a fire there, the Ukrenergo grid operator wrote on Telegram. The governor said no casualties had been reported.

Air defenses were able to down nine out of 10 of the incoming Russian drones, the General Staff said.

Russia has pounded Ukraine's energy facilities in recent weeks, dealing significant damage to the Ukrainian power system and causing blackouts in many regions.



## Pakistan likely to announce 18-member squad for NZ T20I series in two days



LAHORE

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) is expected to announce the national squad for the T20I series against New Zealand in a couple of days, as a consultation process has begun to finalise the names in Kakul, Abbottabad.

Consultation over finalising the

names is underway between skipper Babar Azam and national selectors in Kakul, where players are undergoing strict physical training under the supervision of Pakistan Army staff.

A day earlier, the captain and selectors held a meeting with PCB Chairman Mohsin Naqvi for the

same reason.

The sources said since it was a home series, an 18-member squad was expected to be announced. The T20I series is scheduled to take place on April 18 and the visiting team will reach Pakistan on April 14.

Fast bowler Haris Rauf, who suffered a shoulder injury during the recently concluded Pakistan Super League (PSL) 9, is not completely fit and would continue the rehab process.

The players under consideration for the five-match series are Babar, Saif Ayub, Muhammad Rizwan, Saibzada Farhan, Salman Ali Agha, Iftikhar Ahmed, Azam Khan, Shadab Khan, Usama Mir, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Naseem Shah, Imad Wasim, Muhammad Amir, Zaman Khan, Usman Khan,

## Ukrainian drone hits Russia's third biggest refinery

MOSCOW

A Ukrainian drone struck Russia's third largest oil refinery on Tuesday about 1,300 km (800 miles) from the front lines, hitting a unit that processes about 155,000 barrels of crude per day though an industry source said the damage was not significant. Russian officials said its jamming devices locked onto a Ukrainian drone near Tatneft's Taneco refinery, which has an annual production capacity of more than 17 million tons (340,000 barrels per day). Pictures from the scene indicated the drone hit the primary refining unit, CDU-7, at the refinery, though the drone appears to have not done serious damage.

An industry source who spoke to Reuters on condition of anonymity said the damage to the unit was not critical while the personnel was returning to the plant. A fire broke out at the refinery but was extinguished within 20 minutes, the state news agency RIA said, adding that output had not been disrupted.



Ramil Mullin, the mayor of Nizhnekamsk in the Tatarstan region southeast of Moscow where the refinery is located, said there had been no serious damage done.

The unit that was hit accounts for around half of the plant's total annual production capacity. The refinery accounts for about 6.2% of Russia's refining capacity. A military intelligence source in Ukraine, which has been at war with Russia since Moscow began a full-scale invasion of its neighbour two years ago, said in Kyiv that the primary Taneco refining unit had been hit,

causing a fire. The source said the strike aimed to reduce Russia's oil revenue.

Another Ukrainian intelligence source said Ukrainian-made drones also hit a Russian plant producing long-range "Shahed" attack drones, causing "significant damage". Tuesday's attack was one of several in Tatarstan, a highly industrialised region, in the early hours of Tuesday. The Washington Post reported last year that Russia was mass-producing drones at a plant in Tatarstan.

## EU agrees new rules on hosting migrants, seeks to cut numbers



BERLIN

German Finance Minister Christian Lindner expects up to 9 billion euros (\$9.7 billion) in additional defence spending from 2028 if the country can reduce its debt levels, he said in comments to the DPA news agency published on Tuesday. The additional funds could be freed up if Germany gets its debt below an EU-set target of 60% of gross domestic product from 63%, Lindner, of the fiscally conservative Free Democrats (FDP), told DPA.

"If we fall below this limit, then the repayment of coronavirus debt planned from 2028 could be discussed again," he said.

The German government took out emergency loans totalling around 300 billion euros in 2020, 2021 and 2022 in response to the coronavirus pandemic and the war in Ukraine, while suspending the debt brake that limits government borrowing.

"Without having to change the debt brake, I can then see new financial room for manoeuvre," Lindner said on Tuesday on social platform X.

Germany is budgeting for a debt repayment of 9 billion euros per year from 2028 and of 10.8 billion euros per year from 2031.

"However, if the burden of the pandemic on the debt level has already been overcome by then, the repayment could be significantly reduced," the minister said.

"This would make billions available that will help us achieve the leap to the NATO target in the federal budget after the end of the special programme for the Bundeswehr," he said.

Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Germany set up the 100-billion-euro special fund to purchase modern weapons. It also pledged to reach NATO's target of spending at least 2% of GDP on defence. The German government is currently preparing the budget for 2025 and the financial plan up to 2028.



## Blinken in Paris for talks on Ukraine, Gaza

PARIS

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will hold talks with French President Emmanuel Macron in Paris on Tuesday on supporting Ukraine in its war with Russia and the Israel-Hamas conflict. France is among major military suppliers to Ukraine, which has faced critical shortages of arms and troops as it holds off an onslaught of Russian attacks.

The United States has been the key military backer for Ukraine but a \$60 billion aid package has been held up in Congress.

Paris has also advocated for a permanent ceasefire between Israel and Hamas. The United States, Israel's main ally, recently let pass a UN Security Council resolution that calls for a ceasefire during the month of Ramadan. Blinken will meet with Macron to discuss the mounting international crises, the French presidency told AFP. He will also have talks with Foreign Minister Stéphane Séjourné.

France held an international conference in February in a bid to rally financial and military support for Ukraine. The results will be reviewed by Blinken and French leaders, officials said. Both sides want an "intensification" of support for Ukraine, a member of Séjourné's entourage said.

The French minister was in Cairo on Saturday to discuss the Gaza war and in China on Monday to urge Beijing to press Russia over the

Ukraine war.

The French foreign ministry said Séjourné and Blinken will discuss preparations for a NATO summit in Washington in July, as well as the "crises" in the Middle East, Ukraine and Sudan.

They will hold a joint press conference after their meeting. In a symbolic visit, Blinken was to accompany France's Armed Forces Minister Sébastien Lecornu to a factory near Paris of Franco-German defence group KNDS, which makes artillery guns being used in Ukraine. Blinken is also to go to the Paris headquarters of the UN cultural organisation, UNESCO, that the United States rejoined last year. Blinken will hold a meeting with UNESCO leader Audrey Azoulay. The visit marks the first trip to France for Blinken, a fluent French speaker, in nearly two years.

Macron paid a state visit to Washington in December 2022. After Paris, Blinken will head to Brussels for NATO foreign ministers' talks ahead of the alliance's 75th anniversary summit in Washington in July. Blinken will also hold a three-way meeting in Brussels with EU leaders and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, who has been seeking to branch out from his country's historic alliance with Russia.