

QUETTA VOICE

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Iran President Ebrahim Raisi's helicopter 'crashes upon landing' in Varzaqan region: state media

NEWS DESK: A helicopter carrying Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi and other local officials was involved in a "crash upon landing" in Varzaqan region of the country under poor weather conditions on Sunday, state media Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) reported. The crash occurred while the president was en route to a ceremony in the region. The helicopter was carrying Raisi, his wife, and several other officials. The crash site is in a mountainous area with difficult terrain. The president was reportedly unharmed, but the helicopter was destroyed. The incident has raised concerns about the safety of the president's travel arrangements.

The semi-official Fars news agency called on Iranians to pray for Raisi following the reports. A handout picture provided by the Iranian presidency on May 19, 2024, shows Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi (L) and his Azeri counterpart Ilham Aliyev meeting at the site of the Qiz Qalasi ahead of its inauguration ceremony.—AFP Raisi was visiting East Azerbaijan province on Sunday where he inaugurated a dam project in the company of his Azeri counterpart, Ilham Aliyev, on the border between the two countries. Raisi has been president of the Islamic Republic since June 2021, succeeding the moderate Hassan Rouhani, for a term during which Iran has faced crisis and conflict. He took the reins of a country in the grip of a deep social crisis and an economy strained by US sanctions against Tehran over its contested nuclear programme. Iran saw a wave of mass protests triggered by the death in custody of Iranian Kurd Mahsa Amini in September 2022. In March 2023, regional rivals Iran and Saudi Arabia signed a surprise deal that restored diplomatic relations. The bombardment in Gaza that began on October 7 sent regional tensions soaring again and a series of tit-for-tat escalations led to Tehran launching hundreds of missiles and rockets directly at Israel in April 2024. In a speech following Sunday's dam inauguration, Raisi emphasised Iran's support for Palestinians, a centerpiece of its foreign policy since the 1979 Islamic revolution. "We believe that Palestine is the first issue of the Muslim world and we are convinced that the people of Iran and Azerbaijan always support the people of Palestine and Gaza and hate the Zionist regime," said Raisi.

Balochistan: Nurturing Intellectual, Political, and Cultural Growth

Quetta Voice Special Report:

QUETTA: The recently concluded Pakistan Literary Festival in Quetta provided a unique platform for dialogue, reflection, and exploration. As the Chief Minister of Balochistan, Mir Sarfaraz Bugti, aptly stated, the challenges faced by the region—education, health, and development—stem from internal factors that demand our attention.

Education: A Struggle for Quality and Access

Balochistan's education sector faces significant hurdles. Despite substantial budget allocations, the quality of education remains subpar. Minister Rahila Durrani highlighted the stark discrepancy between the number of schools built and their maintenance. While over 1.1 million students are enrolled, nearly 3 million children remain out of school. A coherent strategy is urgently



Vice Chancellor BUIITEMS, Dr. Khalid Hafeez, handing over a shield of PLF to the Chief Minister Mir Sarfaraz Bugti; Photo Ismail Khan

Intellectual Focus and National Progress

Dr. Khalid Hafeez emphasized the critical link between educational focus and national development. Hiring unqualified educators has compromised the quality of learning. Dr. Pirzada Qasim Raza

Cultural Vibrancy and Collaborative Solutions

The Quetta Literary Festival brought together politicians, artists, poets, and journalists. Their insightful dialogues underscored the festival's role as a cultural and educational hub. Sadiqa Salahuddin rightly pointed out that educational challenges are not unique to Balochistan but affect all provinces. The reliance on donors for educational improvements calls for a national commitment to reform.

Conclusion: A Brighter Future

Balochistan's intellectual, political, and cultural depth is rich and multifaceted. By addressing education, fostering innovation, and nurturing collaboration, we can pave the way for a brighter future—one where Balochistan's potential is fully realized.

Quetta Administration Criticised For Closure Of Press Club To Stop BYC Seminar

Staff Reporter:

QUETTA: The Balochistan Union of Journalists has strongly condemned the administration's decision to lock the Quetta Press Club. This action is seen as an attack on press freedom and a violation of Article 19 of the Constitution. Dr. Mahrang Baloch and other leaders were scheduled to address a seminar on reported fencing in Gwadar. Despite



threats, journalists vowed to continue their duties. The union demands a high-level investigation and will announce the action plan within 24 hours.

The closure of the press club is an attack on the freedom and rights of journalists, which is unacceptable. This step by the administration is a conspiracy to silence journalists and we will strongly protest against it. The union stressed that despite the threats and challenges faced by journalists, they will continue to carry out their duties and cannot be intimidated by such measures.

Pak Iran Border Taftan To Be Operational For 24 Hours

Syed Kaleem Shah:



QUETTA: To bolster trade between Pakistan and Iran, the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has issued an order to keep the Pakistan-Iran Trade Gate at Taftan open 24 hours a day for freight vehicles. The directive, signed by Additional Collector Muhammad Shoaib Qazi, mandates the round-the-clock operation of the gate. The Collectorate of Customs, Assistant Collectors, and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry Quetta, along with the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), Chief Collector of Customs, Assistant Collectors, and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry Quetta Balochistan, have been instructed to implement the necessary measures for

this transition. Leaders from the Chamber of Commerce and Industry Quetta Balochistan, including President Haji Abdullah Achakzai, Senior Vice President Haji Agha Gul Khilji, and Vice President Syed Abdul Ahad Agha, expressed their satisfaction and joy over this development. They emphasized that the continuous operation of the trade gate fulfills a longstanding demand from trade professionals and transporters, which is expected to significantly enhance the movement of fresh produce and other goods, reducing spoilage and delays. This change is anticipated to streamline the bilateral trade process, ensuring uninterrupted movement of cargo vehicles. Previously, the gate's limited hours caused significant congestion, delaying vehicle clearance for weeks and adversely impacting legitimate trade. The Chamber had persistently advocated for this change during annual meetings of the Pakistan-Iran Joint Trade Committee and other forums.

With the 24/7 operation of the Taftan trade gate, both countries are expected to see a positive impact on their import and export sectors, helping to meet trade goals and strengthening economic ties between the two Islamic nations.

Counting underway as polling ends for by-election in Multan's NA-148

MULTAN: Counting of votes is under way after polling ended for the by-election in Multan's NA-148 constituency. The slot had fallen vacant after PPP's Yusuf Raza Gilani, the recently elected Senate chairman, stepped down. In the general elections on Feb 8, Gilani had secured a narrow victory with a margin of just 293 votes.

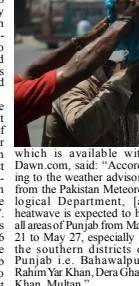


The main contest is expected between the former PM's son Ab Qasim Gilani and PML-N supported Taimur Malik. The PML-N did not field its candidate for the poll for its coalition with the PPP at the federal and provincial levels and announced support for the PPP candidate. Polling began earlier today at 8am at 275 polling stations across the constituency. Arrangements as per the directives of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP). He said security measures had been taken and deployment of additional

police personnel had been made while surveillance cameras had been installed at sensitive locations. Strict action would be taken against any disruptions to law and order, he had added. According to the office of Regional Police Officer (RPO) Muhammad Sohail Chaudhry, 3,829 polling officials will be on duty for the security of 275 polling stations. In a statement, the ECP had said media outlets would be permitted to broadcast election results one hour after the conclusion of polling, clarifying that these results would be unofficial and subject to change. **NEWS DESK.**

Punjab hospitals told to implement SOPs ahead of expected rise in temperature

PUNJAB: The Punjab Primary and Secondary Healthcare Department on Sunday directed health facilities in the province to implement certain standard operating procedures (SOPs) ahead of an expected rise in the temperature. Earlier this week the Meteorological Department warned that the presence of high pressure in the upper atmosphere would result in heatwave conditions in most parts of the country, especially Punjab and Sindh from May 21 and a severe heatwave from May 23 to 27. Daytime temperatures were "likely to remain 4 to 6 degrees centigrade above normal" in Sindh and Punjab from May 21 to 23 and six to 8°C from May 23 to 27, it said.



On Friday, the Punjab government had reduced the timings of all public and private sectors from May 18 to May 31. Today, the provincial health department issued directives to the chief executive officers of all district tertiary care hospitals as well as DHQs and THQs, which provided information to the public about heatwaves as well as preventative measures. These included establishing heatwave counters at tertiary care hospitals as well as DHQs and THQs, which provided information to the public about heatwaves as well as preventative measures. The health department also directed officials to hold

coordination meetings with all stakeholders and "establish the responsibility matrix of each department". Further, officials were told to disseminate information to the general public on how to avoid the heat and limit outdoor activity, proper hydration and how to handle an emergency situation. "All water coolers, with plenty of clean water and air conditioners shall be functional across all health facilities, without fail," it said, adding that all medicines should be made "available across all health facilities round the clock". Further, the department told officials to keep a close liaison with all district/tehsil administrations, Rescue 1122 district disaster management authorities, and to respond to any emergency situation immediately. **NEWS DESK.**

Students not satisfied with govt's measures for their evacuation from Kyrgyzstan: PTI

PESHAWAR (INP): Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan has voiced concerns over the safety of Pakistani students in Kyrgyzstan, urging the government to expedite their evacuation amidst a deteriorating public order situation.

In a statement on X, Khan highlighted the plight of over 100 students from institutions such as the International Medical University, Asian Medical Institute, and

Adam University. Students, including Adel Talha, Komal Gilani, Abdul Hai, Amir Afzal, and Shahzeeb, conveyed their distress and the challenges they face during a Zoom meeting with Khan.

Khan emphasized the urgent need for government intervention, stating that the students are dissatisfied with the current protection measures. He appealed for immediate action to ensure the safety and swift evacuation of these students.

Meanwhile, the

Deputy Foreign Minister of Kyrgyzstan assured that the situation is under control and legal action will be taken against the attackers.

Following directives from Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, Pakistani Ambassador to Kyrgyzstan Hasan Zaigham met with the Deputy Foreign Minister to discuss the concerns of Pakistani students and their families.

The Deputy Foreign Minister reported that the local police are providing full security to all hostels and that the situation in Bishkek

has normalized. He added that 14 people, including some Pakistanis, have received first aid, with one Pakistani currently undergoing treatment. The Kyrgyz President is reportedly overseeing the matter closely to ensure justice is served. Pakistani Ambassador Zaigham emphasized the need for the Kyrgyz government to prioritize the safety of Pakistani citizens, reinforcing the call for stringent protective measures for the students.



MIANWALI: P resident Asif Ali Zardari offering Fateha during his visit to the family home of Shaheed Major Babar Khan.

Bishkek situation normal; political party misrepresenting incident: Tatar

LAHORE (INP): Federal Minister for Information, Broadcasting, National Heritage and Culture Atta ullah Tatar has said that a political party is misrepresenting the Kyrgyzstan incident. He said that the situation in Bishkek has returned to normal, and those spreading fake images of casualties should fear Allah.

Addressing a press conference here on Sunday, he said that no Pakistani student had died in Bishkek; the incident was misreported, and any condemnation was insufficient.

He stated that when a clash had occurred in Bishkek, Pakistani students got caught up in the conflict, although they were not the target.

He mentioned that when the incident had occurred, the Prime Minister's Office immediately took action, and the government promptly activated an emergency response cell at the Foreign Ministry.

The Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister have been continuously monitoring the situation moment by moment for the past two days. Currently, six Pakistani students are receiving treatment in three different hospitals, he added.

The Federal Minister said that propaganda was launched by a political party, where a photo of a Bangladeshi student was used to depict a Pakistani student.

He mentioned that the Prime Minister had spoken to Pakistan's Ambassador to Kyrgyzstan, Hasan Ali Zaigham, who confirmed that no Pakistani student died, or any female student was assaulted.

The incident was misrepresented, and parents were misled into believing their daughters were assaulted, and their sons had died, which is highly condemnable, he added.

He urged those engaging in political point-scoring to fear Allah.

The Federal Minister said that Kyrgyzstan's Foreign Ministry shared a picture showing students from both countries sitting together.

Attaullah Tatar emphasized that the protection of every Pakistani is the state's foremost responsibility.

He stated that the data of Pakistani students residing in Bishkek has been compiled, and complete cooperation is being provided to those who wish to return to Pakistan.

He added that some students do not want to return due to the disruption of their studies, but if anyone wishes to return, they should register themselves.

He mentioned that special arrangements have been made for the return of students living with their families in Bishkek, and the government will bear all the expenses of their return. The Federal Minister said he has personally been in contact with the students, and the ambassador is in continuous contact with them.

The entire government machinery is taking this matter seriously, he maintained.

Deputy PM assures support for victims of Bishkek incident, dismisses false propaganda

LAHORE (INP): Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar expressed his regret over the unfortunate incident in Bishkek, emphasizing that the government stands firmly with the victims during this challenging time.

At a press conference held on Sunday, alongside Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tatar and Federal Minister for Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan Affairs Ameer Muqam, Dar reassured that medical treatment for injured Pakistani students is a top priority.

He confirmed that all students are safe and stated that the incident stemmed from a misunderstanding, with false information being circulated on social media for political purposes.

"The Bishkek incident was due to a misunderstanding and various nationalities including Pakistani, Indian, Bangladeshi, and Arab students were among the sixteen in reports are being spread on social media, which is disgusting," said Dar.

He clarified that misleading information, such as labeling a Bangladeshi student's picture as Pakistani, is being propagated. He dismissed claims of assault against a female student as unfounded, citing confirmation from the Kyrgyz government.

He highlighted the immediate response by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, stating, "An emergency unit was activated right after the incident. Prime Minister Muhammad Sharif and the entire government machinery are closely monitoring the situation."

He mentioned that despite the Kyrgyz ambassador being on leave, his deputy provided detailed information on Saturday, ensuring full communication between the governments. The Deputy Prime Minister revealed that six Pakistani students were among the sixteen in reports are being spread

currently receiving treatment in three different hospitals.

He underscored the strong fraternal relations with Kyrgyzstan, emphasizing that the incident was not targeted against Pakistan.

"The situation is now normal, with Kyrgyz students visiting the injured as a gesture of goodwill. Security has been heightened in Kyrgyzstan as a precaution," he added.

Due to the incident, a planned visit was canceled at the request of the Kyrgyz government, the minister said. Instead, he added that two officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were dispatched to Bishkek. He assured that continuous contact is maintained with the students and their parents through the embassy.

"We have facilitated the return of 130 Pakistani students so far, with over 50 more registered to return today. Additionally, 540 students will return on commercial flights, and a Pakistan Air

Force flight is also arranged to bring students back from Bishkek.

Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi will personally welcome these students," he stated.

He also touched upon Pakistan's international standing, noting, "Pakistan was isolated on the international stage during the previous era, but under Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif's strategy, the country's global image has been restored, and diplomatic relations have improved." He emphasized the importance of increasing the number of medical institutions in the country. Federal Minister Ameer Muqam affirmed the government's ongoing contact with Kyrgyz authorities since the incident occurred. "It is crucial to set aside emotions and focus on the facts. The education of students in Kyrgyzstan benefits both countries, and the government is providing comprehensive support to the victims," he concluded.



HYDERABAD: Leader PTI Firdous Shamim Naqvi addressing a press conference IIPC.

Body of second missing Mongolian climber found on Everest

KATHMANDU (INP): Rescuers found the body of a second Mongolian climber who went missing on Mount Everest, expedition organisers said Sunday, confirming the second fatality on the world's highest peak this mountaineering season.

Usukhijargal Tsendamba, 53, and Puresuren Ikhgajav, 31, were last in contact Sunday evening from Camp 4, which is situated less than a kilometre (0.6 miles) below the summit.

Tsendamba's body was found around an altitude of 8,600 metres (28,215 feet) on Friday morn-

ing after days of search and rescue operations that had been hampered by bad weather.

"The second body was also found on Friday, but needed verification. We confirmed it was him yesterday," Pemba Sherpa of 8k Expeditions, which organised the duo's climbing permits and base camp stay, told a foreign news agency.

"We are trying to bring the bodies down."

Four guides had been sent for their search and rescue.

Lkhagjav's body was found near an area called the balcony, a small platform at an elevation of around 8,400 metres

(27,560 feet). Sherpa said that two men were climbing without guides and that their walkie-talkie had been found in their tent.

Nepal's tourism department said in a statement on Tuesday that another team had spotted the pair "heading towards Everest's summit" on Monday morning.

Hundreds of climbers have flocked to Nepal — home to eight of the world's 14 highest peaks — for summiting in the spring climbing season when temperatures are warmer and winds are typically calm.

Nepal has issued more than 900 permits for its mountains this

year, including 419 for Everest, earning more than \$5 million in royalties.

Around 80 climbers have already reached the 8,849-metre (29,032-foot) summit of Everest after a rope-fixing team reached the peak last month.

Two climbers have died on nearby Makalu, the world's fifth-highest peak, this year.

French climber Johnny Saliba, 60, died at an altitude of 8,120 metres (26,640 feet) during his summit push last week.

A 53-year-old Nepali guide died on the same peak last week while descending from the summit.

Most parts of country to remain in grip of heatwave for next 10 days

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Met Office on Sunday said that extreme heat would persist in Sindh, Punjab and Balochistan for the next 10 days as the day temperatures would go up as high as 51 degrees Celsius in some parts of these provinces.

However, it said that there were chances of a drop in temperatures in the first week of June.

The Met Office informed that Dadu was the hottest place in the country Saturday as the maximum temperature in the city shot up to 48 degrees

Celsius, while it was 47 degrees Celsius in Nawabshah, Sukkur, Dera Ghazi Khan, 46 degrees Celsius in Sibi, 45 degrees Celsius in Hyderabad, Sargodha and Sahiwal, 44 degrees Celsius in Multan and Faisalabad, 42 degrees Celsius in Turbat and Nokundi and 40.2 degrees Celsius in Karachi.

It was hot and suffocating in Karachi in the morning as the Met Office said that the day temperature would rise to 40 degrees Celsius in the afternoon, while to 45 and 46 degrees Celsius in localities of the city like the

DHA, Korangi and Clifton.

The humidity level in the air was recorded at 60 per cent, while the wind was blowing from a south-westerly direction at the speed of 60 kilometres per hour.

Jawad Memon, a weatherman, said that there would be a further increase in temperatures in the city in the next few days.

He further said that the high level of humidity in the air was making people feel suffocated.

The temperature was recorded at 33 degrees Celsius in

Lahore in the morning, while the Met Office said that it would shoot up to 43 degrees Celsius later in the day.

The level of moisture in the air stood at 38 per cent, the office said.

It forecast extremely hot and dry weather for the city and other parts of Punjab during the next 24 hours, while further increase in temperatures in the coming days.

On the other hand, doctors advised people to take precautionary measures to prevent themselves from falling sick due to exposure to the sun.

China invested in Pakistan in difficult times: Ahsan Iqbal

ISLAMABAD (INP): Minister for Planning Development and Special Initiatives Professor Ahsan Iqbal has said that China invested in Pakistan under China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project when the country was passing through difficult times, which helped to turnaround the local economy and put it on the sustainable growth and development trajectory.

"When China decided to invest \$25 billion in Pakistan, this is [in] 2013, when we had

18 hours of power shortages and frequent suicide bombings at that time they decided to come to Pakistan and support Pakistan," he stated in an interview with VOA.

This shows they have trust and confidence in Pakistan, he said adding that recent bullish performance of the country's stock exchange showed that the local investors had full confidence in the direction the government was following. "I think it is the same sense of confidence that Chinese in-

vestors and Chinese government has in this government," he said adding that "China considers Pakistan as a strategic friend and has confidence in Pakistan."

Regarding the security of the Chinese nationals, the minister reaffirmed the government's commitment for ensuring security of Chinese nationals and said that a special security unit as well as law enforcement were tasked with ensuring their safety.

Another question regarding issues of security threats, the minister maintained that when you were fighting terrorism, the terrorists always tried to find a way somewhere. Ahsan Iqbal said that the Chinese government had made it very clear that such cowardly incidents would not deter them from pursuing CPEC. The minister further informed that Pakistan was not opposed to Afghanistan's inclusion in a Chinese-funded mega-development project, but would like Beijing to persuade Kabul to crack down on terrorist groups operating on its soil.



KARACHI: Villoters distributing water to the Passengers during a hot day in the city near the Numash Chowrang.

PDMA issues alert regarding three consecutive heat-waves

LAHORE (INP) The Punjab Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) has issued an alert regarding three consecutive heatwaves, raising concerns about potentially record-breaking temperatures in several cities, including Lahore.

The PDMA Punjab has warned of temperatures soaring up to 47 degrees this month, with Lahore facing the possibility of shattering heatwave records. The spokesperson of PDMA emphasized the severe risk of heatwave in major cities and plains of Punjab from May 21 to 27, prompting alerts to district administrations.

Stringent measures have been advised, with strict legal action threatened against those violating heatwave guidelines. Authorities are urged to ensure the availability of clean water in public spaces and to provide first aid for heatstroke-related

emergencies in hospitals and mobile health units.

Irfan Ali Kathia, in charge of PDMA, has issued directives for citizens to take precautions, such as avoiding outdoor activities during peak heat hours, wearing light-colored clothing, and staying hydrated. Special attention is urged for children and the elderly, with unnecessary travel advised against.

Meteorologists have warned of an unprecedented and potentially catastrophic heatwave set to engulf Pakistan. The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) has identified areas at high risk, including Umartok, Tharparkar.

Tindwalyar, Mattari, and Sanghar in Sindh, as well as Bahawalpur and Rahimyar Khan in Punjab.

The first heatwave spell,

expected to last 2 to 3 days, poses a threat to these regions. A second heatwave, forecasted for late May or early June, could see temperatures soaring to 45 degrees for 4 to 5 days. A third heatwave is projected for the first 10 days of June, impacting Tharparkar, Umartok, Sanghar, Badin, and Khairpur.

The Meteorological Department's advisory indicates a significant rise in temperatures from May 21, with extreme heatwaves expected from May 23 to 27. Above-normal temperatures are anticipated in Islamabad, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Kashmir, Gilgit-Baltistan, and Balochistan during this period.

Citizens are urged to stay informed through various media channels and take necessary precautions to combat the impending heatwave onslaught.



LAHORE: Deputy PM of Pakistan and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Ishaq Dar, Federal Minister Attaullah Tarar and Federal Minister for Kashmir Affairs, Ameer Muqam holding a press conference.

APHC pays tributes to Mirwaiz Molvi Farooq, Khawaja Ghani Lone & Hawal martyrs

SRINAGAR (INP) The All Parties Hurriyat Conference has paid glowing tributes to prominent Kashmiri leaders, Mirwaiz Molvi Muhammad Farooq, Khawaja Ghani Lone and the martyrs of Hawal on the eve of their martyrdom anniversaries in Indian illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir.

According to Kashmir Media Service, Mirwaiz Molvi Muhammad Farooq was shot dead by unidentified gunmen at his residence in Srinagar on 21st May in 1990. On the same day, seventy mourners were killed when Indian troops opened indiscriminate fire on his funeral procession in Hawal area of Srinagar. Twelve years later on May 21 in 2002, Khawaja Ghani Lone was martyred by unknown attackers when he was returning after addressing a gathering at the Martyrs' Graveyard in Srinagar.

APHC spokesman Advocate Abdul Rashid Minhas in a statement in Srinagar, paying homage to Shaheed Mirwaiz Molvi Muhammad Farooq and

Shaheed Khawaja Ghani Lone, said these leaders' path of seeking peaceful resolution of the Kashmir dispute in accordance with the wishes of its people is the way forward and also the way to peace and prosperity for the region. He said hegemonic authority, use of force or intimidation of people, only complicate the conflict further.

He said the sufferings of the people and the sacrifices rendered by them in quest of the resolution of the Kashmir dispute constantly remind Kashmiris that the conflict has to be resolved and the Kashmiris' sentiment honored. "Imprisonment and incarceration cannot change that reality. We will continue to pursue that goal and the path shown by our dear leaders," he maintained. The APHC spokesman deplored that through the use of extreme force and intimidation, the Indian authorities had implemented a complete ban on any form of individual or collective expression by people or the leadership, giving no space and no scope for it.

He said the best way to pay homage to the Kashmiri martyrs, including Mirwaiz Molvi Umar Farooq, Khawaja Ghani Lone and martyrs of Hawal on their anniversaries, is to carry forward the ongoing freedom struggle till it reaches its logical conclusion. He said the BJP-led Indian regime cannot suppress the Kashmiri people's urge for freedom through brutal tactics. Meanwhile, programs will be observed in IIOJK and AJK Pakistan on Tuesday, May 21, to mark the martyrdom anniversaries of prominent liberation leaders, Mirwaiz Molvi Muhammad Farooq and Khawaja Ghani Lone and martyrs of Hawal.

The APHC-AJK Convener, Mehmood Ahmed Saghar, in a statement in Islamabad, while paying tributes to Mirwaiz Molvi Farooq, Khawaja Ghani Lone and victims of Hawal massacre, said the blood of Kashmiri martyrs will not be allowed to go waste and the ongoing freedom movement will be continued till complete success.

Khawaja Asif hails CM Maryam for taking steps to meet modern needs

SIALKOT (INP) Defence Minister Khawaja Asif on Sunday hailed Punjab Chief Maryam Nawaz for taking steps to meet modern needs in line with providing health facilities to the masses.

Addressing the inauguration ceremony of the Clinics on Wheels' project here, Asif said, "The mobile clinics (also known as clinics on wheels) will bring a pleasant change in daily life. These clinics will provide eye specialists and offer mammography services for women," he added. Lavishing his praise on CM Maryam, Asif said, "Her [CM Maryam] efforts will bring healthcare facilities right to

people's doorsteps." Maryam Nawaz rolls out 'Clinics on Wheels' project - Few days back CM Maryam rolled out the "Clinics on Wheels" project.

Addressing an event in Lahore, CM Maryam stated, "The initiatives taken by Nawaz Sharif and Shehbaz were sabotaged by the previous government. It takes up to three months to organise the new government."

"It is Nawaz Sharif who gets pleased with the launch of every project," she added. Speaking about the "Clinics on Wheels" projects, CM Maryam said, "It is not about the vehicle

but the entire clinic, which will reach outside the doorsteps of the masses." She maintained, "The vehicle will be available in the underprivileged areas for six days, from 9:00 am to 3:00 pm. The pregnant women will be given complete facilities in the ambulance."

CM Maryam vowed to increase the doctors and paramedic staff. "Now doctors from every district will be given priority in terms of recruitment," she said.

"We are rolling out cardiology centres in eight districts, including Mianwali, Saikot, Jehlum, and Layyah. I would like to ask the health secretary to roll out the free insulin project," she said.



ISLAMABAD: Senator Abbas Afridi addressing a press conference at NPC.



LAHORE: Governor of Punjab Sardar Saleem Haider calls on Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif.

Finance Minister updated on banking sector's strategic initiatives in priority sectors

KARACHI (INP) Pakistan Banks' Association (PBA) held a meeting with the Federal Minister for Finance & Revenue, Muhammad Aurangzeb.

The meeting focused on enhancing support by the banks for the three key sectors of Agriculture, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), and Digital & Technology in Pakistan. The discussion underlined the banking sector's commitment to fostering financial inclusion in the Country.

Federal Minister mentioned at the outset that the idea of this exercise shall be to encourage the entire sector to contribute towards these priority sectors as per their size and unique offerings & strengths. While there will be no "directed lending", however, there shall be voluntary targets to be set between the banks and the regulator to share the responsibility to contribute towards these critical sectors. He expects the banks to step up and continue to work with the Government in the revival and the growth of the economy.

During the session, PBA Chairman Zafar Masud, along with the Steering Committee members on these initiatives, including Vice Chairman PBA, Ahmed Bozai, CEO & SG PBA, Muneer Kamal, Executive Director (Financial Inclusion Group) State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), Syed Irfan Ali, and President & CEO Meezan Bank, Irfan Siddiqui, presented a comprehensive set of recommendations aimed at promoting growth and sustainability in these vital sectors.

The proposals were developed in close consultation with SBP to ensure they effectively address the unique challenges

and highlight the opportunities within each sector.

The key recommendations included, among other steps, restructuring crop loan insurance schemes to integrate crop yield factors, revitalizing agricultural cooperative banks and upgrading provincial agricultural cooperative legislations to facilitate the creation of agricultural cooperative lending institutions.

The recommendations also included exploring technology-driven solutions to facilitate the distribution of targeted subsidies through banks, particularly to the subsistence-level farmers, similar to BSP, to promote much-needed financial inclusion.

Similarly, it was resolved in the meeting that banks get actively involved in providing financial and management support to entities such as the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Authority (SMEDA) and National Credit Guarantee Company Limited (NCGCL).

The Minister was apprised that PBA and SBP are actively engaged to revising SME Prudential Regulations, enhancing clean financing limits, and reviewing regulatory retail portfolio limits to facilitate SME financing. The Minister was informed that PBA is contemplating to establish "SME and Agriculture Index" to target the customers currently outside the documented economy while also enhancing credit risk management.

On the Digital & Technology front, PBA recommended facilitating retail foreign investment through digital micro sukuk/intra bonds and integrating freelancers into pay-

ment gateways. It was also proposed to enhance foreign remittance flows via specially developed online portals for overseas Pakistanis. It was emphasized that the banks be allowed to offer products and services in technology space, currently only used for their own operations, to the outside world to harness export flows.

The recommendations related to documentation of the economy through the use of technology were also discussed, and outlined the role that the banks will play in furthering Government's efforts in this respect.

The Minister commended PBA's Steering Committee, and the respective Task Forces for the three identified priority sectors, for their thorough analysis and valuable recommendations. He highlighted the crucial role of the banking community in driving economic growth. He stressed upon the banks to enhance their efforts in supporting these priority sectors to foster economic development and prosperity.

The Minister consented on the governance structure for the implementation of the proposed recommendations by PBA, jointly with SBP and the Ministry of Finance & Revenue spearheaded by him and the Governor SBP.

"PBA and its members are fully committed to working closely with the Ministry of Finance and the SBP to implement these recommendations and ensuring effective contribution of the banking sector to Pakistan's economic prosperity." Commented Zafar Masud, Chairman - PBA at the end of the meeting.



LAHORE: Federal Minister for Interior Mohsin Naqvi visiting NADRA Center Garden Town.

Sindh CM reviews progress on 7 mega projects

KARACHI (INP) Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah on Sunday paid visit to seven different under-construction projects, reviewed its progress and removed bottlenecks causing delays in the completion of Malir Expressway and Karamabad Underpass.

The CM expressed his displeasure over the shifting of K-Electric and Sui Gas Company's installations, which have caused a delay in the completion of the Malir Expressway.

He suspended SHO Korangi for his failure to stop dumping debris and garbage along Korangi Causeway and directed SSP Korangi to personally monitor the area where different projects Malir Expressway, New Jam Sadiq Bridge and Korangi Causeway Bridge were being constructed.

The CM was accompanied by provincial ministers Sharjeel Inam Memon, Syed Nasir Shah, Saeed Ghani and Mayor Karachi Muratza Wahab.

Chairman of P&D Najam Shah, Commissioner Karachi Hassan Naqvi, Secretary Local Govt Khalid Hyder Shah, Secretary Transport Asad Zamir, Project Director Malir Expressway Niaz Soomro, PD Mega Projects Tariq Mughal and Engineer Khalid Masroor briefed the chief minister during his visit to different projects.

The CM was told that the Malir Expressway project was 38.661 km starting from Jam Sadiq Bridge to Kathore at M9 was started on May 12, 2022 and its completion period was 26 months. It is a three-plus-five (six-lane) project and would have six interchanges.

To a question, Niaz Soomro told the CM that the progress of Malir expressway segment-I from Korangi to Quaidabad has 70 per cent physical progress while segment-II from Quaidabad to Kathore has 30 per cent.

The CM expressed his displeasure when he was told that

the completion of Segment-I had been delayed by three months due to the shifting of utilities by K-Electric and Sui Southern Gas Company (SSGC).

The reasons behind the delay were stated to be that K-Electric has to shift its remaining four installations for which it has already been paid. The K-Electric has also to shift its High-Tension Line (HTL). The Sadiq so that its connectivity with the Malir Expressway could be made.

The CM was also told that the SSGC had to lower its three Pressure lines at channage, but they were delaying the process, therefore work on the project has been delayed. The chief minister expressed his displeasure on K-Electric and SSGC and directed his secretary to fix his meeting with both companies at CM House at the earliest.

The chief minister was told that there were some encroachment issues at the existing loop of Quaidabad Interchange.