

# QUETTA VOICE

Editor: Asim Khan

Tuesday, May,21,2024

dquettavoice@gmail.com



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

## 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 needed to bridge this gap and ensure quality education for all.

### 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.

### Cultural Vibrancy and Collaborative Solutions

The Quetta Literary Festival brought together politicians, artists, poets, and journalists. Their insightful dia-

logues underscored the festival's role as a cultural and educational hub. Sadiq Salauddin 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.

## Journalists Protest Closure of Quetta Press Club; Chief Minister Responds

Staff Reporter:

**QUETTA:** In response to the abrupt closure of the Quetta Press Club, the journalist community in Quetta staged a walk-out from the Assembly session. The protest concluded after Chief Minister Balochistan, Mir Sarfaraz Bugti, provided assurances to address their concerns.

The unexpected lockdown of the press club deeply troubled the journalists, prompting the protest. A 4-point charter of demands was subsequently presented to the Chief Minister by key journalist community figures, including Balochistan Union of Journalists (BUJ) President Khalil Ahmed, General Secretary Abdul Shakoor, Press Club President Abdul Khalil Rind, and other senior journalists.

### Action To Be Taken Against Responsible Persons: CM Bugti

Chief Minister Bugti expressed regret over the incident, describing the closure as unintentional and unfortunate. "The closure of the



Press Club President Abdul Khalil Rind emphasized the journalists' firm stance, stating, "Until our demands are accepted, the protest will continue." He further noted that Chief Minister Bugti assured action against those responsible for the press club's closure.

### We Believe In Freedom Of The Press", CM Bugti Assured

press club is sad," he remarked, recognizing the press club's vital role in society. To address the issue, the Chief Minister has established a committee to investigate the circumstances of the lockdown and address the journalists' concerns.

In his address to the Balochistan Assembly, Chief Minister Bugti reaffirmed his commitment to resolving the issue, stating,

"We believe in the freedom of the press."

He assured that measures would be taken to prevent such incidents in the future and thanked the journalists for ending their walk-out.

BUJ President Khalil Ahmed, while acknowledging the Chief Minister's efforts, indicated that the BUJ and the Press Club would continue their nationwide protest until all their demands are fully met. He asserted that the BUJ would not remain silent on the matter.

This development underscores the ongoing dialogue between the government and the press in Balochistan.

highlighting the importance of press freedom and the need for transparent communication between journalists and state officials.

## Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi confirmed dead in helicopter crash

**NEWS DESK:** Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, a hardliner long seen as a potential successor to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, was killed in a helicopter crash in mountainous terrain near the Azerbaijan border, officials and state media said on Monday.

The charred wreckage of the helicopter which crashed on Sunday carrying Raisi, Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian and six other passengers and crew was found early on Monday after an overnight search in blizzard conditions.

Supreme Leader Khamenei, who holds ultimate power with a final say on foreign policy and Iran's nuclear programme, said First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber would take over as interim president, the official IRNA news agency reported.

"I announce five days of public mourning and offer my condolences to the dear people of Iran," Khamenei said in a statement. Mokhber, like Raisi, is seen as close to Khamenei.

Under Iran's constitution, a new presidential election must be held within 50 days.

Footage from Iranian state television showed wreckage scattered on a foggy hillside, while separate reports from IRNA showed Red Crescent workers carrying a covered body on a stretcher. All those



board the helicopter were killed, a senior Iranian official had earlier told Reuters.

Killed alongside Raisi were FM Amirabdollahian, known for his fierce anti-Israel sentiment and scepticism of the West, and seven others, including the governor of East Azerbaijan Province and a senior imam from Tabriz city. Deputy Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri Kani was appointed as acting foreign minister following the death of Amirabdollahian, IRNA said. A total of nine people were on board the aircraft, according to Tasnim news agency. Raisi's convoy had included three helicopters, and the other two had "reached their destination safely", said the news agency.

An Israeli official told Reuters it was not involved in the crash. "It wasn't us," said the official, who requested anonymity.

Iranian authorities first raised the alarm on Sunday afternoon when they lost contact with Raisi's helicopter as it flew through a fog-

shrouded mountain area of the Jolfa region of East Azerbaijan province.

The helicopter went down in the Varazjan region north of Tabriz, IRNA reported, as Raisi returned from an official visit to the border with Azerbaijan.

Raisi had been at the Azerbaijani border to inaugurate the Qiz-Qalasi Dam, a joint project. Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev, who said he had bid a "friendly farewell" to Raisi earlier in the day, also offered assistance in the rescue.

State media reported that images from the site showed the US-made Bell 212 helicopter slammed into a mountain peak, although there was no official word on the cause of the crash. An Iranian official earlier told Reuters that the helicopter was completely burned in the crash.

Rescue teams fought blizzards and difficult terrain through the night to reach the wreckage in East Azerbaijan province in the early hours of Monday.

## CM Bugti Vows to End Job Sales in Education Sector Amidst Recruitment Scandal

Manan Mandokhail:



**QUETTA:** Chief Minister Sarfaraz Bugti has brought attention to the critical issue of stalled appointments in the education sector through the Sardar Bahadur Khan Women University (SBKWU). Speaking in the Assembly,

Bugti emphasized the importance of discussing the recruitment process for these positions.

"There were large-scale money transactions in the SBKWU recruitments, and I want a thorough discussion on this matter in the Assembly," stated Bugti.

### 12,000 Schools Are Closed In Balochistan

He stressed that there should be no compromise on the recruitment of teachers, given the significant impact on the education system.

"Poor people rely on government hospitals for treatment, yet the current model is failing to deliver," he said. Bugti called for a new model for hospitals, citing the Nawab Ghous Bakhsh Raisani Hospital as

an exemplary model that could be emulated.

Bugti highlighted the dire situation in Balochistan's education sector, revealing that 12,000 schools are currently closed.

"Some individuals are pushing for rapid teacher recruitment, but we must ensure transparency and fairness in the process," he added. The Chief Minister assured that no jobs would be sold, maintaining the integrity of the recruitment process.

In addition to addressing education, Bugti also spoke about the healthcare sector, pointing out the inefficiencies and lack of facilities in government hospitals despite substantial financial investments.

"We have strengthened institutions by recruiting more people, but we need to ensure that these institutions are delivering on their promises," Bugti asserted. He acknowledged that significant reforms are necessary to improve the healthcare system and other public institutions in Balochistan.

The Chief Minister's statements underscore the need for transparency and efficiency in both the education and healthcare sectors, highlighting the government's commitment to addressing these pressing issues.

## Ahead of impending heatwave, Punjab decides to close all schools from May 25 to May 31

**NEWS DESK:** With temperatures expected to soar due to an impending heatwave, the Government of Punjab has decided to close all public and private schools in the province from May 25 to May 31 in order to ensure the safety of students.

Severe heatwaves will sweep most parts of the country over the coming days, the Meteorological Department warned last Thursday, forecasting dust storms, thunderstorms, and heavy rains in the country's northern areas.

The presence of high



pressure in the upper atmosphere will result in heatwave conditions today to parts of the country, especially Punjab and Sindh from May 21 and a severe heatwave is expected to last the advisory had warned.

In light of the advisory, the provincial government in Punjab decided today to close schools for seven days.

However, a notification issued stating the examinations will still be carried out "as scheduled", with "necessary precautions to ensure the safety of students."

The decision to temporarily close schools came after the Punjab government last week reduced the timings of all public and private schools from May 18 to May 31. It had also instructed school heads to ensure that fans were in working condition, water coolers were available and that no student was made to sit in an open space or school lawn during the summer.

Given the instructions of PDMA Punjab, the Health Department also issued a heatwave advisory. A PDMA spokesperson said, "From May 21 to May 27, there is a

severe risk of heat wave in Punjab." The PDMA predicted intense heat in the Bahawalpur, Rahim Yar Khan, Dera Ghazi Khan and Multan districts of South Punjab and instructions were issued to set up heatwave counters in all hospitals and ensure the supply of all related medicines.

DG PDMA Irfan Ali Khan said that citizens are being informed about the dangers of heat wave through print, electronic and social media. "All departments can fight heat wave by working together and co-operating," he added.

Ziarat Juniper Forest in Peril: Ancient Trees Face Deforestation Threat

Summan Ismail:

The Ziarat Juniper Forest, nestled in Pakistan's Balochistan territory, stands as a testament to nature's splendor and history's governance. This sacred forest is renowned for its towering, thousand-year-old Juniper trees, which rank among the world's oldest and tallest. This article explores the profound significance of the Ziarat Juniper Forest, its historical roots, ecological importance, and the pressing need for conservation efforts.

A Glimpse into History

The story of the Ziarat Juniper Forest is a journey through time. Once inhabited by nomadic tribes, these Juniper trees served as versatile resources. They provided fuel, construction materials, and medicinal remedies, ingraining themselves in the local culture. Over generations, the forest became a cherished asset, safeguarded by tribal elders.

A Global Ecological Gem

In recent years, the Ziarat Juniper Forest has garnered international recognition for its unique and vital ecosystem. It is an integral part of the region's biodiversity, hosting a diverse array of plant and animal species. Furthermore, the Juniper trees themselves offer a rich source of genetic information, fueling discoveries in ecology and herbal science.

The Dark Side of Progress

While the past decade has brought comfort and progress to the region, it has come at a steep price. One industry that has thrived at the expense of the forest is the furniture sector, leading to extensive deforestation. These ancient woodlands, found mostly at altitudes above 2000 meters, are under severe threat. The Ziarat region, home to approximately 5000-year-old Juniper species, faces rampant deforestation due to domestic fuel consumption, agricultural expansion, construction, medicinal use, and furniture production.

Protecting Wildlife and Promoting Sustainable Tourism

Conservation efforts are underway to protect the diverse wildlife within the Ziarat Juniper Forest. Endangered species such as the Asiatic Mountain Bear, Snow Leopard, and Markhor call this forest home, and preserving their habitat is paramount. Simultaneously, initiatives aim to promote sustainable tourism, allowing visitors from around the world to appreciate the forest's natural beauty and ecological significance.

The Call to Action

The allure of the valuable Juniper wood has led to its exploitation, with reports implicating authorities in the illegal trade. To secure the future of this ancient forest, immediate action is essential. It is imperative that we collectively embrace sustainable practices, raise awareness, and curb deforestation. Only by doing so can we ensure the preservation of this unique species and its vital role in our natural world. Together, we must act responsibly to safeguard the Ziarat Juniper Forest for generations to come.

At the expense of the forest is the furniture sector, leading to extensive deforestation. These ancient woodlands, found mostly at altitudes above 2000 meters, are under severe threat. The Ziarat region, home to approximately 5000-year-old Juniper species, faces rampant deforestation due to domestic fuel consumption, agricultural expansion, construction, medicinal use, and furniture production.

Alarming Trends: A Deforestation Study

A recent report titled "Observing Carbon Stock and Land-Use Change in 5000-Year-Old Juniper Woods Stand of Ziarat, Balochistan, through a Synergistic Methodology" conducted a comprehensive analysis of the forest. The study revealed a substantial reduction in the Juniper tree population from 71,005 hectares to 50,311 hectares between 1988 and 2018, alongside a decline in agricultural land in the same period. This academic publication also noted a decrease in the forest's carbon supply, primarily due to deforestation.

compliance. It entails squaring the circle between overtaxing certain sectors and under-taxing others. Expenditure must be rationalised to meet development and budget crises. Much reliance is being placed on promises of investment from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states. But the strategy to attract foreign direct investment (FDI) and translate promises into reality should be part of a broader, coherent economic plan and not operate in a policy silo. Significant foreign investment will be elusive unless macroeconomic stability is established and political uncertainty ended. This requires a de-escalation of domestic political tensions and a calmer environment.

Even though the country has stepped back from the brink, the structural sources of persistent financial imbalances have not disappeared. Risks are high as the trends are all negative. The fiscal deficit remains high with the economy expected to grow by only 1.8 per cent this fiscal year. Foreign exchange reserves are fragile, domestic and foreign debt have reached unsustainable levels. Large external financing is needed to meet debt payments, inflation is at a record level, the current account and trade deficits remain wide, FDI remains low while business confidence is weak. The poverty level has risen to 40pc.

Beyond the economic crisis

The second area creating a business-friendly environment. The government should act as a facilitator to promote business growth and take substantive actions to reduce the cost of doing business. The economic plan should aim to establish a single business regulatory framework for the country, reduce the regulatory burden, cut bureaucratic red tape that inhibits private sector activity and remove barriers that deter foreign investment. What should be the key elements of a comprehensive reform programme? Long-term economic progress rests on action in a few fundamental areas. The most urgent is curbing the fiscal deficit. This involves instituting a credible and simplified tax system, bringing untaxed and under-taxed sectors into a wider revenue net, ending exemption and ensuring tax

competitive advantage and then work towards export diversification, both in terms of products and markets. The goal should be to achieve greater integration of the country into the global economy and markets, at present Pakistan's share of global trade is minuscule. An export-oriented industrial and trade policy framework will need to be put in place. This means ending the anti-export bias in trade policy, which requires tariff rationalisation and review of export subsidy schemes.

The fourth area involves leveraging Pakistan's promising potential in digital technology, a dynamic sector, which is growing fast and can be a vital vehicle for the country to leapfrog towards social and economic progress. This requires building digital capabilities, making investments in this sector and creating an enabling environment to unleash private sector initiatives and innovation.

Investment in human capital should be the fifth area of priority and an integral part of reform. Failure on this count has left the country with deteriorating social indicators and at the bottom of global human development rankings. Underinvestment has meant 40pc of Pakistanis are out of school, 26 million school-age children are out of school.

Gas Injustice Chronicles: Sui Southern Gas Company Under Scrutiny

Editorial:

As the Sui Southern Gas Company (SSGC) awaits an impending judgment, it finds itself entangled in allegations that go beyond mere billing discrepancies. Increasing gas meter tampering has become a systemic problem within the company in Quetta and other parts of Balochistan, prompting this editorial to underscore the urgent need for the SSGC to address these issues, especially in light of allegations linking some officials to major gas thieves.

A court order issued a month ago brought to light the alarming rate of gas meter tampering, resulting in significant financial losses for the SSGC. These losses, coupled with allegations of illicit connections between certain officials and major gas thieves, unfairly burden the economically vulnerable. Unannounced load shedding has become an unfortunate norm, exacerbating the challenges faced by consumers already grappling with inadequate gas pressure and exorbitant bills.

SSGC Must Acknowledge The Gravity Of The Situation

The SSGC must acknowledge the gravity of the situation and take immediate steps to rectify its practices. The alleged ties between the company and those involved in gas theft not only raise ethical concerns but also perpetuate a vicious cycle of inequality. These connections, whether direct or indirect, erode public trust and integrity. Failure to address these issues not only harms the company's reputation but deepens the existing trust deficit between the SSGC and its consumers.

The impending judgment marks a pivotal moment for the SSGC, going beyond financial implications for the company. This case will set a precedent for accountability within the energy sector, emphasizing the need for the SSGC to prioritize the welfare of its consumers and work towards restoring public trust in its operations.

Recent Protests In Quetta Underscores Urgency Of Situation

Recent protests in Quetta against overbilling and gas load shedding underscore the urgency of the situation. Allegations of disproportionate billing, variations in charges between regions, and inflated bills in Balochistan demand a thorough and transparent investigation. The company must demonstrate a commitment to fair and transparent billing for all consumers, regardless of their geographical location. Failure to address these issues not only harms the company's reputation but deepens the existing trust deficit between the SSGC and its consumers.

Company Must Take Steps To Ensure Justice For Consumers

In conclusion, the Sui Southern Gas Company cannot afford to delay corrective measures any longer. The pursuit of gas justice necessitates immediate action, rectification of billing practices, and a commitment to transparency. Addressing these issues head-on is the only way for the SSGC to rebuild public trust and fulfill its responsibility to provide a reliable and equitable gas supply to all consumers. The company must act swiftly to prevent further harm to its reputation and, more importantly, to ensure justice for its consumers.

Land of opportunity

By Zarrar Khuhro:

FIRST: it's not necessary that every investigative story like Dubai Unlocked can or will, in and of itself, cause the government to fall or the prevailing order to be unsettled. Sometimes, such journalistic works only confirm what we already know to be true, which, in this case, is that Pakistan is a poor country with some very rich people. And that, more often than not, those people are the very ones who tend to control the levers of power, often using them like the lever of a slot machine in Las Vegas, except with the near-guarantee of a massive payout. All told, as per the data on record Pakistanians own about \$12.5 billion worth of properties in Dubai, although former FBR chairman Shahbaz Zaidi thinks the actual value is closer to, or possibly in excess of, \$20 billion. Now, this may not be a huge sum by global standards but it gives the perpetual penalty of Pakistan, it's pretty darn staggering.

Also bear in mind that there are a lot of prominent and not-so-prominent Pakistanis who happen to be clearly the FBR's time-suckers. Resident in Dubai but not show up on this list, leading one to believe that the properties they 'own' are not in their names or the names of their relatives. The Dubai leaks data can be the starting point for a deeper probe. That said, some important disclaimers are necessary, owning property in Dubai or anywhere else in the world is not an illegal act — in and of itself — evidence of any kind of financial fraud or wrongdoing has been repeatedly stated by all the publications who have reported on the uncovered data. Certainly, many of these properties, however, are above board, but at the very least we must expect the FBR to inquire as to whether the names listed in the leaks, thus far, we have been promised that this will not happen with the FBR chairman promising that if he has access to the data as well as information on residents and status, and if the political will is present, he will certainly go after tax evaders. While this is a lot of ifs and buts it would certainly be a more worthwhile use of the FBR's time than trying to block the SIMS of non-filers. If nothing

else, such data can prove to be the starting point for a deeper investigation in Pakistan, provided anyone has the will to do so. And therein lies the rub: accountability, when it comes, usually tends to target politicians and that too, those politicians it happened to be convenient to target. In the not-so-distant past we have seen that an IFM's or an unpaid salary is enough to have a prime minister knocked out by using Black's Law Dictionary as a cudgel. Even though the country's slide into another crisis, it should be sure the IMF's bailout package and rollover of foreign loans helped to avert a breakdown. The government is now in discussions with the Fund for a larger, longer-duration loan deal, which will be the country's 24th IMF programme. But meeting IMF conditionalities cannot be the be-all and end-all of economic policy. An IMF package is necessary but not sufficient to achieve durable stabilisation and chart a path to resilient economic growth. A Fund programme should be one component of the country's own long-term plan and strategy. It cannot serve as its substitute.

A credible plan should address the country's weak macroeconomic fundamentals, which persist and make the nascent recovery — the result of all the hoopla and hand-wringing, they will spark another eruption on the same issues. In 2024, however, the AAC had a 15-point demand list which included the restoration of wheat subsidy, suspension of Finance Act, land acquisition rights for locals, share for GB in the NFC Award, royalties from the Damer-Bhusha dam, an end to prolonged power outages and exploitation of GB's mineral resources, among others.

A new generation of educated young people is redefining politics in AJK and GB. The regions of AJK and GB both have a disputed status. They are semi-autonomous regions which have gone through various reforms since 1947. AJK has its own constitution, government and legislative assembly, while GB has only a legislative assembly. However, both re-

gions are politically and financially dependent on the centre. Islamabad maintains a tight grip on their administration through federal bureaucrats. Representatives elected to the provincial assemblies with their hands tied. They cannot deviate from the centre's policies. They often acknowledge the people's frustration with such protests — as in the case of AJK's recent protests — but also admit they have the answers to their questions. Relying on old methods won't work and this AJK episode is a glimpse of that.

There is no harm in empowering regional governments and granting autonomy in local affairs. It is perhaps the best solution to regain the trust of the people and avoid future unrest.

Self-determination, a catchword linked to Kashmir, generally refers to the right of people to constitute themselves as a nation-state or to integrate with an already existing one. Salvatore Senese divides it into two categories: internal and external. The latter has been already mentioned. Internal self-determination, according to Senese, is 'the right of people to freely choose their own political, economic, and social system'.

Can Pakistan provide internal self-determination to AJK and GB? The time is ripe for it. The episode is a glimpse of that. There is no harm in empowering regional governments and granting autonomy in local affairs. It is perhaps the best solution to regain the trust of the people and avoid future unrest.

AJK and GB movements

By Sajjad Ahmad:

AMID a grave economic crisis and the recent Dubai leaks overnight, the situation in what people generally believe are 'peripheral' areas of Pakistan has drawn the attention of the authorities. Be it Haqdo Tehreek in Balochistan, the Awami Action Committee of Gilgit-Balistan or the Jammu Kashmir Joint Awami Action Committee (JAAC) demanding their rights, what is common in all these movements is that their issues lie in the centre. Islamabad. Through protests, sit-ins, strikes and general agitation, these so-called per-ipheral and marginalised areas are gaining centre-stage and a general feeling of dissatisfaction and disenfranchisement among the population seems to be the driving force behind

these movements. The recent protests in AJK led by JAAC — an alliance of farmers, truckers, transporters, and civil society members — which led protests and a march towards Muzaffarabad, the demands, which were neither irrational nor unfair, are being met. They were asking for the electricity rate to be set according to hydropower generation costs. AJK, subsidised wheat flour, and downsizing government officials to spend less money on the ruling elite. Their argument is simple: the AJK economy is a population of only four million, it doesn't need so many ministers and labour leaders, and there is a burden on the

region's budget. However, given the abysmal record of managing crises, the authorities, rather than being proactive, adopted a reactive approach. The unrest began when activists and members of JAAC were detained pre-emptively in overnight raids by law enforcement agencies. This prompted JAAC to call for a strike on May 10 and a march towards Muzaffarabad on May 11. During the several days of unrest, four protesters were killed and over a hundred were injured. Consequently, in an emergency meeting in Islamabad, PM Shehbaz Sharif met all the demands, and the JAAC called off the protests.

The PM announced a grant of Rs23 billion to AJK, which included subsidies on flour and electricity, price controls, and a PML-N leader Rana Sanaulah acknowledged that the situation was mishandled and that the government had been avoided through early negotiations. In Pakistan, it has become a pattern to deny they get out of control as a result in a full-fledged crisis. The wheat subsidy is not a new issue for the government. Just a few months ago, GB was embroiled in mass protests, sit-ins and strikes for the restoration of wheat subsidy granted to the region. The anger was also due to the unilateral decisions of the federal government. The demonstrations were led by the Awami Action Committee (AAC) — an alliance of trade unions, religious and political leaders, and CSOs. This was only a legislative assembly. However, both re-

gions are politically and financially dependent on the centre. Islamabad maintains a tight grip on their administration through federal bureaucrats. Representatives elected to the provincial assemblies with their hands tied. They cannot deviate from the centre's policies. They often acknowledge the people's frustration with such protests — as in the case of AJK's recent protests — but also admit they have the answers to their questions. Relying on old methods won't work and this AJK episode is a glimpse of that.

There is no harm in empowering regional governments and granting autonomy in local affairs. It is perhaps the best solution to regain the trust of the people and avoid future unrest.



Biden faces silent Gaza protest at Martin Luther King Jr's college

GEORGIA (INP): US President Joe Biden said Sunday he heard the voice of Gaza war protesters as some students turned their backs on his graduation ceremony speech at the former university of civil rights icon Martin Luther King Jr.

A number of Morehouse students had called for Biden's speech to be canceled over the Gaza war but the ceremony went ahead without disruption. Biden told the students that Gaza was enduring a "humanitarian crisis" and that he was working for an "immediate ceasefire to stop the fighting, bring the hostages home."



ISLAMABAD: Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Senator Mohammad Ishaq Dar arrives in Astana, Kazakhstan. He was received by Director of the Kazakhistan Minister of Foreign Affairs Nursalmyly Yergalyev and Pakistan's Ambassador to Astana, Nauman Bashir Bhatti at the Airport.

Gary Kirsten joins Pakistan team in Leeds ahead of first England T20I

LEEDS (INP): Pakistan cricket team's white-ball head coach Gary Kirsten has joined the squad ahead of the T20I series against England, starting from May 22.

After the conclusion of the England series, the Pakistan team will depart for the United States of America (USA) to participate in the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2024.

Saudi crown prince's visit to Japan postponed over King Salman's health

TOKYO (INP) Japan's top government spokesman said Monday a planned visit this week by Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman has been postponed "due to the health condition of King Salman."

Salman's health, the visit had been postponed, Yoshimasa Hayashi told reporters. The visit of His Royal Highness Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman will be re-coordinated between the two countries, Hayashi said.



QUETTA: Provincial Minister PHE Sardar Abdul Rehman Khetran is talking to Balochistan Chief Minister Mir Sarfraz Bugti in the assembly session.

Deadly strikes hit Gaza as US envoy visits Israel

GAZA (INP): An Israeli strike killed 31 people in central Gaza Sunday, the Palestinian territory's civil defence agency said, as US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan visited for talks on the conflict.

Israel's military, which on Sunday reported its aircraft had "struck dozens of terror targets" over the past 24 hours, said it was checking the reports. Witness Yasser Abu Oula told reporters an entire residential complex "was destroyed" and "there are still bodies under the rubble."

Oil climbs after Iran's president dies, Saudi king's health issue

TEHRAN (INP): Oil prices extended gains on Monday amid political uncertainty in major producing countries after Iran's president died in a helicopter crash and Saudi Arabia's crown prince cancelled a trip to Japan, citing issues with the king's health.

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, a hardliner long seen as a potential successor to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, was killed in a helicopter crash in a mountainous terrain near the Azerbaijan border, officials and state media said on Monday.



KARACHI: Iran consulate in Pakistan on Monday lowered the flag at half-mast in honor and commemoration of the martyrdom of President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi, Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian and other delegation members after helicopter crashed.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Law and Justice, Senator Azam Nazeer Tarar, addressed an important Press conference.

IHC hears petition for recovery of missing poet Ahmed Farhad

ISLAMABAD (INP): The Islamabad High Court on Monday heard petition for recovery of missing poet Ahmed Farhad filed by his wife.

The court summoned reply from the ministry officials told the court that the secretary defence has been comprehensively briefed. They pleaded to the court for two days' time.

### Senior Journalists Condemn Quetta Press Club Raid, Announce Nationwide Protest

News Desk:

QUETTA: May 18, 2024—A joint emergency meeting of senior journalists, including executive members of the Balochistan Union of Journalists (BUJ) and Quetta Press Club, was held yesterday at the Quetta Press Club. The meeting, chaired by President Press Club Abdul Khaliq Rand and BUJ President Khalil Ahmad, expressed grave concern over a recent raid on the Quetta Press Club by the district administration and police, resulting in the club being locked.

Participants of the meeting voiced their extreme anger at the provincial government's indifference and the curtailment of press freedom.

They described the closure of the Quetta Press Club as a direct attack on freedom of expression under Article 19 of the Constitution of Pakistan, aimed at preventing journalists from performing their duties.

The assembly emphasized that the closure not only disappoints the journalist community



but also impacts all sections of society. They warned that without a robust protest, society would be deprived of its voice.

In unanimous agreement, the senior members condemned the lockout and decided to initiate a nationwide protest movement.

The first phase involves a walkout from the Balochistan Assembly meeting scheduled for today, followed by a protest demonstration outside the assembly. They plan to present a four-point demand to the provincial government.

If these demands are not met, the second phase will commence with a nationwide "Black Day" on May 21.

The Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists will call for protests in all press clubs across Pakistan.

Black flags will be hoisted outside press clubs nationwide, symbolizing solidarity and resistance.

This decisive action underscores the journalists' commitment to protecting press freedom and ensuring the public's right to information is upheld.



ISLAMABAD: Chairman Senate Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani in a meeting with Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan at Parliament house.

### PBBF suspends KBBA officials over misconduct

ISLAMABAD (INP): In a decisive move to uphold integrity and discipline within its ranks, the Pakistan Basketball Federation (PBBF) General Council suspended the Ghulam Muhammad Khan, President of the Karachi Basketball Association (KBBA) and other officials on grounds of regulatory violations and misconduct.

These decisions were taken during the general council meeting of Pakistan Basketball Federation, presided by PBBF President Brig. (R) Ihtikar Mansoor here at local hotel Islamabad attended by all stakeholders.

Ghulam Muhammad Khan, who was also attended the meeting accepted his mistakes, tendered an apology, and recommended Senior Vice President Muhammad Yaqoob as his interim successor. Amidst this central decision, the PBBF council also ratified the establishment of a Scrutiny Committee.

This body is tasked with assessing the clubs in Karachi, aiming to pave the way for transparent elections within the next 90 days for KBBA, followed by elections for the Sindh Basketball Association.

Further disciplinary actions were imposed on two KBBA officials Zafar Iqbal and Zain Ul Abidin, who faced a three-year ban and a fine for severe misconduct.

and inappropriate behavior during the Divisional Basketball Championship Grade B in Quetta. Usman Paracha from Khanawal was banned for falsely representing PBBF and misconduct, with his case being referred to the Multan Division Basketball Association for further proceedings.

Three players from MEPCO, a subsidiary of WAPDA, were banned and fined for illegitimately representing themselves as part of the Multan Division Basketball Association during the All-

Punjab SONA Basketball Tournament in Rahim Yar Khan. Similarly, a player from LESCO was fined for use of abusive language and misconduct during the recent WAPDA Inter Unit Basketball Tournament.

Additional fines were levied on one player from LESCO, Rawalpindi, POF, Rangers for multiple violations of the PBBF's transfer policy.

These five players are directed to submit affidavits affirming their commitment to not repeating such violations, with the stern warning that further infractions could lead to lifetime bans.

Their current bans are conditional, to be lifted upon the payment of their respective fines. PBBF also finalized the Calendar of Activities and the implementation of Developmental programs for Players, coaches, Referees and statisticians in view of the upcoming South Asian Games in Pakistan.

### LHC gives Punjab govt ultimatum for judges' appointment

LAHORE (INP): The Lahore High Court (LHC) has issued an ultimatum to the Punjab government regarding the appointment of judges.

Chief Justice Shehzad Ahmed Khan presided over a hearing on the Punjab government's petition to transfer cases from LHC's anti-terrorism court 1 Rawalpindi to another court.

During the proceedings, the advocate general Punjab informed the court that a government committee had consulted with Punjab Chief Minister on the matter of judges' appointment, assuring that it had been prioritized for the upcoming cabinet session.

However, Chief Justice

Khan inquired about the timeline for the next cabinet session, expressing dissatisfaction with the absence of immediate action.

The Chief Justice ruled that either a special cabinet meeting should have been called or the government committee should have appeared before the court after completing its task.

In response, the advocate general assured that the matter would be resolved in the cabinet session scheduled for Friday. Expressing dismay over the absence of the government committee in court, Chief Justice Khan deemed it disrespectful.

The advocate general

promptly promised the committee's presence within half an hour upon receiving the court's call order.

Consequently, the court directed the Punjab CM and the cabinet to issue a notification regarding judges' appointment before the next hearing.

The court also warned that if the notification was not issued by then, the Punjab Chief Minister would be required to appear in the next hearing.

Addressing any potential concerns, the advocate general clarified that the government had no objections to the names recommended by the court for judges' appointment. Consequently, the case hearing has been adjourned until May 24.



Islamabad: Federal Minister for Finance & Revenue Senator Muhammad Aurangzeb was called on by Ambassador of Italy to Pakistan H.E. Ms. Marilina.



ISLAMABAD: Group photo of Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif and Foreign Minister of Turkiya Hakan Fidan.

### Imran Khan, other PTI leaders acquitted in Azadi March case

ISLAMABAD (INP): A session court in Islamabad acquitted former Prime Minister and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan along with other PTI leaders in cases registered at Karachi Company police station related to the Azadi March.

Judicial Magistrate Mureed Abbas announced the verdict reserved earlier on plea seeking acquittal of Imran Khan, Faisal Javed, Ali Nawaz Awan, Saifullah

Niazi, Zartaj Gul and Asad Umar. Advocate Naem Panjthra, Sardar Masroof and Amna Ali appeared in court to present arguments for the acquittal petitions.

Asad Umar and Saifullah Niazi were present in court while Faisal Javed and Zartaj Gul moved pleas seeking exemption from personal appearance before the

court. Advocate Panjthra argued that Imran Khan was accused under Section 109, suggesting the case was insti-

gated at his behest, and that only the authority enforcing Section 144 had the right to file such a case. He contended that the FIR was registered by an unauthorized person, making the basis of the case invalid and unfit for prosecution.

Furthermore, Panjthra pointed out that no video evidence implicating Imran Khan was presented, and that FIRs were filed even for peaceful protests. He emphasized that multiple similar cases had been registered against Imran Khan in different police stations, all of which resulted in his acquittal.

Sardar Masroof argued that FIRs registered by unauthorized individuals are illegal and cannot be the basis for a case. He cited an Islamabad High Court order to support his argument.

After hearing the arguments, the court reserved its decision and later announced the acquittal of Imran Khan, Faisal Javed, Ali Nawaz Awan, Saifullah Niazi, Zartaj Gul, and Asad Umar.

A session court in Islamabad also acquitted Imran Khan and others in a case registered at Kolsar police station related to protests and vandalism. Judicial Magistrate Shehzad Khan allowed pleas seeking acquittal of Imran Khan, Sheikh Rashid, Faisal Javed Khan, Ali Nawaz Awan, Shah Mehmood Qureshi, Qasim Suri, Raja Khurram Nawaz, and other accused.

The court dismissed the charges of violating Section 144 during the Azadi March.

Lawyers Sardar Masroof and Amna Ali argued that the accusations against Imran Khan and others were baseless and politically motivated.

The court, after completing the arguments, reserved and later announced the acquittal of the accused in this case as well. It may be mentioned here that on May 15, the Islamabad District and Sessions Court had also acquitted PTI founder Imran Khan in a case registered at Khama police station during the Azadi March.

### NA Speaker grieved over tragic death of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi

ISLAMABAD (INP): Speaker National Assembly, Sardar Ayaz Sadiq, has expressed profound sorrow over the tragic demise of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi in a helicopter crash.

The Speaker remarked that the news of the crash, which also claimed the lives of Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian and other high ranking officials, was deeply heart-wrenching and unfortunate.

The Speaker expressed his shock at the news of sudden passing away of President Raisi, describing him as a great friend of Pakistan.

Recalling their recent meeting during late President Raisi's visit to Pakistan, the Speaker highlighted their fruitful discussions aimed at strengthening bilateral and parliamentary cooperation.

He noted that President Raisi was a strong proponent of Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian and other high ranking officials, was deeply heart-wrenching and unfortunate.

The Speaker expressed his shock at the news of sudden passing away of President Raisi, describing him as a great friend of Pakistan.

extended heartfelt condolences to the government of Iran, the families of the President, the Foreign Minister, and all others who lost their lives in the incident, as well as to the people of the brotherly nation of Iran over the martyrdom of Iranian leadership in the helicopter crash.

Speaker Sadiq assured that the government, parliament, and people of Pakistan stand in solidarity with their Iranian brethren in this time of grief and pledged full support and cooperation from Pakistan to overcome this unimaginable loss.



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Sweden to Pakistan Mr. Henrik Persson called on Minister of State for IT and Telecommunication Ms. Shaza Fatima Khawaja.

### Lady cop writes to CJP against harassment by Khairpur police officials

KHAIRPUR (INP): A lady police officer has written a letter to the Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Qazi Faez Isa to get justice against harassment by two police officers and accountant at the SSP Office Khairpur.

The lady police officer Mehak Buzdar wrote in her letter that Accountant Riaz Billu and two other police officers were harassing her and repeatedly transferring her.

She said in her letter that despite multiple complaints to SSP Khairpur Zubair Nazir Shaikh, former SSP Samiullah Soomro, and former DIG Abdul Hameed Khoso via WhatsApp, no action has been taken against the harassers.

The lady police officer said

she faced frequent transfers between the Sukkur DIG Office and Khairpur over the past three months. The sources in Sindh police said, lady police officer Mehak Buzdar is being pressured to withdraw her petition from the Sindh High Court (SHC) and has been instructed by SSP Khairpur to avoid media contact.

Mehak Buzdar has filed a harassment petition against Riaz Billu and two police officers in the SHC and claimed that the accountant asked to meet her personally and upon refusal, she was transferred multiple times over three months.

She also exposed the WhatsApp chat messages between her and the accountant

Riaz. In these chat messages, SSP Khairpur Office Accountant Riaz harasses lady police officer Mehak Buzdar by accusing her of not working and only showing off. He threatened to replace her with another officer, Asma in the chat messages.

In response, Mehak reminds him that she reported to him yesterday, yet he still replaced her as he had mentioned. She questioned why this is happening, asking if it matters whether she performs her duty inside the women's police station or outside.

Civil society has demanded that SSP Khairpur remove the accused officers and conduct an inquiry.