

## IMF chief meets PM Shehbaz, pledges support for govt's actions

Islamabad (News Desk) The International Monetary Fund (IMF) Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva has met Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif during his visit to the United Arab Emirates and assured him of the lender's support for the government's decisive actions regarding the programme, according to a statement released on Wednesday. In a post on X, she said, "Wonderful to meet Prime Minister @CMShehbaz and his team." "I am encouraged by their strong commitment to Pakistan's IMF-supported reforms and support their decisive actions to pave the way to higher growth and more

jobs for Pakistan's youthful population." These comments come amid the IMF team's visit to the country for a week-long scrutiny of the judicial and regulatory system as part of the ongoing \$7 billion Extended Fund Facility (EFF) to address governance and corruption vulnerabilities. According to a statement from the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), the premier held a meeting with the IMF chief on the sidelines of the World Governments Summit (WGS) 2025 in Dubai, where both sides discussed Pakistan's ongoing IMF programme and the macroeconomic stability achieved through the government's compre-

hensive reform agenda. Furthermore, the meeting focused on Pakistan's commitment to implementing structural reforms and maintaining fiscal discipline, "which had been instrumental in restoring economic stability and would be critical in driving sustainable growth." The prime minister talked about the progress made under the programme, attributing the economic progress to the bailout deal. Furthermore, he reaffirmed the government's resolve to sustain reforms, particularly in tax reforms, energy sector efficiency, and private sector development. The IMF chief commended

the country's efforts "in effectively implementing the IMF-supported programme, highlighting the country's improving economic performance with rising growth and declining inflation," per the statement. She recognised that Pakistan was "on the path to growth and has undergone economic recovery", further reiterating the IMF's support for its reform agenda. The premier was in the UAE alongside Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar on a two-day visit at the invitation of President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan to participate in the World Governments Summit (WGS).



IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva meets Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif during his visit to the United Arab Emirates (UAE)

## 'Peca stifles free speech, doesn't curb disinformation'

ISLAMABAD: (News Desk) The recent amendments to the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (Peca) will stifle free speech instead of combatting disinformation as claimed by the government, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) said in a statement on Tuesday. The global media watchdog has urged the government to repeal the amendments, adding that the Peca, passed by parliament in 2016, already posed a threat to journalists, and these amendments further exacerbated those dangers. Peca had already been used to arrest dozens of journalists who criticised the government, the statement said, adding that now, its "repressive role" has been strengthened. "Under the guise of combating disinformation, Pakistan is taking censorship to a new level," said the statement. The definition of false and prohibited content provided in these amendments is "vague" and gives authorities "a formidable legal weapon for blocking information". Céla Mercier, the head of RSF South Asia Desk, said prohibited content includes publications "against the ideology of Pakistan" or which "coerce or intimidate" people or that contain "aspersions" against any person, including members of the judiciary, armed forces and parliament.

## Opposition alliance resolves to give govt 'a tough time'



ISLAMABAD: (News Desk) An alliance of opposition parties, on Tuesday, resolved to increase coordination in order to give the government a tough time.

At a dinner, hosted by Tehreek-i-Tahaffuz-i-Ayeeen-i-Pakistan chief Mehmood Khan Achakzai, opposition leaders Fazlur Rehman, Asad Qaiser, Omar Ayub, Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, Sardar Latif Khosa, Arif Khan, Mustafa Nawaz Khokhar and others agreed to hold a multi-party conference. A steering committee headed by former PM Abbasi was formed to coordinate the event, which will also include Mr Qaiser, Shibli Faraz, Kamran Murtaza, Sahibzada Hamid Raza, Sajid Tareen, Akhundzada Hussain and Mr Khokhar.

Separately, the PTI is said to be weighing a suggestion that it should approach the visiting International Monetary Fund (IMF) delegation to brief it about its stance regarding the Feb 8, 2024 elections, which the party considers "rigged". The delegation will also be informed about consequences of the 26th amendment. Sources added, however, that it was being examined whether protocols allow the party to approach the IMF's office in Pakistan, or not.

## Police hold Azam Swati 'culpable' in May 9 cases in Lahore ATC

Islamabad (News Desk) Police investigators told a Lahore Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) on Wednesday that their probe had found PTI leader Azam Swati culpable in five cases related to the May 9 riots, as Judge Manzar Ali Gul heard his bail petition. The PTI founder's arrest on May 9 in the Al Qadir Trust case had resulted in widespread violence and saw important military installations come under attack. Following the mayhem, the state had launched a crackdown against his party, leading to arrests and legal cases against several

PTI leaders and supporters. Today, the Lahore ATC announced that the police had completed their investigation and that they had found him "guilty". However, the judge provided one last chance for Swati to present arguments related to his bail. "You all should present your arguments for bail, perhaps it will be approved," the judge said. Swati maintained that the cases against him were "fabricated". In response, the judge said that Swati must present the arguments to hold his ground. "It has been more than a

year since the bail applications were filed, and the police investigation has also been completed," the judge said. The hearing was then adjourned until Feb 25. Aleema, Uzma Khan innocent in Jinnah House attack case: police Meanwhile, the Lahore ATC also heard a case against PTI founder Imran Khan's sisters, Aleema Khan and Uzma Khan, for their alleged involvement in the Jinnah House attack on May 9. During the hearing, the investigation officer told the court that the probe against the two sisters had

been completed, adding that the two were found "innocent". The IO said there was no need to arrest the duo, who withdrew their bail applications in the case. Last month, a Lahore ATC judge extended the pre-arrest bail of Aleema, Uzma and PTI Secretary General Salman Akram Raja in the Jinnah House attack case until February 15. Speaking to the media outside the court, Aleema said: "After 20 months, Allah has made us prosperous", adding that she had learned a lot about the justice system during her trial.



Federal Minister for Railways Azam Khan Swati speaks to the media in Lahore on Sunday

## LHC dismisses Azam Swati's plea for case transfer

Lahore (News Desk) Lahore High Court Chief Justice Aalia Neelum on Monday dismissed an application of PTI leader Azam Swati seeking transfer of his case from one antiterrorism court to another. At the outset of the hearing, a lawyer for the petitioner contended that the ATC judge had disclosed his bias during the proceedings of his client's

pre-arrest bail in May 9 riot cases. He pointed out that ATC Judge Khalid Arshad had mentioned that police gave him a USB containing videos of the alleged occurrences, and it was concluded that those making speeches were guilty. Chief Justice Neelum asked the counsel how he could request a transfer of cases to another court by alleging bias against the judge.

Elahi given last chance to appear before court in illegal appointments case The lawyer then requested for more time to prepare his arguments, which the chief justice denied, saying if there was no argument, the court would pass a decision. She observed that the petitioner had not so far joined the investigation. The lawyer said police were not recording the statement of the peti-

tioner. After hearing the arguments, the chief justice dismissed Mr Swati's application. Indictment of Parvez Elahi A special anti-corruption court on Monday expressed displeasure over the continuous absence of former chief minister Parvez Elahi in a case relating to illegal appointments in the Punjab Assembly, giving him one last opportunity to appear.

## Ayaz Sadiq takes issue with judge's remarks about parliament

ISLAMABAD: (News Desk) National Assembly Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq on Tuesday reacted sharply to a statement by a judge of the Islamabad High Court (IHC) about parliament, denouncing the remarks as "an attack" on the institution. During Tuesday's sitting of the National Assembly, the speaker, quoting media reports, said that an honourable judge of the IHC had stated that parliament, along with the executive and judiciary, had

collapsed. "Nobody has the right to make statements against parliament. This is our prerogative. If this is true, please convey to that honourable judge that this is not acceptable to parliament," he said, addressing the law minister. On Tuesday, during the hearing of a case in which candidates who appeared in the CSS 2024 exams sought to have the FPSC halt the upcoming exam until the previous re-

sults were announced, Justice Mohsin Akhtar Kayani made significant remarks, stating that living in Pakistan was a constant battle. When the petitioners' lawyer argued that the state must protect citizens' rights, Justice Kayani remarked that the pillars of the state no longer exist. "The state is now in the air. Men above 45 years of age, including me, are ineffective. Only the youth must take action for this country. I am not hopeless. The

same youth have to take care of the country. The judiciary, parliament and executive have all collapsed," he said. During proceedings of the lower house, Mr Sadiq also urged the PTI leadership and members to stop the 'drama' of calling parliament fake. "The parliament of 2018 was not fake, but according to them, the parliaments of 2013 and 2024 are." Mr Sadiq said such remarks from the opposing were unacceptable as they amounted to a



direct attack on parliament. "They only call parliament fake when they are not in power." He also criticised PTI lawmakers for returning to parliament and drawing salaries after

boycotting proceedings. When the petitioners' lawyer argued that the state must protect citizens' rights, Justice Kayani remarked that the pillars of the state no longer exist.

## Three held for 'torturing' minor housemaid

RAWALPINDI: (News Desk) A minor house maid was shifted to hospital in a critical after she was allegedly tortured and ill-treated by her employers, husband and wife. Police have taken the couple and the woman, who brought the girl to the hospital, into custody and started an investigation.

A team from the Child Protection Bureau Rawalpindi also reached the hospital.

The incident came to light after the victim was shifted to hospital from the Asghar Mall Scheme area of Bani police station, Rawalpindi, after her condition deteriorated. The victim was shifted to the hospital by the woman who used to teach Quran to children at home. CPO Rawalpindi Khalid Hamdani directed the police to take legal action against the accused. Police said Iqra, a 12-year-old girl, was shifted to the hospital in an unconscious condition.

## PM Shehbaz builds case for climate finance at UAE summit

ISLAMABAD: (News Desk) Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Tuesday presented Pakistan's case for climate finance at the World Governments Summit in the United Arab Emirates, urging multilateral institutions to support emerging economies like Pakistan in achieving sustainable economic growth. He made these remarks in an address at the summit before coming back to the country following a two-day official visit to the UAE. In his address, the premier asked the international community to strengthen climate financing and technology sharing and also invited the private sector to explore untapped green energy and infrastructure opportunities in the country. He said the global shift to a green economy required shared responsibility, adding that Pakistan was fully committed to mobilising its domestic resources and policy reforms which required international support. "Pakistan's energy transition alone demands \$100 billion in investment," he said. He said Pakistan's economy was recovering despite huge challenges. "Pakistan stands at the defining moment of economic transformation. The headline inflation has dropped to 2.4 per cent in January this year, the lowest in the last nine years, with interest rate capped at 12 per cent," he added. The PM said energy security and sustainability were a national priority, as Pakistan was committed to producing 60 per cent of the clean energy mix by 2030 and converting 30 per cent of all its vehicles into electric vehicles.

## Senate rights panel concerned by 'alarming rise' in violence against children

ISLAMABAD: (News Desk) A parliamentary body on Tuesday focused on key legislative and administrative matters concerning children's rights, the protection of persons with disabilities, safeguarding minorities, and measures to prevent crimes against children. The Senate Functional Committee on Human Rights convened at the Parliament House with Senator Samina Mumtaz Zehri in the chair. The meeting conducted a detailed review of the National Commission on the Rights of Child (NCRC), its performance, functions, and actions to curb crimes against children. Legislation concerning the rights of children and persons with disabilities was deferred till the next meeting. Senator Dr Zarqa Taimur Sohrawardy, attending online, requested time to consult with the NCRC chairperson before updating the committee. In response, Chairperson Senator Samina Mumtaz Zehri postponed both bills to the next session. The committee also reviewed the National Commission for Minorities Bill 2025. The secretary of the Ministry of Human Rights, Allah Dino Khawaja, briefed the committee, highlighting that Pakistan had signed international conventions and that the bill had already been passed by the National Assembly. The committee examined various clauses of the bill in detail, with the members agreeing that input from the minority representatives in both the National Assembly and Senate should be included.