

Kidnapped cop recovered F.P. Report

D I KHAN: A police constable Muhammad Azam, who was kidnapped last evening, was safely recovered here on Friday. The policeman was successfully recovered during a joint operation that lasted throughout the night and was conducted under the leadership of DPO Dera, Sajad Ahmed Sahibzada by teams of police, CTD, and the Pakistan Army.



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Case transferred F.P. Report

LAHORE: An anti-terrorism court in Lahore on Friday ordered withdrawal of terror-related provisions from the FIR registered against alleged land mafia leader Malik Mansha Khokhar aka Mansha Bomb and his sons and transfer the case to a sessions court. ATC Judge Arshad Javed pronounced the verdict. A case was filed against Mansha Bomb and his sons for grabbing government plots.

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ISLAMABAD: Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan, Jiang Zaidong called on Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

PM, Chinese envoy discuss cooperation

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Chinese Ambassador in Islamabad Jiang Zaidong on Friday called on Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif here where in they discussed the matters related to economic and security cooperation between the two countries.

The prime minister greeted the ambassador and conveyed his good wishes to the Chinese leadership and the people of China, including all Chinese nationals residing in Pakistan, as they celebrated the Chinese New Year, according to a PM Office press release.

He expressed the hope that this new year would further strengthen the bonds of friendship between Pakistan and China and bring prosperity to the peoples of both countries. Ambassador Jiang Zaidong thanked the prime minister and the people of Pakistan for extending their warm wishes to the Chinese government and its people on this joyous occasion.

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif in his message on World Interfaith Harmony Week being observed from

February 1st to 7th urged the religious scholars, community leaders and citizens to play role in promoting brotherhood as extremism and divisive rhetoric were threat to social peace and harmony.

The prime minister shared these views while joining the international community in observing World Interfaith Harmony Week, a Prime Minister's Office news release said. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said this week served as a powerful reminder of the importance of dialogue, understanding, and cooperation among diverse religious communities.

"Pakistan, envisioned by our founding father Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah as a sanctuary for all faiths, remains steadfast in its constitutional oath to protect every citizen's right to belief, dignity, and equality. Our faith-rooted in Islam's timeless teachings of justice, mercy, and respect for all creation-compels us to lead by example," the prime minister said. He resolved that the government would continue to uphold these values through policies that promote inclusivity and social

cohesion.

"To those who sow hatred, we respond with dialogue. To those who preach fear, we answer with courage. To those who divide, we build bridges," Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said. He added that the government was committed to fostering an environment of acceptance, tolerance, and mutual respect.

The groundbreaking Interfaith Harmony Policy and Strategy of Religious Tolerance were enforced, targeting hate speech at its core, safeguarding every temple, church, and shrine, the prime minister said. PM Shehbaz Sharif underscored that despite policy interventions implemented, the government recognized that challenges persist. "Extremism and divisive rhetoric, remain threats to our social fabric. At a time when the world faces growing challenges of intolerance and division, it is essential to reaffirm our collective commitment to peace and unity," he said. "May this week inspire us all to embrace the values of tolerance and cooperation, ensuring a peaceful and prosperous future for all," the prime minister said.

Govt hikes petrol price by Re1, diesel by Rs7 per litre

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The government has increased the price of petrol by Re1 per litre, setting the new price at Rs257.13 per liter for the next fortnight.

According to the notification issued by the Ministry of Finance, the price of petrol has been increased by Re1, and the price of high-speed diesel has risen by Rs7. After the price hike, the new price of petrol is Rs257.13 per litre, while the new price of high-speed diesel is Rs267.95 per litre.

The new prices have been implemented from midnight. It is noteworthy that on January 15, the government had raised the price of petrol by Rs3.47 and the price of high-speed diesel by Rs2.61 per litre.

Fazl says govt on weak footing

F.P. Report

GUJRANWALA: Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam chief Maulana Fazlur Rahman said on Friday the incumbent government would crumble the day the powers that be backtracked from its support.

Addressing a press conference in Gujranwala, he said "his party believes in a political solution through negotiations, PTI did not take the opposition into confidence before talking to the government. He said that the government's writ in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had been absent as armed groups were ruling there while the situation in Balochistan also worrying.

The JUI chief said "it is necessary that the situation in Balochistan be looked at seriously at the state level." On the Peca act, he said the JUI-F chief said the suggestions of journalists on the controversial act should have been taken before its passage.

IHC suspends sentences of 10 in May 9 cases

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Friday suspended the imprisonment sentence of ten accused in cases registered against them on protest after the arrest of PTI founder Imran Khan on May 9, 2023.

A division bench comprising Justice Mohsin Akhtar Kayani and Justice Sardar Ijaz Ishaq Khan suspended the sentences and approved the bails against surety bonds worth Rs 25,000 each. It may be mentioned here that an Anti-Terrorism Court has announced collectively five years and ten month jail term to the accused in November 2024. The accused were alleged to attack the police and setting fire a police check point near Faizabad.

The IHC stated that as per the case record, not even a single accused was arrested from the crime scene. The lawyers told the court that the accused were acquitted from terrorism sections and awarded minor sentences.

The Frontier Post

PECA Act to tackle social media threats

Tarar urges all journalistic organizations support

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Attaullah Tarar said on Friday that the PECA Act is designed to address the threats posed by social media, with the rules still under development and open for consultation, and urged all journalistic organizations to offer their support.

Talking to media, the minister described the PECA Act as a positive measure to address the dangers of social media. He reassured that the Act will not create problems for media and newspapers. Tarar noted that the rules under the Act are still being developed, leaving room for consultation.

He stressed that all stakeholders will be involved in the process and urged journalistic organizations to support the law. The president has signed the PECA Act Amendment Bill into law after it was approved by the parliament. This move aims to combat the spread of fake propaganda, false news, harassment and child abuse on social media, which threaten national integrity.

Tarar said the PECA Act's primary goal is to address the dangers posed by social media, such as the spread of chaos, uncertainty, and harassment in Pakistan. The Act aims to prevent the misuse of social media to create confusion about the country's economy, intimidate individuals, make false accusations, and incite violence. Furthermore, it seeks to protect women from blackmail, which can result in psychological harm.

The minister announced that Parliament has approved the PECA

Act to address the dangers and misuse of social media. He said a Social Media Protection Authority will be established, with nominations from the private sector, including journalists affiliated with press clubs or journalistic organizations.

Tarar said the tribunal will consist of journalists and IT professionals, ensuring that its members have ties to press bodies or associations. The minister highlighted that the PECA Act is crucial for regulating social media and safeguarding citizens from its potential dangers. Attaullah Tarar clarified that there had been considerable confusion regarding appeals against PECA Tribunal decisions, but the process is now clear. Just like appealing Federal Service Tribunal decisions in the Supreme Court, decisions of the PECA Tribunal can also be contested.

He said the Tribunal must issue verbal orders within 24 hours, which can then be challenged through a writ petition in the High Court and further appeal in the Supreme Court. The minister stated that the rules under the PECA Act are still being developed, with room for consultation. All stakeholders will be involved in this process. He emphasized that the Act is a positive step towards addressing the dangers of social media, preventing chaos, and ensuring peace. The minister urged all journalistic organizations to support the Act and engage in the ongoing rule-making and consultation process.

The minister stated that the PECA Act incorporates the best global practices and welcomed discussions on any controversial clauses. He questioned whether tackling fake news or

creating a system for social media regulation should be seen as contentious. The minister emphasized that no contentious issues regarding the PECA Act have been raised so far. He acknowledged that protest is a fundamental right, and social media laws with checks and balances exist globally, including in Western countries. However, in the case of Pakistan's law, while protests are occurring, no one has pointed out specific clauses or highlighted any contentious or incorrect provisions, he added.

The minister noted that the Tribunal and Social Media Protection Authority include private sector representatives and press club journalists, ensuring adequate representation. Moreover, individuals have the right to appeal and file writ petitions with the Council of Complaints. Given these provisions, the minister questioned why there is fear or concern.

He said the PECA Act is designed to address the misuse of social media and prevent the spread of chaos, fear, and misinformation in Pakistan. The minister stated that the Act is crucial to tackling the rising threat of disinformation on social media, a concern recognized globally, as noted by the World Economic Forum. He emphasized that developed countries are already taking measures to regulate social media and curb the spread of false information. Therefore, Pakistan's efforts to implement similar regulations should not be seen in a negative light. He said the Act aims to protect citizens from the harmful effects of social media and ensure peace and stability in the country.

IHC judges express concern over CJ's appointment

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: In a significant development on the judicial front, the judges of Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Friday penned a letter to the chief justices (CJ) of the Supreme Court and high courts in which they expressed concerns over the appointment of a transferred judge to the IHC's top slot.

They urged them to take a stand and resist such a development. According to the Judicial Commission of Pakistan (JCP) new rules which came into effect last year, the seniority criterion was not followed to appoint the top-most judge. The JCP proposed that the chief justice of a high court could be appointed from among the panel of five senior-most judges.

The letter was signed by IHC's senior puisne judge Justice Mohsin Akhtar Kayani and Justices Tariq Mehmood Jahangiri, Babar Sattar, Sardar Ejaz Ishaq Khan and Saman Rafat Imtiaz. The names of Justices Arbab Muhammad Tahir and Mianqul Hassan Aurangzeb were also in the

letter but didn't bear their signatures.

"The high courts are independent and autonomous. The justices who are elevated to a particular high court, take oath, under Article 194 of the Constitution, with respect a particular province, or for the purposes of the IHC, with respect to the Islamabad Capital Territory. Since the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution in 2010, and during the times of political democratic governments in Pakistan, there has been no precedent of permanent appointments to the high courts through the invocation of Article 200 of the Constitution," the letter said.

It said that despite a major overhaul to the judicial framework under the 26th amendment, the legislature did not allow for permanent transfers to become constitutionalised as envisaged in the proposal. "Article 200 did not undergo any changes. The conception of each court being separate and autonomous, under the system of federal-

ism, has remained intact."

The letter said that the purpose of the LHC judge's alleged transfer was reported to be a consideration for the IHC's top post, adding that this "just cannot be under the Constitution". It argued that the transferred judge would need to take a fresh oath under Article 194 of the Constitution, for serving in a new high court and thus their seniority would be determined from the date of the oath for the purpose of serving at the IHC.

The letter pointed out that the Supreme Court had already held that the seniority of a judge was determined from their oath-taking date at the high court they were to serve at. "Hence, a transferred judge, required to take a fresh oath, would be at the bottom-end of the seniority list, at the date of such transfer, despite his prior service at another high court. The transferred judge, as a result, may find such a situation to be unfortunate, which, may, in turn, lead to friction, jeopardising the smooth functioning of the court."

What is difference between Dec 16, May 9 civilians, asks SC

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Justice Aminuddin Khan on Friday remarked that there was no second opinion that any law contrary to the Constitution could not remain in effect.

A seven-member constitutional bench, headed by Justice Aminuddin Khan, is hearing intra-court appeals against the trial of civilians in military courts. At the start of the hearing, the lawyer for former Chief Justice, Justice Jawad S. Khawaja, Advocate Khawaja Ahmad Hussain, continued his arguments, stating that ordinary civilians are not subject to military law, and the Army Act only applies to civilian employees of the Pakistan Armed Forces.

Justice Hassan Azhar Rizvi asked whether the Army Act applies in cases of attacks on airbases, while Justice Musarrat Hilali asked what the difference is between the incidents of the Army Public School (APS) attack and the May 9 protests. Advocate Hussain responded that the APS was a terrorist attack. Justice Hilali remarked that all the victims at APS were civilian

children, to which Advocate Hussain replied that their case is not outside the Constitution. The May 9 accused should not be tried in military courts.

The head of the constitutional bench, Justice Aminuddin Khan, remarked that there is no disagreement that any law that contradicts the Constitution cannot stand. Advocate Hussain also referred to the ISPR's statement issued on May 15 regarding the May 9 incident and was asked by the court if he had any objections to the statement. Khawaja Hussain responded that he had no objection to the statement itself, but he questioned how a fair trial could be expected in military courts after such a statement was issued by the Corps Commander.

Justice Aminuddin Khan then referred to the example of Indian spy Kulbhushan Jadhav, noting that in the case of Jadhav, not only the Pakistan Armed Forces were affected. Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar stated that if Section 2(1)(d)(2) of the Army Act were declared invalid, similar military trials could not be conducted in

cases like Kulbhushan Jadhav's. Advocate Khawaja Hussain stated that the Jadhav case had not been discussed in the court's decision, to which Justice Hassan Azhar Rizvi asked what would happen if a foreign spy was captured in the future.

Khawaja Hussain responded that the trial would take place in an anti-terrorism court. Justice Hassan Azhar Rizvi smiled and remarked that it would be strange if a law's provision is invalidated, but exceptions are made for special remedies.

Advocate Khawaja Hussain continued his arguments, mentioning that in a Field General Court Martial, one cannot choose their lawyer unless permitted by the Army Chief. Justice Musarrat Hilali asked if they were representing the accused in this court, to which Khawaja Hussain explained that in a Field General Court Martial, the lawyer is appointed by the Army Chief, and without the Army Chief's permission, a preferred lawyer cannot be appointed.

Security forces kill 10 terrorists

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: At least ten Khwarij were killed in various operations by the security forces in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province.

On reported presence of Khwarij, an intelligence based operation was conducted by the Security Forces in general area Khulachi, Dera Ismail Khan District. During the conduct of operation, own troops effectively engaged the khwarij location and resultantly, four khwarij were sent to hell.

In four separate encounters in North Waziristan District, fire exchange took place between the Security Forces and khwarij in general area Datta Khel, Hassan Khel, Ghulam Khan and Mir Ali. Resultantly, six khwarij were successfully neutralized by own troops.

Weapons and ammunition were also recovered from the killed khwarij, who remained actively involved in numerous terrorist activities in these areas against the security forces as well as killing of innocent civilians.

Sanitization operations are being conducted to eliminate any other Kharji found in the area as the security forces of Pakistan are determined to eliminate the menace of terrorism from the country.

President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Friday paid tribute to the security forces for their bravery on eliminating 10 Khawarij terrorists during successful operations in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP).

In separate messages, the president and prime minister reiterated their resolve to completely eradicate Fitna-ul-Khawarij (terrorism) from the country. The President said that the security forces were taking action to eradicate the menace of terrorism, whereas the entire nation was united against terrorism.

"Operations against Fitna-ul-Khawarij will continue until terrorism is completely eradicated," President Zardari said. Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif also appreciated the security forces for various successful operations against Fitna-ul-Khawarij terrorists in Kolachi, Dera Ismail Khan and Waziristan districts. "The entire nation stands with security forces in the fight against terrorists and are resolute to eradicate all forms of terrorism from the country," the prime minister said.

F.P. Report

KOHAT: Barrister Dr. Saif, Advisor to the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Information and Public Relations, addressed the Grand Jirga in Kohat district, emphasizing that the issue of Karam region is rooted in hatred. He stressed that lasting peace is impossible until this hatred is eradicated.

Dr. Saif said that social media platforms are fueling this hatred, which is a grave concern. If we fail to address this hatred, peace will remain elusive. The Advisor warned that war always damages truth and trust, and it's essential to eliminate mistrust and



restore mutual confidence. He assured that those responsible for destruction will be brought to justice.

Dr. Saif updated the audience on the ongoing efforts to disarm militants, with a plan to be presented today regarding the surrender of arms by one party. He also shared that Barrister Saif said that medicines worth Rs. 16 crore have been sent to Karam district. Besides this Over

3,000 people have been safely evacuated from Karam district via helicopter.

He said that all elements challenging the government's writ will be punished according to the law. The Advisor concluded that the provincial government has initiated the process of compensating for damages and that the Kohat Agreement will be equally applicable to both parties.

AC injured in Kurram firing incident

F.P. Report

PARACHINAR: The assistant commissioner (AC) of Boshehra, Upper Kurram, was injured as a result of firing by unidentified attackers on Friday.

According to police, unidentified assailants opened fire on Assistant Commissioner Saeed Manan in the Bushara area of Upper Kurram, leaving him injured. The police stated that Saeed Manan was present in Bushara with law enforcement personnel when the attack occurred.

He was immediately shifted to a hospital for medical treatment, while a heavy police contingent launched a search operation to track down the attackers. Earlier, Deputy Commissioner Javedullah Mehsud was also targeted in a firing incident in Lower Kurram, where he sustained injuries. At the same time, a grand jirga

began at the Commissioner House in Kohat to ensure lasting peace in Kurram.

Meanwhile, the prolonged closure of roads in Kurram District for over four months has put the future of thousands of students at risk, while the local population continues to face hardships.

According to district administration and locals, the Parachinar-Tall main highway and the Pak-Afghan Kharlachi border have remained closed for more than four months due to ongoing security concerns. This prolonged blockade has left the entire region isolated, causing immense difficulties for residents who are virtually trapped with no means of transportation.

The road closures have also affected students seeking admissions in foreign educational institutions, as well as those pursuing employment opportunities

abroad. Citizens report that around 4,000 overseas Pakistanis and nearly 3,000 students remain stranded in Parachinar. Meanwhile, relief convoys have started reaching the area, providing some respite to the affected residents, however, the situation remains dire.

However, after law enforcers' efforts, peace was restored and essential supplies also started coming into Kurram, which was cut off from the rest of the country for months.

The peace efforts faced another obstacle today due to the attack on AC Saeed Manan. According to law enforcers, Manan was present in the area alongside the police when he was targeted. He was immediately shifted to a hospital for medical treatment. Following the attack, a heavy contingent of police launched a search operation to track down the perpetrators.



Murad orders formation of facilitation committee for industrialists

KARACHI (PPI): Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah chaired two meetings to review the progress of the Dhabeji Special Economic Zone (SEZ) and committed to addressing the concerns of industrialists through a joint 'Facilitation and Coordination Committee' to be established under CM.

According to a statement issued today, the meetings took place at the CM House and were attended by Minister for Planning and Development Syed Nasir Shah, Minister ACE & Agriculture Mohammad Bux Maher, Minister Home Zia Lanjar, Minister Industries Jam Ikram, Chief Secretary Asif Hyder Shah, Special Assistant to the Chief Minister for Investment Syed Qasim Naveed, PSCM Agha Wasif, Chairman of P&D Najam Shah, Secretary for Investment Raja Khurram, DG PPP Unit Asad Zamin, CEO of SEZMC Azeem Uqaili, among others.

Resolution of Industrialists' Issues: In a separate meeting, the Chief Minister directed the Revenue and Police Departments to eliminate encroachments and address all revenue and police-related issues faced

by industrialists. He mentioned that industrialists had met with Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari to discuss their concerns, and the Chairman issued clear directives for their resolution.

Murad Shah instructed the Chief Secretary to notify the establishment of the 'Facilitation & Coordination' committee, which will include heads of various associations of industrialists, such as ABAD, to facilitate collaboration in solving their issues. He also directed SMBR Baqaullah Unar and IG Police Ghulam Nabi Memon to remove all encroachments from industrial areas and restore green belts, collaborating with industrialists for proposals on further facilities for both existing and upcoming investments.

The Chief Minister emphasized the need to review issues related to drainage, water supply, and roads, stating that some roads in the city's industrial areas were constructed through association efforts and that work was ongoing. He insisted that the Revenue Department must resolve industrialists' issues and asked the Chief Secretary to personally follow up on reports from Revenue offices.

He expressed a strong commitment to fostering a conducive environment for industrial growth to enhance the national economy.

Dhabeji SEZ Progress: During the meetings, the Chief Minister learned that the construction progress of the Dhabeji Special Economic Zone (SEZ) stood at 10.6 per cent. He expressed dissatisfaction with this pace and directed his special assistant to expedite the construction work and provide regular updates.

It was reported that 70 per cent of the electrification work had already been completed, and gas installation was underway. The CM noted that the water supply system for the zone was in progress and instructed his special assistant to lay a 10 MGD line, with a completion deadline of February 2025.

When asked about the condition of internal roads, Minister for Planning and Development Nasir Shah indicated that the Works & Services Department was handling construction, with 50 per cent of the work completed. The Chief Minister further directed the P&D Minister to accelerate the development efforts.

LHC expresses concern over declining groundwater levels

LAHORE (APP): The Lahore High Court (LHC) on Friday expressed serious concerns over the continuous decline in groundwater levels, stressing the need for immediate conservation measures.

Justice Shahid Karim made these remarks while hearing a set of petitions, filed by a citizen Haroon Farooq and others against ineffective measures to combat smog. During the hearing, the court stated that water scarcity had become the most critical issue and noted that until water meters were installed, water would continue to be wasted. The court also criticised the Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) for its inaction.

In response, the PDMA representatives informed the court that they had

launched awareness campaigns through advertisements and television broadcasts. However, the court expressed serious displeasure and termed such campaigns a waste of public funds. It directed the PDMA officials to hold a meeting with a member of the Judicial Water and Environment Commission and submit a report on steps to conserve water, instructing that the meeting minutes be presented to the Punjab chief minister.

At this stage, a commission member submitted a report regarding school buses. In response, the court noted that while contractors could be temporarily hired, schools must eventually purchase their own buses. It directed the authorities to establish rules mandating that schools buy buses annu-

ally and submit reports detailing their acquisitions. The court questioned the Transport Department about its report on e-buses and ordered it to submit a detailed progress report. The court also observed that two-wheelers and three-wheelers should be converted to electric vehicles.

The court noted that it received reports that the Parks and Horticulture Authority (PHA) had expanded its office by encroaching on Racecourse Park. A commission member further submitted that a restaurant was illegally operating in Nasser Bagh despite a court stay order, prohibiting such establishments inside public parks. The court was also informed that the Ravi Urban Development Authority (RUDA) had been trans-

ferred 6,000 acres of land from the Forest Department. However, since 2022, only 192 acres had been developed, he added.

The court questioned why the land was handed over to RUDA, stating that it was likely to be used for housing societies. It then issued notices to the Board of Revenue and RUDA, summoning them for the next hearing.

At this point, a commission member suggested allocating a specific area for pet businesses. The court agreed, stating that sufficient land was available and that a pet market could be developed and leased out accordingly.

Subsequently, the court adjourned the hearing until February 7, directing the relevant authorities to submit reports on all discussed matters at the next session.



LAHORE: Crane being used to remove derailed coaches of Shalimar Express, which was traveling from Lahore to Karachi, near Shahdara Railway Station. —APP Photo

Punjab to launch anti-polio campaign from February 3

LAHORE (APP): The Punjab government is set to launch a province-wide anti-polio campaign from February 3, aiming to vaccinate 23.3 million children across the province.

In Lahore, Rawalpindi and Faisalabad, the campaign will continue until February 9, while in other districts, it will conclude on February 7. This was informed in a meeting which was held at the Civil Secretariat under the chairmanship of Chief Secretary

Punjab Zahid Akhtar Zaman to review the campaign's arrangements.

The Chief Secretary emphasized the need for an effective and successful campaign, stressing that the presence of the polio virus in environmental samples remains a serious concern. He directed deputy commissioners to personally monitor the campaign and ensure the use of modern technology for improved results. He highlighted that digitization could enhance microplans,

making vaccination efforts more efficient.

In view of ongoing school exams, the meeting decided to engage minimal staff from the Education Department in the campaign. The deputy commissioners were also instructed to make special arrangements at transit points to administer polio drops to traveling children.

Secretary Primary Health Nadia Saqib provided a detailed briefing, confirming that all arrangements

have been finalized for the campaign. She stated that 2,654 transit teams, 4,888 fixed teams, and 85,000 mobile teams have been formed to ensure that every child receives the vaccine.

The meeting was attended by officials from various departments and representatives of international organizations working for polio eradication. Divisional commissioners and deputy commissioners joined via video link to discuss the strategy.

French envoy calls on Mayor Karachi

KARACHI (APP): The Consul General of France, Alexis Chahtahinsky, called on the Mayor Karachi Barrister Murtaza Wahab, at his office on Friday to discuss matters of mutual interest. Murtaza welcomed the French CG upon his arrival at the head office of the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation. During the meeting he briefed him on the municipal services provided to the citizens of Karachi and the ongoing efforts to develop the city's infrastructure.

Mayor Karachi on this occasion suggested that France could send cultural and academic delegations to Pakistan, while also promoting Pakistani culture in France, which would bring the two nations closer. He noted that France is a prominent and developed country in Europe, with a rich history and culture, added that the people of Pakistan admire France's remarkable progress in industrial development and technology, and Pakistan desires to learn from France's experience to modernize its own cities,

particularly in urban affairs.

He also highlighted that Karachi offers vast and attractive opportunities for foreign investment due to its unique geographical significance as a crucial link between South Asia and Central Asia. Karachi has always been developed as an important trade port, which has helped it become a major industrial and commercial hub.

French CG Alexis Chahtahinsky expressed his best wishes for Murtaza Wahab's work and hoped that he would continue to serve the city of Karachi and its people in an even better manner, ensuring they have access to high-quality urban facilities. He also agreed that cultural and educational exchanges would strengthen the relationship between the two countries, benefiting both Karachi and French cities.

German delegation meets Sindh energy minister

KARACHI (PPI): A German delegation met Sindh Minister for Energy, Development, and Planning

Syed Nasir Hussain Shah to explore investment options in the province's energy sector. The meeting highlighted the potential of the 350MW solar-wind hybrid project, which is set to become the world's largest. According to a statement, Minister Shah emphasized the abundant solar and wind energy resources in Sindh, presenting golden opportunities for investment. He noted that both domestic and foreign investors are showing significant interest in these profitable ventures.

The Minister assured that the Sindh government is providing comprehensive support to investors, which has resulted in a record increase in investment interest. He emphasized the growing trust and confidence in the government's investor-friendly policies.

Secretary of the Sindh Energy Department Musaddiq Ahmed Khan gave a detailed briefing on the ongoing and future projects of the Energy Department on this occasion.

PDP lables PECA Act as a black Law

KARACHI (PPI): Pasban Democratic Party General Secretary Iqbal Hashmi on Friday described PECA Act as a black law and said that it violates basic human rights, democracy, and the Constitution of Pakistan.

According to a PDM statement, Mr Hashmi said: This law should be immediately repealed. The government is busy creating one law after another to silence the people. Individual privacy in Pakistan has been lost."

He further said that by using this law, any citizen could be placed under house arrest. Even under the worst dictatorship, such laws were not made, he noted.

PDP leader further said: "Attempting to control social media under the guise of national security is a dangerous endeavor for the country's integrity.

Therefore, the government should take careful steps in this matter. It is shameful that this dark mark has been placed on the face of the selected democratic government. With the presence of this law, the use of social media will have to be abandoned."

He said: "Discussing and debating any topic on social media will no longer be possible. This backdrop has been opened to give government institutions freedom to act arbitrarily and indulge in corruption. The country is on the brink of economic collapse, and now, by silencing voices of truth, the last remaining hopes are being strangled."

Hashmi said that the implementation of the PECA Act was a grave violation of journalists' and human rights. While Pakistan's government institutions are respectable, such legislation requires the agreement of all sectors of society, he suggested.

NOTICE FOR AUCTION OF MINOR MINERALS OF DISTRICT BANNU AS "ONE-UNIT"

The District Auction Committee of District Bannu invites applications from registered contractors of Minor Minerals for participation in auction and grant of Minor Mineral leases of the following 09 identified blocks as "One Unit" in District Bannu under provisions of Section-78 Sub Section (3) of The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Mines & Mineral Act, 2017 for a period of one year on the basis of "As is where is" against reserve prices **Rs.2,01,52,000/-** and call deposit of **Rs.50,38,000/-** in office of the Deputy Commissioner Bannu on **18/02/2025 at 11:00 AM**. In case of non-auction due to any reason, the next date of auction will be **19/02/2025 at 11:00 AM**

S.No.	Location & Extant of Area	Acreage
01	Near Village Ghulam Killa, Sheri Killa, Kot Barara, Kabir Killa, Slima Sikandar Khel, District Bannu. MDW/BU/MM/(01)/2015	3028.99 acres
02	Near Village Dwa Manzi, Shah Jamal Ziyarat, Kot Sadat, District Bannu. MDW/BU/MM/(02)/2015	2112.720 acres
03	Near Village Shah Hussain, Miri Khel, Baik Khel, Chaki Azim, Jower Nala, Kashu, Tehsil Domel, District Bannu. MDW/BU/MM/(03)/2015	476.71 acres
04	Near Village Dandi Killa, Link Road Chowk, Tehsil Domel, District Bannu. MDW/BU/MM/(04)/2016	302.89 acres
05	Near Village Marghali, Tehsil Domel, District Bannu. MDW/BU/MM/(05)/2018	2250.318 acres
06	Near Village Kurram Garhi, Azal Shah Garhi, Tehsil & District Bannu. MDW/BU/MM/(06)/2020	1698.76 acres
07	Near Village Sirki Khel Wazir, Tehsil Domel, District Bannu. MDW/BU/MM/(07)/2020	828.26 acres
08	Near Village Barmi Khel, Gango Nala, District Bannu. MDW/BU/MM/(08)/2020	1634.44 acres
09	Near Village Jhando Khel, Tatar Khel, Raaz Gul, Shamshi Khel, Shah Nawaz District Bannu. MDW/BU/MM/(09)/2013	1989.17 acres

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

- Only those persons or firms registered with Directorate General Mines & Minerals Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as Minor Minerals Contractors can participate in auction. Interested parties can register themselves in the Directorate General Mines & Minerals Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.
- The registered parties/individuals shall submit application form complete in all respect along with call deposit of **Rs.50,38,000/-** (Refundable) and application fee of **Rs.10,000/-** (Ten thousand) non-refundable on any working day at least three (03) days before the auction. Last date for submission of application form is **13/02/2025 at 5:00 P.M.** No application will be entertained after due date and time.
- Blacklisted / Defaulter persons or those persons who are not registered with Directorate General Mines and Minerals are not allowed to participate in the auction.
- The interested parties can visit and check the advertised areas before the auction for their satisfaction. The sketches of the areas are available for the interested parties in the office of the Assistant Director (Tech) Mineral Development Bannu. The successful bidder shall strictly work inside the above mention 09 blocks.
- Call deposit shall be deposited under account No.0066-2008140092 and application fee under account No.0066-2008209319 in any branch of Bank of Khyber.
- The registered applicants/parties shall also submit attested copies of CNIC, income tax registration certificate (NTN) and partnership deed/article & memorandum of association along with evidence of paid-up capital (if applicant is partnership firm company).
- The successful bidders shall deposit 1/4th of the total bid money as security within three days from the date of auction, otherwise, call deposit shall be forfeited in favour of the Government and the bid of second highest bidder shall be considered as highest bid, subject to condition that the difference between the first and the second highest bids is not more than 10 percent of the highest bid.
- The successful bidder shall demarcate his leased area of all the 09 blocks within fifteen days from the date of issuance of Allotment Letter on his own expenses and will work inside the said blocks.
- The successful bidder shall be bound to pay Excise duty to Commissionerate of Mines or its approved excise duty collection contractor on government notified rates.
- The successful bidder before issuance of allotment letter shall be bound to deposit withholding tax under Rule-236-A of ITO 2011 with Income Tax Department and Professional Tax as per rules to the Excise & Taxation Department Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.
- The successful bidder will be bound to pay surface rent to the land owner under the provisions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Mines & Minerals Act, 2017.
- The successful bidder shall be responsible to work in leased area strictly in accordance with the provisions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Mines & Minerals Act, 2017.
- The successful bidder shall be bound to use only verified challans for transportation of minor minerals duly verified by the concerned Assistant Director. Transportation without a verified transit challan shall be considered as unauthorized transportation and action under section-56 of the ibid Act shall be initiated against the lessee as well as other offenders.
- The Licensing Authority reserves the right to accept or reject any bid with cogent reasons.
- The successful bidder shall be bound to carry out mining activities in the granted area/ blocks as per the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Mining of Minor Minerals from River Bed Rules-2022 as directed by Honorable Peshawar High Court Peshawar in its decision dated 15/06/2023.
- Other information in this regard can be obtained from the office of the undersigned during office time i.e. **09:00 AM to 05:00 PM** on any working day.

**Assistant Director (Tech)
Minerals Development Bannu**

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NOTICE INVITING RE-TENDER

Sealed tenders based on MRS-2024/Non MRS-items as per approved PC-I for the below mentioned works out of "District Development Initiatives (DDI) and Social welfare fund" are hereby invited on the basis of Single Stage Two Envelope Procedure from the Government contractors registered with PEC, enlisted with C&W Department as per Centralized Enlistment Policy of the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for the current financial year:

S. No	Work Name	Estimated Cost (Million)	Bid Security @2% (Rs)	Last date & time of submission of Technical & Financial bid	Date & time of opening of Technical Bid
1	Construction of Pcc streets/Roads and improvement of sewerage system at various locations at PK-98 (Package-I)	42.00	840000/-	17/02/2025 12:00 pm	17/02/2025 2:00 pm
2	Construction of pcc streets/Roads and improvement of sewerage system at various locations at PK-98 (Package-II)	40.00	800000/-	-do-	-do-

Terms and Conditions:

- A complete set of Bid Solicitation Documents can be obtained by an interested eligible bidder on submission of a written application on bidder official letter head from an authorized person upon payment of 0.03% on Estimated Cost (non-refundable fee) in shape of original Call Deposit Receipt prepared in the name of procuring entity (AD LG & RDD Karak). In case of any further information / clarification, the bidders may visit the office on any working day before the closing of the bid or contact on email adkarak@gmail.com or Phone no 0927-291204.
- The bid securities shall be in the shape of call deposit receipt in favor of the AD LG & RDD Karak.
- The sealed tenders/bids both (Technical & Financial) should reach to the office of the undersigned through courier/registered post on or before the closing date/time given against each work.
- Duplicate copy of tender/bids both (Technical & financial) may be reached through courier/registered post to the office of DG LG & RDD Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Peshawar before the closing date/time.
- Technical and financial bids should be in sealed envelopes clearly marked "Technical bids & Financial Bids" complete (both original and duplicate).
- The following documents are required to be submitted with the Technical bid. i. Certificate that the Bid Security in the shape of call deposit in (Original) has been enclosed in financial bid. ii. Active NTN/Income Tax certificate. iii. C&W Centralized Enlistment Card of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Peshawar for the current year. iv. Copy of CNIC of the bidder. v. Form H of the company/Firm. vi. Copy of registration and renewal of Pakistan Engineering, Council for the current year and relevant code of specialization. vii. Active KPRA Registration. viii. Documents showing general capabilities, financial soundness, general & relevant experience record, personal capabilities, equipment's details and availabilities, Audit reports, managerial capabilities, litigation states Etc. ix. Any other documents to support the technical bid.
- Technical bids will be opened after 2 hours of closing time in the presence of bidders/their representative.
- Financial bids will be opened on latter and date will be communicated to technically qualified bidders only.
- Earnest money & additional securities shall be prepared in light of KPRA Notification No. S.R.O.(14)/Vol: 1-24/2021 Dated 10th May 2022.
- Bids and original call deposits received through fax or by hand will not be acceptable. Sealed bids sent through registered mail/courier service should reach up to the specified time and date as mentioned above.
- The contractor or his representative can be present at time of opening of bids.
- The call deposits i.e. bid security for the work / contract must be prepared after publishing of NIT and before closing time of the bid apply.
- In case of tie / draw amongst the responsive bidders, the bid may be decided through free toss which shall be considered as final.
- The quoted rate must be clearly mentioned in words and in figures on tender and BOQ form. Incomplete/over-writing/dis-figuring will not be accepted and will be considered as non-responsive.
- The procuring entity may reject all bids or proposals at any time prior to the acceptance of bids or proposals in light of KPRA Rule.47.
- The bidder on a written request to procuring entity can withdraw their bids till closing time of the bid.
- No bidder shall be allowed to withdraw his bid after closing of bid time till award of the contract or till bid is valid, whichever is earlier.
- The time limit of each work shall be as per work order issued to the successful bidder and the contractor have to have to start work within 15 days' time period issuance of work order filing which the work will be cancelled and security/additional security (if any) will be forfeited.
- Any bidder who provides false, or materially inaccurate or incomplete or do not send information in hard form will be disqualified as per KPRA Act Section 29 (1) read with KPRA Rule (43). Furthermore, the Office of the Assistant Director, LG&RDD (procuring entity) will recommend and sent cases for debarring / blacklisting and will initiate / take action in light of approved procedure / mechanism as per KPRA Act Section 29 (2) read with KPRA Rule (44). The contractor who is already debarred by the LG&RDD can't participate in these tenders.
- Bids will remain valid for 90 days from the closing date of bids. 21. Any addition made in the terms & conditions in the NIT advertised will be implemented as per KPRA Rules.

**Assistant Engineer (Sr)
LG&RDD Karak**

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**Assistant Director (Sr)
LG&RDD Karak**

KP’s strategic location to boost trade with Central Asia, says Governor

PESHAWAR (APP): The Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Faisal Karim Kundi, stressed on Friday that the province’s strategic geographical position makes it an ideal gateway for trade with Central Asian countries.

He outlined several measures aimed at activating trade corridors and streamlining business operations to boost regional commerce.

He said this during a meeting with the delegation led by Akbar Khan, Coordinator of the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI). The delegation included Taj Muhammad President of the Mardan Chamber of Small Traders and Small Chamber, Ejaz Karim, Executive Committee Member of Swat Chamber, and Bilal Rahman.

The meeting focused on promoting trade activities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, opening trade routes with Central Asian countries, establishing chambers of commerce offices in various districts of the province, addressing challenges faced by the industrial sector, and discussing issues related to small industries.

During the discussion, both the Governor and the FPCCI delegation emphasized that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, due to its geographical location, could serve as an ideal gateway for trade with Central Asian nations. To this end, various measures were considered to activate trade corridors and facilitate businesses.

Governor Faisal Karim Kundi assured that the provincial government is working diligently with federal agencies to promote economic development in the region, with the aim of making Khyber Pakhtunkhwa a hub for regional trade.

The delegation also raised the issue of land allocation for establishing chambers of commerce offices in different districts of the province.

The Governor assured that he would raise this matter with the relevant authorities and ensure practical steps are taken.

In addition, the meeting addressed the challenges facing industries, including the supply of electricity and gas, infrastructure improvements, and the need for industry-friendly reforms in government policies.

The delegation informed the Governor about the need for policy stability and an improved business environment to foster industrial growth.

Governor Faisal Karim Kundi assured that the government would provide all possible support to industrialists to encourage investment in the province.



PESHAWAR: Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Khan Gandapur presiding over 41st Board of Director Meeting of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Education Foundation.

BISP Hunarmand program launched

PESHAWAR (APP): Chairperson, Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP), Senator Rubina Khalid here Friday said that Benazir Hunarmand (skills) programme was being launched to financially empower about 10 million beneficiaries in the country.

Talking to media after visiting GTVC Gulbahar, Namak Mandi and Gems and Jewelry Centre and GTVC Hayatabad where she met with BISP skilled beneficiaries, she said the financial empowerment of about 10 million beneficiaries were the top priority of the present elected Government, and necessary technical education and vocational training as per international standards would be provided to their children through Benazir Hunarmand Program.

She said that certification of the qualified youth and children of these beneficiaries would be raised to such a level from where they could get dignified employment not only in the country but abroad also.

By doing so, she said that they would be able to get dignified jobs in foreign markets, thus earning valuable foreign exchange for themselves as well as for the country.

Senator Rubina Khalid said BISP was an internationally recognized programme started as per vision of Benazir Bhutto Shaheed benefiting millions poor and underprivileged through a transparent disbursement procedure.

She praised teachers’ role in education and vocational training to children and sought their active support for the success of the Benazir Hunarmand Programme. She met with beneficiaries and inquired after their problems. She issued spot directives for its resolution.

Mandatory blood tests before marriage: KP govt submit reply in High Court

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: The government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has submitted a detailed response to a petition filed in the Peshawar High Court (PHC), seeking to make blood tests for thalassemia, hepatitis, AIDS, and other blood diseases mandatory before marriage.

The petition, filed by Muhammad Nasir Ghazalza advocate, argued that making these tests mandatory would help prevent the spread of these diseases and protect future generations. The petitioner also stated that he is the provincial coordinator for the Association of International Lawyers.

In its response, the provincial government stated that it has already passed an act making blood tests mandatory before marriage and is in the process of revising the Nikah Nama (marriage certificate) format to include these requirements. The government also stated that it is raising awareness about the importance of these tests among nikah registrars, government officials, and the general public.

The government’s response also stated that it is working with NGOs to promote awareness about the importance of blood tests before marriage and is providing training to nikah registrars on the revised Nikah Nama format. The government also stated that it will ensure the implementation of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Preventive Health Act 2009 to prevent the spread of diseases in the province.

Furthermore, the government stated that it is collecting data on important events, at the village council and neighborhood council levels, and is playing its role in promoting awareness about the importance of blood tests before marriage.

Faisal Karim Gundi criticizes PTI for neglecting province

PESHAWAR (APP): The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Governor Faisal Karim Kundi on Friday slammed the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf for leaving the province at the mercy of terrorists.

During a meeting with a delegation from the Khyber Union of Journalists (KhUJ), led by newly elected President Kashifuddin Syed and General Secretary Irshad Maidani, Kundi stated that he had urged Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to pay attention towards KP.

He also called for federal ministers to actively engage with KP, using the Governor House as a platform for their activities and addressing the provincial issues.

The Governor emphasized the need to establish Daanish Schools based on ground realities and urged the Prime Minister’s Youth Program to extend beyond Punjab, highlighting that KP has the highest youth population but is often overlooked in federal initiatives.

Regarding the provincial government, he claimed it has failed to provide basic facilities in every department. He also acknowledged the sacrifices and contributions of KP journalists, assuring them that he would personally discuss their issues with Federal Information Minister Attaullah Tarar.

He pledged to work on welfare and training programs for journalists in consultation with media representatives.

Earlier, KhUJ President Kashifuddin Syed thanked Governor Kundi for his engagement with the press community. He noted that journalists in Peshawar were facing increasing challenges. Press Club President M Riaz and senior journalist Shamim Shahid, also shared their concerns about issues related to federal departments and media challenges in KP.

Meanwhile, renowned Musician Zainullah Chitrali called on the governor here and discussed the promotion of cultural heritage, the development of local music, and the welfare of artists in the province.

Governor Kundi emphasized that preserving KP’s cultural identity and traditional music is one of his top priorities.

He announced that a comprehensive strategy is being developed to promote local arts, music, and languages, which includes the establishment of cultural institutions across the province.

Zainullah Chitrali spoke about the challenges faced by local artists and stressed the need for government support to preserve KP’s rich cultural heritage.

Governor Kundi assured that practical steps would be taken for the welfare of artists, musicians, and poets, and their suggestions would be incorporated into policymaking.

Flowers business on rise in KP

PESHAWAR (APP): As the spring season approaches in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), the demand for flowers and ornamental plants has seen a significant increase in Peshawar, with a noticeable rush of buyers at local nurseries eager to decorate their homes with vibrant roses and other plants.

Tarnab, a well-known business hub for flowers and ornamental plants located about seven kilometers north of Peshawar, is witnessing a surge in visitors.

Residents are flocking to the area to purchase flowers and plants to brighten up their houses, bungalows, and farmlands.

Among the most sought-after plants are ornamental varieties like the Kangi Palm, Bottle Palm, and Araucaria, which have seen a dramatic rise in demand despite their high prices.

“I came from Nowshera to buy Kangi Palm and Araucaria to decorate my newly built house near Wapda Town,” said Nasir Khan, a property dealer at Tarnab. “These plants are my favorite as they hold a special fascination for me,” he added.

Nasir highlighted that Pakistan’s diverse climate, with ample sunshine, rainfall, and distinct seasons, makes it an ideal country for various types of plants. He emphasized the importance of promoting native trees as part of national programs like the Plant for Pakistan and spring afforestation initiatives, which could benefit honey production, wildlife, and the furniture industry.

Sellers at Tarnab shared that Patokai Qasur district is a major source of ornamental plants and flowers, with seasonal plants being transported in bulk to meet the growing demand.

Polio eradication drive from Monday: Advisor



PESHAWAR (APP): A polio eradication campaign is set to commence in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on February 3, with 40,000 teams formed to administer vaccinations to children across the province.

Comprehensive security arrangements have been made, with 50,000 police personnel deployed to ensure the safety of the anti-polio teams.

Official sources said on Friday that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Health Advisor, Ihtesham Ali, has inaugurated the campaign.

While officially launching the anti-polio campaign, Ihtesham Ali said that the campaign will begin on February 3 and aims to vaccinate 6.5 million children against polio in the province.

The health advisor acknowledged that security concerns often hinder polio eradication efforts in certain areas. To address this issue, 50,000 police officers have been deployed across the province for the first polio campaign of the year.

He further emphasized that necessary measures have been taken to ensure the campaign’s effectiveness, including extending efforts to Upper and Lower Kurram. District Health Officers have also been summoned to contribute to the success of the drive.

Additionally, he mentioned that steps are being taken to improve the availability of medicines in hospitals and resolve the issue of ICU bed shortages across the province. He also issued a strong statement against corruption, asserting that it will not be tolerated under any circumstances.

PPP rejects imposition of tax

PESHAWAR (APP): Provincial president Pakistan People’s Party Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Syed Muhammad Ali Shah Bacha has the imposition of termed the tax on agricultural income as an anti-farmer act, tantamount to economic murder of the farmers in the province.

In a statement issued here on Friday, he said that expensive fertilizers, spurious agro-medicines and rising cost of production have already hurt agriculture, and now this cruel tax will make farmers suffer even more. He said that governments around the world give subsidies to promote agriculture, but the KP government has made it difficult for farmers to continue farming by putting more burden on them.

He warned the provincial government to withdraw the decision of the imposition of agricultural tax with immediate effect, otherwise, PPP will also join hands with farmers in their protest against it.

Syed Muhammad Ali Shah Bacha said that the Tehreek-e-Insaf government has always taken decisions against the public interest and now the farmers are also robbed of their rights. The imposition of tax on agricultural income is not acceptable, and if the government does not withdraw this decision, the farmers will besiege the provincial assembly.

He urged the Governor of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa against giving assent to this anti-people bill and the government should come to its senses, otherwise the People’s Party will join hands with farmers to resist it on every forum.

KP first province to form climate change policy

PESHAWAR (APP): Special Assistant to the Chief Minister for Environment, Pir Musawir Khan, has said that Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is the first province in Pakistan to formulate a policy on climate change.

Chairing a meeting regarding the Environmental Protection Agency here Friday, he stated that the provincial government is taking concrete measures to combat environmental pollution and mitigate the effects of climate change.

A Climate Change Committee has been established to ensure the implementation of this policy.

During the briefing, the Special Assistant was informed that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regularly monitors burning of waste in industrial units and hospitals. To control pollution, brick kilns across the province are being shifted to zigzag technology.

Furthermore, the briefing highlighted that pollution control systems have been implemented in nine cement industries and 50 steel industries in the province. Additionally, GIS mapping of 3,600 industrial units has been completed, and a special complaint cell has been set up for public grievances.

A centralized monitoring committee has also been established to take action against industrial units violating EPA regulations. Regional environmental laboratories will soon be established in Abbottabad, Mingora, and Dera Ismail Khan.

The Special Assistant instructed officials to facilitate the issuance of No Objection Certificates (NOCs) to industrial units while ensuring compliance with environmental laws. He also emphasized the need to collaborate with NGOs and donors working on climate change and environmental issues.

Drug smuggler convicted for life imprisonment

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Additional District and Sessions Judge (AD&SJ) Hina Mahwesh has sentenced Umar Daraz for life imprisonment and a fine of Rs 500,000 for smuggling narcotics worth millions of rupees in the Jungel Khel area, on Friday.

Deputy Public Prosecutor Zulfikar Ali presented the case on behalf of the prosecution. During the hearing, he stated that on October 13, 2022, the police arrested the accused, Umar Daraz, at a checkpoint in Jungel Khel and recovered 12 packets of hashish weighing 12 kilograms from his motorcycle.

The police registered a case against the accused at the Jungel Khel police station. The Deputy Public Prosecutor argued that the defense counsel failed to refute the prosecution’s evidence and that the accused should be punished severely according to the law, as narcotics are menaces to society.

The defense counsel, argued that the accusations against the accused were baseless and that the prosecution failed to prove its case. He requested the court to acquit the accused. After hearing the arguments, the court sentenced the accused, Umar Daraz, to life imprisonment and a fine of Rs500,000/-.

Digitization must to ensure transparency and merit: SACM

PESHAWAR (APP): Special Assistant to Chief Minister M on Science and Information Technology, Shafqat Ayaz has said that digitization of all government departments is must to ensure transparency and merit in them.

He expressed these views while addressing an introductory meeting organized under the auspices of a private IT company ‘PASHA’ here in a local hotel on Friday.

Besides, the officials of private bank officials, chief executive officers of various IT companies and officials of Information Technology Board Khyber Pakhtunkhwa also attended the ceremony.

Speaking on the occasion, the Special Assistant paid tribute to the organization for organizing the best awareness program and appreciated the efforts of the private bank and IT Association.

He assured that he will take all necessary steps for the promotion of the sector, saying the process of development will be continued. He said that like Prisons’ Department, the process of digitizing all the departments of the province will continue.

He said that after digitization of the jails, now the inmates and their loved ones in the jail hold online meeting. He said that has arrived that all the affairs of the provincial government are being made paperless beside working on holding e-cabinet meetings to save time and money.

He further said that he wished that all the hospitals and laboratories of the health department should be digitized and the data of each patient should be collected so that complete information about the patient’s health would be available.

Special Assistant for Science and Technology Shafqat Ayaz assured all the private IT companies that the provincial government is taking serious steps to provide them with all possible support so that every department of the province can be digitized using science and technology to promote transparency and merit.

He said that there are ample investment opportunities in the IT sector in all the departments of the province and there is a need to attract the youth towards it.

At the end of the ceremony, the Special Assistant for Science and Technology Shafqat Ayaz was presented a commemorative shield by the association.

Izhar to participate in Bacha Khan’s anniversary

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Provincial leader of Awami National Party (ANP), Izhar Khalil has said that number of party workers will participate in the anniversaries of Bacha Khan and Khan Abdul Wali Khan today (on Saturday).

This he said while talking to media personnel and that he will lead a large number of ANP’s workers in a procession to Nishtar Hall from his Hujra. He added that Aimal Wali Khan will address the party workers on the occasion and talk about the memories and their political struggles for Pakhtuns.

Izhar Khalil stated the ANP would uphold the worsening law and order situation in province and poor economic condition of the people as well during the gathering.

He made it clear and saying their leaders will give future course of action in the program over various issues and province natural resources. As ANP has always raised its voice for natural resources of the province and it’s autonomy, he added





In brief

14 years boy drowned in river Syed Waliullah Shah

NOWSHERA: A 14-year-old boy drowned in the Kabul River while attempting to escape from police during a crackdown on illegal mining in the area. According to details, the incident occurred at the Misri Banda area of Nowshera, where the police raided a site of illegal mining in the Kabul River. The 14-year-old boy, identified as Ahmad, was among those involved in the mining. Fearing arrest, Ahmad jumped into the river but unfortunately drowned. Rescue 1122 teams are currently searching for Ahmad's body but have so far been unsuccessful. It is worth noting that the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has repeatedly issued orders banning illegal mining in the Kabul and Indus rivers, but the district administration of Nowshera has failed to enforce these orders. The incident highlights the ongoing issue of illegal mining in the province, which has resulted in loss of life and damage to the environment. The authorities have been criticized for their failure to take effective action against those involved in illegal mining.

9 cattle die as house catches fire F.P. Report

UPPER DIR: A fire eruption in a house in Karo Dara, Dir Upper Friday resulted in the death of nine cattle and complete destruction of the property. Police said, fire broke out in a house owned by one, Gul Muhammad. The fire erupted suddenly during wee hours, engulfing the five-room house and reducing it to ashes. The cattle died in the incident included four cows and five goats. The cause of the fire remains unknown, but the estimated damage is reported to be around 5 million rupees.

PTI stages public meeting F.P. Report

HARNAI: PTI Harnai on Friday staged a public meeting at Gunj Bagh, demanding the release of incarcerated founding chairman of PTI, Imran Khan, the reversal of 26th constitutional amendment, the restoration of democracy, the return of the stolen mandate and the recovery of all missing persons. Addressing the public meeting, speakers said that owing to government of form-47, passport of the country had no value in the word, adding that there was one law for other political parties in the country while another law for PTI. They said that leader of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf had been kept behind the bar for the last one year. They demanded the release of incarcerated founding chairman of PTI, Imran Khan, the reversal of 26th constitutional amendment, the restoration of democracy, the return of the stolen mandate and the recovery of all missing persons. Public meeting was General Secretary, PTI Balochistan, Jahangir Rind, member central committee, Sharif Khilji, President, district Harnai, Saddam Tarin, member provincial executive committee, Matu-Allah Kakar, Siddique Khan Tarin, Sadiq Agha, Naem Khatak and others. Meanwhile, all routes leading to Harnai were closed on Friday by the district administration Harnai ahead of public meeting of PTI scheduled in Harnai. Closure of routes caused long queues of vehicles. District administration Harnai closed all routes, including Harnai to Quetta, Harnai to Ziarat, Dam-bora Road, Harnai-Spin Tungi Road and Harnai-Sanjawi Road, for all kinds of traffic due to public meeting of PTI in Harnai city.



LOWER DIR: Secretary Higher Education Department Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Kamran Ahmad Afridi inaugurating Podcast Studio in Department of Journalism and Mass Communication at University of Malakand.

Toxic chips, snacks' kills three children in Shangla

F.P. Report

SHANGLA: As many as three children from the suburban villages of Sanghrat and Gali Bat lost their lives after consuming toxic substances, while one girl remains under treatment at Saidu Sharif Hospital, Alpurai.

According to reports, the deceased children include Hamza, son of Bahao Uddin, aged 4 years, Nadeena, daughter of Farooq, residents of Sanghrat and Moaz, son of Bakht Rehman, aged 9, resident of Gali Bat. One girl, Hadiqa, daughter of Bahao Uddin from Sanghrat, is currently receiving treatment at Saidu Sharif Hospital and is now out of danger. Initial reports indicated that the children had

consumed substandard chips and flavored powder from a local shop, which led to their critical condition.

However, further information and police confirmation revealed that the parents of the children from Sanghrat claimed the children had picked up and consumed a toxic substance from a garbage pile. Their condition deteriorated rapidly, with two children passing away en route to Civil Hospital, Karora. The third child was given initial medical aid and then referred to Saidu Sharif Hospital for further treatment.

Meanwhile, the child from Gali Bat was brought to the District Headquarters Hospital in Alpurai, where

he succumbed shortly after arrival. His death was attributed to the consumption of substandard snacks and flavored powders.

It is worth noting that the district administration had imposed Section 144 a few months ago to ban the sale and transportation of substandard snacks, flavored powders, and chips from Swat. However, this ban was not enforced effectively, leading to this tragic incident.

The local community has demanded immediate action against the businesses and suppliers involved in selling such hazardous products. They have urged the authorities to ensure strict measures to prevent such incidents in the future.

Studio at University of Malakand inaugurated F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: The Department of Journalism and Mass Communication (JMC) at the University of Malakand marked a significant milestone with the inauguration of its state-of-the-art Podcast Studio. The Secretary Higher Education Department Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Kamran Ahmad Afridi attended the ceremony as a chief guest while Vice Chancellor of the university Prof. Dr. Rashid Ahmad, Deans of faculties and heads of departments of various departments also present on this occasion.

During the inaugural ceremony, the chief guest Karaman Ahmad Afridi, in his address, emphasized his commitment to promoting quality education in the province and highlighted various initiatives undertaken to uplift the education sector. He lauded the University of Malakand's dedication to academic excellence and praised Vice Chancellor Prof. Dr. Rashid Ahmad for his visionary leadership in strengthening the institution's educational standards.

Furthermore, Karaman Ahmad Afridi extended his heartfelt congratulations to the faculty, particularly Dr. Sajjad Ali, Assistant Professor of Journalism and Mass Communication, for his instrumental role in establishing the Podcast Studio. He recognized the significance of this initiative in enhancing practical learning opportunities for students and bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and industry practices.

Vice Chancellor Prof. Dr. Rashid Ahmad also commended Dr. Sajjad Ali's efforts and underscored the importance of such initiatives in equipping students with modern media skills. He reiterated the university's commitment to fostering an innovative learning environment that aligns with contemporary media trends.

The deans and heads of various departments, also expressed their appreciation for this groundbreaking initiative. The launch of the Podcast Studio is expected to provide students with hands-on experience in digital content creation, podcasting, and media production, further strengthening the university's journalism and mass communication program.

Amusement & recreation day arranged F.P. Report

LAKKI MARWAT: A day of amusement and recreation was arranged for the families of martyrs at the police lines in Lakki Marwat district on Friday. District Police Officer Muhammad Jawad Ishaq mingled with the children and other family members of the martyrs who attended the event with full enthusiasm.

Children spent the day playing at the Iqbal Momband Shaheed Park inside the police lines while senior members of the families met the district police chief and other police officials. DPO also distributed gifts among the kids. He also heard the problems of martyred cops' family members and assured them of complete support.

JI holds protest against over-billing, load shedding

F.P. Report

BUNER: Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) arranged protest demonstration against load-shedding and over-billing in front of power grid station Swari bazaar, on Friday. The protesters displayed banners with slogans against over billing, load shedding, cruel taxes and IPPs.

JI Buner Emir Engineer Nasir Ali Khan, youth president Abbas Shaheen and Kalem Ullah advocate addressed the protesters. They bitterly criticized the federal and provincial governments for increasing salaries and other facilities of ministers and members of the assembly.

The speakers called it sheer injustices to put the burden on the poor people and has demanded of the federal and provincial governments to give relief to the people, otherwise Jamaat-e-Islami will come out on the streets with public. They gave credit to JI Emir Hafiz Naeem-ur-Rehman for ending the monopoly of the IPPs.

JI Buner bitterly criticized Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for spending of the national public on continuous protests for political gains. They also criticized the member of the National Assembly, Barrister Gauhar Khan, who was elected from Buner and camped in Islamabad after taking votes from the people and has left the people of Buner hopeless and helpless while the provincial members are also sleeping for a long time and the poor people of their constituencies are paying the electricity over bills by selling cattle and constructing roads and streets by collecting donations.

JI holds protest rally in Dir: Jamaat-e-Islami Khyber Pakhtunkhwa North chief and former provincial minister Inayatullah Khan, while addressing a protest rally held on the call of party chief Hafiz Naeem ur Rehman at Timergara here on Friday, has said that the Independent Power Producers (IPPs) contracts are tantamount to looting national wealth.

The JI district chief and former MNA Maulana Asadullah, JI Youth Wing district president Ateeq ur Rehman and others also addressed the rally. Earlier hundreds of the JI workers marched on the roads from Ahyal Uloom and gathered at a chowk in Timergara. The protesters chanted slogans against the government for its failure to reduce power tariff in the country.

"We will create awareness among the people against the unjust contracts with the IPPs", Mr Inayat said, adding the excessive power outages and inflated power bills were unacceptable to the consumers. He said the JI central chief Hafiz Naeem-ur-Rehman, Ameer would respond to the national recovery agenda. The JI leader said the Malakand division had the capacity to generate 7000 megawatts of electricity. Expressing wonder at the delay in the Koto Hydro project, he said that it was the failure of the PTI government to make the project functional which would generate 41 megawatts of electricity.

The JI leader alleged the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government had dropped development projects worth of Rs 42 billion in Malakand Division which would be taken into account. He said that mega corruption was being surfaced in the establishment of the Timergara Medical College and upgradation of Timergara Teaching Hospital which should be properly investigated. He said that classes were not started at the college despite the lapse of eight years. He said that the Dir University was dropped from the ADP, which was an injustice to the people of Dir.

"Abolishing the e-tendering system to open bidding is an example of corruption", Inayat said, adding that imposition of agricultural tax on the people was an insult to the heavy mandate of the people. He said the JI rejected the agricultural tax in the province. He said the people should trust Jamaat-e-Islami to fulfill their dream of a welfare state.

Dir ex-state employees hold protest against admn

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: Former Dir State's ex-employees held a protest rally at Samarbagh urging the administration to take notice of the state land grabbing in the area. The protesters warned to extend their protest to the entire district if their demand was not accepted.

The ex-state employees led by their leader Sarbiland Khan and ANP's activist Israr-ul-Haq while addressing the rally pointed out that the encroachment mafia had become active in Samarbagh. The alleged land mafia was occupying the state lands, while the administration did nothing to curb it. The speakers said that the land near the

Animal Husbandry Hospital, police station and other valuable government properties in Samarbagh had been sold.

Dr Sarbiland Khan alleged that the Samarbagh administration had failed to stop the illegal sale and purchase of state lands. He announced the local administration would be charged in the case if any of the local residents was injured in any untoward incident. He warned that the administration should immediately withdraw the notice given to the veterinary hospital for vacating the building and if the notice was not withdrawn within five days, then there would be a complete strike and the administration would be

responsible for any kind of damage.

Man injured: One Malik Attaullah, a resident of Chinargay Maidan was injured when unknown accused opened fire on him at Ashari Gat in the Jurisdiction of Balambat police station. The Rescue 1122 medical team rushed to the site and shifted the injured the nearby hospital. The accused fled from the scene.

Meanwhile, Mansoor 18 was killed when he drowned in 140 feet deep well at Amirabad Chakdara. The Rescue 1122 divers pulled out the body and shifted it to the THQ hospital Chakdara wherein the doctors announced him dead.

Police arrests main killer involved in murder of students

F.P. Report

MARDAN: Police arrested the main accused involved in the murder of two youths near Commerce College and also recovered the weapon and motorcycle used in the commencement of crime, on Friday.

This was disclosed by SP Sadder during a press conference and claimed that actions were underway against the criminal elements. Police arrested the main accused in the double murder case, Sohaib son of Shams-ul-Islam resident of Hoti, area of Mardan district.

trict.

The accused had shot and killed two youths near Commerce College for the past and oral repetition named Sudais resident of Gharibabad and Shahzad resident of Sharifabad bypass road. SP said that the police committed to protect the lives and property of the people and the accused involved in serious crimes like murder will be brought to the role of disbelievers.

Meanwhile, police arrested alleged drug dealer identified as Abdul Jabbar (alias) Jabare, resi-

dent ff Khaksar Wazirabad in the premises of city police station. The accused opened fire on the police to avoid arrest. However, the police responded in response. He was arrested in the injured condition. The accused was shifted to Mardan Medical Complex (MMC) for treatment. The arrested accused is convicted in 15 serious drug cases and was running a major drug trafficking network in the area Pistols and huge quantities were recovered from the possession of the accused, while investigations are underway.

58th convocation of CFSP held

F.P. Report

LARKANA : The 58th convocation of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Pakistan (CPSP) was held at the CPSP headquarters in Larkana. Attended by the College of Physicians and Surgeons. Pakistan (CPSP) Prof. Muhammad Shahidullah, President of British College of Physicians and Surgeons (BCPS) also participated as Chief Guest while Prof.

Andrew Elder, President of Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh also participated. Chief Guest while Professor Syed Khalid Ahmed Ashrafi, Counselor CPSP administered the oath to the Post Graduates. On this occasion, Professor Muhammad Shoaib Shafi said that we pay tribute to General Wajid A Barki who founded CPSP in 1962 with only 50 experts, offers, and has trained more than 52,122

medical professionals.

He said that this year we awarded FCPS fellowship to 897 doctors, MCPS to 185 doctors and MCPS scholarship to 185 doctors, thus a total of 1082 doctors were given degrees in various specialties. Yes, CPSP has gained global recognition. The organization also praised the CPSP. Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah said that the future of CPSP is in the hands of the young professionals who have graduated today. It is committed to continue its continuous development. Appreciated the CPSP.

Criminals damaged equipment at govt high school: The increase in criminal incidents has become a norm in Larkana. Criminal elements did not spare educational institutions either.

According to details, thieves broke the school's locks on Friday night from the Government Higher

Secondary School Bero Chando damaged valuables such as microscopes, physical balances, silver plates and stole wires from the science laboratory. This incident caused a stir among the students and teachers of the school, after that the students & teachers and the public staged a sit-in against the negligence of the criminals and the police by blocking Qambar Shahdadt Road.

The demonstration was led by Senior Principal Professor Qalandar Bakhsh Mugheri, FA Mumtaz Ali Mugheri, Ghulam , GSTA leader Shiber and others protested before the media, they said that the school is a sacred institution that is being robbed from time to time, but the administration has not taken any action, warning that if the damage is not repaired and the culprits are not arrested, the scope of the protest will be expanded.

RCD Highway inaugurated at Gadani Ship Breaking Yard

F.P. Report

GADANI: Provincial Minister for Agriculture and Co-operative Mir Ali Hassan Zehri has said that today is a very important milestone for Gadani. He was addressing the inauguration ceremony of Gadani Main RCD highway from the Ship Breaking Yard to 18 km road construction at Gadani. Earlier, when Mir Ali Hassan Zehri arrived in Gadani, the workers of PPP and the people welcomed him.

On the occasion, Mir Ali Hassan Zehri laid the foundation stone of the event and said that at a cost of Rs. 94 crore, the construction of 18 km road from Gadani Main RCD Road to Ship Breaking Yard will be completed soon. He said that the PPP is at the forefront of the service of the people and Balochistan is steadily

on the path of development and prosperity. President Asif Ali Zardari is taking special interest in the development of Balochistan. Mir Ali Hassan Zehri further said that the construction work of the first phase of the project has begun.

The road will be constructed at a cost of Rs 94 crore and the project includes a bridge. With the completion of the project, Gadani will further enhance global support and a new era of prosperity of the people here will begin.

The provincial minister said that I have come here to work and the task of bringing prosperity has been started.

He said that, In the past, some of the self-interested and public enemy elements deprived the people of the Hub of their basic rights and we have been on hundreds of billions of projects

to make the hub as the ideal district of Pakistan. Work has begun.

Most of these projects have reached its final completion and work on the rest of the projects is underway and constantly changing the hub with efforts day and night. While addressing the ceremony, Mir Ali Hassan Zehri said that President Asif Ali Zardari told me that one of my Homes is Nawabshah, the other is the HUB and Zardari's house is also being constructed in Hub and soon he will come here regularly.

Provincial Minister said that we will build factories including iron factory in the hub which will provide more people across the district here for employment opportunities. He said more that the construction of 2 km road in Barkat Goth has been completed.

Polio eradication committee review arrangements

F.P. Report

TOBA TEK SINGH: A meeting of the Polio Eradication Committee held under the chairmanship of Deputy Commissioner Toba Tek Singh to review the preparations and arrangements for the upcoming polio vaccination campaign starting from 3rd February.

The meeting was attended by officials from rele-

vant departments, including health authorities. During the briefing, it was revealed that 1,916 mobile teams, 106 fixed teams, and 49 transit teams will be deployed across the district to ensure the vaccination of 4,33,838 children under the age of five. DC Naem Sindhu directed that polio teams be stationed at bus stands, railway stations, and other key locations to maximize coverage.

DC emphasized that the campaign would be monitored at multiple levels and that negligence in duty would not be tolerated. The DC urged parents to cooperate with polio teams to help eradicate the virus completely. He reiterated that Pakistan's polio-free future remains the top priority, and repeated campaigns are essential for achieving this goal.



MILAN: Migrants following the authorities after their arrival, as Italy sent 49 people to Albania for processing following earlier court rejections to Albania, in Shengjin.

Congolese civilians caught in a growing rebellion face a choice

GISENYI, Rwanda (AP): Many of the millions of people trapped in eastern Congo's escalating rebellion face a terrible choice: Retreat into Congo's interior and seek the protection of a weak army in disarray, or cross into nearby Rwanda, which is accused of backing the rebels.

The largely unchecked rebel advance that seized Goma, the region's largest city, this week has raised fresh questions about the inability of Congolese troops and their allies to protect civilians as a decades-long African war revives almost 1,000 miles from Congo's capital - and a short walk from Rwanda. "On one hand, you have a foreign force that you cannot trust fully. On another side, you have a weaker army, corrupt," said Imani Zawadi, who fled into Rwanda from a village in the outskirts of Goma, a city of 2 million. "So you have nobody to trust."

Her fears encapsulated those of many Congolese uprooted by the M23 rebels' violence over the years. Already, more than 1,200 Congolese - including some surrendering soldiers - have sought refuge in Rwanda since the rebels marched into Goma, closing the airport and overwhelming hospitals with casualties.

This time, there are concerns that the M23 will hold Goma as a sort of buffer zone as Rwanda essentially redraws the border with its vastly bigger neighbor in a region estimated to have trillions of dollars in largely untapped mineral wealth like cobalt and gold. Rebel leaders say they plan to set up an administration in the city.

The rebels have claimed multiple victories at the expense of a larger

Congolese army that has the support of a 14,000-strong UN peacekeeping force as well as troops from African countries deployed under a regional bloc.

There are even Romanian military contractors that Rwandan authorities describe as mercenaries. One of the Romanians knelt on the ground, hands behind his head, as rebels sought to usher him and others toward the border crossing.

"We are fighting for the future of our children. Sit down. On the ground," M23 spokesperson Willy Ngoma told him. Ngoma said 289 mercenaries were escorted into Rwanda and sent "home," as a line of UN peacekeepers watched. The M23 spokesperson called the rebels "a people's army" that would bring peace. The rebel advance shatters a 2024 ceasefire and echoes the M23's capture of Goma over a decade ago, which didn't last long as the international community pressured Rwanda to back off.

Rwanda, which has long denied supporting the M23 despite evidence collected by United Nations experts, says it wants to protect ethnic Tutsis in Congo - even as rebel commanders stand accused of exploiting minerals and other natural resources in areas they control. UN experts estimate there are up to 4,000 Rwandan forces in Congo. Rwanda's President Paul Kagame, who has led the country's recovery from its 1994 genocide that killed some 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus, told diplomats at a luncheon this month in Kigali that his concerns about the perceived threat in Congo remain strong.

"The very people who murdered

people here in Rwanda, those who carried out the genocide, still exist, are still armed, are still practicing the ideology of genocide in our neighborhood, in eastern Congo," Kagame said on Jan. 16. "Supported by government, supported by leaders in that place, on the watch of this international community that talks about values, that talks about interests."

Kagame has said the question of how to protect Congolese Tutsis is one of two that Congo's leaders must answer in any negotiations with the M23, along with Rwanda's fears that other rebel groups among the dozens active in eastern Congo pose a security risk. Rwandan authorities assert that a rebel group known by its acronym FDLR, whose members include alleged perpetrators of the genocide, "is fully integrated into" the Congolese military, which denies the charges.

Congolese President Felix Tshisekedi has previously ruled out direct negotiations with M23, and peace talks leading to last year's ceasefire were between Congo and Rwanda, with Angola mediating. But the seizure of Goma, which sparked violent demonstrations in the capital, Kinshasa, as locals protested what they called the international community's inaction, could force his hand. Kagame's strong stance on policing eastern Congo has led some pro-Kagame intellectuals in the region to suggest that Rwandan authority over the region would be a better outcome for civilians. Some of those civilians fleeing into Rwanda felt otherwise. "The truth is that Rwanda is trying to take our territory, but this will not be possible no matter how long it takes," said one, Rose Clemency.

Man who killed five people gets life in prison

TEXAS (AP): A man accused of killing five people in Texas in 2023 after a neighbor complained that he was keeping a baby awake by firing a gun in his yard late at night pleaded guilty to murder charges and will serve a life sentence without the possibility of parole, a prosecutor said.

Francisco Oropeza, a Mexican national, pleaded guilty to capital murder of multiple persons as part of a deal to avoid a possible death sentence, San Jacinto County District Attorney Todd Dillon told The Associated Press. Oropeza was offered the deal after prosecutors had lengthy discussions with family members of the victims, he said. Oropeza entered the pleas after listening to emotional testimony from family members of the victims, Dillon said.

Oropeza's attorney, Anthony Osso Sr., didn't immediately respond to a phone message seeking comment. He previously said that tension between Oropeza and his neighbors had been building for quite some time. Police say Oropeza stormed into his neighbor's house on April 28, 2023, after being asked to stop firing his gun late at night. All five victims, including a 9-year-old boy, were from Honduras. The baby wasn't harmed.

The shooting happened in the rural town of Cleveland, about 45 miles (72 kilometers) north of Houston. Police say Oropeza fled the neighborhood after the shooting, setting off an intense search. He was eventually arrested near Conroe, roughly 20 miles (32 kilometers) from the crime scene.

Florida officer gets 17 years in prison

MIAMI (AP): A Florida police officer has been sentenced to more than 17 years behind bars after pleading guilty to stealing drugs, cash and firearms from federal investigations and admitting that he once went so far as to swap cocaine seized by the US Drug Enforcement Administration with a fake kilo made from a 3D printer. James Hickox's sentence, handed down in Jacksonville federal court, is the stiffest yet imposed against more than 20 DEA agents and task force officers charged in recent years with crimes ranging from perjury and assault to wire fraud and money laundering on behalf of the same drug cartels the DEA is charged with fighting.

Hickox, a sergeant with the Nassau County Sheriff's Office, was arrested in 2023 along with Florida Highway Patrol Trooper Joshua Earrey on charges of possession with intent to sell drugs. Both had been assigned to a DEA-led task force in Jacksonville. As part of his plea agreement, Hickox admitted to receiving more than \$420,000 for routinely stealing and selling marijuana, cocaine and other drugs seized as part of DEA operations and then falsely claiming the evidence had been destroyed following normal procedure.

He also confessed that in 2022, he swapped a kilogram of cocaine seized by the DEA with a brick made from a 3D printer sprinkled with real cocaine to make it look legitimate. Hickox said he then gave the real cocaine to a Jacksonville drug trafficker who sold it for around \$20,000. About half that amount was paid to Hickox. Hickox's father said the stress of his work for the DEA, dealing with criminal informants on a daily basis and being surrounded by large amounts of cash and drugs, contributed to his son's descent into criminality. He said the DEA needs to provide mental health counseling to properly vet its workforce and prevent other criminals from abusing the public's trust.

"They have to live two lives," his father, James Lee Hickox, told WJXT television in Jacksonville. "You're out slinging dope for the DEA and then you go home and be a family man." Hickox, 38, also said he gave around 550 pounds (250 kilograms) of marijuana to one informant, receiving about \$200 to \$400 for every pound sold.

Philippine president offers a deal to China

MANILA (AP): Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. offered to remove a US missile system from the Philippines if China halts what he called its "aggressive and coercive behavior" in the disputed South China Sea. The US Army installed the Typhon mid-range missile system in the northern Philippines in April last year to support what the longtime treaty allies described as training for joint combat readiness.

China has repeatedly demanded that the Philippines remove the missile system, saying it was "inciting geopolitical confrontation and an arms race." Asked by reporters about China's criticism of the missile system, Marcos said he did not understand the Chinese position because the Philippines does not comment on China's missile systems which "are a thousand times more powerful than what we have." "Let's make a deal with China: Stop claiming our territory, stop harassing our fishermen and let them have a living, stop ramming our boats, stop water cannoning our people, stop firing lasers at us and stop your aggressive and coercive behavior, and we'll return the typhoon missiles," Marcos told

reporters in central Cebu province.

"Let them stop everything they're doing and I'll return all of those," he said. Chinese officials did not immediately comment on the Philippine leader's remarks. The US Army's mobile Typhon missile system, which consists of a launcher and at least 16 Standard Missile-6 and Tomahawk Land Attack Missiles, was repositioned about two weeks ago from the northern Philippines to a strategic area nearer the capital, Manila, in consultation with Philippine defense officials, a senior Philippine official told The Associated Press. The Philippine official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because of a lack of authority to discuss the sensitive issue in public, said the US missile system is now nearer an area where Chinese and Philippine coast guard and navy forces have been involved in increasingly tense faceoffs in the South China Sea.

Tomahawk missiles can travel over 1,000 miles (1,600 kilometers), which puts parts of mainland China within their range. The missile system will remain in the Philippines indefinitely, the Philippine

official said. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said last week that the Philippines is "creating tensions and antagonism in the region and inciting geopolitical confrontation and an arms race" by allowing the US missile system to be positioned in its territory. "This is a highly dangerous move and an extremely irresponsible choice," Mao said.

Philippine Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro has rejected China's demand that the missile system be removed as interference in Philippine internal affairs. The US and the Philippines have repeatedly condemned China's increasingly assertive actions to press its territorial claims in the South China Sea, where hostilities have flared over the past two years with repeated clashes between Chinese and Philippine coast guard forces and accompanying vessels. Aside from China and the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan also have overlapping claims in the busy waterway, a key shipping route which is also believed to be sitting atop large undersea deposits of gas and oil.

Explosion forces crew to abandon container ship

DUBAI (AP): An explosion has struck a Hong Kong-flagged container ship traveling north through the Red Sea, sparking a major fire that forced its crew to abandon the vessel, shipping industry officials said.

The ship was drifting and ablaze about 225 kilometers (140 miles) off the coast of Hodeida, a port city in Yemen held by the country's Houthi rebels, said the Diaplor Group, a maritime firm. It didn't name the vessel. Data from NASA satellites tracking wildfires showed that the blaze burning off Eritrea's Dahlak Archipelago corresponded to satellite-tracking data from MarineTraffic.com for the location of the ASL Bauhinia, a Hong Kong-flagged container ship. It had been traveling from the United Arab Emirates' Jebel Ali port in Dubai to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, before beginning to drift.

It wasn't immediately clear what caused the fire in the Red Sea, which has been repeatedly targeted by attacks from the Houthis. The rebels said last week that they were limiting their assaults following a ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip. The Houthis didn't immediately acknowledge the fire incident. The vessel was abandoned and the crew later rescued unharmed, another maritime industry official told The Associated Press. The official spoke on condition of anonymity as authorization hadn't been given to speak publicly about the incident.

The vessel had advertised itself on broadcasts as being crewed entirely by Chinese mariners, information from LSEG Data & Analytics showed. Ships traveling through the Red Sea during the attacks broadcast messages like that or "Muslim crew" to try and avoid being targeted by the Houthis. The Chinese navy has been operating in the region as well with three vessels

based out of Djibouti, just south of the Red Sea on the Gulf of Aden.

The official described the cargo aboard the vessel as "dangerous," without immediately elaborating. The ultimate owner of the ASL Bauhinia, CSSC Hong Kong Shipping Co. Ltd., couldn't be immediately reached for comment. The Red Sea is home to coral and marine life that previously has been threatened by burning ships from the Houthi campaign and the threat of wider oil spills. The Houthi attacks, which began in November 2023, have halved the number of ships passing through the Red Sea corridor, a crucial route for energy shipments and cargo moving between Asia and Europe. Despite the pledge by the Houthis to limit their attacks, shippers broadly are still shying away from the route over the risks. About \$1 trillion worth of trade passed through the region each year before the attacks.

Prominent Palestinian prisoner freed in Gaza

GAZA (Reuters): Zakaria Zubeidi's last, fleeting, taste of freedom involved five days on the run after escaping from an Israeli maximum security prison in 2021, but the Palestinian militant was released as part of the Gaza ceasefire deal.

Zubeidi, a former leader in an armed group in the West Bank city of Jenin who was involved in deadly attacks two decades ago, flashed a "V-for-victory" sign as he arrived in a bus with other Palestinian prisoners in Ramallah. However, he may not be able to return home. The Jenin refugee camp where he grew up has turned into a battle zone, with Israel pivoting from the war in Gaza to step up military operations against Hamas in the West Bank.

The fate of Zubeidi, one of the most prominent Palestinian prisoners being released, underscores the growing shift in Israel's focus to the West Bank and particularly to Jenin, which its forces entered as soon as the Gaza ceasefire began. But his release also highlights the high stakes at

play in an ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinians to which no political solution appears close.

Under the terms of the Gaza ceasefire deal, Israel is releasing Palestinian prisoners in exchange for the militant Islamist group Hamas freeing hostages it seized in the Oct. 7, 2023 attack that set off 15 months of war in the tiny enclave. Zubeidi was Jenin head of the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, the military wing of the main Palestinian party Fatah, throughout the Second Intifada, the armed uprising against Israeli occupation that raged from 2000 to 2005.

Jenin, a crowded township built for descendants of Palestinians who fled their homes or were driven out in the 1948 Middle East war around the creation of the state of Israel, was a focal point for the intifada and a major battle site in 2002. That conflict made Zubeidi a powerbroker, both in Jenin and in wider Palestinian politics, and he was subject to assassination attempts before being included in a 2007 amnesty

deal between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. Zubeidi has said in press interviews that his childhood memories include Israeli forces arresting his father for membership of Fatah and then shooting him in the leg and jailing him for throwing stones at them when he was a teenager.

His mother hosted a children's theatre group in Jenin run by Israeli peace activists and Zubeidi was a keen participant. She was killed during an Israeli military operation in the camp in 2002, but after the Second Intifada ended Zubeidi again turned to theatre, this time as a director. Israel arrested him in 2019 on charges of engaging in armed activities. But he and five other prisoners dug a tunnel through the floor of their cell over two years using plates, concealing it with a floorboard. They clambered through a drainage system and escaped on foot, running through fields. But five days later he and a fellow escapee were discovered hiding in a truck in an Arab village in northern Israel.

Italy denies asylum for 43 migrants relocated to Albania

MILAN (AP): Italian authorities rejected the asylum requests of 43 asylum-seekers transferred to Albania in a speedy procedure that a non-governmental delegation

observing the process said illegally deprived them of legal assistance.

"The commission is clearly operating in line with the expressed desire of the gov-

ernment to refuse the asylum requests, in violation of international, European and constitutional law," the TAI Asylum and Immigration Board said in a statement.

Air Force deportation flight skirts Mexican airspace to Guatemala

MEXICO CITY (AP): A US Air Force jet with migrants bound at their wrists and ankles departed Texas for Guatemala, carrying 80 deportees in another deportation flight that reflects a growing role for the armed forces in helping enforce immigration laws.

The flight from Fort Bliss, an Army base in El Paso, was scheduled to take about seven hours, nearly twice as long as a direct route, because the military plane could not fly over Mexico, said US Border Patrol spokesperson Orlando Marrero. Eight children were aboard. "The message that we have for those people is that if you cross the border illegally, we are going to deport you to your country of origin in a matter of hours," Marrero said.

The Trump administration has used military aircraft to deport people to Guatemala, Ecuador and Colombia, a departure from US Immigration and Customs Enforcement's previous practice to employ charter and commercial planes. "There are some countries that don't like military planes coming into their territory," said US Rep. Henry Cuellar, a Democrat who represents a Texas border district. "It's something that logistically has to be worked out with the country before, because you don't want to have a plane turned around in midair."

Colombia's President Gustavo Petro refused two US military planes with migrants, prompting Trump to announce 25% tariffs on Colombian exports. Colombia backed off and

said it would accept the migrants but fly them on Colombian military flights that Petro said would guarantee them dignity.

The Pentagon began deploying active-duty troops to the border last week but it was unclear to what extent they will break from supporting roles they have played under presidents since George W. Bush, including ground and aerial surveillance, building barriers and repairing vehicles. An 1878 law prohibits military involvement in civilian law enforcement, but Trump and his aides have signaled the president may invoke wartime powers. Trump said in his Inauguration Day order declaring a border emergency that the Defense Department may assist with detention and transportation, two enormous cost-

drivers.

Trump ordered that a US base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, be used to detain migrants, saying it could hold up to 30,000 people. That would nearly double ICE's current detention capacity. Yael Schacher, director for the Americas and Europe at Refugees International, said using military aircraft for deportations was uncommon but "largely symbolic." US immigration officials said Oropeza had been deported four times between 2009 and 2016. But Dillon said he will spend the rest of his life behind bars in Texas. "He is not eligible for deportation. He is not eligible for anything," Dillon said. "He will stay in the custody of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice until he breathes his last breath."

Kim inspects nuclear facility as Pyongyang pressures Trump admn

SEOUL (AP): North Korean leader Kim Jong Un inspected a facility that produces nuclear material and called for bolstering the country's nuclear fighting capability, state media reported, as the North looks to increase pressure on the United States following the inauguration of President Donald Trump.

Kim's visit suggests a continued emphasis on an expansion of North Korea's nuclear arsenal, though Trump has said he's willing to talk to Kim again to revive diplomacy. Many analysts view North Korean weapons moves as part of a strategy to win sanctions relief and political concessions from the United States.

The official Korean Central News Agency reported that Kim visited the nuclear-material production base and the

Nuclear Weapons Institute. It didn't say where those facilities are located, but North Korean photos of Kim's visit indicated that he likely visited a uranium-enrichment facility that he went to last September. That visit was North Korea's first disclosure of a uranium-enrichment facility since it showed one to visiting American scholars in 2010.

During the latest visit, Kim said North Korea reported "amazing" results in its production of nuclear material last year and underlined the need to exceed this year's production goal to strengthen "the nuclear shield of the country," according to KCNA.

Kim said that further boosting the country's nuclear counteraction posture is "our invariable noble task" to cope with intensifying challenges posed by

"hostile forces," an apparent reference to the US and South Korea. The start of Trump's second term raises prospects for the resumption of diplomacy between the United States and North Korea, as Trump met Kim three times during his first term. The Trump-Kim diplomacy in 2018-19 fell apart due to wrangling over US-led economic sanctions on North Korea, and Kim has since significantly dialed up weapons testing activities.

During a Fox News interview broadcast, Trump called Kim "a smart guy" and "not a religious zealot." Asked whether he will reach out to Kim again, Trump replied, "I will, yeah." North Korea hasn't yet directly responded to Trump's overture as it continues its belligerent rhetoric against the US along with weapons testing activ-

ities. Many experts say Kim could eventually sit down for talks with Trump and would likely think he now has greater leverage than before because of his enlarged nuclear arsenal and deepening military ties with Russia.

North Korea said it tested a cruise missile system, its third known weapons display this year, and vowed "the toughest" response to what it called the escalation of US-South Korean military drills.

North Korea views US military training with South Korea as invasion rehearsals, though Washington and Seoul have repeatedly said their drills are defensive in nature. In recent years, the United States and South Korea have expanded their military exercises in response to North Korea's advancing nuclear program.

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US isn't polarized - it's fractured

WE hear almost constantly how Americans are more politically polarized than ever. Even in Donald Trump's barnstorming return to the presidency, we see a battle between unified and triumphant Republicans, and demoralized Democrats plotting a comeback. But partisan polarization fails to capture an even more important reality: We are not divided into opposing left-right camps. Rather, we are fractured as a society into numerous competing worldviews, policy positions and identities.

Beyond polarization, we live with a condition I call "hyperpluralism," in which people are split into countless political factions, each with new capabilities to make policy demands and destabilize old centers of power. We see hyperpluralism in social media, which makes political organizing easier and more disruptive than ever. We see it in the way we consume news, where media-choice has shattered common understandings of events.

We see this among lawmakers, where politicians previously beholden to party elites can now broker their own information and fundraising coalitions. A post on social media can directly reach political audiences and raise thousands of dollars. Hyperpluralism is the outcome of the proliferation of political speech on social media, podcasts and news websites. It stems from the ability of people who previously might have been political outliers to achieve national audiences and to obtain essential financial support - whether Rep. Nancy Mace (R-S.C.) or Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-N.Y.). Freedom Convoys or Black Lives Matter, Joe Rogan or the Young Turks.

Pluralism was to be a good thing - an open society would encourage civil debate and solutions for the common good. Yet the explosion of public discourse and engagement on the internet, resulting in hyperpluralism, has torn us apart and fractured us into so many different interests and perspectives. It proves difficult to achieve the common good when conflict abounds and it is hard to agree upon what we have in common. There are no easy solutions to what we might call the mischief of too many factions. Ideologically, there are no obvious schools of thought we could agree upon to bring us all together. The progressive left, neoliberal globalists and faith and flag conservatives, to name but a few major political divisions, share little in common in terms of political philosophy or policy preferences. Passing laws or amending the Constitution for bold solutions - like instituting proportional representation or putting an end to gerrymandering - would be incredibly difficult to push through a divided Congress and an electorate that lacks consensus.

Meanwhile, the internet makes it easier than ever for people to disperse into their own political bubbles, and social media algorithms are designed to drive us further apart. Under these conditions of hyperpluralism, it is more likely than ever for Americans "to vex and oppress each other than to cooperate for their common good," to borrow, again, from Madison. So here we are. Trump is blitzing the country in a honeymoon of Republican unity. But beneath this triumphant wave is a fractured society. To many, Trump himself is challenging democratic institutions like no one in our lifetimes. An even greater challenge to those institutions may be the divisions among the people they are intended to unite. The question remains whether, under such strains, Madison's great solution can hold.

Tragic reality of Cuba's medical brigades

WITH Marco Rubio's unanimous confirmation as secretary of State, now is the time to stand up to Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel. Rubio has a history of standing up to the Cuban regime while in the Senate, there is no reason he won't continue to do so in his new position. In fact, the Trump administration has already reinstated Cuba as a state sponsor of terrorism.

January marks National Human Trafficking Prevention Month, and it's important to remember that modern slavery comes in different forms. In 2008, Ramona Matos Rodríguez, a family medicine physician from Cuba, was sent to work in San Agustín, Bolivia, a small town in the Amazons. Her passport was seized by a Cuban security agent at the airport. She was not allowed to possess any other identifying documents, and she and her fellow doctors were forced to fill out paperwork with false statistics about made-up patients or else face retribution from the Cuban regime.

Matos was one of thousands of medical personnel trafficked abroad into forced labor - all for the profit of the Cuban regime. Cuba has a long history of sending its armed forces and medical personnel to foreign countries under the guise of "aid." Fidel Castro sought to export his brand of revolutionary violence across Latin America - as in the failed "invasion" of Bolivia by Castro's associate, Che Guevara. Cuba's communist regime also has a long history of sending military advisors and troops to prop up dictators, advance authoritarian parties, and attack democratically elected governments in Angola, Mozambique, Panama, the Dominican Republic, Ethiopia, Yemen, Algeria, Syria and elsewhere.

Because their pay, passports and medical licenses are often held by the Cuban embassy, they aren't able to travel and are forced to continue working in unsafe conditions. Additionally, these doctors and their families are, in a very real sense, held hostage. Once abroad, they are cowed into silence and bullied by implicit or explicit threats to themselves or their family members back home.

This is not humanitarian work or even public diplomacy. These Cuban citizens thought they were going to use their skills to help people and instead, they are surveilled, asked to spy, deprived of their right to travel, and restricted from privately communicating with family. All of this to bring profits and positive publicity to the communist elite back in Cuba. The first duty of any government is to protect its citizens, but Cuba's communist regime violates this obligation every day. Those doctors and nurses have taken an oath to "do no harm," and they should not have to fear harm at the hands of their own leaders. A bipartisan resolution introduced in the House last Congress denounces the Cuban regime for profiteering by forcibly sending its medical personnel abroad. This resolution also condemns the Pan American Health Organization and other government officials for their role in facilitating and perpetuating human trafficking and calls on the executive branch to utilize existing visa revocation authorities on the responsible parties. Foreign officials who violate international agreements and traffic human beings must be held accountable for their actions. It is time for nations around the world to tell Cuba that its medical professionals should not be exploited, abused or threatened - and the US should lead the charge.

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Power of Russia's Black Sea clean-up volunteers

Angelina Davydova

THE oil spill in the Black Sea, caused by damage to two Russian tankers in mid-December, also brought thousands of volunteers from all over the country to come and help address the aftermath of the disaster. Many of the volunteers spoke critically of the authorities to tackle the oil spill, while also trying to bring public and political attention to the problem and call for action.

Grassroots environmental movements are one of the few remaining civil society initiatives still present in today's Russia. However, if the volunteers want to have a bigger impact they will need to transform from an emergency-response group to a more professionally operating civic or political structure, which can be challenging at the moment. Such a task will be extremely difficult.

Following the slow and what some experts describe as an inadequate reaction from the regional and federal Russian authorities, thousands of volunteers headed to the affected regions. They helped purify the beaches, removed oil from the sand, cleaned the feathers of contaminated seabirds and ran volunteer facilities to feed injured wildlife. In the first weeks following the disaster, some 2,000-3,000 volunteers came daily to work on the beaches and in wildlife rescue centers. That number fell significantly around mid-January after the holiday season was over.

In addition to grassroots volunteers, environmental NGOs, pro-government NGOs and state environmental and youth organizations also brought people to help deal with the consequences of the oil spill. Regional authorities sent along students of military and marine academies, city and regional administrators and personnel from the emergencies ministry.

At first glance, such social mobilization reminds us of many similar stories when thousands of people organize emergency rescue and relief campaigns when the reaction of authorities is too slow or insufficient. Examples include volunteer efforts during the 2010 forest fires in Central Russia or the 2012 Krymsk flood.

All these trends created serious challenges for the environmental movement in Russia. In addition, organizations have suffered from the loss of international contacts and cooperation programs and restrictions making it harder for them to secure stable financing. Predictably, this recent wave of environmental

However, this volunteer movement is also part of the larger environmental movement, which, surprisingly, still exists in today's Russia. In the few years before the beginning of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, environmental and urban development grassroots movements were notably strong and often effective in achieving their goals. Many researchers

Predictably, this recent wave of environmental activism around the Black Sea oil spill also provoked a mixed response from the authorities. Many of the volunteers were openly critical of the way rescue efforts have been organized and about how slow and inadequate first recovery measures were. Many of them hoped that calling out local authorities stepping in to provide support.

and analysts viewed them as a sign of a healthy civil society that could provide a basis for further democratic reforms.

But after February 2022, these hopes were dashed as the government cracked down on civil society, restricting their freedom of speech and ability to cooperate with international partners. Activists have faced repression and prosecution with most international environmental NGOs (like Greenpeace and Bellona) being designated "undesirable" in Russia, rendering their work illegal. At the same time, numerous pro-government NGOs and environmental movements emerged or were created by the state to provide a supposedly safe alternative to green activism in an attempt to hijack the environmental agenda for the Kremlin's benefit.

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civil society, even within the restrictive permitted framework.

Local bureaucrats may have some reasons to worry. There are rumors that the governor of the Krasnodar region might soon be replaced, potentially by the current environmental minister. This is reminiscent of how the governors of the Archangelsk region and the republic of Komi were fired following massive protests in Shiyeys against a new landfill that was supposed to accept household waste from Moscow.

The ongoing case of independent social mobilization around the oil spill in the Black Sea, along with continuing environmental protests across the country, including some successful green campaigns demonstrate that even during a time of increasing political repressions, there is still some space for civic dissent and activism. It should be noted that not all environmental activists share all further values with oppositional political or human rights activists. Some of them might even have a different view about the war in Ukraine or other domestic or international political issues (even though some environmental activists have also been prosecuted for their anti-war protests).

Still, participation in a grassroots movement or volunteer campaign does provide civic experience, allows people to unite, teaches them to coordinate their actions, formulate their demands, and interact with the media and fellow citizens. It also leaves them space to speak and act critically at a time when doing so is becoming more and more difficult. It also allows activists and volunteers to discuss topics that represent the common good, seemingly unpolitically. But, of course, the environment is political. Paradoxically, if these groups and people would like to strengthen civil society and even have political influence, they would have to become more openly political, growing from an emergency-response group to a more professionally operating civic or political structure. As difficult and personally dangerous as that is at this moment, that could change one day.

The Moscow Times

Palestinian resilience triumphs over Israeli genocide

Dr. Sami Al-Arian

SINCE the Oct. 7, 2023 attack by Hamas on Israeli military bases and settlements near the outskirts of Gaza, Israel has been waging a vicious war of extermination against the Strip for over 15 months - on a scale unseen since World War II.

In the devastation unleashed on Gaza, at least 60,000 people have been killed or are missing, and 140,000 have been injured, 60% of whom were women and children. More than 2 million Gazans have been internally displaced. Throughout this relentless onslaught, the Zionist regime systematically destroyed every facet of civilian life, including hospitals, clinics, universities, schools, bakeries, markets, roads, power stations, water desalination and sewage treatment plants, public buildings, mosques, churches, and the majority of residential buildings and neighborhoods. The entire city now lies in ruins. Nothing has been spared.

For 470 days, genocide in a 365-square-kilometer (nearly 141-square-mile) enclave has been televised and live-streamed before a paralyzed world unable to stop it, despite overwhelming condemnation by over 170 nations. The UN's secretary-general, General Assembly, Security Council, and International Court of Justice (ICJ), as well as countless tribunals, human rights organizations, and NGOs have all called for it to end. Tens of millions of people have demonstrated across the globe, demanding an immediate halt to the unimaginable suffering of the people of Gaza.

Because of the crippling siege and brutal war of starvation that Israel unleashed on Gaza, injured and sick Palestinians have faced an acute lack of medicine and medical supplies, compounded by severe shortages of food, water, electricity, and gas for heating. Scenes of children dying from extreme cold and stray dogs scavenging human remains have become disturbingly common. Yet, the Zionist regime has continued its genocidal campaign uninterrupted. Throughout this campaign of ethnic cleansing and extermination, Israel has been enabled by the US, which has provided it with over \$22 billion in military aid, along with political cover, diplomatic protection, and other forms of support that facilitated this slaughter. As a parting gift, the complicit Biden administration recently notified the US Congress of another \$8 billion package of ammunition and military hardware for Israel.

For over a year, all attempts by the UN and other mediators - including Egypt, Qatar, the US, and others - have essentially been rejected by Israel. Last May, US President Joe Biden proposed a multi-phase deal to end the war in exchange for the release of hostages. While Hamas accepted the proposal, it was promptly rejected by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Similarly, a version of the deal proposed by Egypt and Qatar, with tacit US approval in early July, was also rebuffed by Netanyahu. Throughout these attempts, Israel intensified its military campaign, killing scores of

Palestinians daily, occupying more land, displacing the majority of residents from their homes in the north, while continuing to destroy as much of Gaza's infrastructure as possible.

But despite the carnage, the Zionist regime was unable to eradicate Hamas or find an alternative to rule Gaza. Netanyahu remains incapable of declaring "total victory" or securing the release of hostages through military pressure. Meanwhile, the Israeli army continues to suffer significant casualties in its war of attrition against Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and other resistance factions in Gaza. Many military observers have noted the mounting losses and the absence of any clear strategic objectives.

Amid this colossal failure, US President-elect Donald Trump aims to begin his administration on Jan. 20 without inheriting this impasse and its catastrophic implications. During his presidential campaign last summer, he called for Netanyahu to "complete the job" by destroying Hamas. Having seen no success on that front, Trump has since shifted his focus to ending the catastrophic war. He announced that hell would break loose if the hostages were not released by his inauguration day. While many interpreted this as a threat against Hamas and the Palestinians, it is unclear what else Trump could do to them that the Zionist regime has not already done. This week, Trump's incoming Middle East envoy, Steve Witkoff, met with Netanyahu and effectively warned him that if no agreement were reached, there would be serious consequences. Within days, Netanyahu capitulated, accepting all the conditions that Hamas had previously set and that he had rejected before.

Hamas and its partners set five key markers for any deal, which have been part of former deals and the current agreement. A firm commitment to a permanent ceasefire, guaranteed by the three mediators: Qatar, Egypt, and the US. A complete Israeli withdrawal from Gaza after the second phase. A just prisoner exchange deal, in which Israeli captives are released in exchange for thousands of Palestinians held by Israel, including hundreds serving life sentences or long terms. Massive aid and supplies to the suffering Palestinians. Large-scale reconstruction and rehabilitation projects in Gaza.

In previous agreements, these conditions were either scuttled or rejected by Israel. Under this deal, they are now integral parts of the agreement, complete with details on how they will be implemented. The answer to who won and who lost in this dark chapter should be clear. While Palestinian resilience and resistance, no agreement would have been possible. Netanyahu demanded total Palestinian surrender and failed. Meanwhile, the Palestinians effectively broke the chains of their prison in a daring operation on Oct. 7, continuing their struggle for freedom and self-determination. Through this deal, they have shown the world that their march toward liberation remains undeterred.

AA

Türkiye's strategic role in ending Sudan's civil war

Imran Khalid

TÜRKIYE'S global diplomatic influence is rising as it turns its attention to Sudan's devastating civil war, a conflict that has raged for nearly two years. After successfully brokering peace between Ethiopia and Somalia, Türkiye has now focused on bringing resolution to Sudan's fractured political landscape, marked by a power struggle between two rival generals.

The devastating conflict has displaced over 11 million people, with tens of thousands of lives lost. In early January, Sudan's military ruler, Gen. Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, accepted Türkiye's mediation proposal, seeking to ease tensions with the United Arab Emirates.

The war between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces has spiraled into one of the most devastating humanitarian catastrophes of our time. With millions displaced and a nation's economy and infra-

structure in ruins, Sudan faces a state of despair. But the tragedy is now reaching beyond Sudan's borders, rippling through the region and threatening fragile political balances. The international community can no longer afford to stand idly by as this crisis intensifies.

This year must mark a turning point when the world shifts from rhetoric to action. It is a time for serious engagement, not just in words but in deeds, to bring an end to the fighting, halt the suffering, and lay the groundwork for recovery. The stakes are immense, not only for Sudan but for the stability of the entire Horn of Africa. This moment demands more than humanitarian intervention. It is a crucial turning point for global diplomacy, requiring bold action, innovative thinking, and collective resolve to prevent further devastation. Anything less is an abdication of responsibility to the Sudanese people and regional peace. Türkiye's

solution seems practical: secure the UAE's cease of RSF backing in return for Sudan lifting complaints against Abu Dhabi at the United Nations. According to a recent United Nations report and several media investigations, the UAE has been found to be financially supporting and arming the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). In response, Washington has imposed sanctions on the RSF leader Hemedi and seven Emirati companies. Meanwhile, Türkiye has presented a proposal to Abu Dhabi, seeking to persuade it to halt its support for the RSF in exchange for Sudan retracting its complaints against the UAE at the UN Security Council.

As a part of its mediating efforts, on Jan. 4, 2025, Turkish Deputy Foreign Minister Burhanettin Duran visited Port Sudan with a positive and pragmatic agenda, which included establish-

ing a bank and setting up a new aid agency in the region. Türkiye's involvement is not just a matter of diplomatic leverage but also a significant effort to address the growing humanitarian crisis, highlighting its proactive role in the unfolding regional dynamics. Türkiye's strategic influence across Africa is rapidly expanding as it seeks to play a larger role in the Horn of Africa and the Sahel amid reduced US engagement. Türkiye's growing engagement in Africa is perhaps the most positive development in recent years for peace and stability in the region. In addition to signing military agreements with key countries such as Nigeria, Rwanda, and Ethiopia, Ankara has also embarked on economic ventures, including oil and gas exploration off Somalia's coast, signaling a deeper economic and geopolitical commitment.

Türkiye's trade with

Africa surged from a modest \$5.4 billion in 2003 to \$35 billion in 2023. Türkiye's growing influence in Africa is often perceived through a lens of diplomacy and soft power rather than through military might. While security cooperation is a component of its presence on the continent, Türkiye's Africa strategy has mostly been defined by tools of influence like economic partnerships and development projects.

As Sudan's civil war persists, Türkiye, with its deep historical ties to the region, has emerged as a surprising but steady force for peace. From the outset of the conflict, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has kept channels of dialogue open between the rival factions. He has advocated a balanced approach based on the principle of equal sovereignty, which stands in contrast to the failed attempts of other international mediators.

Türkiye's prior successes in diplomacy, such as broker-

ing peace in the Ethiopia-Somalia dispute, bolster the optimism surrounding its potential role in Sudan. Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan has proven to be a key player in managing these intricate negotiations.

The country's involvement is not merely strategic but represents an earnest desire to help end the violence and bring much-needed stability to a war-ravaged Sudan. In addition to bolstering ties with the UAE, Türkiye is solidifying its position as a diplomatic bridge-builder, positioning itself as an impartial and reliable player in this multifaceted crisis. If Türkiye's peace efforts succeed, easing the humanitarian disaster and addressing the widespread displacement and hunger, the world will once again witness the power of functional diplomacy, as Erdogan's vision serves as a potential model for resolving conflicts across the globe.

Trump’s conflicts in foreign policy

TRUMP’S slogans at the inauguration ceremony showed that, like in his first term as president, he would not be able to create a way of governing America that could stop the country’s decline. With his first statements, Trump showed that he did not recognize the new developments in the world and intended to call the world to fight to restore American hegemony and replace rationalism with belligerence. Attention to the following axes will clarify the path of the Trump administration’s ongoing conflicts.

Trump’s words about increasing pressure on Mexico, Canada, and Panama showed that "Neighborhood Harassment" will be one of the main axes of US foreign policy. Trump’s strongest belligerent approach against Mexico was focused on three factors: trade, illegal immigration, and security issues. In the trade area, Trump wants to impose tariffs on Mexican goods imported to the United States from February 1; in fact, he will start an economic war with Mexico. The White House is also set to intensify its approach to confronting the arrival of Mexican immigrants by declaring a national emergency on the southern border with Mexico and sending the army to that area, and to carry out an unprecedented operation to expel millions of Mexican immigrants at home. In the security area, Trump will narrow the field for Mexico under the pretext of confronting drug cartels and will move towards dominating the Gulf of Mexico with this pretext. These moves will certainly face serious challenges in Washington-Mexico City relations during Trump’s second term and will make the Mexican government determined

to defend its territorial integrity and national sovereignty. Trump’s statements against America’s other neighbor showed that he is seeking to reclaim the Panama Canal and control over Greenland. The United States took responsibility for building the canal in the early 20th century and has not had the right to violate the country’s territorial integrity since the 1970s, when it handed over full control of it to Panama under a treaty. Trump says the Panamanian government has not fulfilled its obligations to the canal and has placed the waterway in the path of China’s interests. China is the second largest user of the Panama Canal after the United States and has major economic investments in the country.

Trump’s threat to annex Canada to the United States and launch a trade war with Ottawa by imposing a 25 percent tariff on Canadian products is another form of Trump’s belligerent approach to neighbors. The occupation of Canada, which has a record in American history, would put both countries in difficult situations if it were repeated during Trump’s term.

Trump, like his first term in office, in opposition to international standards, announced that he would withdraw from the Paris Climate Agreement, which he believes is a fraud, and also signed an executive order to withdraw from the World Health Organization. Trump, who is in a record of disobedience and a pioneer in violating international standards and regulations, also officially withdrew from the "Pacific Trade Agreement", the "UN Migration Agreement", the "Paris Climate Agreement", "UN Human Rights

Commission", "UNESCO", the "Iran Nuclear Agreement with the P5+1 Group" in his previous term of office. Trump pursued the discrediting of international trade institutions, even the World Trade Organization, and disrupted the idea of free trade by imposing unilateral tariffs. To serve Israel’s interests, he ignored UN resolutions and moved the US embassy to Jerusalem. Trump pursued the grand deal of the century, which included annexing the West Bank to the Zionist regime, and unilaterally recognized the Golan Heights as belonging to Israel. The continuation of international hostility during Trump’s second term will further isolate the country in the world.

In conflict with European allies, Trump threatened to impose new tariffs on the European Union and declared, "The European Union is treating us very badly, and so they will face tariffs. This is the only way we can achieve justice."

In turn, the President of the European Commission warned at the Davos summit about the consequences of a trade war, and German Chancellor Schulz said, "Europe should not subordinate itself to American policies." To maintain power and move towards becoming a hegemon, the United States needs more allies, especially in Europe, but Trump’s anti-European approach is causing European allies to adopt anti-American policies.

Trump’s policies during his previous presidency led to many European countries becoming more inclined towards China, and the United States lost the power to create a consensus in its favor in the field of international

competition. This situation could be repeated in Trump’s second term.

In his statements, Trump said that the tariffs he imposed on China during his first presidency are still in place and that his administration is considering imposing a 10% tariff on Chinese imports. He cited the reason for imposing tariffs on Chinese goods as the shipment of the morphine-like drug fentanyl from China to the United States through Mexico and Canada. Trump’s main concern is the creation of a new order based on multilateralism in the world, including the rise of regional institutions such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, BRICS, the Eurasian Union, and the Latin American Union.

Today, Europe has opened its markets to Chinese electric cars and green technology, and the Chinese have set up factories across Europe. In the new Trump era, given the belligerent approaches in foreign policy, America is becoming more integrated with the Chinese economy, and its consequences will haunt the White House for years to come.

Although Trump tried to portray Biden and the Democrats as the main cause of America’s decline during his inauguration, his admission of this decline indicates that, given the primacy of national sovereignty, America’s hegemony is irreversible and the world does not welcome America’s unilateralism. America was on the path of decline more than ever during Trump’s first term as president, and given Trump’s unilateralist and belligerent policies, America’s decline will accelerate, and the future of globalization will be without a hegemon.

IRNA

Mohsen Pakaein

AI makes Chinese, Iranian hackers more efficient

A report issued Wednesday by Google found that hackers from numerous countries, particularly China, Iran and North Korea, have been using the company’s artificial intelligence-enabled Gemini chatbot to supercharge cyberattacks against targets in the United States. The company found - so far, at least - that access to publicly available large language models (LLMs) has made cyberattackers more efficient but has not meaningfully changed the kind of attacks they typically mount.

LLMs are AI models that have been trained, using enormous amounts of previously generated content, to identify patterns in human languages. Among other things, this makes them adept at producing high-functioning, error-free computer programs. "Rather than enabling disruptive change, generative AI allows threat actors to move faster and at higher volume," the report found. Generative AI offered some benefits for low-skilled and high-skilled hackers, the report said.

"However, current LLMs on their own are unlikely to enable breakthrough capabilities for threat actors. We note that the AI landscape is in constant flux, with new AI models and agentic systems emerging daily. As this evolution unfolds, [the Google Threat Intelligence Group] anticipates the threat landscape to evolve in stride as threat actors adopt new AI technologies in their operations." Google’s findings appear to agree with previous research released by other large US AI players OpenAI and Microsoft, which found a similar failure to achieve novel offensive strategies for cyberattacks

through the use of public generative AI models. The report clarified that Google works to disrupt the activity of threat actors when it identifies them.

"AI, so far, has not been a game changer for offensive actors," Adam Segal, director of the Digital and Cyberspace Policy Program at the Council on Foreign Relations, told VOA. "It speeds up some things. It gives foreign actors a better ability to craft phishing emails and find some code. But has it dramatically changed the game? No." Whether that might change in the future is unclear, Segal said. Also unclear is whether further developments in AI technology will more likely benefit people building defenses against cyberattacks or the threat actors trying to defeat them.

"Historically, defense has been hard, and technology hasn’t solved that problem," Segal said. "I suspect AI won’t do that, either. But we don’t know yet." Caleb Withers, a research associate at the Center for a New American Security, agreed that there is likely to be an arms race of sorts, as offensive and defensive cybersecurity applications of generative AI evolve. However, it is likely that they will largely balance each other out, he said.

"The default assumption should be that absent certain trends that we haven’t yet seen, these tools should be roughly as useful to defenders as offenders," he said. "Anything productivity enhancing, in general, applies equally, even when it comes to things like discovering vulnerabilities. If an attacker can use something to find a vulnerability in software, so, too,

is the tool useful to the defender to try to find those themselves and patch them." The report breaks down the kinds of threat actors it observed using Gemini into two primary categories. Advanced persistent threat (APT) actors refer to "government-backed hacking activity, including cyber espionage and destructive computer network attacks." By contrast, information operation (IO) threats "attempt to influence online audiences in a deceptive, coordinated manner. Examples include sock puppet accounts [phony profiles that hide users’ identities] and comment brigading [organized online attacks aimed at altering perceptions of online popularity]."

The report found that hackers from Iran were the heaviest users of Gemini in both threat categories. APT threat actors from Iran used the service for a wide range of tasks, including gathering information on individuals and organizations, researching targets and their vulnerabilities, translating language and creating content for future online campaigns. Google tracked more than 20 Chinese government-backed APT actors using Gemini "to enable reconnaissance on targets, for scripting and development, to request translation and explanation of technical concepts, and attempting to enable deeper access to a network following initial compromise." North Korean state-backed APTs used Gemini for many of the same tasks as Iran and China but also appeared to be attempting to exploit the service in its efforts to place "clandestine IT workers" in Western companies to facilitate the theft of intellectual property.

Rob Garver

Talks with Trump are a win-win for Kremlin

BOTH Washington and Moscow have announced that they want a meeting between Presidents Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin, to discuss ending the war in Ukraine, to take place as soon as possible. Opinions vary, but nobody knows what Trump’s plan is. Putin’s requests are also unknown. What he says publicly does not qualify as a negotiating position. Instead, it is intended for an internal audience.

It seems to me that Putin is not expecting these negotiations to result in anything. He is convinced that he will get a result that is good for Russia whatever happens. Things are going well on the frontlines, the enemy is slowly but surely retreating and his personal position in the Kremlin is strong. The Russian economy, despite sanctions and incredible military spending, is growing.

Furthermore, the population is not only not taking to the streets with anti-war slogans, but on the contrary. For those who will not go to war in the name of patriotism, there are persuasive financial rewards. Why would Putin need any negotiations in such a case? What could Trump offer that Putin would agree to without ruining the whole picture of strength?

Putin cares about negotiations with Trump because they offer a route out of international isolation and demonstrate his importance on the world stage. Negotiations are evidence that Russia is still a superpower that speaks on an equal footing with the world leader, the United

States. A lot has happened in the quarter-century Putin has led Russia. The world is no longer keen to welcome Moscow into the international community, as in the 1990s and 2000s. Putin first encountered this at the G20 summit in Brisbane in November 2014, where no world leaders wanted to sit at the same table with him at breakfast or stand next to him during a group photo. Spotting him in the audience, Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper said, "I think I should shake your hand. But I can only say one thing to you: get out of Ukraine." This reaction came as a complete surprise to the Russian president. His press secretary Dmitry Peskov said in the evening of November 15, that all rumors about Putin’s early departure from the G20 summit in Brisbane were untrue. On November 16, Putin did not come to breakfast with his G20 partners and left Australia, claiming he needed to get some sleep before his work week.

According to political analyst Andrei Piontkovsky, Putin flew to Brisbane with the hope of making a "grand bargain" with the West: "Just a week before the trip, all his sympathizers - from Henry Kissinger to Sergei Markov - threw in variants of the so-called 'grand bargain,' and he went to probe its parameters. It failed then. Now, there seems to be hope of discussing a grand bargain with Trump. Political commentators say Moscow’s objectives for a possible deal will go something like this: you stay out of our zone of influence here

and do not support our domestic enemies and we will stay out of your business. We won’t sow chaos across the world over the world or attack anyone else." Putin knows for a fact that Trump likes big deals. Trump will not cling to democratic values, he is self-centered and a pure pragmatist. Putin probably sees Trump as an easy target. He may even try to persuade Trump to bring Russia back to the G8.

Putin remembers that in June 2020, Trump had already proposed that Russia return to the G7 (making it the G8 again). At that time, the other members did not support this call. Now Putin would surely like Trump to repeat his proposal as part of negotiations over Ukraine. No matter how hard propaganda proves otherwise, Putin does enjoy feeling like a global pariah. Then there is the International Criminal Court arrest warrant. It’s not much of a ride. The largely unimportant visit to Mongolia was presented by propaganda as triumphant because he was not arrested. Furthermore, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres came to the BRICS summit in Kazan.

Putin is transferring his personal grievances to the whole country, infecting the population with this great resentment against the West. There are cries about the alleged Russophobia inherent in all foreign countries, about the revival of Nazism everywhere except in the great and peace-loving Russia, and about plans to destroy Russia as a state. These narratives do not meet with any resistance from the population,

who believe that they do in fact live in a hostile environment where Western leaders are set on dismembering Russia and appropriating its wealth. But let us imagine the unimaginable: the grand bargain is made. The International Criminal Court warrant for Putin’s arrest is rescinded. Soldiers return home from the front and Russians return to Eurovision and the Olympics. Trump and Putin stand next to French President Emmanuel Macron watching the Victory Parade in Red Square.

Will the people be ready for another perestroika and détente with the world they were taught to hate? I am afraid that the people will not be ready for it. And Putin, having once unleashed this genie of hatred and, let’s face it, fascism, will not be able to put it back into the vessel if he wants to. Therefore, he will have no desire to do so.

Putin really wants observers to believe that he and Trump stand on an equal footing on world issues instead of being ignored and insulted. He is like a child who, to get the attention of adults, rips off a tablecloth and dashes the dishes on the floor. The only problem is that Putin did not only smash some crockery. He drenched the world in blood. By claiming that international law does not exist, but only interests, he has long ago crossed the line beyond which there can be no more conversation on equal footing. This is where a lot depends on Trump. Is he ready to sit at the same table for years with Putin, who will do nothing to ensure that these negotiations are fruitful? Only time will tell.

VOA

Yes, Panama Canal was built at a dear price - paid in Black lives

“The spirit of the frontier is written into our hearts,” said President Trump in his second inaugural address, on Jan. 20, as he cited his foreign policy initiatives. The Gulf of Mexico would be changed to the Gulf of America and Denali peak renamed as Mt. McKinley. But he paid special attention to the Panama Canal, which he saw as "foolishly" returned to Panama under President Carter. "We're taking it back," he promised.

Part of his justification for American ownership of the Panama Canal is that the US "spent more money than ever spent on a project before and lost 38,000 lives" to build it. Indeed, the American construction of the canal had a heavy cost, but it is not one that Trump has acknowledged.

The popular telling of the canal’s origin is a story of America’s technical prowess, of man’s triumph over nature and of the cunning of figures like Theodore Roosevelt, who supported Panama’s secession from Colombia and in the process seized land rights to what would become the Panama Canal. These histories for the most part ignore that the great majority of the workers were Black migrants from the Caribbean. They came from the islands of Barbados, Jamaica, Martinique and others, then plantation economies and colonies of European nations. It was these migrants who paid for the construction of the canal with their lives - some 5,000 to 8,000 individuals, by historians’ estimates. It’s unclear how Trump arrived at the 38,000 figure.

On arrival, workers faced a system of racial segregation. Skilled workers, mostly white Americans, were placed on the "Gold Roll." They received high salaries and access to employee benefits. Black Caribbean workers, on the other hand, were placed on the "Silver Roll" and received much lower pay rates in local coin, along with substandard lodging, food and healthcare.

This payroll system extended throughout the canal construction from 1904 to 1914. All spaces under American sovereignty, including cafeterias, barracks, hotels and hospitals, were racially divided between Gold and Silver.

Joan Flores-Villalobos

Rather than a shining beacon of American progress, the canal construction was if anything one of the most glaring examples of Jim Crow exported abroad.

This system of segregation also created disparate survival outcomes for canal workers. Of the 5,609 fatalities officially recorded by canal authorities, Black workers make up 80%. A body count alone cannot capture the experiences of Black workers, who risked

These protesters are celebrated every year in Panama on Martyr’s Day. Increasing anti-imperial protests in Panama and the leadership of nationalist Gen. Omar Torrijos led to negotiations for a change in control of the canal, largely under Republican Presidents Nixon and Ford. The Carter administration completed a deal with Torrijos in 1977, under which the US would cede the canal to Panama in 1999.

death every day from dynamite explosions, rock blasts, train accidents and tropical disease. One Black Caribbean worker named Alfred Dotin remembered the early days of construction: "The working conditions in those days were so horrible it would stagger your imagination. ... Death was our constant companion."

The construction also cost Panama decades of sovereignty. As Panamanian historian Marixa Lasso described in her book "Erased," the canal was not built upon cleared virgin, uninhabited forest but instead required the destruction of multiracial Panamanian towns after the US presumed to take the land. Some "lost towns" were depopulated by an executive order from President Taft in 1912, while other communities fell under the waters of reservoirs created to flood the locks. New construction provided administration buildings for the American canal authorities and suburban-style lodging inhabited mostly by white American engineers and their families.

Panamanians were rarely welcome within this American enclave, and tensions remained high throughout the 20th century.

ry. They finally erupted on Jan. 9, 1964, when a group of students rushed to the Canal Zone and raised Panama’s flag over Balboa High School. In response to their protest, American students and staff attacked the students, and authorities tear-gassed the crowd, eventually resulting in the death of 28 people, 21 of whom were Panamanian. These protesters are celebrated every year in Panama on Martyr’s Day.

Increasing anti-imperial protests in Panama and the

leadership of nationalist Gen. Omar Torrijos led to negotiations for a change in control of the canal, largely under Republican Presidents Nixon and Ford. The Carter administration completed a deal with Torrijos in 1977, under which the US would cede the canal to Panama in 1999.

The way Trump talks about the Panama Canal, and his ambition to reclaim it, betrays what he really means when he says he wants to "end the government policy of trying to socially engineer race and gender into every aspect of public and private life." It means he wants to ignore America’s inconvenient legacy of Jim Crow and colonialism. By erasing the racial disparities at the center of the Panama Canal construction, Trump gives justification to his expansionist policy while ignoring the cost of US empire and its perceived "triumphs." Every year, descendants of Black Caribbean workers who remain in Panama cross the canal to commemorate the deaths of their ancestors, throwing flowers into the water and singing mourning songs. They have not forgotten the cost. Neither should we.

The Los Angeles Times

DeepSeek just blew up AI industry’s narrative

AND finally, in the year 2025, here comes DeepSeek to blow up the industry’s whole narrative about AI’s bottomless appetite for power, and potentially break the spell that had kept Wall Street funneling money to anyone with the words "harnessing artificial intelligence" in their pitch deck.

ICYMI: DeepSeek dropped a bomb known as R1 that’s got all of Silicon Valley and much of Wall Street in a tizzy. The Chinese company’s large language model is basically a cheaper, more efficient ChatGPT, built on a fraction of OpenAI’s budget and using far fewer chips than any other leading chatbot. "That is a massive earthquake in the AI sector," Gil Luria, head of tech research at investment group D.A. Davidson, told me. "Everybody is looking at it and saying, 'We didn’t think this is possible. And since it is possible, we have to rethink everything that we have been planning.'"

Suddenly, all that money and computing power that the Sam Altmans, Mark Zuckerberg and Elon Musks have been saying are crucial to their AI projects - and thus America’s continued leadership in the industry - may end up being wildly overblown. DeepSeek, which on Monday climbed to No. 1 on the Apple app store, claims to have built its base model for less than \$6 million (versus the more than \$100 million Altman has said it cost to build GPT-4).

It also claims to have used just 2,000 Nvidia chips that it obtained before US export restrictions were put in place. (OpenAI says it used 25,000 of the more powerful Nvidia H100 chips to build GPT-4.) It’s awkward timing for the Trump administration, which last

Allison Morrow

week announced a half-trillion-dollar private-sector investment to build more data centers and keep the United States ahead of China in the AI race. (Oops!) And it’s incredibly bad news for Nvidia, the American chip maker powering the AI gold rush. Nvidia shares sank 17% Monday, shedding \$600 billion in market cap in a single session - the biggest one-day loss for a single stock in history. Alphabet, Microsoft, Oracle, TSMC and plenty of others sank, and because tech stocks are so dominant, that dragged the broader stock market down, too.

The tech-heavy Nasdaq plunged by 3% and the broader S&P 500 fell 1.5%. (The Dow, buoyed by health care and consumer companies, ended the day up less than 1%.) Of course, one bad day on Wall Street does not an apocalypse make. (That’s for later, when one of these AI labs creates superintelligent murder bots. Kidding! Kind of.) But DeepSeek is forcing investors to take a beat and question tech companies’ assumptions. By its own reasoning, the AI industry needed to keep increasing "compute" (or computational power), which meant buying tens of thousands of Nvidia’s state-of-the-art chips and building giant data centers. "DeepSeek makes it very clear that that the current trajectory of scaling up of data centers is highly unlikely to be economic to Nvidia’s customers," Luria said.

The AI industry, and OpenAI in particular, has been going down two paths at once. There’s the business of designing AI models with better algorithms and sounder reasoning - the kind of stuff that requires "finesse, as opposed to brute

force," Luria says. And then there’s the Stargate path of giant energy investments. The first task is still "valid and important," while the second path looks "ridiculous," Luria said. "DeepSeek makes it clear that that scale and that spend would be, at the very least, wasteful."

In other words, AI isn’t dead. But the landscape is shifting faster than anyone, perhaps most of all Nvidia, expected. Nvidia has become the ultimate "picks and shovels" play on Wall Street, transforming it into a \$3 trillion company in the span of a couple of years. Up until now, the demand for Nvidia chips appeared boundless - tech companies were going to keep gobbling them up faster than Nvidia could produce them. But if DeepSeek really did manage to build a ChatGPT competitor using a handful of old processors, then maybe Nvidia’s tech customers soon won’t need as many as they’d thought. Many on Wall Street seemed to think so Monday as the stock went into a tailspin. (For its part, Nvidia seemed to shrug at the selloff in a statement to Bloomberg, calling DeepSeek’s model an "excellent AI advancement" that "illustrates how new models can be created.")

It’s also good to keep in mind that Wall Street is prone to tantrums, which is how some tech investors chalked up Monday’s selloff. "At the end of the day, there is only one chip company in the world launching autonomous, robotics, and broader AI use cases, and that is Nvidia," Wedbush analysts wrote in a letter to clients. "Launching a competitive LLM model for consumer use cases is one thing... launching broader AI infrastructure is a whole other ballgame, and nothing with DeepSeek makes us believe anything different."

CNN



Governor SBP advises banks to promote climate resilient & technology based Agri-financing

F.P. Report

MULTAN: The State Bank of Pakistan convened the Agricultural Credit Advisory Committee (ACAC) meeting on Friday in Multan, reaffirming its commitment to boosting agriculture financing and driving sustainable growth in Pakistan's agriculture sector.

In his keynote address, Governor SBP, Jameel Ahmad, underscored the vital role of agriculture in Pakistan's economy, highlighting its contributions to food security, rural livelihoods, and its integration with the industrial and services sectors. While acknowledging the sector's persistent challenges-low productivity, climate change

impacts, and limited financial inclusion-he urged banks to prioritize agricultural finance as a core and viable business line.

The Governor noted that the agriculture sector achieved remarkable growth during FY24. In Q1-FY25, however, agricultural growth slowed down to 1.2% from 8.1% last year and has resulted in a relatively slower GDP growth of 0.9% against 2.3% recoded in Q1-FY24. There are signs of a modest wheat crop, highlighting the need for resilience and innovation in agriculture for sustained growth. During FY24, due to collaborative efforts by SBP and the banks, a record credit disbursement of Rs.

2,216 billion was witnessed, marking a 25% annual increase. Building on this momentum, the first half of FY25 recorded disbursements of Rs. 1,266 billion whereas the number of borrowers rose modestly to 2.86 million. To increase the number of small borrowers particularly in underserved and unserved areas, the Governor emphasized the banks to expand their rural presence by designating more branches for agri-lending and deploying additional agricultural credit officers.

Looking ahead, the Governor urged the banks to fully implement their Agricultural Credit Expansion Plans and invest in human resources, infra-

structure, and digital technologies to better serve the farmers. He encouraged financial institutions to collaborate with relevant Government departments, fintechs, microfinance institutions, and Agri-Tech companies to deliver end-to-end digital loan solutions and advisory services tailored for small farmers.

He highlighted that there are three key areas for stakeholders to focus to uplift the agriculture sector. First, addressing the climate change challenges calls for targeted strategies to mitigate risks and enhance resilience by adopting climate-smart agriculture, green financing, and farmer training to ensure food security and sustainable growth.

Second, leveraging modern technology is crucial for transforming Pakistan's agriculture. Globally, Geospatial technologies are transforming agriculture by enabling precise crop monitoring, enhancing resource management, and minimizing production risks. Pilot projects in Pakistan can adopt these tools to enhance productivity and reduce resource waste. Third, enhancing focus on livestock sector, which contributes 14% of GDP and 2.1% of the country's total exports, offers massive opportunity for diversifying income streams and reducing dependency on traditional crop cycles by creating exportable surplus. Adopting advanced tech-

nologies like efficient breeding, improved dietary regimes, and manure management systems, can increase productivity and also align with Pakistan's climate goals to reduce greenhouse gases by 50% till 2030.

While listening to the issues faced by farmers from Baluchistan, the Governor shared that SBP will take a lead and convene all the stakeholders including relevant Government departments, Banks and farmers' associations and service providers in Quetta to take a holistic approach in addressing agriculture credit bottlenecks faced by famers in Baluchistan. This should be followed by other provinces as well.

A key highlight of the meeting was a session on climate-smart agriculture, which provided actionable insights on leveraging geospatial technologies for precision crop monitoring, optimizing resource allocation, and mitigating climate risks. The session also showcased the Climate Resilience Fund, a World Bank initiative, as a vital financing opportunity for microfinance banks to support climate adaptation strategies in agriculture.

Concluding the meeting with a call to action, the Governor stated, Pakistan's agricultural sector holds immense untapped potential. By expanding financial access, fostering innovation, and addressing cli-

mate challenges, we can transform agriculture into a resilient, sustainable, and globally competitive driver of economic growth. This transformation demands the collective effort of all stakeholders-banks, policy-makers, and technology providers.

The Agricultural Credit Advisory Committee meeting remains a strategic platform under SBP's leadership to address the evolving needs of the agricultural sector. The meeting was attended by key stakeholders, including presidents of commercial and microfinance banks, federal and provincial government officials, and representatives from Chambers of Agriculture and Farmers' Associations.

PSX stays bullish, gains 1,049 more points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-Index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) continued with bullish trend on Friday, gaining 1,049.33 more points, a positive change of 0.93 percent, closing at 114,255.73 points as compared to 113,206.40 points on the last trading day.

A total of 543,124,378 shares were traded during the day as compared to 483,939,931 shares the previous trading day, whereas the price of shares stood at Rs27,973 billion against Rs26.103 billion on the last trading day.

As many as 454 companies transacted their shares in the stock market, 234 of them recorded gains and 164 sustained losses, whereas the share price of 56 companies remained unchanged.

The three top trading companies were Sui Nerg-

yico PK with 66,683,225 shares at Rs7.75 per share, WorldCall Telecom with 37,804,093 shares at Rs1.64 per share and Bank Hakramah with 18,549,052 shares at Rs3.75 per share.

Ismail Industries Limited witnessed a maximum increase of Rs97.89 per share closing at Rs1,947.89 whereas runner-up was PIA Holding Company Limited with Rs89.07 rise in its share price to close at Rs979.73. Unilever Pakistan Foods Limited witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs81.50 per share price, closing at Rs22,305.50, whereas the runner-up was Mehmood Textile Mills Limited with Rs28.14 decline in its per share price to Rs644.24.

Rupee gains 03 paise against dollar

Pakistani rupee on Friday appreciated by 03 paise against the US dollar

in the interbank trading and closed at Rs278.94 against the previous day's closing of Rs278.97.

However, according to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the dollar in the open market stood at Rs279.50 and Rs281.00, respectively.

The price of the Euro decreased by 72 paise to close at Rs290.21 against the last day's closing of Rs290.93, according to the State Bank of Pakistan.

The Japanese yen remained unchanged and closed at Rs1.80, whereas a decrease of 49 paise was witnessed in the exchange rate of the British Pound, which was traded at Rs346.84 as compared to the last day's closing of Rs347.33.

The exchange rates of the Emirates Dirham and the Saudi Riyal decreased

by 01 paise each to close at Rs75.94 and Rs74.36 respectively.

Gold prices up by Rs1,500 per tola to Rs291,800

The price of 24 karat per tola gold increased by Rs1,500 and was sold at Rs291,800 on Friday against its sale at Rs290,300 on previous trading day, All Sindh Sarafa Jewellers Association reported.

The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also increased by Rs1,286 to Rs250,171 from Rs248,885 whereas that of 10 gram 22 karat went up to Rs229,331 from Rs228,152.

The prices of per tola and ten gram silver were traded at Rs3,300 and Rs2,829 respectively.

The price of gold in the international market increased from \$2,778 to \$2,792, the Association reported.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Industries and Production Rana Tanveer Hussain chairing meeting on sugar prices.

Chicken prices increases by Rs65

ISLAMABAD (APP): In the twin cities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi the price of chicken increased by Rs 65 per kg as compared with the previous month of December 2024, and the current price of poultry chicken increased from Rs 430 to Rs 440 rupees per kilo to January 31st,2025.

The last month until December 24, the chicken was sold at 350 rupees per kg, which was less than the previous month's price hike in poultry prices in the retail market.

The prices of poultry consumables, chicken, and eggs have been reduced for the past few weeks and are once again out of the public's reach.

The prices of poultry

items have increased by 15 percent in the twin cities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi during the last two weeks, which has created huge volatility in the market.

According to the market survey conducted by APP here Friday, during the past two weeks in the twin cities, a 15 percent increase was witnessed in the price of chicken, while a same 12 percent increase in the price of poultry eggs in the last seven weeks.

According to the survey, the price of live chicken in the twin cities was between Rs 412 to 440 per kg from the last three weeks of this month of January 2025. Similarly, chicken meat is sold at Rs 670 to Rs 680 per kg in the market of both

cities.

During this time, it was also found that in the last few weeks poultry eggs used to be sold at Rs 220 to 250 per dozen in the market of both cities.

Meanwhile, talking to APP, the farmer Chairman Pakistan Poultry Association (PPA),

Chaudhry, Muhammad Ashraf said the increase in the current prices of poultry is due to demand and supply issues.

PPA ex. Chairman said that the increase in poultry business inputs and cost of doing business was seen across the country due to which the market was in crisis.

He said that many people related to the chicken business in the country were

affected by the current crisis and especially small businesses and poultry farms were closed, adding the poultry business in the four provinces including Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is suffering from the current economic crisis.

Chaudhry Ashraf said that the country's economic conditions are also an important issue and the poultry feed ingredients imported from foreign countries are very expensive, in which soybean is important.

He said that many soybean ships have stopped at Karachi port, which has an inevitable impact on poultry prices.

Court Notice

In the court of Sadia Ali Civil Judge IV, Bannu. Suit No: 135/1 institution: 2024, Next Date of hearing 01-02-2025, Case title. Syed Afthar ali shah etc Syed shaid Abbas Shah etc Syed shaid Abbas Shah 2. Syed Raza Abbas shah 3.Syed Nasir Abbas shah 5.Syed Umer Abbas shah Sons 6.Syed Aliya Abbas D/O Syed Abbas 7.Mst.Gohar Abbas Widow Syed Abbas shah 8.Syed kamal shah Son Syed Khamar Shah 9.Noor kalim 10.Afsar kalim 11. Mamraiz 12.Babrak khan 13.Hidar 14. Akbar khan 15.Zubir khan sons gul Hakim khan R/o Bazzar Ahmad khan Bannu. Whereas in the above mentioned case the mentioned defendants can not be served in the ordinary way, it is, therefore, proclaimed that if the said defendants will / shall not appear personally or through a dually authorized agent or pleader in the court at 8 am dated 01-02-2025, the proceeding will be taken ex-parte. Given under my hand and seal of this Court.

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SPI goes down by 0.36 per cent

ISLAMABAD (APP): The weekly inflation, measured by the Sensitive Price Indicator (SPI), went down by 0.36 percent for the combined consumption groups during the week ended on January 30 and decelerated to 0.44 percent on a year-on-year (YoY) basis, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported

on Friday.

According to the PBS data, the SPI for the week under review in the above-mentioned group was recorded at 319.06 points as compared to 320.21 points during the past week.

As compared to the corresponding week of last year, the SPI for the com-

bined consumption group in the week under review witnessed an increase of 0.44 per cent.

The weekly SPI with the base year 2015-16 =100 covers 17 urban centres and 51 essential items for all expenditure groups.

The SPI for the lowest consumption group of up to Rs 17,732 witnessed decrease of 0.52 per cent and went down to 309.85 points from last week's 311.47 points.

The SPI for consumption groups of Rs 17,732 to 22,888; Rs 22,889-29,517; Rs 29,518-44,175 and above Rs 44,175, declined by 0.47 percent, 0.39 percent, 0.35 percent and 0.29 percent respectively.

During the week, out of 51 items, prices of 09 (17.65%) items increased, 16 (31.37%) items decreased and 26 (50.98%) items remained stable.

The items, which recorded major decrease in their average prices on a week-on-week basis included tomatoes (16.18%), onions (12.32%), potatoes (7.66%), eggs (5.09%), pulse gram (3.67%), LPG (3.21%), pulse masoor (1.32%), electricity charges for q1 (0.99%), wheat flour bag (0.95%), garlic (0.41%) and firewood

(0.27%).

The commodities which recorded major increase in their average prices on a week-on-week basis included bananas (4.60%), sugar (3.39%), chicken (0.93%), rice basmati broken (0.70%), cooking oil 5 litre (0.40%), vegetable ghee 1 kg (0.32%), beef (0.28%) and vegetable ghee 2.5 kg (0.26%).

Year-on-year basis, the commodities that witnessed decrease included onions (54.36%), eggs (37.38%), wheat flour (36.77%), tomatoes (35.82%), chillies powder (20.00%), electricity charges for q1 (18.92%), pulse masoor (11.48%), pulse mash (10.56%), rice basmati broken (7.92%), diesel (6.36%), petrol (6.07%) and LPG (3.47%).

The commodities which recorded an increase in their average prices on year-on-year basis included, ladies sandal (75.09%), potatoes (34.95%), pulse gram (32.92%), pulse moong (32.01%), powdered milk (25.71%), beef (22.52%), vegetable ghee 1 kg (17.46%), garlic (15.82%), gas charges for Q1 (15.52%), vegetable ghee 2.5 kg (15.05%), shirting (14.83%) and firewood (12.82%).

Shipping activity at PQ

KARACHI (APP): Five ships, Jaru Bhum, Tolten, Rhine, Meissa and Isabella Kosan carrying Container, Palm oil and Chemicals berthed at Qasim International Container Terminal, Multi-Purpose Terminal, Liquid Cargo Terminal and Engro Vopak Terminal respectively on Thursday.

Meanwhile another containers ship 'Mol Presence' also arrived at outer anchorage on Friday morning. Eight ships were engaged at PQA berths during the last 24 hours, out of them two ships, Jaru Bhum and Milaha Ras Laffan left the port on Friday morning, while six more ships, KK Marlin, Rhine, Split, Isabella Kosan, Tolten and Mol Presence are expected to sail.

Cargo volume of 123,747 tonnes, comprising 92,972 tonnes imports cargo and 30,775 tonnes export cargo carried in 2,647 Containers (2,158 TEUs Imports & 1,417 TEUs Export) was handled at the port during last 24 hours.

Nineteen ships at Outer Anchorage of Port Qasim, out of them four ships, Inlaco Express, Ayat, MP MR Tanker-1 and Mol Presence & two more ships, MSC Positano and EVA Pearl scheduled to load/offload Iron Ore, Palm Kernel, Gasoline, Container and Chemicals are expected to take berths at MW-1&2, FOTCO, QICT and EVTL are respectively, while another containers ship 'X-Press Salween' are due arrive at outer anchorage today (Saturday) February.

DG PAA visits Multan Int'l Airport

F.P. Report

MULTAN: Air Vice Marshal Zeeshan Saeed, Director General of the Pakistan Airports Authority (PAA), visited Multan International Airport (MIAP) to inspect the ongoing expansion project.

During the visit, the DG was briefed by the Airport Manager, sectional heads, and Joint Director Services (Planning & Development) on the existing facilities and future upgradation plans. He appreciated the efforts of the airport team in enhancing commercial activities and improving passenger facilitation.

The DG PAA emphasized the importance of ensuring maximum passenger comfort and safety in line with international aviation standards. Key improvements at MIAP include:

Expansion of airport access lanes from 2 to 4 for smoother traffic flow.

Installation of a third



scanner at the International Briefing area to reduce congestion.

Relocation of the Joint Search area for improved passenger movement.

Addition of more check-in counters to manage long queues efficiently.

With MIAP handling over 1.4 million passengers annually-surpassing its cur-

rent terminal capacity-DG PAA stressed the need for expansion and modernization. Future upgradation plans include:

Increasing aircraft parking bays from 4 to 6, including two wide-body aircraft stands.

Remodeling and expanding the passenger terminal to accommodate the grow-

ing influx of international travelers.

Multan International Airport, the fourth largest in Pakistan, serves South Punjab, parts of Central Punjab, and Sindh. The Pakistan Airports Authority remains committed to enhancing infrastructure and passenger services in line with the country's aviation growth.

Stock markets close out turbulent week with gains

LONDON (AFP/APP): European and Asian stock markets mostly rose Friday, the end of a week beset by volatility after China's DeepSeek unveiled an artificial intelligence model to rival those of US tech giants.

Confirmation from US President Donald Trump that the world's biggest economy would impose hefty tariffs on Canada and Mexico from this weekend added to the economic unrest felt around the globe, pushing haven investment gold to fresh record highs Thursday.

Following sharp losses for equities early in the week as tech stocks plunged, markets have recovered somewhat thanks to positive earnings and company strategy updates.

London's benchmark FTSE 100 hit fresh highs Friday, helped by an 11-

percent jump in the share price of Smiths Group after the British engineering company said it planned to simplify the business and return substantial sums to shareholders.

The British index also took "cues from solid trading on Wall Street as the recovery from Monday's DeepSeek-related volatility continued", noted Russ Mould, investment director at AJ Bell.

US equity indices closed higher Thursday shortly before Apple reported that sales growth fell shy of expectations in the final quarter of last year.

Focus later Friday turns to a fresh inflation reading from the United States.

"There's one more hurdle to get over this week as core PCE inflation data is released in the US," said Mould. "This metric is a

big factor in informing the decision-making of the Fed (on interest rates) so a surprise in either direction could make markets increasingly febrile again."

The US Federal Reserve kept borrowing costs unchanged this week, in contrast to the European Central Bank which Thursday cut rates as growth stalls in the eurozone.

Next week the Bank of England is widely forecast to trim its main interest rate, as the UK struggles to grow its economy. The dollar rose Friday, including against the British pound, euro and yen.

The greenback weighed more so on the Mexican peso and Canadian dollar, however, after Trump said he would go ahead with the threatened 25 percent tariffs on the countries pencilled in for Saturday.



In brief

Rain halts SL Test as Australia tighten grip

GALLE (AFP):

Incessant afternoon rain forced an early end to day three of the first Test between Australia and Sri Lanka on Friday, with the visitors leading by 518 and former home skipper

Dinesh Chandimal waging a lone battle on 63. Sri Lanka were 136-5 by lunch in Galle, with wicketkeeper Kusal Mendis also at the crease on 10, after losing two more wickets from their overnight 44-3. The break was called early and players were kept off the pitch through the afternoon, with officials calling an end 90 minutes before the scheduled finish. Kamindu Mendis departed for 15 after an edge to the keeper off Mitchell Starc, further denting the Bradman-like average he maintained at the start of his Test comeback last year.

Captain Dhananajaya de Silva looked comfortable before rushing down the track to Matthew Kuhnemann and missing the ball completely, gifting Alex Carey a regulation stumping and leaving for 22. Left-arm speedster Starc expertly created rough patches outside the off stump, while Nathan Lyon relentlessly probed away from the other end. Chandimal, who was promoted to the crucial number three position last year and has since averaged over 50, stood firm despite the uphill battle to avoid the follow-on. Australia declared on 654-6 late on the second day after opener

Usman Khawaja's career-best 232. The opening day saw stand-in skipper Steve Smith join the elite club of 10,000 career Test run-makers, the fifteenth player and fourth Australian to reach the milestone. Picturesque Galle will also host the second and final match of the series next week before a two-match ODI series in Colombo.

Kohli flops on return to domestic cricket

NEW DELHI (AFP):

Superstar Indian cricketer Virat Kohli flopped on his first domestic cricket match in more than a decade Friday to the dismay of thousands who turned out to see him play. International stars were ordered by India's cricket board to return to domestic matches in a bid to lift their form following a soul-searching 3-1 series defeat in Australia. Kohli, 36, and other team titans have made regular appearances in the lucrative Indian Premier League (IPL), but this week marked his return to the Ranji Trophy -- the country's premier red-ball tournament -- after a 12-year absence. He strode in to bat for home team Delhi on day two of their match against Railways to roars and chants of his name from the stands. After a circumspect start and a few play-and-misses on the off-side, Kohli drove fast bowler Himanshu Sangwan for a rasping straight drive to bring the crowd to its feet. But the joy was short-lived as the next ball went straight through his defence and the off-stump went cartwheeling with him on six. Dejected fans began making their way to the exit even as Kohli was walking back to the pavilion, and the stadium numbers soon dwindled from thousands to less than a few hundred. India skipper Rohit Sharma had also faltered on his return to Ranji cricket last week when he scored just three off 19 balls for Mumbai. Rohit and fellow opener Yashvi Jaiswal opted out of this week's match. Both Kohli and Rohit have faced severe scrutiny over their recent batting struggles in Australia, with questions raised on their future in Test cricket.

PCB announces squad for Champions Trophy

LAHORE (Monitoring Desk): The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) on Friday announced the national squad for the upcoming Champions Trophy tournament with Saim Ayub a notable exclusion from the team due to his injuries.

In a video posted on the PCB's X account, members of Pakistan's winning squad for the 2017 edition announced the team lineup.

A press release issued by the PCB said the board has until February 11 to make any changes, after which any

replacements would only be permitted on medical grounds, subject to approval by the ICC Event Technical Committee.

"The squad, to be captained by Mohammad Rizwan with Salman Ali Agha as vice-captain, includes three members from the 2017 title-winning side -- Babar Azam, Faheem Ashraf and Fakhar Zaman. Babar and Fakhar, along with Haris Rauf, Shaheen Shah Afridi and Saud Shakeel had also featured in the last 50-over ICC event -- the ICC Men's 50-over Cricket World Cup 2023," the PCB said.

Outlining the changes in the squad, the PCB said Abdullah Shafique, Muhammad Irfan Khan, Saim Ayub and Sufyan Moqim were replaced by Faheem Ashraf, Fakhar Zaman, Khushdil Shah and Saud Shakeel.

The PCB said the squad would assemble in Lahore on Monday.

Pakistan squad: Mohammad Rizwan (c), Babar Azam, Fakhar Zaman, Kamran Ghulam, Saud Shakeel, Tayyab Tahir, Faheem Ashraf,

Khushdil Shah, Salman Ali Agha, Usman Khan, Abrar Ahmed, Haris Rauf, Mohammad Hasnain, Naseem Shah, Shaheen Shah Afridi.

Gaddafi Stadium to be reopened on Feb 7

Earlier, PCB Chairman Mohsin Naqvi said the Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore will be reopened on February 7 by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, while the Karachi Stadium will be reopened by President Asif Ali Zardari on February 11.

The reconstruction of three

stadiums -- in Lahore, Karachi and Rawalpindi -- which started on Oct 10 last year, looked in peril at one time as the board tried to finish the preparations for Pakistan's first ICC event since the World Cup in 1996.

Speaking to the media in Gaddafi Stadium today, the PCB chairman said that the stadium would be "100 per cent complete before the inauguration on Feb 7".

"It is the first time in history that a stadium, equipped with the latest international facilities, is prepared in Pakistan," Naqvi

said earlier in the day, adding that fans, along with players, would enjoy the facilities. Earlier this month, the board extended the deadline to Feb 2 from the previous Jan 25, stating that most of the finishing work on the stadium was completed but the final touch would need 10 more days.

The two other stadiums under renovation for the event in Rawalpindi and Karachi are facing similar delays, however, the board has said that the preparations will be completed on time.

Tareen and Pollard invest in Cricket Footwear Brand

F.P. Report

LODHARAN: Ali Khan Tareen, owner of the Pakistan Super League (PSL) team Multan Sultans and a passionate advocate for grassroots and women's cricket in Pakistan, has announced a strategic investment in ME+U, a UK-based cricket footwear brand. Joining Tareen in this venture is international cricketer Kieron Pollard, adding strength to the brand's global mission.

As stakeholder board members, both are committed to bringing inclusive, high-performance cricket footwear to players at all levels.

Tareen will also join the ME+U board of directors, bringing his extensive business acumen and growth-oriented mindset to the company. His leadership in the Multan Sultans, the Tareen Cricket Academy, and his upcoming sports investments will

help integrate ME+U's innovative cricket footwear into both elite and grassroots programs worldwide.

The investment prioritizes increasing access to advanced cricket footwear that enhances stability, performance, and injury prevention key aspects that are often overlooked for cricketers at all skill levels in Pakistan.

"Cricket has evolved into a precise science, demanding exceptional technique, physical endurance, and, most importantly, the right gear to maximize performance," said Tareen. "As cricket enthusiast (and injury-prone fast bowler), I know the crucial role proper footwear plays in supporting a player's body during competition. ME+U's cricket shoes are designed to meet these demands, and I'm confident they will make a significant impact on the performance and safety of players, regardless of gender."

Tareen emphasized the need for better equipment for women cricketers. "Women cricketers often lack access to the same high-end gear as their male counterparts. This partnership ensures female players in Pakistan will now have access to world-class cricket footwear, contributing to their success and safety on the field." Founded in 2023 by Matt Carter, Richard Woodhouse, and a passionate team of cricket and footwear experts, ME+U was created to revolutionize the cricket footwear market. With a focus on performance, inclusivity, and comfort, the company addresses a critical gap by providing cricket shoes specifically designed for both male and female players. Traditional footwear often fails to meet the unique anatomical needs of women, and ME+U is dedicated to bridging this gap through high-quality design and technology.

The debut product line from ME+U includes all-rounder cricket shoes for women, all-rounder cricket shoes for men, and bowling shoes for men. Each pair is engineered using cutting-edge materials to enhance performance and stability on the field. In 2025, ME+U plans to launch a new range of cricket footwear, incorporating valuable feedback from professional players and the latest advancements in sports-wear technology.

This collaboration strengthens ME+U's global mission and aligns with Tareen's ongoing efforts to promote cricket development across Pakistan, particularly in South Punjab. Together, Tareen and Pollard aim to ensure that every player has access to professional-grade cricket footwear, promoting longer-term success and physical well-being in the sport.

ME+U is dedicated to bridging this gap through

MCC announces fund for Aghan women's refugee team

LONDON (Reuters):

Afghanistan's exiled women cricketers will be the first beneficiaries of a new refugee fund started by the Marylebone Cricket Club, the MCC said on Friday.

Hundreds of athletes fled Afghanistan after the Taliban reclaimed power in 2021 and effected sweeping restrictions on women in the country.

Of the 25 Afghan women contracted by the country's cricket board in 2020, most have settled in Australia and played their first match on Thursday.

The MCC's global refugee cricket fund, which aims to initially raise one million pounds (\$1.24 million), is intended for displaced communities such as the Afghan players.

"Cricket has the power to inspire, unite, and empower, and through this initiative, we aim to bring hope and opportunity to those who need it most," MCC secretary Rob Lynch said in a statement.

While Afghanistan has an established men's team and enjoys funding from the International Cricket Council (ICC), the women are unfunded and unsanctioned by the global body despite pleas for support from the players.

The Taliban say they respect women's rights in accordance with their interpretation of Islamic law and local customs and that they are internal matters that should be addressed locally.

The early focus of the

refugee fund will be to raise money to provide safe training facilities, educational opportunities, and growth pathways, the MCC, which is responsible for the laws of cricket, said in a statement.

The England and Wales Cricket Board has also lent a helping hand.

"The cricket community must take action, to support the brave Afghan women, and to give hope that cricket can be a sport for any woman or girl," ECB deputy chief executive Clare Connor said.

"We hope the launch of the fund will inspire other cricketing organisations to support this cause, and to unlock cricket's power to unite communities around the globe."

Controversy as India beat England to clinch T20 series

PUNE (Agencies):

England slid to a 15-run defeat in a gripping fourth T20 as India took an unsailable 3-1 lead in the series.

The tourists made a rapid start in pursuit of 182 but faltered against spin again to fall from 62-0 to 67-3.

Ben Duckett was caught after miscuing Ravi Bishnoi on 39, Phil Salt was bowled for 23 by Axar Patel and leg-spinner Bishnoi returned to claim the crucial wicket of England captain Jos Buttler for two in the eighth over.

Harry Brook made 51 but Liam Livingstone and Jacob Bethell were dismissed by Harshit Rana, who was controversially allowed to come in as a concussion substitute and took 3-33.

England needed 25 from the last two overs but Harshit conceded six from the 19th and bowled Jamie Overton for 19 to all but seal the victory. England were bowled out for 166 in the final over.

They can have justified complaints that Harshit, who replaced Shivam Dube as a 'like-for-like' player, was able to play such a hand but they also squandered a dominant

position with the ball.

Saqib Mahmood, playing in the series for the first time in place of Mark Wood, took three wickets in his first over to reduce the hosts to 12-3. But, having kept India to 79-5 after 11 overs, England lost control late on.

India plundered 65 runs between the 16th and 19th overs with Hardik Pandya striking 53 from 30 balls and Dube the same score from 34 deliveries as India reached 181-9. The win means India have clinched the series prior to the finale in Mumbai on Sunday. A three-match one-day international series follows next week.

Controversy as Bazball begins with defeat. Defeat also means England have lost their first assignment with Brendon McCullum as their white-ball coach. As has been the case with his Test team, this was further evidence that his tenure will rarely be dull. Struggles against spin have been a constant throughout this series and returned again.

Duckett had pulled, flicked and swept seven boundaries before he miscued the final ball of the powerplay to extra cover. Phil Salt played one risky

cut off his stumps too many and Buttler got one that bounced to take an edge.

The story, though, was Harshit, who came in for his T20 debut.

England had found worth in attacking a hard length and the fast bowling all-rounder replaced Dube, who was hit on the helmet by an Overton bouncer, and his pace was ideal for such a tactic. Livingstone nicked the seamer behind for nine and Bethell mis-timed a slower ball to long-on for six.

Only Brook seemed able to score freely against the seamer, who had only batted three times in professional T20s yet replaced India's number six who rarely bowls.

Regardless, England should probably still have won but Brook, having hit Harshit for two sixes and a four, scooped leg-spinner Varun Chakravarty to short fine leg.

Adil Rashid hit the final ball of the 18th for six to give England hope but Harshit - bowling close to 90mph - expertly closed out the match while England curiously turned down singles in an attempt to give Overton the strike.

Slot urges Salah to sign new Liverpool deal after Saudi links

LONDON (AFP): Arne Slot has urged Mohamed Salah to sign a new contract with Liverpool, advising the Egypt star against a lucrative move to Saudi Arabia.

Salah has been in sensational form this season but is out of contract in June, with speculation persisting that the Saudi Pro League could be a possible destination for the Egyptian superstar.

Saudi sports minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Turki Al-Faisal was asked whether the forward was the "big prize" for the Middle East nation in an interview on the Piers Morgan Uncensored YouTube channel on Thursday.

"Definitely, because if he ticks all the right boxes, even for us, we'd love to have him," the sports minister said. "We feel like we are one with the Egyptians, from our culture and our history and so on." The 32-year-old Salah, who tops the Premier League goalscoring charts with 19 goals this season, said at the end of December he was still "far away" from reaching an agreement over a new deal at Anfield.

Liverpool manager Slot reiterated at his pre-match press conference on Friday that the club want to keep hold of their talismanic striker, who joined the club in 2017.

"We want him to extend, of course, as well," he said. "That is clear, but I'm not surprised that Saudi wants him, I'm also not surprised if other countries want him as well."

"He's old and wise enough, he's done so many smart things in his career that he will make the right decision for himself and hopefully for us as well." Referring to the Saudi links, the Dutchman added: "He's done so well without my advice for a long time, so he can probably keep doing what is best for his career, even without my advice. "But my advice to him would be different from the one you just mentioned."

Liverpool captain Virgil van Dijk and England defender Trent Alexander-Arnold are also out of contract at the end of the season, giving the Premier League leaders a headache. Slot, whose team face in-form Bournemouth on Saturday, said it "would be ridiculous" if he did not speak to his players about the future, but he refused to be drawn on the progress of contract talks.

Man City face Real Madrid in pick of Champions League play-off ties

PARIS (AFP): Reigning champions Real Madrid will face 2023 winners Manchester City in the plum tie of the play-off round of this season's Champions League, following Friday's draw.

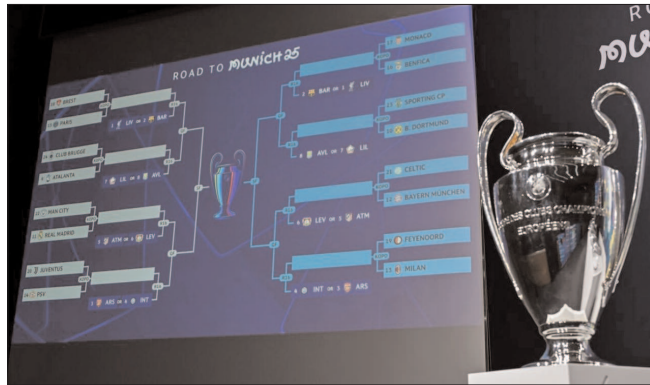
It is the fourth year running in which the sides have been drawn against each other in a knockout tie, with Real emerging victorious in a penalty shoot-out in the quarter-finals last season.

City, who scraped through after finishing 22nd in the league phase in this first season of the new format for Europe's elite club competition, knew they faced a tough draw with Bayern Munich their other possible opponents.

Pep Guardiola's team will be at home in the first leg before going to Spain for the return.

"It feels like a derby already," Guardiola said at a press conference on Friday. "Four years in a row facing Real Madrid. But Bayern or Madrid -- both was really tough. Hopefully we can arrive in the first leg here, and then at Madrid, as best as possible."

Real won a dramatic semi-final tie on the way to lifting the trophy in 2022, but City gained revenge at the same stage in 2023 as they went on to become champions. Carlo Ancelotti's side then came out



on top last season, while Real won a semi-final tie between the sides in 2016 and City won in the last 16 in 2020.

"We know each other very well," said Emilio Butragueno, Real's director of institutional relations, to Spanish media. "They are a really great team who have the experience and are used to these types of games, so they will be very difficult opponents."

"But this competition is very special for us and we will play the second leg at home, at the Bernabeu." Elsewhere, Celtic will face six-time European champions Bayern, after the Scottish champions reached the knockout stage for the first time in 12 years.

All-French tie

Paris Saint-Germain will play surprise package Brest in an all-French tie, while Juventus play PSV Eindhoven and Feyenoord take on AC Milan in two ties between former winners of the competition.

Last season's Europa League winners Atalanta, who finished one place outside the top eight which offered a direct path to the last 16, will face Club Brugge of Belgium.

Sporting of Portugal were drawn against last season's runners-up Borussia Dortmund, while Monaco will take on Benfica having lost at home to the Portuguese club in the league phase.

The play-off ties will take place next month, with the eight winners going through to

the last 16 along with the eight highest-placed sides from the league phase.

Liverpool, Barcelona, Arsenal, Inter Milan, Atletico Madrid, Bayer Leverkusen, Lille and Aston Villa are the sides already through to the last 16.

Those teams finished in the top eight in the standings in the 36-team league phase -- the first season of the new format for the competition saw all competing clubs placed together in one giant pool, each playing eight games against eight different opponents.

The draw for the remainder of the competition is partly predetermined, meaning that whoever emerges triumphant in the tie between City and Real knows they will play either Atletico Madrid or Bayer Leverkusen in the last 16.

The draw for the last 16 onwards will take place on February 21, and it remains to be seen if Liverpool derive any advantage from having come first in the league phase.

Arne Slot's team will play either PSG or Brest, or Monaco or Benfica, in the last 16 in March.

This season's Champions League final will be played at the Allianz Arena in Munich on Saturday, May 31.



In brief

8 nabbed for having illegal weapons

RAWALPINDI (APP): As many as eight accused were arrested from different areas of the Rawalpindi district on Friday for having illegal weapons and ammunition. According to a Rawalpindi Police spokesman, the accused including Faisal, Faiz, Zameer Ali, Zubair and Waqas were respectively arrested by the Airport, Taxila, Wah Cantt, Gujar Khan and Rawat Police for having a 30 caliber pistol each. Similarly, the Wah Saddar Police also nabbed three accused Imran Javed, Asif and Waqas on the recovery of a 30 bore pistol from all of them.

SSP holds Khuli Kutcheri

RAWALPINDI (APP): Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Operations, Rawalpindi Kashif Zulfiqar here on Tuesday held a 'Khuli Kutcheri' under the open door policy of the Punjab government in Police Lines Headquarters. In the 'Khuli Kutcheri', the citizens presented their applications for redressal of the complaints, on which the SSP issued orders and directed the authorities concerned to take immediate action. The 'Khuli Kutcheries' are not only ensuring the redressal of the complaints of the citizens but also helping to improve the quality of policing, Kashif Zulfiqar said. On some applications submitted in the 'Khuli Kutcheri' the SSP ordered the officers concerned to sort out the requests according to merit and sent the reports within the stipulated time frame. Speaking on the occasion, the SSP said that the 'Khuli Kutcheries' are being held not only to resolve the complaints of the citizens, but the quality of policing is also being further improved. He directed the police officers to make efforts to improve service delivery.

Police arrest 87 beggars

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi district police on the directives of City Police Officer (CPO) Rawalpindi launched a crackdown against professional beggars and arrested 87 beggars during last 24 hours. According to a police spokesman, special squads have been formed to take action against professional beggars. Police stations, anti-baggage squads and traffic police are conducting operations to net professional beggars from city roads and intersections. The professional beggars cause traffic congestion on busy roads and inconvenience to the citizens, he said adding, most of the professional beggars are also involved in different crimes. FIRs have also been registered against the arrested beggars, he informed. The spokesman said that police launched the crackdown against professional beggars across the city according to the vision of the Chief Minister Punjab.

Bike lifter held

RAWALPINDI (APP): The New Town Police of Rawalpindi on Thursday arrested a bike lifter and busted a two-member gang of thieves. According to a police spokesman, the accused bike lifter was identified as Amanat Ali. The police also recovered 10 stolen motorcycles from his possession. Likewise, the two-member gang involved in thefts comprising Abdul Rehman and Sunny Raza was also held by the New Town Police. The stolen amount of Rs 28,600 was also recovered from them.



RAWALPINDI: President Asif Ali Zardari being briefed about the National Aerospace Science and Technology Park (NASTP), during his visit to NASTP.

Speakers for establishing strong relations between Pak-Bangladesh

ISLAMABAD (APP): Speakers at a seminar emphasized that Pakistan and Bangladesh are two brotherly Islamic nations, and there is an urgent need to establish strong and sustainable relations between them in all spheres.

The seminar titled "Bangladesh-Pakistan Relations: A New Era of Cooperation" was organized under the auspices of the Isar Trust and Riphah International University here yesterday.

The special guest of the event was the High Commissioner of Bangladesh to Pakistan, Iqbal Hussain Khan. Other

distinguished attendees included Dr. Anis Ahmed, Vice Chancellor of Riphah International University; Syed Muhammad Bilal, President of Isar Trust; Dr. Rashid Aftab; Lieutenant General (Retd.) Naem Lodhi; Ambassador Moazzam Khan; Naem Anwar; and other speakers.

During the seminar, proposals were made to establish think tanks and funds to assist each other during natural disasters.

The importance of working together for the welfare of the people of both countries, especially the youth, was also highlighted. The speakers noted that this

progress comes at a time when Bangladesh and Pakistan are working to resume direct flights and strengthen diplomatic relations after decades of historical tensions.

The seminar also discussed potential areas of cooperation, including education, research, mutual connections, cultural exchanges, defense collaboration, regional security, diplomatic relations, trade, economy, technology, and sustainable development.

Meanwhile, recommendations were also presented to further enhance these areas of cooperation.

ANF recovers over 23 kg drugs

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting 6 operations across the country managed to recover over 23 kg drugs worth Rs 3.9 million and arrested 5 accused, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman here on Friday.

He informed that 100 grams hashish and 10 intoxicated tablets were recovered from the possession of an accused arrested near Punjab Chowk in Mansehra.

The arrested accused confessed to selling drugs to the students of educational institutions.

In another operation, 78 Ice-filled capsules were recovered from the stomach of a passenger going to Doha at Peshawar International Airport.

135 grams ice drug tactfully concealed in jeans was recovered from a parcel booked for Australia through a courier office in Karachi.

19.2 kg hashish was recovered from a tanker intercepted near National Highway Hyderabad and an accused was arrested during the operation.

1.5 kg heroin, 650 grams ice and 200 grams suspicious powder were recovered from the shoulder bag of an accused near Chenab Toll Plaza GT Road Gujrat.

In the 6th operation, 1.655 kg ice drug was recovered from the possession of the accused arrested near Jinnah Bus Terminal Thokar Niaz Baig Lahore.

Separate cases have been registered against the arrested accused under the Narcotics Control Act and further investigations are under process.

Aqeel Ahmad tells PTI to choose dialogue over confrontation

ISLAMABAD (APP): Prime Minister stressed that the PTI leadership must demonstrate a willingness to engage in constructive dialogue, rather than persisting with a confrontational approach that has yielded little progress.

He cautioned that the country cannot afford to be held hostage by political brinkmanship and that all parties must work together to find a way forward.

Aqeel Ahmad also noted that the government is taking concrete steps to address the economic challenges facing the country and that a stable political environment is essential for implementing these reforms.

He expressed hope that the PTI leadership would respond positively to the government's offer and join the negotiating table

in a spirit of cooperation and compromise. Responding to a query about the demand for the release of prisoners from the November 26 incident, he clarified that those not involved in the incident are being released.

However, individuals who were directly implicated or witnessed in the incident will face jail time and any further actions will be taken in accordance with the law and the constitution.

He emphasized that the government does not have the authority to release anyone through an executive order, instead, he stated that the issue will be resolved strictly in accordance with the law, ensuring that due process is followed and justice is served.

Govt approves national policy on countering violent extremism

ISLAMABAD (APP): The federal government has officially approved the National Policy on Countering Violent Extremism, formulated by the National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA).

According to the Press Release issued on Friday, the announcement was made by NACTA member Dr. Khalid Chauhan during a National Dialogue on Countering Violent Extremism, held with the participation of various stakeholders, including representatives from federal ministries, civil society, and international organizations.

The event, attended by the Institute of Islamic Research and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), focused on developing a collective strategy to combat violent extremism in Pakistan. Chairman of the Higher Education Commission (HEC), who participated as the chief guest, highlighted the role of students in fighting extremism and emphasized the power of education in defeating violent ideologies.

During the dialogue, Dr. Khalid Chauhan stated that the approval of this policy reflects the government's strong commitment to eliminating extremism. He added that its successful implementation would lay the foundation for a peaceful society for

future generations. The Director General of the National Commission for Human Development (NCHD) also addressed the participants, stressing the importance of countering extremism and its impact on Pakistan's Human Development Index.

In the opening session, DG NACTA Saleha Zakir Shah, along with government representatives and experts, underscored the need for joint efforts to ensure a peaceful Pakistan. The event concluded with Dr. Khalid Chauhan stating that the dialogue had established a solid foundation for implementing concrete steps in line with the national policy.

CDA, WB join hands to combat smog, improve air quality

ISLAMABAD (APP): World Bank Senior Disaster Risk Management Program Specialist Lesley Y. Cordero assured on Friday his full cooperation to Chairman CDA Muhammad Ali Randhawa in tackling smog-related challenges.

The CDA chairman in a meeting with World Bank delegation led by Lesley Y. Cordero proposed establishing a Carbon Credit Cell within the CDA, seeking the World Bank's technical support in obtaining carbon credits for various green initiatives. Cordero offered assistance in developing short-term, medium-term, and long-term strategies to improve

Islamabad's air quality.

Discussions revolved around formulating effective measures to curb air pollution and ensure a healthier environment for Islamabad's residents.

Chairman Randhawa emphasized the need for a reliable Air Quality Index (AQI) to provide accurate data for public awareness and policy decisions. He underscored the urgency of implementing preventive measures against smog before the peak season begins, stressing the need for strict control over smoke-emitting vehicles.

A key decision taken during the meeting was to

enforce fitness certification for all vehicles in the city to reduce emissions.

The CDA chief reiterated a zero-tolerance policy against vehicles contributing to pollution, highlighting the introduction of electric buses as a major step toward sustainable urban transport. He also outlined plans for an extensive tree plantation campaign this year, aimed at mitigating air pollution.

Chairman Randhawa reaffirmed CDA's commitment to leveraging global expertise in environmental management, ensuring that Islamabad remains a cleaner and greener city for its residents.

DIG vows strict action against criminals

ISLAMABAD (APP): Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Muhammad Jawad Tariq on Friday chaired a crime meeting attended by SSP

Operations Muhammad Shoaib Khan, Zonal SPs, SP Dolphin, SDPOs, SHOs, and the in-charge of AVLS.

A public relations officer told APP that during the meeting, DIG introduced all officers and directed them to take strict

legal action against criminals involved in serious crimes, ensuring they are brought to justice.

DIG Tariq emphasized the immediate arrest of absconding suspects and instructed officers to conduct investigations on merit.

"The prosecution of arrested suspects should be based on solid evidence to ensure they receive due punishment," he said.

DIG Tariq also ordered more effective and purposeful patrolling, strict action against illegal display of weapons, and an indiscriminate crackdown on land grabbers. He stressed the importance of arresting proclaimed offenders involved in serious crimes.

Furthermore, he directed SHOs to address public complaints at the police station level and resolve

citizens' issues on a priority basis. "Officers must improve their performance; crime meetings will be held in every zone," he added.

DIG Tariq reiterated a zero-tolerance policy against corruption, urging all officers to fulfil their responsibilities professionally. "Negligence in duty will not be tolerated under any circumstances," said DIG Jawad Tariq.

Supreme Court to hear KP Universities' vice chancellors appointment case on Feb 6

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: A three-member bench of the Supreme Court of Pakistan will hear the case regarding the appointment of vice chancellors in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) universities on February 6. The bench will be headed by Justice Amin-ud-Din Khan. The vice chancellor positions in 19 universities of KP have remained vacant for over one and a half years. The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government, led by Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur, has refrained from acting on the recommendations made by the caretaker government in February 2024.

The vice chancellor positions were advertised in 2022 during the previous PTI government, but interviews for potential candidates were not conducted, leading to the matter being

transferred to the caretaker government. After obtaining permission from the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), the caretaker government completed the interview process and prepared panels of three candidates for each university.

During this period, three members of the Academic Search Committee (ASC) resigned, and the caretaker government replaced them as per routine to continue the process. By the end of January 2024, the process was completed, but due to administrative snags, the file containing summary of the recommendations could not reach the Governor KP for his final approval.

Upon assuming power, the PTI government rejected these recommendations and, in July 2024, decided to re-advertise the positions and form a new ASC, which included the same members

except for one. However, some top-listed candidates challenged this decision in the Peshawar High Court (PHC) in August 2024.

The government argued to PHC that the ASC members substituted by the caretaker government were not legally appointed, as the ECP's approval was mandatory. The petitioners, however, contended that while the caretaker government had sought ECP permission to proceed with the vice chancellors' appointing process, replacing a few members for a short 28-day period was a routine matter and did not require ECP's approval.

On August 22, 2024, the PHC ruled in favour of the petitioners and directed the government to complete the process as per the law. Nonetheless, the PTI government filed a Civil Petition for Leave to Appeal (CPLA) in the

Supreme Court in September 2024. The Supreme Court is set to hear the case on February 6.

Currently, 25 out of 34 universities in KP lack permanent vice chancellors, despite the Supreme Court's directive that provincial governments should not leave such positions vacant for more than six months.

As a result, universities are facing severe financial and administrative crises. The PTI government, despite its claims of prioritizing education, has allocated only PKR 3 billion for 34 universities. In contrast, Balochistan has allocated PKR 5 billion for 11 universities, Sindh PKR 32 billion for 26 universities, and Punjab over PKR 12 billion for 52 universities.

University faculty members in KP have strongly criticized the government, accusing it of deliberately pushing universities into

financial distress. They claim that excessive hiring was carried out under weak caretaker administrations, and they demand a thorough investigation into appointments made during the current PTI government's tenure.

Moreover, faculty members have pointed out that many universities in KP are located in conflict-prone areas, where weak administrative structures have turned university hostels into safe havens for miscreants, creating a law and order situation and hardships for students and staff alike.

All eyes are now on the Supreme Court, which is set to hear the case on February 6. Education experts and faculty members hope that the court's decision will ensure a transparent and non-political appointment process for vice chancellors in KP universities.



ISLAMABAD: Journalists hold protest against PECA act outside NPC. —INP Photo

RDA marking dedicated bike lane on Old Airport Road

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi Development Authority (RDA) has begun the marking of a dedicated bike lane on Old Airport Road from Korla

Chowk to Flying Club Chowk to facilitate to cyclists and bikers.

According to a RDA spokesman, RDA under the vision of Director General (DG), RDA Kinza Murtaza, is taking significant strides to promote safe and sustainable transportation options in Rawalpindi city.

This initiative aims to ensure a safer journey for cyclists and bikers while enhancing the overall infrastructure of the city, the spokesperson informed. The project covers a total length of 7 kilometers on both sides of the road, with a track width ranging from 10 to 12 feet, as per the site specifications.

In her message for the general public, the DG RDA said that this initiative aims to improve road

safety and provide a safer, more organized route for cyclists and bikers. The new lane would enhance traffic flow and reduce the risk of road accidents by clearly defining bike paths along one of the city's busiest roads, she added.

"We are committed to making Rawalpindi a more cyclist-friendly city. The new biker-lane is part of our ongoing efforts to improve transportation infrastructure for all the residents, ensuring a safer and more sustainable environment for everyone, said Kinza Murtaza.

The project is expected to be completed very soon, and will serve as a model for future infrastructure projects aimed at promoting alternative transportation options in Rawalpindi.

Rawalpindi Police nab 3 accused with over 2,300 kites

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi Police during their ongoing operations against kite flyers and sellers, arrested five accused with over 2,300 kites and 73 strings on Thursday. Following the directives of City Police Officer Syed Khalid Hamdani, the police vigorously continued the drive against both the kite sellers, a police spokesman said. The Westridge Police, he said, nabbed accused Ikram on the recovery of 1,500 kites and 30 strings from him, while the Airport Police recovered 480 kites and 38 strings from accused Niaz. Similarly, the R A Bazaar Police held accused Youhan Yousuf with 200 kites and 2 strings and the Wah Cantt Police captured accused Moez Amir with 48 kites and 3 strings.

Water shortages

KABUL (Amu TV): Nearly 39 percent of households in Afghanistan are struggling with water shortages as sources dry up, OCHA said. According to OCHA, 23 percent of Afghan households rely on unimproved water sources, while 28 percent lack proper sanitation facilities. "In 2025, partners require \$264 million to prioritize water, sanitation, and hygiene services but have only received \$8.4 million so far," OCHA Afghanistan said in a post on X.

Women don't need seminars

KABUL (Ariana News): The head of a humanitarian organization has said that Afghan women do not need seminars abroad, but that Western diplomats should return to Afghanistan and fight for their rights. Jan Egeland, the secretary general of the Norwegian Refugee Council told France 24 in an interview broadcast Thursday that only a few European diplomats are traveling to Kabul, that too for a short mission.

Asia is comparable to a living body composed of soil and water. The heart that beats inside the body is Afghanistan. The destruction of Afghanistan would be the destruction of Asia. And in its progress and prosperity lies the well-being of Asia. - Allama Iqbal

Drug trafficking nearly ‘zero’: Islamic Emirate

KABUL (TOLONews): The Islamic Emirate, in response to remarks by an Iranian official regarding the increase in drug smuggling from Afghanistan, stated that poppy cultivation and drug trafficking in the country have nearly reached zero.

Zabihullah Mujahid, the spokesperson of the Islamic Emirate, said that Kabul remains committed to its agreements with Tehran, and there should be no concerns in this regard.

“Afghanistan pledges that there should be no worries. We prevent all types of smuggling. Drug production in Afghanistan has been eliminated, and drug cultivation and trafficking are nearly zero. This itself indicates that if there was a

smuggling problem in the past, it has ended or is naturally coming to an end,” the spokesperson further stated.

Ali Akbar Pourjamshidian, Iran’s deputy minister of interior, had earlier expressed concerns about what he described as an increase in drug smuggling and insecurity in the eastern parts of his country, bordering Pakistan and Afghanistan. He claimed that large drug reserves still exist in Afghanistan.

“Although the leader of Afghanistan has declared a ban on drug cultivation and opium poppy, we believe that there are still large drug reserves in Afghanistan, which are transferred to Iran through the eastern borders. This issue affects

border security, our national security, and our social security,” stated Ali Akbar Pourjamshidian.

“The Iranian mafia operating in Iran had, and still has, vast drug reserves. However, if both countries can create coordination and equal cooperation between themselves, it will be effective and impactful in the fight against drugs,” said Fazl Rahman Oria, a political analyst.

The Iranian Deputy Minister of Security and Law Enforcement also expressed concerns about terrorism threats from the eastern borders with Afghanistan and Pakistan.

However, the Islamic Emirate assures that it remains committed to its agreements with Iran.

Free eye treatment begins in Kunar province



KUNAR (TOLONews): A charitable organization has launched a free eye treatment campaign in Kunar province of Afghanistan.

According to officials, 250 eye patients who cannot afford treatment in private hospitals will receive free surgeries and medical care as part of this initiative.

Shakerullah Ameen, the head of the charity organization, stated: “We have a program for 250 fellow citizens, and its implementation has already begun. All necessary examinations and medications for those requiring surgery will be provided free of charge.”

Muzaffar Khan Mukhlis, the head of public health in Kunar, also emphasized: “For those who want to serve this community and its people, our responsibility in public health is to facilitate their efforts, and we have done so.”

Several patients have called on officials and charitable organizations to continue the free treatment program in Kunar province.

Abdul Rahman, a resident of Marawara district in Kunar, has been struggling with an eye disease for years but has been unable to afford treatment due to financial difficulties.

His vision problems have made daily life chal-

lenging, and he has now traveled to Asadabad, the capital of Kunar, for free treatment.

“There is a kind of veil over my eyes; it has improved slightly, but my vision has deteriorated. I cannot read books. I suffer a lot at night and don’t know what to do,” he said.

“I came here because these surgeries are free and are being conducted at no cost to the people,” said Another resident of Kunar, Sayed Mahmood.

“Such organizations should be supported, and they should be provided with facilities and suitable environments so that they can better serve the people of Afghanistan in their specialized fields,” Mohammad Ghaus, another Kunar resident, also emphasized.

According to health officials, earlier this year, some charitable organizations, in collaboration with the Ministry of Public Health and the Afghan Red Crescent Society, facilitated free eye treatments in Helmand, Herat, and several other provinces.

15,000 tons apples exported

MAIDAN WARDAK (TOLONews): Local officials in Maidan Wardak say that 15,000 metric tons of apples from the province have been exported to India, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, and some European countries.

150,000 metric tons of apples have been harvested from the province’s orchards this year, they said.

Eid Mohammad Zaheri, the head of agricultural affairs at the Department of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock in Maidan Wardak, stated: “This year, more than 150,000 metric tons of apples have been collected from farmers. This is good news for farmers, as apple production has increased by 20 to 25 percent compared to previous years.”

Several orchard owners in Maidan Wardak have called on officials to

improve the market for selling their products.

“Before the harvest season, prices are high, but as soon as the apples reach the market, prices drop significantly, and we can’t even cover our costs. We have dug large wells for irrigation and worked hard, but at the time of sale, even the cost of fertilizers and pesticides is not recovered,” said Mohammad Shah, an orchard owner.

According to the findings, the number of traffic accidents in the first five months of this year was high because there were two Eids during this period and many traffic accidents occurred during the previous Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Adha.

Reasons behind traffic accidents and solutions

Wahidullah, a resident of Kunar’s Asmar district was injured in the Ghazni traffic accident said: “I was going to Kandahar, I bought a ticket in Kabul, I was on my way out when suddenly this accident happened, the vehicle was also driven in a high speed. My request to drivers is that this road is not a one-way road, they should be careful.”

Farzad Akbari, a resident of Mazar-i-Sharif’s seventh Police District, said: “About eight months ago, his cousin lost his life in a traffic accident, saying it was a very painful event.”

He called on drivers and said: “My dearest cousin lost his life in a traffic accident. It is a very painful thing. However, I urge all drivers to not drive too fast and to be careful.”

Akbari also called on the government to prevent these incidents, as traffic

Food prices remain high

KABUL (TOLONews): Since Wednesday evening, the value of a US dollar decreased by four afghani.

Afghanistan’s central bank has stated that through the implementation of rational monetary policies, it has been able to stabilize the afghani against the dollar.

Due to the recent increase in the dollar’s value in the country’s markets, the Prime Minister’s Office issued a decree to prevent the smuggling of dollars out of the country.

Additionally, the central bank injected \$90 million into the foreign exchange market in the past two weeks.

“As we promised our dear citizens, the central bank has sufficient resources, and we have been able to maintain the afghani’s value against the dollar by implementing rational monetary policies. We did not allow severe fluctuations to occur,” Haseebullah Noori, the spokesperson of Afghanistan’s central bank, told TOLONews.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Finance has attributed the depreciation of the afghani against the dollar to widespread negative propaganda and said efforts are ongoing to maintain the permanent stability of the afghani against foreign currencies, particularly the dollar.

“The national currency has depreciated against foreign currencies, especially the dollar, and the main reason is believed to be large-scale negative propaganda, which does not reflect the country’s actual positive economic situation,” stated Ahmad Wali Haqmal, the spokesperson for the Ministry of Finance.

At the same time, as the dollar’s value increased, food prices also rose. Some Kabul residents say that despite a slight drop in the dollar’s value, no noticeable decrease in food prices has been observed.

“The dollar rate dropped, but food prices remained unchanged. We urge the Islamic Emirate to regulate prices, assign a committee, and inspect shops,” said Mohammad Zarif, a Kabul resident.

“If food prices decrease, a laborer earning 50 or 100 afghani a day will be able to buy a couple of kilos of flour or oil,” said another Kabul resident, Khadim Hussain. However, the Kabul Municipality pledged that it is working to stabilize the prices of essential goods and will take legal action against hoarders.

“Imported goods are affected when the dollar rises, but we will not allow anyone to sell at fake or higher-than-market rates,” stated Nematullah Barakzai, a representative of Kabul Municipality. This comes as, in less than a week, the Afghani lost significant value against the dollar, with the exchange rate reaching as high as 81 afghani per dollar.

WHO: US withdrawal threatens anti-polio efforts

KABUL (TOLONews): Hanan Balkhy, the Regional Director of the World Health Organization For the Eastern Mediterranean, has expressed concern over the United States’ decision to withdraw from the organization.

Balkhy stated that halting US support will create significant challenges, particularly in the fight against polio in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

This comes as polio has yet to be fully eradicated in Afghanistan.

“The announcement of the United States’ withdrawal from WHO is undoubtedly regrettable, especially because the United States has provided significant support over the past seventy years since the establishment of the WHO. This includes substantial contributions to the Eastern Mediterranean region, particularly in combating polio. We are now in the final stages of eradicating polio in the last two countries in the world—Afghanistan and Pakistan,”



the regional director emphasized. WHO has funded various health projects in Afghanistan. However, what impact would cutting off funding have?

“The World Health Organization has played a major role in this area—both in terms of training and monitoring and reporting. The organization also implemented educational

programs, such as those for polio vaccination, to encourage citizens to vaccinate their precious children and save them from paralysis,” said Najibullah Qasemi, a doctor.

“Most of the projects in Afghanistan managed by WHO were funded directly by the US government. Unfortunately, with this withdrawal, there is a possibility

ty that the continuation of these projects will face significant challenges.” Another doctor Sayed Abdullah Ahmadi, remarked.

Afghanistan continues to battle polio. While the Ministry of Public Health denied reports of any positive cases last year, WHO recorded over 20 confirmed polio cases in Afghanistan during the same period.

Afghanistan Embassy entrusted to Taliban-appointed individual

KABUL (Khaama Press): Following the closure of the Afghanistan’s Embassy in Oslo, a reliable source in Norway has revealed that the host country has handed over the care of the embassy building to someone approved by the Taliban.

Norway closed the Afghanistan’s Embassy in September of last year at the request of the Taliban. For the past three years, the embassy had been managed by diplomats loyal to the former Afghanistan’s government.

Yusuf Ghafurzi, the former Afghanistan’s ambassador to Oslo, announced in September that his mission

had ended after serving four and a half years in Norway.

Sources stated that the handover of the embassy building to a Taliban-approved individual does not signify the reopening of the embassy. Any official reopening would require the removal of legal barriers by the host country.

It has been reported that the person assigned by the Taliban to care for the embassy building currently resides in Oslo.

The Afghanistan’s Embassy in Oslo announced in September that, at the request of the Norwegian government, the embassy would remain

closed until September 12, 2024. During this period, all movable and immovable assets, including the embassy building, would be entrusted to the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs as a trust until a legitimate government, based on the will of the people, is formed in Afghanistan.

Both Norwegian and Taliban officials have yet to comment officially on the handover of the Afghanistan’s Embassy building.

International organizations and Western countries have strongly criticized the Taliban’s current restrictions on women, particular-

ly the banning of their participation in public life. These measures have been condemned for violating women’s basic human rights and limiting their access to education, work, and healthcare, further isolating Afghanistan from the global community.

The continued tensions between Norway and the Taliban reflect broader international concerns over the Taliban’s policies, particularly regarding women’s rights.

As the situation remains unresolved, it highlights the challenges of navigating diplomatic relations with Afghanistan under Taliban rule.

Afghanistan become North Korea, says former French Ambassador

KABUL (Khaama Press): David Martinon, former French ambassador to Afghanistan, stated in an interview with Nice Matin newspaper that the Taliban have turned Afghanistan into an “Islamic North Korea.” He emphasized that the outlook for change in the country under Taliban rule is not promising in the short term.

Martinon, who is now based in South Africa, has explored the situation in Afghanistan in his new documentary, The Fall of Kabul, which is based on his own book. He considers

the fall of Kabul a failure for both the international community and Afghanistan’s political class.

He mentioned that the Taliban have created an atmosphere of terror, depriving women of access to public spaces, education, and medical training. He described this situation as “domestic slavery” and noted that the condition of women has become increasingly difficult.

Martinon also pointed out that the French diplomatic team carefully carried out evacuation operations in the days leading up

to the fall of Kabul, making efforts to rescue at-risk Afghans.

The documentary The Fall of Kabul, written and directed by Thomas Bremond, David Priser, Nils Montel, and Miriam W, recounts the events of Martinon and his team’s three-year mission in Kabul. It is set to air on January 31 on the French network Canal+.

Meanwhile, Martinon’s reflections on Afghanistan under the Taliban highlight the dire situation, especially for women and vulnerable groups, and underscore

the international community’s failure to prevent the collapse of the Afghanistan’s government. As the documentary airs, it will shed more light on the challenges faced by the diplomatic teams working to save those in danger.

This documentary will provide a detailed and personal perspective on the final days in Kabul, offering a critical insight into the broader implications of the Taliban’s return to power. It will likely spark further discussions on the international community’s role in Afghanistan’s ongoing crisis.

2,775 people killed, injured in 639 traffic accidents nationwide

KABUL (Pajhwok): Nearly 770 people have been killed and 2,008 others wounded in 639 traffic accidents in the first 10 months of the ongoing solar year nationwide, Pajhwok Afghan News has learned.

Figures, however, showed 32 percent drop in casualties in the past five months now compared to the past.

More than half of these deaths and injuries occurred in Ghazni, Samangan, Maidan Wardak, Baghlan, Laghman, Faryab, and Badakhshan provinces, with the highest number of deaths and injuries occurring on December 29; on that day, 50 people were killed and 70 others injured in two incidents in Ghazni, and five people were killed and injured in Parwan.

Figures recorded with Pajhwok showed that 68 percent of all fatalities and injuries are adult males, eight percent are females, and 16 percent are persons of unknown gender. According to previous Pajhwok reports, the reason for the higher number of fatalities and injuries among men in traffic accidents is that they travel more than children and

women.

Similarly, Pajhwok Afghan News’ findings showed that the highest number of people killed in Ghazni, Badakhshan, Baghlan, and Faryab, while the highest number of people were injured in Ghazni, Maidan Wardak, Samangan, and Laghman provinces.

The death toll could be higher because this figure is only for the 639 traffic accidents that Pajhwok Afghan News Agency has reported; Pajhwok did not report traffic accidents in which no one is killed or fewer than five people got injured.

91 people killed, 280 injured in Ghazni, 78 killed, 87 injured in Badakhshan, 66 killed, 110 injured in Baghlan, 58 killed, 109 injured in Faryab, 43 killed, 155 injured in Samangan, 42 killed, 51 injured in Herat, 37 killed, 156 injured in Maidan Wardak, 32 killed, 140 injured in Laghman, 28 killed, 115 injured in Parwan, 26 killed, 57 injured in Nangarhar, 25 killed, 103 injured in Bamyan, 24 killed, 39 injured in Balkh, 22 killed, 31 injured in Helmand, 20 killed, 48 injured in Farah, 15 killed, 34 injured in

Daikundi, and 15 killed, 39 injured in Kapisa.

Similarly, 14 killed, 54 injured in Jawzjan, 14 killed, 24 injured in Nuristan, 14 killed, 19 injured in Uruzgan, 12 killed, 22 injured in Ghor, 12 killed, 75 injured in Logar, 12 killed, 24 injured in Sar-e-Pul, 10 killed, 43 injured in Badghis, 8 killed, 19 injured in Kabul, 8 killed, 6 injured in Panjshir, six killed, 30 injured in Kandahar, six killed, 30 injured in Kunar, five killed, 11 injured in Khost, five killed, 27 injured in Paktia, five killed, 25 injured in Zabol, four killed, 14 injured in Kunduz, four killed, 13 injured in Paktika, three killed, nine injured in Nimroz, and three killed and nine injured in Takhar.

Traffic accident statistics recorded by Pajhwok show that the number of fatalities and injuries due to traffic accidents has decreased by nearly 32 percent compared to the first five months of the current solar year.

In the first five months, 1,648 people were killed and injured in 458 traffic accidents, and in the last five months, 1,127 people were killed and injured in 181 traffic accidents.

According to the findings, the number of traffic accidents in the first five months of this year was high because there were two Eids during this period and many traffic accidents occurred during the previous Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Adha.

Reasons behind traffic accidents and solutions

Wahidullah, a resident of Kunar’s Asmar district was injured in the Ghazni traffic accident said: “I was going to Kandahar, I bought a ticket in Kabul, I was on my way out when suddenly this accident happened, the vehicle was also driven in a high speed. My request to drivers is that this road is not a one-way road, they should be careful.”

Farzad Akbari, a resident of Mazar-i-Sharif’s seventh Police District, said: “About eight months ago, his cousin lost his life in a traffic accident, saying it was a very painful event.”

He called on drivers and said: “My dearest cousin lost his life in a traffic accident. It is a very painful thing. However, I urge all drivers to not drive too fast and to be careful.”

Akbari also called on the government to prevent these incidents, as traffic

accidents have increased in recent days.

Khalifa Raosul, a resident of western Herat province, said around one month before six people were killed in a traffic accident and around 16 people, including their relatives, were injured.

He said: “The government should hold a meeting with companies to control vehicle speed; because this [Kabul-Herat] highway is a public road and connects one province to another; there is a lot of traffic on it and drivers should be careful.”

Mohammad Nabi Afghan, Deputy Chairman of the Land Transport Coordination Council, told Pajhwok Afghan News that unfortunately many traffic accidents happen on highways and it has different factors.

He said the construction of substandard and poor roads, the presence of large boulders on highways, the movement of vehicles on both sides of the highway, lack of weight control, the lack of specialized personnel in the construction and design of highways, the presence of substandard policies in the transportation sector, the presence

and increase of vehicles that violate Afghanistan’s traffic laws, the conflict of policies, plans, and plans of transport-related agencies, the lack of coordination between traffic and transportation agency officials, forcing drivers to drive for more than eight hours, and some other factors are some of the factors that cause many traffic accidents on highways.

He asked on government to take action in this regard and added: “The causes of traffic accidents are different, but most of them are attributed to the government, we have talked a lot and discussed it repeatedly over the past two to three years since the takeover of the IEA, and I have also spent a lot of resources on these issues.”

Mohammad Nabi said: “Roads should be built according to load; the design and structure of the road are from the time of Zahir Shah, there is a large volume of traffic on it, four to five thousand vehicles travel on it every day, and right-hand traffic is allowed to pass freely.”

Referring to the recent decline in traffic accidents, he said: “There has been a slight decrease, there is

more and more control, checkpoints have been set up, but roads need to be built, control has been established and people have become aware.”

He said that there are also problems among drivers, and transport companies also have their own problems and mistakes that they must pay attention to and prevent.

Col. Abdul Wadud Khairkhawa, told Pajhwok Afghan News that unfortunately more traffic accidents happen and people’s lives are lost.

Referring to the casualty figures caused by traffic accidents, he said: “The numbers you get from health centers are accurate because all victims are registered there and are relatively accurate, but your statistics are lower for traffic accidents, more than a thousand cases have been registered, the deaths are accurate, and the number of injuries may be three percent higher than your figures.”

The poor quality of roads and bridges, obvious and hidden technical problems and malfunctions of vehicles, carelessness and unprofessionalism of drivers, negligence of transport

companies, and the hiring of inexperienced people by these companies are the causes of traffic accidents on highways,” said Khairkhawa.

Referring to the traffic control and the prevention of traffic accidents, he said: “Traffic flow should always be under control; fortunately, we have this plan, we send the plans to the relevant managements and it is already working, it is the efforts of this administration that these incidents are rare... Our roads are under control, our traffic police are working actively, and the traffic administration keeps everything under control by creating sound policies and sending them to the relevant managements, and we strived to prevent traffic accidents from occurring on the highways.”

He also believed that lack of coordination and conflicting policies between traffic and transportation agencies were the causes of traffic accidents, but added that this problem has been addressed in the newly developed plan of this agency, and with its implementation, this shortcoming would be eliminated.



RAWALPINDI: President Asif Ali Zardari being briefed about National Aerospace Science and Technology Park.

PTI planning to sell land of universities: Aimal

F.P. Report

MARDAN: The central and provincial leaders of Awami National Party here on Friday paid rich tributes to their founding leaders on the occasion of 37th death anniversary of Fakhar-e-Afghan Bacha Khan, also known as Abdul Ghaffar Khan, and the 19th death anniversary of Khan Abdul Wali Khan.

In this regard to remember both the great Pakhtun leaders, a ceremony related to death anniversaries of Abdul Ghafar Khan Baba and Abdul Wali Khan Baba, was held in Mardan.

On the occasion, the ANP central president Aimal Wali Khan, secretary general Dr Mohammad Saleem Khan, provincial president Mian Ifthikhar Hussain, provincial general secretary Hussain Shah Yousafzai along with other central and provincial leaders and large number of workers attended the death anniversaries' ceremony.

Addressing on the occasion, the ANP central president Aimal Wali Khan alleged that more than fifty-percent fake votes were polled in the last general with the purpose to snatch seats from Awami National Party. He challenged that ANP would be the largest winning party if free and fair probe was conducted in the matter related to rigging in the last general elections of Pakistan.

He accused that the Pakhtuns' mandate was theft and the power of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province was handed over to politically immature and incapable people who had ruined the KPK on all levels. The ANP chief blamed that the PTI provincial rulers could not built a single school but they were planning to sell land of universities of the province. He reminded that earlier, the PTI leadership had sold government vehicles, buffalos and in the end wrest watch from Thosha Khana.

"We are following the ideology of

Abdul Ghafar Khan Baba and Wali Khan Baba," he maintained. On the occasion, he claimed that ANP was against the Pecca Act and they were standing with free media. "We have rendered matchless sacrifices for restoration of peace as they have been stood like of rock against the militancy and other cruelties which are going on the Pakhtun soil," he added.

Referring towards the militant related activities, he blamed that it was not the fight of Islam rather it was the fight to usurp and grab natural resources and other valuable items in the country, adding that the Pakhtuns' minerals were occupied by some forceful powers of the country as they were smuggling those minerals to other places for their personnel interest.

While addressing on the occasion, the former chief minister KPK Ameer Haider Khan Hoti asked the PTI provincial rulers to stop political victimization as they would take to task all those people responsible for the said act when the ANP would come into power.

Haider Khan Hoti blamed that the provincial kitty was empty that was why doctors, teachers, municipal employees and even people of all sectors were on strike and protest against the PTI government. He said that the incumbent provincial rulers were going to sale out lands of educational institutions but the ANP leaders and works would strongly resist the said move of provincial government.

The provincial president of ANP Mian Ifthikhar Hussain while addressing the party activists, said that they were following the non-violence ideology of Baha Khan and Wali Khan. He claimed that Khan Abdul Ghafar Khan Baba had struggled for humanity and equality. He said that they wanted maintenance of peace on Pakhtun land. He said that they could progress and go forward only when they would adopt the ideology of non-violence.

President visits NASTP

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: President Asif Ali Zardari visited the National Aerospace Science & Technology Park (NASTP), a flagship project spearheaded by Pakistan Air Force.

During the visit, the President was briefed in detail regarding various set-ups established at NASTP. Declaring NASTP a major landmark in PAF's journey towards progress, the Chief of the Air Staff was also present on the occasion. He emphasized that the project is of national importance, poised to form basis of knowledge and technology-based economy in Pakistan. NASTP aims to bridge the gap by seamlessly fusing private and public sector enterprises in Space, Cyber, IT, Artificial Intelligence & Aerospace domains.

It was emphasized that the National Aerospace Science & Technology Park is all set to become one of the best Aerospace, Cyber & IT clusters in the world and will transform the national landscape with design, R&D and innovation centres for emerging and disruptive technologies to foster research, innovation and development in related technologies. This endeavour will for sure maximise social, economic, security and scientific dividends for the country.

The President lauded PAF, and its skilled personnel and conveyed his admiration for the state-of-the-art technological ecosystem witnessed during his visit to the National Aerospace Science & Technology Park which will serve as a beacon of innovation to promote futuristic aerospace and aviation capabilities. He also commended Pakistan Air Force's leadership for the vision and proactive approach towards addressing modern warfare challenges and completing this project of national strategic importance in an unprecedented time frame.

PHC extends bail of Tarakai brothers

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: A divisional bench of Peshawar High Court (PHC) comprising Justice Syed Arshad Ali and Justice Waqar Ahmad has extended protective bail of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leader & Member of the National Assembly (MNA) Shahram Tarakai and Provincial Minister Faisal Khan Tarakai, and restrained the relevant authorities from arresting them, on Friday.

The counsel Muhammad Asif Babar advocate appeared before the court on behalf of the petitioners. He informed the court that the petitioners had submitted applications seeking details of the cases registered against them.

On January 21, the court had heard the case and directed the government to submit a report on the cases registered against the petitioners. However, the court's written order did not mention the extension of protective bail.

The petitioners' counsel requested the court to extend the protective bail. The court accepted the request and extended the protective bail of Shahram Tarakai and Faisal Khan Tarakai. The court also directed the federal government and relevant authorities not to arrest the petitioners in any registered case until the next hearing and to submit a detailed report on the cases registered against them.

Ramazan package in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Govt to provide Rs 10000 cash assistance to 5000 families

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has decided to provide Rs.10 thousand cash assistance to as many as five thousand families in each and every provincial constituency as Ramazan package. It will also establish a proper cell in the Chief Minister's Secretariat to keep the prices of essential commodities under control and check hoarding and profiteering.

This was disclosed by the Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Khan Gandapur while chairing 22nd meeting of the Provincial Cabinet here on Friday. The cabinet meeting was attended by Ministers, Advisors, Special Assistants, Additional Chief Secretaries, Senior Member Board of Revenue and Administrative Secretaries. The Chief Minister directed the cabinet members to be prepared for keeping close contact with the people at the grass root level to ensure that nobody takes undue benefit from the needs of the people during the holy month of Ramazan. He also said that all MPAs will be asked to help prepare the lists of such deserving families so that the aforementioned assistance reaches them (the deserving families) without any discrimination. The Chief Minister also directed his cabinet colleagues to ensure their visits to each and every corner of the Province and interact with the people at large and include their inputs in their proposals for the next Annual Development Program. He directed that work must be started in preparation for the next year ADP, particularly when the provincial government has come out of ructions of the throw forward liabilities. He said that while the government had achieved a 90 per cent target, they must try to achieve a cent per cent target next year. While recommending schemes, the Chief Minister said that the MPs must ensure their schemes are viable, self-sustainable, and beneficial to the general masses.

The Cabinet on this occasion approved the revised PC-1/DCE'S of the project "Up-gradation of IRNUM PET-CT/Cyclotron Project". This project is aimed at uplifting the infrastructure and provision of diagnostic facilities in therapeutic cancer treatment to the patients. It also approved the extension of the 'D-Talk and Insulin for life' project with the help of foreign grant worth US\$ 5.00 Million. This project provides free-of-cost insulin and medicines to the diabetic population of the province with particular focus on needy patients. At present

Kundi advocates due rights of KP journalists from Centre govt

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A delegation from the Khyber Union of Journalists (KhUJ) met with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Governor Faisal Karim Kundi on Friday to discuss the challenges facing the media industry in the province.

The delegation included KhUJ President Kashifuddin Syed, Senior Vice President Imran Ayaz, Vice President Shehzad Ahmed, General Secretary Irshad Ali, Joint Secretary Shahid Khan, Finance Secretary Ameer Maavia, and Executive Council members Saif-ul-Islam Saifi, Shah Faisal, Arshad Dar, Asim Shiraz, Jehanzaib Sarhadi, and Ghulam Ghaus. Peshawar Press Club President M. Riaz, General Secretary Tayyab Usman, and senior journalist Shamim Shahid attended the meeting as special invitees.

During the meeting, the delegation raised concerns about the federal government's lack of attention to the media sector in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the growing challenges for journalists, and the economic difficulties faced by media workers.

KhUJ President Kashifuddin Syed highlighted that the federal government had completely ignored the KhUJ and the Peshawar Press Club, with no budget allocation for journalists in the province, which he termed an injustice.

He further pointed out that recent downsizing in the media industry had led to a sharp rise in unemployment, with more than 200 journalists losing their jobs and struggling to make ends meet. He lamented that no federal minister or the prime minister

KP CM launches scholarships for students

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: As another significant step towards promoting higher education in the province, Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Ali Amin Khan Gandapur, has launched scholarships under the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Education Foundation for students enrolled in higher educational institutions. In this regard, ceremony was held at the Chief Minister's Secretariat in Peshawar, attended by Provincial Minister for Higher Education Meena Khan Afridi, Secretary for Higher Education Kamran Ahmad Afridi, Managing Director of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Education Foundation Zarif-ul-Maani, and other officials.

According to details, the scholarship program will provide scholarships to 204 students based on merit and in-affordability. The initiative will cost Rs 20 million during the current fiscal year. Through these scholarships, students from the province will be able to get free education in different higher educational institutions across the country.

On this occasion, the Chief Minister also announced special scholarships for students from backward districts of the province. He stated that the provincial government would provide an additional amount of Rs 100 million as seed money for this purpose. This will enhance the scholarship seed money from Rs 300 million to Rs 400 million. The additional Rs 100 million will be exclusively allocated for scholarships for students from under-privileged areas.

In his address, the Chief Minister emphasized that the promoting education in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa one of the top priority of the incumbent provincial government, adding that government is spending huge resources for the purpose. He stated that the seed money for the Chief Minister's Education Endowment Fund has also been enhanced from Rs 1.2 billion to Rs 2.4 billion, while a separate fund of Rs 2 billion has been established for the Education Card in the province. He assured that resources will be provided on a priority basis for the education of talented and deserving students, ensuring that no child is deprived of education due to financial constraints. Later, the 41st meeting of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Education Foundation was held under the chairmanship of the Chief Minister, where various agenda items were discussed and approved.

85,789 patients are registered under the project at 22 districts through 26 insulin banks/centres across the province. The Chief Minister on this occasion pointed out that diabetes diseases are spreading in the province at an alarming rate, therefore, he stressed that awareness for its prevention be created among the general public.

The cabinet approved a detailed proposal for conversion of Provincial Government MI-17 Helicopter into an air ambulance. The proposal includes a provision of Rs.150.00 million costs. The cabinet directed the Aviation Wing of Administration Department to carry out the modification of the helicopter as per ambulance requirement and its operation by rescue 1122.

The cabinet exempted the Humanitarian Cargo (International Shipments) by World Food Program through Torkham in Transit Trade with Afghanistan through Custom Stations located in the Province and reduced the Infrastructure Development Cess in respect of the Transit Trade with Afghanistan at

the rate of one percent of the value of goods imported to the Province.

The Cabinet approved the creation of a Provincial Police Station for the Special Investigation Wing Anti-Corruption Establishment Khyber Pakhtunkhwa with the jurisdiction of the entire Province. It also approved extension of the incumbent Female Technocrat member for the Local Government Commission. Local Government Commission is one of the statutory organs, defined in the Local Government Act, 2013 (amended) to perform the assigned functions as mentioned in Section 55 of the Act. It further approved the creation of one post of Finance Manager (BPS-16) and 03 post of Coach (BPS-16) in the Sports Department.

The Cabinet approved amendment in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa promotion policy, 2009 - authorizing Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Provincial Services Academy for MCMC training and deferment of promotion in cases of non-declaration/non-filing/assets and income tax returns.



had visited the Peshawar Press Club in the past two years to engage with journalists and address their concerns. He urged the governor to convey these grievances to the federal government.

Peshawar Press Club President M. Riaz and senior journalist Shamim Shahid also briefed the governor on the hardships faced by journalists. Governor Kundi acknowledged their concerns and assured them that efforts would be made to strengthen communication between the government and the media.

The governor pledged to discuss these issues with the prime minister and push for the regular visits of federal ministers to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to address journalists' problems. Expressing concern over the increasing unemployment among journalists, he noted that many of those affected were highly qualified professionals with master's degrees

yet were earning insufficient salaries. He assured the delegation that he would raise this issue at the federal level.

Governor Kundi also expressed dissatisfaction over the exclusion of KP journalists from foreign tours and promised to bring the matter to the attention of federal authorities. He committed to advocating for grants for the KhUJ and Peshawar Press Club at the federal level. Additionally, he announced plans to coordinate with NGOs to organize training workshops for journalists in the province and scheduled a follow-up meeting with KhUJ and Press Club representatives.

He reaffirmed his commitment to highlighting journalist's issues at the highest levels in Islamabad and announced plans to meet with the President of Pakistan upon his return from China to specifically discuss the concerns of KP journalists.

Hamas to free three Israeli hostages in next ceasefire swap

JERUSALEM (AFP): Hamas and Israel will carry out their fourth hostage-prisoner swap of the Gaza ceasefire on Saturday, with the militant group to free three Israeli captives in exchange for 90 inmates in Israeli jails.

Militants in Gaza began releasing hostages after the first 42-day phase of the ceasefire with Israel took effect on January 19. The hostages have been in captivity for nearly 15 months. Hamas and Islamic Jihad militants have so far handed over 15 hostages to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in exchange for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners.

Israeli campaign group, the Hostage and Missing Families Forum, named the captives to be released on Saturday as Yarden Bibas, Keith Seigel, who also has US citizenship, and Ofer Kalderon, who also holds French nationality. The

office of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu confirmed it had received the names of the three captives to be released.

In exchange, Israel will free 90 prisoners, nine of whom are serving life sentences, the Palestinian Prisoners' Club advocacy group said. During their October 7, 2023 attack on Israel which started the Gaza war, militants abducted Siegel from kibbutz Kfar Aza, and Kalderon and Bibas from kibbutz Nir Oz. Militants took a total of 251 people hostage that day. Of those, 79 still remain in Gaza, including at least 34 the military says are dead. Those seized include the wife and two children of Bibas, whom Hamas has already declared dead, although Israeli officials have yet to confirm that.

The two Bibas boys — Kfir, the youngest hostage, who turned two in

captivity earlier this month, and his four-year-old brother Ariel — have become symbols of the suffering of the hostages held in Gaza. The children were taken along with their mother, Shiri. Hamas says the boys and their mother were killed in an Israeli air strike in November 2023. The arrangements for hostage handovers in Gaza have sometimes been chaotic, particularly for the most recent handover in the southern city of Khan Yunis, which produced scenes that the Israeli prime minister condemned as "shocking." Woman hostage Arbel Yehud was visibly distressed as masked gunman struggled to clear a path for her through crowds of spectators desperate to witness her handover, television images showed. Israel briefly delayed Thursday's prisoner release in protest and the ICRC urged all parties to improve security.

Israeli airstrikes kill 2 in Lebanon

BEIRUT: Two people were killed and 10 injured in an Israeli airstrike on Friday near the town of Janta on the Lebanese-Syrian border, the Lebanese Ministry of Health reported. The strike was one of four in the area, which severely damaged a road linking Tfail in Lebanon to Assal Al-Ward in Syria that has been used by Hezbollah as a smuggling route.

Hezbollah paved the road during the Syrian war under

the pretext of facilitating the movement of people. Lebanon later asphalted it and installed a security checkpoint. The airstrikes caused a crater 7 meters deep and 10 meters wide in the road and severed electricity supply lines.

As well as the attacks in Janta, Israeli warplanes carried out two airstrikes in the Wadi Khaled border area. These are the latest in a series of breaches of the ceasefire agreed between Israel

and Hezbollah. Israeli warplanes earlier struck targets in Baalbek-Hermel province. Hezbollah lawmaker Ibrahim Al-Moussawi condemned Friday's attacks as "a systematic escalation and a war crime against civilians." The Israeli army said the strikes were based on intelligence reports and directed against Hezbollah targets in Bekaa that "pose a threat to Israel and its army." — Arab News