

2 injured in Chaman blast  
F.P. Report

CHAMAN: Two people were injured in an explosion near Chaman Railway Station in Balochistan on Friday. The injured were promptly transported to a nearby hospital for medical treatment. Security forces cordoned off the area after the blast and initiated a search operation to ensure safety. Authorities stated that the cause of the explosion is yet to be determined.



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ISLAMABAD: Secretary General of Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Hissein Brahim Taha called on Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

## Satisfy court on trial in mly courts: Justice Mandokhail

Justice Hilali observed that even after imposition of martial law, the trial was not held in a military court

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Justice Naeem Akhter Afghan on Friday remarked that trials in a military court were "similar" to those in a civilian court, as a Supreme Court constitutional bench heard a case on military trials of civilians over last year's May 9 riots.

Justice Afghan's remarks came as the bench resumed hearing intra-court appeals (ICAs) challenging the Oct 23, 2023 ruling by a five-judge bench that had unanimously declared that trying the accused civilians in military courts violated the Constitution. The seven-judge constitutional bench is headed by Justice Aminuddin Khan and also includes Justices Afghan, Jamal Khan Mandokhail, Muhammad Ali Mazhar, Hassan Azhar Rizvi, Musarrat Hilali, and Shahid Bilal Hassan.

In recent hearings, SC judges have questioned why the accused were "specifically" tried in military courts instead of anti-terrorism courts, with Justice Mandokhail observing that "the executive cannot play the role of judiciary". During hearing, Advocate Khawaja Haris appeared as the defence ministry's lawyer and continued his arguments in the case. Additional Attorney General (AAG)

Aamir Rehman was present as the state counsel.

Justice Afghan remarked, "There is also the facility to hire a lawyer of one's choice in a court martial case. The trials in a military court are also similar to ordinary (civilian) courts." However, Justice Mandokhail wondered whether an "officer presiding over a military court is perfect enough to determine such harsh sentences".

Justice Hilali also questioned trials in military courts, noting that cases over the May 9 riots were registered under the Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA), rather than the Army Act. The hearing was adjourned till January 13 (Monday), when the defence ministry counsel would continue his arguments.

At the outset of the hearing, Justice Mandokhail asked the defence counsel to satisfy the court about the trial process in military courts. Justice Hilali remarked, "An officer who hears the trial in the court does not pronounce the verdict themselves. The officer conducting the trial sends the case to another senior officer who announces the verdict."

"How does an officer who did not hear the case pronounce the decision?" she asked. Stating that despite being in a judicial career for 34 years,

he did not consider himself "complete", Justice Mandokhail questioned: "Does an army officer have enough experience and expertise that a death sentence is handed over?"

Haris, the defence ministry lawyer, replied he would detail the military trial process in the second phase of his arguments. Justice Mandokhail then noted that there was a difference between the Pakistan Army Act 1952 and "other laws". "According to the Constitution, all these protect fundamental rights. A reasonable explanation has been given in the law." At this point, Justice Afghan recalled presiding over "many court martial cases" at the Balochistan High Court, prior to his ascension to the SC. Justice Rizvi remarked that there were defence counsels in Field General Court Martial, not judges.

Here, Justice Afghan asked Haris to detail the fundamental rights guaranteed under Article 10-A (right to fair trial) of the Constitution. "How are the trials being conducted in military courts? What are the stages in it? Tell everything. Everyone is thinking that trials in military courts are not like in civilian courts. Give an example of any trial held in a military court," he said.

(Continued on Back Page)



## Malala to attend girls' education summit

ISLAMABAD (AFP): Nobel Peace Prize winner Malala Yousafzai will attend a summit on girls' education in Islamabad. Yousafzai was evacuated from the country in 2012 after being shot by the Pakistan Taliban, who were enraged by her activism, and she has returned to the country only a handful of times since.

A spokesperson for the Malala Fund charity confirmed Yousafzai will attend the conference in person. "I am excited to join Muslim leaders from around the world for a critical conference on girls' education," she said Friday in a post on X.

"On Sunday, I will speak about protecting rights for all girls to go to school, and why leaders must hold the Taliban accountable for their crimes against Afghan women & girls." Pakistan's neighbour Afghanistan is the only country in the world where girls and women are banned from going to school and university.

Since returning to power in 2021, the Taliban government has imposed an austere version of Islamic law which the United Nations has called "gender apartheid". Girls are only allowed to attend primary school, while women are largely restricted to working in segregated environments in health or education.

## Trump sentenced in New York hush-money case

NEW YORK (Reuters): US President-elect Donald Trump will not go to jail or pay a fine over his criminal conviction stemming from hush money paid to a porn star, a judge ruled on Friday, but the sentencing will place a judgment of guilt on his record.

Justice Juan Merchan's sentencing of Trump, 78, to unconditional discharge closes a case that had loomed over his bid to retake the White House just days before his Jan. 20 inauguration. By granting an unconditional discharge, Merchan would place a judgment of guilt on Trump's permanent record - without any other legal penalty such as custody, a fine or probation.

Trump pleaded not guilty and has vowed to appeal the guilty verdict. He appeared with his lawyer on TV screens beamed to the courtroom with two American flags in the background. "It's been a political witch hunt," Trump said before sentencing, wearing a red tie with white stripes. "It was done to damage my reputation so I would lose the election and obviously that didn't work."

"I'm totally innocent. I did nothing wrong," said Trump, who did not testify during the six-week trial last year. Now that he has been sentenced, he is free to pursue the appeal, a process which could take years and play out while he is serving a four-year term as president.

Trump fought tooth and nail to avoid the spectacle of being compelled to appear before a state-level judge so close to when he is due to be sworn into office. The U.S. Supreme Court on Thursday rejected a last-minute bid by Trump to halt it. The six-week trial last year played out against the extraordinary backdrop of Trump's suc-



cessful campaign to retake the White House. The sentencing marks the culmination of the first-ever criminal case brought against a U.S. president, past or present. Trump will be the first president to take office with a criminal conviction.

Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg, a Democrat, charged Trump, a Republican, in March 2023 with 34 counts of falsifying business records to cover up his former lawyer Michael Cohen's \$130,000 payment to adult film actress Stormy Daniels for her silence before the 2016 election about a sexual encounter she said she had with Trump, who denied it. Trump defeated Democrat Hillary Clinton in that election.

The Manhattan jury found Trump guilty of all 34 counts on May 30. Prosecutors argued that despite the tawdry nature of the allegations, the case was an attempt to corrupt the 2016 election.

Critics of the businessman-turned politician cited the charges and other legal entanglements he faced to bolster their contention that he was unfit for public office. Trump flipped the script. He argued the case - along with three other crim-

inal indictments and civil lawsuits accusing him of fraud, defamation and sexual abuse - was an effort by opponents to weaponize the justice system against him and harm his reelection campaign. He frequently lashed out at prosecutors and witnesses, and Merchan ultimately fined Trump \$10,000 for violating a gag order.

As recently as Jan. 3, Trump called the judge a "radical partisan" in a post on his Truth Social platform. In a decision that day, Merchan said that setting aside the verdict would "undermine the Rule of Law in immeasurable ways" and wrote that Trump's behavior during the trial showed disrespect for the judiciary.

"Defendant has gone to great lengths to broadcast on social media and other forums his lack of respect for judges, juries, grand juries and the justice system as a whole," Merchan said. The hush money case was widely viewed as less serious than the three other criminal cases Trump faced, in which he was accused of trying to overturn his 2020 election loss and retaining classified documents after leaving the White House. Trump pleaded not guilty in all cases.

## PM for swift disposal of legal cases on FBR revenue collection

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Friday directed the authorities concerned to appoint talented manpower in the appellate tribunals to ensure the swift disposal of legal cases regarding the Federal Board of Revenue's revenue collection.

The prime minister, chairing a meeting to review the matters regarding the appellate tribunals, called for necessary measures to clear the backlog of cases and warned against any laxity, according to a PM Office press release.

He said people of international caliber should be recruited in the tribunals offering them competitive salaries and perks in accordance with their professional capabilities. He told the participants that work on FBR reforms was going at a fast pace and a Faceless Customs Assessment System had been installed at the Karachi Port to curb corruption and considerably reduce clearance time.

He reiterated the government's resolve to bring the tax evaders under the tax net to avert the burden from the poor people. In the briefing, the prime minister instructed the completion of reforms in the Inland Appellate Tribunals within the stipulated time.

Federal Economic Affairs Minister Ahad Khan Cheema, Minister of State for Finance Ali Pervaiz Malik, Attorney General of Pakistan and relevant senior officers attended the meeting.

## 5 terrorists killed in D I Khan action

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: Security forces killed five militants in an operation in Dera Ismail Khan on Friday, said ISPR. According to military's media wing, security forces conducted an intelligence-based operation in the Maddi area of Dera Ismail Khan district following reports of militants' presence. During the operation, the forces effectively targeted the militants' hideout, killing five terrorists, including their leader, Shafiqullah Shafi.

Weapons and ammunition were recovered from the killed militants, who were involved in terrorist activities against security forces and the targeted killings of innocent civilians. A sanitisation operation is underway to eliminate any remaining militants in the area.

ISPR reiterated that Pakistan's security forces are committed to eradicating the menace of terrorism from the country. President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif paid tribute to the security forces for killing five terrorists during the operation in Dera Ismail Khan.

In separate messages received here, the president and prime minister appreciated the bravery of the security forces for killing five terrorists during successful intelligence-based operations (IBOs). The president said, "The security forces are conducting operations to eliminate the menace of terrorism. The entire nation is united against terrorism. The operations against Fitna-al-Khawarij will continue until the complete elimination of terrorism."

He also reiterated the commitment to the complete elimination of terrorism from the country. Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif also appreciated the security forces for the successful operation against terrorists in Dera Ismail Khan. He praised the professional skills of the officers and personnel participating in the operation for killing five terrorists including the terrorist leader among others. "We will continue the war against the scourge of terrorism until its complete elimination from the country. The entire nation stands in support of its brave forces in the war against terrorism."

## Resolution of J&K dispute Shehbaz hails OIC's support — lauds MWL's support in promoting true identity of Islam at global level

Saqib Mushtaq

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif expressed appreciation for the Organization of Islamic Cooperation's (OIC) principled position and consistent support for the resolution of Jammu and Kashmir dispute, in accordance with its relevant resolutions and those of the United Nations.

The Prime Minister was talking to Hissein Brahim Taha, Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation on Friday at the Prime Minister's House. The Prime Minister thanked the OIC Secretary General for his participation in the International Conference on Girls' Education in Muslim Communities, being organized in Islamabad on 11-12, January 2025. He noted that the initiative was aimed at galvanizing concrete and concerted efforts to further improve quality education and women empowerment in the Muslim World.

Deeply appreciating the Secretary General for his dynamic stewardship of the OIC, the Prime Minister reaffirmed Pakistan's full support to advancing the Organization's shared priorities and objectives while making it more effective as a collective voice of the Muslim Ummah.

On Palestine issue, while strongly condemning Israel's genocidal campaign, he stressed upon the need to bring an immediate and unconditional ceasefire in Gaza, ensure unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance for the Palestinian people and global accountability of Israel for its widely documented war crimes and crimes against humanity. The Secretary General thanked the Prime Minister for the warm hospitality extended by Pakistan to him and his delegation.

He said that the International Conference on Girls' Education in Muslim Communities exemplified Pakistan's leadership role on issues of importance for the Muslim Ummah. The Secretary General reaffirmed OIC's full support to the

Kashmiri people in their legitimate struggle for freedom and self-determination and briefed the Prime Minister about the OIC's ongoing diplomatic efforts in this regard.

The Secretary General agreed with the Prime Minister that the OIC should continue to press upon the international community for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and stressed that addressing the Palestinian Question on basis of the two-state solution was key to ensuring durable peace and stability in the region. The two sides also exchanged views on regional and global issues of shared interest, including Afghanistan and the global surge in Islamophobia. Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar and Special Assistant to the Prime Minister Tariq Fatimi were also present in the meeting.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif also praised the Muslim World League's (MWL) support in promoting the true identity of Islam at the global level, advocating the common goals of the Muslim world, and promoting mutual respect and understanding between religions, beliefs and cultures.

The prime minister made these remarks during a call on paid by the Secretary General of Muslim World League, Sheikh Dr. Mohammad bin Abdulkarim Al-Issa here at the Prime Minister House, a Prime Minister's Office news release said.

He extended his gratitude to the Secretary General of MWL for the decision to establish the Sirat Museum in Pakistan and underscored the country's vision to continue to work for the early completion of joint projects, especially the establishment of Sirat Museum.

Appreciating the thoughtful leadership of the Secretary General, the prime minister praised the organization's support in promoting the true identity of Islam at the global level, advocating the common goals of the Muslim world, and promoting mutual respect and understanding between religions, beliefs and cultures.



ISLAMABAD: Ground staff stands next to PIA aircraft ahead of take off for Paris.

## PIA's Paris flight marks return to Europe

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) has resumed its long-awaited flights to Europe, marking a major milestone for the national carrier after more than four years of hiatus, as the first flight took off for Paris on Friday.

PIA's authorisation to operate in the Europe was suspended in June 2020 over concerns about the ability of Pakistani authorities and its Civil Aviation Authority to ensure compliance with international aviation standards. The flight took off from Islamabad around 12:40pm, becoming the only carrier to offer a direct route to and from the European Union.

"This is the first time I am travelling with PIA," said passenger Shumaila Rana, a 38-year-old school teacher living in Germany. "I'm nervous and I'm having a lot of anxiety, but I'm hoping it's gonna be a good flight." Federal Minister for Aviation Khawaja Asif, who saw off the passengers at the airport, said that the flight, PK 749, was 100% booked, signaling a positive turn for the airline, which has faced several challenges in recent years.

While addressing a ceremony after the flight's take off, Asif said that the national airline's services to Europe were once again

operational, with PIA now connecting Pakistan with the French capital. The minister emphasised that the closure of several of PIA's profitable routes in the past had severely impacted its operations. He also noted that these losses had affected services provided to overseas Pakistanis, particularly in Europe.

Asif highlighted how PIA had previously been a symbol of national pride, with the airline offering essential services such as transporting the bodies of deceased Pakistanis back to their homeland free of charge. This service, however, had been discontinued, leaving many overseas Pakistanis without this vital support. The minister also expressed his hope for the future of the national carrier, stating that the restoration of PIA's European routes was just the beginning. He confirmed that direct flights to the UK would be launched soon, further expanding the airline's reach.

Additionally, he suggested that privatising PIA could be a potential solution to secure the airline's long-term success and ensure its profitability moving forward. "The green and white flag of Pakistan is once again waving in European skies," Khawaja Asif declared, referring to the airline's renewed presence

ence in the continent's airspace.

He also took the opportunity to criticise the negative impact that "irresponsible" statements about PIA by a former minister had caused over the years. He called for accountability from those who had made damaging remarks, stressing that such comments should not be allowed to hurt the reputation of the national carrier. The successful takeoff of PIA's first flight to Paris is seen as a significant step in the airline's recovery, with 323 passengers on board for this historic journey.

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif congratulated the nation on departure of the first flight of Pakistan Airlines (PIA) to Paris following restoration of PIA flight operation to Europe.

The prime minister, in a statement said the restoration of PIA flights to Europe will facilitate the overseas Pakistanis as they will benefit from the direct flights. He noted that due to suspension of flights, the national airlines had to incur huge losses worth billions of dollars and also had to lose its reputation. "By the grace of Allah Almighty, the incumbent government has restored the identity of the national airlines," the prime minister said.





## Providing best facilities to Hujjaj govt's top priority

ISLAMABAD (APP): Special Representative to the Prime Minister on Religious Harmony and the Pakistani Diaspora in Middle East and Islamic Countries, Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mehmood Ashrafi, on Friday, said that the government prioritizes providing the best facilities to the intending pilgrims (Hujjaj Karam) and was taking steps to facilitate them in collaboration with private Hajj groups.

Addressing a press conference along with the Chairman of the Hajj Organizers Association of Pakistan (HOAP) Nasir Khan, he said that Saudi Arabia had appreciated the role of HOAP for making the best Hajj arrangements last year and "We fol-

low the regulations of the Saudi government during Hajj".

He added that the Pakistani government are working to improve arrangements for the government quota and private Hajj pilgrims.

Hafiz Muhammad Tahir Mehmood Ashrafi stated that the Ministry of Religious Affairs had settled the matters with the private Hajj bookings groups in the last day meeting and 904 private groups would carry out the Hajj operation 2025.

He added that last year, only 14 complaints had been lodged of 90,000 private pilgrims while this year "We will ensure no complaint".

He said that the Hajj conference

and Hajj Exhibition was going to start in Saudi Arabia on January 13 in which a Pakistani delegation led by Chairman HOAP Nasir Khan would participate.

Special Representative to the Prime Minister on Religious Harmony thanked the Saudi government for giving respect and facilitating the Pakistan Hajj mission.

Chairman HOAP Nasir Khan on the occasion said that exemplary arrangements would be ensured during Hajj 2025 while 80 per cent of intending pilgrims who were going to perform Hajj and collect the blessing of Allah Almighty would perform the Hajj at the cost of Rs one million.

## BT Properties DWC LLC launches new headquarters in Dubai South

F.P. Report

DUBAI: BT Properties DWC LLC has officially opened its new head office in Dubai South, solidifying its position as a global leader in the real estate sector. This expansion marks a pivotal moment in the company's journey, bringing its legacy of luxury, innovation, and large-scale urban development to one of the fastest-growing real estate markets in the world.

The grand opening ceremony featured a ribbon-cutting by Chairman Malik Riaz Hussain, symbolizing the beginning of an exciting new chapter for the company. Present at the occasion were Ahmed Ali Riaz Malik, Group CEO, Shahid Mehmood Qureshi, Head of Global Sales, along with other company team members, industry leaders, key

brokers, investors and prominent dignitaries. Group CEO Ahmad Ali Riaz Malik echoed this sentiment, emphasizing the company's focus on excellence, innovation, and global outreach.

"We are not just entering Dubai's real estate market—we are here to lead. Our vision is to introduce a new standard of luxury living, blending state-of-the-art technology, world-class infrastructure, and exceptional service. This new head office represents our dedication to offering the highest levels of quality and professionalism in every project we undertake."

The new office, situated at Office 101, 1st Floor, Building A1, Dubai South Business Park, reflects BT Properties' commitment to delivering high-value developments in premium locations. With Dubai South

being a thriving commercial and residential hub, and its close proximity to Al Maktoum International Airport - set to become the world's largest airport upon completion, the company is strategically positioned to offer top-tier real estate solutions, connect with investors, and introduce transformative property developments to the region.

BT Properties is an international extension of Bahria Town, Asia's largest private real estate developer, renowned for its groundbreaking contributions to modern city planning. With a legacy that spans three decades, Bahria Town has revolutionized urban living in Pakistan, delivering world-class gated communities, commercial hubs, and integrated smart cities. The company has successfully turned vast, undeveloped

landscapes into fully functional, high-end metropolitan centers. Now, it is bringing that same expertise to Dubai South, aligning its vision with The Emirate's ambition to create a global hub for business, investment, and luxury living.

As part of its global growth strategy, BT Properties has adopted advanced Oracle Fusion and Salesforce CRM systems, ensuring that all financial, operational, and client engagement processes are optimized. These technologies will enhance transparency, enable seamless transactions, and create a more sophisticated investment experience for clients worldwide. Dubai South has rapidly grown into a 145-square-kilometer master-planned city with free-zone benefits and world-class infrastructure.

## Petition against minister dismissed

LAHORE (APP): An election tribunal of the Lahore High Court (LHC) on Friday dismissed an election petition challenging the victory of the Minister for Local Government, Zeeshan Rafique, from PP-51.

The tribunal, headed by Justice Sultan Tanvir Ahmad, heard the petition filed by the runner-up candidate, Waqas Iftikhar.

Advocate Chaudhry Imran Raza represented Zeeshan Rafique before the tribunal and argued that the election petition was not maintainable.

He submitted that the necessary legal requirements, as per the Election Act, were not fulfilled at the time of filing the election petition. He pleaded with the court to dismiss the petition for being non-maintainable.

The tribunal, after hearing the arguments of the parties, dismissed the petition for being non-maintainable.

The petitioner had challenged the election results of the PP-51 constituency in Sialkot, where Zeeshan Rafique won a seat in the provincial assembly.

He asked the tribunal to set aside the respondent's victory notification and declare him the returned candidate instead.

## Sara welcomes Child Courts Bill

LAHORE (APP): Child Protection Bureau Chairperson Sarah Ahmad has lauded the National Assembly's Standing Committee on Interior for approving the landmark Child Courts Bill.

In her statement issued here on Friday, she termed it a crucial advancement in protecting child rights and ensuring prompt justice for victims of abuse.

"This is a historic milestone in our collective efforts to safeguard children across Pakistan.

The establishment of child courts will create a safe and supportive environment for children, enabling swift justice and instilling hope in affected families," Sarah Ahmad stated.

Highlighting key provisions of the bill, she appreciated the requirement for resolving child abuse cases within six months.

The legislation ensures that children statements will be recorded in a child-friendly setting in the presence of psychologists, which is vital for their emotional well-being, she added.

Referring to recent data, Sarah Ahmad expressed concern over the rising number of child abuse cases.

This bill represents more than just legislation—it is a beacon of hope for our children. By guaranteeing justice and creating trust in the judicial system, it will encourage victims and their families to come forward without fear, she said.

The Child Protection Bureau reaffirms its commitment to working alongside stakeholders to ensure the successful implementation of laws and to continue advocating for the rights and safety of children.



KARACHI: Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Mr. Ahsan Iqbal addresses Press Conference at the Residence of Muzaffar Ali Shujra. —APP Photo

## GOVERNMENT OF KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA COMMUNICATION & WORKS DEPARTMENT NOTICE INVITING E-BIDDING

(Single Stage Two Envelop E-Bidding System)

C&W Department Highway Division Abbottabad, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa invites Electronic Bids from eligible firms /contractors in accordance with KPPRA procurement rules 2014 on single stage two envelop procedure for the following works.

S#	Name of Work	Relevant Category of C&W & PEC	E/ Cost (M)	Bid Security i/c S/Duty	Period of Compl- etion	Last date of submission of Bids & time	Date & time of Opening of financial bids
DISTRICT DEVELOPEMNT INITIATIVE IN MANSEHRA AND ABBOTTABAD ADP No. 934/240315 (2024-25)							
PK-44 DISTRICT ABBOTTABAD							
PACKAGE NO 1 (PK-44)							
1	Construction of PCC Roads at Sajikot	C-5	28.00	600000	As per Work Order	14-02-2025 1200 hrs	Financial bids will be opened after approval of technical bid from competent authority
2	Construction of PCC Roads at Dewal Manal						
3	Construction of PCC Roads at Makol						
4	Construction of PCC Roads at Nagri Tarfi						
5	Construction of PCC Roads at Narra, Kasoria, Thesi, Kalanda						
6	Contri: of PCC Roads at Poona Haidlaan Maidlaan Dhakan						
7	Construction of PCC Roads at Satora, FatehAbad						
8	Const: of PCC Road at Maari						
9	Constn: of PCC Road at Chanjah						
10	Construction of PCC Road at Mahjuan-1						
PACKAGE NO 2 (PK-44)							
1	Construction of PCC Roads at Bandi Atai Khan	C-6	22.00	480000	AS per Work Order	14-02-2025 1200 Hrs	Financial bids will be opened after approval of technical bid from competent authority
2	Construction of PCC Roads at Tarmuchia						
3	Constn: of PCC Roads at Mujaad/Peepal Sada						
4	Construction of PCC Roads at Chamnaka						
5	Construction of PCC Roads at Langrial						
6	Construction of PCC Roads at Dhurban						
7	Constn: of PCC Roads at Faqeer Muhammad Danna Road						
8	Construction of PCC Road at phulwali						
9	Construction of PCC Road at Sultan Pur						
10	Construction of PCC Road at Sareela						
11	Construction of PCC Road at Karakhi						
12	Construction of PCC Roads at Karach Dhanak						
13	Construction of PCC Roads at Havelian Village						
PACKAGE NO 3(PK-44)							
1	Construction of PCC Roads at village Jhangra, Kashka, Panigaran	C-5	25.00	540000	As per Work Order	14-02-2025	Financial bids will be opened after approval of technical bid from competent authority
2	Construction of PCC Roads at Chamba, Noshehra, Kalu Maira						
3	Construction of PCC Roads at Malla Waziran						
4	Construction of PCC Roads at Cant Ward-1						
5	Construction of PCC Roads at Cant Ward-2						
6	Construction of PCC Roads at Kotla						
7	Construction of PCC Roads at Havelian Village						
PACKAGE NO 4 (PK-44)							
1	Leveling of Ground at Sultanpur	C-5	25.00	540000	AS per Work Order	14-02-2025 1200 Hrs	Financial bids will be opened after approval of technical bid from competent authority
2	Construction of PCC Roads at Havelian City						
3	Construction of PCC Roads at NC Havelian Urban 1,2 & 3						
4	Construction of PCC Roads at VC Kokal 1						
5	Construction of PCC Roads at VC Kokal 2						
6	Construction of PCC Roads at Langra, Lari, Tanaki, Barwal & Muhanda						
7	Construction of PCC Roads at Banda Langra, Muhabatan, Lunda samliala, Banda Sahab Khan & Samliala						
8	Construction of PCC Roads at Hajia Gali						
9	Construction of PCC Roads at Bodla						
10	Construction of PCC Roads at Massa Gojri						
11	Construction of PCC Roads at Kangan Hotar						
12	Construction of PCC Roads at Laasan						
PACKAGE NO 5 (PK-44) LOWER TANAWAL							
1	Construction of PCC Roads at Kuthiala (Soban Gali, Bhega Kot, Sora Piswal	C-5	27.50	590000	As per Work Order	14-02-2025 1200 Hrs	Financial bids will be opened after approval of technical bid from competent authority
2	Construction of PCC Roads at Khuthiala (Banj Gali, Misar, Trida, Phagla)						
3	Construction of PCC Roads at Khuthiala Pagla, Syljot , Pinyal, Joganmar)						
4	Construction of PCC Roads at Pind Kargo Khan-I						
5	Construction of PCC Roads at Pind Kargo Khan-II						
6	Constn: of PCC roads at seri sher Shah, Lakhala, Pohar						
7	Construction of PCC Roads at Kangora, Khanda Khu, Kand						
8	Construction of PCC Roads at UC Sherwan (Chamat 1 &2)						
9	Construction of PCC Roads at UC Jarra (Jaral, Kotnali, Khulyala, Jabi)						
10	Construction of PCC Roads at UC sherwan (Thora Khurd , Kalan, Shaheedabad, Jarmali)						
11	Construction of PCC Roads at UC Sherwan (Kalakot, bamochi Khurd, Kalan, Talang, Khar Khaiteer)						
12	Construction of PCC Roads at Patelal UC Sherwan						
13	Construction of PCC Roads at UC Chamad & Kakot						

- Bid documents and instruction to bidders can be downloaded upto one day prior to the opening date from C&W website ([www.cwd.gkp.pk](http://www.cwd.gkp.pk)).
- All the bidders are required to be registered with C&W Department and are on the Active Tax Payer's list of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Revenue Authority.
- Instructions issued by KPPRA vide Notification No.S.R.O.(14)(Vol)1-24/2021-22 dated:10/05/2022 will be applicable.
- All the bidders are required to submit the bid security, additional security and tender fee in shape of Call Deposit.
- Separate CDRs for each package should be provided alongwith an application showing Package No.and CDR No for the package.

EXECUTIVE ENGINEER  
C & W HIGHWAY DIVISION ABBOTTABAD

INF(P)131/25

## FBR revokes satellite tracking license, hands oversight to four companies

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Certain sections of the national press have published news items on 09th January 2025 regarding FBR's new process of monitoring the Transit cargo according to which satellite tracking has been replaced with human monitoring only.

It has been reported in the press that the license of the only company having satellite tracking system has been revoked abruptly and the same has been awarded to four tracking companies which qualified technically four years ago.

It was alleged that these companies do not possess modern tracking equipment and significant experience. Such news items are based on lack of understanding about the previous system, the present interim arrangement and FBR's whole hearted efforts to put in place a vibrant, risk free and state of the art technology based new system.

2. The license of the company that was tracking the cargo movement since 2013 was not terminated abruptly and without valid grounds rather it was done after following the due process of law and on account of following charges:

. Outdated tracking technology,

. Frequent technical faults,

. Inability to perform the live satellite tracking en-

route but charging fee to the tune of Rs.445 million and making windfall profits

. Suspension of its operations due to cyber-attacks

. Multiple cases were registered by various field formations on account of different violations

. During the course of hearing TPL accepted that its devices were unable to provide satellite services and they send unnecessary or frivolous alerts.

This resulted in breaking the monopoly/hegemony of the company providing sub-standard services while charging exorbitant charges making windfall profits and compromising the integrity of the en-route cargo.

3.The credentials of four companies entrusted to task of tracking transit cargo these companies were technically evaluated and found eligible by the Licensing Committee and in fact they were granted the license under Tracking and Monitoring of Cargo Rules but the same had to be cancelled in view of the court cases. The following steps have been taken to ensure safe transportation of transit & transhipment cargo during the interim time:

(i). Installation of PMD devices on vehicles.

(ii). Movement of cargo in convoys under Customs escort from the port of arrival till the port of destination.

(iii). Selected Scanning of the cargo is also being done at both the ports of destina-

tion and arrival to guarantee the safety of cargo and provide deterrence against any possible pilferage incident.

(iv). A centralized Customs Control Room working 24/7 has been established for real time tracking and monitoring en-route vehicles

(v). Effective surveillance of ATT/TP cargo by the field units of enforcement formations throughout the network

4.FBR has already initiated the tendering process of new EOI to select well qualified companies after competitive and transparent bidding process to ensure the newest technologies are deployed at the earliest for

effective cargo tracking and monitoring. The requirement of Container Surveillance Devices (CSDs) for the tracking companies has not been discontinued rather the new cargo tracking and monitoring system envisaged by FBR aims at utilizing the latest GSM and Satellite tracking technologies.

The ongoing fresh Expression of Interest (EOI) process will lead to selection of qualified companies after competitive and transparent process to ensure the newest technologies are deployed at the earliest for fool proof cargo tracking and monitoring.



### PAF BASE, KOHAT

### TENDER NOTICE

Sealed tenders / bids are invited from the Government-registered firms / contractors to rent out PAF Shops, located at Kernal Sher Khan Shopping Complex (86 shops), Base Welfare Complex (12 shops) Bannu Road, Kohat & PAFWA shops (16 shops) at Zahoor ul Islam Road Kohat Cantt. Tenders / bids for each shop should be submitted to the office of Officer Incharge Personnel Squadron, PAF Base, Kohat on or before **27 January, 2025** at 1000 Hrs. The Tenders will be opened on the same day at 1200 hrs. The applications received after due date will not be entertained. The undersigned reserves the rights to accept / reject any tender, on technical grounds.

**Officer Incharge, Personnel Squadron**  
**PAF Base, Kohat**  
**Ph: 0922-9260095 Ext: 5031**  
**Mobile: 0323-9452311**



### ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

### GOVERNMENT OF KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA

### NOTICE FOR PUBLIC HEARING

1. This notice is published for information of all stakeholders, general public and concerned Government agencies that EPA Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has admitted the application of following project to accord Environment Approval required under Section 13 of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Environmental Protection Act 2014.

Name of Project	Location	District
Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for a project Lifestyle Housing (Block I) by Lifestyle Development (SMC-Pvt) Limited	Warsak Road Mathra	Peshawar

2. All stakeholders, general public and concerned Government agencies are invited to submit their comments/suggestions on the EIA report/Project. The comments and suggestions may be submitted to office Of Director General, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), 3rd floor, SDU Building, Khyber Rd, Peshawar Cantt, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, within a period of 15 days from the date of publication of this Notice.

3. Public Hearing will be conducted as per following schedule

Date	Day	Time	Venue
28 January 2025	Tuesday	11:00 AM	Warsak Road Mathra Peshawar

4. All stakeholders, general public are invited to attend the hearing proceedings to share their proposals/ concerns/ suggestions. The EIA report is available at EPA office Peshawar, if any one wants to review the report, he/she can visit EPA office Peshawar (In Office Timing).

<b>Director General</b> Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) EPA, 3rd floor, SDU Building, Khyber Road, Peshawar Cantt, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Phone: (091) 9210263	<b>Lifestyle Development (SMC-Pvt) Limited</b> Akakhel Stop, Warsak Road, P.O Mathra, Peshawar Ph: (091)-2950067
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PESHAWAR: Minister for Higher Education, Archives and Libraries, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Meena Khan inaugurating Solar System at University of Agriculture.

# Govt to address financial crises of varsities: Minister

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: The Minister for Higher Education, Archives and Libraries, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Meena Khan Afridi, has said that the incumbent provincial government is committed to address the financial crises faced by universities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. He assured that universities struggling with financial challenges would soon be relieved of their difficulties. He added that the provincial government aim is to drive universities and other institutions towards sustainability and green energy.

The provincial minister expressed these views during the inauguration of a 750 KW solar system at the University of Agriculture, Peshawar. He unveiled the solar system plaque and formally inaugurated it by pressing the solar activation button.

ProVice-Chancellor and Dean Prof. Dr. Dawood Jan, Registrar Dr. Rizwan Ahmad, Dean Prof. Dr. Iftikhar Hussain Khalil, Dean Prof. Dr. Abdul Rehman, Dean Prof. Dr. Shah Alam Khan, Dean Prof. Dr. Zafarullah Khan, Treasurer Dr. Abdul Salam, Engineer Kamran Khan, faculty members, and administrative staff were also present at the event. Director of Works Engineer Zarif Khan briefed the minister.

Vice-Chancellor Prof. Dr. Jehan Bakht welcomed the minister with a bouquet and expressed gratitude for his continued efforts in the development and promotion of higher education. He highlighted the minister's support in resolving challenges faced by the university.

Dr. Bakht mentioned that the University of Agriculture, Peshawar, is the first institution took step towards the green energy initiative. He stated that the solar system would not only provide financial benefits to the university but also reduce environmental pollution and significantly lower electricity expenses.

He further shared that another solar project is underway and will soon be completed. Regarding the ongoing academic and development projects, he added that the university has always focused on providing quality education, research, and training. Graduates of the university have made significant contributions not only at the provincial level but also at national and international levels in the fields of agriculture, livestock, management, and IT. He praised the provincial government's initiatives to promote higher education.

In his address, Mr Meena Khan acknowledged the role of experts from the University of Agriculture in advancing agriculture and its related fields. During the event, he also planted an Araucaria tree, marking tree plantation campaign at the university while VC presented a shield to the minister.

# PHC seeks response from KP govt on Forest’s Tribunal establishment

**Humayun Khan**

PESHAWAR: A divisional bench of Peshawar High Court (PHC) comprising of Justice SM Attique Shah and Justice Fahim Wali has issued a notice to the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, seeking a response on the establishment of a Forest Tribunal in the province, on Friday.

The petition was filed by Alam Zeb, who argued that the Forest Ordinance 2002 requires the establishment of a Forest Tribunal in the province. The counsel Rahman Ullah Shah, argued that the Forest Tribunal has been non-functional for the past four months, and despite the passage of several months, the tribunal has not been established.

The lawyer further argued that the non-establishment of the Forest Tribunal has created several problems, including the registration of FIRs related to forest lands, but no action is taken due to the absence of the tribunal. The petitioner's case is also pending due to the non-establishment of the tribunal.

The lawyer stated that the Forest Ordinance 2002 makes it mandatory for the provincial government to establish a Forest Tribunal in the province. However, despite the passage of several months, the tribunal has not been established.

PHC has directed the provincial government to respond to the petition against non-establishment of Forest Tribunal despite the requirements of the Forest Ordinance 2002.

# Commission NCHR visits Hamza Foundation

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: Commission NCHR, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Honourable Mr. Tariq Javed PSP, visited Hamza Foundation Welfare Thalassaemia Center and Blood Transfusion Services Peshawar KP.

Hamza Foundation Founder Chairman Mr. Ijaz Khan and Dr. Tariq Khan gave detail briefing to the chief guest about different welfare activities of the organization, especially free of cost blood and medical services providing to poor and underprivileged patients of Thalassaemia and Hemophilia of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Chief guest also visited different sections of Hamza Foundation.

He was briefed that at present 1504 patients of different blood disorder disease are registered with the organization, and 207840 bags of screened blood and blood products provided to patients till date. Mr. Tariq Javed, PSP has appreciated the welfare services of the organization and promised that he will support the noble cause of the organization for the ailing humanity.

On this occasion founder Chairman hamza foundation Ijaz Khan presented HF shield to Mr. Tariq Javed, Commissioner, NCHR, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

# PHC stops interview for hospital’s Director at HMC

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Medical Teaching Institutions (MTI) Appellate Tribunal has suspended the interview process for the post of Hospital Director at Hayatabad Medical Complex (HMC) Peshawar, on Friday.

The tribunal, comprising Chairman Justice (R) Abdul Shakoor and Member Mansoor Tariq, heard the appeal filed by Dr. Khalid Mehsud. In the appeal, the Board of Governors HMC Peshawar, Chairman Selection Committee Professor Dr. Muhammad Jehan Zeb Khan, and others has had made as respondents.

The counsel Habib Anwar advocate argued that he had served in important positions at Lady Reading Hospital, Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences Islamabad, and Life Care Hospital and Research Institute Peshawar. He is currently serving as Hospital Director at MTI Bacha Khan Medical Complex Swabi.

The lawyer stated that Dr. Khalid had applied for the post of Hospital Director at HMC Peshawar and was shortlisted among 13 candidates. However, the selection committee, headed by an officer from University of Peshawar, recommended interviewing only five candidates and did not call Dr. Khalid Mehsud for the interview.

The appeal argued that the formation of the selection committee was in violation of the MTI Regulations, specifically Regulation 4, as the head of the committee was appointed from outside. The counsel argued to declare the committee's actions null and void, and request that the petitioner should be called for the interview.

The tribunal, after initial arguments, sought comments from the respondents and directed the HMC legal advisor to assist the tribunal in the subject matter. The tribunal also directed the selection committee not to conduct any interviews for the post of Hospital Director until further orders.

**ASJ convicts in attempt to murder for 14 years prison**

Additional Sessions Judge (ASJ) Syed Zahid Shah has sentenced a convict to 14 years imprisonment and a fine of Rs. 2.9 million in attempt to murder committed against Muhammad Shakeel by firing at him in the premises of Peshtakhara police station, on Friday.

Senior Public Prosecutor Haseena Syed pursued the case against Raj Wali, who was found guilty under sections 324 and 337-D of the Pakistan Penal Code. According to the prosecution, the accused had fired at Muhammad Shakeel, causing him serious injuries.

The police had registered a case against the accused on June 18, 2022, under sections 324 and 337-D of the PPC. The prosecution alleged that the accused, Raj Wali, was guilty of attempting to murder Muhammad Shakeel by firing at him in the premises of Peshtakhara police station. The court, after hearing the arguments and examining the evidence, found the accused guilty.

# PRCS delivers relief for affected families of Kurram

PESHAWAR (APP): The Pakistan Red Crescent Society (PRCS) on Friday sent essential relief supplies to 2,000 affected families in Parachinar district Kurram.

Following the request of Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Karim Kundi, the aid includes family tents, blankets, kitchen sets, hygiene kits, and other necessities, aimed at supporting those affected by the ongoing crisis in the areas.

The swift response from the PRCS, coordinated by its Chairman, Sardar Shahid Ahmad Laghari, has been widely praised by Governor Kundi.

The supplies, dispatched from the organization's National Headquarters, were handed over to the Red Crescent Khyber Pakhtunkhwa branch for distribution among the affected families.

The timely action has been recognized as an example of humanitarian service, reflecting the Red Crescent's core mission of providing immediate assistance during emergencies.

Governor Kundi had personally appealed to the Red Crescent for aid, which was promptly delivered to alleviate the suffering of the displaced families.

The Red Crescent's efforts are seen as a vital support to government measures in the province, where the situation remains tense.

Sardar Shahid Ahmad Laghari emphasized that the Pakistan Red Crescent's role is to provide impartial aid to those in need, regardless of background, during both natural and man-made disasters.

**Governor hails forces for killing militants in DI Khan**

Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Karim Kundi on Friday praised security forces for killing five militants, including a key leader, in an operation in the Madi area of Dera Ismail Khan.

"The killing of five terrorists, including a leader, is a major victory for our forces," Kundi said, commending their efforts in combating terrorism.

He further emphasized that the entire nation stands united with the security forces in the fight against terrorism.

He said that the operation is seen as a significant step in dismantling terrorist networks and ensuring peace and stability in the area.

**Progress reviewed on digitalization of Food Dept’s operations**

**F.P. Report**

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Food Zahir Shah Toru has stated that the digitalization of various operations of the Food Department is in its final stages, with formal inauguration expected soon. He made these remarks while chairing a progress review meeting on ongoing digitalization projects of the department, last day.

The meeting was attended by Secretary Food Saqib Raza Aslam. Additional Secretary Ashfaq Ahmad, Director Food Musarrat Zaman, Managing Director of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa IT Board, and other senior officials.

During the session, the minister was briefed on the completion of technical work on the inspection/price control system, supply chain management system, and integration of the digital payment gateway. While other projects are also nearing completion.

Zahir Shah Toru emphasized that, in line with the vision of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's founder Imran Khan and under the leadership of Chief Minister Ali Amin Khan Gandapur, the Food Department's operations are being transitioned to a fully digital system. This transformation, he said, will ensure transparency and eliminate corruption.

# PTM’s misguided agenda and the realities of ‘Lar o Bar Yaw Afghan’

Tamannah Begum

**D**ESPITE its claims to support Pashtun rights, the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) raises doubts about its true goals and objectives based on its rhetoric and behavior. The most notable of these is the way it consistently promotes the phrase "Lar o Bar Yaw Afghan." This slogan subverts Pashtun identity, ignores historical and geographical facts, and promotes an agenda that is neither realistic nor advantageous to the Pashtun people, despite appearing to be a cry for togetherness.

The history of the Pashtuns predates the current state of Afghanistan, making them a proud and ancient nation. From the time of Ahmad Shah Abdali until the present, they have preserved their unique cultural identity for a long time and have been instrumental in forming the history of the area. However, it is not only historically incorrect but also undervalues the enormous contributions made by Pashtuns to the larger region to reduce their identity to that of a subset of Afghan nationalism.

The current Afghan state, marred by decades of war and instability, is ill-equipped to embrace more responsibilities, let alone integrate the Pashtun-majority areas of Pakistan. Afghanistan has been plagued by poverty, weak governance, and the absence of basic services for its citizens. By contrast, Pashtuns in Pakistan have benefited from their inclusion in a stable state, where they actively participate in politics, economy, and society. Pakistan has invested heavily in the development of its Pashtun regions, with substantial improvements in infrastructure, education, and healthcare over the years.

Afghanistan's struggles are no secret. According to recent reports, over 28 million people more than two-thirds of its population-require humanitarian assistance. With poverty rates exceeding 90% and a literacy rate of merely 37%, Afghanistan remains a state grappling with basic survival rather than progress. Furthermore, the Taliban's regressive policies have deprived women of fundamental rights, including education and employment, reducing their role in society to near invisibility.

In stark contrast, Pashtuns in Pakistan enjoy far greater opportunities for advancement. Literacy rates in Pashtun-majority regions like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) have risen significantly, and the region has seen vast improvements in infrastructure, employment, and quality of life. Pakistan's commitment to integrating tribal areas into the national framework has further opened avenues for development, leaving little doubt as to which system better serves the Pashtun people.

Despite its claims of being a voice for Pashtun rights, PTM's actions often appear misaligned with its stated goals. Instead of focusing on real issues such as education, health, and employment, PTM's rhetoric frequently veers into anti-state propaganda, accusing Pakistan's institutions without substantial evidence. For instance, their promotion of "Lar o Bar Yaw Afghan" is not just an emotional plea for unity but also a veiled attempt to destabilize Pakistan's Pashtun-majority regions by linking them to a failing Afghan state.

Moreover, PTM's alignment with anti-Pakistan narratives raises questions about external influences and funding. Historical events, such as Afghanistan's unprovoked aggression against Pakistan in the 20th century, illustrate Kabul's long-standing hostility. By adopting a narrative that aligns with Afghan interests rather than those of the Pashtun people in Pakistan, PTM risks alienating its base and losing credibility as a genuine advocate for Pashtun welfare.

The call for uniting Pashtuns under Afghan nationalism ignores the harsh realities faced by Afghanistan's own Pashtun population. They suffer immensely from poverty, displacement, and violence. It is not uncommon for Afghan Pashtuns to seek refuge in Pakistan, where they find greater opportunities and safety. The notion of merging Pakistan's Pashtun regions with Afghanistan is both impractical and detrimental, as it would subject the people to the same instability and suffering that has plagued Afghanistan for decades.

On the other hand, the idea of Afghan Pashtuns merging with Pakistan presents a more practical and beneficial alternative. Pakistan's stable institutions, growing economy, and established social framework can provide Afghan Pashtuns with the opportunities they desperately need. In this context, the slogan "Lar o Bar Yaw Pakistan" emerges as a more viable and constructive vision for the region's future.

Pakistan's efforts in Pashtun-majority regions stand as a testament to its commitment to uplift the community. From the construction of over 200 schools in tribal areas to health centers serving thousands of families, the state has consistently prioritized development. Literacy rates in KP have improved, roads and highways have connected remote areas to urban centers, and youth training programs have provided employment to thousands.

Operations like Zarb-e-Azb and Radd-ul-Fasaad have significantly reduced terrorism, creating a safer environment for development. The integration of erstwhile tribal areas into KP and subsequent legislative reforms have empowered Pashtuns to have a stronger voice in national affairs. These advancements demonstrate that Pakistan's approach to Pashtun welfare is rooted in tangible progress, not hollow slogans.

The PTM's insistence on promoting "Lar o Bar Yaw Afghan" is a misguided and counterproductive agenda that fails to address the real needs of Pashtuns. Afghanistan's dire situation offers no promise of stability or progress, making the notion of unification unrealistic. Instead, Pashtuns' future lies in strengthening their role within a stable and prospering Pakistan.

It is time for Pashtuns to reject emotional but impractical narratives and focus on building a brighter future within the framework of Pakistan. The unity, progress, and opportunities provided by Pakistan far outweigh the uncertain promises of an unstable Afghan state. By embracing "Lar o Bar Yaw Pakistan," Pashtuns can honor their rich history while securing a prosperous future for generations to come.

**Uraan Pakistan’s vision for unified, progressive nation widely eulogized**

PESHAWAR (APP): Pakistan's 13th Five-Year Plan (2024-2029), dubbed as "Uraan Pakistan," aims to chart a new path for the country's sustainable economic growth and societal development. Positioned at a pivotal moment in its history after its launch by Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz, Uraan Pakistan provides an inclusive workable roadmap to address the socioeconomic and environmental challenges besides provides quality education and healthcare services I addition to create jobs opportunities for youth. As Pakistan is determined to learn from the successes and failures of the previous plans, the 13th plan will help overcoming the long-standing systemic barriers that have hindered its progress.

In an interview with APP, Professor Dr. Naeem Khattak, former Chairman of the Economics Department at the University of Peshawar, described Uraan Pakistan as a pivotal initiative designed to strengthen the economy, alleviate poverty and create job opportunities for the youth.

Emphasizing the importance of reducing foreign debt dependence and fostering domestic industrial growth for long-term economic stability, he highlighted the critical need for innovation and technology, combining climate change imperative to drive a robust and export-oriented economy. Dr. Khattak also called for transparent financial resource allocation and effective oversight to ensure the success of the 13th plan.

He stressed that the private sector's participation, alongside accelerated infrastructure development and technological innovation, would play a crucial role in achieving the desired outcomes.

Investment in renewable energy, digital infrastructure, and vocational training to youth for a dignified employment are also central to the plan's objectives.

Reflecting on past strategies, Dr. Khattak cited Dr. Mehboob-ul-Haq's first Five-Year Plan (1983-1988), which focused on human resource development over mere economic expansion. While political instability and governance issues in the past impeded the full realization of Dr. Haq's vision, he noted that the subsequent plans attempted to address these challenges by focusing on economic growth, infrastructure, and social welfare. However, despite incremental successes, the 11th and 12th Five-Year Plans faced major hurdles due to political turbulence, economic volatility, and gaps in policy implementation. The 12th Plan, for instance, aimed for a 7-8% annual GDP growth but was significantly impacted by external shocks, including the global COVID-19 pandemic. Despite these challenges, the 13th Five-Year Plan—Uraan Pakistan—offers a renewed vision. This plan prioritizes innovation, environmental sustainability, and social infrastructure. He said a key component of the plan is the creation of a knowledge-based economy, with an emphasis on sectors like information technology, renewable energy, and agriculture.

"The aim is to position Pakistan as a competitive player in the global economy, ensuring that developmental benefits reach all segments of society, particularly marginalized groups such as women and rural communities."

PMNLN Nowshera President Hamza Khan also lauded the economic stability under the PMNLN government, pointing to the country's solid efforts to combat unemployment, price hike besides a better positive stock market performance.

He reported that Pakistan's foreign receipts had increased significantly, with expectations for further growth by the end of the financial year.

The plan also sets ambitious targets for 2035, aiming for a national GDP of one trillion dollars and an annual growth rate of 6% over the next five years.

As part of its climate commitment, Uraan Pakistan proposes green technologies, water conservation measures, and sustainable agricultural practices to combat climate change. Gulzar Rehman, former Conservator of Forests said Pakistan was highly vulnerable to climate change, emphasizing that Uraan Pakistan offers comprehensive solutions to environmental challenges.

He pointed out that the past plans underscored the importance of political stability and economic policy continuity, urging a unified approach across all levels of government and society to achieve the plan's objectives. Experts agreed that Uraan Pakistan represents a beacon of hope for the nation, offering a roadmap for sustainable and inclusive growth. With unwavering political will, effective governance, and collaboration across sectors, Pakistan can realize the aspirations of its people and secure a prosperous future for generations to come.





## In brief

### DC approves eight projects F.P. Report

KOHAT: A meeting of the District Development Committee (D-DC) was held with the Deputy Commissioner Kohat Abdul Akram Chitrali in the chair at his office on Friday. The meeting was attended by the authorities concerned of the relevant departments. Total 8 Projects were approved in the meeting including 3 for Agriculture, 2 for PCC Street, 2 for Livestock and 1 for Pressure Pump/Water Filtration Plant Sectors. Deputy Commissioner Kohat strictly directed the authorities concerned to ensure the timely completion of these projects without compromising on the quality of work. He further directed to ensure the provision of better services to the public. He stressed them to provide all possible relief and facilities to the people.

### Singer Wazeer passes away

HYDERABAD (INP): Famous Sindhi folk singer Wazeer Ali Umrani breathed his last after a protracted illness in Qambar on Friday. Famous for his other name of Bulbulay Sindhi, Wazeer Ali Umrani was suffering from a liver disease. Folk singer's last rites were performed at Sarmast Umrani village in Tehsil Meeru Khan. Umrani sang thousands of songs in six different languages including Sindhi, Balochi and Urdu.

### Young woman killed

SUKKUR (PPI): A young married woman was killed under the pretext of Karo Kari rite in the outskirts of Sukkur on Friday morning, police said. On information, the Site Area Police Station swiftly responded, locating her body dumped near Ring Road, and shifting it to the hospital for medico-legal formalities. According to the police, Abida, 23, was strangled to death by her husband and in-laws, who accused her of being Kari. The perpetrators, residents of Pirzada Bagh area, fled the scene, abandoning their home. This incident serves as a stark reminder of the dire need to address the pervasive issue of violence against women in our society.

### Connections disconnected

SUKKUR (PPI): Sukkur Electric Power Company (SEPCO) has disconnected 323 electricity connections of various government institutions across 10 districts, including Sukkur, Shikarpur, Khairpur, and Larkana. The power disconnection affects various government institutions, street lights, and public services. Notably, street lights on major roads in Sukkur city, such as Airport Road, Military Road, and Shikarpur Road, have been turned off, causing inconvenience to residents. According to SEPCO's CEO, Ijaz Ahmed Channa, the action was taken due to the Sindh government's failure to pay outstanding dues. The disconnection of electricity supply to government institutions underscores the urgent need for the Sindh government to address these financial obligations to restore essential services in the affected areas. SEPCO, a major electricity provider in Sindh, serves multiple districts, including Sukkur, Shikarpur, Khairpur, and Larkana. SEPCO is responsible for distributing electricity to both private consumers and public sector institutions. Over the years, there have been recurrent issues with unpaid electricity bills from various government institutions.



KOHAT: A view of over loaded vehicle at University Road, may cause any incident.

## Coal miners stuck in Balochistan belongs to Shangla expect one

### F.P. Report

SHANGLA: Another wave of sorrow has struck Shangla as a coal mine operated by the Balochistan United Mineral Company collapsed following a poisonous gas explosion. The incident occurred in Quetta's Sijandi area on Thursday night, trapping 12 miners, all hailing from Shangla. Rescue teams have so far recovered one charred body, while operations continue to retrieve the remaining 11 miners who remain buried under the debris. According to details, the mine exploded due to the accumulation of toxic gases, causing a catastrophic collapse. Rescue operations began immediately after the incident, but the absence of heavy machinery hindered progress throughout the night. By Friday morning, heavy equipment was brought in, intensifying efforts to recover the trapped miners.

The first body to be recovered was identified as Umar Wali resident of Tangow. The company has released a list of the trapped miners, which includes: Roshan Zeb, Izharuddin, (residents of Banda Pir Abad), Muhammad Malik, Amanullah, Noman, (residents of Banda Mian Khel, Pir Abad), Waheed Zaman and Nizamuddin, sons of Muhammad Yousuf,



Muhammad Shafi, (residents of Rahimabad), Umar Wali, (resident of Tango, Akbarullah (resident of Zara, Luqman (resident of Madain, Khwazakhela) Swat.

One miner, a local resident of Quetta. Shangla, tragically known for its coal miners, has 79% of its population working in the coal mining sector due to the lack of alternative livelihoods. Unfortunately, safety protocols and regulations are often ignored in these mines, leading to frequent accidents that disproportionately affect Shangla's impoverished laborers. This incident underscores the ongoing failure of authorities to enforce safety measures in coal mines, leaving workers vulnerable to such disasters.

Despite the large-scale operations of the coal mining industry, government efforts to regulate the sector and hold companies accountable remain insufficient. Consequently, the lives of workers continue to be at risk, with tragedies like this becoming all too common.

## Buner press club elects unopposed cabinet

### F.P. Report

BUNER: Buner Press Club (BPC) cabinet formed with consensus for 2025, on Friday. The cabinet included Mukhtar Alam President, Saeed Rashid General Secretary, Shabbir Ahmed Vice President, Zainul Abedin Abid Joint Secretary, Bahlul Khan Information Secretary and Muhammad Rehman Finance Secretary. While Abdur Rahman Abid, Moammar Zaman, Imranullah Ikram Yousfzai and Said Laiq

Jan chose members executive committee.

District Bar Association President Advocate Mian Naem u din Bacha and the Buner Bar Cabinet have completed the election process and announced cabinet. Deputy Commissioner Kashif Qayum DPO Shah Hasan, ADC Relief Syed Akram Shah all members of District Press Club Buner participated.

The speakers said that the importance of media in the current era cannot be denied. Therefore, the

voice will be raised in every forum and the journalists will raise their voices through their pen and tongue for the oppressed and the public's justice.

The speakers said that the journalists of District Press Club Buner have always done positive journalism and have always highlighted the deprivations of Buner. Deputy Commissioner Buner said that the district administration of Buner will fully cooperate with the newly elected cabinet.

## Man commits suicide over domestic issues

### F.P. Report

SHAHADKOT: A 38-year-old named, Ranjhan son of Muhammad Ibrahim Khoso, resident of village Rahmon Khoso area of Qambar Shahdadkot district, ended his life by firing a pistol in anger with his family over a domestic problem.

On receiving information, the police officials of Gaji Khuhwar police station took the body of the deceased into custody and after conducting a post-mortem at the Taluka Hospital Warah after that it was handed over to the heirs. The body was found

to be in a state of shock upon reaching home. The deceased is survived by two children and his widow.

Ombudsman commits for redressal for public issues: Regional Director Ombudsman Larkana Ali Akbar Jagirani said that if there is any complaint in the society, especially about various departments working under the administration of Sindh province, they can come to the regional office and register their complaints, and their problems will be solved, because the job of our office is to solve your problems without delay.

He further said that this institution is open to solving your legitimate problems. If your problems are not solved by any government institution, then you can file a written complaint against it.

On this occasion, the students of Government Girls College Qambar also asked some questions to the Regional Director Ombudsman Larkana, to which they were given satisfactory answers. While in this seminar, Principal of Government Girls College Qambar Nighat Mehjabin Shah, students and staff participated in large numbers.

## Terrorist attack in Khuzdar flayed

### F.P. Report

QUETTA: In the incidents that took place in Zehri yesterday, the elements that damaged the innocent people and government property are active in the direction of the enemy.

These views were expressed by Senator Samina Mumtaz Zehri, the chairperson of the Senate Standing Committee on Human Rights, in a condemnatory statement. She strongly condemned the cowardly acts of terrorist elements in Zehri Khuzdar and said that the cowardly acts are the actions of failed and cowardly anti-national elements who do not wish anyone well. Such elements will surely be brought to their end.

The cowardly elements that damage the country's property and challenge the government's writ in the name of rights do not deserve any discount. Under a well-thought-out plan, they are proving

their cowardice by cowardly attacking civilians and security forces and damaging property, which the entire nation strongly condemns.

She said that targeting innocent people and government offices is a clear reflection of the "cowardly thinking" of terrorists. Senator Samina Mumtaz Zehri while paying tribute to the security forces said that the brave security forces foiled the cowardly terrorists in their evil intentions.

They cowardly by cowardly attacking civilians and security forces and damaging property, which the entire nation strongly condemns.

She said that targeting innocent people and government offices is a clear reflection of the "cowardly thinking" of terrorists. Senator Samina Mumtaz Zehri while paying tribute to the security forces said that the brave security forces foiled the cowardly terrorists in their evil intentions.

## Activists demand completion of much awaited power plan

### F. P. Report

LOWER DIR: Local political and social activists on Friday complained that despite the tall claims and promises, the long-awaited Koto Hydro Power Project could not be completed even after nine years. The project, which was started at a huge cost of Rs 13998 million project, will generate 40.8 MW of electricity. According to official sources, 98 percent of the project has been completed so far.

The government treasury will get Rs 6 billion annually from the project. The activists demanded the government and concerned authorities to take notice of the matter and speed up work on the project.

Higher security authorities recently visited the site to review security arrangements for the Chinese engineers working on the project. A total of 215 police officials along with Dir Levies personnel are currently deployed for the security of the Koto hydro Power Project.

According to official

sources, the Pakistani government is working on the said project in collaboration with the Chinese company Sichuan-Sarwar-Silian-Chongqing Luyang (JV). The founder of PTI Imran Khan along with the then Chief Minister Pervaiz Khattak, had laid the foundation stone of the said project on July 4, 2015, which was to be completed in February 2019. In the last 3 years, 6 announcements were made regarding the inauguration of the said project, which could not be implemented till now. On October 17 last year, the Project Director Sultan e Room assured the Special Secretary Irfanullah Wazir that the project would be completed in November 2024.

According to the project authorities, over 98 percent work on the Rs 13998.89 million project has been completed. The powerhouse will generate 40.8 MW of electricity that would be added to the national grid. Several dates for completion were announced earlier by the concerned authorities, but

the project was yet to be completed, mostly due to security threats to foreign engineers.

**Section 144:** The district administration has banned illegal construction, exchange, purchase and sale of state land. The order, issued under Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC), aims to prevent the government from sustaining losses due to illegal use of state land, an official said.

The ban, which will come into effect immediately, will remain in force for 30 days. Violation will be punishable under Section 188 of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC). The order has been sent to the concerned authorities including District Police Officer, Assistant Commissioners, and Secretary to Commissioner Malakand Division.

The administration has warned that disciplinary action will be taken against the concerned officers if any illegal construction is reported on government land.

## Commissioner inspects construction work

### F.P. Report

MARDAN: Commissioner Mardan visited district headquarters hospital, on Friday. He reviewed the ongoing work on the OPD block, mosque, hostels, and diagnostic block under the hospital's development package number three. Deputy

Commissioner Mardan was also accompanying him. Medical Superintendent Dr. Javed Iqbal and Xen C&W briefed the Commissioner Mardan, and stated under the package three of the DHQ hospital, work is underway to expand the hospital to 600 beds at a cost of Rs 2.6 billion. 80 to 85 percent of the construction work on the

facilities under this package has been completed, but the problem of funds is pending for the remaining work, for which the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Gandapur has approved funds of Rs 20 crore.

Commissioner Mardan Nisar Ahmad inspected the ongoing development work and construction work in detail. He said that the DHQ hospital is located in the center of Mardan city and there is a lot of rush of patients from the city and outside, so it is necessary to complete the work under package three as soon as possible.

**Girls achievements in sports lauded:** A Prize

Distribution Ceremony at the Hall of Fame to honor winners of All Pakistan Girls Sports Competition BISE Mardan held, Chairman BISE Mardan Prof Jehan Zeb graced the occasion as a Chief Guest.

Secretary BISE Mardan Prof Hazrat Ali along with senior officers of the board also participated in the ceremony. Prof. Jehan Zeb, Chairman BISE, Mardan addressed the gathering, emphasizing the importance of sports alongside education. He said "Participation in sports is as essential as education, as it not only strengthens individuals physically but also enhances their mental health.



HYDERABAD: A thick fog blankets the entire city, shrouding everything in mystery as the chill of the morning weather causes all to vanish in the mist.

## Anti-encroachment operation launched

### F.P. Report

HAFIZABAD: In compliance with the orders of Chief Minister of the Punjab, crackdown against encroachments started in the district Hafizabad and different anti-encroachment teams led by Chief Officer Municipal Committee are engaged in removing temporary and concreted encroachments in the city.

Anti-encroachment crackdown is also underway in Pindi Bhattian, Sukheki Mandi and Jalalpur Bhattian to demolished encroachments to ensure provision of better

communicational to people particularly women and female students. All handcarts have been shifted from redzone, chowks and markets to hand-carts model bazar established by the district administration by the orders of the Chief Minister Punjab.

Employees hold rally: Government employees under auspice of All Pakistan Clerks Association Hafizabad took out a rally against unacceptable anti-employees steps taken by the government including amendments of pension, 17-A and leave encashments rules led by President APCA

Chaudhry Abdul Majeed Gujjar, Rai Hussain Ali, Faisal Abbas and Chaudhary Nasrullah Hanjra.

Participants of the rally demanded the Chief Minister of the Punjab to all anti-employees notifications and stop discrimination among government employees. They also demanded the government to restore life time provision of pension for widows.

They also demanded that all benefits and equal rights be provided to employees of all provinces and to stop night attack on benefits of the government employees.

## Crackdown launched against illegal gas refilling

### F.P. Report

Toba Tek Singh: On the instructions of Director General Civil Defense Punjab and Deputy Commissioner Toba Tek operations against illegal gas refilling and illegal petrol agencies are going on rapidly throughout the district. Civil Defense under the

supervision of District Civil Defense Officer Mehmood Gill. The team conducted inspections at 35 locations and during these operations, 12 shops were sealed, one FIR was registered, and four challans were issued. Civil Defense Officer Mehmood Gill said that these illegal businesses are not only dangerous to public life and

property but also a violation of the law.

He expressed his determination that these operations will continue without any pressure for the safety of the people. Citizens appreciated the actions of the administration and said that these operations are important to ensure safety standards in the area.





**KAOHSIUNG :** Two Kuang Hua VI-class missile boats are seen during a simulated attack drill off Kaohsiung City, southern Taiwan.

## As wildfires rage in Los Angeles, Trump doesn't offer much sympathy

WASHINGTON (AP): As cataclysmic wildfires rage across Los Angeles, President-elect Donald Trump hasn't been offering much sympathy. Instead, he's claiming he could do a better job managing the crisis, spewing falsehoods and casting blame on the state's Democratic governor.

Trump has lashed out at his long-time political foe Gov. Gavin Newsom's forest management policies and falsely claimed the state's fish conservation efforts are responsible for fire hydrants running dry in urban areas. Referring to the governor by a derisive nickname, Trump said he should resign. Meanwhile, more than 180,000 people were under evacuation orders and the fires have consumed more than 45 square miles (116 square kilometers). One that destroyed the neighborhood of Pacific Palisades became the most destructive blaze in Los Angeles history.

Trump v. Newsom: Round 2 was to be expected - the liberal Democrat has long been one of Trump's biggest foils. But the Western fires are also a sign of something far more grave than a political spat or a fight over fish. Wildfire season is growing ever longer thanks to increasing drought and heat brought on by climate change. Trump refuses to recognize the environmental dangers, instead blaming increasing natural disasters on his political opponents or on acts of God. He has promised to drill for more oil and cut back on renewable energy. Trump said on social media

that Newsom should "open up the water main" - an overly simplistic solution to a complex problem. "NO MORE EXCUSES FROM THIS INCOMPETENT GOVERNOR," Trump said, adding, "IT'S ALREADY FAR TOO LATE!"

Standing on the street in a scorched subdivision as a home behind him was engulfed in flames, Newsom responded to the criticism when asked about it by CNN. "People are literally fleeing. People have lost their lives. Kids lost their schools. Families completely torn asunder. Churches burned down, and this guy wants to politicize it," Newsom said. "I have a lot of thoughts and I know what I want to say, but I won't."

In a post on his Truth Social media network, Trump tried to connect dry hydrants to criticism of the state's approach to balancing the distribution of water to farms and cities with the need to protect endangered species, including the Delta smelt. Trump has sided with farmers over environmentalists in a long-running dispute over California's scarce water resources. But that debate has nothing to do with the hydrant issue in Los Angeles, driven by an intense demand on a municipal system not designed to battle such blazes. Trump hosted Republican governors at his Mar-a-Lago club in Florida and suggested that, upon taking office, he'd pressure California into changing its water policies. "We're gonna force that upon him now," the president-elect said of Newsom. "But it's very late because I think it's one of the great

calamities in the history of our nation."

About 40% of Los Angeles city water comes from state-controlled projects connected to northern California and the state has limited the water it delivers this year. But the southern California reservoirs these canals help feed are at above-average levels for this time of year. Roughly 20% of hydrants across the city went dry as crews battled blazes, Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass said. Firefighters in Southern California are accustomed to dealing with the strong Santa Ana winds that blow in the fall and winter, but the hurricane-force gusts earlier in the week took them by surprise. The winds grounded firefighting aircraft that should have been making critical water drops, straining the hydrant system.

"This is unlike anything I've seen in my 25 years on the fire department," Los Angeles Fire Capt. Adam VanGerpen told CBS This Morning. Janisse Quiones, head of the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, said the ferocity of the fire made the demand for water four times greater than "we've ever seen in the system." Hydrants are designed for fighting fires at one or two houses at a time, not hundreds, Quiones said, and refilling the tanks also requires asking fire departments to pause firefighting efforts. President Joe Biden, who was in California for an environmental event that ended up being canceled as the fires raged, appeared with Newsom at a Santa Monica firehouse.

## More than 46,000 Palestinians have been killed in the Israel-Hamas war

GAZA STRIP (AP): More than 46,000 Palestinians have been killed in the Israel-Hamas war, Gaza's Health Ministry said, with no end in sight to the 15-month conflict. The ministry said a total of 46,006 Palestinians have been killed and 109,378 wounded. It has said women and children make up more than half the fatalities, but does not say how many of the dead were fighters or civilians.

The Israeli military says it has killed over 17,000 militants, without providing evidence. It says it tries to avoid harming civilians and blames Hamas for their deaths because the militants operate in residential areas. Israel has also repeatedly struck what it claims are militants hiding in shelters and hospitals, often killing women and children. In recent weeks, Israel and Hamas have appeared to inch closer to an agreement for a ceasefire and the release of hostages. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said this week that

a deal is "very close" and he hopes to complete it before handing over U.S. diplomacy to the incoming Trump administration.

But he and other US officials have expressed similar optimism on several occasions over the past year, only to see the indirect talks stall. The war began when Hamas-led militants stormed into Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting around 250. Some 100 hostages are still inside Gaza. Israeli authorities believe at least a third of them were killed in the initial attack or have died in captivity.

The war has flattened large areas of Gaza and displaced around 90% of its 2.3 million people, with many forced to flee multiple times. Hundreds of thousands are packed into sprawling tent camps along the coast with limited access to food and other essentials. Fatma Abu Awad lost six family members in two Israeli strikes

15 minutes apart. An Israeli strike on a vehicle killed her son, while a separate strike on a tent in Muwasi Khan Younis wounded her son and killed his wife and four children. "I swear we've been waiting for news about a truce every day - but there's no truce, only news of my son and my daughter-in-law and her children being killed," she said at a school in Khan Younis where she's sheltering alongside many other displaced families.

Later at a nearby cemetery, she prayed over the graves of her family, marked only by headstones of cinderblock rubble stuck in the dry earth. "What we are living is not a life. Nobody could bear the situation we're experiencing for a single day," Munawar al-Bik, a displaced woman, told The Associated Press in an interview this week. "We wake up at night to the sounds of men crying, because of the bad situation," she said. "The situation is unbearable. We

have no energy left: we want it to end today."

Al-Bik spoke on a dusty road in the southern city of Khan Younis next to a destroyed building. Behind her, a sea of makeshift tents filled with displaced families stretched into the distance. Dozens of people took part in funeral prayers outside the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in the central Gaza city of Deir al-Balah for people killed in Israeli strikes the day before. In the hospital morgue, a man could be seen kneeling and bidding farewell to a relative before slamming a refrigerator door in an outburst of grief.

Palestinian health officials said Israeli airstrikes killed at least nine people in Gaza, including three infants - among them a 1-week-old baby - and two women. "There is hope every day that there would be truce and ceasefire negotiations would work but it's useless hope as we've been waiting for a year and two months for the war to end.

## Taiwan demonstrates sea defenses against potential Chinese attack

KAOHSIUNG. Taiwan (AP): Taiwan demonstrated its sea defenses against a potential Chinese attack as tensions rise with Beijing, part of a multitiered strategy to deter an invasion from the mainland.

The island's navy highlighted its Kuang Hua VI fast attack missile boats and Tuo Chiang-class corvettes in waters near Taiwan's largest port of Kaohsiung, a major hub for international trade considered key to resupplying Chinese forces should they establish a beachhead on the island. The Kuang Hua VI boats, with a crew of 19, carry indigenously developed Hsiung Feng II anti-ship missiles and displayed their

ability to take to the sea in an emergency to intercept enemy ships about to cross the 44-kilometer (24-nautical mile) limit of Taiwan's contiguous zone, within which governments are permitted to take defensive action.

China routinely sends ships and planes to challenge Taiwan's willingness and ability to counter intruders, prompting Taiwan to scramble jets, activate missile systems and dispatch warships. Taiwan demanded that China end its ongoing military activity in nearby waters, which it said is undermining peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait and disrupting international shipping and trade.

Mountainous Taiwan's strategy is to counter the much larger Chinese military with a relatively flexible defense that can prevent Chinese troops from crossing the strait. Landing sites are few on Taiwan's west coast facing China, forcing Beijing to focus on the east coast. Hsiao Shun-ming, captain of a Tuo Chiang-class corvette, said his ship's relatively small size still allows it to "deliver a formidable competitive power" against larger Chinese ships. The Tuo Chiang has a catamaran design and boasts high speeds and considerable stealth ability.

Taiwan has in recent years reinvigorated its

domestic defense industry, although it still relies heavily on US technology such as upgraded fighter jets, missiles, tanks and detection equipment. US law requires it to consider threats to the island as matters of "grave concern," and American and allied forces are expected to be a major factor in any conflict. Exercise "demonstrates the effectiveness of asymmetric warfare, and Taiwan's commitment to defense self-reliance," said Chen Ming-feng, rear admiral and commander of the navy's 192 Fleet specializing in mine detection. "We are always ready to respond quickly and can handle any kind of maritime situation."

## Poland to hold presidential election on May 18

WARSAW (AP): The head of Poland's parliament said that the country's presidential election will be held on May 18, with a runoff on June 1 if needed. The election will decide whether the pro-European Union Cabinet of Prime Minister Donald Tusk will gain an ally in the presidential palace at a challenging time for Poland and for Europe, with a full-scale war in neighbouring Ukraine.

The incumbent right-wing President Andrzej Duda is at odds with the government, blocking legislation and making strongly critical comments. In the latest spat, Duda chose skiing over attending a concert gala marking the launch of Poland's rotating presidency in the EU. Duda is to leave office in August, ending his second five-year term. He cannot seek another term, according to Poland's constitution.

Szymon Holownia, the powerful speaker of the lower house of parliament, or Sejm, has declared he will run for president as head of Poland 2050, a party within the ruling coalition. He said he was announcing the election date early in the political calendar to allow ample time for procedures and campaigning, which can officially begin from Jan. 15.

The powers of the president are limited in Poland, where the government decides on domestic and international policy. The president is the supreme commander of the armed forces, cooperating with the government. He can propose legislation and veto new laws and also has a say on Poland's foreign relations. The chief governing party, the Civic Coalition, has chosen Warsaw Mayor Rafal Trzaskowski as its candidate for president. Tusk, the party's leader and former head of the European Union, has chosen to stay in his government seat.

The right-wing opposition party, Law and Justice, backs historian Karol Nawrocki in the election. Nawrocki, now head of a national history institute, IPN, has been a controversial figure. Recent media reports allege Nawrocki had ties to hard-right groups and acquaintances in criminal circles. Nawrocki denies the allegations. Law and Justice was ousted in the 2023 general election after eight years of turbulent, euro-sceptic rule. Duda hailed from the party and was largely its ally.

## Body of British hiker found in Italian alps

ROME (AP): Rescue crews found the body of a missing British hiker buried in the snow of the Italian alps, but a search for his friend was suspended by poor weather conditions.

Experienced hikers Aziz Ziriati, 36, and Sam Harris, 35, had set out on Jan. 1 for a New Year's Day excursion in Italy's Adamello range. Italy's Alpine rescue service said it received an alert about the men on Jan. 6, after they failed to make a scheduled flight home.

After two days of fog, snow and avalanche warnings hampered searches, the service said rescuers guided by the hikers' phone registrations reached the pair's last recorded location. They found the body of Harris buried in snow at the foot of a rockfall at the base of the south face of the Carè Alto. Rescuers said it was possible he had fallen from above.

Rescuers also found the men's backpacks and some of their hiking equipment. British media quoted relatives and partners of the two men as saying they were experienced hikers who had planned to hike from mountain hut to mountain hut. The families said they had last heard from the pair on Jan. 1 but weren't concerned when they didn't hear from them in subsequent days. "They are experienced hikers and they go a couple of times a year. It wasn't surprising that they had no signal as they like going off the grid," said Joe Stone, a university friend of Ziriati. "Alarm bells were raised though when they didn't turn up for their flight on January 6."

## Iran holds military drills as it faces rising economic pressures

DUBAI (AP): Iran is reeling from a cratering economy and stinging military setbacks across its sphere of influence in the Middle East. Its bad times are likely to get worse once President-elect Donald Trump returns to the White House with his policy of "maximum pressure" on Iran. Facing difficulties at home and abroad, Iran last week began an unusual two-month-long military drill. It includes testing air defenses near a key nuclear facility and preparing for exercises in waterways vital to the global oil trade.

The military flexing seems aimed at projecting strength, but doubts about its power are high after the past year's setbacks. The December overthrow of Syrian President Bashar Assad, who Iran supported for years with money and troops, was a major blow to its self-described "Axis of Resistance" across the region. The "axis" had already been hollowed out by Israel's punishing offensives last year against two militant groups backed by Iran - Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in Lebanon. Israel also attacked Iran directly on two occasions.

An Iranian Revolutionary Guard general based in Syria offered a blunt assessment this week. "I do not see it as a matter of pride that we lost Syria," Gen. Behrouz Eshbati said, according to an audio recording of a speech he gave that was leaked to the media. "We lost. We badly lost. We blew it." At home, Iran's economy is in tatters.

The US and its allies have maintained stiff sanctions to deter it from developing nuclear weapons - and Iran's recent efforts to get them lifted through diplomacy have fallen flat. Pollution chokes the skies in the capital, Tehran, as power plants burn dirty fuel in their struggle to avoid outages during winter. And families are struggling to make ends meet as the Iranian currency, the rial, falls to record lows against the US dollar.

As these burdens rise, so does the likelihood of political protests, which have ignited nationwide in recent years over women's rights and the weak economy. How Trump chooses to engage with Iran remains to be seen. But he left open the possibility of the US conducting preemptive airstrikes on nuclear sites where Iran is closer than ever to enriching uranium to weapons-grade levels.

"It's a military strategy," Trump told journalists at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida during a wide-ranging news conference. "I'm not answering questions on military strategy." Iran insists its nuclear program is peaceful, yet officials there increasingly suggest Tehran could pursue an atomic bomb.

It's not just Trump or Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, a longtime foe of Tehran, that paint Iran's nuclear program as a major threat. French President Emmanuel Macron, speaking to French ambassadors in Paris, described Iran as "the main strategic and security challenge for France, the Europeans, the entire region and well beyond." "The acceleration of its nuclear program is bringing us very close to the breaking point," Macron said. "Its ballistic program threatens European soil and our interests."

While Europe had previously been seen as more conciliatory toward Iran, its attitude has hardened. That's likely because of what Macron described as Tehran's "assertive and fully identified military support" of Russia since it's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. France, as well as Germany and the United Kingdom, had been

part of Iran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers. Under that deal, Iran limited its enrichment of uranium and drastically reduced its stockpile in exchange for the lifting of crushing, United Nations-backed economic sanctions. Trump unilaterally withdrew America from the accord in 2018, and with those UN sanctions lifted, it provided cover for China's to purchase oil from Iran.

But now France, Germany and the United Kingdom call Tehran's advances in its atomic program a "nuclear escalation" that needs to be addressed. That raises the possibility of Western nations pushing for what's called a "snapback" of those UN sanctions on Iran, which could be catastrophic for the Iranian economy. That "snapback" power expires in October. Iran released a visiting Italian journalist, Cecilia Sala, after detaining her for three weeks - even though she had received the government's approval to report from there. Sala's arrest came days after Italian authorities arrested an Iranian engineer accused by the US of supplying drone technology used in a January 2024 attack on a US outpost in Jordan that killed three American troops. The engineer remains in Italian custody.

The length of the military drills started by Iran's armed forces and its paramilitary Revolutionary Guard may be unusual, but their intended message to the US and Israel - and to its domestic audience - is not. Iran is trying to show itself as capable of defending against any possible attack. Iran held air-defense drills around its underground nuclear enrichment facility in the city of Natanz. It claimed it could intercept a so-called "bunker buster" bomb designed to destroy such sites.

controversy and political division, adding that Trump will collaborate effectively with states regardless of whether they are red or blue. "I worked well with Biden, during his time, with natural disasters, and I worked well with Donald Trump," DeSantis said, referring to hurricanes that have hit Florida as well as the deadly collapse of a beachfront condo in Surfside in 2021. "So, I'm very confident, as a state that knows - we face these - that a Trump administration is going to be very strong and going to be there for the people regardless of party." One of the questions Trump answered was about the frequent drone sightings that made headlines in recent weeks, but have seen attention wane more recently. That prompted several of the governors around the table to express concern that such aircraft could make incursions into military or other secure areas.

"They don't want to talk about it," Trump said, repeating an assertion he's made in the past that the government may be covering something up on the issue. He promised to shed more light on it after Inauguration Day on Jan. 20. "We're gonna find out on the 21st," he said. "You have to give me a little time after the Inauguration. But, shortly thereafter, I will give you a report on it. We'll tell you exactly what it is."

## Trump hosts Republican governors in Florida

PALM BEACH, Fla. (AP): President-elect Donald Trump hosted 22 of the nation's 27 Republican governors for dinner at his Florida club, looking to help drive the agenda in conservative-run states after he takes office in 11 days.

Montana Gov. Greg Gianforte told reporters outside the gathering that some of the GOP governors unable to attend were being inaugurated, and that one was delayed by snow and was unable to make it to Mar-a-Lago in Palm Beach. But he said attendees who could come were "thrilled to accept the president-elect's invitation" and welcomed a coming "collaborative, working relationship, which we have not had for four years" during the Biden administration.

"It's been a long period without cooperation from Washington," Gianforte told reporters outside. "So, we're looking forward to the new administration coming in. We have a lot of business to get done on behalf of our states. We're just pleased to be here to meet with the president." Most reporters weren't invited to the proceedings, but cameras were allowed inside for part of the time. That allowed Trump to answer a series of questions from a Fox News Channel journalist. He discussed everything from his desire to have the US take control of Greenland to the parade of

an interview with state TV, Koulamallah praised the vigilance of the palace guards, describing the attackers as disorganized and intoxicated by alcohol and drugs. When asked if the attack was terrorism, he said it was probably not, as the attackers were local youths from the capital, N'Djamena.

The attack occurred the same day as a visit by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, who congratulated Deby Itno on reestablishing constitutional order. In the immediate aftermath, rumors spread online that the attack was the work of Islamic militant group

Boko Haram. Boko Haram, which launched an insurgency more than a decade ago against Western education, seeks to establish Islamic law in Nigeria's northeast. The insurgency has spread to neighboring West African countries including Cameroon, Niger and Chad. Chad, a country of nearly 18 million people, has been reeling from political turmoil before and after a controversial presidential election that resulted in Deby Itno's victory. He had led the country as interim president during the period of military rule that followed the death of his father in 2021.

## Attack on Chad's presidential palace leaves 19 dead

N'DJAMENA, Chad (AP): An attack on Chad's presidential palace left 18 assailants dead and six in custody, with one soldier killed and three wounded, state media reported. The attack occurred while Chadian President Mahamat Deby Itno was inside the palace, but authorities said the situation was quickly brought under control.

"The situation is completely under control. There is no fear," Foreign Affairs Minister Abderaman Koulamallah said while surrounded by soldiers in a live Facebook broadcast filmed inside what appeared to be a quiet presidential palace. In

an interview with state TV, Koulamallah praised the vigilance of the palace guards, describing the attackers as disorganized and intoxicated by alcohol and drugs. When asked if the attack was terrorism, he said it was probably not, as the attackers were local youths from the capital, N'Djamena.

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# Ukraine isn't fighting a forever war

**D**ONALD Trump's election victory in November brought him praise and congratulations from leaders and governments around the world. One of the more surprising messages appeared in a post on X from the Taliban in Afghanistan. The country's foreign ministry expressed hope that the president-elect's impending return to the White House would allow "both nations to open a new chapter of relations based on mutual engagement."

The group's overture reaffirmed the resounding futility of the longest war in America's history. For 20 years - from a month after the 9/11 attacks until summer 2021 - the US military fought and failed to vanquish the Taliban. More than 2,400 troops lost their lives in Afghanistan, along with almost 4,500 killed in Iraq. The men and women who survived the "forever wars" carried home the fraught question of whether their fallen comrades died in vain. Trump has tapped three of them for high-level positions in his incoming administration. Vice President-elect JD Vance and Tulsi Gabbard, Trump's nominee for director of national intelligence, deployed to Iraq. His pick for defense secretary, Pete Hegseth, served tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan. The trio's stated aversion to US intervention abroad, including in Ukraine, traces back to their misgivings about the forever wars.

Two years before winning election to the Senate in 2022, Vance wrote, "I left for Iraq in 2005, a young idealist committed to spreading democracy and liberalism to the backward nations of the world. I returned in 2006, skeptical of the war and the ideology that underpinned it." Vance, Gabbard and Hegseth frame Trump's "America first" isolationism as a principled corrective to the country's post-9/11 military misadventures. But their opposition to US support for Ukraine lays bare a worldview without a moral compass. All three appear oblivious to a dark irony: After years of claiming that America's political and military establishment betrayed their generation of veterans, they soon will assume the role of betrayer, abandoning Ukrainian troops to their fate. I reported from Afghanistan for three years starting in 2011 and I've covered the war in Ukraine since shortly before Russian troops and tanks crossed the border in early 2022. In terms of US involvement, an obvious distinction separates the forever wars from Russia's full-scale invasion, one that Trump and his team prefer to omit when they talk of shrinking America's military presence overseas. US leaders sent hundreds of thousands of troops to topple the regimes in Afghanistan and Iraq and to occupy both countries. They have shipped only weapons, equipment and ammunition to aid Kyiv in its just war of self-defense. There is little comparison between America's role then and now - even if Vance, presenting himself as "anti-war," conveyed that false equivalence on the Senate floor last spring after Congress passed a \$61 billion funding package for Ukraine.

So I'll offer a reminder that no US troops are fighting (or dying) in Ukraine's struggle against Russian President Vladimir Putin, who figures to emerge as the greatest beneficiary of America's retreat from the world. If Trump withholds assistance from Ukraine to force President Volodymyr Zelensky toward a cease-fire dictated by Moscow, the move will prove "anti-war" only in the sense that over time Ukrainian troops will lose the capability to defend their homeland. Countless more will die at Putin's hands. In military parlance, "Got your six" means "I've got your back." The culture of the US armed forces teaches troops to always protect one another, an ethos they uphold with soldiers of other nations - as in Afghanistan and Iraq - who patrol alongside them as partners.

Since Trump avoided military service during the Vietnam War, Vance, Gabbard and Hegseth could draw on their experience in uniform to enlighten him about the concept of mutual vigilance. They could seek to persuade him that America bears a moral obligation to protect a democratically invaded by a fascist dictator and that fulfilling its obligation enhances the safety of Ukraine, America and the entire West. They instead will turn their backs on Kyiv, abetting a national act of desertion that will compound rather than redress the tragedy of the forever wars.

I've interviewed dozens of veterans over the past decade who doubted the purpose of their service in those ill-conceived, ill-fated conflicts. In 2019, while reporting a story on moral injury, I spoke with former Army Sgt. Nate Vass, who deployed to Afghanistan in 2006. He finished his 16-month combat tour beset by post-traumatic stress disorder and deep disillusionment about a war he called misguided. "I feel a sense of bitterness about all of it," he told me. He mentioned friends killed overseas and others who died by suicide after coming home. "For what?" The specter of betrayal that shadows so many of the country's 21st-century veterans arises, in large part, from the absence of clarity about why four successive presidents - including Trump - sent them to Afghanistan and Iraq. No such strategic or moral haze obscures the reasons for supporting Ukraine. The country's brave fight to preserve its freedom, territory, culture and national identity exemplifies the democratic ideals that define the West - ideals that Vance, Gabbard and Hegseth revere in word but scorn in deed. Their forsaking of Ukraine will leave more blood on America's conscience, if not their own.

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# Can US ties with S Korea survive ongoing chaos on peninsula?

Donald Kirk

**T**HE turmoil surrounding South Korea's impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol is bitterly disillusioning to US officials and think-tank influencers who had thought Seoul and Washington were getting along famously. Americans were just as shocked as Koreans when Yoon declared martial law on Dec. 3, as well as when the assembly voted down the martial law decree and then impeached President Yoon by four more votes than the requisite two-thirds of its 300 members.

The prospect of Korea's constitutional court either approving or disapproving the impeachment, ousting Yoon as president or reinstating him with the authority that he lost with his impeachment, inspires scenarios ranging from civil war to business as usual. As much as the State Department and Pentagon wish the Korean crisis would calm down enough to ensure the Korea-US alliance emerges unscathed, the bond is in danger, with no chance of reconciliation between Yoon's conservative People Power Party (PPP) and the left-leaning Minju (or Democratic Party). The Minju, the dominant force in the National Assembly, spearheaded Yoon's impeachment and now is pressuring the badly scarred PPP regime and the courts to dispose of Yoon. His foes want him imprisoned for "insurrection" - the reason a district court in Seoul issued a warrant for his arrest at the behest of the high-level Corruption Investigation Office.

Serving the warrant, though, was another matter. First the investigators had to breach thousands of Yoon sympathizers blocking the way, and then, once they got into Yoon's compound, his security people refused to let them near him. Initially, the investigators gave up and left, resolving to come again in a portent of long-term civil unrest. Finally, after the police refused to help serve the warrant, the investigators got another warrant as Yoon stood fast. All this as Antony Blinken, shoring up US-Korean relations in his last foreign foray as

secretary of State, met with leaders of both sides.

In Washington, the deepest concern is that the crisis will go from bad to worse. The worst-case scenario would be for civil strife to break out in Seoul and other cities, as hundreds of thousands take to the streets while the court delays ruling on Yoon's impeachment. Six of the court's nine judges must uphold the impeachment motion for Yoon to lose his job permanently. As the court took up the impeachment motion, three of its nine seats were vacant. Needing only a simple assembly majority to impeach the acting president, Prime Minister Han Duck-soo, a former ambassador to the US who had automatically taken over from Yoon, the Minju-led assembly quickly impeached him after he refused to approve all three selections.

Armed with impeachment as a weapon, the Minju-led majority was hardly appeased after the new acting president, Deputy Prime Minister Choi Sang-mok, who serves as the finance minister, accepted two of the three Minju choices for the court. Minju leaders are holding over Choi's head the threat of also impeaching him, along with other Cabinet ministers, badly crippling the government's normal functions.

In a spiraling standoff, it is difficult to see any chance of reconciliation between left and right. Assuming that Minju adherents will never accept an adverse judicial outcome, their supposedly non-violent "candlelight vigils" will melt erupt into violence fueled by extremists in a deeply divided society.

For official Washington, the battle over Yoon's impeachment spells the end of painstaking efforts to reverse the anti-Americanism of the previous president, Moon Jae-in, a leftist who dreamed of reconciliation with North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un. Moon had clung to the fantasy ever since meeting Kim at Pannmunjom in April 2018, two months before President Trump

and Kim staged their historic summit in Singapore.

Moon persisted in imagining a deal with North Korea even as Kim refused to see him after Trump walked out of his second summit with Kim in Hanoi in February 2019 when Kim refused to agree to stop producing nuclear warheads. In vain hopes for North-South reconciliation, Moon jeopardized the US-Korea alliance by blocking joint exercises of US and South Korean troops. American defense strategists were overjoyed when Yoon, after narrowly defeating Minju leader Lee Jae-young in 2022, endorsed large-scale US-Korean war games. But the vision has vanished with Yoon's impeachment.

America, falling back on clichés, insists the bond between the US and South Korea remains "ironclad," but worries the allies will never renew the kind of exercises seen as essential for training for defense against the North. Also at stake is "trilateral" cooperation fostered by President Biden when he got Yoon and Fumio Kishida, then Japan's prime minister, to rendezvous at Camp David in August 2023, laying the groundwork for a permanent bond among the three nations. The so-called Spirit of Camp David infused what resembled a de facto three-nation alliance despite the legacy of Japanese colonial rule over the entire Korean peninsula from 1910 to 1945. These days, no one is harking back to Camp David.

Instead, the Americans give the impression of support for whoever's the acting president, praying that the Minju will not go on in driving out one government leader after another. The fear of "candlelight vigils" devolving into violence raises the specter of military and police forces diverting from defense against North Korea, as in the era before the democratic movement of 1987 that led to presidential elections every five years. The mass protests that resulted in the impeachment, ouster and jailing in 2017 of Park Geun-hye, daughter of the long-ruling dictator Park

Chung-hee, assassinated in 1979 were largely peaceful.

With conservatives fed up with the Minju's relentless efforts at stifling the government, however, this time may be different. The Minju, led by Lee Jae-myung, former mayor of Seongnam City south of Seoul and former governor of Gyeonggi Province surrounding the capital, promises to undo many of the gains achieved during the first two and a half years of Yoon's administration. If the constitutional court were to approve Yoon's impeachment, Koreans would vote for a new president in a snap election 60 days later. Lee, avoiding charges for which he faces trial in real estate and financial scandals, would almost certainly run again. Reviving Moon's search for a deal with the North, Lee could be expected to block US-South Korean joint exercises while looking for an "end-of-war" agreement - if not a peace treaty - replacing the Korean War armistice. Of course, the North's Kim Jong Un would stick to his demands for an end to the US-South Korean alliance and withdrawal of America's 28,500 troops while refusing to give up his precious nukes and missiles.

This worst-case scenario, however, does not have to happen. Trump, now president-elect, has indicated he would like to talk again to Kim, with whom he professed to have fallen "in love" at their Singapore summit. He has let it be known that he might not be averse to pulling out US troops while demanding the South pay far more than the \$1.1 billion a year agreed on as its share of US defense costs in 2025. It's possible, if Lee were to become president, that he would want to maintain close ties with the US for the sake of mutual interests ranging from economic to cultural as well as military. In Washington, a return to normalcy would come as a relief regardless of who's in charge in Seoul. The current crisis has been a nightmare from which the Americans would hope to awaken and discover the alliance, at least, endures as it has ever since the Korean War.

# Syrian regime change and New Years' attacks

Giorgio Cafiero

**O**N Jan. 20, US President-elect Donald Trump will begin his second term. It is extremely difficult to say how the incoming administration will approach the Middle East given Trump's unpredictability and the countless unknown factors that will shape regional dynamics in these upcoming years. If Trump's first term is any guide, it is probably safe to assume that Trump's second term foreign policy will be confusing and all over the map.

Trump announced the withdrawal of US troops from Syria on three separate occasions but never followed through on these promises during his first term. Additionally, for all his talk about ending the "endless wars" that he blamed on former President George W. Bush, his 2016 opponent Hillary Clinton, and others, Trump never ended the US military presence in Afghanistan or Iraq during his first four years in the Oval Office. Since winning last year's presidential election, he has selected neo-conservatives, hardline hawks, and pro-Israel advocates such as Marco Rubio, Elise Stefanik, and Pete Hegseth to serve his second administration. At the same time, Vice President-elect JD Vance has declared that "neo-conservative foreign policy is strategically and morally stupid."

Trump, despite sabotaging the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2018, commonly known as the Iran Nuclear Deal, expressed openness last year to negotiating a new deal with Tehran. He also attributed de-dollarization to US sanctions, including those imposed on Iran, while delivering a speech at the New York Economic Club. On the other hand, he has selected several individuals for high-ranking roles in his second administration who advocate for a US policy of regime change in Iran. Even if Trump does not pursue a direct regime-change agenda toward Tehran, his second administration will likely impose "maximum pressure 2.0" on Iran, which means they will be doing the same maximum pressure method in their second term as well. This would likely involve imposing increasingly stringent sanctions on Iranian oil exports to China and seeking European support to intensify pressure on the Islamic Republic. Trump will possibly encourage messianic Israel to take even more aggressive action against Iran and Tehran-aligned non-state actors in the region, such as the Houthis in Yemen.

However, the Middle East has undergone significant changes since Trump left the White House in January 2021, which will complicate his second term's foreign policy approach. Gulf Arab monarchies are now engaged in detente with Iran and are unlikely to support a renewed US-led "maximum pressure" campaign. It will also be extremely difficult for

Trump to build on his Abraham Accords legacy by bringing more Arab states into the Israeli normalization fold, especially in the context of the region's post-Oct. 7, 2023 environment. It is important to observe how Trump's second term policies adjust to the past four years of these major shifts in the Middle East.

It is unclear if or how the deadly New Year's Day attack in New Orleans - in which a 42-year-old US citizen and Army veteran named Shamsud-Din Jabbar intentionally drove a pickup truck into a crowd - will impact the second Trump administration's Middle East foreign policy. Given that the attacker used the Daesh/ISIS emblem, the possibility of new power vacuums in Syria or other countries in the region opening the door to a possible revival of the so-called "Caliphate" could result in the incoming administration focusing heavily on extremism in the Arab-Islamic world. In practice, this could entail Trump ordering the US military to launch strikes against Daesh/ISIS and other groups in the region. Given Trump's desire to avoid deploying US ground troops to conflict-ridden parts of the Middle East, remote drone strikes would probably be his preferred approach. Mindful of the fact that Trump waged drone attacks against such groups in a host of countries during his first term, imagining similar actions during his second term is somewhat easy.

Known for his unpredictability and tendency to appear "tough" on the international stage, Trump's Middle East foreign policy will likely be shaped by contradictions, tensions, and dysfunctionality. Conflicting motivations on the part of those serving his administration stand to further complicate matters with a divide between hardline neo-conservative hawks and "restrainers" wanting to avoid costly wars and quagmires. Time will tell who in the incoming administration makes the arguments that Trump finds most convincing. Nonetheless, there will likely be spirited internal debates that inform the president-elect's foreign policy decision-making.

Regardless of how such debates play out, Trump will probably make his foreign policy decisions in a transactional manner. Lacking a vision for the Middle East while opting to implement policies that serve the highest bidder, there is no reason to expect Trump, in his new term, to approach international relations based on the concept of American exceptionalism. Instead of believing that the US has a special mission in the world and a responsibility to shape a "liberal" global order, the president-elect can be counted on to approach the Middle East based on his loosely defined "America First" strategy, considerations of his legacy, and drive to secure lucrative business deals for large US companies while advancing his own financial interests.

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# China takes aim at Philippine democracy

Adam Nelson

**I**N April 2024, a spokesperson for former Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte suggested that the Philippines and China had entered into an undisclosed "gentleman's agreement" between 2016 and 2022. China would not challenge the status quo in the West Philippine Sea and the Philippines would send only basic supplies to its personnel and facilities on the Ayungin Shoal.

But now, the Philippines is emerging as an essential player in resisting China's strategic ambitions in the region, with President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr.'s administration asserting Philippine maritime claims through naval confrontations and new legislation. This comes at a time when the country is facing a quieter, but equally serious, threat at home. The recent, high-profile case of Alice Guo - a former mayor accused of graft, money laundering and espionage - shows

how domestic corruption leaves the Philippines vulnerable to Chinese infiltration and subterfuge. How the Philippines navigates this challenge could shape not only its future but also the broader stability of Southeast Asia.

In addition to conducting aggressive military maneuvers in the surrounding seas, China is also pursuing strategic investments and subtler forms of manipulation to push Philippine leaders (at all levels of government) into a more China-friendly stance. This is in keeping with its global strategy of building influence through investments targeting other countries' elites, clandestine business alliances and economic incentives. As the Philippines approaches critical elections in 2025 and 2028, China will try to befriend or otherwise gain sway over anyone who is open to its overtures. Given these efforts, one cannot rule out a future Philippine government that adopts China's

own model of governance, state control and mass surveillance. Such a government might not only consult China's authoritarian playbook to quash dissent; he or she could also leverage China's resources and international political support to evade scrutiny and accountability. Institutions meant to serve the Philippine people would become tools for monitoring and restricting opponents and critics, and China will have secured itself a valuable foothold in Southeast Asia.

China has been stepping up its information operations globally, using the Philippines as a testing ground for tactics designed to propagate anti-American narratives and build pro-Chinese sentiment. Through platforms like Facebook and TikTok, which many Filipinos rely on for news, Chinese accounts amplify content that casts doubt on Philippine-US rela-

tions and erodes social trust within Philippine society.

By exploiting internal instability, Chinese influence operations aim to distract Philippine authorities from China's own aggression in the surrounding seas. One potential source of disruption is the lead-up to the elections in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). Should an ongoing peace process there falter, the region would inevitably demand much more of the national government's attention and resources. What can be done? Even if US investments do not match the scale of China's infrastructure projects in the Philippines, Western strategic aid can help by presenting a clear alternative to China's debt-driven model.

Such a strategy would not only support Philippine sovereignty but also strengthen America's network of alliances in the Indo-Pacific. Specifically, to counter

Chinese interference, the US and its allies should direct investments and support to advance five priorities. First, since corruption is a national security threat, they should fund programs to ensure disclosures of "beneficial ownership" (who ultimately owns private businesses), debt transparency and the integrity of public procurement and tendering processes. This would not only create a level playing field for all businesses; it would also help safeguard Philippine institutions and political processes from covert foreign manipulation.

Second, the integrity of elections must be strengthened. Long-term election monitoring can help expose and counter covert foreign influence efforts and misuses of resources, ensuring transparency beyond Election Day. If sufficiently supported, citizen-led observation efforts can reinforce the sense that the process is fair, making electoral institutions more resilient against external pressures.

Third, the Philippines' allies need to protect the BARMM peace process, such as by funding initiatives that strengthen local governance and security institutions in the region. The peace process, and the country more broadly, would benefit from enhanced information security, including targeted support for local initiatives to improve the public's digital news literacy.

Lastly, the Philippines needs help countering Chinese surveillance of its citizens and officials. US support for cybersecurity and programs to protect digital rights can frustrate Chinese influence tactics and provide more transparency on major digital platforms. A stable, democratic Philippines is vital to US interests and regional security. America and its Indo-Pacific partners and allies must do more to help the country build resilience against Chinese aggression not only in its territorial waters, but also in its politics.



# Trump wants to rekindle his Kim Jong Un bromance

Daniel R. DePetrís

**TO say that President-elect Donald Trump has a lot of plans for his second term would be a gross understatement. He has vowed to implement the largest deportation operation in American history, secure the US-Mexico border and negotiate a peace settlement between Ukraine and Russia.**

Yet for Trump, all of these items may be minor when compared to one other issue: resolving the North Korea nuclear conundrum. Taking Pyongyang's nuclear program off the board is Trump's proverbial white whale, a feat that none of his predecessors managed to accomplish. Members of Trump's inner circle told Reuters in late November that the next president was already talking about restarting the personal diplomacy with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un that had begun during his first term.

Talk is one thing, reality another. If Trump enters office thinking he can easily resurrect his relationship with Kim, then he's going to set himself up for disappointment. Resolving the North Korean nuclear issue was hard five years ago, but it will be even harder today. During his first term, Trump was able to push for personal engagement with North Korea's head of state despite resistance among his national security advisors. This was the right move at the time. After all, bottom-up attempts by the Bush and Obama administrations to negotiate with Pyongyang proved to be both laborious and unsuccessful.

After nearly a year of fire-breathing rhetoric and talk about a "bloody nose" strike that would scare Pyongyang into talks, Trump opted to gamble on direct diplomacy. This was partly because his other options - more economic sanctions or military action - ranged from ineffective to disastrous, and partly because the South

Korean president at the time, Moon Jae-in, was able to convince Trump that a direct channel of communication to Kim might be the key to cementing a nuclear deal of historic importance. Despite three Trump-Kim meetings, face-to-face diplomacy failed to produce anything over the long-term. While

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Trump managed to get North Korea to suspend missile tests for a year - no small accomplishment given its past activity - the flashy summitry ultimately crashed and burned. In the end, Trump and Kim, their personal chemistry notwithstanding, were unable to come to terms - Trump, pushed by his hawkish advisors, advocated for North Korea's complete denuclearization; Kim, meanwhile, was only willing to demobilize his main plutonium research facility at Yongbyon.

US-North Korea diplomacy has been dead ever since. The Biden administration's overtures to Pyongyang over the last four years have been repeatedly slapped down, apparently a consequence of what the North Korean leadership views as a lack of seriousness on the part of Washington as well as US attempts to solidify a trilateral military relationship between the United States, South Korea and Japan.

In other words, on Jan. 20, the perennial North Korean nuclear problem will be as thorny as ever. And probably thornier: Kim is far less desperate for a nuclear agreement and an end to US sanctions now than he was during Trump's first administration. First, Kim hasn't forgotten his previous meetings

with Trump. He sees the summitry of 2018 and 2019 as a waste of time at best and a personal humiliation at worst. This shouldn't be a surprise; the North Korean dictator staked significant capital on negotiating an agreement to lift US sanctions and to normalize Pyongyang-US relations. His entreaties failed on both accounts. Three summits later, US sanctions remained intact and US-North Korea relations remained in their usual acrimony.

Kim will be more cautious this time around. "We have already explored every possible avenue in negotiating with the US," he said in November, adding that the result had been more US aggression. And in a December speech, he promised to deliver the "toughest ... counter-actions" against the US, an expression of his commitment to resisting what he perceives as a hostile bloc underwritten by Washington. The geopolitical environment has evolved as well. Back in 2018-

2019, North Korea was isolated, and the suspension of US sanctions was seen as a critical to its economic growth.

But now Putin's war in Ukraine has provided the Kim regime a golden opportunity to diversify its foreign relations away from China by cozying up to Moscow, not least by sending thousands of North Korean troops to the Ukraine-Russia front lines. Russia, which used to be a partner in the United States' desire to denuclearize North Korea, is now using North Korea as a way to frustrate America's grand ambitions in East Asia. For Kim, the advantages of his relationship with Russia are equally clear: Putin needs arms and men; Kim needs cash and military technology. And thanks to Russia's veto at the UN Security Council, additional sanctions are a pipe dream for the foreseeable future, while those on the books already are meekly enforced. As long as the Russia-North Korea relationship continues as its current pace, Trump will be hard pressed to bring the North Koreans back to the negotiating table.

None of this is to suggest that Trump shouldn't try another diplomatic foray with North Korea. Regardless of the criticism he received at the time, Trump's decision to shake things up and go straight to the source was an admirable attempt to manage an issue that has defied US presidents for more than three decades. Yet if Trump wants a second roll of the dice, he needs to keep a healthy dose of skepticism front-of-mind. Given the continued improvement of North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile capabilities, any agreement the United States signs with the Kim regime will be less impressive than it could have been in 2019 - assuming we get an agreement at all.

The Los Angeles Times

# Meet the new Russian man, shaped by war

Mélina Magdelénat

**WAR impacts gender hierarchies and gender roles deeply, reducing men to their duty of protection over vulnerable women. The masculine duty to defend the state becomes even more acute during wartime. Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Putin's propaganda has promoted a militarized masculinity as an ideal above softer alternatives. This wartime shift is captured in a video circulated on Telegram not long after the partial mobilization in September 2022.**

Two young men in sweatshirts, sitting on a bench and chatting, appear to contribute little to the economy or the labor force. But they are the ones highlighted as real men - whereas the successful, wealthy banker hurrying to leave Russia is dismissed as a selfish boy. The banker's failed masculinity is shown by his refusal to carry out his duty to protect vulnerable women as an elderly woman falls near his expensive car. Instead, his driver crushes the oranges that the elderly woman bought with what little money she has. Not only does he fail to act as the protector, but he harms the more vulnerable in society.

The two young men, by contrast, are Russia's future. They have stayed loyal to the state, ready to fight for Russia on the field or in the street. The advert seeks to make people who identify with the youths proud and shame those who fled like the banker. It reflects not only the popular resentment against those often upper-middle-class, well-educated Russians who left in the first months of the war, but also a recalibrating of who is hailed as a true Russian man. Exemplifying this redefinition is the outsized role that the Wagner Group came to play in the first 18 months of the full-scale invasion. Its mercenaries epitomized raw, aggressive, unfiltered, shirtless "muzhik" masculinity in contrast to the sleek cosmopolitanism associated with corporate elites and the economic turmoil of the 1990s.

Prigozhin's recruitment of troops directly from Russia's prisons greatly contributed to this re-evaluation, turning obscure, excluded individuals in society into war heroes. This is part of what political scientist Ivan Krastev called an attempt to redefine the Russian nation: "Prisoners are welcomed in the nation, while all those anti-war cosmopolitan elites, including some of Putin's oligarchs, are not." In an unofficial 2024 calendar, the FSB veterans' charity further exalts this type of masculinity.

The Russian soldier - a faceless, nameless man, heavily clad in head-to-toe combat gear - is validated in his masculinity by a series of feminized figures reduced only to their shared vulnerability. The calendar's artwork places modern Russian soldiers in a continuous line of ethnically Russian heroes, from President Vladimir Putin - portrayed in a tight Z-branded T-shirt flaunting very muscular arms - to Peter the Great and Alexandr Nevsky.

Other materials to encourage conscription emphasize even more explicitly the inflated masculine and societal value of military service, compared to other occupations. In one advertisement, men in various service jobs are shown fleetingly in military uniform, then back to their normal work clothes, with messages encouraging them to put their skills to better use by becoming soldiers. At the end, the text on the screen reads, "Aren't you a real man? Be one." This messaging plays on the promise that through military service, working-class men can now aspire to the wealth and status once only available to urban elites. In Russia (as in many countries), military service is tied to material success as well as heroic status.

In a first-hand account of life in his parents' village, historian Sergei Chernyshov describes the appeal that a soldier's wages and honor have for men from poor and remote areas in Russia's provinces. Enlisting can mean death, of course. But it can also mean coming back with more cash than most can ever imagine making in their deprived hometowns. For criminals, it can mean

rehabilitation and social approval. Chernyshov wrote that a former Wagner soldier who had spent his life in prison for petty theft and hooliganism lived on the same street as his parents. "Now he has a medal and a brand new car."

He took his parents on holiday to the seaside. They supposedly cried with pride for their son." Clare McCallum documented a shift in "heroic masculinity" from the soldier to the worker during the post-war Soviet Peace movement in the 1950s and 60s. One could argue that Russia is now experiencing the opposite shift.

The permeation of this ideology into Russian society has led to dire consequences in the war and when soldiers return home. Since February 2022, the Russian regime's repression

***But it can also mean coming back with more cash than most can ever imagine making in their deprived hometowns. For criminals, it can mean rehabilitation and social approval. Chernyshov wrote that a former Wagner soldier who had spent his life in prison for petty theft and hooliganism lived on the same street as his parents. "Now he has a medal and a brand new car. He took his parents on holiday to the seaside. They supposedly cried with pride for their son." Clare McCallum documented a shift in "heroic masculinity" from the soldier to the worker during the post-war Soviet Peace movement in the 1950s and 60s. One could argue that Russia is now experiencing the opposite shift. The permeation of this ideology into Russian society has led to dire consequences in the war and when soldiers return home. Since February 2022, the Russian regime's repression and intimidation of its people have rapidly worsened.***

and intimidation of its people have rapidly worsened. Masculinized violence has come to define not just the Russian army's gender posturing, but the regime's actions at home and abroad. The Russian army's new and aggressive masculinities brutally manifest in the acute prevalence of sexual violence.

The UN Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine has produced alarming reports of sexual violence committed "at gunpoint, with extreme brutality," on victims as young as four years old. One prosecutor in the Kherson region called it a "systematic approach." In occupied Ukrainian territories, this violence largely targets women and girls, whereas victims in detention are mostly male POWs - against whom violence is often perpetrated to dehumanize them by symbolically stripping them of their masculinity. Kateryna Busol, a human rights lawyer, argues that authorities have created a "permissive environment for sexual violence" by failing to hold soldiers accountable for their atrocities, pardoning murderers and rapists in return for service and encouraging the brutal hazing of new recruits. But conscription is also to blame. Political scientist Dara Kay Cohen showed in 2013 that armed groups that rape is used as a method of socialization when troops are recruited forcibly or from prisons. Rape acts as a bonding mechanism to create unit cohesion among anxious conscripts in unfamiliar environments.

Cohen's research helps make sense of the many stories of soldiers gang-raping women, while others watch and even cheer. One man who was held in a Russian detention facility recalled hearing soldiers jointly rape another detainee with a baton, saying, "They enjoyed it. They were having fun." It is easy to see how the emphasis on aggressive masculinity outlined here could contribute to this behavior. Soldiers are being told that the only correct masculinity they can exhibit is violent and "muzhiki."

They are shown that the most praiseworthy men in society are now criminals and those wielding weapons. In group con-

texts, this is conducive to participating in rape to prove one's belonging to the correct category of masculinity. But this is reinforced by the Defense Ministry's ruthless approach to conscription. Thousands of newly naturalized migrants, especially Central Asian men, are being forced into military service through passport-seizing and abusive court cases over minor debts. Men recruited from prisons are already routinely exposed and desensitized to sexual violence as a means of discipline. On the battlefield, this creates volatile and emotionally challenging environments.

When soldiers return from the war, the normalization of violence continues to have dire consequences. Soldiers return home traumatized and emboldened by the legalized violence they were

exposed to, often materializing as domestic abuse. In 73% of cases where military men were charged with battery, the victims were women, mostly close relatives of the perpetrator. A former convict returned from the front was pardoned by Putin and went on to stab his girlfriend to death with a hunting knife.

In many stories, the perpetrators are often former Wagner fighters, which seems to confirm the link between an emphasis on aggressive masculinity and actual aggressive behavior.

Soldiers' heroic status means they also mostly get away with violence. Instead of being offered adequate support to prevent them from committing crimes, or being given more than negligible fines when they do, they are pardoned, glorified, and invited to speak at schools. Such impunity further legitimizes violence against women as something normal and inevitable - perpetuating a vicious cycle of structural oppression. Even when soldiers are offered some psychological help, this is mostly gender-blind and feeds into the same systemic issue. One Russian psychologist told Deutsche Welle that some psychologists treating soldiers with PTSD emphasize the heroic nature of their experience of war. "On an emotional level," he said, "it can be supportive therapy. But on a moral level, it normalizes violence and aggression."

The wartime reshaping of Russian masculinity is therefore both a cause and a consequence of wartime violence. Embedded in structural mechanisms that shape Russian society, it then creates further ripples of violence away from the front lines. Decrypting these patterns can help us understand not just the behavior of Russian soldiers, but that of militaries more broadly. However, in the Russian case, they are part of a wider gendered picture. Putin has built the legitimacy of his invasion on the protection of an idealized traditional gender order and on the marginalization and securitization of LGBTQ+ people. It is hence crucial to remain attuned to the variety of complex roles gender plays in this war.

The Moscow Times

# Türkiye's strategic role in Somalia's development and security

Dr. Tunc Demirtaş

**TÜRKIYE, which sent troops to Somalia on Jan. 3, 1993, took a step toward establishing international peace and stability as part of the United Nations' Second Somalia Operation (UNOSOM II). This step opened the door to a new era in which Türkiye intervened in conflict areas in Somalia with diplomatic and humanitarian assistance. The visit of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who was the prime minister at the time, to Somalia in 2011 was a turning point in Türkiye's approach to Somalia.**

Türkiye's contributions to strengthening state institutions, as well as stability and defense, have grown at an ever-increasing pace. Acting with an understanding of joint growth and development, Türkiye has advanced its relations with Somalia within this framework.

Indeed, contributions to the formation of a strong and inclusive governance system have been made by increasing the capacities of public institutions in Somalia through technical support programs and training. In addition, with its health, education and infrastructure projects, Türkiye has contributed to the development of state-society relations in Somalia by increasing the access of the Somali people to basic services and fostering trust. On the other hand, Türkiye has always supported Somali society and prioritized institutional relationships over individual ties while exclusively cooperating with legitimate governments and supporting democratization.

However, one of the most obvious areas of Türkiye's contributions to Somalia is the defense sec-

tor. Indeed, in 2017, a comprehensive program was launched to enhance the Somali National Army's operational capacity by establishing the TURKSOM Military Training Base in Somalia. In order to shape the Somali security forces in accordance with local conditions and to protect the territorial integrity of Somalia, a wide range of assistance is provided, from military training to operative support in the conflict area. Türkiye also provides training for the Somali Police Force, including the Haramcad public order units.

Türkiye also makes significant contributions to Somalia's infrastructure and economic development. In this context, the modernization of Mogadishu Airport and Mogadishu Port, the rehabilitation of main roads and the improvement of public services are concrete indicators of Türkiye's interest in the development of Somalia.

Additionally, humanitarian aid and health support in newly established districts in regions liberated from the Al-Shabaab terrorist group in Somalia continue through organizations like the Turkish Red Crescent, Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA), and civil society groups. Thus, the contributions of soft power play a crucial role in preventing these regions from falling under terrorist group Al-Shabaab's control.

Therefore, it is understood that humanitarian aid aimed at improving the quality of people's daily liv-

ing conditions also contributes to sustainable stability in Somalia.

Relations between Türkiye and Somalia have developed and continue to develop in many areas over time. These ties have turned into a strategic partnership encompassing both diplomatic and emotional ties. Türkiye's large-scale humanitarian aid operation in Mogadishu in 2011 helped gain the trust of the Somali people. Following this start, Türkiye continued its humanitarian aid and has continued to support Somalia, which it sees as a brotherly partner, in almost every field. Economically, Turkish companies have contributed to the revival of Somalia's local economy by undertaking infrastructure projects. Türkiye's establishment of its largest embassy in Mogadishu and Turkish Airlines' regular flights to the city have contributed to boosting trade and facilitating travel between the two countries.

At this point, Türkiye's educational partnerships have become more prominent. Thousands of Somali students have studied in Türkiye through scholarships provided by the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB). Upon their return, these students have actively contributed to Somalia's development, including roles in state administration. In addition, the hospitals and health services Türkiye has established in Somalia have significantly improved the quality of life of the Somali people.

Later, Türkiye also shared its expertise in enhancing security in Somalia and provided support to counter-terrorism efforts within the framework of international law.

These efforts elevated Turkish-Somali relations to the level of brotherhood and strategic partnership.

Somalia's strategic geopolitical position offers substantial opportunities for future cooperation with Türkiye. In this context, projects and investments such as securing territorial waters, constructing new airports and ports, and the space station project will further deepen the partnership between the two countries. On the other hand, all these projects will increase Türkiye's investment volume in Somalia, allowing Somalia to stand out more prominently in the region in terms of investments. Additionally, the construction of the new Mogadishu city, recently announced by Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, and the potential new opportunities for the private sector arising during this process will also contribute to deepening relations. Indeed, the establishment of the entire infrastructure for the planned new city will bring significant advantages.

Furthermore, with the potential discovery of reserves by the Oruc Reis, which is conducting seismic research in Somalia, and the initiation of activities in the fishing sector, Turkish companies will be able to take on an active role in Somalia. These areas also hold a great potential in terms of both energy independence and maritime security. Similarly, the anticipated deepening of relations in the fields of defense and security will also allow for the consolidation of relations in counter-terrorism efforts. In summary, the sustainability of Türkiye-Somalia relations is expected to strengthen cooperation in various fields for the future.

# Give Biden his due, he has been one of the best presidents of our time

Juan Williams

**NANCY Pelosi joked before the November election that President Joe Biden will one day be on Mount Rushmore in the company of presidents Roosevelt, Lincoln, Jefferson and Washington. That's over the top. But there is a lot of truth in Pelosi's tribute. Here is a straightforward, honest scorecard on Biden's time in the Oval Office. As you will see he deserves to be celebrated as an effective president. One of the best of our time.**

First, let's start with the economy. His critics harp on the economy as his major failing. It is the reason, they say, the GOP triumphed in the 2024 elections and will control the White House, Senate and House of Representatives in a few weeks. The critics are so wrong that history will judge them as dizzy on their own lies. The fact is that as Biden leaves office the US economy is the envy of the world. Remember that when Biden came into office the US economy was in such bad shape that a recession was widely forecast by Republicans and Democrats. Four years later, no recession ever gripped the American economy thanks to Biden. Today American stocks account for 65 percent of global equities. The historical record tells

us the US financial holdings now dwarfs the combined totals of Japan, China and the United Kingdom. The per capita GDP of the poorest US state - Mississippi - is roughly equal to the United Kingdom.

And the job market flourished under Biden. Unemployment hit record lows. There are historic gains in wage growth. Without a doubt, America remains the best place in the world to do business or hold a job. Thanks, President Biden. I can hear the naysayers raising a ruckus. What about inflation? Good point. Biden did spur inflation by pumping money into the economy. But what was the alternative? The rescue measures kept the economy afloat and millions of people out of bankruptcy. And to repeat, the recession never happened.

And inflation is coming down. No. 2 on the scorecard is his winning record as commander-in-chief. Biden ended America's longest war, the war in Afghanistan. Three previous presidents agreed it was an endless, mostly pointless use of the military. Biden stood tall and withdrew US troops from Afghanistan. As Biden said in his 2021 speech announcing the withdrawal, "No

amount of military force would ever deliver a stable, united, and secure Afghanistan ... known in history as the 'graveyard of empires.'" The withdrawal was undeniably tragic - 13 American military died. But how many lives were saved by getting Americans off that battlefield? Ask the British and the Russians who lost thousands when they withdrew. Also on the scorecard is Biden's remarkable leadership in fighting Russian aggression against Ukraine without putting US troops in danger. Biden built an international coalition to support Ukraine. He reinforced the principle that no country is free to grab territory from a neighbor. Biden's steadfast support for Ukraine also sent a clear message to China about US commitments to defend Taiwan.

Biden also upheld America's longstanding alliance with Israel at great political cost as Israel stirred global angst by exercising little restraint in going after the terrorist group Hamas. Thank you, President Biden. The scorecard shows big domestic wins for Biden. Biden beat back an attempted insurrection by Donald Trump after the 2020 election. Modern America had no experience with the threat to democracy posed by

the Jan. 6 riot at the Capitol. Biden steadily held to the principle of free and fair elections. He never stooped to lies about election fraud. He never threatened local election officials or retaliated against Trump. His presidency is a testament to the resilience of American democracy in the face of unprecedented challenges. Thank you, President Biden.

The scorecard does show Biden committing errors. His decision to stay in the 2024 race until a disastrous debate performance was a big mistake born of ego and opened the door to Trump's return. The scorecard shows a second big error in his pardon of his son after promising to uphold the law even when it came to his family.

Yes, he has reason to worry about the incoming president's talk about retaliation against political foes. But Biden looks hypocritical. Here's the final score: The scrappy kid from Scranton made America a better place. Americans may find themselves longing for the Biden years. They may even ask him - or his capable vice president - to step back into the fray and save the nation once more. For now, we owe Joe Biden our gratitude. Thank you, Mr. President, for a job well done. The haters can take a walk to Mount Rushmore.





Brand seminar 2025

# Haier shows committment to technological innovation, environmental sustainability



F.P. Report

LAHORE: Haier Brand Seminar 2025, showcasing its commitment to technological innovation, environmental sustainability, and a forward-looking vision for modern living. The event was held in Lahore on 8th January 2025.

The seminar brought together Haier's vast dealer network, key stakeholders, and prominent figures from across Pakistan. The event was packed with excitement, groundbreaking announcements, and a glimpse into Haier's transformative journey for 2025. Haier Brand Seminar Leading Together; Innovation, Green, Future, highlighted Haier's dedication to pushing boundaries, reducing environmental impact, and continuously meeting the evolving needs of its customers.

As part of the seminar, around 1000 Haier's dealers all over Pakistan were

invited to visit the Haier's Factory where they visited the production facilities and display centers. They witnessed firsthand how Haier maintains its high standards in manufacturing while introducing groundbreaking, tech-savvy products designed to enhance modern living. The display of cutting-edge appliances reaffirmed Haier's leadership in delivering innovative solutions that resonate with Pakistani households. The dealers were impressed to see the modern production and complete product range.

The seminar was graced by Olympic Gold Medalist Arshad Nadeem, who served as the chief guest. Sharing his inspiring journey of persistence and hard work, Arshad drew a powerful parallel between his achievements and Haier's relentless pursuit of excellence. "Just as dedication and persistence helped me achieve my dream, Haier's continuous efforts are

paving the way for innovation and progress," he remarked.

Leading the Greener World; Haier remains committed to sustainability, incorporating eco-friendly practices and technologies into its products. From energy-efficient air conditioners to environmentally conscious washing machines, Haier's innovations are designed to reduce energy consumption and minimize harm to the planet. This focus on green solutions aligns with global efforts to create a more sustainable future.

Shaping the Future of Home Living; Looking ahead, Haier is dedicated to accommodating the changing needs of its customers through continuous innovation. The company's vision for the future revolves around smarter, more connected homes that enhance comfort, efficiency, and convenience. Haier is not just meeting expectations; we are setting new

benchmarks for the future.

The event featured inspiring addresses from Haier's leadership team: Mr. Feng Xianfa, CEO Haier Pakistan, expressed his excitement, stating, "Haier is here to not only meet but exceed customer expectations with unparalleled solutions." Mr. Sohaib Rathore, Director Sales, shared, "2025 will be a year of deeper customer engagement and sustainable business practices." Mr. Hamayoun Bashir, Director Marketing, declared, "Haier is committed to groundbreaking advancements that will redefine comfort and convenience for our customers." During the event, the product managers also discussed the new innovative product launches which will further ease, transform, and redefine the lives of the consumers.

Haier Brand Seminar 2025 was more than an event, it was a testament to the brand's unwavering commitment to innovation, sustainability, and shaping a brighter future for its customers and partners.

Haier recognized and awarded its outstanding dealers for their dedication and contributions, solidifying the strong bond between the brand and its network.

The event also served as a platform to celebrate the strong partnerships between Haier and its dealer network. Haier is leading the charge into a future of smarter, greener, and more connected living.



ISLAMABAD: Chairperson PEGASUS Airlines and Hiit Nur Goknman called on Federal Minister for Board of Investment, Privitisation and Communication Abdul Aleem Khan.

## Int'l Bioethics Conference at SIUT begins

F.P. Report

KARACHI: SIUT's Centre of Biomedical Ethics and Culture (CBEC) inaugurated its two-day international conference titled "The Warp and Woof of Human Morality." This event marks the 20th anniversary of the Centre and features national and international speakers discussing human morality and ethics through talks meant to appeal to public and professionals alike.

The conference opened with Professor Farhat Moazam, Founding Chairperson of CBEC, acknowledging the role of Professor Adib Rizvi in the growth of the Centre. She then presented the national and regional impact of the Centre's educational programs and highlighted some of the challenges Pakistan still faces in ethical medical practice in Pakistan. Professor Anwar Naqvi from SIUT spoke about CBEC's achievements in Pakistan and in the region over the past twenty years. Following this, Professor Aamir Jafarey presented the institution's milestones over the past two decades making use of archival media.

The keynote address, titled "Pluriversality in Bioethics," was delivered online by Dr. Caesar Atuire, a distinguished scholar in Bioethics and Global Health from Ghana, and



President of the International Association of Bioethics (IAB). Dr. Atuire critiqued the colonial mindset within bioethical traditions and highlighted the importance of local context and values in shaping human morality. This was followed by three presentations by CBEC's alumni, Dr. Amjad Mahboob (KPK), Dr. Nida Wahid Bashir (Sindh) and Dr. Natasha Anwar (Punjab). Each described the impact that their ethics education in the Centre has had on their personal and professional lives.

The afternoon sessions, conducted in Urdu, focused on "Women in Pakistan." Dr. Arfana Mallah, from University of Jamshoro presented the challenges faced by women in Sindh, highlighting the intersection of feudalism and fundamentalism.

Dr. Fatima Hasan, an author, offered her exploration of women's voices in literature within the South

Asian subcontinent. The first day concluded with a play highlighting environmental issues performed by schoolchildren.

The talks on the second day will include Dr. Paul Lombardo, a historian and bioethicist from the USA, on the Muslim philosopher and physician, Ibn-e-Sina. Dr. Syed Noman-ul-Haq of IBA will discuss the story of 'ayy ibn Yaq?'n by Muslim philosopher, Ibn Tufayl. Dr. Nauman Faizi from School of Social Sciences and Humanities, LUMS will speak about different approaches to living an ethical life.

The conference will conclude with an Urdu literary event discussing the deep connection between Urdu literature and human values. The panel will include renowned poets, Iftikhar Arif sahib, Zehra Nigah sahib, Noor-ul-Huda Shah sahib, and will be moderated by Harris Khaliq sahib, well-known writer and poet.

### COURT NOTICE

In The Court of Ms Mashal Latif C.J-IV Kohat Suit no.374/1. Inst.25/7/22 Date of hearing.13-01-2025, Titled:- Naeem Shah Vs Sher Khan(etc) Notice against:- (2)Basheer Khan Son of Noor Badshah R/o Banda Parachgan Tshil and District Kohat presently R/o(Now in Abroad Dubai UAE) (Defendant) Whereas the above plaintiff has instituted a civil suit against you Defendant in which date of hearing 13-01-2025 is fixed for your appearance Since your intimation/service is not possible through ordinary means/mode therefore you Defendant is intimated through this publication to appear before this court by person or by pleader on date fixed 13-01-2025 otherwise court shall be proceeded in accordance with law.order Issued on.09-12-2024 (Court of CJ-IV Kohat)

### COURT NOTICE

In the Court of Inam Ullah Mohmand Civil Judge-I, North Waziristan at Bannu. Suit No. 331/1 Institution No. 15-05-2024 Next Date of Hearing 27-01-2025 Case Title Abdullah Vs Abdul Shakor etc.Notice to (2)Abdul Saboor (5) Muhammad Ishaq sons of Muhammad Ghafoor Khan resident of Taj Muhammad Kot Chishma Tehsil Miranshah District North Waziristan presently Abroad. In the above case titled the service of above defendant (s) is not possible through ordinary means, therefore , you defendant (s) is / are informed through this publication that on 27-01-2025 at 8.00 AM. You have to appear before this court either personally or through attorney or through counsel to pursue the suit noted above, otherwise, Ex-parte proceeding will be initiated against you.

### COURT NOTICE

In the Court of Inam Ullah Mohmand Civil Judge-I, North Waziristan at Bannu. Suit No. 333/1 Institution No. 15-05-2024 Next Date of Hearing 27-01-2025 Case Title Abdullah Vs Abdul Shakor etc. Notice to (2) Abdul Saboor (5) Muhammad Ishaq sons of Muhammad Ghafoor Khan resident of Taj Muhammad Kot Chishma Tehsil Miranshah District North Waziristan presently Abroad. In the above case titled the service of above defendant (s) is not possible through ordinary means, therefore , you defendant (s) is / are informed through this publication that on 27-01-2025 at 8.00 AM. You have to appear before this court either personally or through attorney or through counsel to pursue the suit noted above, otherwise, Ex-parte proceeding will be initiated against you.

### COURT NOTICE

In the Court of Inam Ullah Mohmand Civil Judge-I, North Waziristan at Bannu .Suit No. 640/1- Institution 2024 Next Date of Hearing 16-01-2025. Case Title. Asharf ali khan V/S Provincial Government etc Notice To .6 abdul wadud son Inayat ullah khan 10 bahsh ahmad son muhammad shaheed 20/4 Muhammad Faiz son banat khan R/o Hasu hail merali District North waziristan .In the above titled suit the service of above defendant is not possible through ordinary means, Therefore, you defendant is informed through this publication that on 16-01-2025 at 08-30 AM you has/ have to appear before this court either personally or through attorney or through counsel to pursue this suit noted above, otherwise Ex-parte proceeding will be initiated against you. Given under my hand and seal of this Court.

## Birth anniversary of Hakim Said observed

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Several simple but graceful events were held on Thursday to mark the birth anniversary of Shaheed Hakim Mohammed Said, the martyred founder of Hamdard Foundation Pakistan and Hamdard University (HU), at Madinat al-Hikmah, the main campus of the university.

The day began with recitation of the Holy Quran at the mausoleum of Hakim Said, after which

Fateha was offered by the students and staff of the university, who were led by Vice Chancellor Prof Dr Syed Shabib-ul-Hasan. A memorial ceremony was then held at the Hamdard Public School, which was also attended by Hakim Said's daughter and HU's Chancellor Madam Sadia Rashid.

The chief guest on the occasion was Prof Dr Ahsana Dar and the guest of honour was Accountant General of Sindh Baber Khan. The other prominent

personalities present on the occasion were HU's Vice Chancellor Prof Dr Shabib-ul-Hasan, Registrar Kaleem A. Ghias, Hamdard Foundation Pakistan's Director Syed M. Arsalan, HFP's Adviser Sumera Javed, Syed Mansoob Ahmed, Shakila Khurram, Saleem Feroqi, and Alia Kashif Azimi.

An exhibition of calligraphic pieces prepared by the students of the university and arranged at Bait al-Hikmah was inaugurated by Madam Sadia. She

expressed delight over the high quality of some of the paintings on display.

A brief citation describing the life and achievements of the martyred visionary was read out on the occasion. Hakim Said - who was instrumental in reviving Unani medicine in Pakistan and launching a number of educational institutions and business and philanthropic ventures - was born on Jan 9, 1920 in Delhi. He was assassinated by unknown gunmen on October 17, 1998.

## US job growth blows away expectations in December

Unemployment rate falls to 4.1%

WASHINGTON (Reuters): U.S. job growth unexpectedly accelerated in December while the unemployment rate fell to 4.1% as the labor market ended the year on a solid footing, reinforcing views that the Federal Reserve would keep interest rates unchanged this month.

The Labor Department's closely watched employment report on Friday also showed a decline last month in the number of people who have permanently lost their jobs and a shortening in the median duration of unemployment. A rise in these measures had raised concerns about labor market deterioration.

The upbeat report also supported the U.S. central bank's cautious stance toward further monetary policy easing this year amid mounting fears that pledges by President-elect Donald Trump to impose or massively raise tariffs on imports and deport millions of undocumented immigrants could stoke inflation.

Those worries were evident in minutes of the Fed's Dec. 17-18 policy meeting published on Wednesday, which noted "most participants remarked that ... the Committee could take a careful approach in considering" further cuts.

"The odds have increased that the Fed is close to being finished with its loosening cycle, particularly if the incoming Trump administration pushes ahead with a

stagflationary mix of tariffs and immigration curbs," said Thomas Ryan, North America economist at Capital Economics.

Nonfarm payrolls increased by 256,000 jobs last month, the most since March, the Labor Department's Bureau of Labor Statistics said. Data for October and November was revised to show 8,000 fewer jobs added than previously reported.

Economists polled by Reuters had forecast payrolls advancing by 160,000 jobs, with estimates ranging from 120,000 to 200,000 positions added. The economy created 2,232 million jobs in the final year of President Joe Biden's term. About 3 million jobs were added in 2023.

Though hiring has slowed in the aftermath of the U.S. central bank's hefty rate hikes in 2022 and 2023, labor market resilience, mostly reflecting historically low layoffs, is powering the economy by supporting consumer spending via higher wages. The economy is expanding at well above the 1.8% pace that Fed officials regard as the non-inflationary growth rate.

Job gains last month were concentrated in non-cyclical industries like healthcare, which added 46,000 positions that were spread across home healthcare services, nursing and residential care facilities as well as hospitals. Retail employment rebounded by 43,000 jobs after declining 29,000 in

November. Government payrolls rose further, adding 33,000 positions. Employment in leisure and hospitality increased by 43,000 jobs.

Financial markets overwhelmingly expect the Fed to keep its benchmark overnight interest rate unchanged in the 4.25%-4.50% range at its Jan. 28-29 policy meeting, CME's FedWatch tool showed. The central bank has lowered its policy rate by 100 basis points since launching its easing cycle in September. The Fed last month projected only two quarter-point rate cuts this year compared to the four it had forecast in September, acknowledging the economy's endurance and still-elevated inflation. The policy rate was hiked by 5.25 percentage points in 2022 and 2023.

The dollar rose against a basket of currencies. Longer-dated U.S. Treasury yields jumped to their highest levels since November 2023.

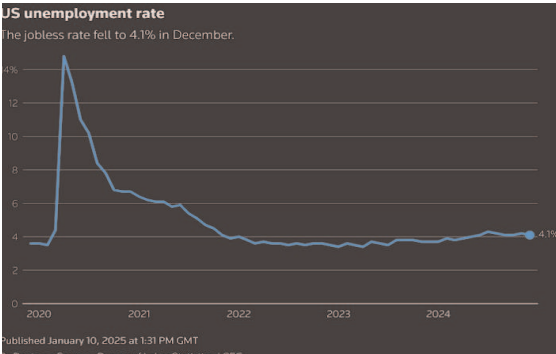
Average hourly earnings increased 0.3% last month after gaining 0.4%

in November. In the 12 months through December, wages advanced 3.9% after rising 4.0% in November.

While business sentiment perked up following Trump's Nov. 5 election victory on hopes of tax cuts and a less-stringent regulatory environment, economists do not expect a surge in hiring in the near term. Business surveys likewise have shown no sign that companies are planning to boost headcount. The fall in the unemployment rate was from 4.2% in November.

The government revised the seasonally adjusted household survey data, from which the unemployment rate is derived, for the last five years. There was minimal impact on the jobless rate. The number of people who have permanently lost their jobs dropped 164,000 to 1.7 million last month.

The median duration of unemployment decreased to 10.4 weeks. It had steadily risen since September, hitting a near three-year high of 10.5 weeks in November.



## CCP stresses for level playing field for business

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) organized an advocacy session on Competition Law for members of the Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RCCI), highlighting the need for fair competition to drive economic efficiency.

Saeed Ahmad Nawaz, Member of the CCP, emphasized the importance of a level playing field for businesses across all sectors.

The session was attended by a significant number of businessmen and corporate lawyers, said a press release issued here on Friday.

Saeed, stressing the need for greater awareness and understanding of the law, elaborated on CCP's proactive enforcement measures, including its Market Intelligence Unit

(MIU), which uses advanced data analysis to identify abnormal pricing trends and take enforcement actions when necessary. He further explained that the CCP's role extends beyond enforcement, as it actively engages with government ministries and regulatory bodies to recommend policy changes that promote fair competition.

The session featured a detailed presentation by Ahmed Qadir, Director General of MIU, who explained the core components of the Competition Act, 2010. Qadir provided insights on issues arising from abuse of dominant position, prohibited agreements, deceptive marketing practices, and mergers and acquisitions.

He highlighted why avoiding anti-competitive practices important for businesses and encouraged

businesses to consult the Commission's Guidance on Competition (GCC) booklet for self-regulation.

RCCI President, Usman Shaukat, acknowledged the crucial role of the CCP in fostering fair competition and creating an equitable business environment. He expressed concern over the dominance of large businesses, which often marginalize small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Shaukat emphasized the need for continued support and a conducive environment for the growth of SMEs in the country.

The session concluded with a vote of thanks by Khalid Farooq, Senior Vice President RCCI, who expressed gratitude to the CCP for its ongoing efforts to support businesses and ensure a fair and competitive market in the country.

## Seminar on sustainability of Indonesian Palm held

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Indonesian-Pakistan Seminar on Palm Oil 2025, titled "Strengthening Sustainable Palm for the World," was organized by the Indonesian Consulate General in Karachi, jointly hosted by the Indonesian Palm Oil Association (IPOA) and the Palm Oil Supplier Association of Pakistan (POSAP).

The seminar was held at a prominent hotel in Karachi and featured insightful addresses from renowned international speakers, including Dr. Mohammad Fadhil Hasan, Head of Foreign Relations GAPKI-IPOA; Mr. Sohail Bhatti, Senior Vice President of

POSAP; and Dr. Hammad Hassan, Associate Professor of Regenerative Medicine at Aga Khan University, said a press release issued here on Friday. The event commenced with opening remarks by Mr. Teguh Wiweko, Acting Consul General of the Indonesian Consulate.

This was followed by an address from Mr. Naveed Gilani, Chairman of POSAP Mr. Eddy Martono, Chairman of GAPKI-IPOA, then highlighted the significance of palm oil trade between Indonesia and Pakistan.

Dr. Rizal A. Lukman, Secretary General of the Council of Palm Oil

Producing Countries (CPOPC), also delivered an engaging presentation on sustainable palm oil practices and global trade.

He also invited the Thailand government to join the CPOPC, being the 4th biggest producer of Palm Oil in the world. The event brought together owners of the edible oil industry, diplomats from various countries, and other stakeholders, creating an enriching platform for knowledge sharing and networking.

The evening concluded with a sumptuous dinner, allowing participants to engage further in discussions and forge meaningful connections.





## In brief

## Djokovic says he was 'poisoned'

SYDNEY (Agencies): Novak Djokovic was "poisoned" by the food he ingested while detained during his 2022 Australian Open visa saga, the former world number one told GQ in an interview released on Thursday. The Serbian 24-times major winner had his visa cancelled ahead of the tournament following days of drama over Australia's COVID-19 entry rules and his unvaccinated status, and was detained in a Melbourne hotel shared with asylum-seekers. "I realised that in that hotel in Melbourne I was fed with some food that poisoned me," said Djokovic, who is known to monitor his diet strictly. "I had some discoveries when I came back to Serbia. I never told this to anybody publicly, but discoveries that I was, I had a really high level of heavy metal. Heavy metal. I had the lead, very high level of lead and mercury." GQ said Australia's Department of Home Affairs had declined to comment on the matter, citing privacy reasons. Djokovic told Melbourne's Herald Sun newspaper this week that he still has trauma from his experiences three years ago and feels stress arriving at the city's airport. The 37-year-old begins his campaign for a record-extending 25th major title at the Australian Open next week.

## O'Sullivan withdraws from Masters

SHEFFIELD (Agencies): Defending champion Ronnie O'Sullivan has withdrawn from the Masters on medical grounds. O'Sullivan, 49, was aiming to win a record-extending ninth title, and had been set to face John Higgins in a blockbuster opening to the tournament at Alexandra Palace on Sunday. The Englishman's place in the invitational event for the 16 highest-ranked players in the world will be taken by Neil Robertson. Like Higgins, the Australian is a two-time winner of the Masters and most recently triumphed in 2022 and was ranked 17th at the seeding cutoff in December. O'Sullivan has won 41 ranking events and seven world titles during a storied career since turning professional in 1992 and claimed his first Masters crown in 1995 at the age of 19. His success 12 months ago, aged 48, meant that he became both the oldest and youngest-ever winner of the second Triple Crown event of the season. He also elected to miss the Masters in 2020. This week, he pulled out of the Championship League before his final group game on Thursday after becoming frustrated with his own performance in a 3-2 loss to Robert Milkins. "The Rocket" played four matches on Wednesday, losing three of them and whacked his cue against the table after missing an easy pink against Milkins. While he quickly apologised to the referee and his opponent, there were reports from Leicester, external that he later threw his cue into a bin before it was retrieved. Every round of the Masters, which runs from 12-19 January, will be shown live on BBC TV. You will also be able to watch uninterrupted coverage on BBC iPlayer, the BBC Sport website and the BBC Sport mobile app, with additional coverage on BBC Red Button.

## Tamim Iqbal announces retirement from international cricket



DHAKA (Agencies): Tamim Iqbal has announced his retirement from international cricket. This is the second time he has called time on his career, having previously retired in July 2023 in an emotionally charged press conference, only to reverse the decision within 24 hours after intervention from Bangladesh's then-prime minister Sheikh Hasina.

Tamim informed the Bangladesh selectors of his decision in Sylhet on Wednesday. The Gazi Ashraf Hossain-led selection panel asked him to return to the Bangladesh team for the Champions Trophy. Tamim had reportedly told them then that he would stick to his decision to retire, but after a few Bangladesh players, including captain Najmul Hossain Shanto, had requested him to reconsider, he took a day longer.

"I have been away from international cricket for a long time," he wrote on Facebook. "That distance will remain. My chapter in international cricket is over. I have been thinking about this for a long time. Now that a big event like the Champions Trophy is coming up, I do not want to be the focus of anyone's attention, which could lead to the team losing their focus. Of course, I did not want this to happen before, too."

"Captain Najmul

voluntarily stepped down more than a year ago.

"Even after that, there has been unnecessary discussion. The decision to retire or continue playing is the right of a cricketer or any professional sportsman. I have given myself time. Now I feel that the time has come."

Almost 18 months ago, Tamim announced his retirement at a press conference, breaking down a few times. After Tamim made the announcement, Hasina tracked him down, and requested him to come out of retirement the next day. Tamim obliged but then stepped down from ODI captaincy shortly afterwards. Tamim played two ODIs in September 2023 as the Minhajul Abedin-led national selectors were preparing him for the ODI World Cup.

The selectors however didn't pick him in the 15-man squad. Tamim then hit out at the BCB, claiming they created roadblocks for him in the lead-up to the squad announcement. Shakib Al Hasan, the captain at the time, even launched a scathing attack on Tamim following the incident, calling him "childish".

"What happened before the 2023 World Cup was a big shock for me, as I did not leave the team due to cricketing reasons," Tamim said further in his post.

"Even after that, many cricket fans told me that they want to see me back in the national team. I thought about their love."

"I also have a fan at home. My son has never told me this directly but he has repeatedly told his mother that he wants to see his father play in the national jersey again. I am sorry for disappointing the fans. I have told my son, 'The day you grow up, you will understand your father.'"

## 'Very difficult' to improve Arsenal in January window, says Arteta

LONDON (AFP): Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta said it will be difficult to find January signings that will be capable of immediately improving his side as they aim to end a five-year trophy drought.

A lack of firepower was exposed in the past week as Arteta's men lost 2-0 to Newcastle in the League Cup semi-final first leg and drew 1-1 at Brighton in a blow to their Premier League title hopes.

Adding to Arteta's attacking problems, Arsenal winger Bukayo Saka is set to be sidelined until at least March after surgery on a hamstring injury.

The Gunners lie six points adrift of Premier League leaders Liverpool, who have a

game in hand, although they are well-placed to progress to the Champions League knockout stages.

On Friday, Arteta shot down suggestions he has to add more forward options to his squad over the next month.

"Bringing in bodies doesn't help us all," said Arteta ahead of Sunday's FA Cup third round tie against Manchester United.

"It's just about somebody who can immediately impact our performance and can bring something that we don't have. To find that in this market is very difficult to achieve."

"The circumstances (can) change because we have certain injuries for

some big players, so it's always a possibility but always it's about somebody that is really going to make us much better."

Arteta's comments after the defeat to Newcastle that the ball used in the League Cup was "tricky" and "flies different" to those used in the Premier League have been widely mocked.

However, the Spaniard said his explanation for Arsenal's missed chances against the Magpies was never meant as an excuse.

"It's not an excuse, it's a reality," added Arteta. "Every pitch is different, the weather conditions are changing in football, that's the beauty of it."

"That's it, we adapt to that, and I never use it as an excuse."

## Muhammad Asif clinches SAARC Snooker C'ship title



ISLAMABAD (Monitoring Desk): Renowned Pakistani snooker player Muhammad Asif has once again brought pride to the nation by winning the prestigious SAARC Snooker Championship, sparking a wave of congratulations from prominent figures,

including Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

In the final match, Muhammad Asif defeated his Sri Lankan opponent with a dominant 5-0 victory, securing the championship title.

President, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif

President Asif Ali Zardari congratulated the snooker star for his outstanding victory.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif extended his heartfelt congratulations, stating, "Muhammad Asif has illuminated Pakistan's name globally by winning

a significant snooker championship. The entire nation takes pride in your achievement."

Punjab Sports Minister Malik Faisal Ayub

Punjab's Sports Minister Malik Faisal Ayub also praised Muhammad Asif, saying, "Well done, Muhammad Asif! You have established your place in the world of snooker. Your victory has once again brought an international title to Pakistan."

He further highlighted the consistent achievements in snooker, noting,

"The continuation of successes after the World Championship is encouraging. Pakistan is brimming with talent in all sports, and the Punjab Sports Department remains committed to supporting athletes and sports initiatives."



ISLAMABAD: West Indies' batter Keacy Carty plays a strikes during the first Test cricket match against Pakistan at Islamabad Club.

## Sinner doping hearing at sports court fixed for April

PARIS (AFP): World number one Jannik Sinner will have his hearing into allegations of doping at the Court of Arbitration for Sport on April 16-17, the Lausanne-based body said on Friday.

The World Anti-Doping Agency appealed after the International Tennis Integrity Agency (ITIA) cleared Sinner after he tested positive twice for the banned steroid clostebol in March last year. "No parties requested a public hearing and it will be conducted behind closed doors," CAS said in a statement.

The ITIA accepted defending Australian Open champion Sinner's explanation that the drug entered his system when his physio used a spray containing it to treat a cut, then provided massage and sports therapy to the player. Asked on the eve of the Australian Open if he knew when a verdict was due, the 23-year-old said: "I know exactly as much as you guys know."

"We are in a stage where we don't know many, many things," Sinner, who faces a stern first-round test at Melbourne Park against big-



hitting Chilean Nicolas Jarry, admitted the scandal continued to play on his mind.

"You think about this, of course," he said. "I would lie if I would tell you I forget. 'It's something what I have with me now already for quite a long time. But it is what it is. I'm here trying to prepare the Grand Slam. Let's see how it goes.'"

Sinner said he had always been "very, very careful on every single medicine I take, even what I eat". "When the bottle is open, I throw it away. I take a new one," he said.

"In my mind I know exactly what happened, and that's how I block it (out)."

"I haven't done anything wrong, that's why I'm still here. That's why I'm still playing." ATP chairman

Andrea Gaudenzi has insisted Sinner's case was "run by the book".

"I genuinely believe there has been a lot of misinformation out there, which is unfortunate," Gaudenzi told the Australian Associated Press in a recent interview.

"I am 100 percent sure that there has not been any preferential treatment. The process has been run by the book and according to the rules, by the ITIA."

Former world number one Novak Djokovic said he believed Sinner when he said he tested positive due to contamination, but the 24-time Grand Slam winner asserted that players had been "kept in the dark" throughout the process.

"I've been really frustrated, as have most of the other players, that we've been kept in the dark for five months," Djokovic said. "He (Sinner) received the news (of the positive tests) in April and the announcement was not until August, just before the US Open."

The ATP has not really talked in depth about why they kept that case away from the public."

## Athanaze hits 99 as West Indies begin prep for two-match Test series

ISLAMABAD (APP): West Indies closed the opening day of the three-day warm-up match against Pakistan Shaheens with 273-7 in 74 overs on the back of Alick Athanaze's 99 at the Islamabad Club on Friday.

The toss was undecided as the teams mutually decided for the West Indies to bat first in this non-first-class fixture.

Left hander Athanaze, batting at No.5, faced 142 balls, which included 15 fours and one six. He was dismissed by Ahmed Safi Abdullah one shy of century.

Earlier in the day, opening batters Kraigg Brathwaite (34, 39, 5x4s, 1x6) and Mikyle Louis (34, 63b, 4x4s, 1x6) stitched a 47-run opening partnership before the former fell to Ahmed Safi.

Louis, Keacy Carty (22, 46b, 3x4s) and Kavem Hodge (17, 22b, 2x4s) became Mohammad Rameez Jnr's preys, as the right-arm leg-spinner returned figures of 3-40 in 13 overs.

Amir Jangoo (29 not out, 42b, 2x4s, 1x6) and Joshua Da Silva (11 not out, 28b) will resume batting for West Indies on day two with 16 overs remaining in the first innings as the first dig for both the teams has been restricted to 90 overs for maximum practice.

Apart from Rameez Jnr and Ahmed Safi, Hussain Talat was the other wicket-taker for Shaheens as he dismissed Tevin Imlach (13, 36b, 1x4).

Scores in brief: Warm-up match (Day 1 of 3): Pakistan Shaheens vs West Indies at the Islamabad Club Ground

Toss - Uncontested

West Indies 273-7, 74 overs (Alick Athanaze 99, Kraigg Brathwaite 34, Mikyle Louis 34, Amir Jangoo 29 not out, Keacy Carty 22; Mohammad Rameez Jnr 3-40, Ahmed Safi Abdullah 2-91).

## Inzamam, Misbah, Mushtaq and Anwar inducted to PCB Hall of Fame



LAHORE (APP): Inzamam ul Haq, Misbah ul Haq, Mushtaq Mohammad and Saeed Anwar have been inducted to the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) Hall of Fame. The quartet has joined the other illustrious 10 cricketers who have won the coveted title.

The PCB launched its Hall of Fame in 2021 and since then Abdul Qadir, AH Kardar, Fazal Mahmood, Hanif Mohammad, Imran Khan, Javed Miandad, Wasim Akram, Waqar Younis, Younis Khan and Zaheer Abbas have been named. Two cricketers are added to the group every year and since no crick-

eters were named in the year 2023, four former legendary cricketers have been added to the Hall of Fame in 2024.

The four stalwarts will be formally inducted into the PCB Hall of Fame during the course of the year when they will be presented with commemorative caps and specially-designed plaques.

The four cricketers have been wonderful servants of the game for Pakistan and won laurels for the country during different eras. All of them served as captain of the Pakistan cricket team while Misbah ul Haq was the most successful captain in the team's

cricketing history.

Chairman PCB Mohsin Naqvi, in his commendation message, said, "On behalf of the Pakistan Cricket Board, I extend heartfelt congratulations to these four cricketing legends on their well-deserved inductions into the PCB Hall of Fame. This honour represents a tribute to their outstanding contributions to Pakistan cricket and to the global game."

"These four giants of the game hold a special place in Pakistan's rich cricketing history. Their contributions not only elevated the sport within Pakistan but also inspired future generations to pursue excellence. Their talent, charisma and unwavering commitment have made them true ambassadors of cricket and the PCB takes immense pride in honouring their accomplishments," Naqvi added.

Paying tribute to the skill and mastery in the game, Chairman PCB said Mushtaq Mohammad is regarded as one of Pakistan's finest captains, known for his astute leadership and inspiring style.

Inzamam-ul-Haq's immense talent and match-winning ability have left an indelible mark on the sport. Misbah-ul-Haq took charge of the Pakistan

team during challenging times, guiding it to the pinnacle of Test rankings and achieving a historic series win in the Caribbean. Saeed Anwar, with his natural grace and classical technique, redefined the role of an opener and thrived against some of the world's best bowlers under all conditions.

Inzamam-ul-Haq played international cricket from 1991 to 2007 and was a member of Pakistan's 1992 World Cup-winning team. He is the leading run-scorer for Pakistan in ODI cricket with 11,701 runs, and currently third in the list of Pakistan Test run-scorers (8,829). He captained Pakistan in 31 Tests, winning 11, drawing 9 and losing 11. Also led in 87 ODIs, winning 51, losing 33 and 3 no-results.

Misbah-ul-Haq represented Pakistan from 2001 to 2017, was part of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2009 winning squad and guided the team to the No.1 spot in the ICC Test Team Rankings in 2016. The only cricketer to captain Pakistan in, at least, 50 Tests, leading in 56 Tests and winning 26; also led the team in 87 ODIs (including in the 2015 World Cup) and in eight T20Is.

Mushtaq Mohammad played for Pakistan from 1959 to 1979 and captained the team to its first-ever Test win in Australia in 1977, featured in inaugural ICC Men's Cricket World Cup 1975 in England before coaching the Pakistan side to the ICC Men's Cricket World Cup 1999 final - also in England.

Meanwhile, Saeed Anwar represented Pakistan from 1989 to 2003, amassing a total of 31 centuries and 68 half-centuries, including three centuries and three half-centuries across the 1996, 1999 and 2003 World Cups. He scored 8,824 runs in 247 ODIs, including 7,227 runs in 205 away ODIs. More than 20 years after his last match, Anwar remains Pakistan's leading century-maker in ODI cricket with 20 such scores. He also led the Green Shirts in 11 ODIs.

Acknowledging the honor bestowed on him by the Pakistan cricket, former batting great Inzamam ul Haq said "I am deeply honored to be inducted into the PCB Hall of Fame, joining a group of remarkable cricketers from my generation and those before me. To be recognized by the parent organization of Pakistan

cricket is truly special and I hope this initiative continues to inspire current and future generations of cricketers."

Misbah ul Haq, in his note of thank, said "I have been incredibly fortunate to have shared the field with some of the most talented and skilled cricketers, whose support and camaraderie enabled me to grow and improve throughout my career. As a captain, I had the privilege of leading players who were committed, passionate and driven to give their all for Pakistan. Their contributions were instrumental in shaping some of the most iconic moments in our cricketing history. For that, I remain deeply grateful."

The four icons of the game were inducted following an independent and transparent voting process, which was participated by Wasim Akram, Zaheer Abbas (both PCB Hall of Famers), Azhar Ali (former Pakistan captain), Bismah Maroof, Nain Abidi (both former women international cricketers), Majid Bhatti, Mohi Shah, Mohammad Yaqoob, Nauman Niaz, Sawera Pasha and Zahid Maqsood (cricket journalists/analysts).



**In brief****IRSA releases 32,300 cusecs water**

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Friday released 32,300 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 38,200 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1475.90 feet and was 77.90 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and out-flow in the dam was recorded as 15,100 cusecs and 10,000 cusecs respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1133.40 feet, which was 83.40 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 4,800 cusecs and 4,000 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 19,500, 12,500, 4,800 and 6,000 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 12,700 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 5,600 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.

**11 drug peddlers netted**

RAWALPINDI (APP): Rawalpindi police in an action against suspected drug peddlers and bootleggers on Friday arrested 11 accused besides recovering over seven kg drugs, 30 liters liquor and other items from their possession. A police spokesman said that Westridge, Pirwadhai, Taxila, Wah Cantt and Airport police conducted raids in their respective jurisdiction and arrested Shakeel, Farooq, Sajid, Imam Shah, Hamad, Yasir and a female drug peddler and recovered over seven kg drugs. In other raids, Waris Khan, Civil Lines, Jatli and Dhamial police arrested four bootleggers namely Yasir, Naveed, Syedan Haider, and Amir Waqas and recovered 30 liters liquor from their possession. Separate cases have been registered against all the accused while further investigations are underway.

**ITP takes action against traffic violators**

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Traffic Police (ITP) has taken strict action against over 47,000 drivers in the last two weeks for violating traffic rules, as part of ongoing efforts to maintain discipline on the roads and ensure the safety of citizens. A public relation officer told APP on Friday that the ITP's Education Wing and Special Squads have been continuously working to raise awareness and enforce traffic laws. He said during the last two weeks, the ITP took legal action against over 47,000 drivers involved in traffic law violations. Additionally, 1,041 vehicles and motorcycles involved in serious traffic violations were impounded at various police stations. Furthermore, 11,922 citizens were educated about traffic rule violations, and 5,982 citizens were issued warnings. A total of 59 cases were registered against drivers involved in serious violations, he added. The ITP Smart Response Unit and other special units are responsible for maintaining the flow of traffic on highways, improving traffic flow during rush hours, solving parking problems in commercial areas and preventing violations of traffic rules in Islamabad. ITP also organized 58 other activities, including a flower and candy campaign, a Clean and Green Islamabad awareness walk and a Friends of Police badge initiative to promote community policing and raise awareness of traffic rules. These activities saw full participation from traffic police officers, members of civil society and other departments.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Education Dr. Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui met with a delegation led by Dr. Nazir Mohamed Ayad Egyptian Grand Mufti of Arab Republic.

## Minister underscores pivotal role of women in society

ISLAMABAD (INP): Minister for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony, Chaudhry Salik Hussain on Friday underscored the pivotal role of women in society.

Addressing the global conference on 'Girls' Education in Muslim Societies: Challenges and Opportunities,' he said that an educated woman serves as the first teacher to her children, instilling values, ethics, and a love for knowledge. An educated mother produces leaders of tomorrow by imparting wisdom and principles to her children, he added.

Chaudhry Salik Hussain said women hold a central position in society as mothers, daughters, wives, and professionals. "The Holy Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) emphasized the importance of education for women, which is key to

nurturing generations and shaping the future of societies," he added.

Chaudhry Salik Hussain emphasized that acquiring knowledge is not only a fundamental religious obligation but also a vital necessity for societal progress and public welfare. "Education empowers women to actively participate in societal development, contribute to economic growth, advocate for their rights, and engage in decision-making processes," he added.

Citing examples from Islamic history, he said, "The legacy of women in Islamic history serves as a beacon of inspiration. Despite Islam's clear guidance, many Muslim societies face challenges to women's education, such as cultural barriers, economic constraints, and security concerns."

"These challenges are

not rooted in Islam but are the result of social traditions and the misinterpretation of religious teachings," the minister clarified. He stressed the importance of addressing these barriers through collective wisdom and efforts.

Calling for a collaborative approach, Chaudhry Salik Hussain urged governments, religious scholars, and community leaders to create an environment where girls feel safe and supported in pursuing education.

This includes providing scholarships, financial aid, and establishing secure, accessible schools. Additionally, he highlighted the importance of raising awareness about the Islamic perspective on women's education and engaging religious leaders to counter cultural misconceptions.

## ANF recovers 13.930 kg drugs in five operations

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting five operations across the country managed to recover 13.930 kg drugs worth over Rs 10 million and arrested six accused including two women, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman on Friday.

He informed that 6 kg hashish was recovered from a woman rounded up near a park on GT Road Rawalpindi. 5 kg heroin was recovered from a woman arrested near Chungi No. 26 in Islamabad.

1.5 kg ice was recovered from two accused held on M-1 Motorway Islamabad.

940 grams ice was recovered from an accused arrested near Sakhi Sarwar Road in Dera Ghazi Khan.

In fifth operation, 490 grams ice was recovered from an accused near a university in Multan. Cases have been registered against the arrested accused under the Narcotics Control Act and further investigations are under process.

## Rawalpindi Police arrest 27 law breakers

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi Police on Friday held some 27 law breakers, including illegal arms owners, kite sellers and the Tenancy Act violators.

According to a police spokesman, a total of five suspects were held on the recovery of illegal weapons and ammunition. The Airport Police recovered a 30 bore pistol from accused Imad while the Taxila Police nabbed Allah Ditta and Muhammad Hassan on the recovery of a 30-bore pistol each from them. Likewise, the Gujar Khan Police recovered a 223 bore rifle from accused Mukhtar while the Jatli Police held Shehryar Ahmed with a 30 bore pistol.

Similarly, 20 accused were arrested for violation of the Tenancy Act during search operations in different areas. The arrested accused included Asif, Shamoan, Waqar Ahmed, Shan Hussain, Tahir, Imran, Fazal Khaliq, Ijaz, Zavar, Ishaq, Afaq, Sajid, Haider, Zubair, Adil, Jahanzeb, Sadaqat, Sher Ali, Rehmatullah and Hamid. Meanwhile, the Wah Saddar Police held accused Aziz with 50 kites and Usman Azam with 45 kites.

## Mushaal slams India's 'Barbaric' treatment of Hurriyat leaders

ISLAMABAD (APP): Mushaal Hussein Malik, wife of veteran Kashmiri leader Yasin Malik Friday unleashed a scathing indictment of India's brutal treatment of Hurriyat leaders in jails, slamming the Indian government for its egregious violations of international law and human rights and demanding justice for the Kashmiri people.

Talking to PTV news channel, she emphasized that the torture and mistreatment of these leaders are a clear contravention of human rights and international law, highlighting the urgent need for the global community to take notice and act.

Mushaal Malik expressed serious concerns about the deteriorating human rights situation in Indian Illegally occupied Jammu & Kashmir.

She has repeatedly spoken out against India's actions, including the rev-

ocation of Kashmir's special status in 2019, which she termed as a "biggest violation of human rights".

Mushaal Hussein Malik also strongly condemned India for torturing Hurriyat leaders, including her husband Yasin Malik, Aasiya Andrabi, Ashraf Sehrai, Shabbir Ahmed Shah and Syed Ali Shah Gilani, who have been subjected to inhumane treatment, including torture, poor living conditions and denial of medical care and legal aid in Indian jails.

Mushaal Hussein Mullick criticize Modi regime for its blatant attempts to alter the demographic landscape of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK).

She said by grabbing land and properties under various pretexts, the Indian government is settling non-locals in the region, effectively displacing Kashmiris from their

ancestral homeland.

This is a clear attempt to change the region's demography, a tactic reminiscent of Israel's treatment of Palestinians, she mentioned.

She emphasizing that the Modi regime's actions are a blatant attempt to suppress the Kashmiri people's right to self-determination.

The Indian government's policies, including the revocation of Article 370 and 35-A, have led to widespread human rights abuses, arbitrary detentions and a complete disregard for the Kashmiri people's aspirations, she added.

The international community must take notice of these egregious human rights violations and pressure the Indian government to respect the Kashmiri people's rights and resolve the dispute in accordance with UN resolutions, she concluded.

## CJ IHC inaugurates website of district courts

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chief Justice Islamabad High Court (IHC) Aamer Farooq on Friday formally inaugurated the official website of district session courts Islamabad.

On this occasion, the Chief Justice IHC was briefed about the features of the website that it has special features for searching cases and judgments.

The briefing stated that all interim orders of the district courts would also

be available at a click, and cases could be searched by entering the FIR number.

In addition, Chief Justice Amir Farooq also inaugurated the Central Library at the District Courts Complex Islamabad.

Addressing the District Bar Association, he said that he tried to solve the problems of bar.

The website of the District Judiciary has been launched, which will not only benefit the petitioners

but also the overseas litigants, he said.

The chief justice said that the website of IHC was available but that of district courts was not. In one year, the District Judiciary of Islamabad disposed of 119,000 cases, he added.

He also said that we have made nominations from the District Judiciary for the appointments in the high court and good news will be received soon.



ISLAMABAD: A bike rider passes by posters along Srinagar Highway, showcasing Pakistani culture in preparation for the upcoming Pakistan International Girls Conference, which will host delegates from over 40 countries. —APP Photo

## IHRA refutes media reports on Nov 26 events

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Islamabad Healthcare Regulatory Authority (IHRA) has refuted misleading media reports, and clarified facts on November 26 events.

In response to recent media reports circulating about the events of November 26, the authority through a handout has issued a strong denial and clarification regarding several claims made in the media. The hospitals categorically refuted the allegations to set the record straight with accurate, evidence-based information.

"First and foremost, any suggestion that hospitals were overwhelmed by the number of casualties is completely unfounded."

The authority said that these medical facilities have consistently demonstrated their ability to handle major emergencies, from natural disasters like earthquakes to global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Their capacity to manage such situations has been proven time and again with efficiency, professionalism, and resilience.

Furthermore, the allegation that surgeries were conducted without administering anesthesia is not only false but also deeply harmful. "Such claims are malicious and aimed at tarnishing the reputation of the healthcare institutions and the dedicated professionals who work within them." The IHRA said that medical procedures are

governed by strict ethical guidelines, professional protocols, and legal frameworks, all of which make such actions impossible.

The source of these unfounded allegations appears to stem from either deliberate misinformation or unverified, irrelevant sources, both of which are irresponsible and misleading. The authority added that hospitals also addressed the circulation of purported lists on social media, which claim to be official hospital records.

These lists are not authentic and have not been verified or certified by hospital authorities. The inclusion of "Firearm Injury" in some of these lists is particularly concerning. It said that the initial information recorded in hospital forms is based on statements from patients' attendants and does not reflect the professional opinions of the attending doctors.

"In light of these baseless claims, the Board of Authority urges all stakeholders, including the media, to avoid disseminating unverified information that could damage the credibility of the healthcare system." Such misinformation not only creates unnecessary panic but also erodes public trust in the medical professionals and institutions that serve the community.

The authority said that it is essential for all involved to prioritize accuracy and responsibility when reporting on sensitive matters related to public health and safety.

## Underpasses to be opened for traffic

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chairman Capital Development Authority (CDA), Muhammad Ali Randhawa, was informed on Friday that both underpasses on the Srinagar Highway would be opened for traffic later this month.

The CDA chairman along with senior officers, visited key development projects, including Constitution Avenue, Margalla Avenue, and the Serena Chowk Interchange.

He also reviewed the progress of construction on the Margalla Road section from the Secretariat to Bari Imam. Chairman CDA Muhammad Ali Randhawa directed the MPO Directorate to expedite and complete construction work at the earliest.

He emphasized the development of green belts and median strips with flower plantations and attractive landscaping along the roads.

Additionally, he instructed the installation of modern lane markings and aesthetically pleasing lights on the Margalla Road from Secretariat to Bari Imam. During his visit to Constitution Avenue, Chairman CDA Muhammad Ali Randhawa issued directives to prioritize its beautification and uplift.

He called for the accelerated installation of decorative lights on a permanent basis, emphasizing that this would not only eliminate rental costs but also enhance CDA's assets on permanent basis while reducing operational expenses.

## Al-Azhar University announces to open a campus in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD (INP): Al-Azhar University, one of the oldest and most prestigious centers of Islamic learning, has announced plans to open a campus in Pakistan, strengthening ties between the two nations and focusing on promoting women's education and deepening understanding of Islamic teachings and Arabic culture.

The announcement was made during a meeting between Dr. Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui, Pakistan's Minister for Federal Education, and Dr. Nazir Mohamed Ayad, the Grand Mufti of Egypt. Dr. Ayad expressed the importance of this collaboration in strengthening the educational landscape of both countries.

He also emphasized the value of learning Arabic to

fully grasp the true teachings of Islam, while highlighting Al-Azhar University's strong support for women's education, with over 40% of its students being women.

Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui warmly welcomed the delegation, emphasizing the strong Islamic and cultural ties between Egypt and Pakistan. He noted that both countries share ancient civilizations among the oldest in the world.

The minister further discussed the upcoming International Girls Conference in Pakistan on January 11-12, celebrating the initiative by Islamic countries to promote girls' education. He clarified that Islam supports the education of both men and

women, dispelling misconceptions about the prohibition of women's education in Islam. He stressed that the Pakistani government prioritizes equal educational opportunities for women.

Khalid Maqbool Siddiqui urged greater collaboration between Egypt and Pakistan in advancing girls' education, emphasizing that educating women is key to building a progressive society. He further reiterated that such efforts would help nurture future generations in alignment with the true teachings of Islam.

Secretary of Education Mohyuddin Ahmad Wani assured full support from Pakistan's Ministry of Education in establishing the Al-Azhar campus. To highlight the government's



### Afghanistan, Russia form joint working group

KABUL (TOLONews): The Ministry of Economy has welcomed the establishment of a joint working group between Kabul and Moscow and considers its role significant in expanding economic and trade relations between the two countries. Earlier, Zamir Kabulov, Russia's Special Representative for Afghanistan, stated that this group would replace the intergovernmental commission on economic cooperation.

### Afghanistan's passport ranks least powerful globally

KABUL (Ariana News): Afghanistan's passport has been ranked the least powerful in the world, securing the 106th spot on the latest Henley Passport Index. This ranking highlights the severe travel restrictions faced by Afghan citizens, who can only access 26 countries without a visa. The Henley Passport Index, a leading global ranking system for passports, evaluates countries based on the number of destinations their passport holders can visit visa-free.

## Pakistan launches new phase of scholarships for Afghan students

KABUL (Amu Tv): Pakistan on Friday announced the second tranche of the Allama Iqbal Scholarships Programme, offering 4,500 fully funded scholarships to Afghan students over the next three years.

The scholarships, covering fields such as medicine, engineering, agriculture, and other disciplines, are available for undergraduate, postgraduate, and PhD studies.

The program was unveiled during a meeting of the Afghanistan Central Asia/Azerbaijan Inter-governmental Coordination Cell (ACICC), chaired by Pakistan's Special Envoy for Afghanistan, Mohammad Sadiq. He emphasized the significance of the initiative, calling it the largest and most popular foreign scholarship pro-



gram for Afghan students.

"This month, over 22,000 applicants will take an online test, followed by interviews for final selection. The entire process will conclude within 45 days," Sadiq said in a statement.

Notably, 33% of the

scholarship slots have been reserved for female students, reflecting efforts to support women's education in Afghanistan amid challenges posed by the Taliban's restrictions on female participation in higher education.

The meeting was attended by the Chairman of Pakistan's Higher Education Commission (HEC), Pakistan's Ambassador to Afghanistan, and senior officials from various ministries and departments.

## UNAMA stresses support for Local Media and Journalists

ZABUL (TOLONews): Alexandre Carette, the head of the UNAMA office in the southern region, stated that the United Nations continues to support the media in Afghanistan.

Speaking during a visit to Zabul province with journalists, Carette emphasized that media outlets are currently the most critical source of information for the people of Afghanistan and the global community. He stressed the importance of providing a suitable and safe working environment for media employees.

"We need to continue to do more, and especially we are trying to push to get funding for more sustainable projects, and including

to support the media. And I understand that the situation is frustrating for all of you here, but I can assure you we have not forgotten that we will continue to fight for the media, and make sure that you have an environment where you can do your job as freely as possible," he said.

Journalists from Zabul present at the meeting requested increased support for local media and journalistic activities in the province. "We ask UNAMA to support journalists and freelance reporters and to organize capacity-building programs for them," said Asadullah Wafa, a journalist.

"The local media in

Zabul face significant economic challenges. Our request is for UNAMA to take measures to support them," said Ismatullah Omari, the provincial head of a media support organization in Zabul.

"The local media in Zabul are struggling with serious economic problems. We seek support for local radio stations and journalists in this province," said Hedayatullah Nikzad, a journalist from Kandahar.

Carette further stated that in 2025, UNAMA would intensify efforts to ensure timely access to information, financial support for the media, and capacity-building for journalists.

## Afghanistan launches 13 projects to restore historical monuments

KABUL (TOLONews): The Ministry of Information and Culture said it has undertaken 13 projects in six provinces of the country to protect and restore historical monuments.

According to the ministry, the work on these projects started this solar year, and the provinces of Herat, Kandahar, Bamyan, Ghor, Ghazni, and Kabul are included in this program.

Khubaib Ghufri, the spokesperson for the Ministry of Information and Culture, said: "In the year 1403 of the solar calendar, the Ministry of Information and Culture has undertaken 13 projects for the preservation and restoration of historical monuments in six provinces." In Afghanistan, due to decades of war, this sector, like others, has not remained immune to damage.

Some university professors believe that the restoration and repair of historical monuments are not only important for preserving cultural identity but also play a significant role in strengthening the economy and attracting foreign tourists. University professor Khalil Ahmad Kamjoo said: "Countries that have historical and ancient monuments attract many tourists. This can be a significant source of income for that country." The restoration and repair of historical buildings are among the most valuable branches of architecture, ensuring that a historical monument remains preserved for many years.

## Mine explosion in Nuristan kills one, injures another

NURISTAN (Khaama Press): Taliban security officials in Eastern Afghanistan, Nuristan province report that a mine explosion in the province has resulted in one miner's death and another being injured.

Ghulam Rahman Haidari, spokesperson for the Taliban's command in Nuristan, said the incident occurred at 2:00 PM on Thursday, January 9, at the "Mawi Ghar" mine in the Duab district of the province.

According to him, the explosion happened while

miners were attempting to set fire to a tunnel in the mine. Haidari added that as a result of the explosion, a person named Ihsanullah was killed, and another individual, Shahidullah, was injured.

The injured person was taken to the Duab district hospital, and his condition is currently stable.

Such incidents have consistently claimed the lives of miners in various parts of the country.

Earlier, a gold mine collapse in Badakhshan killed three workers and injured three others. The

lack of proper safety mechanisms, modern equipment, and technological advancements in Afghanistan's mining industry continues to pose significant risks. Without adequate measures in place, these dangerous mining practices will likely result in more fatalities and injuries.

It is crucial for the government and relevant authorities to invest in safer mining practices and modern technologies to ensure the protection of miners and the sustainable development of the sector.

## Ghazni residents irked by rising firewood prices

GHAZNI CITY (Pajhwok): A number of residents of southern Ghazni province are expressing concern over the sharp rise in firewood prices as winter sets in.

The scarcity of firewood in the market has led to increased prices, forcing some people to resort to cutting down both fruit-bearing and non-fruit-bearing trees to meet their needs.

Sayed Karim, a resident of Waghiz district, told Pajhwok Afghan News: "Given the poverty and unemployment we face, we are unable to afford firewood. In the past, we used to gather firewood from the mountains, but due to drought, those resources have disappeared. As a result, we are forced to cut down our orchards and other trees in our area to meet our fuel needs."

Karim also noted that the prices of firewood and other fuel items have surged compared to previous years.

Noorullah, a resident of Jaghatto district, echoed similar concerns, saying that in the Turgan area of the district, people with private forests sell wood to others. He also confirmed that the cost of



firewood has increased significantly.

Zakaria, a resident of Ghazni city, shared that as a daily laborer, he cannot afford enough firewood. He added, "In previous years, the price of seven kilograms of firewood was about 100 afghanis, but now it has risen to 250 afghanis."

Ghazni residents pointed out that in the past two years, the price of 560 kilograms of firewood ranged between 6,000 and 8,000 afghanis. However, this year, prices have increased to between 16,000 and 18,000 afghanis.

In response to these

concerns, government officials have assured that they are working to control the prices of fuel items.

Abdul Wali Jalalzai, a spokesman for Ghazni Municipality, told Pajhwok that previously, price lists were prepared by municipal offices. However, the Prime Minister's Office has now established a commission to prevent hoarding, with the municipality as a member. This commission is responsible for setting the price lists.

Jalalzai said that while the price of coal has been controlled, the issue of

firewood is still under review by the Fatwa Department, and actions will be taken based on their decision.

He also acknowledged that the quantity of firewood in the province had been low in the past, but recently, more firewood has been brought from other provinces, and prices are expected to be regulated soon.

It is important to note that the government has imposed a ban on cutting down forests, which has contributed to the rise in firewood prices in all provinces, including the capital, Kabul.

## Muttaqi highlights Islamic Emirate's economy-focused diplomacy in UAE visit

KABUL (TOLONews): Amir Khan Muttaqi, the acting Minister of Foreign Affairs, stated during his visit to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) that the Islamic Emirate pursues an economy-focused policy.

Muttaqi also added that the Islamic Emirate seeks positive economic and political relations with all countries.

During this trip, the acting Minister of Foreign Affairs met with Vikram Misri, the Indian Foreign Secretary and reiterated that Afghanistan poses no threat to any country.

Zia Ahmad Takal, the Head of Public Relations at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said about the meeting: "The acting Minister of Foreign Affairs assured the Indian side that there is no threat from Afghanistan to anyone. He also expressed hope regarding the strengthening of diplomatic relations and facilitating processes for patients, businessmen, and students."

According to Takal, the Indian Foreign Secretary said in the meeting with



Amir Khan Muttaqi that New Delhi seeks to expand political and economic relations with Afghanistan. Furthermore, the acting Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Emirate discussed regional issues, enhancing economic cooperation, and increasing trade volumes between the two countries during a meeting with Abdullah bin Zayed, the

UAE's Foreign Minister.

The Head of Public Relations at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs added: "The acting Minister of Foreign Affairs requested the UAE provide visa facilitation for Afghans, and the Afghan government is ready to play its role effectively in this process."

"For us, both the UAE and India are major markets where high-quality

goods are sold, and to a great extent, our fruits have an excellent market in these countries," said Mohammad Nabi Afghan, an economic expert.

This comes as the acting Minister of Foreign Affairs traveled to the UAE earlier this week, leading a delegation, to enhance bilateral relations, economic cooperation, and discuss other issues.

## Rising dollar value strains Afghan economy



KABUL (TOLONews): In the past week, the value of one US dollar has increased by three afghani in the country.

The Money Exchangers' Union of Kabul's Sarai Shahzada emphasized that the central bank must continuously inject dollars into the country's currency markets to stabilize the value of the afghani. According to the union's statistics, one dollar is currently traded at 72 afghani and

30 pul in Kabul's markets.

"For the first time in three months, the Central Bank of Afghanistan's dollar auction yesterday positively impacted the afghani rate.

However, further measures must be taken to stabilize the afghani's value. I believe the afghani rate will change in the future," said the head of the council of money exchangers of Afghanistan, Bahram Khan Zadrani.

The fluctuations in the value of the dollar against

the afghani, especially in recent years, have been a serious challenge for citizens, leading to increased food prices and pressure on low-income families. Some of these families urge the Islamic Emirate to control market prices.

"Unemployment and poverty are widespread. People cannot meet their needs. We ask the government to control the dollar's value," said Rahmat Shah, a resident of Kabul. "The price of flour is

very high. I work from morning till night for 50 afghani. We pay 1,500 to 2,000 afghani for rent. We don't know how to live. We ask the government to control the prices," said Sayed Mohammad, another Kabul resident. Basic goods sellers also complain about a decline in their business due to the rising dollar rate.

"We buy goods in dollars and sell them in afghanis. But we cannot go to the exchange office at the same moment to exchange them. These fluctuations have caused us losses. We sold our goods at 70 afghani per dollar, and we bought new goods at 72.40 afghani," stated Sayed Ali, a shopkeeper.

"Unfortunately, with the increase in the dollar rate, the main sufferers are the poor and unemployed people," said Naib, another shopkeeper. While the Central Bank of Afghanistan has not recently commented on this issue, the bank auctioned 15 million dollars yesterday to stabilize the afghani's value in the currency markets.

## Spain donates 1 million Euros

KABUL (Khaama Press): The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in Afghanistan has announced that Spain has provided a one million euro (1.1 million USD) aid package to Afghanistan.

The organization stated on Thursday, January 9, through a message on its X page, that this aid is aimed at providing humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan.

According to OCHA, the winter season has worsened the economic crisis in Afghanistan, and the organization will continue its efforts to improve the lives of the people.

Meanwhile, as the cold season sets in, several international humanitarian organizations have raised alarms about the increasing need for humanitarian aid for the population of Afghanistan. On Tuesday, January 7, the special trust fund for Afghanistan also announced a 1.56 million USD contribution from Luxembourg to support humanitarian aid efforts in the country.

Recently, the World Food Program in Afghanistan expressed concerns about the ongoing economic crisis, adding that millions of people are in urgent need of assistance. At the same time, OCHA in Afghanistan has published a report stating that in 2025,

## Iran completes 75 km of border wall with Afghanistan



KABUL (Amu Tv): The Iranian military announced the completion of 75 kilometers of a border wall along its frontier with Afghanistan as part of the first phase of a larger border security project.

Stretching 921 kilometers, the Iran-Afghanistan border has been a focus of increased Iranian security concerns since the Taliban's return to power in 2021. Iranian officials have emphasized the importance of bolstering defenses to address perceived threats, including cross-border terrorism, smuggling, and unauthorized migration.

According to Iran's state news agency IRNA,

Brigadier General Sadegh Noori, an Iranian Army commander, said the project is being carried out by four engineering groups from the Army's ground forces and a technical institute.

"The production and installation of border walls, each measuring four meters in height and 3.8 meters in width, has progressed well despite extreme summer heat and freezing winter conditions," General Noori said during a visit to the governor of Taybad, a border region.

He added that the project includes plans to incorporate advanced technology. "Smartening these

walls is a top priority for the technical teams involved, and this phase of the project is being pursued with determination," Noori said.

The border wall is part of a three-year phased initiative aimed at strengthening border management and addressing a range of security concerns. Iranian officials view the wall as a strategic response to growing instability along the country's eastern frontier.

According to Tasnim News Agency, the project seeks to combat cross-border terrorism, smuggling, and illegal migration while responding to geopolitical challenges stemming from instability in Afghanistan.





ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Interior, Mohsin Naqvi in a meeting with JUI-F chief, Maulana Fazlur Rehman.

## Deaths from Israeli attacks in Gaza undercounted by 41%

GAZA: An official Palestinian tally of deaths in Israel's war in Gaza likely undercounted the toll by 41 percent in the first nine months of the conflict as the Gaza Strip's healthcare infrastructure unravelled, according to a study.

The peer-reviewed statistical analysis published in The Lancet journal on Thursday was conducted by academics at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Yale University and other institutions. Using a statistical method called capture-recapture analysis, the researchers sought to assess the death toll from Israel's air and ground campaign in Gaza between October 2023 and the end of June 2024.

Up to June 30 last year, the Palestinian Ministry of Health in Hamas-run Gaza reported a death toll of 37,877 in the war. However, the new peer-reviewed study used data from the ministry, an online survey and social media obituaries to estimate that there were between 55,298 and 78,525 deaths from traumatic injuries in Gaza by that time. The study's best death toll estimate was 64,260, which would mean the Health Ministry had underreported the number of deaths to that point by 41 percent.

The study estimated that 59.1 percent of those killed were women, children and people over the age of 65. It did not provide an estimate of Palestinian fighters among the dead. That toll represented 2.9 percent of Gaza's pre-war population, "or approximately one in 35 inhabitants," the study said. The toll was only for

deaths from traumatic injuries, so did not include deaths from a lack of healthcare or food, or the thousands of missing believed to be buried under rubble.

Israel's war in Gaza has killed at least 46,006 Palestinians and wounded 109,378 since October 7, 2023, the territory's Health Ministry says. The war began on October 7, 2023, after Hamas-led attacks across the border with Israel killed at least 1,139 people and led to more than 200 people being taken captive.

In the first months of the war, the official Health Ministry death count was based entirely on bodies that arrived in hospitals. It later came to include other methods, including distributing an online survey to Palestinian people inside and outside the Gaza Strip, who were asked to provide data on their ID numbers, names, age at death, sex, location of death, and reporting source.

The Lancet study noted that the Palestinian Health Ministry's capacity for maintaining electronic death records had previously proven reliable, but has currently deteriorated under Israel's military campaign, which has included raids on hospitals and other healthcare facilities and disruptions to digital communications. On Thursday, Gaza health officials said the Al-Aqsa, Nasser and European hospitals are at risk of imminent closure, after repeated Israeli attacks and blockades of supplies. The Kamal Adwan, Indonesian and al-Awda hospitals have already been forced to close.

Al Jazeera's Hani Mahmoud,

reporting from Al-Aqsa Hospital in Deir el-Balah, central Gaza, said that many deaths were going unreported in the north of the Gaza Strip, with bodies being buried in the yards of homes or in the streets, as victims from a renewed Israeli offensive in the area cannot be brought to besieged hospitals. "The entire healthcare system in the northern part of the Strip is out of service, without any proper mechanism for recording the number of casualties in the area," he said. "It is increasingly difficult to keep track of mass killings during Israel's relentless attacks."

He said the Al-Aqsa Hospital was now being overwhelmed by a recent influx of injured civilians, many of them women and children. "Doctors are reporting an acute shortage of basic supplies, including surgical tools, antibiotics and painkillers," he said. Reporting from Deir-el Balah on Friday, Al Jazeera's Tareq Abu Azzoum said the Israeli military is escalating its attacks on residential areas.

"Medical teams in al-Awda Hospital continue to report that the Israeli army is going on with bulldozing all residential homes in the vicinity of the hospital amid more deterioration taking place among medical cases left there, and it could be a sign of further Israeli escalation taking place within the coming days," he said. Israel has repeatedly said it goes to great lengths to avoid civilians deaths and accuses Hamas of using hospitals as cover for its operations, which the group has denied. — Aljazeera

## US House votes bill to sanction ICC over Israel arrest warrants

WASHINGTON: The United States House of Representatives has voted in favour of a bill to sanction the International Criminal Court (ICC) in retaliation for its arrest warrants against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the country's former Defence Minister Yoav Gallant.

Legislators in the lower chamber of the US Congress passed the "Illegitimate Court Counteraction Act" by an overwhelming margin, 243 to 140, on Thursday in a signal of strong support for Israel. Forty-five Democrats joined 198 Republicans in backing the bill. No Republicans voted against it.

The bill now heads to the Senate, where a Republican majority was sworn in earlier this month. The legislation proposes sanctions for any foreigner who helps the ICC in its attempts to investigate, detain or prosecute a US citizen or citizen of an allied country that does not recognise the authority of the court. Neither the US nor Israel are parties to the Rome Statute, which established the ICC.

The sanctions would include the freezing of property assets, as well as the denial of visas to any foreigners who materially or financially contribute to the court's efforts. "America is passing this law because a kangaroo court is seeking to arrest the prime minister of our great ally, Israel," Representative Brian Mast, the Republican chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said in a speech before Thursday's vote.

The vote, one of the first since the

new Congress was seated last week, underscored strong support among President-elect Donald Trump's fellow Republicans for Israel's government, despite its ongoing war in Gaza. That conflict has killed more than 46,000 Palestinians since it began in October 2023, many of them women and children. United Nations experts have denounced Israel's methods in Gaza as "consistent with the characteristics of genocide".

That prompted ICC prosecutors last May to issue the arrest warrants against Netanyahu and Gallant. In response, US legislators threatened retaliation against the ICC. In a letter sent to outgoing US President Joe Biden in May, dozens of human rights groups urged him to reject calls for punitive action. "Acting on these calls would do grave harm to the interests of all victims globally and to the US government's ability to champion human rights and the cause of justice," the groups wrote at the time.

This week, another group of human rights organisations issued another letter ahead of Thursday's vote, denouncing the House bill as an attack on an "independent judicial institution". Sanctioning the court, they wrote, will "jeopardize the ability of desperate victims across all the court's investigations to access justice, weaken the credibility of sanction tools in other contexts, and place the United States at odds with its closest allies". The letter warned that imposing "asset freezes and entry restrictions" on ICC allies would bring the US "the stigma of siding

with impunity over justice".

Nevertheless, the US Senate, under Majority Leader John Thune, has promised swift consideration of the act so Trump can sign it into law after he takes office on January 20. In 2020, during his first term in office, Trump sanctioned senior ICC leaders over the court's investigations of US crimes in Afghanistan and Israeli crimes in occupied Palestinian territory. President Biden later lifted those sanctions.

The ICC, based in The Hague, is a permanent court that can prosecute individuals for war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide and the crime of aggression. The State of Palestine has been a member since 2015, and the court first announced an investigation of crimes committed there by both Israeli and Hamas officials in 2019. Though Israel is not party to the ICC, the court has jurisdiction over crimes committed on a member state's territory, regardless of the nationality of those committing them.

The US has supported the court at times, for instance, when the ICC's top prosecutor sought an arrest warrant for Russian President Vladimir Putin over alleged war crimes in Ukraine. Russia, like Israel and the US, is not a member of the court. Karim Khan, the prosecutor who issued the arrest warrant against Netanyahu and Gallant, has said that his decision is in line with the court's approach in all its cases, and he indicated that the warrants could prevent ongoing crimes. — Aljazeera

## Los Angeles wildfire deaths at 10 as National Guard called in

LOS ANGELES (AFP): Massive wildfires that engulfed whole neighbourhoods and displaced thousands in Los Angeles have killed at least 10 people, authorities said, as California's National Guard soldiers readied to hit the streets to help quell disorder.

News of the growing toll, announced late on Thursday by the Los Angeles County Medical Examiner, came as swaths of the United States' second-largest city lay in ruins. A vast firefighting operation continued into the night, bolstered by water-dropping helicopters thanks to a temporary lull in winds, even as new fires continued to spring up.

With reports of looting, Los Angeles County Sheriff Robert Luna said a nighttime curfew was planned, and the state's National Guard was on hand to patrol affected areas. Governor Gavin Newsom said the service members were part of a

thousands-strong deployment of state personnel. "We're throwing everything at our disposal — including our National Guard service members — to protect communities in the days to come," he said. "And to those who would seek to take advantage of evacuated communities, let me be clear: looting will not be tolerated."

Luna said his officers were patrolling evacuation zones and would arrest anyone who was not supposed to be there. But with such a huge area scorched by the fires, evacuees feared not enough was being done and some were taking matters into their own hands. Nicholas Norman mounted an armed vigil at his home after seeing suspicious characters in the middle of the night.

"I did the classic American thing: I went and got my shotgun and I sat out there, and put a light on so they knew people were there," he told AFP. The biggest of the multiple

blazes has ripped through almost 20,000 acres (8,800 hectares) of the upscale Pacific Palisades neighbourhood, while another fire around Altadena has torched 13,700 acres.

Firefighters said they were starting to get a handle on the Pacific Palisades blaze, with six per cent of its perimeter contained — meaning it can't spread any further in that direction. But after a lull, winds were returning and new fires continued to erupt.

One flared near Calabasas and the wealthy Hidden Hills enclave, home to celebrities like Kim Kardashian, late on Thursday. The Kenneth Fire exploded to almost 1,000 acres within hours, forcing more people from their homes, with over 180,000 now displaced. US President Joe Biden told a White House briefing he had pledged extra federal funds and resources to help the state cope with "the most ... devastating fire in California's history".

### Pakistan Navy COMLOG Command award ceremony held

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Pakistan Navy COMLOG Command Annual Efficiency Award Ceremony 2024 was held at PN Dockyard Auditorium Karachi. Vice Chief of the Naval Staff, Vice Admiral Ovais Ahmed Bilgrami, graced the occasion as the Chief Guest. The ceremony is organized annually to recognize the efforts of employees and units for their pivotal role in achieving Command's objectives.

In his address, Vice Chief of the Naval Staff emphasized that continuous efforts, unwavering determination, and a strong commitment to innovation are the core principles of PN Dockyard. He congratulated the award winners and advised to continue the good work with same zeal and zest. Earlier, in his welcome address, Commander Logistics, Rear Admiral M Sohail Arshad highlighted operational achievements of COMLOG Command during the year 2024. He apprised that COMLOG Command successfully carried out its mandated role despite the challenges. He further highlighted that professional excellence has been and will continue to remain hallmark of COMLOG Command.

During the ceremony, the Chief Guest presented awards to individuals and units for their outstanding performances. The event was attended by a large number of senior serving and retired Technical Branch Officers, CPOs/Sailors and Navy Civilians of COMLOG Command.

### Inflow of workers' remittance increased

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Workers' remittances from overseas to Pakistan rise 32.8 percent during the first half of fiscal year 2024-25 with inflows of US\$ 17.845 billion from July to December 2024 while remittances recorded a monthly inflow of US\$ 3.1 billion during December 2024.

The State Bank of Pakistan, in a statement issued here on Friday, stated "Cumulatively, with an inflow of US\$ 17.8 billion, workers' remittances increased by 32.8 percent during HIFY25 compared to US\$ 13.4 billion received during HIFY24."

Workers' remittances recorded an inflow of US\$ 3.1 billion during December 2024 which depicts a growth of 29.3% as compared to December 2023 and 5.6% increase in comparison to November 2024, it added. The remittances inflow was recorded as \$2.91 billion during November 2024 and \$2.38 billion in December 2023, the report mentioned.

Remittances inflows during December 2024 were mainly sourced from Saudi Arabia (\$770.6 million), United Arab Emirates (\$631.5 million), United Kingdom (\$456.9 million) and United States of America (\$284.3 million), the SBP reported. The contribution of expatriates in remittances from other GCC countries during December 2024 recorded as \$310 million, from European Union countries \$360.3 million, from Australia \$68.8 million, Malaysia \$15.8 million and Norway \$9.6 million, the report depicted.

### 153 supporters of PTI gets bail

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: An anti-terrorism court (ATC) in Islamabad on Friday granted bail to 153 suspects associated with the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) in cases related to the former ruling party's do-or-die protest in the federal capital on November 26, 2024.

In his ruling, the ATC judge stated: "Prima facie, it appears that the case, to the extent of the involvement of the present accused/petitioners, namely ..., is subject to further inquiry, which can only be clarified after the recording of prosecution evidence."

The judge noted that the prosecution failed to present any reason to convince the court that the petitioners would fail to comply with the conditions of their release. The suspects were granted bail against surety bonds worth Rs5,000 each.

## Stampede at central Damascus mosque kills four

DAMASCUS (AFP, Al Jazeera): A stampede at the landmark Umayyad Mosque in Syria's capital on Friday killed four people, a Damascus health official told state media. "Damascus Health Director Dr. Mohammed Akram Maatouq announced that the final toll from the unfortunate stampede that occurred today in the Great Umayyad Mosque and its surroundings is four dead and 16 injured," a statement carried by state news agency SANA said.

Earlier, Damascus Governor Maher Marwan had told SANA that the deadly crush took place "during a civilian event at the mosque." A photographer who collaborates with AFP and was at the site of the stampede saw large crowds gathered near the mosque because free meals were being handed out. Ghina, who was at the mosque to attend Friday prayers, said she saw "people carrying an elderly woman with blood dripping from her face," adding that she appeared dead.

The Al-Watan newspaper said the stampede happened during the distribution of free meals by a social media personality. A YouTuber called Chef Abu Omar, who has a restaurant in Istanbul, had earlier posted a video of preparations for the distribution of free meals at the Ummayyad Mosque. Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani had visited the mosque in the morning.

Meanwhile, Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani has held talks with Syria's new rulers and called for talks on easing European Union sanctions imposed on the previous government of Bashar al-Assad.

Tajani met Syria's de facto leader Ahmed al-Sharaa in Damascus on Friday, saying that sanctions imposed after al-Assad's crack-down on antigovernment protests that triggered the country's 13-year civil war "absolutely must not hit the Syrian population".

"They were imposed because there was a different regime. It's important to open discussions on the changed situation," he said, referring to last month's opposition takeover of the country, led by al-Sharaa's Hayat Tahrir al-Sham armed group, which brought al-Assad's rule to an abrupt end. Tajani said Italy wanted to help Syria recover from civil war and rebuild its broken economy, serving as a bridge between Damascus and the EU.

"The Mediterranean can no longer just be a sea of death, a cemetery of migrants but a sea of commerce a sea of development," he said. Al Jazeera's Hashem Ahelbarra, reporting from Damascus, said the meeting with al-Sharaa was "quite significant." "[I]t gives you a sense that the international community recognises the fact that this new administration is a new reality, and they would like to do business with it."

Tajani arrived in Damascus after hosting talks in Rome with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken. EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas, and officials from the United Kingdom, France and Germany on Thursday. He said that the meeting of the so-called Quintet on Syria was key to beginning the discussion about a change to the EU sanctions.

## PHC restrained changes in Sh Yasin Town's master plan

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: A divisional bench of Peshawar High Court (PHC) comprising Justice S.M Attique Shah and Fahim Wali has restrained the authorities from making changes in the master plan of Sheikh Yaseen Town, a private housing society located on Nasser Bagh Road, Peshawar, on Friday.

The writ petition filed by Walid Maqsood, a resident of Sheikh Yaseen Town while the counsel Naveed Maqsood advocate, informed the court that the master plan of Sheikh Yaseen Town was approved, and rules were framed for it, which included a green belt or open space in front of the houses to prevent environmental issues. However, the administration of Sheikh Yaseen Town has recently sought permission from the authorities to use the green belt for commercial and residential purposes, which is incorrect.

The lawyer argued that once the master plan is approved, it cannot be altered, as the residents of the area have purchased plots and constructed houses based on the approved master plan. The green belt

is meant to be used for planting trees or keeping it open to address environmental issues. PHC after initial arguments, restrained the authorities from making changes to the master plan and issued notices to the Tehsil Municipal Administration (TMA) and the administration of Sheikh Yaseen Town.

**Court orders federal's govt to decide Afghan musicians asylum within 2 months:** The Peshawar High Court (PHC) has restrained the federal government from forcibly deporting more than 100 Afghan musicians who are seeking political asylum in Pakistan. PHC has directed the federal government to decide on the asylum applications of the Afghan musicians within two months. The court has also restrained the security agencies from taking any action against the Afghan musicians.

PHC's Justice Waqar Ahmed authored short verdict on the writ petition filed by an Afghan musician named Hashmat Ullah. The counsel Mumtaz Ahmed advocate argued that the Afghan musicians had fled Afghanistan due to the change of government

and the Taliban takeover. They had been facing threats to their lives and had been deprived of their livelihood.

Assistant Attorney General Rahat Ali Nahqi appeared before PHC on behalf of federal's government. The lawyer further argued that the Afghan musicians had been facing harassment and intimidation in Peshawar, and were being forced to leave Pakistan. He argued that this was a violation of human rights and international law.

PHC after hearing the arguments, issued short written order, directing the federal government to decide on the asylum applications of the Afghan musicians within two months. The court also directed the federal government to allow the Afghan musicians to stay in Pakistan until a decision is made on their asylum applications. The court restrained the security agencies from taking any action against the Afghan musicians. PHC observed that the Afghan musicians also apply for asylum with the UNHCR, and directed the federal government to formulate a policy their applications within two months.



ISLAMABAD: Ms Mumtaz Zahra Baloch, Ambassador designate to France called o Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Naveed Ashraf.

## Satisfy court on trial

(Continued from Page 1)

Haris then replied that the Army Act was a "special law", adding that the "process for [collecting] the evidence and the trial was different" under special laws. At this point, Justice Afghan remarked: "There is also the facility to hire a lawyer of one's choice in a court martial case. The trials in a military court are also similar to ordinary (civilian) courts."

Justice Rizvi then stated that during his career, he had appeared as the defence counsel in military courts. "Along with a lawyer, an officer is also appointed as a 'friend of the suspect.'" Justice Mandokhail reiterated his question about the expertise of an officer sitting in a military court, asking if they were "perfect enough to determine such harsh sentences".

Here, Justice Hilali referred to an example given by Haris of military trials being conducted in the United States, asking: "If there was such a trial held in another country, who would be the judge?" To this, Justice Mazhar responded, "Officers are

the ones who preside over a court martial across the world." Haris also asserted that the officers were "experienced".

At one point, Justice Hilali remarked, "After turning off the airport's lights, an army chief's airplane was asked to leave the country. All passengers were put in danger in this incident." To this, the defence ministry counsel replied, "How can a person who was not in the airplane hijack it?" Justice Hilali reiterated that the passengers were put at risk despite there being "a bit of fuel" left in the plane's engine. Haris then said he would not speak of "political matters" but it was acknowledged by the SC that there was "ample" fuel available in the engine.

"A martial law was imposed in the country because of this single incident. Even after the martial law, that trial was not conducted in a military court," Justice Hilali observed. In response, Haris contended that hijacking a flight was not mentioned as a crime in the Army Act, which is why the trial for the case was not held in a military court.

Justice Aminuddin then stated that the difference on the particular matter had been clarified now. However, Justice Hilali said, "This leads to another question. If a war or military plane is hijacked, then in which court will the trial be held?"

Justice Mandokhail also remarked, "You (the coalition government) have the majority. You can also insert [charges of] hijacking and [Pakistan Penal Code's] section 302 (murder) in the Army Act. Who can stop you?" Here, Justice Hilali observed, "All sections in the FIRs (first information reports) over May 9 were of the Anti-Terrorism Act. I do not know how military trials were then held over these sections."

During the hearing, AAG Rehman told the court that only those suspects were handed over into military custody for whom there was evidence of their presence at the site of the incident. According to him, there were more than 5,000 suspects in total. The hearing was then adjourned till January 13 (Monday).