

Bail granted to Bushra Bibi
F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Anti-Terrorism Court Islamabad has granted interim bail to Bushra Bibi, wife of PTI founder, till February 7 in 13 cases. Anti-Terrorism Court ordered Bushra Bibi to submit surety bonds of Rs5,000 each. Anti-Terrorism Court Judge Tahir Abbas Sipra heard bail applications. Bail applications filed in 13 cases registered against Bushra Bibi on November 26 protest.



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COAS calls for improved ties with Afghanistan

— Fitna al Khawarij carried no influence in Pakistan

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Asim Munir on Tuesday said that neither large scale operation was being carried out in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa nor 'Fitna al-Khawarij' have any influence in any area of Pakistan.

Speaking to political leaders here, the army chief said the consensus of all parties on the National Action Plan (NAP) is encouraging, but its swift implementation is necessary. "There is a special bond between the people and the army. Efforts to create a rift between the public and the army stem from foreign agenda", he added.

While urging unity against the menace of terrorism, General Asim Munir said, "the existence of the state ensures the existence of politics; God forbid, if there is no state, there is nothing. We must all stand united against terrorism, without any discrimination or prejudice".

He said, "Creating disorder is a grave sin, and without the state, nothing else matters". The army chief reaffirmed that Pakistan's revolves around national interest. "Our policy is only Pakistan," he said. The COAS said Afghanistan is our "brotherly neighbour" and an Islamic country and reiterated Pakistan's desire for better bilateral relations with Afghanistan, stating differences arise only over the presence of Fitna al Khawarij and cross-border terrorism. "This difference will remain until the issue is addressed," he added.

Meanwhile, COAS on Monday, also separately interacted with politicians of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa belonging to different political parties. The participants resolved consensus on the need for one political

Govt efforts to restore peace in Kurram heading towards success

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The collaborative efforts of the federal and provincial governments to restore peace in restive Kurram tribal district are showing promising results, as the implementation of a peace agreement began on Tuesday. The latest development saw the departure of a convoy from Thall to Parachinar, delivering essential supplies such as medicines, vegetables, fruits, and other necessities to the area, which has been grappling with severe shortages following violent clashes between the rival groups.

Deputy Commissioner (DC) Kurram, Ashfaq Khan expressed confidence in the ongoing peace process and confirmed that the second convoy, comprising around 45 to 50 vehicles, was safely transported from Thall to Parachinar under tight police security.

Talking to media, the DC emphasized that the practical steps being taken were a significant achievement for the people of Kurram, noting that local peace committees had assumed responsibility for maintaining order in the area. The convoy was closely protected by police, with other law enforcement agencies on standby to assist if necessary.

As part of the peace agreement signed on January 1 between the two parties, it was agreed that local bunkers, which had been a major source of unrest, would be dismantled over the course of the coming month. This measure, according to the DC, marks a crucial step toward lasting stability in the region. The dismantling of bunkers is already underway, with four destroyed in Lower Kurram in the past 24 hours. An additional 10 bunkers are scheduled for demolition today. According to the peace agreement, each party is responsible for destroying five bunkers, with operations starting from the Balishkhel and Khar areas.

Government sources indicated that there are over 700 bunkers scattered across a 25 to 30-kilometer area and its dismantling was critical for peace in the area. Ashfaq said discussions with tribal elders and Jirga members regarding the ongoing operations have been successful, ensuring local support for the peace process. In addition to bunker demolition, plans to enhance security along the Parachinar Road are also progressing. The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Apex Committee has approved the recruitment of a Special Protection Force (SPF), with the finance department providing necessary funds.

voice and public support against the scourge of terrorism. The political representatives showed vivid clarity on unflinching support of the Armed Forces and LEAs in nation's fight against terror and agreed on

the need for a unified front beyond political colours against the extremist philosophy of terrorist groups. Upon arrival, COAS was received by the Corps Commander Peshawar.



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif chairing a meeting regarding IT sector.

Bangladeshi army's top brass calls on COAS munir

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: Lieutenant General S M Kamr-ul-Hassan, Principal Staff Officer (PSO) of the Armed Forces Division of Bangladesh, is visiting Pakistan and met with General Syed Asim Munir, NI (M), Chief of Army Staff (COAS), at the General Headquarters (GHQ) Rawalpindi.

During their meeting, both held extensive discussions on the evolving security dynamics in the region and explored further avenues for enhancing bilateral military cooperation. The COAS and the PSO underscored the importance of a stronger defence relationship, emphasizing that the enduring partnership between the two brotherly nations must remain resilient against external influences.

COAS reiterated the significance of joint efforts to promote peace and stability in South Asia and the broader region, while ensuring that both nations continue to contribute to regional security through collaborative defence initiatives.

Lieutenant General Kamr-ul-Hassan commended the exceptional professionalism of the Pakistan Army and acknowledged the immense sacrifices made by the armed forces in their relentless fight against terrorism, noting that their efforts serve as a beacon of courage and determination.

Madrasas safeguard ideological foundations

F.P. Report

VEHARI: Chief of Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F), Maulana Fazlur Rehman, asserted that if it weren't for madrasas, the ideological foundation of Pakistan would have been buried.

Speaking to the media in Vehari, Fazlur Rehman remarked, "We wear turbans not to bow our heads but to hold them high."

He criticised what he called baseless propaganda against religious scholars, emphasizing that such campaigns undermine their role in society. He further stated that religious leadership has always promoted harmony and unity in the country.

PM calls for enrollment of out-of-school children

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Tuesday underlined the need for strong coordination between the federal and provincial governments to enroll the 22.8 million out-of-school children and achieve other objectives of the recently launched Education Emergency.

The prime minister, in his televised opening remarks at the meeting of the federal cabinet chaired by him, said that since education was a devolved subject, the federal government should aggressively work with the provincial governments to address the challenge of out-of-school children with a majority of them being girls.

He directed the federal education minister to enhance coordination with the provinces in the education sector. The prime minister lauded the federal education minister and secretary education for organizing a commendable international conference on girls' education in the Muslim world that garnered great experts who extended informed discourse on the matter.

The OIC Secretary General, Saudi delegation and education ministers from different Muslim countries had participated in the conference that made the event a big success, he added. PM Shehbaz also appreciated the resumption of the flight operations of the Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) to Paris and termed it a great achievement.

He regretted that the unfounded statements by the aviation minister of the PTI government incurred huge economic losses and restrictions on the flight operations of the national flag carrier that had now been relieved. He appreciated and felicitated the Aviation Minister and the entire cabinet members on this achievement and expressed the hope for resumption of flights operation to London as the government was expanding PIA network routes.

Commenting on the new Pak-Iran border crossing in Panjgur, the prime minister extended his gratitude to the Government of Iran for cooperating on the matter as it would help further curb smuggling and promote legal trade between the two neighbouring countries. The prime minister told the cabinet members that the situation in Kurram had improved and the pickets formed earlier had been removed and supplies of essential items was revived.

"All stakeholders together will maintain peace and strive to suppress violence among the groups," he remarked. The armed forces, he said under the leadership of the Army Chief had initiated anti-terror activities against Fitna Al Khawarij (terrorists).

In a recent intelligence-based operation (IBO), 27 terrorists were eliminated and many other IBOs were going on across the country as "the security forces are rendering great sacrifices that will result in the end of Fitna Al Khawarij. History will reckon these sacrifices in golden words." The prime minister concluded that the national task force formed for the transformation of the energy sector was aggressively working and preparing an elaborate roadmap for energy sector resilience.

Shehbaz for further improving IT infrastructure to boost exports by upto \$25b in 5 years: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Tuesday expressed his satisfaction over the steps being taken to boost Information Technology (IT) exports by up to US\$ 25 billion in the next five years and directed the relevant authorities to further improve the IT infrastructure to achieve the target.

Chairing a meeting regarding the IT sector here, the prime minister directed the relevant authorities to simplify further the current Right of Way rules to promote broadband services through fiber optics in the country. He also issued directions to provide the youth with IT training as per international standards so that they could easily get jobs abroad.

Eight more terrorists killed in operation

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: Eight khawarij were sent to hell in two separate engagements in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province. An intelligence based operation was conducted by the Security Forces in Tank District on reported presence of Khwarij. During the conduct of operation, own troops effectively engaged Khwarij location and resultantly six Khwarij were sent to hell.

In another encounter that took place in general area Tirah valley, Khyber District, own troops successfully neutralized two Khwarij. Sanitization operations are being conducted to eliminate any other Kharij found in the area, as security forces of Pakistan are determined to wipe-out the menace of terrorism from the country.

President Asif Ali

Zardari and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Tuesday paid tribute to the security forces for eliminating eight Khawarij (terrorists) in two different operations in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Appreciating the forces for anti-terror operations in Tank and Tirah Valley, the president and prime minister reiterated the nation's resolve to root out terrorism from the country.

"The people of Pakistan stand in support of their security forces to eliminate terrorism and are fully resolved to root out this scourge," the president remarked.

Prime Minister Shehbaz said that the government and the security forces were pursuing the objective of eliminating terrorism in toto. "The entire nation feels proud of its brave security forces. We will continue to thwart the

nefarious designs of the terrorists," the prime minister added.

Federal Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi on Tuesday commended the security forces for their two successful intelligence-based operations in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). He praised the security forces for thwarting the terrorists' nefarious plans, saying that the brave security forces have neutralized the threats and deserve appreciation.

The Interior Minister also acknowledged that the nation stands shoulder-to-shoulder with the security forces and salutes their sacrifices. He emphasized that khwarij terrorists will be completely eliminated with the nation's support. The operations resulted in the elimination of eight khwarij terrorists, marking a significant success.

Ayaz green lights of govt-PTI talks

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The third round of dialogue between the government and the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has finally been called. National Assembly Speaker Ayaz Sadiq has summoned the meeting - third round - on Jan 16 (Thursday). The two sides will once again sit together at 11.30am to take the reconciliation efforts forward.

Earlier, rumours were rife that the negotiations between the two key political parties had been put on the back burner amid delay in PTI delegation's meeting with Imran Khan to discuss the future course of action. The NA speaker, who oversees the negotiation process, is reported to have facilitated PTI leaders' meeting with the incarcerated founder to pave the way for resumption of stalled talks.

Sahibzada Hamid Raza, who is focal person of the PTI team, says they have given the government time till Jan 31 to go for judicial inquiry into May 9 and Nov 26 incidents and any prevarication on the issue could jeopardise talks. The dialogue process between the government and the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf seemed to have entered into a stalemate.

SC sees 'security failure' in Jinnah House attack

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court of Pakistan constitutional bench on Tuesday raised concerns over the security failure during the May 9 incidents, emphasising how protesters managed to enter the Corps Commander's house.

A seven-member constitutional bench, headed by Justice Aminuddin Khan, is hearing the case on civilian trials in military courts. The bench comprises Justices Jamal Khan Mandokhail, Muhammad Ali Mazhar, Hasan Azhar Rizvi, Musarrat Hilali, Naeem Akhtar Afghan, and Shahid Bilal Hassan.

Advocate Khawaja Haris is representing the Ministry of Defence in the case. During the proceedings, Khawaja Haris argued that trials under the Army Act applied if civilians incited military personnel to abandon their duties. He cited past Supreme Court judgments and stated that the law existed since 1967.

Justice Jamal Mandokhail questioned the applicability of the Army Act, noting that its scope, as Khawaja Haris presented, could extend to anyone. He also pointed out the differences between the current case and the FB Ali Case, which occurred during martial law and involved both retired and serving officers.

Justice Hasan Azhar Rizvi asked critical questions about the masterminds behind the May 9 events and whether any military officers were implicated. Khawaja Haris responded that no military officers were on trial and that allegations primarily involved damage to property.

Justice Rizvi remarked that trespassing on the Corps Commander's house without armed resistance reflected a significant security lapse. Justice Musarrat Hilali

remarked that many individuals on May 9 were simply heading somewhere unaware of the situation they were being involved in.

The Ministry of Defence's lawyer stated that these individuals have not undergone trial in military courts, and that he would provide details of the accused. The Supreme Court later adjourned the hearing on the intra-court appeal against civilian trials in military courts until tomorrow, with the Ministry of Defence's lawyer, Khawaja Haris, expected to continue his arguments.

The judge further inquired whether any military officer was tried for involvement in the events of May 9. He noted that people entered the Corps Commander House, which constituted a security breach. Noting that it was necessary to open fire, the judge questioned whether resistance was put up when military installations were damaged on 9 May.

In response, the Ministry of Defence's lawyer said that the charges against the protesters pertain to causing damage to property. No military officer was charged in connection with the events of May 9, and complete restraint was observed to avoid any loss of life.

Furthermore, Justice Jamal Khan Mandokhail raised a question, asking: "If a soldier's rifle is stolen, where would the case be tried?" In response, the Haris explained that a rifle is considered a soldier's combat weapon. Justice Hilali added to the discussion, querying: "If a civilian steals the rifle for financial gain, without intending to disarm the army, where would the trial take place?" To this, the counsel replied that the circumstances of the case would determine the jurisdiction.

Gaza ceasefire deal in 'final stages': Qatar

DOHA/CAIRO/JERUSALEM (Reuters): Negotiators met in Qatar on Tuesday hoping to hammer out final details of a ceasefire in Gaza, with mediators and the warring sides all describing a deal as closer than ever.

More than six hours after talks began there was still no word on an outcome. Qatar's foreign ministry spokesperson Majed Al-Ansari told a news conference that talks on the final details were underway after both sides were presented with a text. US President Joe Biden, whose administration has been taking part alongside an envoy of president-elect Donald Trump, said a deal was close.

Hamas said the talks had reached the final steps and that it hoped this round of negotiations would lead to a deal after mediation by Qatar, Egypt and the United States. An Israeli official said talks had reached a critical phase although some details needed

to be hammered out: "We are close, we are not there yet."

Militant group Islamic Jihad, which is separate from Hamas and also holds hostages in Gaza, said it was sending a senior delegation that would arrive in Doha on Tuesday night to take part in final arrangements for a ceasefire deal. "The deal ... would free the hostages, halt the fighting, provide security to Israel and allow us to significantly surge humanitarian assistance to the Palestinians who suffered terribly in this war that Hamas started," Biden said on Monday.

If successful, the phased ceasefire — capping over a year of start-and-stop talks — could halt fighting that decimated Gaza, killed tens of thousands of Palestinians, made most of the enclave's population homeless and is still killing dozens a day. That in turn could ease tensions across the wider Middle East, where the war has

fueled conflict in the West Bank, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen and Iraq, and raised fears of all-out war between Israel and Iran.

Israel would recover around 100 remaining hostages and bodies from among those captured in the Oct. 7, 2023 attacks by Hamas that precipitated the war. In return it would free Palestinian detainees. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who gave a speech in Washington outlining a vision for governing the Palestinian territories after the war, said it was up to Hamas to accept a deal that was already set for implementation.

Families of hostages in Israel were on edge. Meirav Leshem Gonen, whose 24-year-old daughter Romi was shot and seized by gunmen at a music festival, told Radio 103 the family had been picturing her return for months as "the light at the end of the tunnel." "We have to keep our feet on the ground. But on the other hand

our heads are in the clouds."

An Israeli official said the deal's first stage would see the release of 33 hostages, including children, women including some female soldiers, men above 50, and the wounded and sick. Israel would gradually and partially withdraw some of its forces. A Palestinian source said Israel would free 1,000 Palestinian prisoners in the first phase, which would last 60 days. Families of hostages unlikely to be in the first group remained anxious. As Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu briefed relatives of some hostages, others protested outside his office. "The prime minister should bring a deal that includes all the hostages, including my son," said Ruby Chen, whose soldier son, Itay, was killed on Oct. 7, 2023, his body since held in Gaza. "He saved many people, he doesn't deserve to rot in Gaza."

Israel launched its assault in Gaza

after Hamas-led fighters stormed across its borders on Oct. 7, 2023, killing 1,200 people and taking more than 250 hostages, according to Israeli tallies. Since then, Israeli forces have killed more than 46,000 Palestinians in Gaza, according to Palestinian health officials.

Only one ceasefire has been held so far, lasting for a single week in Nov. 2023, during which around half of the hostages, including most women, children and foreign laborers, were freed in return for Palestinian detainees. Both sides have been committed in principle for months to the prospect of a ceasefire accompanied by a swap of remaining hostages for detainees. But previous talks foundered over the steps that would follow, with Hamas rejecting any deal that stopped short of bringing a permanent end to the war, while Israel said it would not end the war until Hamas is dismantled.

Fighting has meanwhile raged on, focused in recent months on Gaza's northern edge where Israel says its forces are trying to prevent Hamas from regrouping and Palestinians say the Israelis are trying to permanently depopulate a buffer zone. Nightly Israeli strikes have continued across the enclave. Gaza health officials said on Tuesday Israeli strikes killed at least 27 Palestinians in the past day, including one Gazan journalist. One of those attacks killed 10 people in a house in Khan Younis south of the enclave. Another killed nine people in a tent encampment in Deir Al-Balah in central Gaza.

Trump's Jan. 20 inauguration is now widely seen as a de facto deadline for a ceasefire agreement. Trump has said there would be "hell to pay" unless hostages held by Hamas are freed before he takes office, while Biden has also called for a final push for a deal before he leaves.



KARACHI: A view of massive traffic jam seen at Karachi Press Club Chowk. —APP Photo

Azerbaijan Ambassador calls on CM Punjab

LAHORE (APP): Azerbaijan Ambassador to Pakistan H.E. Khizr Farhadov called on Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif, here on Tuesday.

Matters related to enhancing bilateral relations between the two nations were discussed in detail, with a focus on promoting trade, cultural exchanges, and collaboration across various sectors.

CM Maryam Nawaz expressed her commitment to strengthening cultural and educational ties while also exploring new avenues for trade and investment, particularly in agriculture, health, education, and energy.

During the meeting, the CM briefed the Ambassador on ongoing development projects and public welfare initiatives, which were warmly acknowledged by Ambassador Farhadov. He praised the leadership of Maryam Nawaz Sharif, noting her role in continuing the public service agenda of her predecessors, Muhammad Nawaz Sharif and Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif.

CM Maryam Nawaz highlighted the importance of Azerbaijan's recent presidential visit to Pakistan and emphasized the strong, brotherly relations between the two countries. She also

underscored the potential to strengthen cooperation in tourism, with the hope of learning from Azerbaijan's expertise in the sector. The CM invited Azerbaijani investors to Punjab, promising a special package of incentives to encourage investment.

Ambassador Farhadov expressed his country's interest in exploring investment opportunities in Punjab and reiterated Azerbaijan's close and friendly ties with Pakistan.

He also extended an invitation for Maryam Nawaz Sharif to visit Azerbaijan, an invitation she accepted with gratitude.

Sharjeel stresses need for enhanced road safety to protect lives

E.P. Report

KARACHI: Sindh Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon has stated that as a nation, our priorities are shifting. People lose their lives in accidents, and some are left with disabilities. Our priority should be to serve humanity in every possible way. The concept of road safety arises from a commitment to humanity, and it is imperative that we all contribute by adhering to traffic rules.

Speaking as the chief guest at the Consumer Road Safety Award ceremony organized by the Consumer Association of Pakistan in Karachi, Sindh Senior Minister and Provincial Minister for Information, Transport, and Mass Transit, Sharjeel Inam Memon, stated: "I congratulate all the organizers on the successful Consumer Road Safety Award ceremony."

This organization is doing remarkable work with the noble aim of sav-



ing human lives."

He emphasized the importance of respecting traffic rules and educating children about them. He also highlighted the need for awareness, noting that a few moments of haste can not only ruin lives but also create difficulties for others.

Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon stated that when young children drive, it reflects the negligence and irresponsibility of their parents. He urged the media to

play its role in raising awareness about traffic rules, emphasizing that violations not only breach regulations but also lead to numerous negative consequences.

He remarked that in the past, traffic policemen in Karachi were targeted and even killed, yet they remained steadfast and undeterred. He acknowledged their dedication, noting that traffic policemen work tirelessly, standing for hours in the scorching sun, intense

heat, and even in cold weather. He emphasized that when traffic policemen stop someone, it is for their safety, and he honored them as our national heroes.

He stated that Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, President Asif Ali Zardari, and the Chief Minister have given clear directives to expand mass transit. He acknowledged that environmental pollution is a significant challenge and announced that the Sindh government is set to launch an eco-friendly electric vehicle (EV) taxi service for the first time. This initiative will benefit both the environment and the country while creating new employment opportunities.

At the ceremony, Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon presented shields to traffic police personnel and members of the Consumer Association of Pakistan in recognition of their valuable contributions to road safety.

Wafaqi Mohtasib resolves 223,171 complaints in 2024

E.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Wafaqi Mohtasib, Mr. Ejaz Ahmad Qureshi has said that his office received and redressed a record number of complaints during the outgoing year 2024, which stood at 226,371 and 223,171 respectively, indicating an increase of 17% and 16% in the receipt and disposal.

He was informally interacting with a group of journalists, who called on him at the Wafaqi Mohtasib Secretariat here today.

Warmly felicitating the journalists and media persons on the advent of the new year, the Wafaqi Mohtasib termed members of the media his partner and stakeholders in his efforts to raise awareness about the Wafaqi Mohtasib and its services in support of the citizen's rights. Wafaqi Mohtasib further added that the outreach of his office was continuously being increased and the new regional offices have been established at Muzaffarabad (AJ&K) and Gilgit which brings the number to 24. He



added that the institution is planning to establish more regional offices in remote areas during this year.

He further informed that 92.9% decisions made by his organization have been implemented during the year 2024, while expressing the resolve to achieve 100% implementation rate. He said that nearly 2.3 million households have benefited from the services offered by the Wafaqi Mohtasib's Office since its establishment in 1983.

The Wafaqi Mohtasib further added that during 2024, our investigation officers held 126 Khuli Katcheries (Open Courts)

across the length and breadth of the country, thereby sparing the complainants of the hassle to visit the Mohtasib's Offices and received administrative justice at the door steps. He went on to add that the Heads of federal government agencies and departments have been instructed to ensure implementation of the decisions made by his office within the shortest possible time. He said that the Wafaqi Mohtasib's office is the poor man's court established with a view to serving the marginalized and down trodden segments of the society.

He said that by virtue of the

untiring efforts made by his officers and staff members in the and due to new initiative like Khuli Katcheries, Inspection Visits, Informal Resolution of Disputes (IRD), growing number of people are approaching this institution for speedy and free of cost redressal of their complaints".

Touching on the Mohtasib's international role, he stated that being President of the Asian Ombudsman Association (AOA) he presided over the 25th meeting of its Board of Directors in Istanbul in June 2024 besides addressing the International Ombuds Summit (IOS) in Hong Kong as the key note speaker.

Pakistan reports new polio case

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Regional Reference Laboratory for Polio Eradication at the National Institute of Health (NIH) has confirmed the detection of new wild poliovirus type 1 (WPV1) case in the country.

The lab confirmed one polio case from a male child from Jacobabad. The onset of this case was on December 27, 2024. Jacobabad has now reported five polio cases in 2024.

Karachi mayor inaugurates development projects

KARACHI (PPI) Karachi Mayor Barrister Murtaza Wahab launched several development projects in Orangi Town, focusing on road construction and infrastructure improvements. He also addressed issues related to illegal occupation of parking sites and road cutting, emphasizing the ongoing efforts of Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) to enhance the city's infrastructure and governance.

According to a statement

issued by Karachi Metropolitan Corporation, speaking to media representatives on Tuesday after inaugurating road construction and other development projects in Orangi Town, including Qatar Hospital Road, he revealed that KMC had received a cheque of Rs200 million from K-Electric, which would be utilized for various development initiatives. Five key development schemes, worth a total of Rs233.6 million, have been completed in Orangi Town, including improvements to water supply, sewer line repairs, and road carpeting.

In his address to the media, Mayor Wahab reiterated that KMC was striving to become more active and transparent in its operations. He emphasized the importance of addressing public complaints in a timely manner and ensuring that the corporation's resources are directed towards public welfare. He also stated that 20 additional development schemes in District West were underway, with all expected to be completed by June 30.

He revealed that in North Nazimabad Town, Jamaat-e-Islami is granting Sui Gas Company permission for road cutting and announced plans to write to the Anti-Corruption Department regarding this matter soon.

All participants pledged their commitment to contribute to the Gomal development through both financial and social efforts.

After exchanging valuable

Gomal Grand Jirga to be held on January 19

TANK (APP): A meeting of Gomal Nojawan Tehreek held at Kaur Gomal Circle and decided to hold Gomal Grand Jirga on January 19 regarding various issues faced by people of the area.

The meeting was chaired by Shaukat Ali, President of Gomal Youth Movement.

The agenda focused on highlighting the issues of Gomal and the acquisition of a new Tehsil for Tank.

Representatives from various political and social organizations, as well as

youth groups, actively participated in the discussion. The meeting saw the active involvement of the Gomal Welfare Association, chairmen, councilor unions, Gomal Youth Movement, and other local political and social personalities, along with the members of the Awaz Haq Foundation.

All participants pledged their commitment to contribute to the Gomal development through both financial and social efforts.

After exchanging valu-

able opinions, it was decided that a grand Jirga for the entire Gomal Circle would be held on Sunday, January 19.

The event will invite special participation from all walks of life, and a door-to-door campaign will be launched to ensure the success of the Jirga and drive initiatives for the betterment of the areas from Gardavi to Dabra and from Garni Shekhan to Manji, to make sure they attend on January 19 to work towards a brighter future.

HCTRS receives accreditation certificate from GCC

KARACHI (APP): The Halal Certification, Testing, and Research Services (HCTRS), a part of the International Center for Chemical and Biological Sciences (ICCBS) at the University of Karachi, has reached a significant milestone by earning an accreditation certificate from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Accreditation Center.

This achievement was celebrated during an official meeting at the HEJ Research Institute by Prof. Dr. Farzana Shaheen, Director of the ICCBS, University of Karachi, Prof. Dr. Syed Ghulam Musharraf, Incharge HCTRS, Mufti Dr. Syed Arif Ali Shah, General Manager HCTRS, Dr. Ishtiaq Ahmed, and Dr. Shakil Ahmed, said a spokesperson on Tuesday.

Prof. Dr. Farzana Shaheen, Director of the ICCBS highlighted that HCTRS is Pakistan's first fully-fledged, government-

backed Halal certification body, providing a comprehensive one-window solution for Halal certification, testing, training, and research. It is the only public-sector research institution in the country offering such Halal services and is committed to excellence and quality in laboratory operations, she said.

Prof. Dr. Shaheen further emphasized that this achievement reflects compliance with internationally recognized standards, including the GSO Standard GSO 2055-2: 2021 and OIC/SMIC 2: 2019, solidifying HCTRS's role as a pioneering entity in Pakistan's Halal certification sector.

Previously, the Pakistan Halal Authority, operating under the Federal Ministry of Science and Technology, had awarded HCTRS a registration certificate, further establishing its credibility, she mentioned. Speaking about the Gulf Cooperation Council Accreditation

Center (GAC), Prof. Dr. Syed Ghulam Musharraf described it as a globally renowned institution dedicated to fostering international collaboration, promoting the recognition of accredited conformity assessment bodies, and harmonizing accreditation practices worldwide.

It is noteworthy that HCTRS offers Halal certification services across various sectors, including food of animal origin (slaughtering, meat, and meat products), food of plant origin, beverages, processed foods, food services, export and import logistics, distribution, retail, transportation, packaging, storage, and auxiliary services.

The Vice-Chancellor of the University of Karachi, Prof. Dr. Khalid Iraqi, and Prof. Dr. Atta-ur-Rahman, Professor Emeritus and former Federal Minister for Science and Technology, also congratulated the HCTRS team on their outstanding achievement.

Minister reviews door-to-door waste collection

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Minister for Local Government Zeeshan Rafiq visited different areas of the provincial capital and reviewed the work of door to door waste collection under the Suthra Punjab programme of Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz, here on Tuesday.

Special Assistant to Chief Minister for Political Affairs Zeeshan Malik, Secretary Local Government and Community Development Shakeel Ahmed Mian and Chairman Lahore Waste Management Company Malik Bilal Zulfikar Khokhar were also present.

Lahore Waste Management Company (LWMC) CEO Babar Sahib Din briefed the provincial minister about the arrangements made so far. The Local Government Minister and Special Assistant visited

Ashiana Housing Road and Yuhannabad areas. Zeeshan Rafiq interacted with shopkeepers and local residents about waste collection.

The residents of the area told the minister that now the cleaning arrangements were much better than before. Special Assistant Zeeshan Malik directed the cleaning staff present there to work with hard work and dedication.

Provincial Minister and Special Assistant also visited the complaint desk in Yuhannabad. Local Government Minister Zeeshan Rafiq directed the LWMC to take immediate action on public complaints, adding that the scope of door-to-door waste collection would be extended in a phased manner.

"During the current month of January, we will provide this facility in 100 union councils of Lahore,

while the whole of Lahore will be brought under the door-to-door waste collection program by March", he pledged.

He added that under the vision of Chief Minister Punjab, for the first time, a uniform sanitation system was introduced in rural and urban areas. "Suthra Punjab is not a source of income but a program of public service. No initial fee is charged under the program, he said and added that excellent cleaning services would be provided for a nominal fee.

On this occasion, Special Assistant to the Chief Minister Zeeshan Malik said that the work of door-to-door collection was started from those areas where the overall sanitation situation was not satisfactory. "Apart from this, sanitation facilities are being provided for the first time in the villages as well", he noted.



LAHORE: Female students admire the creative art pieces on display at the Master's Degree Show exhibition, held at Shakir Ali Auditorium.

PAF BASE-RISALPUR PUBLIC AUCTION

1. A Public Auction of salvage stores and scrap will be held at PAF Base, Risalpur on Friday **31 January, 2025**, at 1000 Hrs on "AS IS, WHERE IS" basis.

2. **Inspection of various lots:** - Inspection of various lots of salvage stores and scrap will be allowed at 0830 Hrs, on the auction day.

3. **Terms and Conditions:** -

(a) The salvage stores and scrap offered for auction would be sold on "AS IS WHERE IS" basis, without any guarantee or warranty of any nature, whatsoever. PAF Base Risalpur shall not be responsible or liable for any fault, defect, dysfunction or any other problem with any Lot.

(b) The bidders will participate in open bid on the basis of his own inspection and judgment.

(c) The bidders will undertake to be liable and responsible for all losses or damages, resulting from any fault defect or dysfunction of the items in Lot; whether or not they opt to avail the opportunity to inspect the Lot, as mentioned above.

(d) Bringing Computerized National ID card is mandatory for participation in bidding.

(e) PAF Base Risalpur reserves the right to accept or reject complete bid or a part of the bid, without thereby incurring any liability to the affected bidder, and any obligation to inform the affected bidder of the reasons for the action.

(f) PAF Base Risalpur shall neither be liable nor responsible for any costs, charges, expenses or damages of any nature, whatsoever, arising directly, indirectly or consequently on account of submission and / or rejection of bid (s).

(g) The successful bidders will deposit **25%** of the bid value in cash, on-the-spot. Remaining amount (75% plus Taxes) is to be paid in **10 working days**. Delay would result in confiscation of Earnest Money (25%) or any other payment made in this regard in favor of Government.

(h) The successful bidders will have to pay 'All applicable Taxes' as per existing Govt rules and DGDP policies.

(i) The successful bidders will also be responsible to remove their lots from PAF Base Risalpur premises, within **15 working days**. Otherwise, ground rent charges would be levied, as per prescribed Government rules.

(k) Auction will be conducted through Government auctioneer **M/s Shahzaib Gul & Co.** Necessary coordination may be carried out with Govt Auctioneer on Cell No **0325-5730919 & 0309-7451512**.

(l) All decisions of PAF Base Risalpur, pertaining to auction will be final conclusive and binding upon all agencies and shall not be challenged by anyone, in any manner before any forum.

NOTE:- Carrying of mobile phones, cameras, and any type of arms (Licensed / Un-licensed) is strictly prohibited in PAF premises. Security rules should be followed by all participating bidders, during auction.

**OFFICER COMMANDING
PAF Base, Risalpur**

Strengthen polio eradication efforts

CS, PM's Focal Person chair meeting



F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Chief Secretary Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Nadeem Aslam Chaudhary jointly chaired with the Prime Minister's Focal Person for Polio Control Ayesha Raza Farooq, a high-level video link meeting on measuring polio-control measures in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, particularly

in the wake of emerging cases in the province. The meeting, attended by the Federal Secretary Health, Commissioners of D.I. Khan and Bannu Divisions, concerned Deputy Commissioners, law enforcement officials, and provincial and federal polio program representatives, focused on the polio situation in the southern districts of the province.

Health officials briefed on initiatives put in place to counter polio in the afflicted areas while outlining a future strategy to augment the campaign. The briefing made mention of a joint efforts, highlighting the involvement of local elders and influential figures with an objective to maximizing community engagement and ensuring vaccination

for every child. Chief Secretary Aslam Chaudhary addressed the attendees on the need for public cooperation in the fight against polio, saying that: "Public support, cooperation, and involvement are indispensable in the fight against polio. Our goal is to ensure that every child receives polio drops". Prime Minister's Focal Person for Polio Control Ayesha Raza Farooq reiterated that eradicating polio is a national mission. She urged all stakeholders to work together and praised the dedication and hard work of polio workers, stating, "The complete eradication of polio requires collective efforts. I pay tribute to the remarkable services of our polio workers, who are at the forefront of this fight."

Smog reduces 3.9 years life expectancy in Pakistan: Dr. Saddia

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: An awareness walk held regarding hazardous impacts of "Smog" on human being especially a cause for several respiratory diseases which has reduced life expectancy nationally up to 3.9 years in Pakistan at Khyber Teaching Hospital (KTH), on Tuesday. The walk was arranged by Department of Pulmonology with collaboration of Werrick Pharmaceuticals at KTH in which medical practitioners along with students participated. The Smog awareness walk was led by Chairperson Department of Pulmonology Professor Dr. Saddia Ashraf and Werrick Pharmaceuticals representative Bilal. Professor Dr. Saddia Ashraf said that smog is the combination of smoke plus fog which cause of increase



carbon particles in the air. She claimed that vehicle, coal-oil-based electricity power plants and use of bio-fuels in households. She added that large scale solarization may minimize carbon emissions in long term especially in power sector. The pulmonologist claimed that smog is one of major cause for cancer and asthma and along with other respiratory diseases due to in-door and out-door excessive carbon emissions. She added that plantation is a

natural response against climate change, global warming and elimination of smog. In answer to The Frontier Post's question: Dr. Saddia Ashraf claimed that plantation is key for fighting climate change and it is evident from shifting factories from London city to outskirts which has improved environment in the urban areas. She added that modern town planning has designing in a way to meet multi-

faceted goals including commercial benefits and residential purposes by ensuring greenery and healthy environment. The Werrick Pharmaceuticals representative Bilal highlighted importance of Smog Awareness Walk and briefed the participants about earlier activities in this regard. He paid thanks to the participants for their enthusiasm while distributed prizes among students after ques competition.

Establishment of Buner Marble City

Tordher directes authorities to fulfill responsibilities

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Special Assistant to the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for Industries, Abdul Karim Tordher has directed the concerned authorities to resolve the pending issues regarding establishment of the Buner Marble City with in a month. He stated that this industrial project is a key step toward the overall development and prosperity of the area, which will not only help reduce unemployment

but will also serve as a catalyst for bringing economic and social development opportunities. He said that Industries, Commerce and Technical Education Department and district administration should fulfill their assigned responsibilities to ensure the timely commencement of this project. He expressed these views while presiding over a meeting regarding the development project of Buner Marble City held on Tuesday at the Civil Secretariat in Peshawar.

The meeting was attended by Secretary of Industries, Commerce and Technical Education, Aamir Afaq, along with Special Secretary of Industries Anwar Khan, Additional Secretary Rehan Gul Khattak, Deputy Commissioner Buner Kashif Qayyum, officials from the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Economic Zones Development and Management Company (KP-EZDMC) and other relevant officers. During the meeting, the Deputy Commissioner of

Buner informed the Special Assistant about the progress made so far regarding the proposed industrial project and administrative responsibilities related to its subsequent aspects. On this occasion, the forum directed the officials of KP-EZDMC to collaborate with the local administration in executing this project and emphasized that all phases involving different departments should be expedited as a priority, so the long-pending project can be initiated as soon as possible.

PHC imposes ban on usage mercury in gold mining at Kohat

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: A divisional bench comprising of Chief Justice Peshawar High Court (PHC) Justice Ishfaq Ibrahim and Justice Waqar Ahmad imposed a ban on the use of mercury (a chemical) in gold mining in Kohat and summoned officials from the Mineral's Department to appear before court on next hearing, on Tuesday. The petition was filed by former MPA Amjad Khan Afridi and other residents of Kohat while the counsel Nauman Mohib Kakakhel advocate argued the writ petitioner before PHC. The counsel informed the court that mercury is being used in gold mining operations in Kohat, which is not only causing environmental problems but also polluting the water of the Indus River. The use of this chemical is also damaging the surrounding agricultural land. The lawyer argued that the use of mercury in mining operations is not only harmful to humans but also to animals and plants. It is also having a negative impact on agricultural land. The government and relevant authorities have a

responsibility to provide a clean environment to all citizens. The petition stated that the use of mercury is also a violation of the Environmental Protection Act. Therefore, its use should be declared illegal and stopped. PHC after hearing the initial arguments, imposed a ban on the use of mercury in gold mining operations and summoned officials from the Mineral Department to appear before the court on next hearing. PHC directs petrol pump owners to submit record for compensation The Peshawar High Court (PHC) has issued notices to relevant authorities, seeking their response in a petition filed by the owners of petrol pumps affected during Zarb-e-Azb operation in the merged districts of erstwhile Fata, on Tuesday. The petitioners' lawyer informed the court that during the operation, the petitioners' petrol pumps were destroyed, and while some affected petrol pump owners received compensation, the petitioners have not. PHC two-member bench comprising Chief Justice Ishfaq Ibrahim and Justice Waqar Ahmad, heard the

Pakhtunkhwa Services Tribunal disposes of 5,274 pleas

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Service Tribunal has disposed of 5,274 cases with disposal ratio of 103% it is revealed in the annual performance report for the year 2024, highlighting its achievements and progress in disposing of cases, on Tuesday. According to the report, the tribunal has successfully resolved 5,274 cases during the past year, with 4,052 new cases registered in 2024. This remarkable achievement translates to a case disposal rate of 130%. Chairman Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Service Tribunal, Kaleem Arshad stated that the tribunal has made significant progress in clearing the backlog of old cases. Between 2009 and 2022, the tribunal has resolved 12,000 old cases, bringing the total number of pending cases down to 2,300. The tribunal has also made significant strides in digitization, with all its courts now online and using e-Courts and e-Filing systems. This has greatly facilitated the filing and hearing of cases, making the process more efficient and transparent. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa disposed of 271 cases in January, February 691, March 171, April 562, May 410, June 409, July 381, August 28, September 492, October 503, November 405 and highest cases were decided in December as 951. However, these 22 owners lack NOCs (No Objection Certificates) and other legal documents, and their records are not available in the Deputy Commissioner's office. The court directed the 22 petrol pump owners to submit their NOCs and other legal documents at the next hearing and postponed the case.



PESHAWAR: Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Karim Kundi giving away appreciation certificate to agriculture scientist Dr Ghulam Ali in recognition of his services.

Financially struggling KP TMAs get grants

PESHAWAR (APP): Grants have been issued to the financially struggling TMAs of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. According to sources, the Finance Department of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has released a grant of 631.3 million rupees to 106 TMAs in the province. The issued notification states that an amount of 8.29 million rupees has been allocated to the Metropolitan Peshawar, while grants of 2.17 million and 1.90 million rupees have been approved for TMA Chamkani and Shah Alam, respectively. The Finance Department's notification also mentions that grants have been issued to other TMAs such as Abbottabad, Dera Ismail Khan, Haripur, and others. The notification further clarifies that the grant has been issued for the period from January to March. According to the Finance Department, the funds will be used to pay salaries and pensions to the employees of all TMAs.

Zahid Iqbal, Excise & Taxation officer, completes PhD

Syed Adnan

PESHAWAR: Zahid Iqbal, a distinguished Excise and Taxation Officer (ETO), has successfully completed his PhD, marking a significant achievement in his professional and academic journey. This accomplishment is being celebrated as a positive development for the provincial government and the excise force, as it reflects the growing trend of highly qualified officers taking leadership roles in public service. Zahid Iqbal, known for his exemplary service and unwavering dedication, has been a courageous and efficient officer since the inception of his career. With the attainment of this advanced degree, he brings not only academic excellence but also enhanced knowledge and expertise to his role, which will undoubtedly strengthen his ability to serve the department and the province. Observers and colleagues have lauded this accomplishment, noting that it sets a precedent for others in the excise force to pursue higher education and professional development. "This is a testament to the progressive strides being made within the government machinery. Officers like Zahid Iqbal, with their commitment and knowledge, serve as an inspiration for the entire force," stated a senior official. Many officers of the provincial government and the excise department have congratulated Zahid Iqbal on this remarkable achievement and expressed confidence that his enriched capabilities will contribute significantly to the department's efficiency and effectiveness in the future.

Governor commends achievements of Dr Ghulam Ali

PESHAWAR (APP): Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Faisal Karim Kundi on Tuesday arranged a prestigious ceremony here at the Governor House to celebrate the extraordinary achievements of Dr Ghulam Muhammad Ali, a prominent agricultural scientist from Pakistan, who was recently honored with the Presidential Award by the Government of South Korea. Kundi extended heartfelt congratulations to Dr Ali and lauded him for elevating the nation's stature on an international platform. The governor also presented a commemorative shield to Dr Ali, recognizing his invaluable contributions to the agricultural sector. On the occasion, the governor said that Dr Ghulam Muhammad Ali had made the nation proud through his remarkable services in agriculture. He emphasized the importance of hosting such ceremonies across all provinces to encourage and honor the nation's talented individuals. Highlighting the significance of agriculture in Pakistan, the governor remarked, "Pakistan is an agricultural country, and

this sector is the foundation of our economy. By enhancing agricultural development, we can secure economic stability for the nation." Kundi also spoke of KP's fertile lands and the potential for a "Green Revolution" in the southern districts by resolving water scarcity issues. He also announced the groundbreaking ceremony for the Chashma Canal project, scheduled for June this year. Addressing broader issues, Governor Kundi stressed the role of education and employment in countering terrorism, advocating for initiatives that foster economic and social stability. In his response, Dr Ghulam Muhammad Ali expressed gratitude to the governor for the honor and the initiative to host such a significant event. "Receiving the South Korean Presidential Award alongside serving Pakistan's agricultural sector is a reward for the collective efforts towards the progress of our nation," he said. The ceremony was attended by agricultural experts, representatives from the chamber of commerce and industry, and notable figures from various

professional fields, marking it as a momentous occasion of acknowledgment and inspiration. Meanwhile, the Governor met delegation of minority representatives from Merged Districts. The delegation was led by former provincial minister Wilson Wazir and highlighted the issues faced by the minority communities residing in the region. The delegation expressed concerns over delays in initiating development projects approved under the Annual Development Program (ADP) and also requested urgent provision of food and medicine for minority communities in District Kurram amidst the ongoing situation. The governor assured the delegation to address the concerns of all communities, including minorities. He emphasized that the Pakistan Red Crescent was already supplying food and other essentials daily in District Kurram. He reiterated the government's resolve to eliminate the sense of deprivation among minority communities and tribal residents of the merged districts.

Special Assistant to CM visits various projects

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Sohail Khan Afridi, Special Assistant to the Chief Minister of Khyber for Communications and Works, has stated that using government properties and machinery with integrity and in accordance with the law is our collective responsibility. He expressed these views during a surprise visit to assess government properties, offices, and ongoing projects in Peshawar and its adjacent areas. Accompanying him were Chief Engineer Jamshed Ali, XEN Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Highway Yasir Mehsud, MD Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Highway Asad Ali, and SDO PHA Humayun Khan. Sohail Afridi first visited the office of the X Mechanical Division located on Warsak Road,

Peshawar, and gathered information regarding the staff and machinery present there. During the inspection of the C&W owned plot on Warsak Road, he remarked that government lands are national assets, and their protection and effective use are among government priorities. While visiting the under-construction Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Highway Complex spanning 10 kanals in Tarnab, Peshawar, he emphasized that transparency and the protection of public resources should take precedence in the project to prevent corruption and wastage of funds. During his visit to the Azakhel Yard Store, which spans 8 kanals of land in Nowshera, he urged the relevant authorities to develop an effective plan regarding the

unusable machinery, stating that the auction of the machinery present in the store is essential to prevent further deterioration. He also visited the Ghaffarabad Tube Forest Nursery site of the Forestry Department located on C&W owned land in Chamkani, Peshawar, and issued directives to the authorities to contact the Forestry Department regarding the return of the land to C&W. Sohail Khan Afridi expressed his displeasure over the non-payment of rents for government properties and shops in Khyber Bazaar, Peshawar, since 2020, and directed the relevant authorities to issue notices to the shop owners to ensure rental payment. He warned that if they fail to comply, the shops should be sealed.

PMLN lawyers flays killing of advocate in Swat

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PMLN) Lawyers Forum Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has strongly condemned the brutal murder of renowned lawyer Malik Arshad Advocate and his brother in Swat, on Tuesday. PMLN Lawyer forum's leadership including President Kifayat Ullah Khan, Parliamentary Board Chairman Syed Sardar Hussain, Senior Vice

President Farhad Ali, Vice President Timur Afridi, General Secretary Akbar Yousaf Khalil, Secretary Information Salim Shah Hoti, Joint Secretary Muhammad Shabir, and Advisor Muhammad Atif Nazeer, expressed deep sorrow, grief, and outrage over the tragic and shocking incident. In a joint statement, they vehemently denounced the brutal murder and prayed to Allah Almighty to grant the

deceased a place in Jannatul-Firdous and bestow patience, solace, and strength upon their families to bear this irreparable loss. The leadership of the Pakistan Muslim League (N) Lawyers Forum Khyber Pakhtunkhwa demanded that the government and law enforcement agencies take immediate action to arrest the perpetrators of this heinous crime and bring them to justice.



In brief

Two killed in Swat firing F.P. Report

MINGORA: At least two people were killed when unidentified motorcyclists fired multiple bullets at them in Mingora city of Swat district on Tuesday. According to Mingora police the incident occurred in the Wazir Mal locality of Mingora, where motorcyclists opened fire in broad daylight, killing two individuals. Both the victims were shot dead near their homes, and the assailants managed to flee the scene after the attack. The police arrived at the site and transferred the bodies to the Saidu Sharif Hospital for post-mortem examination.

Bus stand inaugurated F.P. Report

WANA: The formal inauguration of the General Bus Stand has taken place in the sub-division of Wana, Lower South Waziristan. The ceremony was attended by Assistant Commissioner, TMO and tehsil Chairman Saleh Shah, on Tuesday. On this occasion, Assistant Commissioner Faisal Ismail Khan, while speaking to the media, stated that there was a dire need for a general bus stand in the sub-division of Wana, as the absence of one caused significant inconvenience to the public in terms of transportation fares. He further mentioned that the establishment of the General Bus Stand is a major relief for the public, and strict legal action will now be taken against illegal stands. TMO Shahid Iqbal Khattak informed the media that the construction of the General Bus Stand was carried out transparently through tenders published in national newspapers. He further added that legal stands would soon be established in other local areas as well. The newly inaugurated General Bus Stand is equipped with modern facilities, including separate waiting areas for men and women, a mosque, restrooms, and terminals for vehicles traveling to different cities across the country. Efforts will be made to further improve the stand according to the needs of the public.

Minister visits PHE projects F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister on Public Health Engineering (PHE) Pakhtun Yar Khan made a detailed visit to the Public Health Engineering Division Kohat the other day and apprised himself of the activities of the department. On this occasion, Chairman DDAC Kohat Shafi Jan MPA, Deputy Commissioner Kohat Abdul Akram Chitrali and the authorities concerned of the department were also with him. The PHE Minister was given a detailed briefing on the proposed, new and ongoing developmental projects in the division, the supply of clean drinking water and the sanitation situation. Pakhtun Yar Khan reviewed the ongoing projects of public interest and gave necessary directions to the authorities concerned in this regard. He strictly directed to complete all the projects well in time. Shafi Jan MPA and the Deputy Commissioner Kohat Abdul Akram had a detailed discussion with the Minister on drinking water and public health issues in the area and also gave useful and viable suggestions for its solution. The Minister assured that the government will take all possible steps to solve the people problems and the ongoing developmental works in Kohat will be accelerated.

Work on bypass road in Dir started

F.P. Report

LOWER DIR: Deputy Commissioner Lower Dir Muhammad Arif Khan along with Additional Deputy Commissioner (Finance and Planning) Gohar Ali, Planning Officer Naveedullah, Executive Engineer (Highway) Nasir Iqbal and Sub Engineer Mohsin Khan on Tuesday visited the much-awaited Kalpani Talash bypass road and inspected the ongoing construction work on the project.

The 10-kilometre bypass road was inaugurated in 2015 while work on it started in 2016 during the PTI previous government. The contractors stopped work several times on the project due to unavailability of funds.

The XEN Highway briefed the visiting officials and said that asphalt work had been resumed as the KP government had recently released funds for it. The XEN said that there were sixteen box culverts and

thirty pipe culverts to be built on the road. He told that asphalt work had already been completed on about 4 kilometers while work will be completed on 3 kilometers very soon. The officials were told that after the construction of the culverts the asphalt work on the remaining 3 kilometres would be started.

The provincial government had allocated thirty million funds for the Talaash Bypass Road, of which twenty million funds had been released, the remaining ten million funds would also be released soon, he added. The DC directed the XEN that work on the culverts should be completed as soon as possible, while construction work on the rest of the road should be started.

The Executive Engineer of the Road was directed to supervise the construction work and ensure the quality and quantity of the construction material as per PC-1. Later on Deputy Commissioner along with

other officials also visited the under-construction Sanam Dam in Adenzai Tehsil. The engineer Abid Jan of Barqab Company, briefed the visiting team on the spot. The provincial government has allocated Rs 1.9 billion for the construction of Sanam Dam, 70 percent work on which has been completed while construction work on the remaining 30 percent is in progress.

According to the engineer, the projects will be completed by June 30, 2025. A total of 2150 acres of barren land will be irrigated on completion of the dam. Speaking on the occasion the DC said that the construction of the dam would not only make the area self-sufficient in agricultural commodities but also promote tourism. There is no obstacle in the construction of the dam. The DC directed the construction company to complete the construction work as per the schedule set in accordance with PC-1.

Tribesmen demand release of Malak Naseer, others

F.P. Report

JAMRUD: Jummat-e-Islami (JI) Khyber chapter Emir Shah Faisal Afridi along with tribesmen condemned the arrest of Malak Naseer Ahmed Koki Khel and Malik Syed Agha Jan. They demanded the immediate release of Malik Nisar Ahmed Koki Khel and Malik Syed Agha Jan, stating that they were arrested for being innocent and for raising their voices for the oppressed people.

The tribesmen said that the civil institutions in Pakistan have been weakened, and the officials have been stripped of their authority. The officials of the civil institutions, including the DC and DPO, have no authority, and the provincial government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has no power.

This he claimed while addressing a press conference at Jamrud Press Club along with the elders of the Koki Khel tribe. Shah

Faisal Afridi stated that the state institutions are involved in oppression against their own people, and there is no one to hold them accountable.

The police, who are responsible for protecting the people, are themselves violating the law and the constitution. It has become difficult for people to get justice from the courts. The courts are issuing verdicts based on the whims of certain individuals.

Shah Faisal Afridi said that the Pakistani people, especially the Pakhtun, have lost trust in the courts. He demanded that the provincial government provide protection to the people and ensure the implementation of their promises. If the government cannot do so, then the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa should resign along with his cabinet.

The tribesmen stated that the crime of Malik Naseer Ahmed Koki Khel, Malik Syed Agha Jan and Khan

Wali Afridi is that they raise their voices for the oppressed people. If raising voices for the oppressed is a crime, then we will continue to commit this crime.

Shah Faisal Afridi questioned the law and the constitution that allows a person to be booked in fake FIRs in different areas of the country without even visiting those areas. Can such a system be allowed to prevail in any country?

The tribesmen demanded to know under which law and constitution fake FIRs were registered against Malik Naseer Ahmed Koki Khel in different areas of the country. He questioned why the courts are silent spectators to these injustices. Shah Faisal Afridi demanded from the courts to quash the fake FIRs registered against Malik Naseer Ahmed Koki Khel and other individuals and release them immediately. Otherwise, they will be forced to stage strong protests.



PABBI: Provincial leader of PML-N Afshan Hussain Advocate condoling with PPP leader Senator Sardar Khan on the sad demise of his wife. — F.P. photo

Strengthening of economy through digital tourism: A way forward

SWAT (APP): Aimed to enjoy the snowfall alongwith delectable bites of trout fish at Kalam valley, the tourists are now basking in the limelight of the digital age. Hoping for a moderate to heavy snowfall at Oshu Vally in Kalam, Nasir Khan alongwith his family, eager to capture the magic of these iconic destinations, have visited Mahudhand lake at Oshu valley, sharing their unforgettable pleasures experiences with relatives and friends through social media platforms.

As the family, led by Nasir, a property dealer of Peshawar, posed for selfies along with loved ones in the backdrop of the stunning beauty of snow clad of Mahudhand lake at Hamalya mountains range, their joy was palpable. With smiles all around, Nasir, his wife, and their three children plan to boast about their adventure on various social media platforms.

To entice friends, relatives, and countless online followers to visit the majestic Mohudhand lake with colorful boats with hope of snowfall, the tourist said he shared five photos of his first visit with my relatives at Peshawar who also planned to join him in few days to enjoy snowfall, skiing and trout fish together.”. “The impact of digital sharing goes beyond just showcasing a beautiful spot.

Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, and WhatsApp have become powerful tools in promoting snow sports and heritage tourism in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa,” said Nasir, adding digital media have transformed how travelers discover new destinations and become integral in boosting local economies.

“Through the lens of digital media, the picturesque lakes and snow covered mountains with snowfall are not just a serene getaway but a burgeoning symbol of the potential for tourism-driven economic growth in Pakistan.” This trend is a boon for the local hospitality, food, hotel and transport industries, creating new opportunities for the youth and supporting the broader economic landscape. As the digital media continues to evolve in Pakistan, it brings with it the promise of revitalizing and expanding the tourism sector, making these lakes and mountains sites are not just beautiful destinations but also catalysts for economic development.

“In today’s modern digital era, the convergence of scenic beauty and social media has set the stage for a new chapter in tourism in Pakistan. Mahudhand, Saiful Malook, Dudipath and Anso lakes are just one example of how the

digital age is reshaping the travel industry in world including Pakistan, offering both stunning vistas and promising economic benefits,” said Abu Zafar Sadiq, President Alpine Club of Pakistan while talking to APP. Being a home of plenty of ancient archeological, cultural and heritage sites, he said that Pakistan is a unique country blessed with six world heritage sites and second highest mountain peak of K-2 that required proper projection on digital, social and electronic media imperative for increasing tourism’s revenue.

Moenjodaro in Sindh, Buddhist Ruins at Takht Bhai and neighbouring city remains at Sahri Bahol in Mardan and Taxila, ancient Indus and Gandhara civilizations, five highest mountains peaks of above 8,000 meters including the second highest K-2 (8611m), 108 highest peaks of above 7000 meters in globe, Kalash culture in Chitral and numerous historical monuments needs proper projection on digital media for economic gains besides enhancing the country global image of tourists friendly country. Abu Zafar said that Pakistan had earned only \$8.8 billion from tourism sector in 2017 which was extremely low compare to SAARC countries. The world travel and tourism

council report 2021 revealed that the travel and tourism sector contributed only \$8.8 billion, approximately 2.9% of total GDP of Pakistan in 2017 against \$15 billion, which accounts for 5.7% of total GDP in 2019.

Alike in 2020, the tourism growth had decreased by nearly 25%, falling to \$11.6 billion or 4.4% of GDP while jobs in the tourism industry also fell 11.1% from 3.45 million in 2019 against 3.63 million in 2020 mainly due to COVID-19 and security challenges. “Advancements in technology have given rise to virtual tourism. Tourists can easily take virtual tours from their homes and the 360-degree videos as well as virtual reality experiences allow potential visitors to explore destinations like Saiful Malook and Mahudhand lakes, Kalam snowfall, Malam Jabba skiing and Lahore’s Badshahi Mosque, Karimabad Bazaar in Hunza, Takht Bhai world heritage site and Shangrila Resort in Skardu before booking flights.

He underscored the need of appointing digital professionals, bloggers and social media experts to promote the tourism industry through small videos to promote adventure and mountain sports here. Abu Zafar said Pakistan was the most suitable country for adventure sports especially for skiing at Nalhar

Gilgit Baltistan and Malam Jabba Swat. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa’s Swat valley, Naran, Kaghan, Gilgit-Baltistan, and a lot more regions in the country were the most beautiful places where holding of rivers rafting, paragliding and adventure sports can help attract foreign tourists.

“Today is an era of digital tourism. Technological advancements were transforming the travel and hospitality industry fast in developing countries including Pakistan, and that negative perceptions and opinions could be changed through effective and responsible digital media strategies and policies besides special programs, videos and features through social and electronic media to explore Pakistan’s tourism treasures,” former ambassador Manzoorul Haq said. The scientific advancements and modern technological inventions have virtually turned the globe into a town and our amazing tourism sites may be effectively highlighted through IT tools and apps before the world. Besides online booking platforms and digital marketing campaign, he said tourism departments need to hire services of reputed tourism firms and international v loggers to attract foreign tour groups to KP.

In developed countries like

USA, UK, China, he said the culture of publicity of tourism destinations through brochures, booklets and pamphlets were replaced by digital tourism and Pakistan could fully exploit its tourism sites by using digital platforms including global positioning system (GPS), and artificial intelligence. He said the services of noted bloggers and social media groups may be hired for projection of tourism sites of Pakistan. Manzoor said ‘one belt and one road initiative (OBOR) had proved a game changer for China, adding CPEC being a major component of OBOR was aimed to improve infrastructure and transportation networks besides help promote tourism in Pakistan especially in GB and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

KP Culture and Tourism Authority’s spokesman told APP that digital tourism was being promoted in KP through small videos packages. He said the recent Kalam event was shared on digital media. He said camping pods were established at new tourists’ destinations besides Kalash culture events are being organized in Chitral. The spokesman said that host tourism project was being launched to provide upto Rs3 million interest free loans to tourism hosted areas people for construction or renovation of two rooms for accommodation of tourists.



KOHAT: KP Minister for Public Health Engineering, Pukhtoon Yar Khan visiting Public Health Engineering Division.

Price Committee revisits edible items’ rates F.P. Report

HAFIZABAD: District Price Control Committee, Hafizabad, revised prices of edibles items in a meeting held under Chairmanship of Deputy Commissioner. Officers of different departments and representatives of traders and consumers attended the meeting.

The refixed price of 10 kg bag of flour Rs. 855, 20 kg bag of flour Rs. 1710, mutton Rs. 1600 per kg, beef Rs. 800 per kg, yogurt Rs. 180 per kg, milk Rs. 170 per liter. The Committee also refixed prices of pulses and other edibles items.

DC directed the shopkeepers to past new price list at their shops at prominent places and to ensure implementation on new price lists, in case of violation of price lists strict action will be taken against profiteers. He said that protection of consumer’s rights was top priority of district administration. He directed the special price magistrates to visit markets and shops regularly for containing artificial inflation in the district.

Meanwhile, taking notice of complaints regarding price hike of chicken and eggs, DC directed the price magistrates to take punitive action against those shopkeepers who were receiving arbitrary prices of chicken and eggs. In compliance with the directions of the DC, price magistrates checked different shops and imposed Rs. 38000/= fine to shopkeepers while 4 cases got registered against shopkeepers for selling chicken and eggs on inflated prices.

Teachers demanded withdrawal of encashment notification: Chairman Muttahida Mahaz Aastiza Hafizabad Riaz Ahmad Tarar has demanded the government to withdraw pension, gratuity and leave encashment notifications which deprived teachers and other government employees from basic financial rights immediately so that teachers and other employees can perform their duties responsibly.

Bugti criticises Mines Dept Inspection teams

F.P. Report

QUETTA: Balochistan Chief Minister Mir Sarfaraz Bugti has expressed concern over the series of fatal accidents in coal mines. Presiding over a meeting in Quetta on Tuesday, the Chief Minister expressed dissatisfaction with the performance of the inspection teams of the Mines Department.

Expressing his anger, the Chief Minister said it is not justified that inspectors cannot go to the mines citing law and order situation. If the employees who have been recruited for the work for which they are not able to do their job then they should resign and sit at home, said a visibly angry

Balochistan Chief Minister.

He directed the responsibility for the accidents must be clearly determined and the responsible must be punished. Chief Minister Mir Sarfaraz Bugti said the second accident in the same company within a year seems to be a sign of irresponsibility.

The Chief Minister ordered the immediate arrest of the accused named in the Sanjadi mine accident. The Chief Minister further ordered to suspend the inspector in the Sanjadi mine accident and transfer the investigation to Chief Minister’s Inspection Team (CMIT).

Chief Minister directed Mines and Minerals Department that safety

measures should be taken for the modern mining module in the world. He further directed that regular inspection of mines should be ensured at all costs.

Rescue and Training Wing should be equipped with all modern technology. Mir Sarfaraz Bugti directed. Chief Minister ordered the Mines and Minerals Department to prepare a comprehensive proposal and government will provide required resources. Early payment of compensation to workers died in accidents should be ensured, Chief Minister ordered. He directed to ensure registration of all mine workers with the relevant authority.

Freedom of Kashmir Pakistan’s top priority

F.P. Report

MUZAFFARABAD: Former President of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and renowned diplomat Sardar Masood Khan highlighted the socio-economic progress of AJK while emphasizing the need for further development to improve the lives of the region’s people. He reaffirmed Pakistan’s unwavering commitment to the Kashmir cause during an interactive session with the researchers from the Centre for International Strategic Studies Azad Jammu and Kashmir (CISS AJK).

Delivering the keynote address, Masood Khan remarked, “AJK has made remarkable strides in economic and social development since its liberation from the Dogra rulers in 1947. However, much remains to be done to enhance the quality of life for our people.”

He lauded the efforts of AJK’s founding leaders, stating, “Our elders built this state from scratch with honesty, dedication, and commitment. Today, we have transformed signifi-

cantly from having only one college in Mirpur in 1947 to now boasting five universities with 11 regional campuses, three medical colleges, and over 100 colleges across the region.” He also highlighted the educational achievements of AJK, noting that thousands of students from the region pursue higher education in institutions across Pakistan and abroad, with the literacy rate in District Poonch nearing an impressive 85%.

Touching on infrastructure development, Masood Khan observed, “In 1947, we had only a dirt road connecting Muzaffarabad to Srinagar. Now, a comprehensive network of roads connects even the smallest villages with major cities in AJK and Pakistan.”

Discussing the region’s untapped potential, he emphasized the importance of leveraging AJK’s natural resources. “Our region has immense potential for hydropower generation and tourism development, thanks to its abundant water resources and natural beauty, which can attract both domestic and interna-

tional tourists.” While acknowledging the progress, Masood Khan stressed the need to address public concerns. “We must listen to the voices of our masses and civil society to bridge the gap between elected representatives and the electorate,” he added.

On the Kashmir issue, the former president reiterated that the liberation of Kashmir and the right to self-determination for its people remain Pakistan’s top priority. He lamented the lack of international focus on the issue, stating, “While the global community’s attention briefly turned to Kashmir after India’s abrogation of its special status in August 2019, the issue has since receded to the background due to the COVID-19 pandemic and internal political dynamics in Pakistan.”

Masood Khan praised CISS AJK for its initiatives and commended its leadership under Dr. Asma Shakir Khwaja. He acknowledged the institute’s dedicated efforts in advocating for the Kashmir cause and its contributions to critical research areas.



Syrians hope for a future without Russia

DAMASCUS (BBC): For years Russia and Syria were key partners - Moscow gained access to Mediterranean air and sea bases while Damascus received military support for its fight against rebel forces. Now, after the fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime, many Syrians want to see Russian forces leave but their interim government says it is open to further cooperation.

"Russia's crimes here were indescribable," says Ahmed Taha, a rebel commander in Douma, six miles north-east of the capital Damascus. The city was once a prosperous place in a region known as the "bread basket" of Damascus. And Ahmed Taha was once a civilian, working as a tradesman when he took up arms against the Assad regime following the brutal suppression of protests in 2011. Entire residential districts in Douma now lie in ruins after some of the fiercest fighting in Syria's almost 14-year civil war. Moscow entered this conflict in 2015 to support the regime when it was losing ground. Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov later claimed that, at the time of the intervention, Damascus was just weeks away from being overrun by rebels.

The Syrian operation showed the ambition of Russia's President Vladimir Putin to be taken more seriously after the widespread international condemnation of his annexation of Crimea. Moscow claimed to have tested 320 different weapons in Syria. It also secured 49-year leases on two military bases on the Mediterranean coast - the Tartus naval base and the Hmeimim air base. This allowed the Kremlin to rapidly expand its influence in

Africa, serving as a spring board for Russian operations in Libya, the Central African Republic, Mali, and Burkina Faso. Despite the support of Russia and Iran, Assad could not prevent his regime from collapsing. But Moscow offered refuge to him and his family.

Now, many Syrian civilians and rebel fighters see Russia as an accomplice of the Assad regime that helped destroy their homeland. "The Russians came to this country and helped the tyrants, oppressors, and invaders," says Abu Hisham, as he celebrated the fall of the regime in Damascus. The Kremlin has always denied that, saying it only targeted jihadist groups like IS or al-Qaeda. But the United Nations and human rights groups accused the regime and Russia of committing war crimes.

In 2016, during an assault on densely populated Eastern Aleppo, Syrian and Russian forces conducted relentless air strikes, "claiming hundreds of lives and reducing hospitals, schools and markets to rubble," according to a UN report. In Aleppo, Douma and elsewhere, the regime forces besieged rebel-held areas, cutting off food and medicine supplies, and proceeded to bomb them until armed opposition groups surrendered. Russia also negotiated ceasefires and deals for the surrender of rebel-held towns and cities, such as Douma in 2018. Ahmed Taha was among the rebels there who agreed to surrender in exchange for safe passage out of the city following a five-year siege by the Syrian army.

He returned to Douma in December as a part of the rebel offensive led by the Islamist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and its leader Ahmed al-Sharaa.

"We are back home in spite of Russia, in spite of the regime and all those who supported it," says Taha. He has no doubt the Russians should leave: "For us, Russia is an enemy." It's a sentiment echoed by many people we speak to.

Even leaders of Syria's Christian communities, who Russia vowed to protect, say they had little help from Moscow. In Bab Touma, the ancient Christian quarter of Damascus, the Patriarch of the Syriac Orthodox Church says: "We did not have the experience of Russia or anybody else from the outside world protecting us." "The Russians were here for their own benefits and goals," Ignatius Aphrem II tells the BBC. Other Syrian Christians were less diplomatic. "When they came in the beginning, they said: 'We came here to help you,'" says a man called Assad. "But instead of helping us, they destroyed Syria even more." Sharaa, now Syria's de facto leader, said in a BBC interview last month that he would not rule out allowing the Russians to stay, and he described relations between the two countries as "strategic". Moscow seized on his words, with foreign minister Lavrov agreeing Russia "had much in common with our Syrian friends".

But untangling the ties in a post-Assad future may not be easy. Rebuilding Syria's military will require either a completely new start or a continued reliance on Russian supplies, which would mean at least some kind of relationship between the two countries, says Turki al-Hassan, a defence analyst and retired Syrian army general. Syria's military cooperation with Moscow predates the Assad regime, Hassan says.

Sweden to test new drone swarm technology

STOCKHOLM (Reuters): NATO's newest member Sweden will test new drone swarm technology developed by defence equipment group Saab and the Nordic country's armed forces, Defence Minister Pal Jonson said. Jonson told a news conference the army will test the technology, which was developed over the past year, during the upcoming Arctic Strike exercise.

"We will need to take some risks to build a stronger defence capability faster than we normally do," he said. Jonson said the technology allows swarms of drones of different sizes to form and then solve tasks autonomously. "With these drone swarms it is possible to conduct both reconnaissance, positioning and identification". Sweden joined the Western defence alliance NATO in March 2024 as a result of Russia's war in Ukraine and plans to increase defence spending to reach 2.6% of GDP in 2028, compared with 2.2% in 2024.

EU minister on Trump's meeting

WARSAW (AP): The defence ministers of Europe's five top military spenders said they want to continue increasing their investments in defense but described meeting President-elect Donald Trump's challenge for them to raise spending to 5% of their overall economic output as complicated.

The defense ministers of Germany, France, Britain, Italy and Poland came together near Warsaw for a meeting in a new format that they established after Trump was re-elected last year. Their first meeting in this format of five NATO members was held in Berlin in late November. The five are seeking ways to maintain their support for Ukraine as US policy is expected to shift when Trump takes power. They also discussed how to strengthen Ukraine's own weapons production capacity.

The German minister, Boris Pistorius, stressed at the start of the meeting that they all support a just peace for Ukraine, one in which Kyiv has a say over its fate. There are concerns in Europe that Trump could push Ukraine to make unacceptable concessions to Russia. The defense leaders also addressed questions of military spending after Trump recently called for NATO allies to increase their spending to 5% of gross domestic product, a level that no NATO member has reached - not even Poland, which is the closest, spending over 4% and expected to approach 5% this year. Several of the ministers said that focusing on the number as a percentage isn't enough.

"I just think that a static debate about percentages doesn't really help us if it doesn't ultimately lead to the implementation of what NATO has agreed upon together, what the goals must be," Pistorius said at a joint press conference. "In my opinion, that's what matters." He also said that for Germany to invest 5% in defense would mean spending a little more than 40% of its entire national budget on defense. "I think that would put an end to the debate very quickly," he said. His Italian counterpart, Guido Crosetto, said his government knows it needs to spend more on defense but also needs to weigh that against reviving the economy. "Increasing defense spending at a time of economic crisis is more complicated than at other times," Crosetto said. "If we combine the two, that is, if we make the European defense industry one of the ways in which we can revive the economy, we can combine the two."

French Defense Minister Sébastien Lecornu said that while there will be increases in security spending, they should not all go to purely military purposes but also should be used to protect society against cyberattacks, terrorism, and other non-military threats. "And you're all repeating 2%, 3%, 4%, without really knowing what the point is," Lecornu said, responding to a reporter's question. "Well, let me be straightforward.



GAZA: Men carrying bodies of Palestinians killed in Israeli strikes at al-Ahli Arab Hospital.

Biden says he's leaving Trump with a 'strong hand to play'

WASHINGTON (AP): President Joe Biden said that his stewardship of American foreign policy has left the US safer and economically more secure, arguing that President-elect Donald Trump will inherit a nation viewed as stronger and more reliable than it was four years ago.

Biden trumpeted his administration's work on expanding NATO, rallying allies to provide Ukraine with military aid to fight Russia and bolstering American chip manufacturing to better compete with China during a wide-ranging speech to reflect on his foreign policy legacy a week before ceding the White House to Trump. Biden's case for his achievements will be shadowed and shaped, at least in the near term, by the messy counterfactual that American voters once again turned to Trump and his protectionist worldview. And he will leave office at a turbulent moment for the globe, with a series of conflicts raging.

"Thanks to our administration, the United States is winning the worldwide competition compared to four years ago," Biden said in his address at the State Department. "America is stronger. Our alliances are stronger. Our adversaries and competitors are weaker. We have not gone to war to make these things happen." The one-term Democrat took office in the throes of the worst global pandemic in a century, and his plans to repair alliances strained by four years of Trump's "America First" worldview were quickly stress-tested by international crises: the chaotic US withdrawal from Afghanistan, Russia's

2022 invasion of Ukraine, and Hamas' brutal 2023 attack on Israel that triggered the war in the Middle East.

Biden argued that he provided a steady hand when the world needed it most. He was tested by war, calamity and miscalculation. "My administration is leaving the next administration with a very strong hand to play," Biden said. "America is once again leading." Trump, hours after the remarks, said Biden had overseen "a terrible four years" in American foreign policy.

"When you look at what happened, during this last four-year period, I think it was the lowest point in the history of our country," Trump said in a Newsmax interview. "It's been so bad." With the US completing its 2021 withdrawal from Afghanistan, Biden fulfilled a campaign promise to wind down America's longest war. But the 20-year conflict ended in disquieting fashion: The US-backed Afghan government collapsed, a grisly bombing killed 13 US troops and 170 others, and thousands of desperate Afghans descended on Kabul's airport in search of a way out before the final US aircraft departed over the Hindu Kush. The Afghanistan debacle was a major setback just eight months into Biden's presidency that he struggled to recover from.

"Ending the war was the right thing to do, and I believe history will reflect that," Biden said. "Critics said if we ended the war, it would damage our alliances and create threats to our homeland from foreign-directed terrorism out of a safe haven in Afghanistan - neither has occurred."

Biden's Republican detractors, including Trump, cast it as a signal moment in a failed presidency. "I'll tell you what happened, he was so bad with Afghanistan, it was such a horrible embarrassment, most embarrassing moment in the history of our country," Trump said in his lone 2024 presidential debate with Biden, just weeks before the Democrat announced he was ending his reelection campaign. Biden's legacy in Ukraine may hinge on Trump's approach going forward. With Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Biden rallied allies in Europe and beyond to provide Ukraine with billions in military and economic assistance - including more than \$100 billion from the US alone. That allowed Kyiv to stay in the fight with Russian President Vladimir Putin's vastly bigger and better-equipped military.

Biden's team also coordinated with allies to hit Russia with a steady stream of sanctions aimed at isolating the Kremlin and making Moscow pay an economic price for prosecuting its war. Biden marveled that at the start of the war Putin thought Russian forces would easily defeat Ukraine in a matter of days. It was an assessment US and European intelligence officials shared. Instead, Biden said his administration and its allies have "laid the foundation" for the Trump administration to help Ukraine eventually arrive at a moment where it can negotiate a just end to the nearly three-year old conflict.

Iraq PM says he will sign security deal with Britain

BAGHDAD (Reuters): Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani said he would sign a bilateral security deal with Britain as well as a strategic partnership accord as he headed to London for an official visit against a backdrop of historic shifts in the Middle East.

Iraq is trying to avoid becoming a conflict zone once again amid a period of regional upheaval that has seen Iran's allies Hamas degraded in Gaza, Hezbollah battered in Lebanon and Bashar al-Assad ousted in Syria. A rare ally of both Washington and Tehran, Iraq's balancing act has been tested by Iran-backed Iraqi armed groups' attacks on Israel and on US troops in the country in the aftermath of the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war on Oct. 7, 2023.

That has led to several rounds of tit-for-tat strikes that have since been contained, but some Iraqi officials fear an escalation after US President-elect Donald Trump takes office on Jan. 20. "It is definitely an important timing, both as it concerns the path of Iraq's relations with the U.K. and as a result of the development of the (regional) situation, which

requires more consultations," Sudani told Reuters while en route from Baghdad to London.

Sudani said the security deal between the U.K. and Iraq would develop bilateral military ties after last year's announcement that the US-led coalition set up to fight Islamic State would end its work in Iraq in 2026. The U.K., Iraq's former colonial ruler, is a key member of the coalition. Islamic State was territorially defeated in Iraq in 2017 and in Syria in 2019 though concerns remain high that it may reconstitute in remote areas of Iraq and exploit a power vacuum in Syria after Assad's ouster by Islamist rebels last year.

Regarding the strategic partnership agreement, Sudani said: "This is one of the key moments in relations between Iraq and the UK. I can describe it as the beginning of a new era in ties." He did not elaborate. The visit will also see the signing of major agreements with British companies, he said. "This is not a protocol trip," he added.

Iraq previously signed a strategic partnership deal with the US that aimed to expand relations beyond the military ties established after the U.S.-led invasion

of Iraq in 2003, which the U.K. also joined. That invasion toppled former dictator Saddam Hussein but unleashed years of sectarian bloodletting and war and then the rise of Islamic State, which massacred minorities and briefly established a so-called caliphate before being beaten back. Violence has subsided in recent years and much of the country is enjoying relative stability, though the economy remains highly dependent on public-sector wages financed almost entirely by oil, leading to periodic crises when prices fall.

Sudani has tried to focus on rebuilding Iraq's war-damaged infrastructure and expanding ties with Western and Arab states while balancing relations with neighbouring Iran, which backs an array of Iraqi armed groups but also provides crucial power and gas. Mohammed Najjar, investment advisor to the prime minister, told Reuters that Iraq saw forging deals with Western and Arab states as a key way to prevent conflict. "We are placing economy at the core of our national security policy," he said, noting the purposefully business-heavy agenda of the visit despite tumult in the Middle East.

China aims to deepen Caribbean ties

BEIJING (Reuters): China is ready to deepen its comprehensive cooperative partnership with Caribbean nations, President Xi Jinping said during a meeting in Beijing with Prime Minister Dickon Mitchell of Grenada, a one-time diplomatic ally of Taiwan.

China is willing to keep up assistance to regional countries to aid their economic and social development, the official news agency, Xinhua, cited Xi as saying. Grenada has benefited greatly from ties with China and looks forward to strengthening cooperation with the Asian giant, it quoted Mitchell as saying at the meeting.

"Both sides should ...

draw a new blueprint for the long-term and high-level development of bilateral relations," Xi said, adding that two-way ties had developed successfully over the last two decades. Mitchell said Grenada firmly adhered to the one-China principle and called for its sovereignty and territorial integrity to be respected. Xinhua added, Mitchell, the first foreign leader Xi has met this year in Beijing, was on an official week-long visit to China. The Caribbean and Latin America have the largest concentration of Taiwan allies, with seven of its remaining 12 allies in the region.

China views the demo-

cratically-governed island as part of its territory with no right to state-to-state ties, a position Taiwan's government strongly disputes. Taiwan broke off ties with Grenada 20 years ago after the Caribbean nation switched ties to China. In the Caribbean, Haiti, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, as well as Saint Vincent and the Grenadines are still its allies. China and Taiwan have for years traded accusations of using "dollar diplomacy" as they compete for diplomatic recognition. Last year, Taiwan security officials said they believed China was likely to continue to whittle away at the number of its allies.

US envoy says world must reinstate 'maximum pressure' on Iran

PARIS (Reuters): The world must return to a policy of "maximum pressure" against Iran to turn it into a more democratic country, US President-elect Donald Trump's incoming Ukraine envoy Keith Kellogg told an Iranian opposition event in Paris.

Trump has vowed to return to the policy he pursued in his previous term that sought to wreck Iran's economy to force the country to negotiate a deal on its nuclear programme, ballistic missile programme and regional activities. "These pressures are not just kinetic, just not military force, but they must be economic and diplomatic as well", Retired Lieutenant-General Kellogg, who is set to serve as Trump's special envoy

for Ukraine and Russia, told the audience at Paris-based Iranian opposition group National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI). He said there was an opportunity "to change Iran for the better" but that this opportunity would not last forever. "We must exploit the weakness we now see. The hope is there, so must too be the action." Iran's foreign ministry, in a statement, said, "The hosting of a terrorist group by France is a clear example of support for terrorism and a violation of the French government's international legal obligation to combat terrorism."

Kellogg has previously spoken at NCRI events, most recently in November, but his presence in Paris, even if in a personal capacity, suggests the group has the ear of the new US administration. He postponed a trip to European capitals earlier this month until after Trump's inauguration on Jan. 20. It was unclear whether he would use his trip to Paris to meet French officials to discuss Ukraine. The French presidency, foreign ministry and Trump's transition team did not immediately respond for comment. Incoming US Secretary of State Marco Rubio has also spoken at NCRI events in the past. The group has repeatedly called for the fall of the existing Iranian authorities, although it is unclear how much support it has within Iran.

Speaking at the start of the event at Auvers-sur-

Oise, the group's headquarters on the outskirts of Paris, NCRI President-elect Maryam Rajavi said the regional balance of power had shifted against Iran's leadership with the fall of Syria's President Bashar al-Assad and the "crushing blow" suffered by its most important ally Hezbollah in its war with Israel. "It is time for Western governments to abandon past policies and stand with the Iranian people this time," she said. The NCRI, the political arm of the People's Mujahideen Organisation of Iran (PMOI), has held frequent rallies in the France, often attended by high profile former US, European and Arab officials critical of the Islamic Republic.

Russia says Iran's president will visit this week

MOSCOW (AP): Russian President Vladimir Putin will host his Iranian counterpart this week for the signing of a broad partnership pact between Moscow and Tehran, the Kremlin said. The agreement on "comprehensive strategic partnership" between the countries will be signed during Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian's visit to Moscow, the Kremlin said.

It added that the leaders will discuss plans for expanding trade and cooperation in transport, logistics and humanitarian spheres along with "acute issues on the regional and international agenda." Ukraine and the West have accused Tehran of providing Moscow with hundreds of exploding drones for use on the battlefield in Ukraine and helping launch their production in Russia. The Iranian drone deliveries, which Moscow and Tehran have denied, have allowed for a barrage of long-range drone strikes on Ukraine's infrastructure.

Iran, in turn, wants sophisticated Russian weapons like long-range air defense systems and fighter jets to help fend off possible attacks by Israel. Tehran long has hoped to obtain advanced Sukhoi Su-35 fighter jets from Russia to upgrade its aging fleet that's been hobbled by international sanctions, but only received a few of Yak-130 trainer jets in 2023.

Pezeshkian will visit Moscow three days before the inauguration of US President-elect Donald Trump, who has pledged to broker a peace deal on Ukraine. Iran faces increasing pressure in the Middle East. Its so-called "Axis of Resistance" has been shattered with the Palestinian militant group Hamas being targeted by a grinding Israeli offensive. The Lebanese militant group Hezbollah also has been severely hurt during a series of attacks and Israel's ground invasion of Lebanon. Syria's government led by Bashar Assad, long funded by tens of billions of dollars from Iran, has collapsed.

Meanwhile, Iran's economy remains in tatters after the collapse of its 2015 nuclear deal with world powers. Iran also has seen its Russian-supplied S-300 anti-aircraft batteries targeted by Israel.

Tehran likely hopes to secure financial and defense promises from Moscow. However, there's been growing discontent over Russia within Iran's powerful Revolutionary Guard, a paramilitary force answerable only to Iran's 85-year-old Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Last week, an audio recording leaked into the Iranian media with a Guard general blaming Russia for many of the woes Iran has suffered in Syria.

Russian forces bypass a key stronghold in a bid to cut off its supplies: Russian forces are bypassing a key stronghold in eastern Ukraine that they have fought for months to capture and are focusing instead on cutting supply lines to it, a Ukrainian official said. Russian troops are going around the vital

logistics hub of Pokrovsk, where a steadfast Ukrainian defense has kept them at bay, and are taking aim at a highway that leads from there to the central Ukraine city of Dnipro, Maj. Viktor Trehubov, a local Ukrainian army spokesperson, told The Associated Press. That route is crucial for supplies feeding Ukrainian forces in the entire region. Cutting the highway traffic would also severely weaken Pokrovsk.

"So far, they have not achieved their goal and (Ukrainian forces) are working to ensure that they do not achieve it in the future - just as they have not been successful in other attempts to bypass the city," Trehubov said in a WhatsApp message.

Ukraine's army is under severe strain along parts of the approximately 1,000-kilometer (600-mile) front line, especially in the eastern Donetsk region where Pokrovsk is located. After almost three years of war, Ukrainian units are depleted and are outnumbered by Russian forces.

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Rehmat Shah Afridi (Late)

Founder

Bilal Shah Afridi

Chief Executive

Jalil Afridi

Managing Editor

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Peshawar Office: 091-5700095, 0300- 9009001

Peshawar Fax: 091-5703687, Post Box No. 573

E-mail: fppeshawar@thefrontierpost.com

Lahore Office: 0335-4026284

Email: fplahore@thefrontierpost.com

Islamabad Office: 0321-5066253

Email: mahmoodafridi@thefrontierpost.com

Karachi Office: 021-32213411, 0300-8340907

Email: fpkarachi@thefrontierpost.com

USA and Canada Toll Free Number 1-800-5905747

Lifting sanctions could give Syria a fighting chance

IF anything reflects the incredible momentum currently behind Syria's political transition it is the fact that just over a month ago the country was labouring under the weight of international sanctions. Most of those restrictions remain in place for now but Sunday's meeting of western and Arab powers hosted by Saudi Arabia revealed high-profile support for scrapping them.

Speaking at the conference, Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan addressed the "importance of lifting unilateral and UN sanctions imposed on Syria" adding that "their continuation will hinder the ambitions of the Syrian people in achieving development and reconstruction". French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot suggested last week that EU sanctions that impeded the country's economic recovery could be lifted quickly and the US has already issued a sanctions exemption for transactions with some Syrian governing institutions for six months.

This is all recognition of the deleterious effect that sanctions have had on Syria's economy and long-suffering people. However, there remains some hesitancy among western powers about immediately lifting economic restrictions from Syria's interim administration, a body that has so far promoted foreign fighters to high-profile state security positions but has yet to produce a clear roadmap for governance or state exactly what kind of Syria it wants to build. An example of this caution was seen in Riyadh on Sunday, when Kaja Kallas, the EU's foreign policy chief, said the bloc was considering how to ease sanctions but added that the new government must include women and "different groups" and avoid radicalisation.

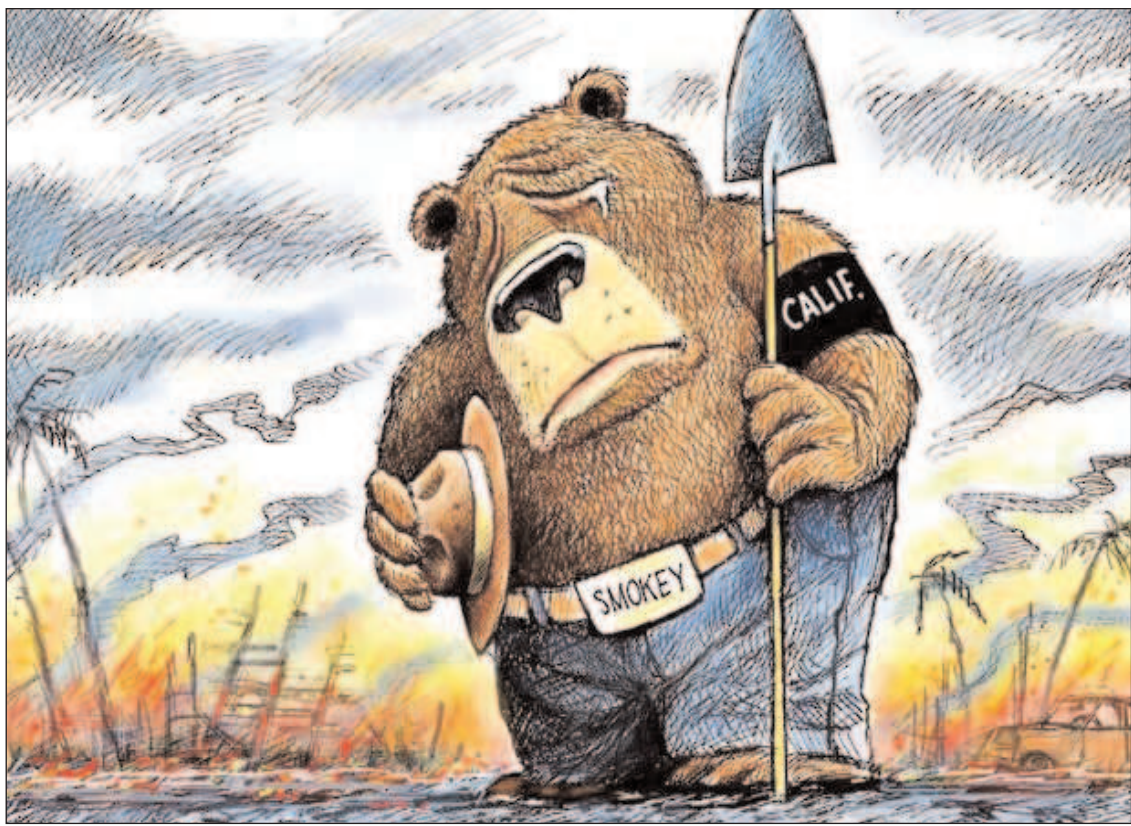
However, the focus right now should not be on Syrians' meeting others' expectations to unlock sanctions. The process should be the other way around – carefully lifting sanctions that hinder recovery will help the new government to build the kind of country that the EU, the US and others will want to engage with. Although the impetus behind moves towards a functioning, stable and just Syria is strong now, allowing the nation's economic crisis to drag on by moving too slowly threatens to slow or even halt it. Having endured years of hardship, Syria's people are rightly impatient to see improvements in their lives.

The reality is that Syria's new authority has inherited sanctions that were aimed at criminalising trade with a different government. That government is gone and Syria's ailing economy cannot afford an impasse where sanctions relief is delayed as western countries wait to see what kind of state emerges. Yes, there are many caveats against hurriedly lifting sanctions, as they present important leverage over the new authorities in Syria. Furthermore, the rule of Hayat Tahrir Al Sham, the de facto governing power in Syria, does not extend to all parts of the country owing to the Israeli occupation in the south-west and the Kurdish-led administration in the north-east. A national dialogue conference scheduled for earlier this month and was intended to bring together all parts of Syrian society has been postponed.

The EU is to discuss the possibility of lifting sanctions on Syria in a meeting in Brussels at the end of January. Ministers should consider the dire straits Syria finds itself in; last May, the World Bank published data that showed Syria's real gross domestic product was projected to contract by 1.5 per cent last year. As of 2022, poverty affected almost 70 per cent and extreme poverty reached 27 per cent, up from a negligible level in 2009. Given these sobering statistics, it is difficult to argue against a controlled, cautious but determined move towards freeing up Syria's economy, giving its nascent government – and more importantly its people – a fighting chance.

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Next four years will test global resilience

Khalaf Ahmad Al-Habtoor

THE world stands on the precipice of uncertainty as Donald Trump prepares to step back into the Oval Office on Jan. 20. His rhetoric, often provocative, has shifted from economic nationalism to what many analysts now see as a veiled expansionist agenda. In recent remarks, Trump floated the idea of annexing Canada, reclaiming control of the Panama Canal, renaming the Gulf of Mexico the "Gulf of America" and even acquiring Greenland. These declarations raise troubling questions. Are they indicative of a broader shift, similar to Elon Musk's recent interference in Germany's elections or Britain's evolving post-Brexit alignment with the US? Are we witnessing the onset of a modern colonial era or is this another iteration of Trump's calculated bluster?

Trump's claims that he could have resolved the Russian-Ukrainian conflict underscore a paradox. On the one hand, he positions himself as a peacemaker. On the other, his actions and words point toward strategies that could escalate global tensions. His foreign policy agenda seems to disregard the sovereignty of nations, provoking alarm among allies and adversaries alike. The next four years will test not just America's standing but also the resilience of the international community.

Trump's suggestion of annexing Canada was met with swift condemnation from Canadian leaders, who dismissed the notion as absurd and offensive. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau categorically rejected the idea, empha-

sizing the enduring sovereignty of Canada. Similarly, the president-elect's comments about the Panama Canal have raised alarm in Latin America. The canal, a vital international trade route, has been under Panamanian control since 1999. Any suggestion of reclaiming it would not only violate international agreements but could destabilize the region.

The idea of renaming the Gulf of Mexico further underscores Trump's disregard for historical and cultural ties. Mexican officials, along with the broader Latin American community, view such rhetoric as an affront to their national identity and a potential prelude to more aggressive policies. These statements have set the stage for heightened tensions across the Americas, with nations bracing for what may come next.

Trump's fixation on Greenland resurfaced during his recent speeches, as he reiterated that acquiring the territory was a matter of national security. Denmark, which governs Greenland, dismissed these claims as absurd and reaffirmed Greenland's autonomy. Danish officials referred to Trump's proposals as a "preposterous affront" to their sovereignty. The geopolitical implications of such an acquisition could shift the balance of power in the Arctic, a region critical for global trade and security.

These ambitions could also backfire, threatening US security and economic interests. By provoking allies and destabilizing key regions, Trump's policies risk undermining America's strategic part-

nerships and exposing vulnerabilities. What more can we expect from the Trump administration? This question looms large as his foreign policy agenda takes shape.

For the Arab region, Trump's return may bring heightened challenges. The US maintains significant military bases in key Arab nations and has tens of thousands of troops on the ground. These military footholds signify strategic dominance, but they also paint targets on these nations amid potential geopolitical escalations.

Trump's past remarks add to the unease. On different occasions, he has suggested that Arab countries "owed" the US a share of their wealth as compensation for military protection. More infamously, he also implied that Arab leaders should "pay up," suggesting that America's security umbrella comes at a price. Such statements raise questions about his approach to allies and whether financial leverage will become a cornerstone of his foreign policy.

The implications of these developments extend beyond the Arab world. Trump's antagonistic stance toward Canada, Denmark and Panama threatens to strain long-standing alliances. His audacious vision could undermine the very principles of international law and diplomacy. Sovereign nations will not stand idly by. They will respond – perhaps diplomatically, perhaps economically, or in ways that could spiral into broader conflicts.

For Europe, the stakes are high. Trump's criti-

cism of NATO has already rattled member states. His potential disregard for the EU as a cohesive bloc may embolden adversarial powers, further destabilizing an already-fragile geopolitical landscape.

As the world grapples with these uncertainties, the question remains: is Trump serious or is this posturing? More ominously, could his actions steer the world toward a third world war? His previous term was marked by a mix of rhetoric and action. He withdrew from international agreements, imposed tariffs and redefined alliances. Yet, some of his most bombastic threats never materialized.

If history teaches us anything, it is to take such threats seriously. Trump's unpredictability is his trademark and the global community must prepare for all eventualities. The Arab world, in particular, must reassess its strategic alliances and prepare for a potential shift in US policy. This is a time for unity, resilience and vigilance.

The next four years will be pivotal. They will test not just the resilience of nations but the principles of sovereignty and international cooperation. The world's leaders must stand firm, ready to defend their people and their territories against any encroachment. Could this align with other global influences, such as Musk's controversial role in Germany and Britain's strategic recalibrations? As Trump's agenda unfolds, one thing is certain: this is not a time for complacency but for decisive and united action. History will judge us by how we respond to these looming threats.

Lebanon's new dawn

Abdulrahman Al-Rashed

AFTER Damascus, Beirut now celebrates a new era with the election of a president, a position that Hezbollah had obstructed, leaving the post vacant since October 2022. This new phase in Lebanon concludes 50 years of regional exploitation of this small country, the second-smallest Arab state in terms of area.

For decades, Lebanon has been a hub for regional conflicts involving Nasserism, Saddamism, the Assad regime and Iranian influence. It was forced to be the sole front with Israel after the Egyptian, Jordanian and Syrian fronts were closed. The situation is now returning to balance after Iran's influence was eliminated and the Assad regime removed.

Thus, international demands have finally been met, paving the way for political and commercial dealings with Beirut. Local battles among Lebanese factions will persist, but as long as they remain without gunfire they will not be the concern of other countries and will be left to internal settlements within Lebanon's complex governance framework.

Following the successful resolution of the presidency, a series of changes is anticipated. Joseph Aoun was elected

president through a successful "cesarean" process, facilitated by Arab and international forces. The Americans threatened to halt economic support from any source and Israeli drones continued to circle overhead, leveraging the context of war and political vacuum.

During the deliberations, an Iranian diplomat's luggage was searched at Beirut Airport and the prohibited contents were confiscated and publicly exposed. On the land border, Lebanese security handed over dozens of wanted Syrian officers to the new regime in Damascus. Inside parliament, it is no longer possible or permissible to coerce MPs into voting against their will, as Hezbollah and the Assad regime once did.

Regardless, Iran is now part of the past. While Hezbollah remains, efforts to dismantle much of its arsenal will continue under the ceasefire agreement with Israel.

The latest war will be the last conflict with Israel conducted via Lebanon. Amid the evolving circumstances, we will witness further developments and new hopes. Lebanon's commercial activity, disrupted by the Syrian war and constrained by Hezbollah and Bashar Assad's drug-

smuggling operations, will find open markets once again.

The country will also be able to activate the energy production agreement relating to its maritime border with Israel and bring an end to the remaining land border disputes fabricated by the Assad regime after Israel's withdrawal from the south in 2000. This was used to justify the "Iranian-Syrian resistance" under the pretext of liberating the "occupied Shebaa Farms." Sovereign states in the region have realized that ending the state of war with Israel serves their national security interests. Anwar Sadat signed the Camp David Accords, closing the Egyptian front, followed by King Hussein of Jordan with the Wadi Araba agreement. Even Hafez Assad preceded them by signing the Disengagement Agreement in 1974, which effectively became a peace treaty lasting 50 years.

Some Lebanese argue for the need for something beyond a ceasefire – an internationally guaranteed permanent agreement to prevent the return of war in the name of resistance. In his inaugural speech, the new president hinted: "We will discuss a comprehensive defense strategy on the diplomatic, economic and military levels."

Lebanon may not yet have recovered sufficiently to take such a bold step and end its use as a battleground for Syria, Palestinian organizations or Iran. However, Lebanon can build on the Naqoura Agreement it signed with Israel in 1949. Based on this, both countries recognized each other's borders and agreed to abstain from military actions by "regular and irregular forces." In reality, peace agreements protect Arab states, not Israel, which is always militarily superior to them.

These agreements also safeguard Arab states' rights to their lands and resources amid the shifting dynamics of conflict with Israel and other regional powers. This matter is best left to the Lebanese at the appropriate time. It is likely that the last war convinced even the remaining factions – such as Hezbollah's popular base, which bore the greatest cost – that ending the wars is in their best interest.

What do others want from Lebanon? In his inaugural speech, President Aoun stated that Lebanon would not rely on external forces and would export only its best products and focus on its economy.

Don't rejoice when the enemy dies, Friends will also die

Muhammad Mohsin Iqbal

ACROSS the broad spectrum of human emotions, grief and sorrow emerge as universal constants. Regardless of whether the loss is caused by a natural disaster or a human-made catastrophe, the pain remains equally profound. Recent events, such as the devastating fires in Los Angeles and the tragic destruction in Gaza, have once again highlighted these shared experiences. While the origins of these tragedies differ – Los Angeles being struck by a natural calamity and Gaza suffering the consequences of deliberate human actions – the anguish endured by those affected underscores the fragility and interconnectedness of human existence.

Natural disasters, like the Los Angeles fires, are often perceived as forces of nature, beyond human control. They wreak havoc, displacing families, shattering communities, and leaving behind trails of destruction. In the face of such crises, collective empathy and solidarity often emerge as a beacon of hope. People from diverse backgrounds unite to provide aid and support, transcending boundaries of race, religion, and geography. Yet, despite this outpouring of humanity, the sorrow remains deep. The loss of life, homes, and cherished memories cannot be quantified in material terms. When someone's home is consumed by flames, the damage goes beyond physical possessions – it creates an irreplaceable void in the heart.

Contrastingly, the ongoing suffering in Gaza represents a tragedy of human making. This is not the result of unpredictable natural forces but deliberate actions stemming from political conflicts and power struggles. The scale of destruction in Gaza is immense, and the human toll is staggering. Entire families are obliterated, homes reduced to rubble, and futures shattered. The sorrow in this instance is compounded by the realization that such tragedies are preventable. They reflect humanity's capacity for cruelty and disregard for life when blinded by enmity and greed.

Both cases compel us to reflect on the nature of human suffering and our response to it. In moments of loss, the essence of shared humanity becomes evident. The Quran reminds us of this interconnectedness in Surah Al-Hujurat (49:13): "O mankind, We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you." This verse highlights the unity of the human race and calls for mutual understanding and compassion.

Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) further emphasized the sanctity of human life and the need for empathy. In a well-known hadith, he said, "The believers, in their mutual kindness, compassion, and sympathy, are just like one body."

When one of the limbs suffers, the whole body responds to it with wakefulness and fever." This profound analogy underscores the importance of standing together in times of hardship, irrespective of the source of the calamity.

Christian teachings echo similar sentiments. In the Bible, Romans 12:15 urges believers to "Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn." This call for empathy underscores the shared nature of human suffering and the importance of supporting one another in times of grief. In Judaism, the Talmud teaches that "Whoever saves one life, it is as if they have saved the entire

world" (Sanhedrin 37a). This powerful statement highlights the sanctity of every human life and the collective responsibility to protect and support one another.

Hindu philosophy also recognizes the interconnectedness of all beings. The concept of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam," meaning "The world is one family," reflects the idea that humanity is bound together in a shared existence. The Bhagavad Gita teaches compassion, non-violence, and the importance of performing one's duty to help others, particularly in times of distress. Similarly, Buddhism emphasizes the cultivation of compassion and the alleviation of suffering. The principle of "Karuna" (compassion) is central to Buddhist teachings, urging individuals to act with kindness and empathy toward all living beings.

However, it is disheartening to witness selective empathy in the world today. While natural disasters often evoke widespread sympathy, man-made tragedies can sometimes become entangled in political biases. The suffering of innocents in Gaza, for example, is at times overlooked or justified under the guise of geopolitical narratives. This selective morality undermines the universal principle of valuing every human life.

Reflecting on the title, "Don't rejoice when the enemy dies, Friends will also die," we are reminded of the dangers of dehumanizing others. Celebrating the demise of an adversary can lead to a cycle of hatred and retaliation, perpetuating suffering. The Quran warns against such attitudes in Surah Al-Isra (17:33): "And do not kill the soul which Allah has forbidden, except by right. And whoever is killed unjustly – We have given his heir authority, but let him not exceed limits in [the matter of] taking life. Indeed, he has been supported [by the law]." This verse stresses the sanctity of life and the importance of justice, urging restraint even in the face of conflict.

When we witness tragedies like the Los Angeles fires or the devastation in Gaza, it is a moment to pause and reflect on our shared vulnerability. These events remind us that suffering knows no boundaries and that human loss, regardless of its origin, is a wound to our collective soul. It is only when we internalize this truth that we can truly empathize with others and work towards a world that values life above all else.

The lessons from the Quran and the teachings of the Prophet (peace be upon him) guide us toward compassion and justice. They remind us to rise above petty divisions and view every life as sacred. In the face of natural calamities, we must come together to support those in need. In instances of human-made disasters, we must strive to address the root causes and advocate for peace and reconciliation.

Ultimately, the pain of losing one's home, whether to a fire or a bomb, is a stark reminder of life's uncertainties. It teaches us to cherish what we have and to extend our hands to those who have lost everything. The true test of humanity lies not in how we respond to the suffering of those we know and love but in how we react to the pain of strangers and even adversaries.

The world today needs more compassion, understanding, and collective action. As individuals and as a global community, we must reject the notion of selective empathy and embrace the universal principle of valuing all lives equally. Only then can we hope to build a world where sorrow is met with solace, and suffering is alleviated by solidarity.

Trump’s second term will begin with a crisis that will test his leadership skills

DONALD Trump has spent weeks preparing a shock and awe start to his second term.

But the new president will walk back into the Oval Office next week with a crisis over the raging wildfires in Los Angeles threatening to distract attention from his big moment.

Trump’s team is determined to get a fast start after learning the lessons of his chaotic first term, especially since the Republican monopoly on Washington power may only last two years. Swift border reforms, huge tax cuts and new incentives for oil exploration are already on deck. And the new White House, which is also expected to unveil a slew of early executive orders, has scheduled an Oval Office signing ceremony for Monday before Trump dons black tie for a trio of presidential balls.

But even if most of the flames are doused by Inauguration Day, the sudden prospect of finding billions of dollars in federal aid to rebuild miles of charred homes already threatens to complicate the task of passing Trump’s agenda with a tiny GOP House majority determined to cut federal spending.

Trump’s rush to blame Democrats and progressive environmental policies for the catastrophe indicates his antipathy to fighting for federal cash for one of the bluest states in his first weeks in office.

But presidents don’t get to pick and choose their crises.

So, Trump is considering a visit to Los Angeles in the first few days of his administration that would bring him face-to-face with two leaders he’s already accused of causing the conflagration, California Gov. Gavin Newsom and Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass, sources told CNN on Monday.

Such a trip would allow Trump to try to establish a “fix-it” persona to cut through what he claims is the calamitous governance of progressives.

And the devastating sight of the damage may bring home to the new president the enormity of the situation facing tens of thousands of people who no longer have anywhere to live.

Trump told Newsmax Monday that the destruction in Los Angeles was “far worse than you even see on television.” But the prospect of a massive real estate construction project did seem to

appeal to the billionaire property magnate.

“We’re going to do things with Los Angeles. You know, I’m already putting my developer cap on,” Trump said.

Presidential trips to disaster zones can offer solace and unlock the power of government. An empathetic visit from the new president could create a strong impression and erase some negative perceptions of his first term among some Americans. But such photo-ops also establish a marker of the commander in chief’s responsibility for a complex and costly relief project.

“The president intends to go to California at

Stephen Collinson,

economy could harm his 2020 reelection prospects.

Even before the latest California wildfire crisis, Trump warned he’d let the state burn unless Newsom fell in with his demands for changes in the way it manages its water. “If he doesn’t sign those papers, we won’t give him money to put out all his fires. And if we don’t give him the money to put out his fires, he’s got problems,” Trump said in California in September.

Trump’s supporters may see this as a legitimate use of presidential power to force California

warming of global temperatures – a phenomenon Trump denies. The president-elect, for example, reposted a social media photo of a burning neighborhood Monday from a follower that had the slogan: “It’s not climate change. It’s Democrats.”

And Trump’s claims that progressive attempts to preserve the environment and to save a rare fish – the delta smelt – led to water shortages that hampered firefighters has been debunked by fact checkers. Any decision to withhold aid for tens of thousands of people, many of whom have lost their homes, based on such falsehoods

fast recovery and rebuild.”

While the fires still rage in Los Angeles, their political reverberations are now reaching Washington.

Passing Trump’s agenda while raising the government’s borrowing authority was already certain to strain the smallest House majority in decades.

The idea of adding billions for California was weighing on GOP leaders Monday.

House Speaker Mike Johnson raised the prospect of using disaster aid to enforce change or to exact punishment on Democratic leaders in California. He told CNN’s Manu Raju that “it appears to us that state and local leaders were derelict in their duties in many respects.”

“I think that there should probably be conditions on that aid. That’s my personal view. We’ll see what the consensus is,” the Louisiana Republican said, adding that he hadn’t yet had the chance to discuss the issue with any of his members. He also said that there had been “some discussion” about linking California aid to raising the debt ceiling – a step that must be taken within months to avoid an economic crisis caused by a US debt default. Such a move might be designed to coerce Democrats to vote to raise government borrowing authority since many Republicans may deprive Johnson of a majority on the issue.

Still, withholding disaster aid is a touchy issue in Congress because each lawmaker knows that their district could suddenly find itself in need.

Democrats reacted angrily to Johnson’s remarks.

“This is a Mistake. If you start this, it will never end,” Florida Rep. Jared Moskowitz wrote on X. “When Dems retake the House, they will condition aid to Florida and Texas. Disaster Aid must stay non partisan. I would fight Democrats should they try and do this. The Speaker can find many other ways to hold people accountable,” he wrote.

New York Rep. Jerrold Nadler also offered a glimpse of the political battle ahead, writing on X that such funds “should NEVER be conditioned or used as a bargaining chip—period.” He added: “Using this tragedy for political points, then making it harder for people to get federal assistance? That’s shameful.”

Netanyahu’s interests taking precedence over ceasefire deal

FOR both the people of Gaza and the families of the Israeli hostages, there is something that is even crueller than the failure to reach a ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas — and that is to repeatedly raise their hopes that such an agreement is close, only to dash them with yet another set of unconvincing excuses. In the meantime, more people are killed in Gaza every single day and more hostages are confirmed to have died in captivity. Only last week, the bodies of father and son Youssef and Hamza Alziadana, who were kidnapped on Oct. 7, 2023, were recovered in Gaza by the Israeli army.

For more than a year, since the fighting was briefly halted in November 2023 to allow a phased exchange of hostages taken by Hamas for Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails, no substantial progress has been made on a ceasefire deal, leaving those who are directly impacted by the war hanging between hope and despair. One could be forgiven for being left with the impression that there is more of a facade of negotiations than any deep commitment to reaching a deal. These are talks for the sake of talks, mainly to appease the international community or in response to domestic pressure, but with neither the political will nor the courage to make the necessary compromises to finalize an agreement.

In recent weeks, the Donald Trump factor has also entered the conversation, mainly due to the US president-elect’s repeated demand for this issue to be resolved before he enters the White House and his threat that “all hell will break out” if the hostages are not released. It is hard to tell what the new administration may be planning to unleash against Hamas if it does not accede to Trump’s demands or what could be more hellish than the situation that already exists in Gaza. However, those demands might also be a message to Israel to play its part in advancing a deal.

A disconcerting aspect of the negotiations is the constant leaks, with claims that the vast majority of the outstanding issues have been resolved. Be that as it may, some key aspects still need to be bridged. In practice, this is almost meaningless because, until everything is agreed, nothing is agreed.

On the face of it, the

Yossi Mekelberg

chief obstacle since the collapse of the November 2023 deal has been Hamas’ demand that any hostage deal must include a broader agreement to end the war in Gaza. With all the justified anger at what Hamas perpetrated on Oct. 7 and its ongoing cruel treatment of the hostages, at this point, when more than 47,000 Palestinians have been killed by Israel, with no care for the lives of civilians and the widespread destruction inflicted on this tiny territory, ending the war will serve everyone’s interests, even if not their respective leaderships.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is insisting on a partial deal and refuses to end the fighting, while still trumpeting his hollow commitment to a total victory. Netanyahu has tied himself, and the Israeli army, into intractable knots by aiming to completely eradicate Hamas and claiming that only military pressure will lead to the release of the hostages. But not only is Hamas still fighting, but 98 hostages are still in captivity and, tragically, as time goes by they become less likely to remain alive.

At this point, there is not a shred of evidence to show that Netanyahu gives a fig for the fate of the hostages or for the consequences of the war on his own society. As long as his right-wing partners in the Cabinet threaten to leave the coalition should he agree to a ceasefire that includes the end of the war and the release of thousands of Palestinian prisoners, his priority will continue to be the well-being of his coalition and not that of the people he was elected to protect.

As for the far-right Religious Zionist party, its Kahanist interpretation of both Judaism and Zionism is beyond contempt. For its leaders, the goal has already switched from defeating Hamas to occupying Gaza and building settlements there.

Itamar Ben-Gvir, who holds the position of national security minister, was the only security Cabinet member to vote against the temporary truce of November 2023 that saw the release of 105 civilian hostages out of the 251.

It is clear that, despite growing evidence of what the hostages are going through in captivity, he will continue to oppose an end to the war, while Netanyahu, in his weakness and deviousness, is unwilling to

oppose this dangerous vision.

Moreover, to expect anyone in the current Israeli government to show any sympathy for the living hell of the Palestinians in Gaza would be naive. As much as Netanyahu would like to turn the debate over a ceasefire deal into a verdict on the character of Hamas and to portray those who support a ceasefire deal, including the families of the hostages, as Hamas apologists, he is well aware that, militarily, he is taking Israel into a long guerrilla war that will cost lives on both sides with no political gain.

This loss of life, and the divisive impact on Israel’s society of the hostages remaining in captivity, immensely outweighs any downside of agreeing to a ceasefire, as costly as that might be. After all, should Hamas violate the terms of the agreement, Israel will be within its rights to respond militarily. If it adheres to the deal, then the hostages are back home and Israel can come to terms with its longest war since that of 1948 and embark on healing its society, its politics and its economy.

However, this scenario is precisely what does not serve Netanyahu’s personal interests or those of his coalition. And the international community, especially the Biden administration, has let those interests prevail. For the current prime minister, disruptions that create an element of controlled chaos, along with a constant external threat, are the ingredients that allow him, against the odds and despite what Israelis consistently favor in the opinion polls, to remain in office and in defiance of every objective criterion of good governance and accountability.

It has become a pattern of Netanyahu’s behavior in the negotiations that every time a deal seems to be close, all of a sudden new conditions pop up. With a general election not due until the end of next year and the opposition generally leading in the polls by a considerable margin, the chances of an early election are slim.

In other words, the country and the conflict are trapped with a government that is recklessly ignoring the suffering of its own people and that of its neighbors for as long as it takes to keep it in power.

It remains to be seen whether the inauguration of America’s new president on Jan. 20 can change this and, if so, how quickly.

The whataboutery in African debates on solidarity with Gaza is misplaced

IN August 2023, I took up the position of director of the Centre for African Studies (CAS) at the University of Cape Town. One of the important commitments I inherited was that CAS would host the inaugural launch meeting of the African Humanities Association in December of that year.

This was a significant development, building on the legacy of the formation of the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) in 1973, and in the decades since, a few other pan-African academic and scholarly institutions committed to intervening in recognising globally the work that African scholars based on the continent are doing. By the time we reached the launch meeting in December, the world was preoccupied with the consequences of the October 7 Hamas attack. Besides the already alarming death toll resulting from Israel’s relentless bombing, we had already seen and read accounts of the destruction of educational institutions and the killing of university deans and scholars in the Gaza Strip.

Ahead of the event, a senior member of the new African Humanities Association organising committee approached a number of colleagues with the proposal to table a motion of solidarity with scholars in Gaza that condemned the scale of killings and destruc-

tion. However, the proposal never moved beyond the discussion in the executive committee since there were objections raised. Instead, the scholar who had proposed the motion read out a statement in his personal capacity during the plenary session and in the discussion that followed, it became clear that there would not be majority support for an assembly statement of solidarity. Instead, another compromise was offered: the statement of the colleague who spoke would be placed on the association’s website and anyone who wished to sign it could do so.

For a number of scholars, including the renowned Tanzanian intellectual Issa Shivji, this was a troubling decision on the part of the association. Shivji himself had given one of the keynote addresses and recalled the strong decolonising and anti-imperial impulses that motivated his generation to respond positively to the initiative of the radical Egyptian economist Samir Amin in the early 1970s to form what would become CODESRIA. Amin and others saw the need for Africans to write their own accounts of Africa as part of postcolonial efforts towards decolonising societies often limited by neocolonial dependencies.

But to return to the African Humanities Association plenary, what were the reasons for the objections? This is my pre-occupation here.

To be clear, the articulated objections were not expressed in terms of support for Israel. Some individual African scholars may have Christian-Zionist-motivated solidarity with Israel, but this was not articulated loudly.

Rather, there were two objections most strongly voiced. The first was that it was a divisive issue and that a statement would weaken efforts to build coherency and consensus in a fledgling association and therefore should not be discussed.

The second, more strongly voiced objection, was a “whatabout” concern: why focus on Gaza when there are a number of troubling conflicts in Africa that require attention, ranging from the longstanding conflicts in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) to southern Cameroon, Sudan, and more recently to Ethiopia and northern Mozambique?

Was issuing a statement on Gaza not a continuation of a longstanding racialised trope to simply underplay death and destruction in some African countries? Why did the scholars campaigning for solidarity statements with Gaza not exercise the same verve and vigour with regard to other Africans and our conflicts?

As a result, I have noticed, some Gaza solidarity events in South Africa have started reflecting sensitivity to these criticisms by choosing more “inclusive” slogans. One event banner I saw read “Free Congo, Free Sudan, Free Palestine”. Another event declared to be “In solidarity with Gaza and Congo”. While it is commendable to be responsive to criticism motivated by a legitimate concern, my worry with these kinds of responses is that they use a problematic conflation. The conflicts in Gaza and in Sudan and the DRC, for example, share one obvious feature: the massive killing of civilians. But they differ fundamentally in terms of the nature of the problems leading to the loss of life, and therefore, require different responses.

Palestinians are losing their lives because they are involved in an anticolonial struggle against an occupying settler-colonial state. Hence it makes political sense to call for a “Free Palestine”. On the other hand, the Sudanese and the

Congolese are losing their lives because

of unresolved postcolonial predicaments, problems of decolonisation, problems arising out of complex questions of who belongs inside of the nation-state, who is the dominant majority or who feels they are a subjugated minority.

In this context, the logic of calling for a “Free Palestine” and a “Free Sudan and Free Congo” as commensurate political demands that name the same kind of struggle or cause is not entirely useful to solving the conflict in Sudan and the DRC in the present conjuncture.

Anticolonialism involves a struggle against a colonising and occupying power or group. Postcolonial decolonisation is less a struggle against a foreign occupying group and more a struggle that unfolds once the occupying group cedes sovereignty to the colonised peoples. The work of decolonisation begins when the coloniser physically leaves, when anticolonial resistance becomes the project to create postcolonial freedom. This means addressing colonial legacies in the economy, in the ideas of a society, in the political and institutional life of the community, and in the conception of citizenship.

If we conflate solidarity with Palestinians in their anticolonial struggle with conflicts that should have more attention and urgency on the African continent,

such as Sudan and the DRC in the form of whataboutism, we end up offering a problematic answer to a legitimate question.

Africans’ solidarity with Palestinians is based not only on concern for human rights abuses, but on an anticolonial solidarity. This is encapsulated in Nelson Mandela’s injunction, that as South Africans who defeated apartheid as a form of colonialism, “we are not free until Palestinians are free”.

The question to ask ourselves as Africans is, when we say we are in solidarity with Palestinians, but we should also be in solidarity, for example with the Congolese, are we not perpetuating a problematic lack of understanding and attention to conflicts in Africa by framing our call to action as a need to be “in solidarity with”? If solidarity implies to stand with, to stand in support of, who are we in solidarity with in fractious, shifting partisan lines between Africans in these conflicts?

There is a need to make visible the loss of African life as part of efforts to humanise and elevate the visibility of African challenges as global challenges. However, that effort to address the invisibilisation of African conflicts as a result of the historical dehumanisation of Africans is not necessarily addressed by the action of being “in solidarity” with one particular conflict or another on the continent. As African scholars,

we should be particularly sensitive to this challenge, since this is often the moment when African conflicts are subject to caricature by outsiders. They often become flattened out into the simplistic universalised categories of human rights frameworks, as a matter of good and evil, bad leaders versus victimised civilians, and so on. Recall the time when there was heady pressure to support a “Free Darfur” or a “Free Sudan”? Now as we witness the unravelling of South Sudan, the lesson is: be careful what you wish for.

Today, if we are to be “in solidarity” with DRC, assuming that this refers to the longstanding conflict in Kivu, it would be more meaningful if it implies that we are encouraging more people to make an effort to understand the complexities of the two Kivus, the historical legacy of citizenship claims, and the regional histories and global arteries that run through the heart of the conflict, including the Rwandan civil wars and the displacement of a large number of people beyond Congolese borders. This continuity has pitted various groups against each other on the basis of belonging and citizenship claims and counterclaims to territory.

If Gaza requires our anticolonial solidarity, conflicts such as those in the DRC might require more rigorous efforts on our part to better understand the problem,

more vociferous voices to stand up and mobilise political action; and a scholarly push to decolonise the solutions so that different forms of political community can emerge. We can stand in solidarity with Palestinians, as an act of anticolonial solidarity of a people subjected to decades of settler-colonial displacement and rule, driven by that shared history of being colonised. And we can challenge the invisibilisation of African conflicts and the loss of life in Africa, which require the humanisation of African life through more study, rigorous and sensitive research, and understanding and thinking about how we can realise the mostly failed emancipatory aims of anticolonial generations who came to power in the 1950s and 60s. From our present vantage point on history, we are better placed to agree with Frantz Fanon that anticolonial movements often did not “dare to invent” the future by fully decolonising societies. There are legacies of colonialism that continue to shape political institutions, and understandings of citizenship and belonging that perpetuate conflicts in postcolonial societies.

What we should avoid is turning our legitimate concern with the invisibilisation of postcolonial African conflicts, a result of the dehumanisation of African life in general, into a competing calculus that determines who we express solidarity with.

—Aljazeera



LAHORE: A carpenter crafts traditional bed pieces using an electric machine at Bati Chowk furniture market.

PSX continues with bullish trend, gains 574 more points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-Index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) continued with bullish trend on Tuesday, gaining 574.11 more points, a positive change of 0.50 percent, closing at 114,804.17 points as compared to 114,230.06 points on the last trading day.

A total of 589,463,320 shares were traded during the day as compared to 521,209,059 shares the previous trading day, whereas the price of shares stood at Rs32.584 billion against Rs28.287 billion on the last trading day.

As many as 463 companies transacted their shares in the stock market, 269 of them recorded gains and 137 sustained losses, whereas the share price of 57 companies remained unchanged.

The three top trading companies were Cnergyico PK with 42,527,928 shares at Rs7.21 per share, Pak Refinery with 38,066,803 shares at Rs41.50 per share and K-Electric Limited with 33,447,471 shares at Rs5.00 per share.

Hallmark Company Limited witnessed a maximum increase of Rs84.54 per share price, closing at Rs950.05, whereas the runner-up was Philip Morris (Pakistan) Limited with Rs70.90 rise in its per share price to Rs789.76.

Nestle Pakistan Limited witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs58.04 per share closing at Rs7,435.93 followed by Pakistan Engineering Company Limited with Rs56.55 decline to close at Rs600.01.

Gold prices dip by

Rs1,400 per tola

The price of 24 karat per tola gold decreased by Rs1,400 and was sold at Rs277,900 on Tuesday against its sale at Rs279,300 on previous trading day, All Sindh Sarafa Jewellers Association reported.

The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also decreased by Rs1,201 to Rs238,254 from Rs239,455 whereas that of 10 gram 22 karat also went down to Rs218,400 from Rs219,500.

The prices of per tola and ten gram silver remained constant at Rs3,350 and Rs2,872.08 respectively.

The price of gold in the international market decreased by \$14 to \$2,661 from \$2,675, the Association reported.

Rupee sheds 5 paisa against dollar

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistani rupee on Tuesday depreciated by 5 paisa against the US dollar in the interbank trading and closed at Rs278.72 against the previous day's closing of Rs278.67.

However, according to the FAP, the buying and selling rates of the dollar in the open market stood at Rs279.05 and Rs280.55 respectively. The price of the Euro increased by Rs1.04 to close at Rs285.70 against the last day's closing of Rs284.66, according to SBP.

The Japanese yen remained unchanged and closed at Rs1.77, whereas an increase of Rs1.95 was witnessed in the exchange rate of the British Pound, which was traded at Rs340.19 as compared to the last day's closing of Rs338.24.

The exchange rates of the Emirates Dirham and the Saudi Riyal increased by 01 and 02 paisa to close at Rs75.88 and Rs74.25, respectively.

Pakistan to issue Panda bond by June: Minister

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan will issue Yuan-denominated Panda Bonds as early as June to further integrate its capital markets with that of China, Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue, Muhammad Aurangzeb said.

The minister added that Pakistan had followed Egypt's lead to issue the yuan bonds on the back of credit improvement from the Beijing-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).

He said, Pakistan had endured years-long inflation and was pushed to the brink of default in 2023 as its economy withered amid political chaos and economic mismanagement. But the country's economy rebounded last year as the inflation rate dropped from nearly 38 per cent in May 2023 to 4.1 per cent last month.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Pakistan also reached an agreement on a 37-month extended bailout loan of about US\$7 billion, with some of the country's main debt holders, including China, agreeing to a one-year debt rollover last year.

Amid what he called the

eign panda bond ... I'm pushing everyone, including our own teams, to see if we can get this done before June," the paper quoted as having said.

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Amid what he called the

"balance of payment problem", Aurangzeb said that enhancing CPEC cooperation would be crucial, adding that the newest version of a flagship Belt and Road Initiative project would help the country digest its debt through an export-led model.

The second phase of the project, according to Pakistan, aims to set up special economic zones in partnership with China to reform the country's agricultural and information technology sectors while attracting Chinese companies to relocate their low-end industries to the country.

Aurangzeb said Pakistan was in trouble because the economy had been "primarily import-led", which caused the country to "run out of foreign currency and get into a balance of payment problem".

"Which means we have to fundamentally change the DNA of the economy towards export-led growth," he added.

"CPEC phase two is all about primarily business-to-business, especially the economic zones. We want

to make it work for some companies from the mainland to come in and use it as a real export hub." He also assured to step up security in his country to protect Chinese companies.

Meanwhile, the minister said, Pakistan was exploring more joint ventures with Hong Kong and secondary listings for its firms in the city, the country's finance minister has said ahead of a meeting with Chief Executive John Lee Ka-chiu on Monday.

He said, he would express his interest to Lee about the possibility of having a Hong Kong delegation visit Pakistan to identify areas for closer collaboration.

"If there is an opportunity for companies out of Pakistan, as joint ventures with local companies, to come in and do primary and secondary listings in the Hong Kong stock exchange, for instance, I think it can be a real win-win, not only in terms of the investment that we expect back in Pakistan, but also outward investment," he said.

Haier partners with TEVTA to enhance skill development

F.P. Report

LAHORE: Haier Pakistan has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Technical Education and Vocational Training Authority (TEVTA) to foster skill enhancement through joint training and development initiatives. This collaboration aims to bridge the gap between industry and academia, enhancing the technical skills of Pakistan's workforce in the presence of Chairperson TEVTA Brig (R) Muhammad Sajid, DG (HR) TEVTA

Muhammad Sheeraz, Head of Training wing TEVTA Miss Amber Chatta and Haier Pakistan HR Leaders Mr. Farhan Mahmood, Mr. Wang Chauquun and Mr. Shahid Alvi.

Mian Farhan Mahmood Director HR & A from Haier Pakistan said that we are thrilled to partner with TEVTA to design and execute customized Trainings in order to develop a skilled workforce that meets the evolving demands of 2025 Production/business. This collaboration is a significant step towards enhancing



ing the employability of Pakistan's youth and fostering sustainable industry growth.

This partnership underscores Haier Pakistan's

commitment to corporate social responsibility (CSR), education, and creating career opportunities for TEVTA graduates and Pakistan's youth.

HABIBMETRO sponsored Karachi Eat Food Festival 2025



F.P. Report

KARACHI: HABIBMETRO brought an unforgettable experience to its customers through an exclusive banking partnership with one of the most anticipated events of the year - the Karachi Eat Food Festival.

As part of this partnership, HABIBMETRO introduced a range of exciting benefits for its customers as well as non-customers:

1. Free Entry: HABIBMETRO Platinum and Ladies debit cardholders

enjoyed free entry to the festival.

2. Fast-track Access: All HABIBMETRO Debit card holders benefitted from fast-track access, skipping the long queues and getting straight into the festival without any wait.

3. Exclusive Lounge: HABIBMETRO customers enjoyed complimentary refreshments and rewards with an exclusive lounge, while non-customers got a chance to win these rewards by participating in various engagement

activities such as photo booth, spin-the-wheel and more.

4. Exciting Prizes: Non-customers had the opportunity to win exciting prizes by opening an account; with our relationship management team providing them assistance throughout the process.

5. Seamless Transactions: The Bank ensured a hassle-free experience for visitors at the event, offering mobile ATM services for easy cash withdrawals. This iteration of Karachi

Eat brought a combination of local and global cuisines, with over 120 food stalls offering a wide range of mouth-watering flavours, alongside live music by some of the country's renowned musicians, including Asim Azhar, Ali Tariq and HAVI among others. This vibrant mix contributed to the lively atmosphere of the event, attracting a footfall of approximately 140,000 people.

"At HABIBMETRO, our customers are our top priority, and we are committed to enhancing their banking journey. Through this partnership, we are offering a unique three-day event featuring live food, music and exclusive benefits for both our customers and non-customers. This event will be another outdoor activity for the people of Karachi. With a focus on reaching untapped markets, particularly the younger generation, we are excited to be collaborating with Karachi Eat for the first time ever.

FMCG Asia Awards 2024 Bisconni's Premium Biscuit Range Wins 'Home Brand of the Year'



F.P. Report

KARACHI: Bisconni's premium biscuit range has been awarded the prestigious 'Home Brand of the Year - Pakistan' category title at the FMCG Asia Awards 2024 held in Singapore. Organized by Retail Asia, this award celebrates excellence in the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector across the continent, highlighting

brands that have shown exceptional innovation, quality, and customer satisfaction.

Introduction of Bisconni's Premium range is a momentous milestone for the company. This range has proved to be a critical move for the company's growth and serving a consumer base that demands quality equivalent to imported products. The premium range has not only

captured the hearts of biscuit lovers, but also disrupted the market ensuring that the brand remains relevant and appealing.

Speaking on this milestone, Muhammad Sabir Godil, Chief Operating Officer of Bisconni, remarked, "Bisconni premium range has effectively carved out a unique space in Pakistan's competitive food industry, appealing to consumers who continue to spend on premium products as a form of self-care or indulgence. Bisconni has just not created a more diverse product portfolio that caters to different consumer segments, but also stabilized revenue streams during economic fluctuations. Winning the Home Brand of the Year - Pakistan award signifies that a brand has been recognized for its excellence and overall market presence within the home

goods sector in Pakistan. We plan to continue to innovate and expand the product range based on consumer feedback and market trends".

The recognition places Bisconni in a strong position to further expand its market share, not just within the region but also globally. With its innovative approach and commitment to excellence, Bisconni is poised to lead the charge in shaping the future of the biscuit industry.

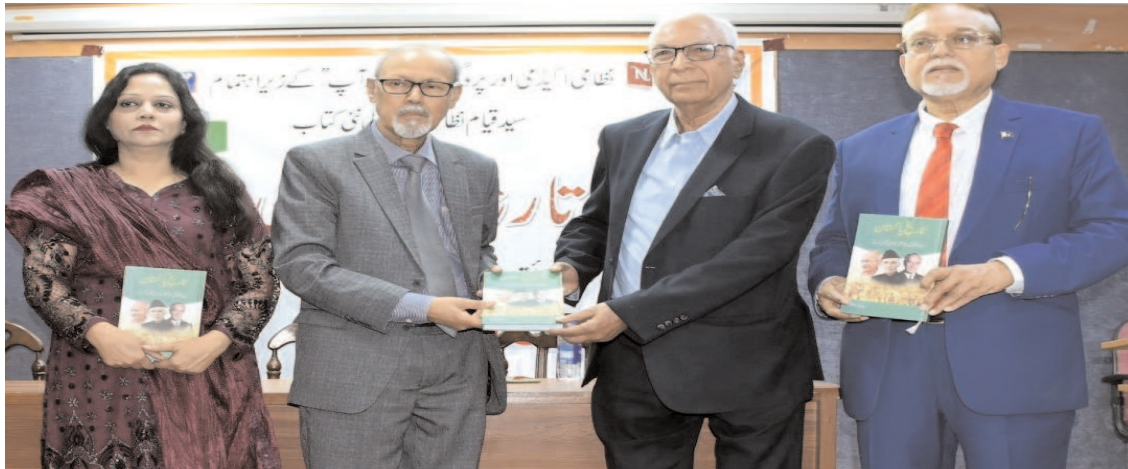
With a portfolio of eight exceptional products, Bisconni Prime has set new standards in the premium biscuit category. Its superior taste, unique flavors, and uncompromising quality have not only captivated consumers but have also redefined market expectations, providing a high-quality alternative to imported brands.

Sir Syed University held a launch ceremony for Tareekh-e-Pakistan

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The launch ceremony of the book 'Tareekh e Pakistan (A few facts that have not been revealed)', written by the late Syed Qayam Nizami, organized by Nizami Academy, was held at Sir Syed University of Engineering and Technology, with former Vice Chancellor of Urdu University and prominent scholar Dr. Iqbal Mohsin as the Chief Guest. The event was conducted by Hamid Islam Khan.

The Chief Guest of the event, eminent scholar Dr. Iqbal Mohsin said that we cannot live in despair. Both Sir Syed Ahmed Khan and Quaid-e-Azam had become disappointed with the nation and had withdrawn from the struggle, but later they brought revolutionary change to the subcontinent. You cannot stop the path of change. Change sometimes comes from where you do not expect it. Our generation is a failed generation. After the partition of India, when the first flight landed in



Pakistan, we thought that people would get off the plane and bow down on the soil of the newly created Pakistan, but they were looking for their luggage. And till today this nation is looking for belongings. The facts came to light but were suppressed, hidden, or erased.

On the auspicious occasion, Dr. Imad-ul-Haq, Chairperson of the Business Administration Department, read out the message of the Chancellor of Sir Syed University, Jawaid Anwar.

Chancellor Jawaid Anwar said in his message that the "History of Pakistan" is an important document for understanding the political, social, economic and societal issues of this region. The future is built on the basis of the past. If we avoid the mistakes of the past and adopt the tried and tested strategic composition of the modern era, then we may be ranked among the developed nations. This was the strategy adopted by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan. He organized

the Muslim nation according to the requirements of the modern era, which resulted in the establishment of Pakistan. The Tareekh e Pakistan is a comprehensive and informative book that sheds light on various aspects of Pakistan's history. This book should become a part of the archive.

Prominent scholar and journalist Mahmood Sham said in his audio message that the history of Pakistan has narrated events with authentic references, the

accuracy of which cannot be denied. It highlights the events that caused the degradation and decline of the Muslim nation.

Chairman of Nizami Academy, Ehtesham Arshad Nizami said that the author was inclined towards Sufism but he was also a historian. On my repeated request, he wrote two books on history in his life - "Hindustan ki Tareekh e Hukmarani" and "Tareekh e Pakistan". We are working for the promotion of knowledge and awareness.

Tareekh e Pakistan is an excellent book that contains the entire history of the subcontinent. The book also includes the author's personal experiences and observations in addition to historical facts. It is a historical error to say that Bengalis founded the Muslim League, while in fact, the first meeting of the Muslim League was indeed held at the house of Khwaja Salimullah in Dhaka, but not only Bengalis were there, people from Punjab, NWFP, Balochistan, Sindh, UP, Bihar, and other areas were also present in the meeting which is not told.

Renowned writer Gul Bano said that since ancient times, man has been going through an evolutionary process. The partition of India was not a common thing. It was an extraordinary event. Such events have been recorded in the book "Tareekh e Pakistan" that we are unaware of.

Famous poet and writer Syed Meraj Jami said that the beginning of history began with the creation of man. Without history, all

knowledge of the world is insufficient. History is the essence of different biographies.

Later, a poetry session was held. The poets included Professor Razia Subhan, Rashid Hussain Rashid (Canada), Feroz Natiq

Khusro, Salman Siddiqui, Noor Sami Noor, Syed Meraj Jami, Salman Siddiqui, Ishrat Moin Seema (Germany), Najma Usman (UK), Sahar Ali and others. The event was hosted by Khalid Pervez Siddiqui.

Court Notice

In the Court of Jauhar Ali Safi Civil Judge I/in. Alaga Qazi Buner at Daggar. Suit No 318/1. Institution 18/10/2024. Date of hearing. 20/2/2025. Hatim Shah etc VS Rehmat Khan etc. Notice to No. 2. Alam Zeb s/o Rehmat Khan resident of Topdara tehsel Daggar district Buner. Whereas in the above mentioned case the mentioned defendants can not be served in the ordinary way, it is, therefore, proclaimed that if the said defendants will/shall not appear personally or through duly authorized agent or pleader in the court at 8.00 am dated 20/2/2025 the proceeding will be taken ex- parte. Given under my hand and seal of this Court.

Court Notice

In the Court of Javeria Sartaj Khan Additional District Judge II /Azafi Zila Qazi Buner at Daggar. Appeal No.119/13 Institution.2/11/2023. Date of hearing. 11/2/2025. Mst Janat Bibi VS Abdul Haq etc. Notice to no. 9. Muhammad Hanif. 11. Mehran Zeb sons Umbara Khan resident of Tonwarsak Buner.24. Mst Zenat d/o Janat Bibi resident of Elai Buner. Whereas in the above mentioned case the mentioned defendants can not be served in the ordinary way, it is, therefore, proclaimed that if the said defendants will/shall not appear personally or through duly authorized agent or pleader in the court at 8.30 am dated 11/2/2025 the proceeding will be taken ex- parte. Given under my hand and seal of this Court.



In brief

Sarfraz appointed coach of Gladiators

LAHORE (Monitoring Desk): Quetta Gladiators owner, Nadeem Omar, has appointed former captain Sarfraz Ahmed as the team's new coach, entrusting him with new responsibilities. Sarfraz Ahmed, who was part of the players' draft for PSL 10, was not selected by any team. However, Nadeem Omar took the opportunity to assign Sarfraz Ahmed as the head coach of the Gladiators and selected Shoaib Malik as a supplementary player. Speaking to the media in Lahore, Nadeem Omar emphasised that Sarfraz Ahmed was the heart and soul of Quetta Gladiators, and the team could not part ways with him. "You will see him in a new role," said Omar. He further mentioned that Sarfraz would work under the guidance of Moin Khan and would learn while both he and Moin Khan would take a backseat, allowing Sarfraz to take the lead.

Rohit likely to visit Pakistan

LAHORE (Web Desk): Indian cricket team captain Rohit Sharma might visit Pakistan ahead of the ICC Champions Trophy. According to Indian media reports, Rohit Sharma could travel to Pakistan for the official photo shoot and captains' press conference scheduled before the tournament. All eight participating team captains traditionally gather in the host nation for these events, as per ICC protocol. The final decision on Rohit Sharma's visit to Pakistan is yet to be made. The Champions Trophy is set to begin on February 19 with opening match to be played between Pakistan and New Zealand. India will play its first match against Bangladesh on February 20 in Dubai.

PCB Level-2 Coaching course starts

LAHORE (INP): Eight Pakistan internationals (men and women) cricketers are among the 30 participants who are taking part in the Level 2 Coaching course, which commenced today at the National Cricket Academy in Lahore. The course will conclude on Sunday, 19 January. Pakistan Test cricketers include Azhar Ali (97 Tests, 53 ODIs), Bilawal Bhatti (two Tests, 10 ODIs, 9 T20Is), Naved Latif (one Test, 11 ODIs), Shadab Khan (six Tests, 70 ODIs, 104 T20Is), Wahab Riaz (27 Tests, 91 ODIs, 36 T20Is) and Yasir Shah (48 Tests, 25 ODIs, two T20Is) are taking part in the six-day course, while Pakistan international Asad Ali (four ODIs, two T20Is) and former Pakistan Women's captain Bismah Maroof (136 ODIs, 140 T20Is) are also taking part in the course. The participants in the course will be taught on the advance coaching skills which include power hitting, modern technical and tactical aspects of the game. The course will also include work on communications skills and work related to mental and physical strength on the players along with modern day game planning and how to execute it. The course will be conducted by former Test cricketer -Saqlain Mushtaq and former international cricketer Dr Imran Abbas alongside NCA coaches including Abdul Majeed, Ifthikhar Ahmed, Mauhtashim Rashid, Rahat Abbas Asadi and Saboor Ahmed. At the conclusion of the course, the participants will be given three months to complete their assignments. The successful participants will be awarded Level 2 coaching certificates.



MULTAN: Pakistan's Babar Azam bats in the nets during a practice session ahead of their first Test cricket match against West Indies at Multan Cricket Stadium. —APP Photo

Pakistan Strike Force camp begins at NCA

LAHORE (INP): The Pakistan Strike Force training camp has started at the National Cricket Academy, Lahore. The camp has been arranged with an aim to work on the hard-hitting and modern-day batting skills of the domestic and international players. The camp will run from 14-30 January at the NCA Lahore and the second leg of the camp will take place at the Multan Cricket Stadium in Multan from 1-28 February. The Strike Force programme will continue throughout the year as elite and emerging players will be invited to the camps from time to time.

Former international Cricketer Abdul Razzaq, known for his incredible ball-striking ability in a 17-year long international career, where he hit 168 sixes, is the head coach for this camp. Razzaq will be assisted by former Test cricketer Humayun Farhat and former first-class player Kamran Sajid in the camp. The experienced team of coaches will mentor 25 players regarding

how to perform under immense pressure, build core strength and strategise aggression and restraint while playing top-flight cricket. Given the meticulous demands of the modern-day cricket, the players will be monitored closely in the camp and trained according to the upcoming challenges.

Following the ICC Champions Trophy 2025, Pakistan are scheduled to play two ICC T20I World Cups, an ICC Cricket World Cup and a number of bilateral white-ball series till 2028, so the camp will also help add quality bench strength to the batting departments of the national setup and domestic teams.

Haider Ali, Jahandad Khan, Khushdil Shah, Mohammad Abbas Afridi, Mubasir Khan, Muhammad Irfan Khan and Usman Khan are the seven Pakistan capped players part of the Strike Force camp.

Pakistan Strike Force squad: Abdul Samad (Faisalabad), Afaq Ahmed (Abbottabad), Ali Imran (Islamabad), Amad But

(Sialkot), Ashir Mehmood (Sialkot), Haider Ali (Rawalpindi), Hasan Nawaz (Islamabad), Jahandad Khan (Rawalpindi), Khawaja Mohammad Nafay (Karachi), Khayyam Khan (Abbottabad), Khushdil Shah (Peshawar), Mohammad Abbas Afridi (Peshawar), Mohammad Amir Barki (Peshawar), Mohammad Faiq (Lahore), Mohammad Faizan (Faisalabad), Mohammad Sarwar Afridi (FATA), Mubasir Khan (Rawalpindi), Muhammad Akhlaq (Lahore), Muhammad Imran Randhawa (Bahawalpur), Muhammad Irfan Khan (Faisalabad), Nasir Nawaz (Rawalpindi), Saad Masood (Rawalpindi), Shawaz Irfan (Lahore), Usman Khan (Karachi) and Yasir Khan (Rawalpindi).

Player support personnel: Abdul Razzaq (head coach), Humayun Farhat (assistant coach), Kamran Sajid (assistant coach), Yasir Malik (trainer), Suliman Azhar (data analyst) and Shahbaz Aajiz (throwdown specialist).

Pakistan U-19 women's team to face Australia in warm-up match

KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA (APP): The Pakistan Women's Under-19 cricket team is set to play a warm-up match against Australia on Wednesday.

The match will take place at the Slangor Turf Club Ground, starting at 2:30 PM local time.

Following this match, the team will travel to Johor on January 16 in preparation for the ICC Under-19 Women's T20 World Cup which kicks off in Malaysia on January 18.

Pakistan's first official match will be against the United States on January 18. In their recent warm-up match, Pakistan secured a victory over Nigeria by 11 runs.

Al-Baghdad Club wins football match

BAHAWALPUR (APP): Al-Baghdad Football Club has won the pre-quarter final match of Seven Sided Football Tournament being played here in the city.

Al-Baghdad Football Club played against Al-Badar Football Club and made one goal. The team of Al-Badar Football club could not make any goal. Al-Baghdad Football Club won second match against Al-Badar Football Club.

Goalkeeper of the Al-Baghdad Football Club foiled two penalty shoot.

The footballers of the Al-Baghdad Football Club including Usman, Nizam, Shamam, Arshad and Masood showed good performance in the match. Speaking on the occasion, renowned footballer, Azhar Hussain said that organizing football tournament would encourage youth to participate in healthy activities.

Klopp hopeful Salah will agree new Liverpool deal

SALZBURG (AFP): Former Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp expressed hope on Tuesday that Mohamed Salah will sign a new contract to stay at Anfield beyond the end of this season.

"I hope he stays. He is a fantastic player, a fantastic human being, an outstanding athlete, the best ambassador your country could have. So I hope he will stay at Liverpool," Klopp replied to a question about Salah from an Egyptian journalist during a press conference in Austria.

Klopp was speaking at his unveiling as Red Bull's head of global soccer, a role in which he will oversee the energy drinks conglomerate's football empire.

The German is starting out in the position having left Liverpool at the end of last season, after close to nine years as the club's manager.

Red Bull controls clubs in several countries around the world, including RB Leipzig in Klopp's native

Germany, while it recently acquired a minority stake in French second-tier side Paris FC.

Liverpool, meanwhile, have enjoyed a seamless transition to life without Klopp, as they sit six points clear at the top of the Premier League and top of the Champions League standings under his successor Arne Slot.

Klopp reiterated that he felt it was the right time to step down at Anfield and said he did not miss the daily grind of club management.

"I am more than happy not to be there," he said.

"It is really great that they are doing so well, I wish them all the best. I watch as many games as I can.

"It is great football. Even if you don't support Liverpool right now you had better watch them because it is really top football, maybe the best balanced in the world right now."

The former Borussia Dortmund coach added that he hoped Salah's fel-

low stars Virgil van Dijk and Trent Alexander-Arnold would also choose to extend their contracts, which expire at the end of the season too.

"I am so happy I am not in charge in that situation, having to answer these questions," he sighed.

"From my point of view I would love all three of them to extend their contracts but I don't know, they didn't tell me."

Asked if he could try to sign any of them for the Red Bull empire, which includes New York Red Bulls in Major League Soccer, he responded with a touch of irony:

"Oh yeah. Virgil I am sure would love to have five more years at Liverpool and then play from 41 to 44 for New York Red Bulls because he probably underestimates US football.

"Mo, yes I would love to, but I don't think we have a chance to pay him to be honest. "I am just really happy I am no longer a part of it."

Trump breezes through to last eight of Masters



LONDON (Agencies): World number one Judd Trump began his bid for a third Masters title with a comfortable 6-1 win over fellow Englishman Barry Hawkins at Alexandra Palace. Trump was quick to pounce on any errors made by Hawkins, the man he defeated in the UK Championship final in December.

The 35-year-old compiled breaks of 59, 60 and 56 on his way to a 5-0 lead. Although Hawkins responded with a 70 break to get a frame on the scoreboard, Trump wrapped up victory with a break of 112 to set up a quarter-final against China's Ding Junhui on Friday.

In the second of Tuesday's last-16 matches, 2018 champion Mark Allen of Northern Ireland will take on Chinese debutant Si Jiahui (19:00 GMT).

"The first frame is so important"

Hawkins scored only 59 points in the first five frames, his cause not helped by knocking in a red when attempting to disturb the pack while potting the blue in the opening frame. Trump, who won the Masters in 2019 and 2023, told BBC Two: "The first frame kind of turned the whole game. He was a bit unlucky, I didn't see if it was a plant, but a couple of times he knocked a ball in.

"You have to be so careful because, I'm not exaggerating, that just turns the match. If he gets in and makes a break, then he settles down and I miss an easy ball in the next frame, it's 2-0 or 3-0 the other way.

"The first frame is so important, whenever I win that first frame I seem to be able to gain momentum. Little things like that can change the game."

The same foul occurred in the fourth frame, by which time Trump was in full control of the match. Former world champion John Parrott, working as a BBC pundit, said: "It was a very dominant display, the display of somebody who thinks he's number one in the world." The other thing is there was very little petrol used up. It was a nice 6-1 - you can expect to come here and have a 6-4 or 6-5 and go through the mill a little bit, but none of that at all. That bodes well for the rest of the event."

Wasim unveils i conic white jacket for CT

DUBAI (Monitoring Desk): The Champions Trophy returns next month for the first time since 2017. Setting the momentum in action, the International Cricket Council (ICC) pays tribute to the iconic 'white jackets' with a promo video featuring Pakistan legend and former captain Wasim Akram, who asks fans across the globe to join the journey of champions as the eight teams put it 'All On The Line'.

According to a press release issued by the ICC, the unmissable tournament will witness the top eight teams battle it out in 15 matches across 19 days in an intense and all-out showdown from Feb 19 to March 9, 2025.

Every match counts in the ICC's most high-stakes event format, where teams not only vie for the Champions Trophy but also for the coveted white jackets – symbolising the ultimate measure of greatness and determination.

The white jacket is a badge of honour adorned by champions. With a decorated career spanning three decades, a cricket champion in his own right, Wasim Akram highlights in the promo video that the jackets embody the relentless pursuit for tactical brilliance, and a legacy that inspires generations.

Winning the white jacket signifies the journey of putting it all on the line for victory.

Teenager Fonseca in Melbourne stunner as Medvedev survives big scare

MELBOURNE (AFP): Brazilian teenager Joao Fonseca stunned ninth seed Andrey Rublev in a major Australian Open shock on Tuesday as racquet-smashing 2024 finalist Daniil Medvedev narrowly avoided the same fate.

A rampant Taylor Fritz, veteran Gael Monfils and home hope Alex de Minaur all progressed into round two at Melbourne Park. In the women's draw, Jasmine Paolini and Elena Rybakina were both emphatic winners on day three, with Emma Navarro and Emma Raducanu also victorious.

But the day belonged to the 18-year-old Fonseca, who defeated Russia's Rublev 7-6 (7/1), 6-3, 7-6 (7/5) on his Grand Slam debut.

Roared on by Brazilian fans decked out in yellow, Fonseca appeared totally unfazed as he set up a second-round meeting with Italy's Lorenzo Sonego.

"It's the first time playing in a huge stadium," he told an energised Margaret Court Arena.

"There are a lot of Brazilians here cheering for me and I enjoyed every moment, thanks a lot." Rublev's fellow Russian Medvedev, a three-time losing finalist in Melbourne including a year ago to Jannik Sinner,

was heavy favourite against Thailand's 418th-ranked Kasidit Samrej.

But in his first match of the season, the fifth seed nearly imploded in a fit of anger before finding some measure of calm. "Second and third set I couldn't touch the ball. I didn't know what to do," Medvedev said after finally winning 6-2, 4-6, 3-6, 6-1, 6-2 on Rod Laver Arena.

The 28-year-old mangled his racquet as he spectacularly lost his rag in the third set, slamming it into the net camera repeatedly until they both became a broken mess. There was no such trouble for fourth seed Fritz as he blitzed fellow American Jensen Brooksby 6-2, 6-0, 6-3 to launch his bid for a maiden Grand Slam crown.

"It's never easy playing that first match in a Slam, there are some nerves, so I did a really good job shaking them off early and playing really solid," said Fritz, who took just one hour and 46 minutes to dismantle his compatriot. France's Monfils battled through a five-set thriller to topple young countryman Giovanni Mpetshi Perricard and continue the 38-year-old's late-career resurgence.

Crowd-pleaser Monfils became the oldest singles

champion in ATP Tour history when he swept to victory at the Auckland Classic on Saturday.

He kept the momentum going against lethal-serving Mpetshi Perricard, 21, over a gruelling three hours and 46 minutes.

"I'm crazy happy," said the popular Monfils. "Everything is a win now, so, you know, no pressure on me." De Minaur, nicknamed "The Demon" by Australian fans and media, eased past Dutchman Botic van de Zandschulp, 6-1, 7-5, 6-4.

'Mind of its own'

Italy's Paolini breezed past Wei Sijia 6-0, 6-4 in just 73 minutes to underline her title credentials. The 29-year-old has said she got a taste for playing on the biggest stage after rocketing to world number four last year on the back of finishing runner-up at both Roland Garros and Wimbledon.

"Maybe everything began from here last year," Paolini, who reached the fourth round 12 months ago, said after hammering the world number 117 from China.

Former Wimbledon champion Rybakina dished out a harsh lesson of her own to 16-year-old Emerson Jones, winning 6-1, 6-1 in a ruthless statement of intent.



The sixth seed from Kazakhstan demonstrated her pedigree as she manoeuvred the world junior number one from Australia to all parts of Margaret Court Arena. The 2021 US Open champion Raducanu blew hot and cold in beating 26th seed Ekaterina Alexandrova from Russia, 7-6 (7/4), 7-6 (7/2).

The 22-year-old Briton, who

next faces American Amanda Anisimova, clocked up 15 double faults and said that her serve had "a mind of its own".

Navarro, the eighth seed, beat fellow American Peyton Stearns in three sets. The 13th seeding proved unlucky for Anna Kalinskaya, a quarter-finalist last year, who withdrew moments before her match against Australia's Kimberly Birrell.

Kalinskaya was replaced by lucky loser Eva Lys of Germany, who took full advantage of her last-minute call-up by winning 6-2, 6-2. Many of the top names including Novak Djokovic, Aryna Sabalenka, Carlos Alcaraz, Coco Gauff and Naomi Osaka will be back in action on Wednesday when the second round begins.



In brief

IRSA releases 29,700 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Tuesday released 29,700 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 40,600 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1476.95 feet and was 78.95 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 15,100 cusecs and 10,000 cusecs respectively. The water level in River Jhelum at Mangla Dam was 1134.40 feet, which was 84.40 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 5,900 cusecs and 100 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 20,500, 14,500, 2,000 and 5,000 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 13,600 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 6,000 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.

ANF recovers 37 kg drugs

RAWALPINDI (APP): Anti-Narcotics Force (ANF) while conducting four operations recovered over 37 kg drugs worth Rs 3.6 million and arrested six accused including three women, said an ANF Headquarters spokesman on Tuesday. He informed 700 grams ice was recovered from a woman arrested near Latifabad in Hyderabad. The arrested suspect confessed to selling drugs to the students of educational institutions. In second operation, 466 grams heroin hidden in the trolley bag of a passenger going to Bahrain through Faisalabad International Airport was recovered. In third operation, 24 kg hashish hidden in a vehicle near a restaurant in Sambrial Mor, Stalkot was recovered and two suspects were arrested. 12 kg hashish was recovered from the possession of two women rounded up opposite the bus terminal in Sohrah Goth, Karachi. Cases have been registered against the arrested suspects under the Narcotics Control Act and further investigations are under process.

HIU nabs suspect in murder case

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Industrial Area Circle Homicide Unit (HIU) team has apprehended a suspect involved in the blind murder of a private company's security guard and recovered the murder weapon on Tuesday. A public relations officer told APP that the accused, identified as Asad Ali, had fatally shot security guard Adil Shahzad using a firearm and fled the scene with the victim's mobile phone, motorcycle registration book, ATM card, and other belongings. DIG Raza took immediate notice of the incident and directed the police to ensure the swift arrest of the suspect. Police official said the police team conducted an investigation using advanced technical and scientific methods, which led to the identification and arrest of Asad Ali. The team also recovered the victim's stolen mobile phone, ATM card, registration book, and other items from the accused. Additionally, the pistol used as the murder weapon was also recovered from the suspect. IG Islamabad Syed Ali Nasir Rizvi and DIG Islamabad commended the police team for their swift and efficient action. "The suspect will be prosecuted in court based on solid evidence to ensure he receives appropriate punishment," he added.



ISLAMABAD: Ambassador of Türkiye Dr. Irfan Neziroglu call on Speaker National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq at Parliament House. —APP Photo

Gilani highlights strengthened energy cooperation with China

ISLAMABAD (APP): Chairman Senate, Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani on Tuesday underscored the deepening ties between Pakistan and China across diverse sectors, including energy.

During a meeting with the Vice President of Shandong Kerui Group Wu Xiaogui, and Chairman and CEO of Tabani Group, he underlined a transformative era in its energy sector, one driven by strategic partnerships with China. He said China's unwavering trust and commitment to Pakistan's development have always been an invaluable source of progress, particularly in the energy sector.

The Chairman Senate said that collaboration with Shandong Kerui Group and other Chinese investors is integral to Pakistan's clean energy future. He highlighted that the two countries share a vision of sustainable growth and environmental stewardship, with clean energy fostering collaboration that benefits both nations.

The meeting underscored the extraordinary advancements made by Shandong Kerui Group and Tabani Global in Pakistan's energy infrastruc-

ture over the past 15 years. The Chairman Senate stressed that such initiatives aim at clean energy, focus on securing vital gas resources, addressing the country's growing gas deficiency, and tackling the substantial amount of gas that is currently wasted in outdated pipeline systems should be addressed. He said this comprehensive approach to energy management is a crucial step toward ensuring long-term energy security for Pakistan.

He said that Pakistan grapples with rising energy demands and a need for cleaner, more sustainable solutions.

Gilani reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to shifting its energy mix. Currently, the country's power sector is heavily reliant on thermal sources, contributing 58.8% of the energy mix, which poses significant environmental and economic challenges.

He said, Pakistan is now focused on diversifying its energy sources, aiming to increase the share of renewable energy to 60% by 2030 through wind, solar, and hydropower projects. He said, "We are keen to expand our cooperation in solar and

wind energy projects.

Gilani said stressing the immense opportunities for foreign investors.

In a forward-thinking move, Pakistan is also setting its sights on a future where 30% of all vehicles are powered by electricity, driving the nation toward its environmental goals while reducing dependency on fossil fuels, anticipated Gilani.

The establishment of the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC), a key initiative to streamline investment procedures and facilitate easier, more effective communication between investors and the government, was also discussed.

This one-stop solution assures foreign investors of safety, transparency, and profitable returns, making Pakistan an increasingly attractive destination for global capital. Under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), both countries have already made significant strides in building critical infrastructure that links Pakistan's vast energy resources with the burgeoning markets of Central Asia and the Middle East.

Ayaz Sadiq meets Ambassador of Türkiye

ISLAMABAD (APP): Speaker of the National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq on Tuesday expressed confidence that deepening parliamentary ties between the Pakistan and Türkiye would serve to further strengthen bilateral relations.

During a meeting with Ambassador of Türkiye to Pakistan, Dr. Irfan Neziroglu he highlighted the enduring relationship between the two nations, which is deeply rooted in shared religion, history, culture, and a sense of brotherhood said a news release.

While emphasizing the long-standing and strong ties between Pakistan and Türkiye, Sardar Ayaz Sadiq said, "Pakistan and Türkiye are like one soul in two bodies."

The speaker further underscored the deep affection and attachment that the people of Pakistan have for Türkiye, acknowledging the significant sacrifices made by the Turkish people

in defending democracy and preserving national sovereignty.

Ayaz Sadiq also pointed out that both countries share unanimity of views on key regional and global issues, particularly on Kashmir, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, and Karabakh.

He noted that Pakistan and Türkiye have consistently supported each other's positions on these matters within international forums and reaffirmed the importance of continuing this mutual support.

"The Pakistan-Türkiye Parliamentary Friendship Group in the National Assembly plays a vital role in advancing parliamentary diplomacy and fostering stronger connections between our two nations," he stated.

He also stressed the importance of enhancing parliamentary exchanges, which he believes will contribute to greater under-

standing and cooperation between lawmakers from both countries.

Ambassador Dr. Irfan Neziroglu warmly commended the Speaker's remarks and reiterated Türkiye's high regard for its fraternal relationship with Pakistan. He affirmed that the bond of love, respect, and mutual fraternity between the peoples of the two nations is deeply cherished in Turkey.

The Turkish Ambassador further emphasized the significant role of parliamentary diplomacy in strengthening the bilateral ties between Pakistan and Türkiye.

He also reiterated Türkiye's commitment to deepening bilateral trade relations and expressed Türkiye's willingness to explore new avenues for collaboration, building on the existing cooperation and moving beyond the framework of Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs).

Students should focus on physical and mental health: Mushaal

ISLAMABAD (APP): Mushaal Hussein Mullick, wife of unlawfully incarcerated Kashmiri leader Yasin Malik said that students should focus on their physical as well as mental health for their bright future and play the positive role the development and prosperity of the country.

She was addressing at Pakistan Chamber of Education Sports Gala Inauguration Ceremony as

a chief guest, she urged that youth are the future of the country and assets of the nation, said a press release here on Tuesday.

More than 300 school children from all over the country were participated in this event and 15 sports competitions including track race, football, tug-of-war were held.

A huge number of students were participated in this event and stadium

echoed with the chants of Pakistan Zindabad Kashmir Payanda Bad, Pakistan China Friendship Zindabad. Mushaal said that "I am very happy among these children and remembered my childhood at the sports ground".

"You have made Allama Iqbal's dream come true," she added. She said that children of Palestine and Kashmir are waiting for our help.

Senate panel investigates delays in border market operations

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Senate Functional Committee on Problems of Less Developed Areas on Tuesday discussed the initiatives launched by the Ministry of Commerce to promote local trade facilities, including the border markets in less developed areas.

During the meeting of the committee chaired by Senator Agha Shahzaib Durrani, officials of the Commerce Ministry informed that the government had initiated border markets with Iran and Afghanistan, however, the latter had rejected the proposal. Moreover, the physical structure of the border market with Iran was in place; however, it has not become operational due to delays from the Iranian government and lack of road connectivity in the region.

The panel was informed that the government has also notified a duty concession for the border markets. Senator Manzoor Ahmed Kakar stated that in a recent meeting of a trade delegation with Iranian officials, the Iranian officials highlighted that the border markets have been delayed due to delays on the part of the Pakistani government.

The committee, in order to identify the cause of the delay, recommended that

the Ministry provide details of communications held with the Iranian government within seven days.

Furthermore, the committee deliberated on the policy guidelines concerning the certificate of origin for Iranian-origin goods and the way forward to streamline Pak-Iran trade issues. Officials of the Commerce Ministry informed that trade with Iran cannot be conducted through banking channels due to the existing US sanctions on Iran.

However, the Balochistan High Court exempted the import/export form for trade with Iran in its stay, which was vacated in October of last year. Afterwards, the government introduced a 45-day waiver for Iranian-origin products, which has also expired. Senator Shahzaib Durrani questioned the fate of the goods ordered before the expiry of the waiver, for which payment has been made and which were currently lying at the port awaiting approval.

The committee directed the State Bank of Pakistan and the Commerce Ministry to conduct a joint meeting on the issue so that the goods lying at the port could be cleared and individuals could be saved from losses.

Earlier in the meeting,

the Committee discussed the recent status of the committee recommendations made in the previous meeting regarding the alleged corruption in the Park Road Federal Government Housing Scheme. The committee had directed the Housing Ministry to conduct an inquiry into the matter.

Secretary of the Cabinet Division, Kamran Ali Afzal, expressed satisfaction with the NESPAK fact-finding and stated that the FIA is also conducting the inquiry and should analyze the report before conducting any further investigation.

The committee chairman opined that it would be better if the ministry conducted the inquiry, as its officials understood the technicalities of the matter. The committee directed the Ministry to conduct an inquiry into the matter and submit the report within two weeks.

Senators Muhammad Aslam Abro, Falak Naz, Danesh Kumar, Hamid Khan and Manzoor Ahmed Kakar attended the meeting. Secretary Cabinet Division Kamran Ali Afzal, Additional Secretary Finance and Revenue Amjad Mahmood and other senior officials from relevant departments were also present in the meeting.

YDA seeks resolution of problems faced

ISLAMABAD (APP): President Young Doctors Association, Dr. Atif Majeed on Tuesday sought the resolution of problems faced by young doctors in Balochistan province.

He expressed these views in the National Press Club along with other members of the association including Dr. Fiaz, Dr. Umar Sultan, Dr. Rizwan Kundi, Dr. Waris Ali Jakhriani and others, the press release said. "Young doctors are facing problems in Balochistan province," the president said, adding that for the welfare of the people, doctors have been demanding more hospitals and more seats for young doctors.

He further said that the demand of doctors should not be misinterpreted and those doctors who have been arrested should be released and all cases should be withdrawn. He appealed to the Chairman Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), Bilawal Bhutto Zardari to resolve the issue in the province as the PPP was ruling the province.

Somalian Minister, Ambassador visit IIUI

ISLAMABAD (APP): His Excellency, Minister of Education, Culture, and Higher Education of Somalia, Farah Sheikh Abdulkadir, an alumnus of the International Islamic University Islamabad (IIUI), alongwith Somali Ambassador H.E. Sheikh Noor Mohamed Hassan visited the university.

Minister Abdulkadir toured the Faculty of Shariah and Law, where he once studied. He met with the faculty there and shared his old memories. In the management block auditorium, he met with Somali students to encourage them in their academic pursuits.

Meanwhile, he also held a meeting with the IIUI President, discussing avenues for collaboration in education and research.

The delegation emphasized the historic ties between Somalia and IIUI, underscoring the university's role in building global academic connections.

Committee reviews implementation of Anti-Rape Act

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Anti-Rape Special Committee has conducted a comprehensive stocktake of the implementation of the Anti-Rape (Investigation and Trial) Act, 2021 at the Ministry of Law and Justice.

Chaired by Senator Ayesha Raza Farooq, the meeting included members of the Special Committee along with participants from PEMRA, NADRA, National Police Bureau (NPB), provincial Home Departments, and other relevant stakeholders.

The session reviewed the progress on three key topics pertaining to the deployment of the National Sex Offender's Register, performance of specialized structures to support survivors of sexual violence and gender-based crimes, and policy considerations to improve implementation of the Act. The National Police Bureau updated the participants on the successful installation of hardware for the Sex Offenders Register

(SOR) at the Gender Crime Cell at NPB, a key milestone in the operationalization of the SOR which will help support investigation and prosecution in sexual violence cases.

The NPB highlighted that data for 94% of eligible entries from 1st January to 30th November 2024 had been collected and was pending entry into the SOR following updates to the digital software. NADRA agreed to provide the necessary technical support so that entries into the SOR can be ensured at the earliest.

Data presented by the Ministry of Law and Justice showed key improvements across the implementation of the Anti-Rape Act, 2021 specifically with regards to availability of Anti-Rape Crisis Cells (ARCCs) and their utilization. Notable improvements were observed in Punjab and Islamabad where referral of cases of serious sexual violence to ARCCs had increased, ensuring better

support services for survivors. Provincial Home Departments committed to ensuring further improvements towards addressing the challenges highlighted during the session and improving coordination between police and ARCCs so that survivors of sexual violence can be better supported.

The Committee also considered policy proposals presented by Ms. Zainab Mustafa, Community Protection Advisor at UPSCALE and member of the Special Committee, for improvements to Pakistan's legal framework to support broader sex offender management and reducing reoffending.

The policy recommendations included improvements to the existing Sex Offenders Register's framework to include offenders were convicted in other jurisdictions before travelling to Pakistan, strengthening monitoring requirements for convicted offenders.

PNCA hosts calligraphy workshop with artist Azeem Iqbal

KISLAMABAD (APP): The Pakistan National Council of the Arts (PNCA), National Art Gallery, hosted a captivating calligraphy workshop led by acclaimed Pakistani calligrapher Azeem Iqbal.

The event drew aspiring artists and calligraphy enthusiasts, offering them a unique opportunity to learn from one of Pakistan's finest calligraphy masters.

The workshop was a continuation of Mr. Iqbal's prestigious calligraphy exhibition, which is currently on display at PNCA.

Mr. Iqbal introduced participants to the Kufic script, one of the oldest and most revered styles of Arabic calligraphy. Through live demonstrations, he showcased his precision and creativity, providing insight into the techniques and philosophy that define his work. Participants were given

hands-on training, allowing them to explore the intricate art form while gaining a deeper understanding of its cultural and artistic significance.

The attendees expressed their appreciation for the workshop, describing it as an enriching experience that not only enhanced their skills but also deepened their connection to the heritage of calligraphy. One participant remarked, "It was a privilege to learn directly from a master. The workshop was truly inspiring."

Director of the Visual Arts Division at PNCA, Mariam Ahmed highlighted the organization's commitment to promoting traditional arts, stating, "PNCA is dedicated to preserving and showcasing the timeless art of calligraphy. We are grateful to Mr. Azeem Iqbal for sharing his expertise and inspiring the next

generation of artists."

The ongoing calligraphy exhibition at PNCA is a celebration of artistic treasures, featuring Mr. Iqbal's masterpieces alongside a curated collection of works from Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) member states. This vibrant display highlights the shared cultural heritage of the region, fostering unity and harmony through the arts.

Visitors to the exhibition can experience the profound beauty of traditional calligraphy, exploring its deep connections to the diverse cultural narratives of ECO member nations. The exhibition underscores PNCA's mission to promote creativity, preserve cultural heritage, and encourage regional cooperation. The exhibition is open to the public at the National Art Gallery, PNCA, Islamabad, until January 19.



ISLAMABAD: Heavy machinery being used for construction work of Serena Chowk Underpass Project during development work in Federal Capital.

Japan donates \$1.5 million

KABUL (Khaama Press): The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in Afghanistan has announced that Japan has contributed \$1.5 million to support the country. According to a statement released on Tuesday, the funds will be used to improve maternal, child, and youth healthcare services in Kandahar, Faryab, and Nangarhar provinces. UNFPA highlighted that Japan's contribution is an "additional financial aid" to Afghanistan, aimed at addressing critical healthcare needs in the region.

Thermal power plants active

KABUL (TOLOnews): Hekmatullah Maiwandi, the spokesperson for the Breshna Company, has stated that thermal power generation plants are currently operational in the provinces of Kabul, Farah, Zabul and Paktika. The thermal power plant in the capital has been able to meet part of the energy demand. Some provinces have thermal power, including Zabul, Kandahar, Farah, Paktika, and other provinces where the grid has not been extended and thermal power is utilized.

Afghanistan to build two dams in Herat

HERAT (TOLOnews): The Ministry of Energy and Water of Afghanistan states that it has signed a contract with a private construction company for the construction of two water dams in Herat province.

According to officials of this ministry, the first phase of the contract includes the survey and design of these dams, and construction operations will begin after the completion of this phase.

Matuallah Abid, spokesperson for the Ministry of Energy and Water, said: "Honorable Mawlawi Abdul Latif Mansoor, the acting minister of energy and water, has signed an agreement for the survey, design, and implementation of two water dams in Herat province with a private company. Based on this agreement, the company can start the survey and design work, and the Ministry of Energy and Water will coop-

erate according to this agreement."

Residents of Herat have welcomed the construction of these dams, considering it a beneficial step for agriculture and the prevention of wastage of running water.

"Whenever a dam, road, or developmental project is built in any corner of the country, agriculture and the people's economy improve, and people are saved from miserable conditions," said Mohammad Ali Mohammadi, a resident of Herat.

"Afghanistan is an agricultural country and needs water management. We are happy that these dams are being constructed, and our dear farmers will be able to use this water," stated Another Herat resident, Mahmoodi.

The construction of water dams and the management of water resources play a key role in economic

growth and creating job opportunities in the country.

"The main goal of building dams is the utilization of water in agriculture. Most people in Adraskan district are engaged in farming and livestock, and these dams can have a significant impact on strengthening these two sectors," said Mohammad Rafiq Shaheer, head of the Herat Experts Council, spoke about the importance of these dams.

While the contract for the construction of these two dams in Herat has been signed, the construction of several other water and power dams is also underway in various provinces of Afghanistan.

Officials of the caretaker government have emphasized that managing running water is one of their main priorities to improve agriculture and strengthen the country's economy.

IFJ calls for immediate release of journalist

KABUL (Amu TV): The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and the Afghan Independent Journalists' Association (AIJA) in a joint statement called on the Taliban to immediately release Mahdi Ansari, a reporter for the Afghan News Agency (Afka), and drop all charges against him.

According to the statement, Ansari was detained by Taliban intelligence in the Dasht-e-Barchi neighborhood of Kabul on charges of collaborating with independent media outlets deemed "anti-Taliban" and accused of spreading propaganda against the Taliban.

This is the second time Ansari has been detained by the Taliban. In October 2023, he was arrested after posting on Facebook about the anniversary of a suicide bombing at an educational center linked to the Hazara community.

The IFJ and AIJA highlighted the escalating pressures on journalists and media workers in Afghanistan since the Taliban took power on Aug. 15, 2021. The groups noted that more than half of Afghanistan's media outlets have shut down, with a significant increase in arbitrary arrests, harassment, and violence against journalists.

"Journalists in Afghanistan continue to face enormous challenges and are at risk of detention, violence, and intimidation," the statement read. "The Taliban have imposed severe restrictions and censorship on media and press activities."

The IFJ also urged the Taliban to cease arbitrary detentions of media professionals and called on the international community to take a stronger stance in defending press freedom in Afghanistan. While the Taliban deny detaining Ansari, the Afghanistan Journalists Center reported that he has been sentenced to 18 months in prison following his arrest.

A friend of Ansari told the reporter disappeared on Saturday evening, Oct. 14, after leaving the Afka News Agency office in the Pul-e-Surkh area of Kabul. His whereabouts remained unknown for days, sparking concern among his family and colleagues.

A family member later confirmed that Ansari had been detained by Taliban intelligence and was being held at the Taliban's Directorate 40 facility in the Shash Darak area of Kabul.

According to sources close to Ansari, his trial was held on Jan. 2, raising further questions about due process and the circumstances of his detention.

Kabul and Tehran discuss strengthening political, economic ties



KABUL (TOLOnews): Zia Ahmad Takal, the Director of Public Relations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said about this meeting: "The political, economic, and cultural relations of his country with Afghanistan, a neighboring and brotherly country, will further expand, and the continuation and development of bilateral relations will be emphasized using the existing opportunities."

"The relations between both countries should expand further, and some existing challenges should be addressed by the new Iranian government. One of the major challenges is the Afghan refugees, who should live with dignity in Iran," said Fazlur Rahman Oria, a political affairs expert.

Meanwhile, the Iranian Ambassador in Kabul, in a meeting with the acting head of the Central Bank of Afghanistan, described the expansion of trade and banking relations between the two countries as valuable and assured comprehensive cooperation in this regard. The acting head of the Central Bank of Afghanistan also considered the development of banking relations and cooperation between Kabul and Tehran to be impactful on the trade progress of the two countries.

Hasibullah Noori, the spokesperson of the Central Bank of Afghanistan, said about this meeting: "In this meeting, the acting gover-

nor of the Central Bank mentioned that banking connections are very important for investment progress and assured cooperation."

"In the future, we can establish banking systems in Afghanistan with the cooperation of Iran, which will be standard and allow our fellow citizens to make good use of the capital they have in the banks," said Shamsur Rahman Ahmadzai, an economic affairs expert. Alireza Bigdeli was introduced as the acting ambassador of Iran in Kabul on the 4th of Qaws (solar year) this year and arrived in Kabul on the 10th of Qaws. He described his main mission as strengthening neighborly relations with Afghanistan.

Taliban leader rejects Haqqanis' push for key ministry appointment

KABUL (Amu TV): Internal divisions within the Taliban have resurfaced, as sources report that the Haqqani faction sought to appoint Ahmad Haqqani, the eldest son of Khalil-ur-Rahman Haqqani, as the new minister of refugees. However, the Taliban's leader, Hibatullah Akhundzada, rejected the request by naming Abdul Kabir, the former deputy chief minister for political affairs, to lead the ministry.

Six days after Akhundzada's decision, there has been no official announcement of Abdul Kabir assuming his new role or any update regarding the now-vacant deputy prime minister position.

On December 13, following the funeral of Khalil-ur-Rahman Haqqani in Paktia province, Taliban officials, including Abdul Kabir, symbolically placed the turban of succession on Ahmad Haqqani's head.

According to sources, this gesture was intended to signal to Akhundzada in Kandahar that Ahmad Haqqani was the Haqqani faction's preferred candidate for the ministry.

For three years, the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation was led by Khalil-ur-Rahman Haqqani, the uncle of Sirajuddin Haqqani, the Taliban's interior minister. The ministry is viewed by the Haqqani network as a key asset.

Sources indicate that Akhundzada's appointment of Abdul Kabir was a deliberate rejection of the Haqqani faction's proposal, signaling his intent to consolidate authority and counterbalance the influence of the Haqqani network within the Taliban's hierarchy.

Mohammad Asif Siddiqui, a former deputy speaker of the Senate, said the move underscores Akhundzada's determination to prevent factional power struggles. "At Khalil-ur-Rahman Haqqani's funeral, the turban was placed on his son's head in the presence of

Abdul Kabir and other Taliban officials, implying he should take over the ministry. But Akhundzada decided otherwise, asserting that there should be no dual leadership and emphasizing his own authority over the Haqqani network."

Despite Akhundzada's directive, the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation remains without an official leader, and Abdul Kabir's name has yet to appear on the ministry's website or social media channels. Analysts point to the delay as evidence of mounting tensions between the Kandahari faction, loyal to Akhundzada, and the Haqqani network.

Sport should not be politicized: Cricketers

KABUL (TOLOnews): Athletes and fans of Afghan cricket have criticized politicians from England and South Africa who are calling to boycott matches with Afghanistan's cricket team.

They emphasized their support for Afghanistan's players and national cricket team, stating that cricket should not be linked to politics. These views arose due to allegations of women's rights violations by Afghanistan's interim government.

"Afghan cricket has been bringing smiles to people for many years. We ask the international community and officials of this sport on a global level not to politicize sports," said Milad Azizi, one of the country's athletes, said about cricket.

"My request to foreign countries is not to politicize sports, especially cricket, gymnastics, volleyball, and football, as athletes in these disciplines are ambassadors

of peace," said Shafi, a veteran athlete.

Some residents of the capital also told TOLOnews that sports, particularly cricket, bring smiles to them and should be supported.

"The Afghan national cricket team has achieved many successes, but certain individuals with agendas want to politicize this sport," said Lima Shirzai, a cricket fan," said Lima Shirzai, a cricket fan.

On average, 39 families displaced daily by climate change

KABUL (Pajhwok): Since the start of the last solar year, over 24,000 families in Afghanistan have been displaced, more than 50% in Herat and Helmand provinces, due to droughts, earthquakes, floods and other natural calamities.

The affected households are seeking urgent assistance, while experts stress the need to address the detrimental impacts of climate change. They want the caretaker government and the international community to accelerate efforts to prevent further disasters.

The government claims having made significant efforts to mitigate the negative impacts of climate change within the country. It has also shared relevant information, plans and proposals regarding climate change risks with international organizations.

Climate change

The Earth's climate is changing rapidly. Global warming is causing droughts in some regions, while in others, it leads to severe storms, heavy rainfall and floods.

The changes, in turn, contribute to the melting of glaciers, raising river water levels.

Research indicates that climate change, particularly an increase in rainfall and the melting of glaciers, can also trigger underground threats such as earthquakes

and volcanic activity.

Afghanistan is one of the countries emitting little greenhouse gas (just 0.19 percent of global emissions). However, according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), it is the fourth most affected country by the climate change crisis.

39 families displaced on daily basis

The Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MoRR) says since the start of the previous solar year (1402) till January 12, 24,297 families have been displaced due to natural disasters.

As many as 7,429 families have been displaced in Herat, 5,194 in Helmand, 2,129 in Nimroz, 1,960 in Ghor, 1,734 in Badakhshan, 1,376 in Takhar, 1,215 in Uruzgan, 462 in Faryab, 380 in Kandahar, 366 in Daikundi, 340 in Farah, 190 in Kunduz, 161 in Bamyan, 145 in Maidan Wardak, 145 in Ghazni, 130 in Samangan, 117 in Laghman, 102 in Parwan, 97 in Sar-i-Pul, 97 in Paktia, 94 in Kapisa, 70 in Panjshir, 58 in Paktika, 37 in Kunar, 13 in Badghis, 18 in Jawzjan, 14 in Zabul, 11 in Khost, and three in Baghlan.

Nearly 31 percent of all the displaced families are in Herat and more than 21 percent in Helmand, with

the remaining spread across 28 other provinces. The primary causes of displacement in Herat and Helmand are earthquakes and droughts.

The previous year, earthquakes struck Herat and surrounding provinces, causing significant damage, particularly in the districts of Ghoryan and Zinda Jan.

The National Disaster Management Authority had reported the earthquake in Herat caused 2,053 deaths and injuries, besides razing 1,320 houses.

Last year, Helmand's Deputy Director of Information Maulvi Mohammad Qasim Riyaz said due to the drought over the past two years, 2,000 families had been forced to leave their areas in four districts of the province.

MoRR says no families have been displaced due to natural disasters in Kabul, Logar, Balkh and Nangarhar provinces since the beginning of the previous year.

Without going into details, the ministry said during the period, 13,168 families were displaced due to non-natural disasters, more than half of them from Kabul, Kunduz and Jawzjan.

The rest were from 24 other provinces.

The ministry said thousands of families in Kabul were displaced due to the

demolition of camps that had been constructed illegally.

Abdul Mutalib Haqqani, spokesman for MoRR, recalled families were displaced by wars in the past. But since the re-establishment of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA), much of the displacement has been forced by droughts, floods, earthquakes and other natural disasters.

The National Statistics and Information Authority indicates over 7,700 families have returned to their areas since last year. Some families may have returned this year as well, but their number is yet to be released.

Number of displaced families falls

The lower number of displaced families this year is because the earthquake in Herat last year displaced many people, while no major incidents have occurred so far this year.

The disasters have also caused considerable human and financial damage.

Mullah Janan Saïq, a spokesman for the NDMA, said without providing further details, since the beginning of the current (1403) year, approximately 1,175 people have lost their lives due to natural and non-natural disasters, 1,911 others have been injured, more than 21,000 houses

have been either completely or partially destroyed, and nearly 17,000 livestock have perished.

IDPs facing whole host of challenges

Abdul Wahid, a resident from the Shalbafan village of Injil district, was displaced to the Hoz-i-Karbas area of Herat City with his family due to earthquakes. He says the quakes destroyed their house and now he lives in a rented house, facing severe financial difficulties.

Mahmood, a resident of Dani village in the Nawzad district of Helmand, has been displaced to Lashkargah due to drought for the past two years.

He says, "We had no water; there were about two or three hundred houses in our area, but now there are no more than ten houses left. All of them have been displaced. Our life was better there, having water, wheat and crops. But here we have been struggling daily, worrying about how to survive."

Ismail, an inhabitant of the Qadis district of Badghis, has been displaced to Herat City as a result of drought. He has been living in a tent with his family for over two and a half years.

He says, "We were facing problems there and came here for the sake of our children's well-being.

Some of us went to Pakistan, but we didn't find any shelter there either. Now, we are living in a place that has only a boundary wall. We can't afford to pay the rent of a basic shelter for our children. Our children are walking barefoot, and we can't even buy them shoes."

Ismail explains they have to burn paper in the evening to warm themselves and sell paper to buy food and water for their children. "We have a patient but don't have water here. We thought we'd be better off here, but it's been even more difficult."

Ismail appealed to wealthy citizens to visit the place and provide them badly-needed support.

The Mohammad Alam, a resident of Jandaq village in the Murghab district of Badghis, migrated to the Ferozkoh in the wake of devastating floods.

He says they were displaced seven months ago, with two months spent in the mountains and four in tents in Ferozkoh. He is now living in one of the government-provided shelters for flood victims.

These displaced people are eager to return to their areas say if droughts end. Reports indicate since the beginning of last year, aid has been provided to thousands of affected families. Many of them have been

given houses.

Disaster if adverse effects not tackled

Climate change and environmental expert Syed Mohammad Sulaimankhel says Afghanistan is highly vulnerable to climate change, whose effects are increasing day by day. Absent remedial actions, he warns, it will lead to a humanitarian disaster.

Sulaimankhel urges the government to prioritise addressing this issue, using all available resources. He recommends IEA should enhance cooperation with all countries, particularly those affected by climate change, to ensure Afghanistan receives help in this area.

He opines: "The international community should not politicise the issue and must provide necessary support to Afghanistan in preventing the impacts of climate change."

He notes central provinces are currently facing severe droughts. "As droughts increase, more families will be displaced, affecting agriculture and other sectors. If measures are not taken, water levels will drop further, agricultural products will be destroyed and we will lose water reserves."

He suggests the Ministry of Agriculture should distribute drought-resistant seeds. In order to minimise

the impacts of climate change, the government should promote public awareness in affected areas through mosques, scholars, schools and local communities.

According to Sulaimankhel, the government should establish emergency centres in the worst-affected provinces and strengthen prediction mechanisms for better preparations in advance.

Preventing climate change impacts

Eng. Roohullah Amin, head of the Climate Change Department at the National Environmental Protection Agency, acknowledges Afghanistan has been harmed in various sectors. He asked the international community to assist Afghanistan financially and technically.

He says the National Environmental Protection Agency has made efforts to alleviate the negative impacts of climate change and has shared proposals and information about Afghanistan's vulnerable situation with global organisations, coordinating with relevant bodies.

Domestically, these agencies have held regular meetings with the departments concerned on implement existing projects and preventing the negative impacts of climate change.

Regularization of KP tourism police announced

KP CM distributes interest-free loans cheques among youth

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The fourth meeting of the Board of Directors of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Culture and Tourism Authority was held here Tuesday at the Chief Minister's Secretariat under the chairmanship of Chief Minister Ali Amin Khan Gandapur.

Several important decisions were made after deliberation on various agenda items. Provincial cabinet members, including Zahid Chun Zeb, Brigadier (Retd) Musaddiq Abbasi, and Additional Chief Secretary Planning & Development Ikramullah Khan, along with other board members, attended the meeting.

Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur announced the regularization of Tourism Police personnel and approved an increase in their monthly salary from PKR 36,000 to PKR 45,000. To further strengthen the Tourism Police, the board decided to provide additional heavy bikes and advanced communication gadgets. The chief minister also directed the tourism department to take steps to identify new tourist destinations in the province.

He instructed that at least four new tourism sites, and a project be reflected in the upcoming ADP for their development. Highlighting the growing number of tourists, he noted that 15 million domestic and international tourists visited Khyber Pakhtunkhwa during the last season, and emphasized the need to explore and develop new tourists spots. Gandapur issued directives to amend and publicize the master plan for the Thandiani Integrated Tourism Zone and emphasized the need for simultaneous construction of access roads for all integrated tourism zones.

He reiterated that tourism remains one of the province's priority sectors, offering significant potential for job creation and investment. The board

approved the establishment of finance and HR committees under the Board of Directors. Additionally, it directed the formation of outsourcing, investment, and culture committees to enhance the operational efficiency of the tourism sector.

The Chief Minister concluded by underlining the immense opportunities in the tourism sector and reaffirmed the government's commitment to promoting the province as a premier destination for both domestic and international travelers.

Meanwhile, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has taken a significant step toward empowering and providing employment opportunities for its youth by initiating the distribution of interest-free loans under the Ehsaas Nojawan Program.

A ceremony to distribute loan cheques was held on Tuesday at the Chief Minister's House in Peshawar, with Chief Minister Ali Amin Khan Gandapur as the chief guest.

Provincial cabinet members, including Syed Fakhar Jahan, Brigadier (Retd) Muhammad Sajjad, Barrister Muhammad Ali Saif, and Muzammil Aslam, along with officials from the Department of Youth Affairs and selected beneficiaries of the program also attended the event.

The Ehsaas Nojawan Program is a flagship initiative under the umbrella of Ihsas Initiatives of the provincial government aimed at economically empowering the young lot of the province by providing them with interest-free loans to start their own businesses. This three-year program, launched with an initial budget of PKR 3 billion, has an allocation of PKR 1.1 billion in the current fiscal year. This program consists of two components.

The first component of the program is being implemented in collaboration with the Bank of Khyber, through which interest-free loans

worth PKR .00 billion are being provided. Under this component, clusters of three to five individuals aged 18 to 35 are eligible for loans ranging from PKR 1 million to PKR 5 million. A flexible repayment schedule spanning eight years has been designed, with the first 20 months as a grace period during which no repayments are required.

The second phase, in collaboration with Akhuwat Microfinance Bank, has a budget of PKR 2 billion. This phase offers interest-free loans between PKR 100,000 and PKR 500,000 to individuals aged 18 to 40 for small-scale business ventures. Special quotas have been reserved for women and persons with disabilities.

Addressing the ceremony, Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur said that three more programs under the Ehsaas initiative-Ehsaas Apna Ghar Program, Ehsaas Rozgar Program, and Ehsaas Hunar Program-will also be launched very soon with a combined allocation of PKR 15 billion in the current budget. The chief minister emphasized that the Ehsaas Nojawan Program is a critical step toward financial independence for the youth, aligning with the vision of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's founding chairman. The initiative aims to encourage young people not only to create employment opportunities for themselves but also to generate jobs for others.

He urged the youth to prioritize entrepreneurship over seeking employment, highlighting the immense potential for growth in business ventures. The provincial government, he assured, is committed to providing full support to young individuals with innovative business ideas. Concluding his address, Gandapur stressed the importance of hard work and integrity, stating, "Honesty is the best strategy, and there is no substitute for hard work."



AKORA KHATTAK: Adviser to KP CM on Information, Barrister Saif meeting with head of Jamiat Ulma-e-Islam (Haqani), Hamid-ul-Haq Haqani.

Saif visits Darul Uloom Haqqania Akora Khattak

F.P. Report

NOWSHERA: Advisor to Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Information, Barrister Dr. Saif Tuesday visited to Darul Uloom Haqqania Akora Khattak and inspected its various sections.

During his visit, CM aide inspected various sections of Darul Uloom including modern academic block, computer lab, central library, classrooms and other under construction projects.

Addressing the students, Barrister Dr. Saif said that Darul Uloom Haqqania is an important religious institution of KP and. He paid tribute to Sheikh-ul-Hadith Maulana Abdul Haq (RA) and Shaheed Maulana Sami-ul-Haq (RA) stating that the academic contributions of Jamia Haqqania are globally recognized. He emphasized that religious and sectarian harmony is foundation of a peaceful society and institutions like Darul Uloom Haqqania has a great responsibility in this regard.

Barrister Dr. Saif added that in this era of knowledge and reasoning, we must influence the world through our intellectual strength. On this occasion, Deputy Administrator Maulana Rashid-ul-Haq Sami praised Barrister Dr. Saif for playing a central role in resolving the conflict in Kurram through peaceful means. He stated that Darul Uloom Haqqania has always worked beyond sectarian differences to promote harmony among Shia, Sunni, and other schools of thought.

Uzair Baloch acquitted

F.P. Report

KARACHI: A District and Sessions Court in Karachi has acquitted alleged Lyari gang war kingpin Uzair Baloch in yet another case related to killing of three persons including a policeman.

As per details, the allied Lyari gang war kingpin was acquitted by the local court in a case registered against him at Chakiwara police station in 2009. According to defence counsel Farooq Haider Jatoi, Uzair Baloch had 'nothing' to do with the killings and was 'unlawfully' implicated in the case.

Farooq Haider Jatoi said that Uzair Baloch was implicated in the case on statements of other accused who are already acquitted from the charges. "There was no evidence linking the accused to the case." It may be noted here that the alleged notorious Lyari gangster has now been acquitted in the 36th case.

Earlier, Uzair Baloch, his brother Zubair Baloch and others filed petitions in an anti-terrorism court hearing, seeking their acquittal in murder case of rival gangster Arshad Pappu. ATC judge expressed resentment over absence of former investigation officer of the case and DSP Baghdadi Abid Ansari and summoned him in the next hearing of the case.

The court ordered concerned SSP to produce the former IO of the case in the next hearing. "No evidence exists against Uzair Baloch and other accused in the murder case," defence lawyer Abid Zaman argued before the court. He pleaded for acquittal of Uzair and other accused in the case. In August last year, a district and session court acquitted Uzair Baloch in another in case related to a police encounter.

Sindh govt introduced economic framework

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Chairman Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has said that the Sindh government has introduced a successful economic framework to strengthen the national economy through the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model. He emphasized that the Sindh government is enhancing the quality of life for citizens across various sectors, ranging from healthcare to infrastructure, through these innovative partnerships.

According to a press release issued by the Media Cell Bilawal House, Chairman PPP presided over a significant meeting at Bilawal House regarding public-private partnership projects in Sindh. The meeting was attended by Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah, Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon, and Minister for Energy Syed Nasir Hussain Shah.

Special Assistant to the Chief Minister on Public-Private Partnership, Qasim Naveed Qamar, briefed Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari on various PPP projects aimed at enhancing infrastructure in sectors such as agriculture, fisheries, and electronic vehicle charging. The meeting was informed that infrastructure improvement projects under the PPP model in Sindh's agriculture sector would lead to a substantial increase in the production of crops, including rice, potatoes, bananas, oranges,



mangoes, guavas, and dates.

Additionally, updates were provided on PPP projects in the fisheries sector, focused on boosting exports through improved packaging and processing. Discussions also included partnerships with international organizations to establish electronic vehicle charging infrastructure in the province.

Expressing his views on the occasion, Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari emphasized that through PPP projects in agriculture, fisheries, and other sectors, Pakistan can achieve an economic revolution. He further pointed out that Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto envisioned the concept of public-private partnership in 1993, and today, its positive outcomes are evident to all.

The meeting was also attended by Sindh Chief Secretary Asif Haider Shah and Director General of Public-Private Partnership, Asad Zamin.

Sindh CM protests with central govt over Hyderabad-Sukkur Motorway:

The Hyderabad-Sukkur Motorway project has become a point of contention between the Sindh and the federal governments, with Sindh Chief

Minister Murad Ali Shah raising objections over 'perceived injustice.'

In a letter of protest to the federal government, Murad Ali Shah highlighted the disparity in project allocations under the National Highway Authority (NHA) plan. The letter stated that out of 105 projects approved by the NHA, Sindh has only been allocated 6 projects.

In contrast, Punjab has been given 33 projects, securing 38% of the total NHA budget, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan have been allocated 17% and 23% of the budget, respectively. For Sindh, merely 4 per cent of the NHA budget has been reserved for development projects, Murad Ali Shah claimed.

The Sindh CM further stated in his letter that Rs708 billion worth of projects were proposed for Punjab, with Rs62 billion allocated in the budget, Sindh's projects amounted to Rs78 billion, with only Rs7 billion set aside for their completion. Murad Ali Shah expressed deep dissatisfaction, calling for a fair distribution of resources and accusing the federal government of neglecting Sindh's development needs, the letter read.

Police Lines blast accused remanded

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: A special Anti Terrorism Court in Peshawar on Tuesday extended the physical remand of Muhammad Wali, a facilitator involved in the Peshawar Police Lines bombing.

The police had requested an extension of his remand to continue the investigation. The ATC Judge, Wali Muhammad Khan granted a one-day extension. Muhammad Wali, a former police officer with links to a banned organization, is under investigation. The investigation has not yet been completed, so the court allowed for an additional day of remand to further question him.

120 killed by shelling in Sudan

KHARTOUM (AFP): Sudanese volunteer rescuers said shelling of an area of Omdurman, the capital Khartoum's twin city just across the Nile River, killed more than 120 people.

The "random shelling" on Monday in western Omdurman resulted in the deaths of 120 civilians, said the Ombada Emergency Response Room, part of a network of volunteer rescuers across the war-torn country. The network described the toll as preliminary and did not specify who was behind the attack.

The rescuers said medical supplies were in critically short supply as health workers struggled to treat "a large number of wounded people suffering from varying degrees of injuries." Fighting between the army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has escalated in recent weeks after more than 20 months of war in Sudan.

N Korea launches missiles toward eastern waters

SEOUL (AP): North Korea on Tuesday test-fired multiple missiles toward its eastern waters, South Korea's military said, as it continued its weapons demonstrations ahead of Donald Trump's return to the White House. South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said the short-range ballistic missiles were fired from a northern inland area and flew about 250 kilometers (155 miles) before landing in waters between the Korean Peninsula and Japan.

The joint chiefs said the South Korean military has strengthened surveillance while sharing the launch information with the US and Japanese militaries. It said it strongly condemns the test, describing it as a "clear provocation" that poses a serious threat to the region's peace and stability. It was North Korea's second launch event of 2025,

following a ballistic launch last week.

North Korea said the Jan. 6 test was a new hyper-sonic intermediate-range missile designed to strike remote targets in the Pacific as leader Kim Jong Un vowed to further expand his collection of nuclear-capable weapons to counter rival nations. North Korea is coming off a torrid year in weapons testing. The systems it demonstrated in 2024 included solid-fuel intercontinental ballistic missiles designed to strike the US mainland and various shorter-range missiles designed to overwhelm missile defenses in South Korea.

There concerns that its military capabilities could advance further through technology transfers from Russia, as the two countries align over the war in Ukraine. At a year-end political conference, Kim

vowed to implement the "toughest" anti-US policy and criticized the Biden administration's efforts to strengthen security cooperation with Seoul and Tokyo, which he described as a "nuclear military bloc for aggression."

North Korean state media did not specify Kim's policy plans or mention any specific comments about Trump. During his first term as president, Trump met Kim three times for talks on the North's nuclear program. Even if Trump returns to the White House, a quick resumption of diplomacy with North Korea could be unlikely. Kim's strengthened position - built on his expanded nuclear arsenal, deepening alliance with Russia and the weakening enforcement of US international sanctions - presents new challenges to resolving the nuclear stand-off, experts say.

PNS Yamama visits Turkiya

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The newly commissioned Pakistan Navy Ship YAMAMA, during maiden voyage from Romania to Pakistan, visited Golcuk and Aksaz Naval Bases Turkiye and participated in Turkish Navy Exercise MAVI VATAN-2025. Earlier, upon arrival, the ship was received by representatives of Turkish Naval Forces along with Naval Attaché of Pakistan.

PNS YAMAMA's visit to Turkiye was aimed at strengthening brotherly relations and reaffirming Pakistan's commitment to foster wide-ranging bilateral relations and defence ties with Turkiye. In same context, during the visit, a number of professional and social activities such as leadership engagements,



visits to Turkish Naval facilities, professional interactions and discourse on professional subjects of mutual interests were conducted. Deputy Commander Turkish Naval Fleet, Vice Admiral Ibrahim Ozden Kocer also visited PNS YAMAMA and received a detailed brief on Ship's capabilities.

Besides port calls, PNS YAMAMA participated in Turkish Navy Exercise MAVI VATAN-2025. PNS YAMAMA was the only foreign participating unit other than Turkish Naval

Ships. The participation of PNS YAMAMA underscores strong bond forged by years of collaboration, brotherhood and mutual respect between Turkish Navy and Pakistan Navy.

PNS YAMAMA is the last of four Offshore Patrol Vessels built for Pakistan Navy by DAMEN Shipyards, Galati, Romania. These versatile, high-tech, and state-of-the-art platforms are designed to operate in contested maritime environments and are equipped to project deterrence across all domains of warfare.

NATO launches new Baltic Sea mission to protect undersea cables

BRUSSELS: NATO chief Mark Rutte says the US-led military alliance will launch a new mission to protect undersea cables in the Baltic Sea region. Rutte made the announcement at a meeting attended by the leaders of Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden in the Finnish capital, Helsinki, on Tuesday.

"It will involve a range of assets, including frigates and maritime patrol aircraft, among others, and will enhance our vigilance in the Baltic," the secretary general told reporters. Rutte also said that under the so-called Baltic Sentry mission, a small fleet of naval drones will be deployed "to provide enhanced surveillance and deterrence".

The Baltic Sea has been the scene of several high-profile infrastructure incidents since the onset of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in

February 2022. In September 2022, a series of underwater blasts ruptured the Nord Stream pipelines that carried Russian gas to Europe, the cause of which has yet to be determined.

No one has claimed responsibility while Russia, without providing evidence, has repeatedly said the attack was carried out by the United States and United Kingdom, both of whom have denied the allegations. In October 2023, an undersea gas pipeline between Finland and Estonia was shut down after it was damaged by the anchor of a Chinese cargo ship.

Most recently, Finland reported that Eagle S tanker had been detained in connection with a subsea cable damage incident that occurred on Christmas Day. Rutte said more than 95 percent of internet traffic is secured via undersea cables, with 1.3 million kilometres (808,000 miles) of

cables guaranteeing an estimated \$10 trillion worth of financial transactions daily.

"Across the alliance, we have seen elements of a campaign to destabilise our societies through cyberattacks, assassination attempts and sabotage, including possible sabotage of undersea cables in the Baltic Sea," Rutte said. Rutte said NATO's adversaries must know that the alliance will not accept attacks on its critical infrastructure, underlining that "we will do everything in our power to make sure that we fight back".

Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson told reporters as he arrived for the meeting in Helsinki that it was "totally unacceptable that these damages seem to have been increasing in numbers recently" but expressed caution in apportioning blame. — Aljazeera