

Another polio case reported
F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The Regional Reference Laboratory for Polio Eradication at the National Institute of Health (NIH) has confirmed the detection of the wild poliovirus type 1 (WPV1) in the country. The lab confirmed one polio case from a female child from Dera Ismail Khan. The onset of this case was on December 31, 2024.



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Israel, Hamas agree to ceasefire deal

DOHA (Reuters): Israel and Hamas agreed to a deal to halt fighting in Gaza and exchange Israeli hostages for Palestinian prisoners, an official briefed on the deal has told Reuters, opening the way to a possible end to a 15-month fighting that has upended the Middle East.

An Israeli source has told Haaretz that "the crisis with Hamas has been resolved", in relation to a Gaza ceasefire deal. An official said that Hamas presented new demands regarding the Philadelphi corridor, contrary to the maps approved by the cabinet and American mediators, adding that Israel strongly rejects "any changes to these maps". An Israeli source told Haaretz that only "small technical details" are delaying the deal, and that Israel hopes the first hostages will be released at the beginning of next week, before the inauguration of President-elect Donald Trump.

The Israel-Hamas deal outlines a six-week initial ceasefire phase that includes the gradual withdrawal of Israeli forces from central

Gaza and the return of displaced Palestinians to north Gaza, says an official briefed on the agreement, Reuters reports. The deal requires 600 truckloads of humanitarian aid to be allowed into Gaza every day of the ceasefire, 50 of them carrying fuel, with 300 of the trucks allocated to the north.

Hamas will release 33 Israeli hostages, including all women (soldiers and civilians), children, and men over 50. Hamas will release hostages over six weeks, with three hostages released every week and the remainder before the end of the period. Israel will release 30 Palestinian detainees for every civilian hostage and 50 Palestinian detainees for every Israeli female soldier Hamas releases.

All living hostages will be released first followed by remains of dead hostages. Implementation of the agreement will be guaranteed by Qatar, Egypt and the US.

Negotiations over the second phase of the agreement will begin by the 16th day of

phase one. The second phase is expected to include the release of all remaining hostages, a permanent ceasefire and the complete withdrawal of Israeli soldiers. Negotiators in Qatar worked to hammer out the final details of a ceasefire between Israel and the militant group Hamas in Gaza after 15 months of war that has killed tens of thousands, destroyed much of the enclave and upended the Middle East.

An Israeli official said Hamas had agreed to a Gaza ceasefire and hostage return proposal shared by Qatari negotiators. But Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said shortly afterward that Hamas had not yet given a response.

Officials from mediators Qatar, Egypt and the US as well as Israel and Hamas said on Tuesday that an agreement for a truce in the besieged enclave, the release of hostages held there, and the freeing of Palestinian prisoners detained in Israel, was closer than ever. There was no comment from Hamas on Wednesday

but a Palestinian official close to the talks said: "I am hopeful a deal can be signed tonight, latest tomorrow."

A senior Hamas official had told Reuters late on Tuesday it had not yet delivered its response because it was still waiting for Israel to submit maps showing how its forces would withdraw from Gaza. During months of on-off talks to achieve a truce, both sides have previously said they were close to a ceasefire only to hit last-minute obstacles. The broad outlines of the current deal have been in place since mid-2024.

If successful, the planned phased ceasefire could halt fighting that has left much of Gaza in ruins, displaced most of the enclave's pre-war population of 2.3 million and is still killing dozens of people a day. That in turn could ease tensions across the wider Middle East, where the war has fuelled conflict in the occupied West Bank, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen and Iraq, and raised fears of all-out war between Israel and Iran.

Pak Mly strongly reacts to Indian army chief remarks

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: Insinuating Pakistan as the epicenter of terrorism by the Indian Army Chief, is not only contrary to facts, but also an exercise in futility to beat the dead horse of India's default position - blaming Pakistan for indigenous reaction to state-sponsored brutality. It is a classic case of extreme duplicity.

Remarks are an attempt to deflect world's attention from India's brutality in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IOJK), repression of minorities internally, and India's trans-national repression. The General Officer, in his earlier stint in IOJK personally oversaw the most brutal repression of Kashmiris. Such politically motivated and fallacious statements reflect the extreme politicization of Indian Army.

The world is witness to the India's hate-speech concludes that provoke genocide against Muslims. International community is not oblivious to India's trans-national assassinations, and Indian Security Forces' oppressive use of force against innocent civilians and gross human rights violations against unarmed Kashmiris. Such oppression has only

served to strengthen the resolve of Kashmiris for their right of self-determination, enshrined in the UN Security Council Resolutions.

Instead of trying to conjure up a non-existent terror infrastructure in Pakistan, it would be wise not to indulge in self-delusion, and appreciate the ground reality. The sobering fact that a senior serving Indian military officer is in Pakistan's custody, caught red-handed while orchestrating acts of terror against innocent civilians inside Pakistan, seems to have been conveniently ignored by the General.

Pakistan takes strong exception to such baseless and unfounded statements. Empathizing with the victims of Indian Army's brutality, it is hoped that civility, professionalism, and norms of state-to-state behaviour would guide the conduct of Indian Army's leadership, rather than pandering to political exigencies.

Meanwhile, Pakistan strongly rejected the baseless accusations and unfounded assertions made by India's Defence Minister and Chief of Army Staff on 13 and 14 January, about Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit Baltistan. "Jammu and Kashmir remains an internationally recognized

disputed territory, whose final status is to be determined in accordance with relevant United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions and the aspirations of the Kashmiri people. In this context, India has no legal or moral grounds to assert fictitious claims over the territories of Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan," Foreign Office Spokesperson said in a press statement. Such rhetoric from Indian leadership could not divert international attention from the grave human rights violations and oppressive measures being carried out in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir. These actions suppressed the legitimate and just struggle of the Kashmiri people for their inalienable right to self-determination, it was further asserted.

The spokesperson said "Pakistan also underscores that provocative statements of this nature are counterproductive to regional peace and stability. Instead of leveling baseless allegations against others, India must introspect and address its own documented involvement in orchestrating targeted assassinations, acts of subversion, and state-sponsored terrorism in foreign territories."

Pakistan was never technical ally of US, says John Kirby

WASHINGTON: White House official John Kirby on Wednesday clarified that Pakistan was never a tactical ally of the United States (US).

"Pakistan was never a technical ally of the United States. I mean, there was no treaty of alliance with Pakistan," Kirby told a press briefing in Washington, when asked about what the Joe Biden administration had done in response to Islamabad's appeal against rising cross-border terrorism.

However, he acknowledged that the United States and Pakistan have joined hands on numerous occasions in the fight against terrorism. "But certainly, over many, many years in the last couple of decades, we partnered with Pakistan as appropriate to deal with the terrorist threat," he mentioned.

"... that still exists on that spine between Afghanistan and Pakistan." Kirby also mentioned that the American authorities recognised that Pakistani people were still falling victim to terrorist violence coming from across that border. The White House official added that his administration, for as long as they'll be in office, remains committed to working with Pakistan to address those common threats and challenges.

"And that's not — that hasn't changed. It's not going to change." In August, 2024, spokesperson from the State Department Vedant Patel had reaffirmed his country's commitment to preventing groups like Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) from using Afghanistan as a hub for launching attacks against neighbouring countries including Pakistan.

Then the next month, spokesperson Matthew Miller had maintained that the US would continue to stand "shoulder to shoulder with Pakistan in its fight against terrorism". Later in December, Miller had reiterated US unwavering support for Pakistan in its fight against terrorism and extremism. "We continue to stand with Pakistan in its fight against terrorism and violent extremism," Miller said while addressing a weekly media briefing in Washington.

A US State Department report released in December noted that Pakistan has made substantial progress in countering terrorist financing and addressing regional extremist networks. In the most recent bilateral engagement, Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi and outgoing US Ambassador Donald Blome discussed strategies for addressing global challenges such as terrorism.

At the same time, the Pentagon has consistently highlighted its close ties with Pakistan's military establishment. Spokesperson Major General Patrick S. Ryder, for instance, emphasised the enduring nature of this relationship while discussing counterterrorism efforts at a recent briefing. "We value Pakistan as a partner in the region and have worked closely with Pakistan on counterterrorism efforts in the past and will continue to have those conversations," he said.

In another statement, Ryder underscored Washington's commitment to supporting Pakistan in combating terrorism. "In terms of Pakistani military strategy, as we've discussed before, the US of course values Pakistan as a partner when it comes to areas like counterterrorism," he stated, adding that such discussions would continue. This careful balancing act — acknowledging Pakistan's importance in addressing shared security concerns while avoiding deeper strategic obligations — has defined the Biden administration's approach. It reflects the enduring complexity of US-Pakistan ties, shaped by decades of collaboration, mistrust, and shifting geopolitical priorities. — Agencies

Four khwarij killed in N Waziristan

F.P. Report

RAWALPINDI: Security Forces conducted an intelligence based operation in general area Spinwam, North Waziristan District on reported presence of khwarij.

During conduct of the operation, own troops effectively engaged khwarij's location and after intense exchange of fire, four khwarij were sent to hell. Weapons and ammunition were also recovered from the killed khwarij, who remained actively involved in numerous terrorist activities against the security forces as well as target killing of innocent civilians. Sanitization operation is being carried out to eliminate any other khwarij 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 paid tribute to the security forces for eliminating four terrorists in an anti-terror operation in Spinwam area of North Waziristan.

S Korea's President Yoon arrested, probe continue

SEOUL: South Korean investigators began questioning President Yoon Suk-yeol on Wednesday after arresting him over accusations of insurrection following his briefly imposed martial law. The arrest ended a standoff between investigators and Yoon's presidential security team, which had prevented his detention earlier this month.

The Corruption Investigation Office announced it had "executed an arrest warrant for President Yoon Suk-yeol today at 10:33 am," after which he was seen stepping out of the car wearing a white shirt and he slipped through the CIO's back entrance for high-ranking officials. "I decided to answer to the CIO's investigations in order to prevent unsavory bloodshed," Yoon said in a pre-recorded video statement released by his lawyers following the arrest. "That does not mean I recognize the CIO's investigation as legitimate."

The CIO is leading a joint probe — together with military investigators and police — to probe allegations against Yoon. He is charged with insurrection and will be held at the Seoul Detention Center. Authorities now have 48 hours to question the president and seek a warrant to detain him for up to 20 days. The probe coincides with Yoon's impeachment trial at the Constitutional Court. The trial began on Tuesday, but hearings were adjourned minutes after it started due to Yoon's absence.

The trial follows the National Assembly's vote on Dec. 14 to impeach Yoon over the imposition of martial law on Dec. 3 — a move that lawmakers swiftly overturned hours after it was announced. Yoon is the first sitting president in South Korean history to be arrested. The CIO's legitimacy in investigating Yoon has come under scrutiny as the president and his lawyers argue that it lacks the legal authority to investigate insurrection charges.

"The CIO does not have the right to investigate insurrection charges ... We strongly urge them to follow due legal processes," Yoon's lawyer and friend of 40 years, Seok Dong-hyun, said in a press conference after the president was taken into custody. Prof. Hong Young-ki from the Korea University School of Law told Arab News it was a matter of interpreting the law, "but the court has already confirmed the legitimacy" by approving the arrest warrant. "The court already recognized the CIO's jurisdiction when it issued the arrest warrant. Then who can go against the court and say that the CIO is illegitimate? How can a third party do it?" he said.

"The president wants to say that, but how can someone who was merely a prosecutor say his interpretation is more correct than that of the court? I don't really think his argument has that much persuasive power." — Arab News

BD top court acquits ex-PM Khaleda Zia



DHAKA: Bangladesh's Supreme Court has acquitted ex-Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in a 2008 corruption case, overturning a previous 10-year prison sentence. In 2018, the country's High Court had convicted Zia and others of misappropriating funds meant for orphans when she was last prime minister, from 2001 to 2006.

But following an appeal, a five-judge panel led by Chief Justice Syed Refaat Ahmed on Wednesday acquitted Zia and all other defendants in the case, including her son and Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) acting chairperson Tarique Rahman. "The case was so vile that both those who appealed and those who couldn't appeal have all been acquitted," defence lawyer Zainul Abedin told the press after the verdict. The verdict is the latest judicial victory for 79-year-old Zia and her family from the BNP, one of two main groups that have dominated the country's politics.

Last November, Zia was also acquitted in another corruption case in which she had been accused of misappropriation of 31.5 million taka (\$260,000) from another trust in 2005. Earlier this month, she was flown to London to treat her health issues including liver cirrhosis and heart problems. Since August, Bangladesh has been ruled by an interim government led by Nobel Peace laureate Muhammad Yunus, after Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina resigned and fled to India following mass protests against her rule. — Aljazeera

Govt increases petrol price

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The federal government has increased the price of petrol by Rs3.47 per litre for the next fortnight, according to an official statement issued on Wednesday.

According to the Finance Division notification, the per litre price of high-speed diesel (HSD) has been increased from Rs258.34 to Rs260.95 after an increase of Rs2.61.

"The Oil & Gas Regulatory Authority (OGRA) has worked out the consumer prices of petroleum products in view of the fluctuations in the international market in the last fortnight," read the official notification. It said the new fuel prices will be effective from January 16.

Bilawal invited to US

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari on Wednesday received an invitation to attend the inauguration ceremony of the newly elected US President-elect Donald Trump.

The sources said that Bilawal Bhutto Zardari is expected to travel to the United States in the coming days. The sources added that he would attend Trump's inauguration and other related events in Washington.

Cut in power tariff to encourage investors

Prime Minister for an active role of all institutions to curb human smuggling

Saqib Mushtaq

ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday hailed the drastic reduction of Rs30 per unit in power tariff for electric vehicles (EVs) as a propitious step for the sector to boost the emission-less and eco-friendly vehicles in the country.

The prime minister, chairing a meeting to discuss the promotion of Electric Vehicle Policy, appreciated the Power Minister Awais Ahmed Leghari and his team for working out a convincing proposal aimed at facilitating the EV manufacturers in rolling out subsidized charge-based automobiles in the country.

"They (power minister and his team) have drastically reduced the tariff in this sector from Rs70 to Rs40 per unit. It will encourage the investors and industry partners to tap more investments into the EVs sector," he said.

He pointed out that the country was facing air pollution and climate change which was also a serious concern for the world. However, the country had actively participated in the global climate forums of COP-27 and COP-29 to present its stance in state-level negotiations on addressing climate-induced disasters and catastrophes like air pollution and solutions to resolve the risks due to it, he added.

"EVs are the right step to address air pollution that needs to be scaled up to contain climate change as it will help reduce air pollution, the massive import bill of fuels and preserve the pristine environment," PM Shehbaz said. Commenting on the com-



mercial aspect of the EVs, he said it was important to look into the electricity tariff offered to these industries that needed to be subsidized as the present Rs70 tariff was not viable for them to operate and continue their production.

Globally, he said these sectors were given special incentives focusing on the industry and the consumers at all tiers. During the meeting, officials from the Power Division briefed the forum on the new policy. They told that EV charging stations would now be charged at a reduced tariff of PKR 39.70 per unit instead of the existing PKR 71 per unit. This reduction is expected to lower travel costs by up to three times compared to petrol and diesel-powered vehicles.

The meeting highlighted that regulations for setting up EV charging stations and battery replacement points have been simplified to encourage investment. Under the new rules, particularly charging station registration and business licenses would be issued within 15 days, safety measures and annual inspections for charging stations would be ensured by NEPRA and a competitive market environment would be fostered to attract direct investments.

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif directed all the relevant institutions to play an active role in curbing

human smuggling and take strict legal action against the perpetrators defaming the country through their heinous business.

The prime minister, chairing a meeting to review the measures against human smuggling, instructed to address the shortage of manpower in the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) and ensure effective screening of those traveling abroad at the airports.

The prime minister directed the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting to run an awareness campaign on illegal foreign travel and human smuggling. He also called for seeking Interpol's support for the extradition of most wanted criminals involved in human smuggling.

During the briefing, the prime minister was told that several human smugglers had been arrested from June 2023 to December 2024. Many government officials have been dismissed for facilitating the crime while several others face disciplinary proceedings.

The prime minister was apprised of the punitive measures being taken against the government officials involved in human smuggling. Besides the assets of human smugglers worth Rs500 million had been confiscated and a process was underway for more such confiscations.

SC raises question about need for constitutional amend

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The constitutional bench of the Supreme Court (SC) on Wednesday raised question about the need for constitutional amendment for military court trials of terrorists in APS case.

The bench, headed by Justice Aminuddin Khan, heard intra-court appeals challenging the decisions of military courts. The bench also comprised Justices Jamal Khan Mandokhail, Muhammad Ali Mazhar, Syed Hasan Azhar Rizvi, Naem Akhtar Afghan, Musarrat Hilali, and Shahid Bilal Hassan.

Defense Ministry counsel Khawaja Haris continued his arguments by stating that the nature of a crime determined the trial forum. "If a civilian's crime was linked to the armed forces, the trial would fall under military courts." May 9 riots accused would face military court trials, he maintained. Justice Mandokhail remarked that the intention behind the crime was a crucial factor and whether the crime was aimed against national interests. Khawaja Haris responded that evidence determined intent, which was evaluated during the trial.

Addressing historical cases, Justice Mandokhail queried why incidents like the GHQ and Karachi Air Base attacks were not tried in

military courts. Justice Mandokhail inquired whether there was a link between the Army Public School tragedy and terrorism. The Defence Ministry's lawyer confirmed that such a link existed. At this juncture, Justice Mandokhail questioned why a constitutional amendment was necessary for trying terrorists in military courts.

Haris referenced the 21st constitutional amendment, which had expanded the scope of military court trials to include various crimes beyond traditional military discipline. Khawaja Haris maintained that the Army Act and the Official Secrets Act were already in place during the Army Public School (APS) attack and other incidents, arguing that amendments were aimed at addressing broader crimes. Later, the hearing was adjourned till today.

Justice Jamal Mandokhail responded, asking whether the intent behind the crime could also be considered — whether the purpose was against the country's interests. The judge also raised the question about why the cases of attacks on the General Headquarters (GHQ) and Karachi airbase did not proceed in military courts.

He said that the answer to this question was provided in the 21st Amendment case.

The defence ministry's counsel explained that the 21st Amendment case mentioned the attacks on the GHQ, airbases, military, and places of worship. The counsel further said that the Army Act mandates that if the crime is related to the military, the trial will be held in a military court. Justice Mandokhail asked for clarification on what "related to the military" meant, to which Haris said that it referred to crimes directly tied to the Army Act.

Justice Mandokhail then asked whether the intent behind the crime would be examined if the crime was related to the Army Act. Justice Amin remarked that the accused could raise a defence by arguing the lack of intent during the military trial. Justice Muhammad Ali Mazhar added that intent could be evaluated during the trial. The counsel for the Ministry of Defence maintained that if the crime was related to the Army Act, a military court would then conduct the trial.

Justice Mandokhail then inquired whether such a link existed in the APS attack. In response, Haris confirmed that there was indeed a connection at the time of the APS attack and noted that one connection is related to an army officer while the other is concerned with the military.



Sindh spokespersons convene for critical strategic talks



F.P. Report

KARACHI: A key meeting of the newly appointed spokespersons of the Sindh government was held in Karachi under the chairmanship of Senior Minister for Sindh Sharjeel Inam Memon.

The meeting discussed issues related to enhancing the provincial government's communication strategy and effectively addressing public concerns. The meeting was attended by Ganhor Khan Isran, Heer Soho, Nadir Nabil Gabol, Sukhdev Asardas Hemnani, Buland Khan Junejo, Seemta Afzal Syed, Syed Tahseen Abidi, Syeda Aqraba Fatima, Mustafa Abdullah Baloch, Secretary Information Nadeem-ur-Rehman Memon.

The meeting comprehensively discussed strategies for effective publicity of the government's narrative, promotion of media relations and public welfare projects by the Sindh government.

Speaking on the occasion, Sindh Senior Minister and Provincial Minister for Information, Transport and Mass Transit Sharjeel Inam Memon said that being a government spokesperson is a huge

responsibility, the Sindh government has entrusted you with this responsibility, the government wants the people to be fully aware of the government's projects for the people.

He said that we should ensure that the people are well informed about the government's efforts and programs, we should ensure that people have access to positive information and end their frustrations.

Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon said that under the visionary leadership of Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari and the guidance of President Asif Ali Zardari and Faryal Talpur, public service is the commitment of the Sindh government, the Pakistan People's Party has always prioritized the welfare of the people.

He said that our spokespersons play an important role in combating misinformation and highlighting our achievements, all government spokespersons should work as a coordinated team for the development initiatives and policies of the Sindh government.

Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon said that along

with public communication, we also have to focus on social media, work together with each other, transparency and effective communication are important to maintain trust with the people of Sindh.

Sindh govt pledges to boost local cinema: The Sindh government has resolved to intensify efforts to promote movies, dramas, and documentaries while encouraging artists and playwrights to raise public awareness, showcase local talent, and develop narratives opposing terrorism and extremism.

The first meeting of the Content and Production Oversight Board was held in Karachi, chaired by Sindh Senior Minister Sharjeel Inam Memon. During the meeting, Minister Memon emphasized the importance of providing special encouragement to local filmmakers and playwrights.

The first meeting of the Content and Production Oversight Board was attended by Sindh Information Secretary Nadeem-ur-Rehman Memon, DG (PR) Saleem Khan, Director of Films Hizbullah Memon, and

Deputy Director Sarang Latif Chaudhry. Board members Qazi Asad Abid, Warda Salim, Nimra Malik, Azan Sami Khan, and Hassan Asghar Naqvi were also present.

Speaking at the meeting, Sindh Senior Minister and Provincial Minister for Information, Transport, and Mass Transit Sharjeel Inam Memon stated that the Sindh government is committed to promoting drama, film, and other creative works to foster democratic values and cultivate a healthy society in the province. He emphasized that the establishment of the Content and Production Oversight Board aims to drive social development through these initiatives.

He stated that new writers and production houses creating innovative dramas and films will be encouraged, with necessary financial support provided to complete their projects, subject to the board's approval. During the meeting, DGPR Sindh Saleem Khan provided an overview of the objectives and policy guidelines for establishing the Content and Production Oversight Board.

Speaking at the meeting, Qazi Asad Abid praised the Sindh government's efforts to establish the board and make it operational within a short timeframe. He highlighted that the primary objective of the Content and Production Oversight Board is to promote new talent.

During the meeting, members shared detailed suggestions to enhance the effectiveness of the Content and Production Oversight Board. It was emphasized that production houses should submit a basic outline of their work by next week. The board will review their submissions in the next meeting.

Lanjar commends Sindh police heroes at awards ceremony

F.P. Report

KARACHI: Sindh Home Minister Zia-ul-Hassan Lanjar, attended a prestigious event as the chief guest at the Saleem Wahidi Auditorium, D.L. Branch Clifton, where police officers were honored for their outstanding services.

In his address, he paid tribute to the brave personnel of the Sindh Police who have sacrificed their precious lives in the line of duty. He expressed pride in the martyrs of Sindh Police and their families, acknowledging the efforts of the police in ensuring the safety and security of the public despite challenging circumstances. He stated that despite inadequate facilities and difficult conditions, the police officers continue to stand firm in the discharge of their duties.

He also appreciated the positive changes seen in the operations and measures of Karachi Police, thanks to the efforts of IG Sindh and his team. Karachi, being a large city with a diverse population from both within Pakistan and abroad, requires collective efforts for the development and prosperity of the country and the province. He emphasized the importance of making decisions based on merit and the priorities of the people.

He expressed that it was



a matter of great pride to be part of today's event, reaffirming their commitment to protect the country, the province, and its citizens. He stressed that they would never shy away from any sacrifice for the peace and security of the nation and would always remember the sacrifices made by their elders.

He also mentioned that the sacrifices made by Qaid-e-Awam, Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and the Daughter of the East, Shaheed Benazir Bhutto, for the country's survival and security would never be forgotten. He praised IG Sindh, Ghulam Nabi Memon, and the Sindh Police for their frontline role in difficult times, expressing confidence that they would continue their efforts.

Additionally, he noted

acknowledged the significant sacrifices made by the police in ensuring peace and security in Sindh and Karachi. The decline in crime rates, including target killings, terrorism, extortion, and other serious crimes, is largely attributed to the police's sacrifices and hard work. He pointed out that today, the city witnesses smooth traffic and vibrant lights at night, which is clear evidence of the successful maintenance of law and order.

He further proposed that the Sindh government should announce annual awards/medals for police heroes, similar to the federal government's practice.

The Sindh Home Minister assured that this would be considered, adding that President Asif Ali Zardari is pleased with the performance of Sindh Police and desires that the bravery of police officers and personnel be acknowledged not only at the government level but also by allocating substantial rewards for them.

The Conferment Ceremony of QPM/PPM was also attended by Additional Chief Secretary for Home Iqbal Memon, spokesperson for the Sindh government, Sumeta Syed, Wahid Halepot, Ghanwar Khan Asran, along with Addl. IGP Karachi, Addl. IGP CTD, DIGs, SSPs, and other senior officers.

Hindu pilgrims return to India

LAHORE (APP): A group of 84 Hindu pilgrims, who visited Pakistan for the annual pilgrimage to the historic Shadani Darbar in Hayat Pitafi Sindh, returned to India through the Wagah border crossing, on Wednesday.

Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB) officials, including Additional Secretary Shrines Saifullah Khokhar and Deputy Secretary Umar Javed Awan, bid farewell to the pilgrims.

Speaking to media, Indian Jatha leader Sant Dr. Yudhishter Lal praised the warm hospitality and excellent arrangements provided by Pakistan. "The love and affection we received in Pakistan will always be cherished."

During their visit, the pilgrims performed religious rituals at Shadani Darbar in Mirpur Mathelo and Sath Belo temple in Sukkur. Dr. Lal expressed his gratitude for the freedom provided to them to practise their religious rituals and commended the continuously improving hospitality for pilgrims every year.

Additional Secretary Shrines Saifullah Khokhar stated that pilgrims completed their visit as per the instructions of ETPB Chairman Syed Ata-ur-Rehman, who ensured all facilities, including transport, security, and medical care, were provided.

Sindh govt investigates kidnappings of three young men

F.P. Report

KARACHI: The Sindh government has taken notice of the abduction of three young men from Karachi in Ghotki. According to initial reports, criminals from the kachcha area lured the youths all the way from Karachi to Ghotki and then kidnapped them for ransom.

Sindh government spokesperson Mr. Sukhdev Asardas Hemnani strongly condemned the incident, stating that the Sindh Government is taking this matter very seriously.

He assured the families that law enforcement agencies are working tirelessly for the recovery of abductees and to arrest the kidnappers as soon as possible. Ghotki and Kashmore police are jointly working on the case, he stated.

Mr Hemnani emphasized that protecting the lives and property of citizens is Sindh Government's top priority. He promised that efforts will continue until the abducted youths are safely reunited with their families.

Azma exposes Rs. 799m embezzlement in KP BISP

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Information Minister Azma Bokhari said on Wednesday that a large-scale financial embezzlement had been uncovered in the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), resulting in the World Food Programme halting its operations in the province.

She revealed that Rs. 799 million had been embezzled under the nose of KP Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur, who claims to be fighting corruption. Azma Bokhari added that the World Food Programme had raised questions about the financial irregularities and ghost employees in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government. She said the government documents highlighted Rs. 799 million in irregularities related to salaries alone. The corrupt individuals had not spared funds allocated for maternal and child health. Prior to this, Rs. 700 million allocated for mosque imams were also siphoned off, added Azma.

NAB recovers Rs. 510.12m from illegal housing society

LAHORE (APP): The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) Lahore has recovered Rs. 510.12 million from an illegal private housing society, La Villa De Paris, and distributed the amount among the affected.

NAB Lahore spokesperson told the media here Wednesday that the amount was distributed among 887 victims holding 3,869 claims. Director General (DG) NAB Lahore Amjad Majeed Aulakh said that by adopting a pragmatic strategy of mutual settlement, NAB Lahore effectively initiated the process of

returning Rs. 1.172 billion to the victims of well-known housing scandal. La Villa De Paris (Pvt) Limited, He said that on June 14, 2023, the bureau launched an investigation into the housing scandal and found out that hard-earned money of 1,346 people was pilfered by the society. A total of 8,790 claims were submitted with NAB, on which, the society administration was forced to return the money to the victims without causing delay. Although, a significant amount had been returned to the victims, with assurances of full

compensation to all by February 2025.

In the first phase, 887 victims bearing 3,869 claims have been returned Rs. 510.12 million (in the shape of cash or plots), which is 66 per cent of the total victims. However, the society administration assured that the remaining 34 per cent of the victims would also be compensated by February 15, 2025.

Chairman NAB Lt-Gen (ret'd) Nazir Ahmed issued clear instructions that all possible steps should be taken to prioritise compensation of losses to common citizens.

Japanese envoy discusses bilateral ties with Punjab governor

LAHORE (APP): Ambassador of Japan to Pakistan Akamatsu Shui Chi called on Governor Punjab Sardar Saleem Haider Khan and discussed strengthening of bilateral ties in the fields of agriculture, economy, and culture during a meeting at the Governor's House, here on Wednesday.

The governor said Pakistan and Japan have cordial relations, adding that these relations would be taken to new heights as per vision of President Asif Ali Zardari. Sardar Saleem Haider said due to fertile land and climate in Pakistan, the

taste of fruits and vegetables here is famous all over the world. He said: "We look forward to cooperation of Japan in the field of agriculture." He said that Japanese automobiles were very popular in Pakistan for their quality and durability. He said that Japanese companies could take advantage of economic opportunities in various sectors in Pakistan, including the automobile sector.

The governor said exchange of business and cultural delegations between Pakistan and Japan would further expand bilateral rela-

tions. He hailed support of the Japanese government for preservation of artifacts in the Taxila Museum.


CORRIGENDUM

Reference to this office advertisement No.INF(P)/114/25 published in daily Mashriq Newspaper on dated 13/01/2025, for the Scheme regarding PK-56 at S#01 and S#02, opening date of tender may be read 04/02/2025 instead of 31/01/2025 the remaining TORs, may be read as same.

Assistant Engineer (Sr.) LG&RDD, Mardan
INF(P) 188/25
Assistant Director (Sr.) LG&RDD, Mardan

900 healthcare projects being completed

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Minister for Primary and Secondary Healthcare Khawaja Imran Nazir disclosed on Wednesday that over 900 healthcare projects were being rapidly completed in Punjab under the leadership of Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz. He shared this during his visit to the Arif Mahmood Dialysis and Diagnostic Hospital, Aashiana Welfare System in Raiwind here. He inspected various departments, including the pharmacy, emergency room, laboratory, dialysis ward, and RO plant at the hospital. He inquired about the availability of medicines, lab tests, and facilities for dialysis patients.

**GOVERNMENT OF KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA, PESHAWAR**
OFFICE OF THE TEHSIL MUNICIPAL ADMINISTRATION KARAK
(CORRIGENDUM)

The Tehsil Municipal Administration Karak has advertised E-tenders Notice" for the year 2024-25 for various development schemes out of CSR / DDI fund through Information Department, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Peshawar and these tenders are also uploaded on ebidding.lcbkp.gov.pk respectively vide NIT No. 19773, NIT No. 19778 and NIT No. 19782 duly published on Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Public Procurement Authority vide NIT No. 20699 The terms & conditions mentioned specifically for the scheme namely "(i) Installation of Solar Street Light at Tehsil BD Shah" Estimated cost to Rs. 10.00 Million and (ii). Installation of Solar Street Light at Karak" Estimated cost to Rs. 2.00 (S.No.10 and S.No.21) may be read as follow in light of advice communicated vide No. AO(Planning)/LCB/TMA/Karak/1-62/2022 dated 12.01.2023 i.e. "Installation of Solar Street Light is specialized work i.e. complex nature of work which is not possible for each contractor and every contractor to execute easily should be put to tender on basis of single stage two envelope containing one technical and 2nd financial envelop. Hence qualified contractors/firms should be made eligible to participate in the specialized nature of work" the contract be awarded to eligible contractor only to execute the contract satisfactorily in the best interest of general public.

Other Terms & Condition will remain the same.

Tehsil Officer (I&S)
TMA Karak

Tehsil Municipal Officer
TMA Karak

INF(P)189/25

Speaker praises 'Suthra Punjab' programme

LAHORE (APP): Punjab Assembly (PA) Speaker Malik Muhammad Ahmad Khan has praised the 'Suthra Punjab' programme as a landmark initiative of the Punjab government. During the launching ceremony of a new plastic recycling app here on Wednesday, he said "the plastic waste around us is like a haunting nightmare".

**OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER**
HYDROLOGY IRRIGATION DIVISION PESHAWAR
Ph#: 091-9212114, Email: hydrology1234@gmail.com

NOTICE FOR INVITING E-BIDDING
(SINGLE STAGE SINGLE ENVELOPE PROCEDURE)

Hydrology Irrigation Division Peshawar Irrigation Department, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, invites electronic bid from the eligible firms/contractors in accordance with KPRA procurements rules 2014 on single stage single envelope procedure for the following works.

#.	Name of Work/Sub Work	E/Cost in (Rs.)	2% E/Money+ P Tax+ Stamp Duty in (Rs)	PEC Relevant Code
A	Annual Maintenance & Repair (AM&R), Calibration & Repair of different types of Gauges in Hydrology Irrigation Division Peshawar Khyber Pakhtunkhwa during (2024-2025).			
1	Calibration and repair to 09 Nos. Gauge stations in District Peshawar.	399227/-	14235	C-6 & above CE-04
2	Calibration and repair to 07 Nos. Gauge stations in District Charsadda.	399928/-	14249	C-6 & above CE-04
3	Calibration and repair to 07 Nos. Gauge stations in District Nowshera.	365895/-	13568	C-6 & above CE-04
4	Calibration and repair to 07 Nos. Gauge stations in District Swabi.	370436/-	13859	C-6 & above CE-04
5	Calibration and repair to 07 Nos. Gauge stations in District Mardan.	310000/-	12450	C-6 & above CE-04
6	Calibration and repair to 07 Nos. Gauge stations in District Swat and Shangla.	382317/-	13896	C-6 & above CE-04
7	Calibration and repair to 06 Nos. Gauge stations in District Peshawar.	320922/-	12668	C-6 & above CE-04
8	Calibration and repair to 05 Nos. Gauge stations in District Chitral, Malakand and Dir.	359626/-	13443	C-6 & above CE-04
9	Establishment of Flood Warning Cell in Hydrology Division Peshawar i.e. PVC panneling etc and unforeseen items.	399476/-	14240	C-6 & above CE-04
10	Provision/repair of telemetry system various item i, e battery etc in District Peshawar and Charsadda.	250000/-	11250	C-6 & above CE-04
11	Repair/Installation of Xpert Data logger i/c replacement of defective parts Kabul River at Adezai.	300000/-	12250	C-6 & above CE-04
12	Repair/Installation of Surface Velocity Radar (SVR) i/c cables, replacement of defective parts Kabul River at Adezai.	390000/-	14050	C-6 & above CE-04
13	Repair/Installation of water Level Radar i/c cables, replacement of defective parts i/c transportation charges Kabul River at Adezai.	1100000/-	36000	C-6 & above CE-04
14	Repair/complete physical checkup of telemetry gauge stations i.e. SVR, Datalogger, cable etc in District Peshawar, Nowshera, and Mardan.	250000/-	11250	C-6 & above CE-04
15	Repair/complete physical checkup of telemetry gauge stations i.e. SVR, Datalogger, cable etc in District Charsadda, Dir and Swat.	250000/-	11250	C-6 & above CE-04
16	Repair/Rehabilitation of Kohati Store at Peshawar.	200000/-	10250	C-6 & above CE-04
17	Calibration & Repair to 06 Nos Gauge Station on various Rivers in District Mansehera.	258940/-	11429	C-6 & above CE-04
18	Calibration & Repair to 06 Nos Gauge Station on various Rivers in District Mansehera Tehsil Balakot and Battagram.	398750/-	14225	C-6 & above CE-04
19	Calibration & Repair to 05 Nos Gauge Station on various Rivers in District Haripur	263727/-	11525	C-6 & above CE-04
20	Calibration & Repair to 04 Nos Gauge Station on various Rivers in District Abbottabad	151015/-	9270	C-6 & above CE-04
21	Provision/repair of telemetry system (Rain Gauge, Stream Gauge) various item i.e. battery etc in District Mansehera and Abbottabad	397560/-	14201	C-6 & above CE-04
22	Repair/over hauling of automatic Rain gauge recorders at Rain gauge station Battagram & Thandiani District Abbottabad.	236000/-	10970	C-6 & above CE-04

TERMS AND CONDITIONS:-

- Bid Solicitation Documents containing all the terms and conditions and other relevant instructions for the work to bidders can be downloaded from the Irrigation Website (www.irrigation.gkp.pk) as well as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Public Procurement Regulatory Authority Website (www.kppra.gov.pk). For the mentioned work separate Bids solicitation documents are to be submitted by the interested bidders.
- Electronic bidding shall be done on "Above / Below system" on BOQ/ Engineer's estimate.
- As per clause 37-(A) KPRA Rules, all bidder are required to have registration with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Revenue Authority.
- The bidder shall submit 2% bid security of the estimated cost as mentioned above, in the shape of deposit at call (Original) enclosed along with their bid before closing date and time which must reach to this office through courier service and the authenticity of the envelop will be confirmed from the courier services.
- Notifications issued by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Public Procurement Regulatory Authority (KPRA) pertaining to procurement process issued from time to time shall be applicable.
- If the evaluated electronic bid costs of two or more bidders are equal, then the successful bidder will be declared through drawl among them as deem fit by the procuring entity.
- The last date & time for Submission of the Bid along with relevant documents is **04-02-2025 upto 12:00 Noon**, which will be opened on the same day at **12:30 PM** in the office of the undersigned in presence of Contractors and their representatives who wishes to attend.
- Bid security of 1st, 2nd and 3rd lowest bidders will be retained till the approval of bids by the competent authority.
- All bidders are required to have valid registration with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Revenue Authority established under the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Finance Act 2018 (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Act XXI of 2013)
- The Competent authority reserve the right to accept/reject any or all bids at any time prior to acceptance of bid as per Para 47 (i) of KPRA rules 2014 by assigning cogent reason.
- The interested firms/contractors may obtain clarification regarding bids solicitation documents during office hour from the office of the Executive Engineer Hydrology Irrigation Division Peshawar.
- The contractor must prepared their CDR's i.e. 2% Earnest money and additional security (If any) as per KPRA rules in shape of call deposit only for all the above mentioned work in the name of **Executive Engineer Hydrology Irrigation Division Peshawar** and should, sure its submission with their bids. In case of failure their bids would be rejected and punitive action should be initiated against the defaulter as per KPRA Act/Rules.
- Non-refundable bidding entry fee @0.03% of tender cost in shape of call deposit separately may be furnished (in original) to this office in the name of **Executive Engineer Hydrology Irrigation Division Peshawar**.

INF(P) 150/25
Executive Engineer | Hydrology Irrigation Division Peshawar



PESHAWAR: Speaker Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly Babar Saleem Swati talking to former Speaker Kiramat Ullah Chagharmatti at Speaker House.

Governor emphasizes need for clean drinking water projects

PESHAWAR (APP): Governor Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Faisal Karim Kundi on Wednesday emphasized the need for clean drinking water projects in different areas of the province and stressed the importance of attracting the attention of donor organizations to meet regional needs.

The Governor said this in a meeting of the Sarhad Rural Support Program (SRSP) at the Governor House.

During the meeting, CEO Masood-ul-Mulk briefed the Governor on ongoing projects in 27 districts of the province.

The Governor was provided details about water supply, sanitation, electricity, solar energy, and skilled training programs in Dera Ismail Khan, Tank, and other districts under the SRSP's initiatives.

The meeting also included a briefing on flood recovery and development programs, as well as infrastructure improvements in nine union councils of Dera Ismail Khan and Tank.

The Governor also highlighted the necessity of ensuring transparency in projects based on public and regional requirements.

Meanwhile, a delegation from the Local Council Association of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa met with the Governor Faisal Karim Kundi.

The delegation included the Provincial President of the Association and prominent political figure, Mayor

of Mardan, Himayatullah Khan Mayar, Coordinator Intizar Khalil, President of the Village Council Bannu, Mian Mahfoozur Rehman, and Member of the Provincial Assembly, Arbab Zarak Khan was also present on this occasion.

The delegation informed the Governor about the difficulties faced by local government representatives and the undemocratic attitude of the provincial government.

Governor Faisal Karim Kundi expressed his concern, saying that the provincial government has been undermining the rights of local representatives for the past three years.

He said that not only are powers and funds not being provided, but peaceful protesters demanding their rights are also subjected to violence. He termed this behavior highly inappropriate and undemocratic.

The Governor assured the delegation that they would not be left helpless and announced plans to host a convention for local government representatives from across the province at the Governor House in the first week of February.

He promised to play an active role in addressing their issues and ensuring their rights are protected.

Governor Kundi chairs Red Crescent meeting to review overall performance

A joint meeting of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Red Crescent and the Merged Districts Red Crescent was held at the Governor House

on Wednesday under the chairmanship of Governor, Faisal Karim Kundi.

The meeting provided a detailed review of the overall performance of both provincial branches of the Red Crescent.

The meeting was attended by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Red Crescent Chairman Malik Habib Orakzai, Vice Chairman Farzand Wazir, Chairman of the Merged Districts Imran Wazir Advocate, members of the management committee, and other relevant officials.

Officials from both branches briefed the Governor on the institution's performance and discussed ongoing projects funded by international bodies such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Norwegian Red Cross, and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC).

A comprehensive report on the relief efforts in the Kurram district was also presented, highlighting the distribution of food, medical supplies, and other essential items through aid and medical camps for both Lower and Upper Kurram's affected populations.

The meeting also informed the Governor about the suspension of Norwegian-funded projects and the support provided by the Sindh and Balochistan governments, which included a grant of 20 million rupees and medical supplies for the relief activities in Kurram.

Officials reported that the annual budget and fundraising efforts for both Red Crescent branches are expected to be completed this month. Additionally, donor-funded projects from the previous year were successfully completed, and audits for all district branches have been finalized. A proposal was also made for a third-party audit of the last three years.

Details about the executive, health, human resources, and IT committees were also shared with the Governor during the meeting.

Governor Faisal Karim Kundi praised the Red Crescent's timely relief efforts in Kurram, commending the dedication of both branches despite the challenging circumstances.

He also expressed gratitude to the Sindh and Balochistan governments, overseas donors, and other organizations for their support in assisting the people of Kurram.

The Governor assured continued cooperation for the provision of essential goods and medicines in the district and emphasized the importance of maintaining effective communication with international relief organizations and donors.

Governor Kundi also urged a detailed report on the assets of both Red Crescent branches, including properties in Bara Gate, Dabgari Garden, and other districts, which will be presented in the next meeting.

Historic Torkham Border old bunkers to be renovated: Aslam

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Advisor to the KP Chief Minister on Finance and Inter-Provincial Coordination Muzammil Aslam, visited yesterday the Torkham border in district Khyber along with Commissioner Peshawar Division, Riaz Mehsud. During the visit, Aslam was given a detailed briefing on security issues and import

export at the Machni Check Post.

Mr. Aslam stated that the Integrated Transit Trade Management System (ITTMS) will be operational within two to three months, increasing trade traffic between Pakistan and Afghanistan from 600 to 2,000 trucks on a daily basis.

He attributed the current congestion at the border to the single lane 'zero

line' where only one vehicle can cross at a time.

KP Advisor on finance directed authorities to expedite clearance mechanisms for perishable goods and establish the Torkham Border Market to facilitate trade. He announced plans to initiate cargo transportation from Peshawar to Torkham border and steps will be taken to restore the tourist train from Torkham

to Peshawar, which has been suspended since 2007.

Mr. Aslam emphasized the need to upgrade and renovate old bunkers in district Khyber and Torkham to preserve historical sites for tourists and other purposes.

He also called for immediate upgrading of facilities at the Friendship "Dosti" Hospital located at the Torkham border."

Sports gala Inaugurates at City Girls College Gulbahar

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The opening ceremony of the inter-class sports gala at Government City Girls Degree College Gulbahar was held in a grand manner. Students showcased excellent performances in various sports and cultural activities.

The guest of honor for the event was the college principal, Professor Rabia Sikandar, who inaugurated

the gala by cutting the ribbon. Other notable attendees included Najma Naz Qazi director sports of GCGC, Shazia Aslam sports lecturer at Government City District Girls College, Sadia Gul sports lecturer at Nahqi Girls College along with a large number of teachers and students.

On the first day of the sports gala, exciting competitions in table tennis, basketball, and tug of war

were held.

In the table tennis matches, BS Urdu students defeated BS Islamic studies students with a score of 2-0, while FA/FSc second-year students beat BS English students with the same score.

In an intense basketball match, the FA/FSc 2nd year team triumphed over the FA/FSc 1st year team with a score of 18-15.

In the thrilling tug-of-war competition, the stu-

dents' team defeated the teachers' team, earning widespread applause.

During the event, various stalls were set up, featuring Charsadda's traditional rice dishes, chapli kababs, dahi bhallay, and other food items. Additionally, stalls showcasing warm shawls, artificial jewellery, paintings, and handmade decorative items attracted special attention from students and teachers alike.

CVI organises modern digital skills courses for youth

PESHAWAR (APP): Short-term 15-day courses on graphic designing, e-commerce, and social media marketing are being conducted at Kohat University of Science and Technology, said a press release issued here on Wednesday.

These courses are organized under the management of Cyber Vision International, with support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Government of Japan. They are specifically designed for the youth of Orakzai and Kurram districts.

A total of 80 women are participating in e-commerce and social media marketing training, while 70 men are enrolled in graphic designing courses. The participants include students, graduates, and young professionals.

The primary aim of this training program is to equip the youth with modern digital skills, enabling them to achieve financial independence and explore new employment opportunities. Through these courses, participants will gain the expertise needed to work on freelance ventures and other digital platforms.

Project Coordinator Bilal Wazir and Trainer Ali Haider stated that these training programs are meticulously designed to empower youth to achieve economic self-reliance. The courses not only familiarize participants with essential digital skills but also provide them with opportunities for financial independence through modern technologies.

Tordher visits site of Industrial Park Peshawar

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Special Assistant to the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for Industries, Abdul Karim Tordher, along with Chairman of the Provincial Assembly's Standing Committee for Industries, Commerce and Technical Education, Itfikhwar Ali Mishwani, and other committee members, including Members of the Assembly Sher Ali Afridi and Samiullah, visited the site of provincial government's new mega project, Industrial Park Peshawar on Wednesday.

Managing Director of the Small Industries Development Board (SIDB), Habibullah Arif, Deputy Managing Directors Noman Fayaz and Engineer Sahibzada Zulfiqar, along with officials from the Provincial Assembly, Law and other relevant departments and the board were also present on the occasion.

The Special Assistant and committee members reviewed various sections



of the new project under its master plan and Deputy MD Sahibzada Zulfiqar gave them a detailed briefing about the project's layout and the measures being taken to facilitate industrialists.

He explained that the project spans 941 kanals, with 800 kanals allocated for industrial plots and the remaining land for commercial purposes.

He further shared that the master plan for this project has been designed with future planning, including provisions for parking, commercial markets and clubs, health facilities and showrooms for the exhibition of industrial products.

The total cost of the

project is 3.21 billion rupees and it has been divided into two packages for completion at the earliest.

The project will feature a total of 393 industrial plots, with a space designated under the "Plug and Play" policy. The payment of industrial plots will be received in four instalment under this project.

On this occasion, the Special Assistant remarked that this project will serve as a significant milestone for industrial development in the Peshawar Valley. It will not only provide social development facilities at the local level but will also create direct and indirect employment opportunities for the people.

He emphasized that the industries set up in this park will help local people acquire skills and efforts will also be made to provide job training.

He directed that steps be taken to acquire additional land for connecting this project to Frontier Road.

Meanwhile, the Chairman of the Committee called SIDB's project an important milestone and suggested that this master plan be adopted for future small industrial estates as well.

He assured that the committee would extend its full cooperation through various forums to ensure the project's timely completion.

WSSP prepares GIS-based map of drainage system

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: The Water and Sanitation Services Peshawar (WSSP) has achieved a significant milestone by preparing/designing the first-ever comprehensive digital (GIS-based) map of Peshawar's drainage system. The map covers all details, including the length, width, depth, starting and ending points, areas, union councils, and connections to natural water channels within the 42 union councils under WSSP's jurisdiction. It also provides separate details of natural water channels entering and exiting WSSP's boundaries.

The map was completed in one year, during which GPS devices were used to survey each area and drainage channel. Engineers and sub-engineers of WSSP collected the data, which was transferred to Arc GIS Software with the assistance of GIS experts from the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Cities Improvement Project (KPCIP). The map serves as a foundational and comprehensive resource for planning and monitoring the drainage system.

The drains have been categorized into three categories-tertiary, secondary, and primary. The overall drainage system spans 1,862 kilometers, comprising

17,480 small and large drains within WSSP's jurisdiction. These included 14 primary drains, 692 secondary drains, and 16,774 tertiary drains. Domestic and rain water flows into tertiary drains, which then feeds into secondary drains, eventually leading to primary drains and natural water channels.

The total length of tertiary drains is 1,419.97 kilometers, secondary drains 383.38 kilometers, and primary drains 58.85 kilometers. Additionally, WSSP manages one DEWATS system (Decentralized Wastewater Treatment System) and three pumping stations.

To appreciate the efforts of engineers and sub-engineers involved in preparing the map, a ceremony was held where WSSP Board of Directors Chairman Engineer Muhammad Uzair and Chief Executive Officer Yasir Ali Khan distributed certificates. General Manager PMER Syed Zamir-ul-Hassan and other officials were also present.

Engineer Muhammad Uzair and Yasir Ali Khan termed the map a landmark achievement and directed for digital map of the water supply system. Yasir Ali Khan also commended the staff for their contributions to this initiative.

CTO reviews security arrangements at traffic driving school

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Chief Traffic Officer Haroon Rashid Khan visited the driving school of traffic police in Gulbahar area of Peshawar and reviewed the security arrangements during his visit.

CTO Haroon Rashid Khan praised the staff for the best security arrangements and the best way to teach driving to the citizens. He directed the in-charge of the driving school and other staff to improve security and said that better performance will be

encouraged of the traffic officials.

He categorically said that legal action will be taken against the negligent officers and officials. There will be no leniency with anyone in this regard, he said and adding punishment will continue in the City

Traffic Police Peshawar.

Mr Haroon directed the traffic officers and officials to perform their duties honestly and teach the citizens to drive according to international standards and educate them with regard to traffic rules and regulations.

Qadri plays Uzma's statement on imams' honorarium

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minister for Awaqaf and Religious Affairs, Sahibzada Muhammad Adnan Qadri, has expressed his reaction to the statement of Punjab Information Minister Uzma Bukhari regarding the honorarium awarded to the prayer leaders (Imams) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The minister termed Uzma Bukhari's remarks as extremely regrettable and accused her of making false claims about the

Imams. In a statement issued from his office, the provincial minister clarified that for the first time in history, Imran Khan extended support to the Imams of mosques, whereas the pro-West government is unable to tolerate the stipends being provided to them.

He advised the Punjab government to abandon its anti-Islam policies and follow the example of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government, which is providing stipends to 16,818 Imams on a quarterly basis.

Minister Adnan Qadri reiterated his commitment by stating that the number of Imams receiving stipends will be increased further, insha'Allah. He remarked that if the Punjab government is uneasy by the stipends being given to the Imams, they will increase it even more.

He emphasized that the Imams are the crown of their heads and will be provided with additional benefits. He added that the propaganda by the Punjab government regarding the stipends given to Imams is

unfortunate.

Expressing his astonishment at the Punjab government's attitude, the Minister for Religious Affairs said it is incomprehensible why the Punjab government is exhibiting hostility toward the Imams, as their role in the betterment of society is universally acknowledged. He suggested that the Punjab government should recognize and value the services of its Imams in the same way as the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government does.

KPIC to act against defaulter govt's depts: Chief Commissioner

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Chief Commissioner Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Information Commission (KPIC) said that strict disciplinary action will be taken against those public bodies who are deliberately obstructing access to information so as to provide timely relief to the complainants under Right to Information (RTI) Act 2013, on Wednesday.

KPIC comprising of the Chief Information Commissioner, Farah Hamid Khan, Information Commissioners Arshad Ahmed and Muhammad Irshad took serious notice of non-compliance of the commission orders. Show cause notices and warning letters to be issued to the

defaulting public bodies including Higher Education Regulatory Authority and AIG Legal (Police Department) in hearings of the complainants.

Muhammad Ayaz resident of District Peshawar filed a complaint (Complaint no 6442) under RTI Act 2013 to the Commission against the WSSP Peshawar wherein he had sought information regarding the appointment details of Tube Well Operators from the Public Information officer/Manager, WSSP.

The Commission directed the PIO WSSP to proactively disclose all the 12 categories of information of the WSSP Peshawar as mandated in the Section 5 of the KP RTI Act 2013 on

the official website of the WSSP besides this, Manager HR WSSP will be summoned in the subject case for providing timely information to the complainant and enhance public trust in the government institutions.

While adjudicating another complaint no 11613 of Faheem Azam, who had filed a complaint with the Commission against Soil & Water Conservation Department Mardan. Wherein he had requested for provision of all the developmental works since January 2017 till date. The department denied the information by stating that they don't have developmental funds except staff salaries. The PIO/Director Soil and Conservation

Department Mardan was directed to provide parawise reply to the requester within a week time positively with proper intimation to the Commission.

The Commission took serious notice of absence of AIG Legal and deputing a Sub Inspector in complaints no 11650 and 11654. The Commission ordered that the AIG Legal should be present in the upcoming proceedings along with the relevant record on 16-01-2025.

Deciding a complaint no 11675, filed by Muhammad Iqbal who had sought information about the leasing documents, technical evaluation of Hamala Rest House Nathia Gali owned by the Culture and Tourism Authority.



In brief

Tribesmen demand probe F.P. Report

WANA: Investigations should be conducted into the alleged corruption of former lawmakers to prevent the wastage of the nation's money. These remarks were made by the elders of the Ahmadzai Wazir tribe, including Maulvi Fazlur Rehman, Malik Ghanam Shah, Malik Khatim, Malik Sarfraz, Malik Sanaullah, Malik Mamak Khan, Malik Jan Muhammad, and Dehqan Khan Khojal Khel, during a joint press conference at the District Press Club, on Wednesday. They stated that it is the collective demand of the Ahmadzai Wazir tribe to investigate the extensive corruption allegedly committed by the former MNA and MPA during their tenures. They claimed that the funds allocated for approved schemes were embezzled, with no trace of the schemes on the ground. They further demanded that the two former members return to Wana to explain the whereabouts of the schemes. According to their estimates, the two have misappropriated billions of rupees and used public funds to build personal assets. They called on the Anti-Corruption Department, NAB, and FIA to initiate investigations against them to reveal the truth. During the press conference, the elders expressed their disappointment, stating that the nation had blindly trusted these two during difficult times and sent them to the assemblies, but they betrayed that trust and misused the entrusted funds, committing treachery against all the tribes of Lower Waziristan. The tribal elders also demanded investigations into the alleged corruption of the close relatives of the two former members.

ADC visits BISP cash center F.P. Report

BUNER: Additional Deputy Commissioner Relief visited the Benazir Income Support Program Center at Government Primary School Daggar where a large number of women were present to collect their monthly installments. However, it is revealed that the facility of chairs was not enough for them while ADC instructed the staff for more chairs for women. On the occasion several women complained of not following proper turn after turn payment them. Following the ADC directed the staff to introduce a token system and pay first-come, first-served women. While men standing outside the center main gate, have been asked.

Mock exercise in DPO office held

JHANG (INP): The mock exercise has been held in DPO office here to keep the forces alert to meet such emergency situation. Police, Elite force, Rescue 1122, Bomb Disposal Squad and other security forces took part in the mock exercise. The mock exercise included supposed attack of terrorists and action of security forces against them. District Police Officer (DPO) Capt (Ra) Bilal Iftikhar Kiani appreciated the participants of the exercises and said that the goal of such exercise was to keep the forces alert to meet such emergency situation. He said the initiative improve coordination among different sectors and timely response in emergency situation. The DPO said that supervisory staff must focus to ensure police officers alert and to improve patrolling of security forces.



NAROWAL: Akamatsu Shuichi, Ambassador of Japan to Pakistan, inaugurating a project for installation of solar powered irrigation system in Shakar Garh Tehsil.

JI demands revisiting all IPPs contracts

Haleem Asad

LOWER DIR: Jamaat-i-Islami Khyber Pakhtunkhwa North chief and former senior ministers Inayatullah Khan has demanded the government to revisit all the contracts made with the private Independent Power Producers (IPPs) and stop the capicity payments. Speaking at a news conference at Timergara here on Wednesday, the JI chief said that unfortunately power consumers across the country paid for electricity they were not utilizing.

The JI provincial deputy chief Arshad Zaman, provincial secretary information Hafiz Yaqoob ur Rehman, president Anjuman Tajirana Timergara Haji Anwar ud Din, JI district secretary information Shuiab Ahmad and other activists were also present on the occasion.

Inayatullah said the JI chief Hafiz Naeem ur Rehman had called a countrywide protest against the unjustified power tariffs on Jan. 17. He said the JI workers would make the drive a success. He said that it was the JI that often raised public related issues. The JI leader said the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa generated electricity and sold it at Rs 5 per unit to the centre; but in return people of the province got it back at Rs 45 to Rs 70 per unit.

Inayat said that power consumers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were forced to bear 10 to 12 hours of power outages even in winter despite the fact that it

generated cheaper electricity. He said that prolonged and unscheduled power outages caused a huge loss to the business community. Expressing wonder on the Prime Minister Shabbaz Sharif statement that the government IPPs also got payments in dollars, the JI leader said that such rulers had no right to govern the country. He threatened the JI would chase the government until power tariffs were not come down.

Regarding the PTI government in the province he said that several approved mega development projects for Malakand division had been dropped from the ADP due to incompetence of the sitting lawmakers. He said the JI would take the dropping of Dir University to the court. He said that the JI organised and mobilized youths to stand for their rights. He said that they would constantly expose both the federal and provincial governments.

University teachers reject KP, HED notification: The "All Pakistan Public Universities BPS Teachers Association" (APUBTA) strongly condemns the notification issued by the KP Higher Education Department on January 13, 2025. According to a press release issued by the APUBTA general secretary Prof Imtiaz Ahmad, the notification violates the KP Universities Act and approved statutes, undermining the autonomy and sovereignty of universities regarding appointments, reappointments of BPS fac-

ulty, promotion of TTS, administrative officers and other supporting staff.

It urged the Minister of Higher Education, KP, and Secretary of the Higher Education Department (HED) to immediately withdraw this notification and all previous notifications that violate the KP Universities Act. "It's extremely surprising that the government itself violates its own Act and statutes approved under the same universities Act", the release said.

The APUBTA demanded that the HED and ministry expedite the appointments of Vice-Chancellors for 26 universities and address the long-standing issues of employees to uplift the standards of education. The association emphasizes that universities are unique institutions in the province lacking the service structure for faculty even having PhDs and publications, and their teachers deserve timely promotions and a service structure.

The APUBTA warns that if the ministry fails to take action, the association will stage a protest in all universities of the province, including class boycotts and a sit-in in front of the assembly. APUBTA clarifies that if the illegal and illogical notification is not withdrawn in a week of time the university employees shall stage a protest for removal of the secretary HED and for resignation of the Education Minister to secure the autonomy and dignity of the esteemed institutions.

Ex-CM closed associate shot killed Syed Waliullah Shah

NEWSHERA: Unknown armed motorcyclists shot killed Malik Wasal Khan, a close associate of former Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pervaz Khattak, in Manki Sharif area of Nowshera while the assailants managed to escape after committing the crime.

The police have registered a case against unknown assailants and started an investigation. According to eyewitnesses, the unknown assailants came from the Tangi Khattak route and escaped from the same route.

The incident occurred when Malik Wasal Khan was sitting at a shop owned by a person named Wajid in the Sauria Khel area of Manki Sharif, Nowshera district. Two armed men arrived on a motorbike and started talking to Malik Wasal Khan.

During the conversation, Malik Wasal Khan asked them why they were carrying weapons, and if they had any enmity with him. The assailants replied, "You will soon find out," and opened fire on Malik Wasal Khan, killing him on the spot.

Khattak Banda Dam an excellent addition F.P. Report

KOHAT: The construction of Khatak Banda Dam in Kohat and Chashma Akhora Khel Dam in Karak by the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is an excellent addition to the Dams in Kohat Division while a new sign of development on the land of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. It will open the new ways of progress and prosperity in the province.

Khattak Banda Dam is under construction in District Kohat. With its completion, beside irrigating the thousands of Acres barren lands, the water level will also go up and overcome the shortage of drinking water. Khattak Banda Dam will not only improve the lives of the local people but also usher a new era of prosperity in the region. This dam is 143 Feet High and 360 Feet Long which is being built using modern RCCD technology. The dam has a total water storage capacity of 8557 Acre Feet.

The said Project is being completed at a cost of Rs.1602.071 Million which will irrigate 2200 Acres of agricultural land and also ensure supply of clean drinking water to the local people. This important project is the priority project of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Government as per the PIT Chief Imran Khan's vision.

MMC staff allegedly involved in sexual assault against widow

Anees Takar

MARDAN: A harrowing case of alleged sexual assault has surfaced at Mardan Medical Complex, where a 32-year-old widow claims she was victimized by two hospital employees. Police have arrested one suspect, while the second is still absconder, prompting an intensive manhunt.

The widow had been reported missing from her home on January 4, with a complaint filed at Chora Police Station. She returned after a week and revealed the traumatic ordeal to her family. Acting on her testimony, the family approached the local court, which directed Sheikh Maltoon Police to launch an investigation.

In the wake of the incident, the hospital administration swiftly suspended the two employees mentioned in the First Information Report (FIR). A spokesperson for Mardan Medical Complex condemned the incident, calling it a personal act of misconduct that does not reflect the values of the institution.

"Strict policies are in place to ensure the safety and dignity of women within the hospital premises. We are committed to full cooperation with the authorities to bring the culprits to justice," said the spokesperson.

The incident has sparked widespread outrage with local communities and human rights organizations demanding immediate and transparent investigations. Activists have criticized the increasing number of such cases and urged the government to enforce stricter laws to curb violence against women.

The case highlights a growing national crisis. According to Sahil.org, over 4,500 cases of violence against women were reported between January and November 2024. These include 533 cases of rape, 799 kidnappings and 1,273 murders. Activists fear these figures only scratch the surface, as many cases go unreported due to societal stigma.

The police have intensified efforts to apprehend the second suspect, assuring the public that no stone will be left unturned.

Meanwhile, the hospital's management has pledged its full support to ensure a fair and impartial investigation. As the nation grapples with yet another incident of gender-based violence, public demand for swift and uncompromising justice grows louder. This case serves as a grim reminder of the urgent need for systemic reforms to protect women and hold perpetrators accountable.

Encroachment, water scarcity, drainage & load shedding common public grievances: Deputy Commissioner Mardan held a 'Khuli Katcheri' at Tehsil Headquarters Taktbhai to ensure immediate resolution of public grievances and ordered to ensure good governance by delivery of public service within stipulated timeframe, on Wednesday.

Besides Additional Deputy Commissioner Finance and Planning, ADC (General) and Regional Director Information Department, SP Sadder division, Assistant Commissioner along with Additional Assistant Commissioners, Tehsildar, DSP Taktbhai and DSP Sadder Circle and officers and representatives of all departments. The objective of the open katcheri was to directly examine public grievances and provide prompt redressal.

The people of the area participated in large number in and complained about various issues including water scarcity, drainage problems, encroachment in Taktbhai and Loond khwor, unruly traffic, education, health, sports facilities and other social services.

The Deputy Commissioner listened to these problems very patiently and issued orders to solve several problems on the spot. DC Dr. Azmatullah Wazir said that the provincial government believes in the immediate solution of people's problems and organizing khuli katchris is a part of this chain. Assistant Commissioner Junaid Khalid also assured the people that the district administration is always trying to solve public problems and all possible facilities will be provided. He appealed to the public to make full use of such forums and raise their issues before the administration without hesitation.

Health Advisor visits DHQ Landi Kotal

F.P. Report

LANDI KOTAL: Advisor to Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on health Ihtesham Ali Khan expressed his deep concern over the lack of medicines and health staff in emergency unit during his surprise visit to District Headquarter Hospital (DHQ), Landi Kotal on Tuesday night.

Flanked by Additional Secretary Health and HRM Khezra Hayat, the advisor

CM examined the emergency unit of the DHQ and met with patients. They complained of lack of medicines and health staff in an emergency and said even a syringe was bought from a private medicine store, outside of the health center to inject.

He also inspected the medicine store in the emergency unit and expressed his displeasure over shortage of necessary medicines in it. Ihtesham Ali Khan said that enough funds

were provided in routine to the hospital to facilitate the illing elements of the tribal society especially in causality but lack of medicines in it put question mark at the efficiency of the administrators of the health center.

He took notice of the negligence and directed to the Additional Secretary Health Khezra Hayat to initiate an inquiry against administration of the hospital and bring to law those found guilty.

DLIS mourns loss of Senior Clerk

F.P. Report

KARAK: The Department of Library and Information Science (DLIS) at the Khushal Khan Khattak University is deeply saddened by the passing of its esteemed colleague, Shahid Ijaz (Late), who served as a Senior Clerk.

In his address Dr Saeed Ullah Jan HoD DLIS added that Mr. Shahid was a dedicat-



ed and valued member of the DLIS team, and his contributions to the department will be deeply missed. He was known for his hard work, dedication, and positive attitude.

In his memory, the DLIS community conducted a special prayer session and a

recitation of the Holy Quran. The event was attended by, faculty members, staff members and students. The DLIS extends its heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family and friends of Mr. Shahid Ijaz. May his soul rest in peace.

Education a foundation for national morality

F.P. Report

TOBA TEK SINGH: Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Education Toba Tek Singh Aqeela Intkhab said that getting education creates awareness in a person. Therefore, parents should educate their children and to train them well, because by getting education consciousness develops in a person as well as his thinking morals.

There is an improvement in lifestyle and Getting education brightens their life. She further said that if a per-

son does not have education, he becomes the owner of bad manners and negative thinking.

Education only brings a person towards improvement and removes him from the darkness of ignorance. Aqeela Intkhab said that our effort is to give the highest level of education to children in all schools so that they can make their name, their parents and the country of Pakistan bright by getting education.

Meanwhile, Civil Defense Officer (CDO)

Toba Tek Singh Mehmood Gill said that gas refilling doesn't deserve any concession as they are playing with lives of public.

CDO added that gas refilling failure to do so may result in a cylinder burst accident resulting in loss of human life. Therefore, these people do not deserve any concession. He said that I warn the gas refilling not to refill gas, if anyone is caught refilling gas, strict action will be taken against him and an FIR will also be registered.

Beyond flames: Environmental toll of Los Angeles wildfires

Marya Haleema

WE often hear about the fires in Los Angeles and frequently share suggestions on how to prevent them within our understanding. But do we ever stop to think beyond the immediate financial losses, property destruction, and tragic loss of lives? Are we truly considering the environmental damage, which surpasses all these impacts and extends its ripple effects not just to the affected region but across the entire planet?

The focus has been on the total economic impact of \$250-\$275 billion (including direct and indirect costs) and

insurance industry losses of \$20-\$30 billion. However, the real loss lies in the climatic effects, which are far-reaching and harder to quantify.

The persistent emission of greenhouse gases has substantially intensified the climate crisis, resulting in hotter and drier conditions across California. As warmer air retains more moisture, it accelerates water evaporation, worsening droughts and drying out vegetation. This process turns the landscape into a rich fuel source for wildfires, increasing the frequency and intensity of large-scale fires.

The melting of Arctic ice has further disrupted the jet stream's behavior, amplifying the risk of wind-driven wildfires. Studies

indicate that although Santa Ana wind events may become less frequent, their intensity during winter months is likely to increase. These powerful winds rapidly spread flames, expanding the scale and destructiveness of wildfires while demonstrating the extensive impacts of climate change on regional weather dynamics.

The wildfires in Los Angeles are emblematic of a broader phenomenon known as compound climate disasters, where multiple climate-driven events—such as heatwaves, droughts, and fires—occur simultaneously. This interconnectedness magnifies their combined effects, making recovery for ecosystems and human communities far more challeng-

ing. These cascading impacts underscore how climate change exacerbates vulnerabilities and causes enduring damage.

Under stress, the atmospheric, oceanic, and ecological systems interact to create feedback loops that intensify the crisis. Wildfires obliterate critical habitats, causing substantial biodiversity loss. Smoke generated by these fires travels across vast regions, degrading air quality and triggering severe health problems. The destruction of infrastructure and homes leads to significant economic losses and forces widespread displacement. Furthermore, prolonged droughts exhaust vital water reservoirs, placing additional strain on urban and agricultural

systems.

The Biden administration's 2023 National Climate Assessment underscores the interconnected nature of climate systems and warns of regime-shifting changes. These abrupt transformations in ecosystems and weather patterns yield unpredictable and far-reaching consequences. The Los Angeles fire of 2025 serves as a stark example of these cascading effects, emphasizing the pressing need for immediate climate action.

These devastating fires serve as a crucial reminder of the consequences of unregulated greenhouse gas emissions. To address the underlying causes, it is imperative to reduce carbon

emissions, shift to renewable energy sources, and adopt advanced fire management techniques. Effective adaptation requires the development of predictive models, resilient infrastructure, and international cooperation to mitigate the growing threats of the climate crisis.

The fires in Los Angeles are not just a regional issue but a global wake-up call. They highlight the urgency of addressing climate change comprehensively, ensuring that efforts extend beyond mere recovery to include prevention, mitigation, and adaptation. Only through unified and sustained action can we hope to combat the escalating impacts of this global crisis.



GAZA: Palestinians inspecting a makeshift shelter destroyed in a displacement camp in Deir el-Balah.

Zelenskyy, Macron discuss Western troop deployment in Kyiv

KYIV (AP): Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that he has held further discussions with French President Emmanuel Macron about the possibility of Western troops deploying in Ukraine to safeguard any peace deal ending the nearly three-year war with Russia.

Zelenskyy's disclosure came before an official visit to Kyiv by German Defense Minister Boris Pistorius. He arrived in Kyiv on an unannounced visit following a meeting in Warsaw with his counterparts from France, the United Kingdom, Italy and Poland.

Germany and the four other countries are Europe's five top military spenders. Pistorius told German news agency dpa that his visit to Kyiv aims to underscore Germany's strong support for Ukraine at a time when US President-elect Donald Trump's term beginning next week looks set to bring deep changes to Washington's policy on the war.

Pistorius said that his visit "is a signal that Germany, as the biggest NATO country in Europe, stands by Ukraine - not alone, but with the group of five and many other allies." Trump has criticized the cost of the war for US taxpayers through major military aid packages for Ukraine, and vowed to bring the conflict to a swift end. He also has made it clear that he wants to shift more of the Ukraine burden onto Europe. Macron prompted an outcry from other lead-

ers, and he appeared isolated on the European stage, after his remarks almost a year ago floated the possibility of putting Western troops in Ukraine.

Pistorius told reporters in Kyiv that the Warsaw meeting didn't discuss Macron's remarks about troop deployments. Zelenskyy has said that Ukraine needs security guarantees to bolster any peace agreement - an issue he said that he discussed with the French leader. "As one of these guarantees, we discussed the French initiative to deploy military contingents in Ukraine," Zelenskyy said. "We considered practical steps for its implementation, possible expansion and involvement of other countries in this process." Potentially sending European troops as peacekeepers to Ukraine is fraught with risk. Such a move may not deter Russia from attacking Ukraine again in the future, which is the fear of Ukrainian officials, and could drag European countries into a direct confrontation with Moscow. That, in turn, could pull NATO - including the United States - into a conflict.

Russia's bigger army has largely pinned Ukrainian forces on the defensive along the around 1,000-kilometer (600-mile) front line. Ukraine's defenses are creaking in the eastern Donetsk region amid a Russian onslaught. Zelenskyy said Ukraine has more than 100 brigades on the battlefield and each of them requires

equipment replenishment before potentially increasing the number of troops through a wider mobilization. Ukraine has built up a domestic arsenal of long-range drones and missiles that it uses to hit targets on Russian soil far behind the front line. The targets are usually infrastructure that supports the Russian war effort, such as arms depots, oil refineries and manufacturing plants.

The Ukrainian General Staff claimed a series of successful attacks on three Russian regions and Russia's Republic of Tatarstan, reaching some 1,100 kilometers (almost 700 miles) into Russia. It said in a report that among the targets struck were an oil refinery and a fuel storage depot, a chemical plant producing ammunition, and two anti-aircraft missile systems. Russian authorities did not report any major damage or injuries from recent aerial attacks. The Russian Defense Ministry accused Ukraine of firing six US-made ATACMS missiles, six U.K.-supplied Storm Shadow missiles and 31 drones at Russia's Bryansk region on the border with Ukraine. All the missiles and drones were shot down by air defense systems, the ministry claimed in an online statement, but it said that the attack "will not go unanswered." Russia has repeatedly threatened Ukraine and the West with retaliation for the use of Western-supplied longer-range weapons to strike Russian soil.

China pushing Philippines 'to the wall' with aggression in South China Sea

MANILA (AP): A Philippine security official said that China is "pushing us to the wall" with growing aggression in the disputed South China Sea and warned that "all options are on the table" for Manila's response, including new international lawsuits.

A large Chinese coast guard ship patrolled hotly disputed Scarborough Shoal in recent days and then sailed toward the northwestern coast of the Philippines, coming as close as 77 nautical miles (143 kilometers), Philippine officials said in a news conference. "The presence of the monster ship in Filipino waters ... 77 nautical miles from our shoreline, is unacceptable and, therefore, it should be withdrawn immediately by the Chinese government," Jonathan Malaya, assistant director-general of the National Security Council, said at the news conference alongside senior military and coast guard officials.

"You're pushing us to the wall," Malaya said of China. "We do not and will not dignify these scare tactics by backing down. We do not waver or cower in the face of intimidation. On the contrary, it strengthens our resolve because we know

we are in the right." A Chinese official said in Beijing that his country's sovereignty in the South China Sea is well established and its coast guard patrols are lawful and justified. "We once again urge the Philippines to immediately stop all infringement, provocation and malicious hype," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun said at a daily briefing when asked about Malaya's comments.

The Chinese government has repeatedly accused the Philippines and other rival claimant states including Vietnam and Malaysia of encroaching on what it says are "undisputed" Chinese territorial waters. Two Philippine coast guard ships, backed by a small surveillance aircraft, repeatedly ordered the 165-meter (541-foot) Chinese coast guard ship to withdraw from the Philippines' exclusive economic zone, a 200-nautical mile (370-kilometer) stretch of water, Philippine coast guard Commodore Jay Tarruela said. "What we're doing there is, hour-by-hour and day-to-day, (we're) challenging the illegal presence of the Chinese coast guard for the international community to know that we're not going to allow

China to normalize the ill-treatment," Tarruela said. Under President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., who took office in mid-2022, the Philippines has aggressively defended its territorial interests in the South China Sea, a key global trading route. That has brought Philippine forces into frequent confrontations with China's coast guard, navy and suspected militia boats and sparked fears that a bigger armed conflict could draw in the United States, the Philippines' longtime treaty ally and China's regional rival.

The lopsided conflict has forced the Philippines to seek security arrangements with other Asian and Western countries, including Japan, with which it signed a key agreement last July which would allow their forces to hold joint combat training. The pact, which must be ratified by lawmakers of both countries before it takes effect, was the first such agreement to be forged by Japan in Asia. China surrounded Scarborough Shoal with its coast guard and other ships after a tense territorial standoff with the Philippines in 2012. The Philippines responded by bringing its disputes with

China to international arbitration in 2013 and largely won three years later when an arbitration panel in The Hague invalidated China's expansive claims in the busy sea passage under the 1982 United Convention on the Law of the Sea. China has rejected the 2016 arbitration ruling and continues to openly defy it. "Will this lead to another case?" Malaya said. "All options are on the table because the closer the monster ship is in Philippine waters, the more it makes tensions high and the more that the Philippine government contemplates things it was not contemplating before." China has warned the Philippines from pursuing another legal case in an international forum after the arbitration, preferring bilateral negotiations, which give Beijing an advantage because of its size and clout, a senior Philippine official has said on condition of anonymity because of a lack of authority to discuss such sensitive issues publicly.

The two countries have also been discussing their territorial conflicts under a bilateral consultation mechanism to avoid an escalation of the disputes. The next round of talks will be hosted by China, the official said.

Vietnam and Russia sign an agreement to expand cooperation

HANOI, Vietnam (AP): Vietnam and Russia inked an agreement to boost cooperation on nuclear energy during Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin's two-day visit to Hanoi.

The Southeast Asian country has been trying to revive its nuclear energy plans - after it shelved building two nuclear power plants in 2016 due to ballooning costs and concerns around safety - hoping it will help it become energy-sufficient and reach its goal of curbing additional greenhouse emissions by 2050. The agreement was signed

between Russia's state-owned nuclear energy company Rosatom and Vietnam's state-owned power utility EVN.

Mishustin also held bilateral talks with his counterpart Pham Minh Chinh and met Vietnam's Communist Party chief To Lam and the chairman of Vietnam's National Assembly Tran Thanh Man. "Vietnam is an important partner of Russia in Southeast Asia," Mishustin said. "Today we plan to discuss with you a comprehensive plan for cooperation between Russia and Vietnam, which runs until 2030."

He is set to meet President Luong Cuong on Wednesday. Alexey Likhachev, Rosatom's general director, arrived in Hanoi. He said that the company was ready to help Vietnam build nuclear power plants and centers, as well as share and localize Russian nuclear technology, according to Vietnamese state media. Russia, which has been trying to bolster ties in Asia to offset its growing international isolation over its war in Ukraine, also agreed to transfer a scientific research vessel for marine research. Mishustin is a technocrat who has

maintained a low political profile and was reappointed as Russia's Prime Minister in 2024. This is his first trip to Vietnam and comes after President Vladimir Putin traveled to Hanoi in June and agreed to work on a roadmap for a nuclear science and technology center in Vietnam. Hanoi and Moscow have had diplomatic relations since 1950 and have been close allies since the Cold War. Evidence of that long relationship and its influence can be seen in Vietnamese cities where Soviet-style apartment blocks co-exist alongside skyscrapers.

Tanker hit by Houthis salvaged, Red Sea disaster averted

ATHENS (Reuters): A risky operation to salvage an oil tanker attacked by Houthi militants in the Red Sea and avert what could have been one of the largest oil spills in recorded history has been completed, British maritime security company Ambrey and Greece have said.

The 900-foot Greek-registered MT Sounion, carrying 150,000 tonnes of crude oil, was struck by several missiles and drones and caught fire on Aug. 21, triggering fears of an oil spill that could cause catastrophic environmental damage in the area. Months later, the vessel has been declared safe and its cargo has been removed, said Ambrey, which led the salvage operation.

Greece had urged all nations to assist with the case with political negotiations extending from the Houthis, who eventually allowed salvage teams to tow the ship, to Saudi Arabia, a key player in the region. "It's a great relief, mainly due to the environmental disaster risk. It was a very complex operation," Greek Shipping Minister Christos Stylianides told Reuters. "I feel relieved and content."

Al-Bayt Guests honored with 'Labatim' award

JEDDAH: In a moment of immense pride, Al-Bayt Guests have been awarded the prestigious "Labatim" Award for Excellence in Serving the Guests of Allah in the International Hajj category by the Ministry of Hajj and Umrah. This recognition was announced during the Hajj Conference and Exhibition, reflecting the organization's outstanding efforts in facilitating the pilgrimage for visitors from Europe, the USA, Canada, and Australia.

The event was graced by the Honorable Minister of Hajj and Umrah, Dr. Tawfiq bin Fawzan Al-Rabiyyah, who visited the Al-Bayt Guest Booth to acknowledge their contributions. Haji Kamran Zeib, former Provincial Chairman of the Hajj Committee, commended Al-Bayt for their remarkable service and assured continued support in their noble mission.

Engineer could flee to Iran to avoid drone strike trial

BOSTON (Reuters): US prosecutors argued that an engineer could flee to Iran if he was granted bail while awaiting trial on charges related to a deadly drone attack on a US military base in Jordan carried out last year by Iran-backed militants.

Federal prosecutors in Boston had three weeks ago told a judge they were open to allowing Mahdi Sadeghi to be released on bond while he awaited trial on charges that he engaged in a scheme to violate US export control and sanctions laws. But prosecutors moved for Sadeghi's continued detention after the Italian government released his co-defendant, Iranian businessman Mohammad Abedini, and allowed him to return to Iran.

That occurred after Iran last week released an Italian journalist, Cecilia Sala, who was detained in Tehran three days after the men's arrests. Prosecutor Christina Clark cited the events in Italy to argue Iran could take steps to help Sadeghi flee if he was released, something she said he might want to do given the potentially long term of incarceration he faces. "What the defendant did was, to put it mildly, not only a violation of the law but an affront to the national security of the United States," she said during a court hearing.

Defense lawyer Jessica Thrall countered that prosecutors were engaging in "conjecture" to argue her client would want to leave the United States, as his wife and children live in the US. US Magistrate Judge Donald Cabell said he would rule at a later date on whether to allow Sadeghi's release.

Russia sees shift from Trump towards recognising 'realities' in Ukraine

MOSCOW (Reuters): Russia says it has detected a shift from US President-elect Donald Trump and his team towards recognising the "realities" on the ground in Ukraine, and sees this as a welcome sign as it prepares to study his plan for ending the war.

The Kremlin says it is open to a meeting between President Vladimir Putin and Trump, which the Republican said would take place "very quickly".

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said that Moscow was ready to study Trump's ideas for ending the conflict in Ukraine once he takes office on Jan. 20.

Lavrov told a press conference that Russia welcomed the fact that the incoming administration had "started to mention the realities on the ground" more often. He referred to comments by both Trump and incoming national security adviser Mike Waltz.

Waltz told ABC that it was clear the war must end somehow by diplomatic means.

He added: "I just don't

think it's realistic to say we're going to expel every Russian from every inch of Ukrainian soil, even Crimea. President Trump has acknowledged that reality, and I think it's been a huge step forward that the entire world is acknowledging that reality. Now let's move forward."

Trump last week acknowledged Moscow's longstanding opposition to Ukraine's ambition to join NATO, something he said would mean that "Russia has somebody right on their doorstep, and I could understand their feeling about that." Russia controls around a fifth of Ukraine after nearly three years of war and says any deal to end the conflict must take account of that. In September 2022 it proclaimed four regions of Ukraine that it only partly controls as part of its own territory, in an action overwhelmingly condemned by the United Nations General Assembly as an "attempted illegal annexation".

Lavrov said that Russia was ready to discuss security guarantees "for the country that is now called

Ukraine". but Moscow would need its own assurances that it could not be threatened on its western borders with Europe. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said earlier this month that security guarantees for Kyiv would only be effective if the United States provided them, and that a ceasefire without such guarantees would merely give Russia time to rearm.

Zelenskyy is also still pressing for Ukraine to be allowed to join NATO - something that Russia rejects out of hand and says it went to war to prevent. Kyiv is concerned it could be forced into serious concessions if Trump withdraws military support from the United States in pursuit of his frequently repeated promise to bring the conflict to a swift conclusion. Lavrov was also asked at the press conference about Trump's comment last week that he would not rule out using military or economic action to acquire Greenland. "First of all, we need to listen to the Greenlanders," he replied.

Biden announces two new national monuments

WASHINGTON (AP): In an announcement postponed by the Los Angeles wildfires, President Joe Biden designated two sites in California as national monuments that will honor Native American tribes while shielding picturesque mountains and deserts from mining and energy development.

Biden made the designations at an event at the White House, a week after - and on the other side of the country from - how he'd originally planned to do so, with a speech in California's Eastern Coachella Valley. The president landed in California on Jan. 6, but made it as far as Los Angeles before high winds - that helped spark the Los Angeles blazes - forced officials to scrap the event. It was a stark reminder that, even as Biden uses the last days of his administration to attempt to safeguard the environment, climate change is already helping to exacerbate natural disasters.

Instead, Biden spoke next to screens featuring towering peaks, desert vistas and an array of plant and animal life. "I was hoping we were going to do

this in place," the president said. "This is as close as we could get." Biden formally created the Chuckwalla National Monument, in Southern California near Joshua Tree National Park, and the Sattitla Highlands National Monument, in Northern California.

The declarations bar oil and natural gas drilling, as well as mining and other exploration and production initiatives, on the 624,000-acre (2,400-square-kilometer) Chuckwalla site, and roughly 225,000 acres (800 square kilometers) near the California-Oregon border. The protected area encompasses natural wonders including the Painted Canyon of Mecca Hills and Alligator Rock, and is home to 50-plus rare species of plants and animals like the desert bighorn sheep and the Chuckwalla lizard - which the monument is named for, the White House said in a statement. At the event, Biden talked about taking his children to national monuments around the country yearly when they were young to "witness the majesty, the beauty."

"Our national wonders are the heart and soul of this nation," he said. "It's a

birthright we pass on from generation to generation." The monuments becoming realities honor past tribal requests. Many Native American tribes and environmental groups have pushed for designation of the Chuckwalla National Monument, while the Pit River Tribe has worked to get the federal government to designate the Sattitla Highlands National Monument. Biden joked about being careful not to mispronounce Sattitla, then still struggled to pronounce it. When he sat down to sign the formal acts, he simply referred to it as the "highlands" monument - meaning he didn't have to give it another try.

The designations are part of a larger Biden administration effort to conserve at least 30% of US lands and waters by 2030. They follow Biden's recent move banning new offshore oil and gas drilling in most US coastal waters, including in California. That was an attempt to thwart possible efforts by the incoming Republican administration to expand offshore drilling, but is also an order President-elect Donald Trump has vowed to quickly reverse.

Lebanon's Nawaf Salam to be designated PM

BEIRUT (Reuters): Lebanese President Joseph Aoun summoned Nawaf Salam, head of the International Court of Justice, to designate him prime minister after most lawmakers nominated him, a big blow to Hezbollah, which accused opponents of seeking to exclude it.

The choice of Salam underlined the major shift in the power balance among Lebanon's sectarian factions since the Iran-backed Shi'ite Muslim group Hezbollah was pummeled in a war with Israel last year, and its Syrian ally Bashar al-Assad was toppled. The presidency said Salam, currently outside the country and due to return, had secured the backing of 84 out of parliament's 128 lawmakers, and Aoun had summoned him to assign him to form the government.

Salam won backing from Christian and Druze factions, and prominent Sunni Muslim MPs, including Hezbollah allies and opponents of the group who have long demanded it give up its powerful arsenal, arguing it has undermined the state. But lawmakers from Hezbollah and its Shi'ite ally the Amal Movement, which hold all the seats reserved for Shi'ites in parliament, did not name anybody, indicating they currently do not intend to participate in

Salam's government and raising the prospect of a sectarian rift if they remain outside cabinet. Senior Hezbollah lawmaker Mohammed Raad, whose Iran-backed group had wanted incumbent Najib Mikati to stay in the post, said Hezbollah's opponents were working for fragmentation and exclusion. He said the group had "extended its hand" by electing Joseph Aoun as president last week only to find the "hand cut".

"Any government at odds with coexistence has no legitimacy whatsoever," Raad said. The group would act calmly and wisely "out of concern for the national interest", he added. Last week's election of army commander General Aoun, who enjoys the support of the United States and Saudi Arabia, was another sign of shifts in the political landscape, in which Hezbollah had long held decisive sway. It has marked a revival of Saudi influence in a country where it was eclipsed by Iran and Hezbollah years ago. Aoun's election and the designation of a new premier are steps towards reviving Lebanese government institutions which have been paralysed for more than two years, with the country having neither a head of state nor a fully empowered cabinet.

Faisal Karami, a Sunni

lawmaker aligned with the group, said he had nominated Salam, citing demands for "change and renewal" and pledges of Arab and international support for Lebanon. Christian lawmaker Gebran Bassil said Salam was the "face of reform". "Hope is in change," he said. The new administration faces huge tasks including rebuilding areas levelled by Israeli airstrikes during the war with Hezbollah, and launching long-stalled reforms to revive the economy and address the root causes of the collapse of Lebanon's financial system in 2019. Aoun said he hoped for a smooth and fast government formation because "we have great opportunities abroad", a reference to pledges of foreign support.

The prime minister must be a Sunni Muslim according to Lebanon's sectarian power-sharing system, which parcels out state positions on the basis of religious affiliation. The presidency goes to a Maronite Christian and the speaker of parliament must be a Shi'ite Muslim. Hezbollah lawmakers attended their meeting with Aoun later than scheduled, delaying their arrival as they saw the momentum building behind Salam, a Hezbollah source said.

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UK's Reeves faces market slump challenge

BRITAIN'S finance minister Rachel Reeves and Prime Minister Keir Starmer are seeking to stem a market slump, but for now what happens next to rising government borrowing costs and the falling pound is largely beyond their control.

Donald Trump and US economic data are likely to have a bigger influence on whether this month's UK selloff proves to be a blip or the start of a crisis for Starmer's government, elected last July. Reeves, visiting China at the weekend, said her targets for fixing the public finances – which have been hit by the rise in borrowing costs – were non-negotiable and “we will take actions to ensure that we meet those fiscal rules”.

Early on Monday, 30-year gilt yields hit a new post-1998 high and sterling fell to its lowest since November 2023. Asked about the market situation, Starmer told reporters his team would be “ruthless” about repairing the budget. The government has blamed previous Conservative governments for damaging the economy and public finances after the shocks of Brexit and the mini-budget crisis under former Prime Minister Liz Truss in 2022.

But Reeves has limited options to change the tone in markets. If Britain's budget forecasters say on March 26 that Reeves is off-course to meet her fiscal rules, she could announce future spending cuts to get them back on track, according to Reuters.

She already plans a lot of spending restraint, however, and the prospect of more pain would anger many of the governing centre-left Labour Party's members and voters.

The option of more tax hikes seems to be off the table with firms cutting hiring after Reeves hit them with higher social security contributions in her October budget.

“It's a tough balancing act with no easy solutions,” Hetal Mehta, head of economic research at St. James's Place, said.

Reeves is due to make an economic growth speech in the coming weeks before setting out a detailed plan in a two-year Spending Review expected in June. Measures announced so far for speeding up the economy are only expected to have a meaningful impact in the 2030s. Reeves' next full budget is due in October or November, by which time the global economic picture could be very different.

US President-elect Trump's promise to impose additional tariffs on imports is widely expected to push up US inflation and investors are pricing in only one interest rate cut by the US Federal Reserve in 2025.

Then there is Britain's reliance on what former Bank of England Governor Mark Carney called “the kindness of strangers” to offset its large current account deficit, the second-biggest in the Group of Seven after the United States.

Sanjay Raja, Deutsche Bank's chief UK economist, said many of those strangers are proving more fickle than in the past, with pension and insurance funds – which often need to hold bonds long-term for regulatory reasons – taking only 20% of sales of new government debt, down from 75% two decades ago. Foreign ownership is up, meanwhile, largely due to the rise of hedge funds. Also beyond the Reeves' control are Bank of England interest rate decisions. Investors currently see a roughly 75% chance of two quarter-point BoE rate cuts in 2025, fewer than the almost four expected from the European Central Bank, the Reuters report adds.

A much stronger-than-expected US payrolls report on Friday – which suggested little need for the Fed to speed up its rate cuts – took a whole US cent off the value of the pound. Ben Zaranko, a senior research economist at the Institute for Fiscal Studies think tank, said Reeves would probably avoid rushing out short-term measures to settle financial markets that could be seen as a sign of panic within the government. Mehta at St James's Place said the big unknown for Reeves remained the outlook for the world economy.

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Pakistan and Bangladesh: Turning the Page on a Bitter Past

Muhammad Mohsin Iqbal

AFTER almost half a century, as a student of history, I was struck by a picture that symbolized the transformation of relationships between two nations. The photograph captured Pakistan Army Chief General Syed Asim Munir presenting souvenirs to a top military delegation from Bangladesh, a gesture of goodwill and friendship. This seemingly simple act carried profound symbolism, not just for Pakistan-Bangladesh relations but also for the broader narrative of South Asian history. As I pondered this picture, my mind wandered to another image deeply etched in history: General Amir Abdullah Khan Niazi signing the instrument of surrender at the Racecourse Ground (now Suhrawardy Udyan) in 16 December 1971, marking the creation of Bangladesh.

This surrender was not just a military event but a culmination of years of political unrest, misunderstandings, and external conspiracies. It symbolized the tragic breakdown of unity within Pakistan and the birth of a new nation under circumstances marred by international intrigue. For years, this image adorned the walls of Bangladesh's political elite. It served as a constant reminder of their liberation struggle and, at times, a tool for fostering animosity against Pakistan. A notable example was the placement of the surrender photograph in the Bangladeshi Prime Minister's office, where Sheikh Hasina Wajid would often stand with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi

for media coverage, emphasizing the bond between India and Bangladesh that was forged during those turbulent times.

However, history has a way of revealing hidden truths. Over time, the Indian narrative of its role in the 1971 war has been openly acknowledged by Indian leadership. Prime Minister Modi himself has repeatedly boasted about India's involvement in the dismemberment of Pakistan. His admission aligns with documented evidence of India's covert operations, military interventions, and support for the Mukti Bahini. This acknowledgment, while a point of pride for India, has also served to expose its role in exploiting regional vulnerabilities for its own geopolitical ambitions.

For decades, Bangladesh appeared ensnared in India's strategic orbit, with economic and political ties heavily skewed in India's favor. Indian goods dominated Bangladeshi markets, water-sharing disputes over transboundary rivers remained unresolved, and Indian influence often seemed to encroach upon Bangladesh's sovereignty. However, in recent years, as relations have shown signs of strain, Bangladesh has begun to assert its independence at the regional level.

In this evolving context, the recent thaw in Pakistan-Bangladesh relations is a development of immense significance. The symbolic meeting between General Syed Asim Munir and the Bangladeshi military delegation represents a conscious effort to move beyond the bitter legacy of

1971. Both nations appear to recognize the futility of prolonged hostility and the benefits of fostering brotherhood. This rapprochement is rooted not just in shared history and culture but also in pragmatic considerations. In a region dominated by India's hegemonic ambitions, cooperation between Pakistan and Bangladesh could serve as a counterbalance, ensuring greater regional stability.

The economic trajectories of both nations further underscore the need for collaboration. Bangladesh has emerged as a global leader in textile exports, achieving remarkable economic growth despite challenges. Pakistan, with its vast resources and strategic location, has the potential to complement Bangladesh's economic aspirations. Trade agreements, joint ventures, and cultural exchanges could unlock untapped potential, benefiting both nations.

Moreover, the shared religious and cultural heritage between Pakistan and Bangladesh remains a powerful bridge. Despite the painful separation, the bonds of faith, language, and traditions have endured. Initiatives such as academic exchanges, people-to-people contact, and collaboration in arts and sports can further cement these ties.

The broader geopolitical landscape also necessitates unity. India's expansionist policies and its attempts to isolate Pakistan have not gone unnoticed. The same India that once posed as Bangladesh's liberator has now been unmasked as a regional bully, manipulating its neighbors to serve its own interests. By strengthening their bilateral

relationship, Pakistan and Bangladesh can collectively challenge this narrative, advocating for a more inclusive and balanced South Asia.

This renewed brotherhood also reflects the resilience of nations and their ability to overcome historical grievances. It is a testament to the enduring truth that no external power can permanently divide those united by shared destiny. The journey from 1971 to the present moment has been fraught with challenges, but it also demonstrates the capacity for reconciliation and forward-thinking leadership.

As I revisited the image of General Niazi's surrender, juxtaposed with the recent picture of General Asim Munir extending goodwill, a poignant Urdu verse came to mind: "Pohnchi wahan pay khak, jahan ka khamer tha" (Destiny ultimately leads us to where we truly belong). The wheel of time has turned, exposing conspiracies and unveiling new realities. The past, though painful, serves as a guide for the future. It reminds us that while history cannot be undone, it can be a source of learning and growth.

The evolving Pakistan-Bangladesh relationship holds lessons for all nations grappling with the weight of historical animosities.

It underscores the importance of dialogue, mutual respect, and the recognition of shared interests. As the region stands at a crossroads, the example set by these two nations could inspire a new era of cooperation and harmony in South Asia, defying the divisive forces that once tore them apart.

New US president ought to reset ties

Anthony Moretti

DONALD Trump has been elected as the next president of the United States and will be sworn into office on Jan 20.

One of the first responsibilities he could shoulder is to stabilize and improve relations with China. Let's not mince words, no country is as important a global partner of the US than China, home to the world's second-largest economy, and the only country with which the US can work together to address some of the world's biggest challenges.

Unfortunately, the US spends far too much time and effort bashing China. At the most basic level, such hostile action hinders the building of trust necessary for the two countries to identify solutions to climate change, global public health issues and food insecurity. The list is much longer, but it is fair to say that solving the three problems mentioned above is necessary to ensure a positive shared future for humankind.

There are three immediate steps he should take in order to improve relations with China. Though none of them is especially complicated, all of them require a kind of leadership that has been woefully lacking in

recent years. The choice is Mr Trump's, so please make the right one.

Another thing Mr Trump needs to do is to lift the tariffs on Chinese products, many of which have been in place for more than half a decade. Yes, imposing extra tariffs on imports makes the US president appear tough, but as a policy, punitive tariffs are bad for free trade.

The Financial Times, perhaps the best Western newspaper that helps readers understand all things money, recently outlined why tariffs are disastrous. Consider just this statement: "tariffs are higher taxes. Worse, they are inefficient, regressive and high on certain to cause retaliation".

Besides, the Tax Foundation said that continued tariffs on Chinese products will reduce the United States' GDP by 0.2 percent and eliminate about 142,000 jobs.

In other words, yes, if the next US president wants to continue driving the US toward economic doom, then keep announcing new tariffs. Logic would say that you do not want to do that.

The other item on the agenda should be to clearly, and powerfully, affirm that the US will not undermine

the one-China principle. One US president after another has often said that the US acknowledges that Taiwan is an integral part of China, and yet has gone on to arm the island – to the tune of billions of dollars – which is a slap in the face of such a claim.

Related to this, the visits by US politicians to Taiwan suggest there is no legitimacy behind the US administration's endorsement of the one-China policy. Much like the tariffs, such visits allow those politicians to tout their presumed strength. But the visits to the island needlessly antagonize Beijing. Remind all US politicians, regardless of their party affiliation, to think less about selfishly boosting their anti-China bona fides and more about selflessly strengthening US-China relations.

Also, keep the doors to US colleges and universities open for Chinese students and scholars. The "China Initiative", launched in 2018, was a terrible idea. So nothing like it should be implemented in the future. The effort was supposed to uncover Chinese scholars "spying" for China. The fact is, no such spy ring existed.

What was the fallout

from this mess?

One leading Chinese American said it best: the initiative "fueled racial animosity, xenophobia, and suspicion toward the (Asian American and Pacific Islander) community and Chinese Americans in particular."

Along the same lines, Mr Trump can forcefully say that the detainment of Chinese students entering the US through its airports will stop. When such activities became news in recent years, there was no way to square these bigoted and discriminatory acts with the US' commitment to welcoming people from all over the world to learn or work in the country.

The relationship between China and the US is akin to a partnership. Working together toward healthy and honorable goals, partners support each other. Of course, there are differences, but compromise and common sense allow for the rough spots to be smoothed over. Beginning early in 2025, Mr Trump will have the choice to either set a new tone to this partnership or continue to push obnoxious rhetoric and questionable policies.

For the good of the world, do the right thing.

What comes after a Gaza ceasefire deal

Osama Al-Sharif

A long-awaited ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas appears imminent, according to US, Israeli, Qatari and Palestinian sources. After months of fruitless negotiations, the two sides are now closer than ever to sealing a multi-phased agreement that would bring an end to the bloodletting, allow for the release of Israeli captives and Palestinian prisoners, and ensure a gradual Israeli withdrawal from war-ravaged Gaza.

Details are sketchy, but what is clear is that US President-elect Donald Trump has stepped in and put pressure on Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to embrace a deal before his inauguration on Jan. 20. President Joe Biden also spoke of an agreement to be sealed soon, while Secretary of State Antony Blinken unveiled his vision for a postwar Gaza on Tuesday.

Speaking about his own foreign policy achievements, Biden mentioned the plight of the people of Gaza, “who have been through hell,” and spoke of the right of Palestinians to self-determination. Trump, on his part, said on Monday: “We are very close to getting it done. There has been a handshake, and they are getting it finished. If it won't happen, there will be a lot of trouble.”

It is ironic and sad that Trump has been able to push all parties to accept a deal when Biden could have done the same months ago, thus sparing many innocent lives on both sides. The fact that Biden and Blinken have allowed Netanyahu and his far-right coalition to carry out the worst genocide in modern times, all while supplying Israel with tens of billions of dollars-worth of arms, is an indelible stain that has made the US complicit in the Gaza carnage.

Trump will take credit

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For stopping the massacre and ending what had become the most horrific war against civilians in the 21st century. Netanyahu, who wasted no opportunity to derail an agreement that could have been reached many months ago, finds himself in a corner. He has not delivered a “total victory,” nor has his army been able to free all hostages. Under the proposed agreement, the Israeli military will withdraw from key positions in Gaza, culminating in total withdrawal in the final phase of the ceasefire agreement.

The end of the war — a final cessation of hostilities that is yet to be agreed upon — will trigger a political crisis in Israel. Netanyahu's far-right partners have threatened to quit the coalition. Pressure will rise in Israel for an independent inquiry into the events of Oct. 7, 2023. Netanyahu's trial on corruption charges will resume. His margin of maneuverability will become much smaller. It is unlikely that he will be able to survive politically as captives begin to return home and the world has a first glance at the level of mass destruction Israel has inflicted on Gaza.

Regarding the “day-after” scenario, Blinken's vision of a reformed Palestinian Authority role, with Arab participation, will depend on how the Trump team sees things. While Hamas has sustained significant losses in its leadership structure and military prowess in Gaza, it has survived as a political force. What role it will have in Gaza in the future depends on the Trump White House, Israel and, to

some extent, the PA.

Much also depends on what the people of Gaza want. They have paid the ultimate price for the events of Oct. 7, 2023, and it is up to them to determine their own future. They should be allowed to do so. The biggest challenges once a ceasefire deal is adopted are to facilitate the passage of humanitarian assistance and the documentation of war crimes in Gaza.

That last challenge will not be mentioned in the ceasefire deal. But even if the war ends, the world should not ignore the fact that Israel has committed serious breaches of international law. Independent investigators and foreign journalists must be allowed into the stricken Strip. They have to report to the world the horrific war crimes that Israel has committed over the past 15 months. Accountability must be a cornerstone of any lasting agreement involving Gaza.

Meanwhile, one has to be wary of Israel's commitment to the ceasefire deal. In Lebanon, Israel has allegedly violated the agreement with Hezbollah hundreds of times. The same will happen in Gaza. Israel will find excuses to derail the deal and resume its aggression in Gaza. The guarantors — the US, Qatar and Egypt — must make sure that an end to the war is lasting and that Israel will have no reason to resume its attacks.

Two complex issues are: who will end up ruling Gaza and when can reconstruction begin. Trump has yet to unveil his Middle East policy, especially regarding the future of the West Bank and the PA. He is reportedly eager to complete what he started with the Abraham Accords. He is to make clear his stand on Palestinian statehood and the right to self-determination. These are issues that will shape the region and the future of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

More than 15 months of the

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And then there is the issue of inter-Palestinian reconciliation.

The Palestinian leadership must conclude that reconciliation and unity are the bulwark of a just cause that the world must address and rectify. After more than 46,000 fatalities — although that figure could double once the war ends — the Palestinians must overcome their differences and find common ground if they are to plead their case to the world.

And, as much as there must be Israeli accountability, there will also have to be a Palestinian revision of the consequences of the events of Oct. 7, 2023, and the geopolitical changes that have occurred as a result.

Palestinians have the right to resist the occupiers but they must agree on how to conduct their resistance. Israel has used the Hamas attacks to launch a genocidal war that has claimed tens of thousands of innocent lives and wreaked inconceivable destruction on Gaza, home to more than 2.3 million Palestinians. There will have to be lessons learned. No outside actors can tag what has happened as a victory or a loss. It is for the people of Gaza to decide. After all, it is they who have paid the ultimate price.

Why Pete Hegseth is a perfect fit to be Trump’s Pentagon chief

PETE Hegseth could hardly be more suited to be Donald Trump’s secretary of Defense – even though he’d surely be deemed unqualified by any conventional president.

The former Fox News anchor slugged it out with Democrats in one of the ugliest Cabinet confirmation hearings in recent administrations on Tuesday.

In the process, he created a blueprint for how the president-elect’s most provocative picks can handle their own hearings – including Pam Bondi – his backup choice for attorney general, who steps up on Wednesday.

By the end of Tuesday, Joni Ernst, the Iowa Republican senator who expressed early reservations about Hegseth, announced she would back his confirmation in a victory for Trump.

On the substance, Hegseth was wobbly.

He was all at sea over the geopolitics of East Asia, one of the world’s most dangerous maritime hotspots, had no answers on how Trump would end the war in Ukraine and said very little about Middle East threats to US security.

And Hegseth fueled fears about Trump treating his power as unlimited. He refused to say whether he’d order troops to shoot protesters if the president-elect told him to and wouldn’t rule out invasion forces to take over Greenland and the Panama Canal in line with Trump’s expansionism.

But Trump prefers performance to details. He likes subordinates who praise and defend him. And Hegseth mirrored his mentor by lashing out against diversity programs in the military, dismissed allegations about his personal life and excessive drinking as “smears” and wouldn’t apologize for past inflammatory statements.

With his stomach for the partisan fight, apparent lukewarm regard for the Geneva Conventions and contempt for Washington power structures, he was the perfect avatar for the tear-it-all down second term that Trump craves. And Hegseth, an Iraq and Afghanistan war veteran, posed as a “change agent” with “dust on my boots” who was ready to give the Pentagon a rigorous shake. In this mission, he’s joining working-class populists in the MAGA movement who want to take a hatchet to a government they think has gone “woke” and failed them.

Democrats came out swinging hard at Hegseth, highlighting his controversial background, arguing he was utterly unfit and lacked

experience to run the world’s most lethal military and the military industrial complex.

“I have voted in favor of all your predecessors, including those in the first Trump administration,” Jack Reed, the top Democrat on the Senate Armed Services Committee, told Hegseth. “Unfortunately, you lack the character and composure and competence to hold the position of Secretary of Defense.”

Such a character indictment from a senator as steeped in military matters as Reed might have squelched most nominations.

But Trump has reason to be cheerful. Before

Stephen Collinson

down Hegseth over alcohol use and his personal life. The former Fox anchor has denied a sexual assault allegation in which he was not charged. He had previously said the encounter was consensual. But Kaine said, “You have admitted that you had sex while you were married to wife two after you just had fathered a child by wife three.” Kaine asked whether Hegseth could be trusted to uphold his oath to the Constitution if he couldn’t be faithful to his wife. Hegseth protested that he’d been “completely exonerated” and “completely cleared” and said he wasn’t a “perfect” person but was now reformed.

culture war Trump has picked him to wage against establishment generals and Pentagon diversity programs.

Hegseth appeared most uncomfortable on vital policy details, national security issues and matters of the law, which are directly pertinent to the job he hopes to hold. Democrats – including Illinois Sen. Tammy Duckworth, Hawaii Sen. Mazie Hirono and Michigan Sen. Elissa Slotkin – were most effective at highlighting the vulnerabilities of the nomination while probing such areas.

Duckworth asked Hegseth to name at least one close US ally in the Association of Southeast

With his stomach for the partisan fight, apparent lukewarm regard for the Geneva Conventions and contempt for Washington power structures, he was the perfect avatar for the tear-it-all down second term that Trump craves. And Hegseth, an Iraq and Afghanistan war veteran, posed as a “change agent” with “dust on my boots” who was ready to give the Pentagon a rigorous shake. In this mission, he’s joining working-class populists in the MAGA movement who want to take a hatchet to a government they think has gone “woke” and failed them.

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Christmas, Hegseth seemed in deep trouble as scandal swirled. Yet Republicans universally embraced him at the hearing. Ernst, who had faced a conservative media onslaught over her previous skepticism of Hegseth and threats of a primary challenge, told WHO Radio in Des Moines on Tuesday: “He was adequately able to answer all of my questions.” She added: “I will be supporting President Trump’s pick for Secretary of Defense, Pete Hegseth.”

Her decision does not automatically eliminate a primary challenge, an Ernst adviser told CNN’s Jeff Zeleny, but makes it far more difficult to criticize and confront the senator.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune pledged to get Hegseth’s nomination on the floor quickly if it’s reported out of the committee, which Ernst’s support makes nearly certain.

Hegseth’s combativeness and fealty to Trumpism energized Republicans in his defense, suggesting that might be the best strategy for other controversial picks like Kash Patel for the FBI and Kristi Noem for the Department of Homeland Security. The South Dakota governor’s hearing has been moved until Friday over a delayed background check.

The most extraordinary moment of the hearing came when the normally genial Virginia Democratic Sen. Tim Kaine dressed

The plan seemed to be to use allegations of sexual misconduct and excessive workplace drinking, all of which Hegseth has denied, to the same effect as those that ended Sen. John Tower’s hopes of becoming President George H.W. Bush’s Defense secretary.

But 2025 is not 1989, and the standards of a previous age have given way to a Republican Party that long since absolved Trump’s personal, political and legal transgressions and – Gaetz aside – seems keen to extend tolerance toward his nominees.

Several other Democrats took turns to press Hegseth over his past opposition to women serving in combat. Hegseth insisted he wasn’t being sexist but argued that standards had been lowered to reach a threshold of women in combat units. “That makes the combat more difficult for everybody,” he said.

But Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren accused Hegseth of having a “confirmation conversion” by softening his position on the issue in the days since he was picked for the Pentagon job. New York Democratic Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand accused Hegseth of denigrating women, moms, LGBTQ service personnel and Democrats in the ranks.

These are important questions. But this was also political territory on which Hegseth seemed happy to fight. He was more than ready to get a jump on the

Asian Nations and how many countries were involved. Hegseth started to talk about South Korea, Japan and Australia – none of which are in the 10-member organization that includes two critical US treaty allies, including Thailand and the Philippines.

Hirono asked Hegseth whether he would “carry out an order from President Trump to seize Greenland, a territory of our NATO ally Denmark, by force, or would you comply with an order to take over the Panama Canal?” He replied with a non-sequitur, saying that Trump won “77 million votes to be the lawful commander-in-chief.”

Slotkin has only been a senator for about a week. But the former US representative and CIA analyst, who did three tours in Iraq, came up with some of the most effective Democratic questions. She asked whether he would “stand in the breach” and push back if Trump gave him an illegal order. “I reject the premise that President Trump would be giving any illegal orders,” Hegseth said.

Republicans defended Hegseth by lauding his combat experience and accusing Democrats of hypocrisy. “There’s a lot of talk going about, talking about qualifications. ... But there’s a lot of senators here I wouldn’t have on my board, because there is no qualifications – except your age and you got to be

living in the state and you’re a citizen of the United States – to be a senator,” said Sen. Markwayne Mullin from Oklahoma.

Montana Sen. Tim Sheehy, another newcomer on the committee after being elected last fall, asked Hegseth about the diameter of an M4A1 round, how many rounds fit into an M4 rifle and how many pushups he could do. “Right there, you’re representing qualifications that show you understand what the warfighter deals with every single day on the battlefield,” the retired Navy SEAL told Hegseth. “You understand what happens on the front line where our troops will be.”

It’s great that a potential secretary of Defense is close to the troops. And Hegseth’s status as an “out-of-the-box nominee” – in the words of one of his sponsors, former Minnesota Sen. Norm Coleman – is faithful to Trump’s successful outsider mystique. Vice President-elect JD Vance wrote on X that the US hadn’t won a war in three decades, had a recruitment crisis and that “Hegseth is assuredly NOT more of the same, and that’s good!”

But Pentagon chiefs are not just required to understand guns and the infantry. They have to be consummate diplomats steeped in policy who are able to defuse dangerous standoffs that could tip into wars. And they need to be able to go toe-to-toe with grizzled Russian and Chinese defense supremos with years of experience. It’s also important for them to brief a president on whether he’s obeying the law.

Leon Panetta, a Democrat who served as Defense secretary, White House chief of staff and CIA director, told CNN’s Dana Bash that it was a “close call” whether Hegseth should win confirmation. “The primary question that (senators) are going to have to be able to arrive at a judgment is whether ... he can be trusted to tell the truth, because as secretary of Defense, your primary role is to tell the truth to the president, to the Congress to the American people.”

There’s little such introspection among many of the Republican senators who, because of their majority in the chamber, will decide Hegseth’s fate. That’s not surprising since the GOP seems increasingly keen to avoid crossing their new president – who, in nine years in politics, has constantly redefined conventional notions of who is qualified for the highest office.

— CNN

Biden could have had the best presidential record - Gaza destroyed it

Hussein Ibish

Netanyahu took to Israeli television and vowed to exact “a mighty vengeance” for the killing of about 1,200 Israeli soldiers and civilians. The war in Gaza has achieved little else, but the “mighty vengeance” certainly took place, and it did so with US support of every variety.

Mr Netanyahu might as well have been echoing the Roman senator Cato the Elder, who began and ended his speeches declaring “Carthaginem esse delendam”, or “Carthage must be destroyed”. Gaza, he seemed to be saying in word and deed, must be destroyed. And so it has.

The Biden administration supplied Israel ample weapons for this mission of raw vengeance, supported it rhetorically, defended it diplomatically – including at the UN Security Council, and encouraged it in every possible way, at least for the first six months. Not until the campaign reached the Egyptian border at Rafah did Mr Biden begin to caution major restraint, and he was essentially ignored.

The only major thing the Biden administration did to express real opposition to Israel’s rampage was to

There is much more to be said in favour of Mr Biden’s successes. But the tally sheet is indelibly smeared with the blood of Palestinians in Gaza.

At least 46,000 Palestinians are estimated to have died, but experts believe the true number may be much greater. This certainly doesn’t include those still buried under the rubble or those who were buried in homes or by relatives and never made it to morgues or hospitals where the official counts take place. If the ceasefire is successful, it may be possible for international organisations to enter Gaza and seriously and impartially calculate the true cost. But whatever it is ultimately determined to be, 46,000 – mostly civilians, and quite possibly mostly children given the demographic realities in Gaza – is already unimaginable.

withhold the resupply of a shipment of 2,000-pound and 500-pound bombs before the attack on Rafah, but this was probably more aimed at the effort to prevent Israel from spreading the war into Lebanon, which had reached a critical point at that time.

The Biden administration’s approach to the Gaza war was not intentionally an immoral one. No one from the President on down actively wanted Palestinian civilians to be killed. On the contrary, the US, along with the UAE, Qatar and the UN – as well as a whole range of humanitarian NGOs – was instrumental in trying to actually get humanitarian aid into Gaza in spite of Israel’s disturbingly effective efforts to use food and medicine as a weapon of war.

Rather it was an amoral policy. The administration wanted, above all, to stop the war from spreading beyond Gaza, believing that – to paraphrase the advertisement for Las

Vegas – “what happens in Gaza stays in Gaza”. What Mr Biden truly feared was a broader regional war, and he was determined to stop it from spreading in a way that might drag in the US and even Iran.

So, Mr Biden ended up miscalculating badly, supporting the Gaza war in order to avoid a Lebanon war. And when Israel pursued the Lebanon war – capitalising on Hezbollah’s unbelievable miscalculation of thinking it could maintain an ongoing low-level confrontation with Israel without being suddenly sucked into a major war – he ended up supporting that, too, in order to avoid a war with Iran.

Thus, the US ended up being dragged around by its own Israeli client in a remarkable inversion of power and influence. Mr Biden only firmly pulled the leash when Israel might have attacked Iranian oil or nuclear installations in response to Tehran’s second missile barrage against Israel. But, noting the failure of Israel’s Arrow anti-missile system (the Iranian bombs largely fell, but in irrelevant places), Mr Biden did reward Israel’s compliance with major new missile-defence systems, gratis of course.

There is much more to be said in favour of Mr Biden’s successes. But the tally sheet is indelibly smeared with the blood of Palestinians in Gaza.

The Biden administration may leave office next week crowing that it has ended the Gaza war. But in fact, it presided over a ghastly and bloody massacre that the atrocious and indefensible mayhem of October 7, 2023 could in no way justify.

His defenders may say he had no choice. Or that the war in Sudan, in which the US is barely involved, is worse than the war in Gaza. Or any other rationalisation. But the reality is that most of the international community, and especially most of the Arab and Muslim peoples, will never regard Mr Biden and his colleagues with anything other than a fully justifiable outrage.

Insiders may have viewed this policy as amoral, rational and guided by fully defensible *raison d’etat*. In practice, however, it was grotesquely immoral.

All Neptune’s great ocean can’t wash away that blood clean from his hands.

How Saudi Vision 2030 is changing lifestyles

AN important outcome of Saudi Arabia’s Vision 2030 is the change it has brought about in terms of lifestyles, while also pursuing its key economic goal of diversifying the economy away from overdependence on oil. Much has been written about the international sporting events, art exhibitions and music concerts that the country now hosts on a regular basis. Going to movies or the theater, which was rare before the vision was adopted in 2015, has become a regular weekend activity.

New outdoor activities are an overlooked part of this change. As the government adopted ambitious programs to reverse desertification, climate change and environmental degradation, vast areas of the country have been designated as natural reserves where only ecologically sound activities are permitted, allowing native fauna and flora to flourish again, including animals that were close to extinction. Ecotourism followed, attracting campers, hikers and trekkers and reviving old towns and hamlets and old arts and crafts.

As part of these efforts, the National Center for Vegetation Cover Development and C o m b a t i n g

Desertification was established in 2018 to oversee the management of grazing lands, forests and national parks and to preserve the plant genetic resources and vegetation cover outside the officially designated natural reserves. The 2022 Saudi Green Initiative was an important part of this drive to make the country green again.

Although Saudi Arabia is known to much of the outside world as one vast desert, its topography is quite diverse. A land area of more than 2 million sq. km makes it one of the largest countries in the world, nine times the size of Britain, for example. It has pine forests and vast grasslands; 3,000-meter-high mountains, deep ravines and fertile valleys; snow-covered peaks in the winter and scorching hot sand deserts in the summer.

Last September, the UNESCO Global Geoparks Council endorsed the nomination of North Riyadh Geopark and Salma Geopark for inclusion in the UNESCO Global Geoparks Network. If approved at the UNESCO General Conference in March, Saudi Arabia will officially join the UNESCO Global Geoparks Network for the first time. These two areas are some of the most important geological sites in

the country, with a geological diversity that combines ancient formations and breathtaking natural landscapes, reflecting a geological history that spans millions of years.

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and providing educational resources for local communities. The model is based on collaboration between the public, private and nonprofit sectors.

tion is part of Saudi Arabia’s efforts to develop sustainable and ecofriendly tourism and play a key role in global geotourism. It employs an interesting model of sustainable natural resource management that integrates ecotourism with local development, creating job opportunities

By raising awareness of the importance of the area’s geological heritage, North Riyadh Geopark gives local people a sense of pride in their region.

The creation of innovative local enterprises, new jobs and targeted training courses are stimulated as new sources of revenue are generated through geotourism, while the geological resources of the area are protected. The bottom-up process ensures the involvement of relevant local and regional stakeholders and authorities in the area, such as landowners, community groups, tourism providers, local organizations and families.

In addition to government efforts, there have been important private initiatives. In December 2020, a group of outdoorsmen established the Pathways and Hiking

Singapore combined. It is located about 120 km northwest of Riyadh and features historical castles, old towns, ancient ruins, interesting natural escarpment formations, valleys, water pools and desert oases surrounded by sand dunes and fringed by palm trees. One of the geopark’s main features is the Khashm Al-Hisan (Horse’s Nose) mountain, with a peak of 996 meters.

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Association, known as Darb, which has become Saudi Arabia’s main hiking organization. Since its inception, Darb has blazed numerous trails and organized hiking outings and trekking expeditions. Together with the National Center for Vegetation Cover Development and Combating Desertification and business sponsors, Darb was instrumental in marking the trail up the Khashm Al-Hisan mountain and making it accessible, although it remains moderately arduous for some people. Part of the attraction of hiking is health concerns. According to an article in the Saudi Medical Journal, the country ranks 14th worldwide in terms of obesity rates, at 35 percent.

It also ranks high in obesity-related diseases, such as Type 2 diabetes. Sedentary lifestyles have contributed to the rise in these rates. One of Vision 2030’s goals is to reverse these trends by encouraging city dwellers to lead a more active lifestyle.

Reversing climate change, greening the country, improving health and growing non-oil local economies combine in North Riyadh Geopark to make ecotourism an attractive way to achieve Vision 2030’s goals.

— Arab News



SCCI urges govt to fulfill promises made with traders

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Members of executive committee of the Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry urged the provincial government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to materialize commitments regarding reduction in infrastructure development cess at 1 percent, ratio of property taxes and removal entry ban on goods-laden trucks to Industrial Estate Hayatabad Peshawar.

The EC members also demanded concrete steps to resolve trading community issues regarding electricity, gas departments and district administration.

According to details, the executive committee meeting convened under chairmanship of the chamber president Fazal Moqeen Khan here at the SCCI house.

Businessman forum leader and former president FPCCI Ghazanfar Bilour, the chamber SVP Abdul Jalil Jan, vice president Shehryar Khan, former

presidents Riaz Arshad, Malik Niaz Ahmad, Fuad Ishaq, Adeel Rauf, Zulfiqar Ali Khan, Faiz Muhammad Faizi, Engr Maqsood Anwar Pervaz, former SVPs Shahid Hussain, Imran Khan Mohmand, Sanaullah Khan, former VPs Ejaz Khan Afridi, Javed Akhtar, executive members Ziaul Haq Sarhadi, Mujeebur Rehman, Abbas Fuad Azeem, Ashfaq Ahmad, Sabir Ahmad Bangash, Gul Zaman Khan, Sultan Mohammad, Saifullah Khan, Shams Rahim, Abdul Nasir, Nadeem Rauf, and Sohail Javed, Abdul Majid, Ihsanullah, Hasnain Sheraz, Affaf Ali Khan, Saddar Gul, Fazal e Wahid, Rashid Iqbal Siddiqui, Ishtiaq Ahmad and Faiz Rasool, Secretary General Muqtasid Ahsan.

Meeting offered fateha for departed soul of Malako Store owner Haji Muhammad Bashir, Pak Bakers owner Syed Mir Hashim Raza and wife of the Malik Pir Baskh and prayed to give courage and bravery to

the beavered families to bear this irreparable loss.

During session for discussion on other matters, the executive members and business community said provincial government made promise to reduce IDC to 1 percent, abolishment of double taxes, curtailing ratio of property tax, lifting entry ban of goods-laden vehicles to Industrial Estate Hayatabad Peshawar, resolution of matters related to cantonment board, electricity and gas departments, district administration and others.

The meeting expressed concern for not timely actions to fulfill the above-mentioned commitments, because of which, traders were harassed during collection of property and other taxes, even arresting and imposing heavy fines on them.

The meeting expressed grave concern over non-implementation of decisions made during a meeting of the Special Investment Facilitation

Council in Islamabad.

The meeting decided SCCI will make contact with relevant departments at provincial and federal level and to convey traders' concerns verbally and in written form.

As many as 3500 export goods-vehicles of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had shifted to Chaman border, Quetta owing to imposition of IDC, consequently, the export had completely halted from this province, the meeting informed.

The house apprised that IDC has been reduced to 1 percent on some items at Peshawar Airport but participants were unanimous about complete abolishment of the IDC on export from KP.

Earlier, participants paid rich tribute to services of former senator and BF leader Ilyas Ahmad Bilour (Late) services for the business community and vowed they will accomplish Ilyas Bilour mission under guidance and leadership of his son Ghazanfar Bilour.



PESHAWAR: President Sarhad Chamber of Commerce & Industry Fazal Moqeen Khan presiding over a meeting of Executive Committee of SCCI.

PAA denies unauthentic and baseless report

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Airports Authority (PAA) categorically states that recent reports claiming the approval of the financial bid by TERG Consortium for the outsourcing of Islamabad International Airport are unauthentic and misleading.

The matter is currently undergoing due process and No decision has been made or approved by PAA at this stage.

PAA emphasizes that any official announcement regarding the process will be made in due course and urges the media to refrain from such misreporting which may be detrimental to critical national matters.

We request all stakeholders to await an official statement, which will be issued at the appropriate time.

FCCI inks five MoUs

FAISALABAD (APP): Various Memorandums of Understandings (MOUs) were being signed with different organizations to ensure maximum facilitation to the FCCI members, said Rehan Naseem Bhara, President Faisalabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry (FCCI).

He inked five MOUs with Fly Dubai, Ripah International College, Darul Arqam, Hadaya International School and Italian Firm Beretta and said that Fly Dubai had offered five percent discount to FCCI members on its minimum air fare.

Similarly, the Ripah International College Sargodha Road had waived off 100 percent admission fee along with 40% concession in tuition fee.

The same facility had also been offered by the administration of Darul Arqam and Hadaya International School, he added.

100-Index of PSX loses 308 points

ISLAMABAD (APP): The 100-Index of the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) shed 308.46 points on Wednesday, a negative change of 0.27 percent, closing at 114,495.71 points as compared to 114,804.17 points on the last trading day.

A total of 659,431,269 shares were traded during the day as compared to 589,463,320 shares the previous trading day, whereas the price of shares stood at Rs39.640 billion against Rs32.584 billion on the last trading day.

As many as 455 companies transacted their shares in the stock market, 176 of them recorded gains and 225 sustained losses, whereas the share price of 54 companies remained unchanged.

The three top trading companies were WorldCall Telecom with 68,666,714 shares at Rs1.80 per share, Pak Refinery with 56,858,715 shares at Rs43.49 per share and Cnergyco PK with 43,218,561 shares at Rs7.06 per share.

Hoechst Pakistan Limited witnessed a maximum increase of Rs120.49 per share closing at

Rs2,850.13 whereas runner-up was Raffan Maize Products Company Limited with Rs62.94 rise in its share price to close at Rs9,080.33.

Services Industries Limited witnessed a maximum decrease of Rs111.56 per share price, closing at Rs1,437.44, whereas the runner-up was Philip Morris (Pakistan) Limited with Rs56.00 rise in its per share price to Rs733.76.

Rupee sheds 4 paise against dollar Pakistani rupee on Wednesday depreciated by 04 paise against the US dollar in the interbank trading and closed at Rs278.76 against the previous day's closing of Rs278.72.

However, according to the Forex Association of Pakistan (FAP), the buying and selling rates of the dollar in the open market stood at Rs279.20 and Rs280.70 respectively.

The price of the Euro increased by Rs1.54 to close at Rs287.24 against the last day's closing of Rs285.70, according to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP).

The Japanese yen remained unchanged and closed at Rs1.77, whereas

an increase of 89 paise was witnessed in the exchange rate of the British Pound, which was traded at Rs341.08 as compared to the last day's closing of Rs340.19.

The exchange rates of the Emirates Dirham and the Saudi Riyal increased by 01 paise each to close at Rs75.89 and Rs74.26, respectively.

Gold prices up by Rs2,900 per tola

The price of 24 karat per tola gold increased by Rs2,900 and was sold at Rs280,800 on Wednesday against its sale at Rs277,900 on previous trading day, All Sindh Sarafa Jewellers Association reported.

The price of 10 grams of 24 karat gold also increased by Rs2,487 to Rs240,741 from Rs238,254 whereas that of 10 gram 22 karat also went up to Rs220,679 from Rs218,400.

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 \$29 to \$2,690 from \$2,661, the Association reported.

PTC, BCI sign MoU

ISLAMABAD (APP): Pakistan Textile Council (PTC) and the Better Cotton Initiative (BCI) on Wednesday signed MoU aimed at getting increased and sustainable production of the yield in the country.

"This strategic partnership aspires to enhance sustainability within the cotton supply chain, encompassing all stages from farm to fashion," said a news release. The cotton, it said, production in Pakistan has been on a constant decline for last many years now.

According to the Pakistan Cotton Ginners Association (PCGA) report, as of December 31, 2024, the total cotton arrivals in Pakistan stood at

5,452,250 bales, compared to 8,171,082 bales in the previous year, reflecting an overall decline of 33.27% in cotton production in 2024. The collaboration aims to promote sustainable and traceable cotton production across Pakistan by raising awareness and encouraging the adoption of the Better Cotton Standard System (BCSS).

This partnership will organize workshops and training programs for stakeholders—including farmers, traders, exporters, brands, trade officials, and public sector representatives—to ensure compliance with national and international trade regulations.

Additionally, the initiative seeks to enhance market access for Pakistani better cotton both domestically and internationally, explore opportunities to showcase sustainable cotton products in global markets through trade missions and expos, and advocate for policies that support the national embedding of BCSS.

The collaboration also focuses on improving Pakistan's adherence to international trade agreements and environmental standards, such as the European Union Green Deal and GSP+, and developing market linkages by connecting Pakistani producers with international buyers seeking sustainably sourced cotton.

Abbott Nutrition Pakistan and Islamabad sign an agreement



F.P. Report

KARACHI: Abbott Nutrition Pakistan and Islamabad United announced that they have entered

into an agreement for Ensure to become the Official Nutrition and Food Supplement Partner of the Islamabad United Cricket team.

"Cricket is a sport that's played, watched and loved across Pakistan. Abbott and Islamabad United have a major aspect in common that makes this partnership a perfect match. "Ensure is the Number 1 Nutritional Supplement Drink in the world and Islamabad United is The Number 1 Team in PSL History with 3

Championship Titles" said Asim Shafiq, General Manager Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iraq.

Together they want to promote cricket and good health, especially in aging adults, so that they can stay fit and active to enjoy life without feeling the weakness and frailty that comes with age.

The combination of both Abbott Nutrition Pakistan and Islamabad United with their collective efforts, will enable to reach more people

to adopt a healthy lifestyle, resulting in having long-lasting impact on the lives of thousands of aging adults in Pakistan who are passionate about cricket and fitness.

Ensure is a complete and balanced nutrition. With experience of 50 years and presence in 85+ countries. Abbott Nutrition has focused on the science of nutrition. Our formulas have been developed under the supervision of leading scientists and have several clinical studies to back them up.

We hold ourselves to a high standard when it comes to nutrition, and we continue to develop products and introduce innovations that provide impactful nutrition for those who strive to improve their health every day.

Ensure is designed for aging adults who are beginning to feel the signs of aging, both physical and mental, and are motivated to make lifestyle changes that includes specialized nutrition to better manage their aging process.

European stocks climb as inflation takes centre stage

LONDON (AFP/APP): European stock markets rose Wednesday as traders focused on inflation data in Britain and the United States.

London led the way in Europe as official figures showed an unexpected dip to UK annual inflation, easing some pressure on the Labour government as it struggles with growing the economy.

The pound steadied versus the dollar and euro, with analysts forecasting that the Bank of England would likely cut its key interest rate next month as the rate of price increases cools.

Separate official data showed Europe's biggest economy Germany contracted for a second straight year in 2024, with little hope of a strong recovery ahead of national elections next month.

Market watchers are now awaiting the release of

US consumer-price inflation data later in the day.

A below-forecast read on US wholesale prices provided a little relief and helped the Dow and S&P 500 end higher Tuesday, though sentiment remains clouded by expectations that the Federal Reserve will not cut interest rates as much as hoped this year.

After Wall Street's broadly positive lead, Asian markets fluctuated Wednesday.

"The S&P 500 is expected to trade flat at the open as investors wait on tentershooks for the latest US inflation snapshot," noted Susannah Streeter, head of money and markets at Hargreaves Lansdown.

"If there's a jump in the core rate of inflation in the US it could quash hopes of an interest-rate cut this year and could lead to fresh market jitters," she added.

In Asia, Tokyo's stock

market ended down, though games giant Nintendo piled on more than two percent and briefly hit a record high as traders anticipate it will soon release its much-anticipated Switch 2 console.

The Nikkei 225's drop also came as the yen strengthened, with traders weighing the chances of a rate hike by the Bank of Japan this month.

Also in focus this week is the release of Chinese 2024 growth data, with expectations that it could come in below the previous year and be among the slowest in more than three decades.

Leaders have unveiled a string of measures to reignite the economy, with a particular emphasis on consumers and the troubled property sector, though there are fears the return of President-elect Donald Trump could see another painful China-US trade war.

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In the Court of Jawad Bin Dawood Civil Judge II, Alaga Qazi Buner at Daggar, Suit No 278/1. Institution 23/7/ 2024. Date of hearing 18/2/2025. Bakht Rawan VS Khan Zada. Notice to No. 8, Ali Zaman s/o Saifon resident of Ghurghushito Talay Buner in abroad. Whereas in the above mentioned case the mentioned defendant can not be served in the ordinary way, it is, therefore, proclaimed that if the said defendant will/shall not appear personally or through dually authorized agent or pleader in the court at 8.30 am dated 18/2/2025 the proceeding will be taken ex-parte. Given under my hand and seal of this Court,



In brief

Ancelotti demands Real Madrid response

MADRID (AFP): Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti on Wednesday demanded a rapid reaction from his team after their capitulation against rivals Barcelona in the Spanish Super Cup final. The Catalans lifted the trophy on Sunday in Saudi Arabia with an emphatic 5-2 victory and Madrid's Italian coach welcomed Thursday's Copa del Rey last 16 clash against Celta Vigo as a chance for his team to bounce back. "It's a great opportunity to leave behind the bad game we played, which hurt us a lot, but has not sunk us," Ancelotti told a news conference Wednesday. "We want to react, it's good this game for us against a team that plays well, the team can have a strong reaction after that bad game the other day..." "It was a step backwards, but we have to keep going forward, we're in a good position in all competitions," Ancelotti said his team made "a heap of errors" against Barcelona but had looked for solutions in the days since ahead of Celta's visit to the Santiago Bernabeu. The coach did not want to single out any players for criticism after the thrashing but said the whole team "lacked commitment" in defence. "The evaluation of the game was a bad game in a defensive sense in every line of the team, not just in attack, or in midfield, or in defence, and there's nothing more to add," added Ancelotti. The veteran coach, who led Real Madrid to La Liga and Champions League triumphs last season, has been criticised in the Spanish media after the defeat in Jeddah. "I'm not following the wave of criticism -- one day you're the best in the world, and the next the stupidest (coach) of all," added the 65-year-old. "Luckily my experience in this world has given me the balance that I need not to follow the wave... I'm not the best in the world but neither am I the stupidest."

Theekshana grabs 3rd spot ODI rankings

ISLAMABAD (APP): Sri Lanka spinner Maheesh Theekshana has attained a career-best third position in the ICC Men's ODI Bowling Rankings after grabbing seven wickets in the last two matches of their three-ODI series against New Zealand that the home side won 2-1. Theekshana gained four slots after finishing with four for 44 in the second match in Hamilton that New Zealand won by 113 runs and three for 35 in the third match in Auckland that Sri Lanka won by 140 runs. Theekshana's 663 rating points are just six less than top-ranked Afghanistan spinner Rashid Khan (669) in a pack of four at the top who are within seven points of each other. Indian Kuldeep Yadav is second with 665 points while Pakistan's Shaheen Shah Afridi follows the three spinners with 662 points. New Zealand seam bowler Matt Henry returns to the top 10 after winning the Player of the Series award for taking nine wickets in the series while left-arm spinner Mitchell Santner is up two places to 15th with three wickets in the last two matches. Sri Lanka fast bowler Asitha Fernando's Player of the Match effort of three for 26 in the final match has lifted him into the top 100. In the Men's ODI Batting Rankings, left-hander Rachin Ravindra of New Zealand is up 11 places to 39th after scoring 79 in the second match and Janith Liyanage has progressed 11 places to 57th after getting a half-century in the final match. New Zealand's Mark Chapman moves into the top 100 after scores of 62 and 81.



MULTAN: West Indies's players attend a practice session ahead of the first Test Cricket Match against Pakistan at Multan Cricket Stadium. —APP Photo

Pakistan plot spin blitz as West Indies return after 19 years

MULTAN (AFP) : Pakistan will look to formidable spin duo Noman Ali and Sajid Khan to torment the visitors when the West Indies play their first Test series in the country in 19 years from Friday. Pakistan capitalised on home advantage when England came in October, tailoring pitches for slow bowling to snap a painful winless streak with a 2-1 victory. Noman and Sajid played starring roles and are joined in the squad by Abrar Ahmed, hinting at a three-pronged spin assault in the two-match series in Multan.

The West Indies last toured Pakistan in 2006, before a militant attack on the visiting Sri Lanka team three years later scared off international sides. Andre Coley is in charge of a West Indies team which has won only two of its last 13 Tests, before he hands over the reins to white-ball coach Daren Sammy in April.

"It's a new series, a new opportunity," Coley told reporters as the team arrived last week. "When you talk about Test cricket, it's not only the opposition's skill that provides tests, but the different conditions, different environments and different game situations."

'Land the first punch' Pakistan selectors delivered victory against England by taking the bold decision to drop ace batsman Babar Azam and pace pair Shaheen Shah Afridi and Naseem Shah. Left-arm spinner Noman and off-spinner Sajid shared 39 of 40 England wickets on pitches baked with patio heaters and dried with fans, clinching the series after losing the first match. "We bounced back well against England," said skipper Shan Masood of a series that salvaged his reputation after Pakistan lost their first six matches under his captaincy. "With backs against the wall we did well. We need to learn

how to land the first punch," he said after his team suffered a 2-0 defeat in South Africa last week. Azam has regained his place but Shaheen and Naseem remain out in a bid to manage their workloads. Opener Saim Ayub is suffering from a calf injury sustained in South Africa and his partner Abdullah Shafique is dropped because of poor form, leaving the door open for the return of experienced Imam-ul-Haq. To match Pakistan's spin attack, the West Indies will deploy left-armers Gudakesh Motie and Jomel Warrican, as well as Kevin Sinclair. Kumar Roach will head the pace attack in the absence of Shamar Joseph — out with a shin injury — and Alzarri Joseph who has opted to play T20 cricket in the UAE. The second Test starts January 25, with the series deciding which team will finish bottom of the World Test

Championship table. Pakistan currently rank eighth and the West Indies ninth and last. South Africa and Australia have already qualified for June's WTC final at Lord's despite Australia's shock loss to the West Indies in Brisbane last year. **Squads: Pakistan:** Shan Masood (captain), Saud Shakeel, Abrar Ahmed, Babar Azam, Imam-ul-Haq, Kamran Ghulam, Kashif Ali, Khurram Shahzad, Mohammad Ali, Mohammad Huraيرا, Mohammad Rizwan, Noman Ali, Rohail Nazir, Sajid Khan, Salman Agha **West Indies:** Kraigg Brathwaite (captain), Joshua Da Silva, Alick Athanaze, Keacy Carty, Justin Greaves, Kavem Hodge, Tevin Imlach, Amir Jangoon, Mikyle Louis, Gudakesh Motie, Anderson Phillip, Kumar Roach, Kevin Sinclair, Jayden Seales, Jomel Warrican.

Usman relocates to Australia for new cricket journey

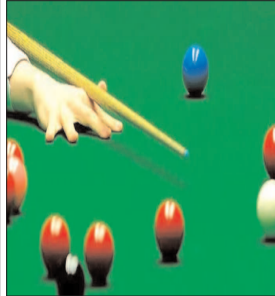
LAHORE (Monitoring Desk): Leg spinner Usman Qadir has relocated to New South Wales, Australia, in pursuit of a fresh cricketing chapter. Currently playing for Hawkesbury Cricket Club in Sydney, the 31-year-old is seeking better opportunities after retiring from Pakistan cricket last October. In a heartfelt social media post at the time, Qadir reflected on his journey with Pakistan cricket, expressing gratitude for the honour of representing his country. "It has been an immense honour to represent my country," he wrote. "I'm thankful for the support of my coaches and teammates who have been with me every step of the way." Qadir's career for the Pakistan national team saw flashes of brilliance. He made an impressive debut in 2020 during a T20I series against Zimbabwe, claiming eight wickets for 60 runs in three matches and earning the Player of the Series title. For a brief period, he was Pakistan's leading leg spinner, even replacing Shadab Khan from the T20I side. However, inconsistency and off-field issues marred his career trajectory. Before committing to



Pakistan cricket, Qadir was on track to play for Australia, representing Western Australia and playing in the Big Bash League (BBL) for Perth Scorchers and Sydney Thunder. Additionally, he had the honour of playing for Australia's Prime Minister's XI. His time in Australia, however, was fraught with challenges, including disciplinary concerns. In 2019, weeks after his father Abdul Qadir's sudden passing, Usman surprised many by joining Pakistan's squad for a series in Australia under the then head coach, Misbah-ul-Haq. Usman later admitted that fulfilling his late father's dream of seeing him represent Pakistan was the driving force behind his decision to leave Australia and return to the country of his birth. Abdul Qadir, one of Pakistan's most celebrat-

ed leg spinners, remained a constant influence on Usman's cricketing ambitions. Despite his father's legacy, Usman struggled to establish a consistent spot in the Pakistan side. His last appearance for Pakistan came during the Asian Games in October 2023. He also voiced frustrations with the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB), accusing it of mishandling his injury earlier that year, claiming he had evidence to back his allegations. With this turbulent chapter behind him, Qadir has returned to Australia with hopes of rebuilding his career. "Cricket is my livelihood, I have come to Australia with a plan for my future," Qadir said. "I am hopeful and determined that I will get good opportunities in cricket only." Qadir's move to Australia also underscores his focus on embracing his father's legacy while forging his own path. "As I step into this new chapter, I will be continuing my dad's legacy, embracing both my love for cricket and the lessons he instilled in me," he said last year. Sources indicate that his family is expected to join him soon, as he seeks to make his name in Australian cricket.

Ali Dara wins Islamabad Snooker Championship



RAWALPINDI (APP): Ali Dara has won the Islamabad Cup Snooker Championship title, Chaudhry Shahzad was declared the winner of the Masters category, Muzammil Sheikh won the Under-20 and Abu Bakr Chatta won the Under-17 title. More than a hundred players participated in the tournament held at the Shender-41 Snooker Academy organized by the Islamabad Billiards and Snooker Association. In final match, Ali Dara defeated Faisal Masih by five frames to four after a tough competition and won the honor of becoming the champion. In the final of the Masters category, Chaudhry Shahzad easily won the title by 1-4 against Raheel Wahid. In the final of the Under-20 category, Muzammil Sheikh defeated Barjees Khan by three frames to one, while in the Under-17 category, Abu Bakr Chatta defeated Ghulam Mustafa by 1-3 frames. Federal Billiards and Snooker Association Senior Vice President Saleem Akhtar Rana, Secretary General Faheem Anwar Khan, MS Rawalpindi Institute of Cardiology Dr. Ayaz Haider, Rawalpindi Billiards and Snooker Association President Dr. Aamir Khan, Vice President Malik Asghar and others attended the closing ceremony and distributed prizes among the winning players.

Djokovic breaks Federer record in Melbourne win

MELBOURNE (Agencies): Novak Djokovic surpassed Roger Federer's record for the most major singles matches played as he reached the Australian Open third round. The 37-year-old was made to work in his 430th Grand Slam singles match but he emerged triumphant, beating qualifier Jaime Faria 6-1 6-7 (4-7) 6-3 6-2. The win gives Djokovic sole ownership of the all-time record for most Grand Slam singles matches played among men and women, and takes him past former rival Federer, who played his last major match at Wimbledon in 2021. "I love this sport. I love competition," Djokovic said when asked about the milestone. "I try to give my best every single time. It's been over 20 years that I've been competing in Grand Slams at the highest level. "Whether I win or lose, I will always leave my heart out on the court. I'm just blessed to be making another record." The victory also meant the Serb became the first man over the age of 30 to reach 150 Grand Slam singles wins. Djokovic can make further history still in Melbourne - win the title and he would claim a 25th

major, moving him clear of Australia's Margaret Court as the sole leader of all-time Grand Slam singles titles. The seventh seed, who has three-time Grand Slam champion Andy Murray in his coaching box, will face Czech 26th seed Tomas Machac in the third round. Norwegian sixth seed Casper Ruud became the biggest casualty in the men's draw, losing 6-2 3-6 6-1 6-4 to 19-year-old Czech Jakub Mensik. World number 48 Mensik and Joao Fonseca, the 18-year-old Brazilian qualifier who stunned ninth seed Andrey Rublev on Tuesday, are the first teenagers to beat top-10 opponents at the same Grand Slam since Djokovic and Murray at Wimbledon in 2006. Zverev cruises into Australian Open third round: World number two Alexander Zverev kept his Australian Open title charge on track Wednesday with a straight-sets victory over Spain's Pedro Martinez. The German proved too hot to handle for his fellow 27-year-old, sweeping into round three with a 6-1, 6-4, 6-1 win in under two hours on Rod Laver Arena. Zverev, who is looking to better the semi-final he

made last year, will now meet Britain's Jacob Fearnley who overcame Frenchman Arthur Cazaux in four sets. "Usually I play 7-6 in the fifth, four-and-a-half hours, but I'm getting older," Zverev, who is pursuing a maiden major crown, joked afterwards. "I have to maybe shorten things up a little bit. Hopefully more to come in the later rounds." Zverev was rarely troubled by Martinez, who has never been beyond the third round at a Grand Slam before. Zverev broke immediately with a backhand winner and powered through the first set in 34 minutes, crunching 10 winners. Martinez, ranked 44, perked up in the second set, holding his own until Zverev pounced with back-to-back forehands from the baseline to earn a break for 3-2 and he never relented. The German raced to a two-set lead and an early break for 2-0 in the third sent him on his way to a straightforward victory. Zverev enjoyed one of his best seasons ever last year, but a Grand Slam title has remained elusive for nearly a decade. Runner-up finishes at the 2020 US Open and French Open last year are his best efforts so far.

James Vince quits first-class cricket to take up PSL deal

LONDON (Agencies): James Vince has quit first-class cricket for 2025 in a move that will enable him to play in the Pakistan Super League despite the ECB's new policy on No-Objection Certificates (NOCs). Vince will continue to lead Hampshire's T20 side but has stepped down as club captain after nine seasons in charge, and will play no part in their County Championship campaign this summer. Vince, 33, was retained by Karachi Kings ahead of the PSL draft on Monday. The ECB announced in November that it will only grant NOCs - the paperwork required for players to feature in overseas leagues - to white-ball specialists for tournaments that take place during the English season, with the notable exception of the IPL. The new policy, and the PCB's decision to shift its flagship tournament into a new April-May window, left Vince with a choice between skipping the PSL - at significant financial cost - or renegotiating the final year of his Hampshire contract to become a white-ball specialist. He has chosen the latter, in a move confirmed by the club on Wednesday morning. "I love Hampshire," Vince said. "It's been my club and home for 16 years, so I want to be able to maintain my best to keep delivering for Hampshire in T20 cricket, and hopefully even further our success in the competition [the Blast]. I also need to understand



what is best for my family, and combine that with the stage of my career I am at." Hampshire cited Vince's decision to relocate his family to Dubai - where he is currently playing for Gulf Giants - as a major factor in his new deal, following a series of unexplained attacks on their home in the county last year. "I am so grateful to everyone at Utilita Bowl for supporting me last year through a really tough time, and for allowing me to make this next step," Vince said. Giles White, Hampshire's director of cricket, asked the club's supporters to be understanding of Vince's decision. "James has been at the heart of the club for the best part of 20 years, showing absolute commitment on and off the field as the team's leading batter and captain," he said. "We recognise that this announcement will be tinged with disappointment for many fans but hope everyone will join us in celebrating what he has given to our club over many years and supporting him as he fulfils his commitment to continue leading the Hawks in the 2025 Vitality Blast." Vince is the first high-profile player to make a

major career decision informed by the ECB's new policy and even if, at 33, he was unlikely to add to his 13 Test caps, his move is significant. He has captained Hampshire since 2015 and has been the linchpin of their batting line-up, scoring 29 hundreds and averaging 41.22 across his 197 first-class matches for them. Tom Kohler-Cadmore, who was signed on a lucrative contract by Peshawar Zalmi on Monday, is likely to follow Vince's lead and has committed to playing in the PSL. He has been speaking to Somerset and the ECB in a bid for clarity over whether he will need to renegotiate his own deal - moving to a white-ball contract - in order to be granted an NOC. Players reacted furiously when the ECB announced its new policy in November, threatening legal action, but the board has dug its heels in since. Richard Gould, the ECB's chief executive, said last month that the policy is designed "to defend our game" and that the collective interest of English cricket "takes precedence over the priorities of an individual". 2025 will be Hampshire's first season under new ownership, after the GMR Group - who co-own Delhi Capitals in the IPL - agreed a multi-million pound deal to buy the club from Rod Bransgrove last year. GMR are also expected to become owners of Southern Brave, the Hundred team based at Utilita Bowl, assuming they meet the ECB's valuation.

Van Dijk eases any concern over Liverpool's form

LONDON (Agencies): Captain Virgil Van Dijk dismissed any fears Liverpool have stumbled in their title bid. Diogo Jota's equaliser, just 22 seconds after the substitute came on, earned a point at Nottingham Forest on Tuesday. Arne Slot's side have won three of their last seven Premier League games but still have a six-point lead over second placed Forest before Arsenal play Tottenham on Wednesday night. They also lost their Carabao Cup semi-final first leg to Tottenham 1-0 last week. "Ooh, so we are in a crisis now?" joked Netherlands international Van Dijk, when Liverpool's form was put to him. "It only confirms the Premier League is a very tough league where you

play against opponents who are very good. "It was always going to be tough, same with [Manchester] United at home with their new manager and the game plan they have been showing especially against the bigger teams. "Every game is tough, we have to find a way to win and I think if we play like we did in the second half and keep fighting, keep trying, keep finding opportunities then I am very confident we will score goals as well like we have been doing all season." The leaders have come from behind five times in their last seven league games, including in their 2-2 draw with United, with Van Dijk praising their character. The 33-year-old added: "It shows resilience, no one wants to come from behind, we have to keep

working on that and have everyone in the best shape to prevent that. All we can do is try to do it in the next game better." Van Dijk felt it was two points dropped at the City Ground, having conceded Chris Wood's early opener. The visitors dominated the second half with Matz Sels twice denying Jota, while Ola Aina blocked Mohamed Salah's late effort on the line. "We should have won, could have won, but the reality is we take a point at a difficult ground," said Van Dijk. "We created many chances and we could have won the game against a team that doesn't concede many chances, they had kept clean sheets in the last four games so that says a lot. "I think we could have scored at least a couple of goals."



In brief

CTP launch operation against heavy vehicles

RAWALPINDI (APP): City Traffic Police (CTP) Rawalpindi on Wednesday launched a crackdown against heavy vehicles including tractor trolleys, water tankers, and dumpers. According to a spokesman, CTP on the directives of Chief Traffic Officer (CTO) Rawalpindi, Beenish Fatima had launched an operation and took action against water tankers, dumpers and other heavy vehicles plying on the roads without fitness certificates and violating traffic laws. He informed that Traffic Wardens are taking solid steps to prevent road accidents and ensuring the safety of the road users. CTP teams are in the field in urban and rural areas and checking heavy vehicles plying without fitness certificates and licenses or operating illegally, he said adding, action in accordance with the law is being taken against the rules violators. The CTO has directed the officers concerned to take strict action against the rules violators and warned that negligence on part of the official concerned would not be tolerated. CTP are giving top priority to the safety of the citizens and heavy vehicles without fitness certificates, driving licenses, careless driving, overloading and other violations are being channeled. FIRs would also be registered against the drivers and owners of the vehicles found violating traffic rules continuously, he added.

Four POs arrested

RAWALPINDI (APP): The Rawalpindi Police on Wednesday arrested four proclaimed offenders wanted in different crimes, including murder, kidnapping and cheque dishonour cases. According to a police spokesman, the Wah Saddar Police nabbed the accused Muhammad Gul, who along with his accomplices had shot dead a citizen Banuzai over a marriage dispute last year. The accused had been on the run while one of his accomplices had already been nabbed. The police used all means including human intelligence to trace and arrest the accused. Meanwhile, the Pirwadhai Police captured the proclaimed offender Mir Hassan, wanted in the attempt to murder case, which was registered last year. Similarly, the Nasirabad Police arrested the proclaimed offender Tahir, wanted in the kidnapping case, and Zaid Nawaz, required in the cheque dishonour case.

IRSA releases 29,800 cusecs water

ISLAMABAD (APP): Indus River System Authority (IRSA) on Wednesday released 29,800 cusecs water from various rim stations with inflow of 39,600 cusecs. According to the data released by IRSA, water level in River Indus at Tarbela Dam was 1477.18 feet and was 78.188 feet higher than its dead level of 1,398 feet. Water inflow and outflow in the dam was recorded as 14,800 cusecs and 10,000 cusecs respectively. The water level in River Jehlum at Mangla Dam was 1134.70 feet, which was 84.70 feet higher than its dead level of 1,050 feet. The inflow and outflow of water was recorded 5,100 cusecs and 100 cusecs respectively. The release of water at Kalabagh, Taunsa, Guddu and Sukkur was recorded as 16,200, 15,200, 2,000 and 4,800 cusecs respectively. Similarly, from River Kabul, a total of 14,200 cusecs of water released at Nowshera and 5,500 cusecs released from River Chenab at Marala.



ISLAMABAD: Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs, Qaisar Ahmed Shaikh meets with the Ambassador of Egypt Dr. Ehab Mohamed Abdel Hameed Hassan to discuss bilateral maritime cooperation.

Govt won't hinder PTI's right to seek justice: Aqeel Malik

ISLAMABAD (APP): Adviser to the Prime Minister on Law and Justice, Barrister Aqeel Malik on Monday said that the PTI has yet to submit its written demands, if they have concerns about Imran Khan's security and health, they can seek legal recourse without any obstacles from the government.

In an interview with a private news channel, Aqeel Malik urged PTI to take the legal route to address health and security

concerns of their leader Imran Khan. He said that the government was awaiting PTI's written demands to move forward with negotiations.

Malik said the government awaits PTI's written demands, expressing his surprise that despite the ongoing negotiations, the party has yet to submit its formal proposals, which raises questions as to why PTI has not submitted their demands yet, thereby delaying the attainment of fruitful results through

meaningful dialogue.

To a query, Aqeel Malik strongly condemned the individuals involved in the May 9th incident, stating that they should be held accountable for their actions.

He also expressed disappointment that PTI is not engaging in negotiations that prioritize the country's interests. Instead, PTI is delaying the process by failing to present a written Charter of Demands, which is essential for formal negotiations.

IESCO installs over 480,000 meters so far

ISLAMABAD (APP): Islamabad Electric Supply Company (IESCO) has installed over 480,000 Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) meters in Rawalpindi City and Rawalpindi Cantonment circles till December 2024 against total target of 1.2 million.

Project Director AMI Mohsin Raza Gilani said AMI meters are being installed on all industries and high losses feeders throughout the IESCO region to get better results.

He said that AMI meters installation in Rawalpindi Sadar, Civil Line, Chaklala, Korang, Swan, Jhanda Chichi, Morgah, Tariqabad, Quaid-e-Azam Colony, F Block, Chandi Chowk, Muslim Town, Kangal, Dhok Kala Khan and Gulzar Quaid has been completed successfully.

He said the technology will ensure automated timely and 100 percent accurate meter readings, timely bills distribution, power theft control, automatic complaint registration, timely bills recovery, distribution system monitoring etc. and due to balanced and stable system transformer and meter burnt cases will also minimize.

Gilani said net metering facility is also available in 3 phase AMI meters. Replacement of old meters with AMI meters is totally free of cost. This technology is a revolutionary step in the power sector towards positive reforms and better customer services.

He said providing quality and timely services to valuable electricity consumers by using modern technology in the power sector is the aim and the vision of the Federal Government of Pakistan and the Ministry of Energy Power Division.

By following the same vision Islamabad Electric Supply Company (IESCO) has started the installation of state of the art Advanced metering Infrastructure AMI meters in Rawalpindi city circle and Rawalpindi cantt circle, he added.

Minister, Envoy discuss mutual interest matters of maritime

ISLAMABAD (APP): Ambassador of Egypt to Pakistan Dr. Ehab Mohamed Abdel Hameed Hassan here on Wednesday called on Federal Minister for Maritime Affairs Qaisar Ahmed Sheikh discussed the mutual interest matters.

During the meeting, both discussed the focusing on opportunities to enhance maritime trade and strengthen bilateral relations, said a press release.

Highlighting the strong ties between the two brotherly Muslim nations, both sides acknowledged the historical and cultural affinities shared by Pakistan and Egypt. They agreed that these commonalities offer a solid foundation for advancing cooperation in various sectors, particularly maritime affairs, which hold immense poten-

tial for economic growth.

The meeting underscored the significance of fostering robust trade relations and identified new avenues for investment in the maritime sector. Both nations were committed to expanding their economic collaboration by leveraging their geostrategic positions and enhancing connectivity through seaborne trade.

The discussion also included the critical role of maritime affairs in regional and global trade dynamics.

Ambassador Dr. Ehab Hassan highlighted Egypt's experience in managing its maritime industry, including the Suez Canal's strategic importance, and extended support to Pakistan in developing its maritime infrastructure and expertise.

The federal minister appreciated Egypt's will-

ingness to collaborate and shared Pakistan's vision for modernizing its ports, increasing maritime trade, and creating investment-friendly opportunities in the blue economy.

Deputy Chief of Mission, Sameh Ahmed El-Ghomrawi, and Secretary of Maritime Affairs, Syed Zafar Ali Shah, were also present at the meeting. They reaffirmed their commitment in fostering mutual understanding and cooperation between the two nations. The discussions concluded with an agreement to explore further avenues for cooperation, with a focus on establishing a sustainable and mutually beneficial partnership. Both countries emphasized the need to hold regular consultations to advance shared goals in trade and maritime development.

Govt's girls' education drive wins parliamentarians' praise

ISLAMABAD (APP): Parliamentarians Wednesday lauded government's efforts in promoting girls' education, praising the successful hosting of a global conference that reiterated Pakistan's commitment to ensuring every child, particularly girls has access to quality education.

Member of the National Assembly PML-N Bilal Azhar Kiyani statement to PTV news channel highlighted the government's efforts to prioritize girls' education, ensuring every child has access to quality education. Pakistan is taking a pioneering role in promoting girls' education, earning appreciation and said the Chief Minister of Punjab and the Prime Minister, who are keenly invested in this initiative.

By hosting a successful global conference on girls' education, Pakistan is leading the way for Islamic

countries to address the pressing issues of girls' education and out-of-school children, tackling challenges such as access to schools, quality education and cultural impediments, he added.

Sardar Muhammad Yousaf, a PML-N MNA also emphasized the importance of girls' education in Islamic society, citing it as both a moral and religious obligation. He highlighted the need to promote girls' education, referencing the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) as emphasized in various Ahadis.

Sardar Muhammad Yousaf further emphasized that an educated woman is the cornerstone of an education society, highlighting the pivotal role women play in shaping the minds of future generations.

Sardar Muhammad Yousaf, also praised Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif for hosting a

successful international conference on girls' education, highlighting the PM's commitment to promoting education for girls in Muslim communities worldwide.

Mirza Ikhtiyar Baig, MNA from PPP also emphasized the importance of girls' education, acknowledging its transformative impact on individuals and society. He appreciated the bold stance taken by the Prime Minister and Malala Yousafzai, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, in promoting girls' education.

He highlights the significance of girls' education in Pakistan, where despite progress, many girls still lack access to quality education. The Prime Minister's initiative and Malala's advocacy have been instrumental in bringing attention to this critical issue and promoting policy changes to support girls' education, he admired.

Govt revs up eco-friendly transport for environment officers: DG

ISLAMABAD (APP): In a bid to curb pollution and promote sustainable transportation, the Punjab government has launched an innovative initiative to electrify the province's two-wheeler fleet, handing over 250 eco-friendly electric motorcycles to environment protection officers in the first phase of a pilot project aimed at reducing carbon footprint.

Director General (DG) Environment Punjab Imran Hamid Sheikh, in an exclusive interview with a private news channel, shared his insights on the recently launched e-bike initiative.

"This is just the beginning, a pilot phase and we are excited to see the impact it will have," he stated.

Sheikh emphasized that the primary objective of this project is to encourage environment officers in the field to switch to eco-friendly transportation, utilizing these e-bikes for

their daily commute.

Sheikh further elaborated on the benefits of this initiative, highlighting its potential to significantly reduce carbon emissions and contribute to a cleaner environment.

He expressed his optimism about the project's success, citing the enthusiasm and cooperation of the environment officers who will be using the e-bikes.

The DG Environment also touched upon the future plans for the project, indicating that the government intends to expand the initiative to other departments and districts, pending the outcome of the pilot phase.

With this ambitious project, the Punjab government aims to set a precedent for environmentally responsible governance and promote sustainable practices throughout the province, he added.

DG Environment Imran Hamid Sheikh praised the

Punjab Chief Minister and the e-bike initiative, recognizing its potential to reduce carbon emissions and promote eco-friendly transportation.

Azeem Shaheen, a member of the Special Squad, highlighted the benefits of the e-bikes, stating that they can be fully charged within 4 hours and can travel a considerable distance.

He also emphasized that the e-bikes require minimal expense for maintenance and repairs, making them a cost-effective option.

Moreover, Shaheen pointed out that the e-bikes are environmentally friendly, producing zero emissions and reducing the carbon footprint of the officers who will be using them.

This initiative is a significant step towards promoting sustainable practices and reducing the environmental impact of transportation, he added.

PIC urges ministries to make public mandatory Info on websites

ISLAMABAD (APP): The Pakistan Information Commission (PIC) has directed all federal ministries to ensure the implementation of Section 5 of the Right to Information Act, 2017, which mandates the proactive disclosure of public information on official websites.

In a formal communication addressed to the Secretaries of all federal ministries, the Commission emphasized the importance of transparency and accountability in governance, urging public bodies to comply fully with the Act, said a press release issued here Wednesday.

The Commission reiterated that the proactive disclosure of information under Section 5 is essential to ensure citizens' access to information without the need for formal requests, thereby promoting openness and encouraging public participation in decision-making processes.

The letter outlined that public bodies are required to systematically disclose details such as organizational structure, functions, decision-making processes, rules, financial records, and reports, among other

categories of information.

The Commission also stressed the need for ministries to establish mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of these disclosures. Section 5 of the Right to Information Act, 2017, obligates public bodies to publish essential information about their organization and activities within six months of the Act's commencement.

This includes details such as the organization's structure, functions, rules, and decision-making processes, as well as financial records, audit reports, and relevant policies. The provision also mandates the publication of criteria for obtaining licenses, permits, and other public services, as well as information about contracts and concessions granted by the public body.

The Pakistan Information Commission warned that failure to comply with Section 5 would result in actions under the Right to Information Act, 2017. Ministries have been instructed to submit compliance reports by February 15, 2025, detailing the steps taken to

ensure adherence to the law.

The Commission emphasized that effective implementation of Section 5 is critical for fostering a culture of transparency and building public trust in governance. By making information accessible to the public, ministries can empower citizens to make informed decisions and actively participate in matters of national importance.

The letter further highlighted that the proactive disclosure of information would contribute to greater accountability and efficiency within public bodies.

The Pakistan Information Commission expressed confidence that the ministries would take necessary steps to meet the requirements of the Act and assured its support in achieving the goal of transparent and inclusive governance.

The Commission reiterated its commitment to ensuring the implementation of the Right to Information Act, 2017, and called on all federal ministries to comply with the provisions of Section 5 without delay.



ISLAMABAD: Jawad Hussain Malik, Assistant Commissioner Rawalpindi speaks during CSS Officers Panel Discussion organized at Quaid-e-Azam University.

33,000 work permits issued

KABUL (TOLNews): Officials at the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs say that 33,000 work permits have been issued in the past three months. Samiullah Ebrahimi, spokesperson for Ministry, said that during this period, 21,000 people were employed in government offices, while nearly 10,000 others found jobs in the private sector. "Work permits were issued to 21,567 of our compatriots in Emirate offices, 9,809 people in the private sector, and 1,920 foreign nationals."

4,000 traffic accidents reported

KABUL (Amu TV): The Traffic Directorate reported on Wednesday that more than 4,000 traffic accidents have occurred on Afghanistan's highways since the start of the current solar year in March 2024, resulting in approximately 2,000 fatalities. Haseebullah Mokhtar, the Taliban's head of the Traffic Department, stated that these accidents also left 700 others injured. The number of recorded incidents is "lower" than the figures published by media outlets and organizations.

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

Afghanistan needs global aid, says Foreign Minister



KABUL (Amu TV): Amir Khan Muttaqi, the Taliban's foreign minister, said on Wednesday that decades of war have left Afghanistan in a state where it requires short-term international aid to recover. He made the remarks during a session with representatives of UN agencies in Kabul. Muttaqi emphasized that Afghanistan is not the only country in need of humanitarian and development assistance, but highlighted its unique status as a post-conflict nation no longer engaged in war. "The number of countries needing humanitarian and development aid is increasing. However, unlike others, Afghanistan is no longer at war and is in a post-conflict phase," he said. Muttaqi called for international assistance to be aligned with Afghanistan's specific needs and priorities, stressing the importance of coordination among aid providers. He proposed that efforts focus on key areas such as the permanent resettlement

of returnees, alternative livelihoods for farmers, access to climate change adaptation funds, support for the private sector, mine clearance, and transitioning humanitarian aid into semi-development and infrastructure projects. He also suggested that aid programs should prioritize long-term infrastructure projects and incorporate a "work-for-aid" model to create sustainable impacts. "Aid should focus on long-term infrastructure programs and be tied to employment opportunities to ensure lasting benefits," he said. To maximize the impact of aid, Muttaqi urged the use of local resources and Afghan-made products in aid initiatives. He argued that such an approach would have a positive ripple effect on the country's economy and create jobs. "Efforts should be made to utilize domestic production so that the positive impact of aid is amplified," he added. This meeting comes

amid growing concerns in the US Congress about the Taliban's potential access to international aid. Taliban have also banned women from working in non-governmental organizations, including UN agencies, and have started oversight of NGOs' activities in the southern province of Kandahar. The Taliban ban on women employees at NGOs have hampered the activities of aid agencies in the country, especially the assistance that is expected to target women. Over the past three years, the United States has been Afghanistan's largest donor, contributing over \$3 billion for humanitarian relief. The Biden administration has emphasized that these funds are intended to address acute humanitarian crises. However, a new bill under consideration in Congress could impose stricter oversight on aid to Afghanistan. The President-elect has reiterated opposition to sending significant funds to a Taliban-led government, citing fears that such aid could be misused. The United Nations has projected that at least 23 million people in Afghanistan will need humanitarian assistance by 2025, with millions already facing severe hunger. Despite this dire need, the UN has reported insufficient funding to tackle the world's second-largest humanitarian crisis.

57 new historical sites registered in Maidan

MAIDAN WARDAK (Khaama Press): Taliban Officials in Maidan Wardak province say that 57 new historical sites have been registered in the province this year. Habibullah Mujahid, the Taliban director of Information and Culture in Maidan Wardak, stated that some of these newly registered sites date back hundreds of years. The sites include shrines, forts, mosques, and stupas from the Kushan era. As a result, the total number of registered historical sites in the province has now reached 75. These historical sites are located in the districts of Narkh, Jalrez, Sayedabad, Dai Mirdad, Chak, and Jaghatu. Earlier, some residents of Maidan Wardak expressed concern that many historical sites in the provincial capital, Maidan Shar, and districts such as Narkh, Jalrez, Sayedabad, Chak, and Behsood are at risk of being destroyed. It is also reported that many archaeological sites in the country are at risk of destruction due to a lack of preservation and maintenance. Recent floods and earthquakes have further exacerbated these concerns. Experts believe that Maidan Wardak is one of Afghanistan's historical and cultural provinces, rich in historical landmarks. These sites hold significant value from various periods in country's history and reflect the diverse civilizations that have shaped the region.

UNAMA officials meet with minister of economy, over Afghanistan aid



KABUL (Ariana News): The head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), along with her deputy, met this week with the acting minister of economy, Din Mohammad Hanif, for discussions around aid. According to the ministry, the meeting between Hanif and Roza

Otunbayeva and Indrika Ratwatte focused on "the effective and transparent adaptation of humanitarian aid in accordance with the economic needs and development priorities of the people". Hanif stressed in this meeting that in the coming year, international organizations should focus more

on the implementation of development projects and activities in the country in order to solve livelihood problems and reduce the level of poverty and unemployment. The UN's World Food Program meanwhile said in its latest report that in December the agency reached 5.9 million vulner-

able people with 43,396 metric tons of food and US\$18.7 million cash under its general food assistance program. The agency also said that WFP Afghanistan is only 10 percent funded for the January to June 2025 six-month period, with a net funding requirement of US\$652 million.

Taliban official claims decades of war have severely damaged environment

KABUL (Amu TV): Abbas Stanikzai, the Taliban's deputy foreign minister, said on Wednesday that decades of war, including

"the use of bombs and chemical weapons", have inflicted significant environmental damage on Afghanistan.

America boasted about, was used here. Its effects are still being felt, damaging agriculture, natural resources, and water supplies."

Nazari said, urging the separation of environmental and economic matters from politics. "This is the responsibility of the world."

Students call for upgrading their institute to a university

NURISTAN (TOLNews): Some students from the Nuristan Higher Education Institute are demanding that the institute be upgraded to a university. They claim that due to the lack of faculties, they have been unable to pursue higher education. Rahmatullah, a 22-year-old resident of Waygal district in Nuristan, is among these students. His father is a farmer, but he has made efforts to provide educational opportunities for his son. Rahmatullah says that he aspired to study at a medical faculty after graduating from high school, but due to the absence of such a faculty, he could not fulfill his dream. Rahmatullah, a student, said: "My passion was for medicine and English literature, but due to very limited facilities and financial challenges, I couldn't study these fields."

Speaking at a conference in Kabul on the impact of the 29th United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP29), Stanikzai stated that 80 percent of Afghanistan's forests were destroyed during the Soviet invasion in the 1980s. He also criticized the United States for its use of weapons like the "Mother of All Bombs" during its military presence in Afghanistan, arguing that such actions have had lasting environmental and economic repercussions. "In the past 50 years, Afghanistan has suffered greatly, especially in terms of the environment. During the Soviet occupation, 80 percent of our forests were destroyed. Bombs used by the Soviets wiped out vast areas of greenery, and the mines they left behind still harm our people today," Stanikzai said. "Then NATO and the United States came, using weapons in Afghanistan that they wouldn't dare use elsewhere. The 'Mother of All Bombs,' which

Stanikzai emphasized the need for improved water management to combat climate change and called for international assistance in addressing the environmental crises Afghanistan faces. The Taliban has often blamed foreign powers for the country's challenges, though critics note their own history of destruction. The remarks come as, over the two decades following 2001, Taliban-led attacks, including suicide bombings and roadside explosives, have resulted in significant civilian casualties and widespread infrastructure destruction. Meanwhile, Abdul Latif Nazari, the Taliban's deputy minister of economy, said that international sanctions and restrictions have hindered Afghanistan's ability to collaborate with global organizations on climate issues. "These sanctions make it impossible for us to work with international bodies on environmental issues," Mr.

Afghanistan remains one of the world's most vulnerable countries to climate change, despite contributing only 0.1 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions. The country faces extreme weather events, including prolonged droughts and severe flooding, which exacerbate food insecurity and economic instability. At COP29, held in Baku, Azerbaijan, \$300 billion was pledged to assist poorer nations affected by climate change. However, Afghanistan has been excluded from accessing these funds since the Taliban's return to power in 2021. For the first time, a Taliban delegation, led by Mutaq Al-Haq Khalis, head of the Taliban's environmental protection agency, participated in the climate conference. The group's inclusion highlighted the international community's dilemma in engaging with Afghanistan while balancing political concerns with humanitarian needs.

14 Afghan prisoners deported from neighbor country



KABUL (Khaama Press): The Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation reports that 14 Afghan prisoners, who had been imprisoned due to a lack of documentation, have been released from Pakistani prisons and deported back to Afghanistan. Officials in the Ministry of Refugees stated that

these newly released prisoners returned to Afghanistan on Tuesday, January 14 after being freed from Pakistani jails. According to information from the Torkham Border Administration in Nangarhar Province, these prisoners had been detained in Pakistan's Balochistan province for 15 days.

Officials from the Torkham Border Administration explained that the reason for the detention was the lack of legal documentation for the migrants. It is worth noting that, while international reactions have called for halting the deportation of Afghan migrants from Iran and

Pakistan, officials from both countries have consistently emphasized the need to strengthen the return process for Afghan migrants. Recently, the detention of Afghan refugees in Islamabad has intensified, a move that has sparked international reactions from organizations such as Amnesty International, the United Nations, and government officials from both countries. The forced deportation of Afghan refugees has highlighted the ongoing challenges they face, not only in Pakistan but across the region. The lack of legal status and harsh treatment often leave refugees vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, further exacerbating their plight. As tensions rise, there are growing calls for more compassionate and lawful handling of refugees, with many advocating for greater international cooperation to protect their rights and ensure their safety.

Hundreds of evacuated Afghan citizens stuck in limbo

KABUL (Khaama Press): Many Afghan citizens who were relocated to third countries after the chaotic US military withdrawal remain stuck in camps resembling "prisons," still in limbo. According to a report by The Guardian, three years after leaving Afghanistan, they have little hope of resettling in another country. US officials have not disclosed the exact number of Afghans still trapped in third countries, but human rights activists estimate that hundreds remain in temporary centers across over thirty-six countries. These refugees are facing significant challenges, including mental health issues, inadequate facilities, separation from families, and the fear of being forcibly returned to Afghanistan. The Guardian revealed this information through documents obtained after a lawsuit against the US Department of Defense and the Department of State. The countries where these

refugees are held remain unspecified, but refugee advocates have indicated that most Afghan evacuees are being kept in the United Arab Emirates, Germany, Qatar, and Kosovo. Recently, the US government reached an agreement with the Philippines to temporarily accept some Afghan refugees for resettlement processing. As of April 2023, over 2,800 refugees are in Qatar, 1,256 in the UAE, 259 in Kosovo, and dozens in other countries. The US Department of State has stated that most refugees have been transferred from the UAE, with about 50 individuals still remaining there. The spokesperson also mentioned that efforts to resettle eligible Afghans have been ongoing since 2021, with applicants living in third countries under US authorization and funding. As of fiscal year 2024, the US has issued over 33,000 special immigrant visas for Afghan refugees.

Since the US announced its withdrawal from Afghanistan in July 2021, over 1.6 million people have fled the country. Human rights defenders have previously expressed concern over the conditions in refugee camps in the UAE, Kosovo, and Qatar. In 2023, Human Rights Watch reported poor conditions for over 2,700 Afghan refugees in the UAE, and there have been reports of hunger strikes and suicide attempts in Qatar and Kosovo. The Kosovo camp is informally referred to as "Little Guantanamo," because refugees were told that leaving the camp would result in the rejection of their immigration applications to the US. Many complaints have also been raised about how immigration cases are being handled. In one case, an elderly woman with Alzheimer's was transferred to the US, while her companions remained stuck in the UAE.

As Afghan refugees wait for resettlement, uncertainty looms, especially with the imminent return of Donald Trump to the White House. Shawn Vander, a former US Navy veteran who worked on Afghan evacuation efforts, expressed concerns that Trump might halt refugee admissions as he did during his first term. The plight of Afghan refugees stuck in limbo highlights the ongoing humanitarian crisis. While international organizations and activists continue to push for better treatment and resettlement options, many refugees face an uncertain future, trapped in camps with no clear path forward. The prolonged uncertainty faced by these refugees not only affects their mental and physical well-being but also underscores the need for a more compassionate and efficient resettlement process that can provide them with safety and stability.

Taliban sign \$1.1 million agreements with 6 NGOs



KABUL (Amu TV): The Taliban-led Ministry of Refugees announced on Wednesday that it has signed agreements worth 88 million afghanis (approximately \$1.1 million) with six domestic and international non-governmental organizations. According to a statement from the ministry, the agreements aim to implement projects in water supply, power network development, and school construction across seven provinces, including Kabul, Nangarhar, Herat, Kunduz, Maidan Wardak, Kandahar, and Balkh. Zainul Abideen Abid, the governor of Nuristan, said: "120 acres of land have been approved, which the Islamic Emirate will purchase for us, and the construction work will begin in the coming spring." Currently, the Nuristan Higher Education Institute has two faculties: Sharia and Education, with approximately 450 students enrolled in them.

The organizations involved include ACTED, Providers of Humanitarian Peace, Compassion Corps, Humanitarian Aid Coordinators, Women's Social Services, and Strengthening and Advocacy. The agreements come as the Taliban continues to enforce a ban on women working for domestic and international non-governmental organizations, a policy the United Nations has warned is severely hindering humanitarian efforts and project implementation in Afghanistan. Last month, the Taliban-led Ministry of Economy

issued a directive reiterating the prohibition on women's employment in NGOs and warning that any organization defying the order would have its operations suspended and license revoked. The United Nations has stated that global aid to Afghanistan has decreased due to the Taliban's restrictions, exacerbating the country's worsening humanitarian crisis. The ban on women's participation in aid work has not only limited the reach of humanitarian initiatives but also drawn widespread criticism from international donors.

KP cabinet approves various developmental projects

F.P. Report

PESHAWAR: Fully satisfied from the implementation of its previous decisions, the Provincial Cabinet of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on Wednesday approved a large number of projects and schemes for the welfare, uplift and security of the general public. These schemes and projects included the enhancement of scope and costs of both the current Annual Development Program (ADP) and also the approval of a number of non-ADP schemes.

The meeting of the Cabinet was held under the chairmanship of Chief Minister Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Ali Amin Khan Gandapur. The meeting was participated by Ministers, Advisors, Special Assistants, Chief Secretary, Additional Chief Secretaries, all relevant Administrative Secretaries. The meeting was informed that 518 major decisions had been taken in 19 meetings of the present Provincial Cabinet of which work over 486 (i.e. 95 per cent) has already been completed while work on seven such decisions is on target and just nine (i.e 2 per cent) are overdue. The cabinet has approved the enactment of 50 legislations also.

After threadbare and daylong discussions, the Provincial Cabinet approved implementation of Anti-Money Laundering Combating the Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT)

Regime in the Province. Under this regime, public entities and reporting entities dealing in real estate agents register as Designated Non-Financial Business and Professions (DNFBPs) under the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR). The public entities include Government agencies involved in property development/transfer, local authorities managing public lands via auction etc. As per FBR reporting entity includes Revenue Officers involved in land transfer such as Tehsildars, Sub-Registrars and Naib Tehsildars. The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) considers DNFBPs may be used as a potential tool for channeling and parking of proceeds of crime. All these sectors have remained by and large undocumented and un-regulated in the perspective of money laundering and terror financing and were identified as high risk and medium risk vulnerable for money laundering and terror financing under National Risk Assessment (NRA 2023).

The Cabinet approved re-inclusion of four AIP schemes of the Energy and Power sector as non-ADP schemes in the Provincial ADP 2024-25. The schemes are related to construction of Grid stations in South Waziristan, Tirah Maidan Khyber, Mamund Bajaur. The Cabinet also approved the enhanced cost for establishment of Trauma Center in District Hospital Lakki Marwat to 698.046 million; and the Up-gradation of



Talash Hospital, Dir Lower from Category D to C. It also approved one-time Rs. 20.00 million grant-in-aid to mission hospital (Dabgari Gardens) Peshawar. This is to be incurred on free of cost treatment of poor patients, staff salaries and other hospital expenses.

The Cabinet approved the enhanced costs of the ADP Scheme Standardization and Up-gradation of Sports compels playground and Sports facilities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. It also approved cost enhancement amounting to Rs. 583.349 million for scheme Standardization and Up-gradation of Sports Complex District D.I.Khan; and Special Grant of Rs. 355.500 million @ of 0.5 million to each for Sports Activities in 711 Village/Neighborhood Councils of Merged Districts.

The Cabinet approved signing of the grant agreement for the German Funded (KfW) Billion Tree Afforestation Support Project. This

agreement is being signed for BTASP phase II. The German Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) through KfW has provided a grant of 13.5 million Euros for execution of the Billion Tree Afforestation Support project (Phase-I) to the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In the year 2022, the BMZ has committed additional funds worth 20 million Euros as grant to BTASP-II to further support protection of forest in the Province. It constituted a high level committee with the Minister of Law, Parliamentary Affairs and Human rights, being its chairman for drafting policy recommendations on exempting stage carriage (passenger vehicles) of Rules 57-B(1), Motor Vehicles Rules 1969.

The Cabinet approved transfer of possession of 37 Kanals & 7 Marlas in D.I. Khan district from Agriculture Department to Sports Department and the upgradation of Cat-B Hospital MTI, Mufti Mehmood

Memorial Teaching Hospital, D.I.Khan from Category B to A. This will enhance the bed strength of the hospital from 200 beds to 500 beds; and the upgradation of MTI, DHQ Teaching Hospital D.I.Khan from category B to A. This will enhance the bed strength from 242 beds to 600 beds.

It also approved the transfer of ownership of Government Land From Agriculture Department to Elementary & Secondary Education Department for Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education D.I.Khan; the transfer of 300 Kanal land from Agriculture Department to Elementary & Secondary Education Department for Girls Cadet College D.I.Khan; enhanced compensation to the 146 victims of land mines and terrorism incidents; and the release of funds amounting to Rs. 118.50 million for operational expenditure of TDPs camp Bakakhel, Bannu. The Chief Minister also directed on this occa-

sion that henceforth all such victims will be provided artificial limbs by the Provincial Government free of costs.

The Cabinet approved recommendations of the implementation report of the High-level technical committee for analysis of lab test results for disposal of PASSCO imported wheat. The aflatoxin levels in all the tested samples collected by the committee are found safe and below the established permissible limits for processed wheat products. The technical committee had recommended for immediate release of the 77,762 MT wheat to flour mills on the basis of First in First out principle and liberal release policy and thus the said release.

The Cabinet sanctioned Rs. 54.63 million grant for the Provincial Public Health Reference Laboratory Khyber Medical University Peshawar under Section-15 of PFM Act 2022; and Financial Assistance of Rs. 2.80 million for Mr. Anwar Zeb, a resident of Charsadda for treatment of kidney disease i.e Kidney Transplant. It also approved the retention of Village Council Haryankot with Tehsil Dargai District Malakand. Earlier this was linked with Tehsil Uthmankhel of the same District; and the transfer of 14 Marlas land at District Peshawar to Administration Department for construction of building for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Services Tribunal.

‘Half of nearly 20,000 Pakistanis jailed abroad are in Saudi Arabia’

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The National Assembly session was informed on Wednesday that nearly half of the approximately 20,000 Pakistani nationals in overseas jails were imprisoned in Saudi Arabia for various crimes.

"The number of Pakistanis detained in Saudi Arabia for various crimes stands at 10,279," Dar, who also serves as the deputy prime minister, stated while providing details of Pakistani inmates during the question break.

According to foreign ministry data, at least 19,997 Pakistanis are languishing in foreign jails. Speaking about the process of repatriation of the prisoners, Dar said that upon the completion of their sentences, emergency travel documents were provided to the Pakistani nationals if their passports had expired.

"Pakistani community pays the fines of prisoners who have completed their sentences," Dar asserted and added, "There is no obstacle in the repatriation of prisoners to Pakistan." Saudi Arabia, according to Dar, has agreed to transfer 570 prisoners to Pakistan under the agreement.

Aa total of 19,997 Pakistanis are in foreign jails, while 68 were on death row in 10 countries on charges of terrorism, murder and drug trafficking, as per data obtained from 88 Pakistani missions across the world. Saudi Arabia has the highest number of imprisoned Pakistanis, followed by 5,292 in the UAE, 598 in Greece, 578 in Oman, 463 in Malaysia, 387 in

Turkiye, 371 in Bahrain, 321 in the UK, 194 in Chengdu, 106 in Beijing, 84 in Guangzhou, 90 in Frankfurt, 63 in Washington, 48 in New York, 17 in Los Angeles, and 10 in Australia.

Major charges/allegations are illegal immigration/border crossing, overstay, murder, possession/use of narcotics & drugs, working without a work permit, sexual assault and harassment, human trafficking, extortion, kidnapping for ransom, robbery/theft, embezzlement/fraud, forgery, possession of counterfeit currency, money laundering, charges of espionage, smuggling (mostly narcotics), illegal possession of firearms, cyber-crime and fighting/physical assault.

Speaker National Assembly, Sardar Ayaz Sadiq reaffirmed his commitment to conducting House proceedings strictly in accordance with parliamentary rules and regulations, and said that he would not succumb to any pressures.

His remarks were made during the question hour when opposition members wanted to speak on point of order. Highlighting the importance of the House's operations, the Speaker underscored that addressing public concerns should remain the primary focus of parliamentary discussions.

He said that an agreement had been reached with the opposition to avoid quorum calls or points of order during the question hour, emphasizing its critical role in addressing public grievances. "We are elected by the people to solve their problems, and this responsibility should not be taken lightly," he said.

The Speaker criticized the opposi-

tion for engaging in political distractions rather than focusing on substantive issues. He urged opposition members to refrain from protests and disruptions during the question hour, describing it as a crucial segment of parliamentary proceedings where ministers are held accountable for addressing key public issues.

Sardar Ayaz Sadiq also pointed out the significant effort invested in preparing for the question hour and called for sessions to remain free of political interruptions. He reiterated that ministers and senior ministry officials had been repeatedly warned to ensure their presence and respond to members' queries.

He termed the opposition protests and disruptions as counterproductive to the nation's interests, urging all members to approach public issues with seriousness and ensure that parliamentary proceedings are constructive and meaningful. Federal Minister for Law and Justice, Azam Nazeer Tarar, expressed disapproval of the disruptive protests during the National Assembly session, calling them inappropriate and detrimental to the House's decorum.

"Mr. Speaker, these protests are unacceptable. The members involved are interfering in photography and videography, which disrupts the decorum of the House," Tarar said. He urged the Speaker to take necessary actions to maintain order. The minister emphasized the need for all members to uphold the dignity of the House and focus on resolving public issues, aligning with the core purpose of parliamentary proceedings.

PTI founder announces to observe Feb 8 as Black Day

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan has announced that February 8 will be observed as a Black Day across Pakistan.

According to sources, the PTI MNAs and MPAs have been instructed to hold demonstrations in their respective areas as part of the protests against 'rigged' elections on February 8 2024.

Imran Khan has directed party leaders to prepare for protests, while also issuing instructions to refrain from making statements against JUI-F chief Fazlur Rehman. The PTI founder has also ordered party leaders to take opposition leaders, including Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, into confidence regarding the planned protests.

The announcement comes as the PTI prepares to launch a nationwide protest campaign against the government. It's worth mentioning here that Pakistan held general elections on February 8, 2024 with independent candidates backed by former PTI winning most of the seats. However, PML-N and PPP formed an alliance to keep Imran Khan's party out of power. The opposition parties have alleged rigging in the elections – a claim rejected by the then caretaker administration, which conducted the polls.

Istanbul toll from tainted alcohol rises to 19 dead

ISTANBUL (AFP): Nineteen people who drank tainted alcohol in Istanbul have died in the past 48 hours, with dozens more being treated for poisoning, the Anadolu news agency reported Wednesday. The figure raised a toll given late Tuesday of 11 dead in 24 hours, Anadolu said. A total of 65 people were affected, with 43 people still being treated in hospital and three others discharged.

Among them were 26 foreign nationals, the agency said without saying if any had died. There was no immediate comment from the health ministry. "The death toll is rising," wrote Istanbul governor Davut Gul on X late Tuesday, saying the "licences of 63 business selling counterfeit alcohol were cancelled and they were closed". One of those was a business posing as a restaurant that was selling counterfeit alcohol in water bottles for 30 lira (\$0.85) each, the private NTV channel said.

In 2024, 110 people fell ill after drinking tainted alcohol in Istanbul, of whom 48 died, the governorate said. Alcohol tainted with methanol is thought to be the cause, methanol being a toxic substance that can be added to liquor to increase its potency but which can cause blindness, liver damage and death. Poisonings from adulterated alcohol are quite common in Türkiye, where private production has shot up as authorities crank up taxes on alcoholic drinks.

World Bank to give Pakistan \$20b

F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: The World Bank (WB) has pledged \$20 billion to Pakistan under the 10-year Country Partnership Framework (CPF), according to sources in the Ministry of Economic Affairs.

The sources termed the commitment as a testament to the successful efforts of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif in securing international support for Pakistan's economic growth, adding the joint efforts by PM and Army Chief Gen Asim Munir have started producing results.

They said \$20 billion would be provided through International Development Association (IDA) and International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD). The CPF will focus on six key development areas, including reducing child stunting, mitigating climate change, improving learning outcomes, providing clean water, and promoting public resources and private

investment for comprehensive development.

The International Finance Corporation (IFC) will also provide funding of \$20 billion to support the CPF. Specific goals include increasing tax revenue to over 15% of GDP, adding 10 Gigawatts of renewable energy capacity, providing quality education to 12 million students, and delivering healthcare services to 50 million people.

The framework also aims to provide safe drinking water and sanitation facilities to 60 million people, strengthen food security for 30 million individuals, and increase access to family planning services for 30 million women. Additionally, the CPF includes objectives to address flood and disaster risks, benefiting 75 million people, the sources added. It is worth mentioning, 19 out of 24 directors voted in favor of Pakistan when approving the 10-year Country Partnership Framework.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday wel-

comed the World Bank's pledge of \$20 billion under its first-ever 10-year Country Partnership Framework (CPF) for Pakistan. The prime minister, in a post on his X timeline, said that while focusing on six key areas, including child nutrition, quality education, clean energy, climate resilience, inclusive development, and private investment, CPF reflected Pakistan's national priorities, as envisioned in its Home Grown Economic Transformation Plan.

The prime minister deeply appreciated the efforts of the Chief of the Army Staff General Asim Munir and other colleagues who had worked day and night to strengthen Pakistan's foundation for such transformative partnerships. "CPF reflects the World Bank's confidence in Pakistan's economic resilience and potential. We look forward to strengthening our partnership as we align our efforts for creating lasting opportunities for our people," he remarked.

Iran president denies plot to kill Trump

TEHRAN: Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian has denied suggestions that his country plotted to kill United States President-elect Donald Trump after two previous attempts on his life in 2024. In an interview with US media outlet NBC News aired, Pezeshkian also insisted that Iran's nuclear programme is peaceful and warned Trump against risking "war".

The interview with the Iranian president, widely viewed as centrist, was aired less than a week before the inauguration of Trump, who during his first term implemented tough policies against Iran. Pezeshkian told NBC: "We have never attempted this [the assassination bid on Trump] to begin with and we never will."

In November, the US Department of Justice charged an Iranian man in connection with an alleged plot by Iran's elite Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) to assassinate the Republican leader.

Law enforcement thwarted the alleged plan before any attack was carried out. Trump said last year during the US election campaign that Iran might have been behind attempts to kill him.

The 78-year-old who won last year's US election, and will take office on Monday, survived two assassination attempts during the campaign – one in September while he was golfing on his course in West Palm Beach, Florida, and another during a July rally in Butler, Pennsylvania. Investigators have found no evidence of Iranian involvement in either. Iran has also previously denied US claims of interfering in US affairs, including through cyber-operations.

Pezeshkian also reiterated that Iran's nuclear programme is peaceful and that Tehran is not seeking "nuclear weaponry". During Trump's first term, the US withdrew from the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

deal that lifted sanctions on Iran's nuclear plans in return for oversight. Trump also threatened during his recent presidential campaign that US ally Israel could strike Iran's nuclear facilities.

"I do hope that Trump will conduce to peace in the region and the world, not conversely contribute to bloodshed or war," Pezeshkian told NBC. "We will react to any action. We do not fear war, but we do not seek it." Asked about the possibility of talks with Trump, the Iranian president said, "The problem we have is not in dialogue. It's in the commitments that arise from talks and dialogue that we'll have to commit to ... It was the other party [that] did not live up to its promises and obligations." Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi reported on Tuesday that ongoing talks with European powers show that they are serious about resuming nuclear programme negotiations. — Aljazeera

PPS financial crisis: PHC orders Secy E&SE, Finance, Estt to appear

Humayun Khan

PESHAWAR: A divisional bench of Peshawar High Court (PHC) comprising of Justice SM Attique Shah and Justice Sahibzada Asadullah summons Secretary Elementary and Secondary Education (E&SE), Secretary Establishment and Secretary Finance to appear personally before the court as to regarding financial crisis Peshawar Public School, on Wednesday.

The petition filed by Peshawar Public School and College's employee association along with other employees seeking a writ of mandamus to direct the government to issue the sanctioned grant in aid to it. The counsel Nouman Muhib Kakakhel advocate argued that

Peshawar Public School and College is a public sector institute managed by a Board of Governors, which is comprised of government officials.

The lawyer stated that the school was flourishing financially, however, a few years back girls branch was merged with it and its finances were used in the girls branch's expenses hence it became a liability to the extent that now the petitioners employees who are teachers of the school and college are not being paid their salaries as the institute does not have any finances.

The counsel argued that as per law the government can give grant in aid for which summaries were moved by the board or governors and 40 million and later 70 million were sanctioned for the institute but never released.

The counsel argued that another summary of 100 million is also pending, which is not being sanctioned at all, while the institute is unable to pay its teachers their monthly salaries. Justice S.M Attique Shah noticed that our focus should be education and the people who are imparting it, however it is unfortunate that all our educational institutes are facing financial crisis.

PHC after hearing arguments of the counsel for petitioners ordered Secretary elementary and secondary education, Secretary Establishment and secretary Finance to appear personally before the court and assist it as to how to fix the school's financial crisis and why the sanctioned grant in aid is not being given to it as the institute has failed to pay salaries to teachers for some months.

Ukraine captures NK soldiers; Russia readies for talks with Trump

KYIV: Russia appeared to ready itself for talks on the future of Ukraine with United States President-elect Donald Trump ahead of his swearing-in on Monday. "No special conditions are needed for this. What is required is the mutual intent and political will to have a dialogue," said Russian President Vladimir Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov on Saturday.

But Russia expressed its parameters very quickly. Putin aide Nikolai Patrushev told Russian news outlet KP that a Ukraine settlement should be reached by the US and Russia, without Ukraine and without the European Union. Asked whether territorial concessions would be made, he said "This is not even up for discussion." Moscow appears confident that Trump's world view is similar to its own and conducive to a deal that sidelines Europe.

Patrushev drew a parallel between Moscow's landgrab in Ukraine and Trump's assertion in a January 7 press conference that the US should absorb Greenland and resume control of Panama, saying "we need them for economic security". Trump also posted a map of the US and Canada as one country, calling their border an "artificially drawn line" and their union "much better for national security" – arguments identical to those used by the Kremlin to

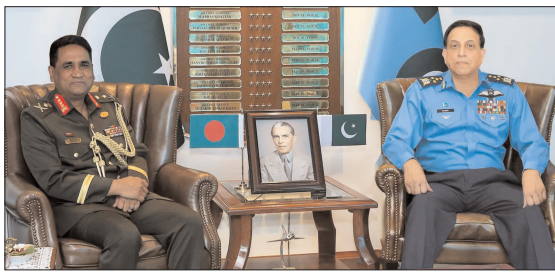
wage war on Ukraine. "Trump outlined his interests in relation to Greenland, the Panama Canal, Mexico, and Canada," Patrushev said. "Redrawing the world map to suit his interests and interfering in the affairs of countries on different continents is an American tradition."

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov also painted the views of Russia and the incoming US administration as aligned. He advised Trump to listen to the wishes of the people of Greenland, just as Russia – he said – listened to the people it annexed in 2022. "I believe that, first and foremost, we need to hear from the Greenlandic people," Lavrov told a press conference in Moscow on Tuesday. "This is similar to how we – as neighbours of other islands, peninsulas, and territories – listened to the residents of Crimea, Donbas, and Novorossiia to understand their stance on the regime that had seized power through an unlawful coup." Moscow holds that the 2014 Maidan uprising that unseated then-President Viktor Yanukovich was a US-orchestrated coup.

Novorossiia was the term Catherine the Great used in the late 18th century to refer to newly conquered territories that now form part of Ukraine. Moscow annexed Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhia and Kherson in September 2022 after unsupervised referenda. Moscow's offi-

cial view of the Ukraine conflict is that it is first and foremost about Russian security, dismissing Ukraine's territorial integrity and right to self-determination as irrelevant. Trump's election confirms the legitimacy of the Russian view, Lavrov said. "Everyone has long understood this, but now they are starting to acknowledge it: This is not about Ukraine itself but about Ukraine being used as a tool to weaken Russia's position in the European security framework," he said. "Naturally, threats on our western flank, along our borders, must be neutralised."

A new global survey of public opinion suggests that a deal between Putin and Trump might win the backing of at least certain influential countries. In the survey released on Wednesday by the European Council on Foreign Relations, majorities in India, Saudi Arabia, Russia, China and Brazil saw Trump's election as a good thing for their countries and for peace in the world. Majorities in India, China, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Turkey and Brazil saw Russia as an ally or necessary partner for their respective countries, and believed its influence in world affairs would not diminish or might even grow. Majorities in Ukraine, the UK and EU stood out in the survey for holding the opposite views. — Aljazeera



F.P. Report

ISLAMABAD: A high level defence delegation of Bangladesh led by Lieutenant General S M Kamrul Hassan, Principal Staff Officer, Armed Forces Division, Bangladesh, called on Air Chief Marshal Zaheer Ahmed Baber Sidhu, Chief of the Air Staff, Pakistan Air Force here Wednesday at Air Headquarters.

During the meeting, Chief of the Air Staff reaffirmed his commitment to enhancing military partnership between the two Air Forces through joint training initiatives, said a press release issued by Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR).

The dignitaries also agreed to explore avenues of collaboration in order including exchange initiatives and joint training.

Lieutenant General S M Kamrul Hassan lauded the innovative projects, cutting-edge technologies and indigenously developed technological framework of Pakistan Air Force under the current leadership. He expressed profound interest

in sophisticated military hardware being developed, notably the JF-17 Thunder fighter jets.

The meeting between Chief of the Air Staff, Pakistan Air Force and Bangladeshi defence delegation signifies a resolute commitment to reinforce military partnership, fostering collaboration and promoting robust relations between the two countries.